



HH Amir to take oath Wednesday

'17th ruler of Kuwait'

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: The National Assembly will hold a special session at 10:00 am on Wednesday for His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to take the constitutional oath.

Article 60 of the Constitution stipulates: "At a special session of the National Assembly and before taking over his functions the Amir shall take the following Oath:

"I swear by God Almighty to respect the Constitution and the Laws of the State, to defend the people's liberties, their interests and their property, and to safeguard the Nation's independence and the safety of its territories."

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is the 17th ruler of Kuwait as per the Constitution and the Emirates Legacy Law. The Council of Ministers declared him the Amir of Kuwait on Saturday in accordance with the Emirates Legacy Law.

Assembly Speaker Ahmed Al-Saadoun invited the ministers and lawmakers to the special session as per the letter of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah who cited Article 60 of the Constitution and Article 72 of the National Assembly Law in this regard.

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal has a fruitful career that started almost 60 years ago, during which he has proven his capability to lead the State of Kuwait. Throughout the three-year reign of HH the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal had always been the latter's best supporter, the most honest consultant and partner in the remarkable achievements over the past three years.

Meanwhile, MPs Abdulkareem Al-Kandari, Muhammad Al-Sayer, Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi and Abdullah Al-Mudhaf expressed condolences on the passing of HH the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf at the condolences ceremony held in Bayan Palace.

Bayan Palace opens doors for condolences



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah welcomes members of the Al-Sabah family and citizens extending their condolences on the passing of Sheikh Nawaf. Amiri Diwan photos

Artists honor late Amir

Colors of compassion on canvas of respect

By Medhat Allam

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Several visual artists in Kuwait expressed their sorrow over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (May God have mercy on him).

They highlighted the late Amir's humility and love for everyone, as well as his support for the plastic art in Kuwait. Some of them also presented portraits they painted of the late Amir on special occasions.

In this regard, the visual artist Asaad Bu Nashi said, "We grieve with all the people of Kuwait over the death of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (May God have mercy on him). His death has saddened all Arab countries and all other countries of the world. He had many positions in contributing to and advancing plastic art among children or beginners in fine arts.

In the year 2016, we presented a workshop following the diving competition in Kuwait. My role was to draw a diver in this competition. I took it as an honor, and I wanted to give His Highness the late Amir a work to convey to him the value of fine art. I hence gave him my book, inside which was a diving panorama. He welcomed us, and after I handed him the book, he presented me with a certificate. This surprised me and that was when I realized that he appreciated Kuwaiti art.

After COVID-19, I presented him with a painting for this occasion, which was painted for him in Souq Sharq.

Because of his humility and wisdom, he did not delay in giving artists their rights. He supported them and asked about them. In fact, he had won the hearts of all the people of this country with his love and humility."

Meanwhile, visual artist Adel Al-Mishaal said, "May God have mercy on the late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who led the march during critical times, along with the current Amir His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who cared for him.

I met the late Amir when he held the position of Minister of Social Affairs and Labor, and at that time I was Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Al-Qurain Cooperative Society. He had a gentle disposition and was a good listener. His simplicity and spontaneity in dealing with everyone

Al-Sabah family, dignitaries, citizens pay homage to late Amir

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received, Monday, members of Al-Sabah family in Bayan Palace, as well as citizens all coming to offer their condolences on the passing of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received in Bayan Palace on Monday a Saudi royal delegation offering deepest condolences over the death of Kuwait's late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The delegation included Saudi's Prince Turki Al-Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Prince Khaled bin Saud bin Khaled Al-Saud, Prince Bandar bin Saad bin Khaled Al-Saud, and Prince Fahad bin Khaled bin Saud Al-Saud.

The delegation also extended condolences to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the family of the late Amir.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at the Amiri Airport on Sunday Bahrain's Crown Prince and Prime Minister Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa and the accompanying delegation.

The delegation arrived in Kuwait to offer condolences to the passing away of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Prince Salman bin Hamad offered condolences to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and members of Al-Sabah family.

Sheikh Nawaf a beacon of national solidarity



KUNA photo
Late Amir Sheikh Nawaf with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18, (KUNA): The late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah left a great legacy of national solidarity, which will be remembered by the future generations.

The late Sheikh Nawaf's wise words will always be ingrained in stone as he was always stressed the importance of the Kuwaiti people's role in preserving

their country, its security and stability and not harming its national unity.

He has always been keen to remember the necessity of cooperation between the state's authorities, which he considered the base of a successful national action as it helps reach further progress and achievements, and to avoid slowing Kuwait's development.

He also stressed the importance of maintaining a calm and purposeful dialogue without insults or accusations, as well as seek accuracy to find the truth.

The late Amir has always prioritized the youth and called for opening future horizons to qualify them with the best modern scientific and academic means and instill authentic cultural values, as they are the future of the Kuwaiti development.

He affirmed his pride in Kuwait's constitution and its democratic approach, stressing the need to strengthen Kuwait's stability, security and safety of the citizens and protect their lives and property.

The late Amir has passed away, but his wise words remain present and will pass down through generation.

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NewsWatch

KUWAIT CITY: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory cable on Monday to Egypt's President Abdelattah El-Sisi, expressing his sincere congratulations on winning in the presidential elections as President.

In his cable, His Highness Sheikh Mishal expressed wishes, success, and prosperity to the Republic under his leadership. (KUNA)

TEL AVIV: U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin was expected to press Israel to wind down major combat operations in Gaza on a visit Monday, in the latest test of whether the U.S. can leverage its unwavering support for the offensive to blunt its devastating impact on Palestinian civilians.

France, the U.K., and Germany - some of Israel's closest allies - joined global calls for a ceasefire over the weekend, and Israeli protesters have demanded the government relaunch talks with Hamas on releasing more hostages after three were mistakenly killed by Israeli troops while waving a white flag. (AP)

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Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:11 Asr 14:34
Sunrise... 06:36 Maghrib .. 16:53
Zohr 11:44 Isha 18:15

Local

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

Weather

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

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

erly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 06-28 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas.

Station Max Exp Min Rec
Kuwait City 23 13

Kuwait Airport	24	07
Abdaly	24	07
Jahra	25	09
Salmiyah	21	15
Nuwaisib	23	11
Wafra	25	08

London, Japan open condolences book

Kuwaiti embassies in many countries mourn death of late Amir

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18, (KUNA): The Kuwaiti embassies in Czech, Romania, Azerbaijan, Algeria and Morocco and the Kuwaiti Consulate General in the Italian city of Milano mourned on Sunday the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, releasing statements and receiving condolences over this sorrowful event.

In Prague, the Embassy of the State of Kuwait to the Republic of Czech issued a statement mourning the great loss of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and opened a condolences book for three days starting Sunday.

Kuwait's Ambassador Rashid Al-Hajiri and the embassy staff received mourners at the official residence of the Ambassador in Prague.

In Bucharest, the Embassy of the State of Kuwait in Romania announced a three-day mourning on the demise of the late Amir. The Embassy opened a condolences book for three days, starting Sunday, and the Ambassador Talal Al-Hajiri and the embassy staff received mourners.

In Baku, the Embassy of the State of Kuwait to the Republic of Azerbaijan issued a similar statement lamenting the death of the late Amir and announced it will receive mourners and open a condolences book at the official residence of the Ambassador in Baku for three days starting Monday.

In Algiers, the Embassy of the State of Kuwait mourned the demise of the late Amir. Kuwait's Ambassador there Mohammad Al-Shabu recalled the great stances and legacy of the late Amir.

The embassy opened a condolences book and announced receiving mourner for three days starting Sunday.

In Morocco, the Embassy of the State of Kuwait in Rabat mourned the late Amir and opened a condolences book and received mourners as of Sunday till Tuesday.

Ambassador Abdullatif Al-Yahya and staff members expressed deep sorrow on the death of the late Amir.

In the Italian city of Milano, the Consulate General issued a statement mourning the passing away of the late Amir and the Consul General Sheikh Jaber Duajj Al-Sabah received mourners at the consulate.

Embassy in London opens condolences book

The Embassy of the State of Kuwait in London opened a book of condolences on the death of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for three days, starting Sunday.

A number of Arab and non-Arab diplomats, public figures and members of the Kuwaiti community in the UK flocked to the embassy to pay tribute of the late Amir.

The mourners were received at the Ambassador Badr Al-Awadhi and the embassy staff members.

The embassy will receive, starting Monday, a larger number of mourners, especially of political figures, lawmakers, representatives of foreign countries and accredited international bodies in the UK as well as former UK officials who have longstanding friendly relations with Kuwait.

In the meantime, worshippers at the Central Mosque (Regent's Park) in London performed today absentee funeral prayer on the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who passed away Saturday.

UN mourn Kuwait's late Amir

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Sunday expressed deep sadness over the passing away of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, late Amir of the State of Kuwait.

His Highness was a distinguished statesman, who contributed to the growth of understanding and cooperation in the Gulf and beyond, and pursued strengthened relations in support of peace and stability in the region and around the world, said Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary General, in a statement. Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad passed away yesterday.

The Secretary General extends his heartfelt condolences to the family of His Highness and to the Government and people of Kuwait. He reiterates the commitment of the United Nations to its close cooperation

with Kuwait on humanitarian issues, as well as on peace, security and sustainable development, the statement noted.

Japan FM signs condolences book

Japan's State Minister for Foreign Affairs Kiyoto Tsuji on Monday visited the Kuwaiti Embassy in Tokyo to sign a Condolence Book in honor of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Tsuji conveyed to Kuwaiti Ambassador Sami Al-Zamanan his deepest sympathy and heartfelt condolences to the government and people of Kuwait, and said Japan will always stand with the people of Kuwait while they overcome this great sadness.

Meanwhile, Japan has dispatched Chairman of the Japan-Kuwait Parliamentary Friendship League Eisuke Mori to Kuwait as a special envoy of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to extend condolences, the Foreign Ministry said.

During his visit to Kuwait through Wednesday, Mori is scheduled to extend condolences to the dignitaries of Kuwait on behalf of the government and the people of Japan, the ministry said in a statement.

Kuwaiti embassy in Argentina mourns

The Kuwaiti embassy in Argentina lamented, Sunday, the loss of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, declaring a three-days mourning period and the opening of the condolences book.

A statement by the embassy said that Ambassador Abdulaziz Al-Besher and staff expressed their sincere condolences over the passing away of the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad who was a great leader and father figure for Kuwaitis and residents alike.

The statement also expressed condolences to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the government, and Kuwaiti people, asserting that His Highness the Amir would continue the legacy of progress and development set by his predecessors.

In the statement, Ambassador Al-Besher affirmed that the death of Sheikh Nawaf was a great loss for the Arab and Islamic nations, indicating that Kuwait and its people would seek solace from Allah Almighty on this great loss.

Embassy in Beijing opens condolences book

The Kuwaiti Embassy in Beijing said Monday that it opened a book of condolences on demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the previous day.

In honor of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf, Chargé d'Affaires of Kuwait to China Abdulaziz Al-Dekhal invites members of the public and diplomatic community to sign the condolence book, which will be available until Tuesday, the Embassy said in a statement.

Iraq's Kurdistan, Istanbul, Lebanon, Egypt mourn

The President of Iraq's Kurdistan Region Masrour Barzani, headed to on Monday to extend his condolences on the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In a press release, the regional government said that during the past two days, many political and governmental figures visited the headquarters of the Consulate General of the State of Kuwait in Erbil to offer their condolences on the death of the late Amir.

The head of Kurdistan Democratic Party, Masoud Barzani, visited the Kuwaiti consulate in Erbil to offer condolences and sympathy on the occasion.

Meanwhile, Kuwaiti Consulate in Istanbul opened a book of condolences ceremony on the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, for a period of three days.

The consulate stated in a statement that it had opened the ceremony and noted that many Turkish officials, led by the Governor of Istanbul, Davut Gul, and a large number of figures from civil society, consuls-general, and international bodies accredited in Istanbul, flocked to the consulate to offer their condolences.

On another front, the Embassy of the State of Kuwait in Lebanon opened a book of condolences ceremony on the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for three days.



KUNA photo

Pakistan Senators raise their hands in prayer to offer condolences on the demise of late Kuwait Amir.

PM Kakar declares Monday day of mourning

Pakistan Senators offer condolences on demise of late Amir

ISLAMABAD, Dec 18, (KUNA): Pakistan Senate Chairperson, Sadiq Sanjrani arrived to the Kuwaiti embassy in Islamabad, on Monday, along with a delegation of Senators to offer condolences on the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Sanjrani, in his condolence message, expressed his great sorrow at the passing of the late Amir, saying that he left behind him a great legacy and that his demise is a huge loss not only for the royal family and people of Kuwait but also for the people of Pakistan.

"His contribution to regional stability, his personal commitment to global development and his work to bridge gaps between nations will long be remembered," he added.

The embassy of the State of Kuwait in Pakistan had opened on Sunday a condolences book for three days where ambassadors of different countries, diplomats, renowned religious scholars and politicians are coming to offer their condolences.

The Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to Pakistan, Nasser Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi mourned the demise of the late Kuwaiti Amir recalling the Amir's exceptional legacy and devotion to the country.

Ambassador Al-Mutairi expressed his gratitude to the government of Pakistan for announcing a Day of Mourning on Monday in the country and flying the national flag at half-mast throughout the country.

He also thanked Pakistani parliamentarians and people of Pakistan for their solidarity with Kuwait and Kuwaiti citizens at this time of sorrow.

Prime Minister of Pakistan, Anwar ul Haq Kakar has declared Monday as a day of mourning in Pakistan on the sad demise of Amir of Kuwait His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

According to the state owned Radio Pakistan, PM Kakar has taken the decision to express fraternal solidarity on behalf of the peo-



KUNA photo

Senate Chairperson Sadiq Sanjrani writes his comments in the condolences book at the Kuwaiti Embassy in Islamabad.

ple and government of Pakistan, with the royal family, the government, and people of Kuwait.

The national flag shall fly at half-mast throughout the country on the day. The Pakistani Prime Minister will undertake a one-day visit to Kuwait on Monday to condole the sad demise of Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

According to the Pakistan Foreign Office, the Prime Minister will convey to the Royal Family, government and the people of Kuwait the sympathies and condolences of the Government and people of Pakistan.

Earlier Prime Minister Kakar in a statement expressed deep grief and sorrow over the death

of Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He said that Pakistan stands in solidarity with the Kuwaiti Royal Family and the people of Kuwait at this moment of grief.

He prayed for the departed soul. The Prime Minister said the late Kuwaiti Amir will always be remembered for his sterling contribution to strengthening Pakistan-Kuwait relations.

Meanwhile, the embassy of the state of Kuwait in Pakistan on Sunday opened a condolences book for three days where ambassadors of different countries, diplomats, renowned religious scholars and politicians offered their condolences here in Islamabad.

PADA, PAAET and EPA mourn late Amir's demise

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Officials at the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs (PADA) mourned the death of His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, praying that Allah covers him with His vast mercy, reports Al-Anba daily.

Director of the Vocational Rehabilitation Department at PADA Al-Anoud Al-Wazzan stated: "We have known and seen nothing but goodness in our late Amir. Despite the short period of his rule, he left a positive impact on the hearts of his people. This impact will remain for life, considering he spent his life serving the country. Everyone bears witness that he was a humble, ascetic worshiper and a ruler who granted pardon. We ask Allah for forgiveness and mercy for him."

Director of the Public Relations and Media Department in the authority Doha Al-Khamis added "We offer our condolences to our father, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, ourselves -- the people of Kuwait, and the Arab and Islamic nations on the death of our dear father, His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, who worked towards the advancement of the country. He served the homeland and the citizens. We ask Allah Almighty to have mercy on our beloved deceased, put him in the spacious gardens, and grant us patience and solace."

Director General of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) Dr Hassan Al-Fajjam has affirmed that the fingerprints of His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah -- may Allah have mercy on him -- are illuminating and influential on education; since he fully supported the entire educational sector, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a press statement, Al-Fajjam

confirmed that HH the late Amir had a vision for developing education and was keen on harnessing everything that contributes to advancement at the State level. He said HH the Amir was the main supporter of Science and education due to his belief that the citizen is the real wealth of the nation; hence, the need to develop human resources.

He revealed that His Highness the late Amir was keen on developing capabilities in the educational process, affirming that PAAET remains committed to work towards the fulfillment of this goal. He added the authority continues to work hard in order to realize His Highness the late Amir's vision, stressing the nation is proud of its youths who are capable of leading and managing national affairs as they carry the necessary weapons -- Science and knowledge.

Acting Director General of the Environment Public Authority (EPA) Samira Al-Kandari mourned the death of His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah have mercy on him, reports Al-Anba daily.

Al-Kandari extended her condolences to the honorable Sabah Family and all of the Kuwaiti people on this great loss. She called to mind the auspicious era of His Highness the late Amir, during which security and safety prevailed throughout the country.

"During the reign of His Highness the Amir, prosperity and work for development continued, putting the name of Kuwait high among the countries of the world by strengthening the political, social and charitable roles it plays; while maintaining the status of the country as a center for humanitarian work," Al-Kandari added as she highlighted the virtues of His Highness the Amir of Pardon, Tolerance, Humility and Humanity.

Kuwait PM receives Jordan condolences

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Monday a phone call from the Jordanian Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Bisher Al-Khasawneh, expressing his sorrow over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Prime Minister expressed his appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments.

Portugal offers condolences

President of Portugal Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa offered his condolences on Monday over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

President Da Souza sent a message of condolence over the death of late Amir on Monday, the Presidency of the Portuguese said on its official website.

In his condolence message, Da Souza indicated that Sheikh Nawaf will be remembered for his important contributions in the country and the region.

On Sunday, the Kuwaiti Embassy in Portugal opened a register of condolences for the death of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for three days.

Flags at half-mast for 40 days

Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education Anwar Al-Hamdan recently issued a circular to all sectors of the ministry, its affiliated bodies and public administrations in educational districts; urging all competent authorities to take the necessary measures to officially lower flags at half-mast in schools, educational districts and all buildings of the ministry throughout the mourning period for the death of His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, reports Al-Anba daily.

This came after the declaration of the official mourning period with flags at half-mast for 40 days and the closure of public institutions from Sunday to Tuesday.



KUNA photo

Kuwaiti embassy in Czech mourns the demise of late Amir.

diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

'Epitome of leadership, caring, kind father ... God have mercy on him'

"WITH hearts resigned to God's will and destiny, we received the news of the passing of His Highness the Amir of the country, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. May God bless his soul and welcome him into His vast paradise," **Sheikh Faisal Al-Hamoud Al-Malik Al-Sabah** wrote for **Al-Anba** daily.

"Despite the profound affliction and the severity of the tribulations, we submit to the decree of our Lord Almighty, acknowledging that God has the power to take and give, and everything has a fixed term with Him.

"In the departure of a symbol like our late Amir, the guide of our path, our prince, and our father, he entered history through the gate of people's hearts. The peoples of the world united in recognizing his stances, generosity, and did not withhold tears on his departure.

"Our beloved ones were not deterred by their own troubles and concerns from fervently praying for his soul. The late Amir was among the leaders who exemplified wisdom, goodness, generosity, and the embodiment of human values.

"Reflecting on some of those commendable deeds and high qualities of the departed, we beseech the Creator, the Almighty, to envelop him in His vast mercy and grant him eternal peace. May he rest in peace among the prophets, the truthful, the martyrs, and the righteous, and be granted the best reward on behalf of his homeland, his people, and the Arab and Islamic nations.

"His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad lived an ascetic life, devoted to doing good, worship, and pleasing God Almighty. He was renowned for his love for mosques and regular presence in them. His love for Kuwait and its people was reciprocated, as Kuwait and its people held him in high esteem. An exceptional leader, he prioritized the interests of his country and its people, leaving behind a fragrant biography shaped by his love for this cherished nation.

"We implore God for our late father, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, to shower him with mercy and forgiveness.

"With great sadness, we extend our sincere condolences to his successor, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, his children and descendants, the Al-Sabah family and leadership, the Kuwaiti people, and the entire Arab and Islamic nation.

"O God, he was the epitome of leadership and a caring, kind father, so in Your infinite mercy, have mercy on him. You fulfilled your trust, leaving behind a profound love in our hearts. May God have mercy on him and grant him entry into the Gardens of eternity."

"Kuwait has bid a heartfelt farewell to its Amir, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, amidst profound sorrow stemming from a genuine bond that connected him with the diverse members of the Kuwaiti populace.

He stood as a unique model of integrity and commitment to lofty values that adorned his life and became a guiding beacon in every facet of his journey," columnist **Abdullah Bishara** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"I came into close contact with him during his tenure as Minister of Interior when the Gulf Cooperation Council was established. Annual meetings of Interior Ministers were convened, emphasizing the need to align Gulf agencies for the exchange of information, unified positions, and the collective confrontation of terrorism to maintain security and stability in member states.

"Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad responded to these imperatives with consistency, actively fostering cooperation, exchanging information, and advocating unified positions to unveil terrorist conspiracies. The Gulf region faced heightened threats from Arab extremism amid geopolitical shifts, including Egypt's peace agreement with Israel, the division of the Arab world, and the surge of partisan extremism and guerrilla front formations.

"As concerns escalated, the notion of a security agreement regulating cooperation among member states emerged. Despite expressing reservations, Sheikh Nawaf, then Kuwait's Minister of the Interior, called for reconsideration, but the other members maintained the agreement's original texts. Kuwait ultimately apologized, leading to the transformation of the initiative into bilateral agreements between consenting countries.

"Facing this divergence with composure and an appreciation for differing perspectives, Sheikh Nawaf recognized that Kuwait's reservations did not compromise the foundations of security cooperation or weaken collective Gulf security dynamics. His approach reflected a commitment to high standards of dialogue, underpinned by the grace of literature that defined his character throughout his life.

"Later, he transitioned from the Ministry of Interior to Defense, where I witnessed him as Minister of Defense on the night of the invasion, grappling with the cruelty of the unexpected assault. Assuming the mantle of governance after the passing of Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad, Sheikh Nawaf garnered a warm welcome from the Kuwaiti people, who admired his distinguished character, the radiance of his integrity, the strength of his values, and the joyful spirit that defined him.

"May God have mercy on him; the decree of God has been issued, and there is no turning back. May he transition to God's mercy, leaving behind a moral epic etched into the annals of Kuwait's history."

"The vibrant pulse of Kuwait, pulsating with love for its people, came to a halt with the demise of Nawaf Al-Ahmad, the embodiment of Kuwait's conscience and heart," columnist **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"His expansive heart, which loved Kuwait in every conceivable way, and the reciprocal love of its people, ceased to beat. The noble prince, an ascetic, worshiper, and recluse, has left us. Throughout his entire life, he eschewed the pursuit of positions, finding solace in reading the Holy Quran in his mosque, engaging in serene conversations with the Almighty Creator. Positions sought him, and kings requested his presence, yet he never sought such recognition.

"Such is the mark of greatness in history -- those who will be immortalized, remembered with kindness, and showered with the mercy of their people. Since Kuwait's independence, Nawaf Al-Ahmad played a pivotal role in the nation's journey of resurgence, a loyal servant who excelled in every role, surpassing his peers and exerting tireless effort.

"It was not surprising to witness him navigating the streets alone, driving his car, sharing in the joys and sorrows of Kuwaitis without a convoy or guard. He visited the sick, offered condolences to grieving families, congratulated newly-

Other Voices

Sheikh Nawaf, a role model, symbol of humility, forgiveness

"THE passing of Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad brought tears to the eyes of all Kuwaitis, who were deeply moved by his faith, humility, and his capacity for forgiveness. His virtuous actions undoubtedly tip the scales in favor of his good deeds. His life was an inspiration, prompting heartfelt prayers for the Almighty to grant him mercy and a place in the expansive Paradise," columnist and CEO of the Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers **Sattam Al-Jarallah** wrote for the



Sattam Al-Jarallah

newspapers. "In Kuwait, we mourn the loss of this esteemed father figure, whom we have known for his asceticism, virtuous deeds, and unwavering faith in Kuwait and its remarkable people throughout his tenure, whether as Crown Prince or as head of state, steadfastly upholding democracy and prioritizing the preservation of institutions and the separation of powers.

"Sheikh Nawaf, may he rest in peace, took great care to foster Kuwait's relationships with all Arab nations, particularly our Gulf brethren. The sorrow extends beyond Kuwait's borders, with grief palpable in all Gulf Cooperation Council countries and many

Arab nations.

"The enormity of the sadness lies in bidding farewell to a leader whose name is engraved in Kuwait's history with letters of gold, forgiveness, and justice.

"Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad leaves an indelible mark not only on Kuwait's history but also on the broader Arab and global stage. He stands as a role model for leaders, distinguished by his commitment to engaging with all segments of society and his unwavering dedication to combating injustice wherever it may exist.

"May God have mercy on Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad. We submit to the will of God, to whom we belong, and to whom we shall ultimately return."

weds, attended the diwanis of Kuwait's people without exception, and maintained an equal distance from all citizens.

"His immense heart overflowed with love for everything Kuwaiti, devoid of discrimination. Generous and magnanimous, he never turned away a petitioner. He earned various nicknames, but none encapsulated his grand personality more aptly than the title 'The Heart of Kuwait'.

"Although his official rule lasted for three years, he assumed a leadership role upon entering political life, serving as the governor of Hawalli. His opinions were sought and consulted on critical dilemmas and major affairs.

"With the cessation of the heart of Kuwait, we console one another on his passing, extending condolences to all of Kuwait for the loss of its beloved Amir. May God reward him, grant solace to those mourning, and guide us all to gather around our Amir Meshal Al-Ahmad.

"May God grant him success, bring goodness to fruition through his hands, and benefit the country and its people under his leadership, as he is the best successor to the best predecessor. To God, we belong, and to Him, we shall return. Praise be to God, the Lord of all worlds."

"His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, has passed away, and mere words of lamentation fall short in capturing the virtues of His Highness the late Amir, may God have mercy on him," columnist **Dr Turki Al-Azmi**, wrote for **Al-Rai** daily.

"He was distinguished by his high moral character, religious devotion, kindness, and deep concern for the well-being of his people. May God have mercy on him. We are left in sorrow by his departure.

"To all those grieving His Highness the late Amir, be it the family members, or the government and people of Kuwait, we remind them of the words of the Almighty God, 'Everyone upon this earth will perish, and the face of your Lord will remain, the Possessor of majesty and honor,' and 'Every soul will taste death, but you will be fully rewarded on the Day of Resurrection.'

"His Highness the Amir concluded his life with an amnesty decree and a call to combat corruption, focusing on the welfare of the Kuwaiti people and working towards the advancement of Kuwait. He was known for his God-fearing nature, and the love the Kuwaiti people had for him.

"His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah has assumed the role of the seventeenth Amir of Kuwait, and I pray to God to grant him success in serving the people and the country, and to provide him with a supportive family that aids him in doing good and guides him on the right path."

"With heavy hearts filled with sorrow and grief, we bid a heartfelt farewell to our beloved Amir, a father, brother, and leader who never allowed us to feel a sense of distance or hierarchy," columnist **AbdulAziz Al-Tamimi**, wrote for **Al-Rai** daily.

"He stood among us without barriers or formality, praying alongside worshippers in the mosque, shoulder to shoulder with any passerby, without the passerby realizing that they were next to Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir, a son of the ruler and grandson of the esteemed Al-Sabah family, may God have mercy on him.

"In his highness, he lived as a prince, transcending petty matters. His benevolent heart radiated with love, tolerance, and mercy. We've lost a father and a brother, a refuge in times of adversity and a pillar of support during trials and tribulations.

"His legacy was one of forgiveness, pardon, and reconciliation. Before leaving this world, he ensured no Kuwaiti remained in distress. His passing, may God have mercy on him, symbolized brotherhood, forgiveness, and tolerance. Through love, he brought hearts together, fostering a collective love for Kuwait, loyalty, and hard work -- a bright new page that showcased how nations are built.

No Kuwaiti mother was left deprived of her son's embrace; he either returned from exile or was freed from imprisonment."

"We mourn the passing of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, may his soul rest in mercy and forgiveness who was born into a ruling family, his upbringing amidst Kuwait's rulers, including Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber, provided him early insights into governmental affairs and responsibilities. He shared his journey with illustrious figures such as Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem, Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad, Sheikh Sa'ad Al-Abdullah, and Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad until it was his turn to assume leadership," columnist **Talib Al-Rifai** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"In the pages of history, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah is etched as a noteworthy figure, having navigated through various governmental roles and undertaken numerous local and Arab responsibilities. Throughout, he maintained his authenticity, sincerity, integrity, and reverence for God.

"A symbol of piety, humility, honesty, and loyalty, His Highness was cherished by the people of Kuwait for his unwavering commitment to his homeland, its citizens, and the broader Arab and Islamic nations. As we bid him farewell, we pray to God Almighty to accept him with kindness, enveloping him in His vast mercy and forgiveness.

"With the passing of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, we now extend our support and condolences to our new Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the esteemed Al-Sabah family, and the entire Kuwaiti populace. We earnestly beseech God to guide His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad in leading our cherished homeland, Kuwait, to secure, proud, and dignified heights -- especially amidst the current tense regional and international circumstances."

Talib Al-Rifai

"The entire nation of Kuwait is immersed in profound grief following the passing of the Amir of Humility, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. May God, in His mercy, grant him a spacious abode in Paradise, and bestow patience and solace upon his family and the people of Kuwait as they grapple with this profound loss," columnist **Dr. Issa Muhammad Al-Amiri**, wrote for **Al-Anba** daily.

"Kuwait mourns the departure of the prince of humility and the beloved leader of the people. Words fall short in adequately expressing the immense impact of this great calamity on the Arab and Islamic nations and the world at large.

"The painful loss of His Highness Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, may God have mercy on him, resonates locally, regionally, and internationally. His significant humanitarian contributions were felt on numerous occasions, as he consistently stood ready to lend support and assistance whenever the need arose or events necessitated his involvement.

"Throughout his life, the deceased dedicated himself to serving the people of Kuwait in every capacity and responsibility he undertook. His influence is evident on every page of Kuwaiti history, as he consistently demonstrated wisdom and unwavering commitment to the well-being of his people. Many pivotal moments in the nation's history were marked by the mutual trust he fostered, providing security and reassurance to the Kuwaiti people.

"The progress and renaissance witnessed in Kuwait bear witness to the significant role played by the late Amir at various local levels. He laid the groundwork for stability and pursued real development, successfully implementing economic plans. Despite the formidable challenges facing the region, his wisdom ensured stability, with the primary goal of safeguarding Kuwait from any potential dangers.

"The late Amir, in his tenure, dedicated attention to the Gulf Cooperation Council, working towards strengthening cooperation among its member countries to address shared risks. Kuwait's journey continued on the solid foundations he established within the state and its institutions. This strength was the late Amir's vision for his society, environment, and state, which he consistently recommended to His Highness the Crown Prince and the appointed governments.

"In inclusion, we extend our deepest and heartfelt condolences to the Arab and Islamic nations, particularly to the people of Kuwait, and to the esteemed Al-Sabah family, as they navigate through this monumental loss."

"May God compensate you, people of Kuwait, in the sorrowful departure of the Amir of Forgiveness, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, may God have mercy on him and grant him forgiveness, after years of dedicated service to Kuwait and its people, as well as neighboring and needy nations," columnist **Hind Al-Shoumer** wrote for **Al-Anba** daily.

"Throughout his illustrious career, the late Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad held various political and ministerial positions. He served as the Governor of Hawalli from 1962 for 16 years, Minister of Interior in 1978, and Minister of Defense in 1988. Following the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, he was assigned to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor in the first post-liberation government. He later became the Deputy Chief of the National Guard in 1994 before returning to the position of Minister of the Interior in 2003, ultimately being recommended as Crown Prince in 2006.

"His career was marked by significant achievements, including contributions to bolstering security cooperation in the Gulf Cooperation Council and Arab countries. He actively encouraged Kuwaiti youth to join the police force and engage in administrative roles within the Ministry of Interior, emphasizing the development of work and implementing a replacement policy to infuse new vigor into the ministry. The late Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, may God have mercy on him, played a pivotal role in establishing the Department of Mukhtar Affairs and the Election Affairs Department.

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

Educational sector officials pay tribute to HH the late Amir

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: A number of educational sector officials confirmed that His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah Almighty have mercy on him, was supportive and keen on improving the educational system; pointing out that with the death of His Highness, Kuwait and the Arab and Islamic nations lost a wise Arab symbol and leader, considering he was a pro-reform Amir and a good servant, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Development and Activities at the Education Ministry **Maryam Al-Anazi** said: "The history of His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, may Allah grant rest to his soul, is full of giving and achievements in serving his people and the Arab and Islamic nations; while supporting their causes.

His Highness put education on top of his priorities. Allah knows well that interest in education is the basis for the development of countries and peoples. May Allah have mercy on our dear Amir and put him in the spacious gardens."

Director of Ahmadi Educational District **Walid bin Ghaith** expressed deep sadness over the death of the Amir of Amnity and Tolerance -- His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad -- may God Almighty have mercy on him. He

implored Allah to forgive His Highness the late Amir, have mercy on him and put him in the gardens of bliss. He pointed out that His Highness reciprocated his people's love and sincerity.

Bin Ghaith affirmed that HH the late Amir was a staunch supporter of the educational sector and worked hard to develop it. "He was fully aware that countries develop and advance through education. The fingerprints of our late Amir, may Allah have mercy on him, are clear in everything. Oh Allah, expand his grave, make him steadfast when asked and accept him into Your spacious Paradise," he added.

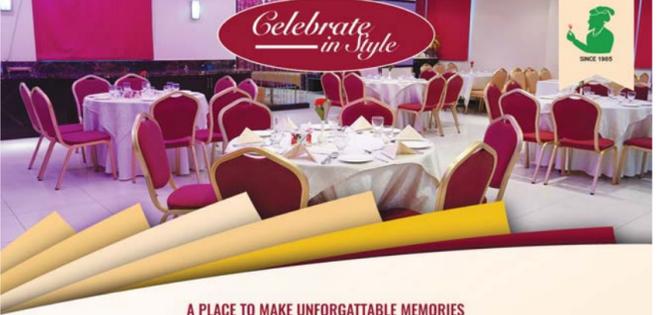
Tolerance

Director of Jahra Educational District **Jassem Bu Hamad** asserted: "We lost a great father and the Amir of forgiveness and tolerance who, through his morals, values and principles, won the love of all the people. His Highness, may Allah Almighty have mercy on him, fully supported everything beneficial to his people and the Arab and Islamic nations. He was the Amir of reform and a good servant."

Academic expert **Dr Mubarak Al-Harbi** stressed that Kuwait lost its Amir, the patron of its renaissance in all fields, particularly the educational and pedagogical ones. His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-

Ahmad, may Allah Almighty have mercy on him, paid attention to education in all its stages -- from kindergarten to primary, intermediate, secondary, university and applied colleges and institutes. "I extend my deepest condolences and sincere sympathy to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah protect and preserve him, and to His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the honorable Sabah family, and to all the people of Kuwait. We pray that Allah Almighty grant His Highness forgiveness and mercy," he stated.

Al-Harbi cited the interest of His Highness, may Allah Almighty have mercy on him, in the educational professionals; particularly his commitment to guide them in overcoming difficulties that could obstruct the educational process in Kuwait, and to ensure the best outputs from the sons and daughters of Kuwait who are considered the hope for a better future in all fields, as they constitute an essential arm in development. He pointed out that the first element of success in the renaissance of Kuwait is the commitment to fully support Kuwaiti youths and human resources in general. His vision focused on developing human resources as a vital factor in building the society and the State.



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Indian President, PM offer condolences on demise of Kuwait Amir

MoE said sidelining directors of edu zones for unknown reasons

'Who implements educational programs and projects?'

By Abdul Rahman Al-Shamari

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Educational sources expressed their astonishment and dissatisfaction with the continued neutralization and exclusion of directors of all educational zones from all decisions, committees and meetings related to educational and pedagogical affairs.

They said they wonder who is behind this trend of excluding the opinions of the educational zone directors and their role in developing education.

The sources indicated that the Education Committee in the National Assembly has been discussing this matter since the first session and is currently following it up in the second session.

They explained that an extended meeting was scheduled to be held Sunday by the Education Committee to discuss the deterioration of education and ways to develop it. All officials and leaders of the education sector have been invited to the meeting, including the general directors of the educational zones who were informed about the date of the meeting. However, the ministry later retracted their invitation and informed the directors of their exclusion from the meeting, which was aimed to discuss the core of the management of educational affairs, something that the directors have

Council okays minister's objection over cleanliness

By Inas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: The Council of Ministers, in its meeting on 27/11/2023, approved the objection of the Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Fahad Al-Shoula to the Municipal Council's decision issued on 18/9/2023 regarding its approval of the proposal submitted by the Municipal Council member Alia Al-Farisi concerning the cleanliness of Kuwait

City in Capital Governorate.

It rejected the objection of the Minister of State for Municipal Affairs to approving the proposal submitted by the Chairman of the Municipal Council Abdullah Al-Mahri for the establishment of a walkway for the residents of Qadisiyah opposite block No. 1, 4 and 7 on the Moroccan Road side, provided that the distance between the walkway and neighboring houses is not less than 20 meters.

In its letter to the Minister of State

for Municipal Affairs and the Head of the Municipal Council, the Council of Ministers committed the two parties to implementing its decision, based on the provisions of the last paragraph of Article 25 of law No. 33/2016 regarding Kuwait Municipality, which stipulates that the decision of the Council of Ministers in this case shall be effective, and the Municipal Council shall be obligated to enforce it within 15 days from the notification date.

been managing for years. They have the ability to explain the causes of the deterioration of the education sector and ways to address it, which is what the National Assembly assigned the Education Committee to research on and prepare a report about.

They were also excluded from the work of controlling secondary examinations, from assignment as under-secretaries of public education, from participating in opinions regarding pedagogical and educational decisions, and from participating in educational conferences and official tasks related to the development of education, and also from the meetings of the educational committee.

The position of the director general of an educational zone, which the ministry ignores in all education affairs, meetings and decisions, is considered a technical and administrative position and is the backbone of educational work in the education sector. He specializes in following up and developing the educational

process in educational areas and working to provide their needs and develop solutions to the problems they encounter in order to reach the best results. He supervises the work of the affairs of the educational and administrative staff in schools and in the areas under his educational zone.

Supervision

There are about 950 schools, about 440,000 male and female students in all four educational levels, about 90,000 male and female teachers, and thousands of administrators working under the direct supervision of the general directors of the educational zones who have been dealing with them on a daily basis throughout the school year. They also deal with the parents of the students, and manage the educational scene with the modest resources that the ministry barely provides for them.

Despite all of this, there are those who try to exclude them and reduce their role because of motives best known to them, and direct the work

compass towards the school subject supervisors to lead the reins of the scene. They assume that the work is complementary in managing the helm of the work, and everyone knows that the majority of it falls on the general directors of the educational zones.

The sources asked, "Who coordinates and implements educational programs and projects, provides advice on developing the technical, administrative and educational aspects in the regions, supervises and monitors the progress of work in each educational district, and bears responsibility for the proper conduct of education there?"

The educational zone director is responsible for organizing the operation of the educational zone to achieve institutional goals, comply with educational policies, and ensure the path of educational development is followed. Despite all these tasks and the expertise, the directors of educational zones are excluded from the educational scene without justification."



Dr S. Jaishankar arrives at the Kuwait Embassy in New Delhi.

Dr S. Jaishankar signs condolence book

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas & Housing and Urban Affairs of India, Hardeep Singh Puri, called on His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of Kuwait, and delivered letters from the President and the Prime Minister of India conveying condolences on the sad demise of Amir, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In her message to HH the Amir of Kuwait, the President of India, HE Smt Droupadi Murmu said that "It is with a sense of great sorrow and deep regret that we have learnt of the passing away of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait.

The contributions of His Highness to the development and prosperity of the State of Kuwait was considerable.

He will always be remembered for the tireless efforts he made for the well-being of the Kuwaiti people. In his passing away, India has lost a good friend and the large expatriate Indian community in Kuwait has lost someone whose care and benevolence they enjoyed.

India is united in grief with the leadership and the people of Kuwait in mourning the demise of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In a similar message the Prime Minister of India, HE Narendra Modi mentioned the "The Government and the people of India are deeply saddened by the news of the passing away of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait.

Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah was an exemplary leader whose wisdom, vision, and dedication have left an indelible mark not only on the history of Kuwait, but also on India-Kuwait relationship.

His efforts to strengthen bilateral cooperation in all areas further reinforced the historic ties between our two countries. The large Indian community in Kuwait always benefited from his fatherly care and concern.

The people of India will forever remember him for his personal commitment in ensuring supply of a large amount of medical oxygen from Kuwait to India during the difficult period of COVID-19 pandemic which saved countless lives."

In his message to HH the Prime Minister of Kuwait, Modi remarked that "It is with profound sadness that I have received the unfortunate news of the passing of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait.

Under the visionary leadership of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait made significant



Dr S. Jaishankar signing the condolence book.

strides in its quest for development, for which he would be fondly remembered by generations to come. His demise is a great loss, not only for the people of Kuwait, but also for the large Indian community in Kuwait, which always benefited from his fatherly care and concern.

India stands in grief with the ruling family, the Government and its people in mourning the demise of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah."

As a mark of respect to late Amir of the State of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, India declared a day of national mourning on Dec 17, 2023. The day of mourning was observed throughout India and abroad during which the national flag flew half-mast at all Government of India buildings across India and all over the world and all official entertainment activities were canceled.

Meanwhile, External Affairs Minister Dr S. Jaishankar visited the Embassy of Kuwait in Delhi today morning to express condolences and pay "my respects on the passing away of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait. The Government and people of India will always remember his notable contributions to the strengthening of our ties."

The Indian Ambassador to Kuwait, in his message said, on behalf of the Embassy of India in Kuwait, I convey my deepest condolences on the passing away of the Amir of Kuwait His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Under his visionary leadership, Kuwait has made great strides towards progress and prosperity and continued to be at the forefront of humanitarian efforts around the world. In his demise, Kuwait and the region have lost a tall leader.

The bilateral relations between India and Kuwait continued to strengthen under his patronage.

The Government and people of India stand united in mourning with leadership and people of Kuwait. The large Indian community in Kuwait will miss the presence and compassionate care of His Highness the late Amir.

Sustainable agri-tourism qualitative shift in promoting green initiatives

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: The Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources stressed the importance of the Kuwaiti Festivals Association initiative, which it launched under the name (Sustainable Agricultural Tourism) to enhance the concept of food security, support the national producer and Kuwaiti farmers, and achieve sustainable development for the United Nations, reports Al-Rai daily.

This came in a statement made by the Director General of the Agriculture Authority, Nasser Taqi, to the Kuwait News Agency, Wednesday, following a coordination meeting held with the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwaiti Festivals Association, Tariq Al-Obaid, and the Deputy Director General of the Agriculture Authority for Fisheries Affairs, Abdul Mohsen Al-Mutairi.

Taqi said that the Festivals Association's initiative falls within the implementation of the government's work program (2023-2027) regarding supporting national agricultural products and is sponsored by the Agriculture Authority and aims to support the agricultural sector as a whole, especially the national project for managing the tourism and entertainment scene in the country, which the Festivals Association undertakes in cooperation with a number of concerned government agencies.

He pointed out that the Agriculture Authority supports all national initiatives that would advance agriculture in general, including the Festivals Association initiative, especially since it is everyone's responsibility and that the citizen is an essential partner in preserving his country and his environment.

He explained that the Agriculture Authority is keen and interested in supporting Kuwaiti farmers and the national producer in all possible ways and in partnership with any effort or entity to be together in improving our country, its economy, tourism and food security in all sectors and fields, each in its position.

Taqi stressed that the (sustainable agricultural tourism) initiative constitutes a qualitative shift towards promoting sustainable green initiatives in society and is concerned with societal progress in sustainability and providing a distinguished model in consolidating the principles of sustainability.

He stated that this is done through com-

munity initiatives within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, achieving Goal 17 of them regarding community partnership and forming successful partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society, built on common goals and visions, and consolidating the principles of sustainability in society for the sake of sustainable development.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Festivals Association, Tariq Al-Obaid, said in a similar statement that the launch of the initiative comes as a true translation of the national project for managing the tourism and entertainment scene in the country, where a timetable will be adopted, identifying farms in Abdali and Al-Wafra, and conducting tourist trips to them during the coming period in cooperation with cooperative societies from During the call for shareholders.

Al-Obaid added that today's meeting between the association and the authority resulted in a focus on productive Kuwaiti farms to introduce citizens and residents to these farms and the quality of production at a time when the role of the Festivals Association is to invite citizens and residents to visit those places that provide comfort and recreation factors and also to get a complete idea about the farms and their role in enhancing food and product security, the National.

He explained that all of this would strengthen the support of the owners of these farms for their national role and their keenness to provide the national product, which began to compete with the imported one, and our goal is to stimulate domestic tourism, especially agricultural tourism, among citizens.

He pointed out that this comes in line with our belief in our role in supporting the country's sectors and facilities and taking care of them side by side with everyone, and this makes the citizen positive on the social level in public work and encourages the highlighting of those places.

He stated that specialized associations in Kuwait, including the Kuwaiti Festivals Association, contribute, in partnership with the rest of the various state institutions, to achieving sustainable development goals by launching a package of purposeful tourism and entertainment community programs.



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It is with deep sadness
THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN KUWAIT
mourns the demise of His Highness
the late Amir Sheikh.

Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah.

May God grant him eternal peace.

His Grace Archbishop

Eugene M. Nugent, Apostolic Nuncio,

His Excellency Bishop Aldo Berardi, O.S.S.T.

Apostolic Vicar of Northern Arabia

and the entire Catholic community in Kuwait, offer
our sincere condolences and heartfelt sympathy;

To His Highness the Amir of The State of Kuwait Sheikh
Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

To His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh
Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

and to the entire
Al-Sabah family.

Our condolences also go out to the
citizens of The State of Kuwait.

LOCAL

Condolence message from Bangladesh ambassador

"I am deeply saddened to learn of the passing away of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (Innaillahi wa innaelahi rajiiun). On behalf of the Embassy of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and Bangladesh community in Kuwait and I, on my own behalf express my sincere and deepest condolence to the Government and the brotherly people of State of Kuwait on his sad demise.



Ashikuzzaman
Major General Md Ashikuzzaman, ndc, afwc, psc,G (retd.)
Ambassador

His Highness was a visionary statesman who made significant contribution for peace, progress and

prosperity of his people and played important role in fostering understanding and cooperation in the region. Bangladesh has lost a true friend and will always value His Highness's personal contribution to strengthening of the close relationship between Bangladesh and State of Kuwait. He was a great leader and Statesman. Throughout his life, His Highness had been a unifying figure who guided the people of State of Kuwait with grace and compassion.

As a mark of respect to His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, late Amir of the State of Kuwait, Bangladesh has declared a day of state mourning on Monday, 18 December 2023. The day of mourning will be observed throughout Bangladesh and at all Bangladesh Missions abroad. Mark-

ing the day, the national flag will be hoisted half-mast atop all government, semi-government and autonomous bodies and all government and private buildings including educational institutions and all Bangladesh missions abroad. Special prayers will be held in all mosques of Bangladesh and special prayers will be offered at other religious institutions praying for the eternal peace of the Amir's departed soul.

We, at the Embassy and the Bangladesh community in Kuwait and the people of Bangladesh, who have long admired His Highness's charismatic and humanitarian personality, share the grief of the people of Kuwait."

Major General Md Ashikuzzaman, ndc, afwc, psc,G (retd.)
Ambassador

Bayan Palace

Continued from Page 1

Amiri Diwan Affairs Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah received Bahrain's Crown Prince and the accompanying delegation at the grounds of the airport.

UAE

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Sunday at the Amiri Airport the Representative of the President of UAE Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahayan, Member of UAE Higher Council and Al-Fujairah Ruler, Sheikh Hamad bin Mohammad Al-Sharqi and his accompanying delegation who arrived in Kuwait to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Sheikh Hamad extended his condolences on the occasion to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and to a number of Sheikhs.

Upon arrival, Sheikh Hamad was received by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Sabah.

Oman

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Amiri Airport on Monday the Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tarik and his accompanying delegation offering deepest condolences over the death of Kuwait's late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The Omani delegation extended their condolences on the occasion to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and to Al-Sabah family and Sheikhs.

The Omani official delegation included Sayyid Fahad bin Mahmood Al-Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, Sayyid Bilal bin Haitham Al-Said, Sayyid Taimour Asaad Al-Said, Chairman of Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal Al-Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen. Sultan Mohammad Al Nu'amani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sheikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah Al-Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal Al-Busaidi, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al-Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Dr. Abdullah bin Nassir Al-Harasi, Minister of Information, Sayyid Faisal bin Hamoud Al-Busaidi and Advisor at the Diwan of Royal Court and Dr. Saleh bin A' Amir Al-Kharousi.

Qatar

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport Qatari Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al-Thani and his accompanying delegation to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The Qatari delegation extended their condolences on the occasion to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and to Al-Sabah family and Sheikhs.

Upon arrival, the Qatari delegation was received by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Sabah.

Palestine

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Sunday at the Amiri Airport Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the accompanying delegation who are in Kuwait to offer condolences over the death of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Palestinian President also offered condolences to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and members of Al-Sabah family.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received President Abbas and the accompanying delegation at the ground of the airport.

Egypt

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Sunday at the Amiri Airport the President of the Republic of

Egypt Abdelfattah Al-Sisi and his accompanying delegation who arrived in Kuwait to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The Egyptian leader extended his condolences on the occasion to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and to Al-Sabah family.

Upon arrival, the Egyptian leader was received by Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah.

Tunisia

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Sunday at the Amiri Airport Tunisian President Kais Saied and the accompanying delegation, who are in Kuwait to offer condolences over the passing away of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

President Saied also offered condolences to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and members of Al-Sabah family.

Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah received the President and his accompanying delegation at the airport.

Lebanon

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Sunday at the Amiri Airport Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, who are in Kuwait to offer condolences over the passing away of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The Lebanese delegation, also including Deputy Premier Saade Chami also offered condolences to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and members of Al-Sabah family.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received the delegation at the airport.

US

Representative of US President Joe Biden, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and his accompanying delegation arrived in Kuwait Sunday and offered condolences to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

EU

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Sunday at the Amiri Airport the European Union (EU) Special Representative in the Gulf Luigi Di Maio and his accompanying delegation.

Di Maio expressed grief over the passing of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Saturday, praising contributions of the late Amir in sustaining bilateral relations between the two sides.

Di Maio extended his condolences on the occasion to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and to Al-Sabah family.

Upon arrival, Di Maio was received by Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah.

Cables

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable on Sunday from Brunei Sultan Hassanah Bolkiyah Muiz'zaddin Wad'daula, expressing his sorrow over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

In the cable, the Bruneian leader expressed grief on behalf of his government and people on the occasion, and extending his sentiments to the Kuwaiti government and people.

His Highness the Amir sent a reply enclosed with utmost appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable on Sunday from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

In the cable, President Erdogan expressed grave grief over the passing away of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Saturday, praising contributions of the late

Amir in sustaining bilateral relations between the two friendly countries, and praying to Almighty Allah to bestow mercy upon his soul.

His Highness the Amir sent a reply enclosed with utmost appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable on Sunday from the President of the Republic of Chad General Mahamat Deby.

In the cable, President Mahamat expressed grief over the passing away of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Saturday, praising contributions of the late Amir and extending his sorrow to the Kuwaiti government and people.

His Highness the Amir sent a reply enclosed with utmost appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable on Sunday from South Korea President Yoon Suk Yeol expressing grief over the passing of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In his cable, the Korean leader praised contributions of the late Amir in sustaining bilateral relations between the two friendly countries, and praying to Almighty Allah to bestow mercy upon his soul.

His Highness the Amir sent a reply enclosed with utmost appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable on Sunday from Maldives' President Mohamed Muizzu.

In the cable, President Muizzu expressed deep sadness over the passing away of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Saturday, praising contributions of the late Amir in sustaining bilateral relations between the two friendly countries, and praying to Almighty Allah to bestow mercy upon his soul.

His Highness the Amir sent a reply enclosed with utmost appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments.

Colors of

Continued from Page 1

was very evident. However, he did not show compliments when it came to Kuwait and its people, no matter what. The people of Kuwait disagree on many issues, but they agree on their love for him.

May Allah protect Kuwait and grant His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah success in leading the progress and development of Kuwait."

Furthermore, the visual artist Suzanne Bou Shannaq said, "I offer my sincere condolences to the honorable Al-Sabah family, the Kuwaiti people, and the entire world over the passing away of our Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He was a man of few words and many deeds. He was loved by everyone and appreciated by all world leaders. He loved his people, and they loved him. He was the Amir of humility, forgiveness, and kindness. May God have mercy on him and place him in His spacious Paradise, Amen."

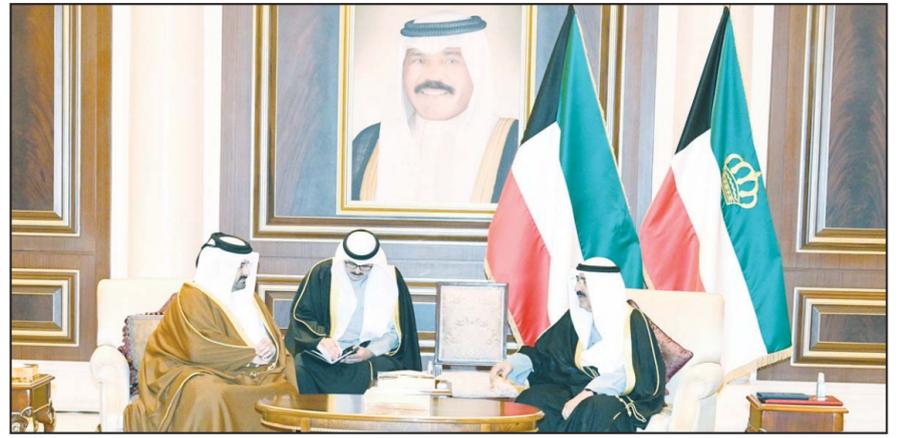
Also, the visual artist Naji Al-Hai said, "We felt extreme pain when he heard about the passing away of His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (May God have mercy on him). Everyone witnessed purity, kindness and humility in his character, and everyone loved him, because of his great human qualities."

"May God have mercy on him and make him dwell in his spacious gardens and may God inspire him. May his family, relatives, and loved ones grant patience and solace, and may he rest in peace."

Meanwhile, the visual artist Ibtisam Al-Asfour said, "The late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (May God have mercy on him) - the leader of our journey - was humble and concerned about the people and their interests."

"His reign witnessed decisions that contributed to correcting the course in various fields, and received popular support, because of their reflection on the public good. The most notable of these decisions was the abolition of the local agent, the vacant land monopoly law, the housing cities law, and the Kuwaitization policy in the Ministry of Interior, which made way for young Kuwaiti experts to replace the elderly in the ministry. The latest of his decisions was the amnesty law."

In addition, artist Fadel Al-Abbar said, "The late Amir of the country Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (May Allah have mercy on him) served as an example of honesty, and humility. His high morals made everyone respect and appreciate him. He ruled Kuwait during a very difficult time, and ensured the safety of the homeland and the citizens at all stages... May God have mercy on him and grant him a spacious paradise."



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Qatari Deputy Amir.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Saudi royal delegation headed by Prince Turki Al-Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

Economic circles continue to mourn Sheikh Nawaf's death

'Kuwait lost a man of humanity, wisdom'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Economic circles continue to mourn the death of His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah grant rest to his soul; recalling the virtues and exploits of His Highness during his fragrant career, his great contributions that will remain firmly established in the country's renaissance, and his role in boosting the local economy, especially during global crises, most notably the corona crisis, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil and Minister of State for Economic and Investment Affairs Dr Saad Al-Barrak said: "May Allah have mercy on you, our dear father and Amir. May He grant you the greatest forgiveness and make you dwell in the highest place in His Paradise. On our behalf and that of the loyal people of Kuwait, may Allah reward you with the greatest goodness. You have been sincere and you fulfilled your promise."

Acting Director General of the Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS) Ahmed Hamad Al-Thunayan mourned the death of His Highness the late Amir, may Allah grant rest to his soul. He stated: "Kuwait lost its late Amir, creating a fracture that is difficult to repair. He did not only put the country in political stability and calm, but also in the cradle of amnesty and reconciliation through his vision of achieving the best for his Kuwaiti children and brothers. His Highness' generosity was not limited to Kuwait. As we mourn the death of the leader and father of Kuwait, we have absolute confidence in the magnificence and solidity of the national structure that he entrusted in our hands. It is a legacy that we will all adhere to and we will follow his guidance. We pledge to our father, our leader and our late Amir that Kuwait will remain as he wanted -- strong, precious, tolerant and harmonious."

Merciful

Chairman of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Investment Company Dr Yousef Al-Ali reiterated that "Kuwait lost a humble father who was merciful to his people. It also lost a leader who supported various aspects of national development; most notably economic development, which witnessed a tangible movement towards the breakthrough that Kuwait deserves during his reign."

Al-Ali indicated that the late Amir supported and repeatedly emphasized the importance of the role of the private sector in boosting the national economy and contributing to ongoing efforts to diversify sources of national income. He highlighted the need for diligent work to keep pace with the successive economic developments throughout the world in the midst of difficulties and challenges that the global economy has been facing.

Former Minister of Commerce and Industry Dr Amami Bouresli added: "We condole ourselves and the Kuwaiti people on the passing of His Highness the Amir, may Allah grant rest to his soul. Kuwait lost a man of humanity and wisdom who had a big heart. During his reign, we witnessed how he dealt with perennial issues as he fought against corruption, issued



Dr Saad Al-Barrak



Ahmed Al-Thunayan

Standard & Poor's issues report

'Kuwait's sovereign rating stability relies on oil prices, fiscal reforms'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: In a recent report, Standard & Poor's (S&P) outlined that Kuwait's sovereign rating stability is mainly due to favorable global oil prices and production prospects over the next two years, given the absence of financial financing mechanisms, reports Al-Rai daily.

The report also indicated that Kuwait is expected to implement additional financing mechanisms, potentially including the removal of long-standing borrowing restrictions through the passage of a new debt law. Such measures could provide a broader range of financing options when fiscal deficits reappear.

The S&P report warned that Kuwait's rating might decline if comprehensive and sustainable financing arrangements are not established in the next two to three years. This could result from ongoing tensions between the government and the National Assembly, hindering the implementation of fiscal reforms or the passage of a debt law.

Rating

On the positive side, S&P suggested that Kuwait's rating could improve if the government successfully implements comprehensive structural reforms, enhancing financial financing mechanisms, diversifying the economy, and reducing the non-oil deficit, supported by positive GDP growth dynamics.

The agency provided institutional, economic, external, financial flexibility and performance, financial related to the debt burden, and monetary evaluations for Kuwait.

S&P estimated Kuwait's per capita share of GDP to decrease from \$37.61 thousand in 2022 to \$36.16 thousand in 2023 before rising to \$37.26 thou-

sand in 2024. GDP growth is expected to be 0.1 percent in 2023 and 2 percent in 2024, with an estimated decrease in the inflation rate from 3 percent in 2023 to 2.5 percent in 2024.

Stabilized

In the broader context, S&P noted that sovereign rating trends in the 55 emerging market countries in the Europe, Middle East, and Africa region have stabilized, with expectations of this stability continuing until 2024. The agency reported six upgrades and five downgrades in 2023, mainly benefiting major energy and commodity exporters.

The report highlighted ongoing challenges for many emerging countries in the region, including internal and external shocks and the impact of long-standing cost-of-living crises on economies. Globally, S&P expects a soft landing with supportive fiscal policies and flexible labor markets contributing to growth. However, concerns persist about the effects of prolonged higher interest rates on businesses and households.

For 2024, S&P anticipates strong recoveries in Hungary, Poland, and Romania, although uncertainties remain about fiscal consolidation in Poland and Romania.

Looking at the broader global landscape, 2024 is an election year for several countries in the Europe, Middle East, and Africa region, with potential policy fluctuations and officials responding to rising food and energy prices.

S&P highlighted challenges in debt restructuring for Ghana, Lebanon, and Zambia, with complexities related to official creditors, legal barriers, and local repercussions from defaults.

encountered over the past three years."

CEO of Express Consulting and Business Management Eng Nayef Bastaki stated: "We extend our sincere condolences and sympathy for His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the entire honorable Sabah Family, the honorable Kuwaiti people, and the Arab and Islamic nations."

He added: "In this context, we remember the role of His Highness the late Amir in reviving the local economy, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thanks to his wisdom and role, he was able to direct State institutions towards repelling health risks to the local economy in general, and to the owners of small and medium enterprises in particular."

Supporter

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Private, Personal and Digital Banking Services Group at Boubyan Bank Abdullah Al-Tuwajri asserted: "The business community in Kuwait has lost a major supporter of its renaissance. HH the late Amir had been a staunch supporter of the private sector, and the expansion of its role and contribution to economic growth and realization of development goals. He was a major supporter of the State's reform policies and improvement of the competitiveness and transparency of the Kuwaiti economy. Because of this, the local economy succeeded in overcoming many obstacles that the global market

World News Roundup

Europe

Allies sound alarm

Russian opposition leader missing as election looms

MOSCOW, Dec 18, (AP): Allies of the imprisoned Russian opposition leader **Alexei Navalny** said they were searching for him for a 13th day after he failed to appear in court Monday.

Navalny's spokesperson Kira Yarmysh wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, that Navalny had multiple hearings scheduled, some of which were suspended after the politician who is President Vladimir Putin's fiercest foe could not be located to participate in person or by video link.

The whereabouts of Navalny, 47, have been unknown since his lawyers lost touch with him after Dec. 6. They believe he is deliberately being hidden after Putin announced his candidacy in Russia's March presidential election, which the longtime leader is almost certain to win. Navalny's team has launched a campaign to encourage Russians to boycott the election or vote for another candidate.



Alexei Navalny

Allies said a defense lawyer was told in court on Dec. 15 that Navalny had been moved from the penal colony east of Moscow where he was serving a 19-year term on charges of extremism, but the lawyer was not told where Navalny was taken. Yarmysh told the AP that Navalny's team had written to more than 200 pre-trial detention centers and special prison colonies as well as

checked all detention centers in Moscow in person in order to find the opposition leader.

Although a judge suspended Monday's court proceedings for an indefinite period after Navalny could not be located, that does not mean judicial officials will find him, Yarmysh said.

Navalny's allies sounded the alarm after his lawyers were not let into Penal Colony No. 6, the prison about 230 kilometers (140 miles) east of Moscow where he was serving his sentence, after Dec. 6. The lawyers also said that letters to him were not being delivered there and that Navalny was not appearing at scheduled court hearings via video link.

Scholz tests positive for COVID: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Monday that he has tested positive for COVID-19, and the government said a visit by Slovakia's new prime minister had to be canceled as a result.

Scholz wrote on social media platform X that "with few symptoms, I am counting on a mild case." Spokesperson Steffen Hebestreit said the chancellor was in his office and communicating by phone and videoconference but would not perform any public duties on Monday and Tuesday.

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico was scheduled to meet Scholz in Berlin on Tuesday, and the visit had to be canceled, Hebestreit said.

It is not yet clear whether Scholz will be able to lead a Cabinet meeting on Wednesday in person, he added.

Scholz, who is 65, received a COVID-19 booster shot this year, Hebestreit said. (AP)

Albanian parliament debates immunity: Supporters of Albania's opposition Democratic Party protested against the government Monday while a parliamentary commission discussed whether to lift the immunity from prosecution of the party's leader, former Prime Minister Sali Berisha.

Prosecutors asked lawmakers last week to strip Berisha of his parliamentary immunity because he did not abide by an order to report to them every two weeks and not travel abroad while he is being investigated for corruption.

Cordons of police officers surrounded the Parliament building Monday as a commission discussed the immunity request. If granted, the full Parliament is expected to vote Thursday to clear the way for prosecutors to put Berisha under arrest of house arrest.

Berisha, 79, was charged with corruption in October for allegedly abusing his post to help his son-in-law, Jamarber Maltezi, buy land in Tirana owned by both private citizens and the country's Defense Ministry, and to build 17 apartment buildings on the property. (AP)

Populists claim a sweeping victory: An early official vote count of Serbia's weekend election on Monday confirmed victory for the ruling populist party in a parliamentary vote in the Balkan country, but political tensions rose over reported irregularities in the capital, Belgrade.

An opposition group said it was robbed of victory in the local election in Belgrade, would not recognize the results and would demand a rerun of the ballot.

Sunday's parliamentary and local election in the Balkan country pitted populist President Aleksandar Vucic's Serbian Progressive Party against the Serbia Against Violence opposition alliance.

Vucic's SNS party won some 47% of the ballots in the parliamentary vote, followed by Serbia Against Violence with 23%, according to a near-complete preliminary tally by the state election commission.

Several other smaller parties also competed in the election, which was held only 18 months after the previous presidential and parliamentary vote. (AP)

Ukraine's soldiers face gloomy mood: A gloomy mood hangs over Ukraine's soldiers nearly two years after Russia invaded their country.

Despite a disappointing counteroffensive this summer and signs of wavering financial support from allies, Ukrainian soldiers say they remain fiercely determined to win. But as winter approaches, they worry that Russia is better equipped for battle and are frustrated about being on the defensive again in a grueling war. Some doubt the judgment of their leaders.

Discontent among Ukrainian soldiers - once extremely rare and expressed only in private - is now more common and out in the open. In the southern city of Kherson, where Ukraine is staging attacks against well-armed Russian troops on the other side of the Dnieper River, soldiers are asking why these difficult amphibious operations were not launched months ago in warmer weather. (AP)

Finland seeks jailing of Russian man: Finnish police on Sunday sought a court order to imprison a Russian man who had been living under an alias in the Nordic country and is accused of committing war crimes against wounded or surrendered soldiers in eastern Ukraine in 2014 and 2015.

Yan Petrovsky, who had been living in Finland under the name Voislav Torden, is already in Finnish custody but authorities are asking that he be formally jailed while they conduct an investigation into his alleged crimes against Ukrainian soldiers. A court ruling on his imprisonment is expected on Monday. (AP)



US President Joe Biden reacts after hearing a loud bang as he leaves his campaign headquarters in Wilmington, Del., Sunday, Dec. 17, 2023. A car plowed into a parked SUV that was part of Biden's motorcade Sunday night while the president was leaving a visit to his campaign headquarters. (AP)

Biden unharmed as vehicle plows into motorcade security SUV

A car plowed into a parked SUV that was guarding President Joe Biden's motorcade Sunday night while the president was leaving a visit to his campaign headquarters. The president and first lady Jill Biden were unharmed.

While Biden was walking from the campaign office to his waiting armored SUV, a sedan hit a U.S. Secret Service vehicle that was being used

to close off intersections near the headquarters for the president's departure. The sedan then tried to continue into a closed-off intersection, before Secret Service personnel surrounded the vehicle with weapons drawn and instructed the driver to put his hands up.

Biden paused and looked over toward the sound, surprised, before he was ushered into the vehicle,

where his wife was already seated, before being driven swiftly back to their home. His schedule was otherwise unaffected by the incident.

Steve Kopek, a U.S. Secret Service spokesman, said the president's motorcade departed without incident. Local Wilmington police were handling the crash, which means the driver was not considered a serious threat to the president. (AP)

America

Trump invokes Nazi-era 'blood' rhetoric against immigrants

US Senate border security talks grind on

WASHINGTON, Dec 18, (AP): Time slipping, White House and Senate negotiators struggled Sunday to reach a U.S. border security deal that would unlock President Joe Biden's request for billions of dollars worth of military aid for Ukraine and other national security needs before senators leave town for the holiday recess.

The Biden administration, which is becoming more deeply involved in the talks, is facing pressure from all sides over any deal. Negotiators insist they are making progress, but a hoped-for framing vote did not emerge. Republican leaders signaled that without bill text, an upcoming procedural would likely fail.

The talks came as Donald Trump, the Republican presidential front-runner in 2024, delivered alarming anti-immigrant remarks about "blood" purity over the weekend, echoing Nazi slogans of World War II at a political rally.

"They're poisoning the blood of our country," Trump said about the record numbers of immigrants coming to the U.S. without immediate legal status.

Speaking in the early-voting state of New Hampshire, Trump, drew on words similar to Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf" as the former U.S. president berated Biden's team over the flow of migrants. "All over the world they're pouring into our country," Trump said.

Throughout the weekend, senators and top Biden officials, including Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, have been working intently behind closed doors at the Capitol to strike a border deal, which Republicans in Congress are demanding in exchange for any help for Ukraine, Israel and other national security needs. Mayorkas arrived for more talks late Sunday afternoon.

"Everyday we get closer, not far-

ther away," said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., as talks wrapped up in the evening.

Their holiday recess postponed, Murphy and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, the Arizona independent, acknowledged the difficulty of drafting, and securing support, for deeply complicated legislation on an issue that has vexed Congress for years. Ahead of more talks Monday, it is becoming apparent any action is unlikely before year's end.

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said senators don't want to be "jammed" by a last-minute compromise reached by negotiators.

"We're not anywhere close to a deal," Graham, whose staff has joined the talks, said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Predicted

Graham predicted the deliberations will go into next year. He was among 15 Republican senators who wrote to GOP leadership urging them to wait until the House returns Jan. 8 to discuss the issue.

Top GOP negotiator Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma and Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell also signaled in their own letter Sunday that talks still had a ways to go. Lankford said later that the January timeline was "realistic."

The Biden administration faces an increasingly difficult political situation as global migration is on a historic rise, and many migrants are fleeing persecution or leaving war-torn countries for the United States, with smugglers capitalizing on the situation.

The president is being berated daily by Republicans, led by Trump, as border crossings have risen to levels that make even some in Biden's own Democratic Party concerned. But the Biden

administration, in considering revival of Trump-like policies, is drawing outrage from Democrats and immigrant advocates who say the ideas would gut the U.S. asylum system and spark fears of deportations from immigrants already living in the U.S.

The White House's failure to fully engage Latino lawmakers in the talks until recently, or ensure a seat at the negotiating table, has led to a near revolt from leaders of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. "It's unacceptable," said Rep. Nanette Barragan, D-Calif., chair of the Hispanic Caucus, on social media. "We represent border districts & immigrant communities that will be severely impacted by extreme changes to border policy."

Progressives in Congress are also warning the Biden administration off any severe policies that would bar immigrants a legal path to enter the country. "No backroom deal on the border without the involvement of the House, the House Hispanic Caucus, Latino senators is going to pass," said Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., on Fox News.

White House chief of staff Jeff Zients, along with Mayorkas, heard from leading Latino lawmakers during a conference call with the Hispanic Caucus on Saturday afternoon.

The senators and the White House appear to be focused on ways to limit the numbers of migrants who are eligible for asylum at the border, primarily by toughening the requirements to qualify for their cases to go forward.

The talks have also focused removing some migrants who have already been living in the U.S. without full legal status, and on ways to temporarily close the U.S.-Mexico border to some crossings if they hit a certain metric, or threshold. Arrests of migrants have topped 10,000 on some days.



President Barack Obama presents the 2009 Presidential Medal of Freedom to Sandra Day O'Connor, Aug. 12, 2009. The late Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman to serve on the Supreme Court and an unwavering voice of moderate conservatism for more than two decades, will lie in repose in the court's Great Hall on Monday, Dec. 18, 2023. O'Connor, an Arizona native, died Dec. 1 at age 93. (AP)



Yeol



Jong Un

Asia

N. Korea conducts missile test: North Korea on Monday conducted its first intercontinental ballistic missile test in five months, likely launching a developmental, more agile weapon, as it vows strong responses against U.S. and South Korean moves to boost their nuclear deterrence plans.

The South Korean government described the missile tested as a solid-fueled weapon, a likely reference to the North's road-mobile Hwasong-18 ICBM whose built-in solid propellants make its launch more difficult for adversaries to detect than liquid-fueled weapons. North Korean leader **Kim Jong Un** previously called the Hwasong-18 the most powerful weapon of his nuclear forces.

South Korea's military said the North Korean missile flew about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. It said the missile was launched on an elevated angle, an apparent attempt to avoid neighboring countries. Japanese lawmaker Masahisa Sato, citing Japan's Defense Ministry, said the missile rose as high as 6,000 kilometers (3,730 miles).

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan spoke with his South Korean and Japanese counterparts on the phone and condemned the North Korean launch as a violation of multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions that ban any ballistic activities by the North. South Korean President **Yoon Suk Yeol** separately ordered officials to maintain a solid South Korean-U.S. joint defense posture and respond "swiftly and overwhelmingly" to any North Korean provocations against South Korea. (AP)

HK prosecutes activist J.Lai: A landmark national security trial opened Monday in Hong Kong for prominent activist and publisher Jimmy Lai, who faces a possible life sentence if convicted under a law im-

posed by Beijing to crush dissidents.

Lai, 76, was arrested in August 2020 during a crackdown on the city's pro-democracy movement under the sweeping national

security law enacted following huge protests four years ago. He was charged with colluding with foreign forces to endanger national security and conspiring with others

to put out seditious publications. (AP)

Myanmar rejects Suu Kyi's appeal:

Myanmar's Supreme Court rejected Monday a special appeal by the country's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi against her conviction in a case in which she was charged with corruption for allegedly receiving gold and thousands of dollars as a bribe from a former political colleague, a legal official said.

Suu Kyi, 78, was arrested on Feb. 1, 2021, when the military seized power from her elected government. She is serving prison sentences totaling 27 years after being convicted of a string of criminal charges that her supporters and independent analysts say were concocted to discredit her and legitimize the military's seizure of power. (AP)

300 rescued from floodwaters: More than 300 people were rescued overnight from floodwaters in northeast Australia, with dozens of residents clinging to roofs, officials said on Monday.

Cairns Airport was closed on Monday due to flooding and authorities were concerned that the city of 160,000 people will lose drinking water. While rain was easing in Cairns, severe weather warnings were in place in nearby Port Douglas, Daintree, Cooktown, Wujal Wujal and Hope Vale, with more rain forecast. (AP)



In this photo released by the Office of the Narcotics Control Board on Sunday, Dec. 17, 2023, acting secretary-general of the Office of the Narcotics Control Board Phanurat Lukboon, third right, talks to reporters as bags containing methamphetamine pills are displayed during a news conference in Chiang Rai province, Thailand. A number of suspected drug smugglers were killed and about 2 million methamphetamine tablets seized in a northern Thai border town near Myanmar after a shootout with Thai soldiers, Thai officials said. (AP)

gold prices rise on weakened bond yields

Gold prices experienced an uptick in early Monday trading, driven by weakened bond yields as investors eagerly anticipated upcoming inflation data in the United States, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Scheduled for release later this week, the data is expected to provide further insights into the potential course of action the US Federal Reserve might take concerning interest rates, espe-

cially after a recent dovish tone from the central bank.

Following last week's Federal Open Market Committee meeting, yields have been on a downward trend, creating favorable conditions for a potential further increase in gold prices, according to Tim Waterer, Chief Market Analyst at KCM Trade. The ten-year US Treasury bond yields are currently lingering near their lowest levels since July. The de-

cline in bond yields effectively reduces the opportunity cost associated with holding non-yielding assets like gold.

Last week, the Federal Reserve chose to keep interest rates unchanged, signaling a potential shift away from the historical tightening of monetary policy witnessed over the past two years. The central bank hinted at the possibility of a decline in interest rates starting in 2024. (AP)

illumina and Grail terminate merger agreement

Biotech giant Illumina says it will undo its \$7.1 billion purchase of the cancer-screening company Grail after losing legal battles with antitrust enforcers in the U.S. and Europe.

San Diego-based Illumina said in a Sunday statement that it made its decision to divest Grail after a U.S. appeals court ruled Friday that the merger could violate antitrust laws.

The European Union in Oc-

tober ordered the deal to be unwound because it closed in 2021 without regulatory approval from the 27-nation bloc. The EU earlier slapped a \$475 million fine on Illumina for jumping the gun on the acquisition without its consent.

Illumina said Sunday it had already pledged to divest Grail if it was not successful with either the European Court of Justice or in the Louisiana-based Fifth Cir-

cuit Court of Appeals, where the U.S. Federal Trade Commission case seeking to block the deal was most recently considered.

The company said the divestiture will happen through a third-party sale or capital markets transaction by the end of the second quarter of 2024.

Illumina is a major supplier of next-generation sequencing systems for genetic and genomic analysis. (AP)

Market Movements

18-12-2023

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts
SAUDI	+75.62	11,676.34	UAE	-10.50	3,990.60
EGYPT	+541.95	25,334.09	JAPAN	-211.57	32,758.98
			PHILIPPINES	-2.94	6,475.50
			PAKISTAN	-1,062.40	65,073.62
			DFM		
			Nikkei		
			PSEI		
			KSE 100		

Business

Kuwait Central Bank reports 2.6% surge in bond issuance

38 bond issues totaling 8.2b dinars

By Ahmad Fathi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: The Central Bank of Kuwait has witnessed a noteworthy surge in the issuance of bonds and corresponding tawarruq, showing a 2.6% increase during the first 11 months of the current year. The total value of these issuances amounted to 210 million dinars, reflecting a continuous effort by the Central Bank to regulate liquidity in the market.

In specific terms, the Central Bank launched 38 issues with a cumulative value of 8.2 billion dinars during this period. This active approach in issuing bonds has resulted in increased coverage by banks, which covered these issuances approximately 12 times, totaling an impressive 98.7 billion dinars.

This surge in bond and tawarruq issues stands in contrast to the same

period last year, where 35 issues were launched, amounting to 8.02 billion dinars. The coverage by banks during this period was 11.3 times, totaling 90.7 billion dinars. The growth in these financial instruments demonstrates the Central Bank's commitment to providing liquidity options for the market.

However, despite the increase in the number and value of issuances, the total balance of the Central Bank's issuances of bonds and corresponding tawarruq with local banks experienced an 11.2% decline. This decrease amounted to 418 million dinars on an annual basis, falling from 3.713 billion dinars at the end of October 2022 to 3.295 billion dinars at the end of October 2023.

It's worth noting that the Central Bank's last issuance, which occurred on November 28th, amounted to 240 million dinars. This issuance, with a 6-month maturity and an interest rate of 4.5%, marked the sixth issue in November. The total value of these six issues reached 1.07 billion dinars, covered by banks with a value of 14.19 billion dinars, achieving a coverage rate of 13.2 times.

Looking ahead, the Central Bank's continuous issuance of bonds serves various purposes. Beyond regulating liquidity, these issuances offer banks opportunities to arrange their liquidity positions effectively and enhance their maturity scales. Additionally, these instruments are classified as risk-free in banks' statements, consuming no percentage of capital, aligning with the strategic goals of financial institutions.

The growth in demand for bonds and tawarruq reflects the rising interest of banks in these financial instruments. This interest is fueled by higher yields, as the returns on investment have been on the rise since the beginning of 2022. While the rate of return on investment in bonds decreased during the 2020 and 2021 issuances, it began to rise from the start of 2022, continuing until the third quarter of 2023.

In summary, the Central Bank's active approach to bond issuances showcases its commitment to providing diverse financial instruments for the market, contributing to the regulation of liquidity and offering attractive options for banks seeking investment opportunities.



Shoppers and sightseers walk on the 5th Avenue, Monday, Dec. 11, 2023, in New York. Last Thursday, the Commerce Department released U.S. retail sales data for November. (AP)

Shoppers defy expectations

US retail sales rise 0.3% in November

NEW YORK, Dec 18, (AP): Americans picked up their spending from October to November unexpectedly as the unofficial holiday season kicked off, underscoring the power of shoppers despite elevated prices.

Retail sales rose 0.3%, in November from October, when sales fell 0.2%, according to the Commerce Department on Thursday. Sales were expected to decline again in November due to a myriad of issues, including uncertainty over the economy. Excluding car and gas sales, retail sales rose 0.6%.

As they have been doing for much of the year, American consumers, a huge engine for economic growth in the U.S., hit the stores, shopped online, went out to restaurants or traveled.

Business at restaurants, furniture stores and online rose. Sales at clothing and accessories stores were also up. Sales at electronics, appliance and department stores fell. The figures aren't adjusted for inflation.

The urge to spend for Americans appears to have some running room even after a blowout summer. Consumer spending jumped in the July-September quarter. Economists have been expecting spending to slow in the final three months of the year as credit card debt and delinquencies rise, and savings fall. And while inflation is easing, prices are still higher at restaurants, car shops, or for things like rent.

"While consumers continue to face hurdles from higher borrowing costs, tighter credit conditions and elevated prices, a still-strong labor market, a positive trend in incomes and an easing in price pressures should keep spending and growth positive for now," wrote Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist for High Frequency Economics.

U.S. employment data last week showed that employers added 199,000 jobs in November and the unemployment rate declined to 3.7%. Inflation has plummeted in little over a year from a troubling 9.1%, to 3.2%. While inflation is still above the desired level, the economy by most counts is likely to avoid the recession many economists had feared, a potential side effect of U.S. attempts to cool inflation.

Yet a lot of Americans remain gloomy, according to the University of Michigan's Index of Consumer Sentiment. The preliminary December figures issued Friday showed moods have improved as more people see inflation cooling.

Stores have been discounting holiday merchandise earlier and heavier. Mark Cohen, director of retail studies at Columbia Business School, believes that stores have been intensifying sales to get shoppers to buy.

Ted Rossman, senior industry analyst at Bankrate, noted that credit card balances and rates are at all-time highs. That has led to some concerns about the willingness to take on debt with the cost of borrowing still comparatively high.

"It feels like the holiday debt hangover could be particularly nasty this year," he said.

The strong retail numbers Thursday were particularly surprising given some of the news coming from retailers themselves.

In the most recent quarter, retailers including Walmart and Macy's said shoppers were being more selective in what they were buying as the holiday shopping season approached.

Walmart attracted shoppers looking for deals, but its expectations going forward were muted. Sales at Target slid even though the chain did better than many industry watchers had expected.

Sales also fell at Home Depot, as customers put off home renovations as well as purchases of big-ticket items like appliances and other goods often bought with credit cards.

The National Retail Federation, the nation's largest retail trade group, still expects shoppers will spend more during the 2023 winter holidays than last year.

The group forecast in November that U.S. holiday sales will rise 3% to 4% for November through December. That is slower than the 5.4% growth over the same period a year ago, but more consistent with the average annual holiday increase of 3.6% from 2010 to pre-pandemic 2019.

'Consumer-friendly settlement reached'

Southwest Airlines settles for \$140m over December 2022 flight meltdown

DALLAS, Dec 18, (AP): Southwest Airlines will pay a \$35 million fine as part of a \$140 million agreement to settle a federal investigation into a debacle in December 2022 when the airline canceled thousands of flights and stranded more than 2 million travelers over the holidays.

Most of the settlement will go toward compensating future passengers, which the U.S. Department of Transportation considers an incentive for Southwest to avoid repeating last winter's mess.

The government said the assessment was the largest it has ever imposed on an airline for violating consumer protection laws.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said the settlement demonstrates his agency's resolve to make airlines take care of their passengers.

"This penalty should put all airlines on notice to take every step possible to ensure that a meltdown like this never happens again," he said.

Southwest said it was "grateful to have reached a consumer-friendly settlement" giving the airline credit for compensation it already provided to customers. The airline said it has "learned from the event, and now can shift its entire focus to the future."

The assessment stems from nearly 17,000 canceled flights a year ago, starting as a winter storm paralyzed Southwest operations in Denver and Chicago and then snowballing when a crew rescheduling system couldn't keep up with the chaos.

Even before the settlement, the nation's fourth-biggest airline by revenue said the meltdown cost it more than \$1.1 billion in refunds and reimbursements, extra costs and lost ticket sales over several months.

The government said in a consent decree dated Friday that Southwest "violated the law on numerous occasions," including by failing to help customers who were stranded in airports and hotels, leaving many of them to scramble for other flights.

Many who called the airline's overwhelmed customer service center got a busy signal or were stuck on hold for hours.

Southwest also did not keep customers updated about canceled and delayed flights, failing to fulfill a requirement that airlines notify the public within 30 minutes of a change. Some said they never got an email or text notice and couldn't access Southwest's website.

The government also charged Southwest did not provide refunds quickly enough. People whose refund requests to a special Southwest website contained errors were not told to fix the mistakes, they simply didn't get the money. Others didn't receive immediate refunds for things like pet fees and boarding

DESTINATION	FLIGHT	AIRLINE	TIME	DATE	STATUS
Phoenix	2275	Southwest	3:10 PM	15	Cancelled
Reno	436	Southwest	12:05 PM	16	Cancelled
Sacramento	1527	Southwest	12:15 PM	15	Cancelled
Sacramento	2403	Southwest	1:55 PM	14	Cancelled
Salt Lake City	3133	Southwest	12:00 PM	18A	Cancelled
Salt Lake City	2403	Southwest	1:55 PM	14	Cancelled
San Antonio	1384	Southwest	10:10 AM	13	Delayed
San Jose	2279	Southwest	2:00 PM	15	Cancelled
Sarasota	1384	Southwest	10:10 AM	13	Delayed
St. Louis	2275	Southwest	3:10 PM	15	Cancelled

Canceled Southwest Airlines flights displayed in red on the departures monitor at the Southwest terminal at the Los Angeles International Airport, Dec. 27, 2022. Southwest Airlines will pay a \$35 million fine as part of a \$140 million agreement to settle a federal investigation into a debacle last December when the airline canceled thousands of flights and stranded more than 2 million travelers over the holidays. (AP)

upgrades that went unused because of canceled flights, according to the department.

In the consent order, Dallas-based Southwest disputed many of the Transportation Department's findings and said only a small percentage of refunds were issued late, but the company said it entered the agreement just to settle the matter.

Southwest said the 2022 storm that produced record cold temperatures, blizzards and power outages a few days before Christmas created "unanticipated operational challenges." The airline said it quickly began reimbursing travelers for meals, hotels and alternative transportation and also distributed frequent flyer points.

Southwest has added de-icing equipment and will increase staff during extreme cold temperatures at key airports, CEO Robert Jordan said.

Southwest had previously agreed to make more than \$600 million in refunds and reimbursements. Still, the carrier disclosed in October that federal officials found its efforts fell short and the carrier could face a civil penalty over its service to customers.

The settlement provides that in addition to the \$35 million fine, Southwest will get \$33 million in credit for compensation already handed out, mostly for giving 25,000 frequent flyer points each, worth about \$300, to affected customers.

FTSE review impacts Boursa with \$22m flows

Foreign institutions tracking the MSCI, FTSE, and Standard & Poor's emerging market indices have closed their accounts for this year following periodic and annual reviews of their investment positions on the Boursa Kuwait, reports Al-Rai daily.

The recent reviews by inactive foreign institutions showed varied impacts, with some reducing weights and making limited increases in positions in major local companies.

The impact of the FTSE review was relatively slight, with approximately \$22 million in total funds flowing in and out of the stock exchange.

On the other hand, active international institutions were more prominent, not being restricted to specific weights or the number of companies. There are expectations that these active institutions will continue to strengthen their positions through selective purchases during daily trading.

Investment sources highlight that local stocks listed on emerging market indices are under constant scrutiny by global entities, funds, and investment portfolios tracking those indices. Active institutions have a significant influence on trading, as their operations are part of daily trading. They are expected to continue with thoughtful purchases before the annual closings.

Recent closings revealed that ten leading entities listed on the stock exchange acquired 27.75 billion dinars, constituting around 69 percent of the total market value of companies. Key sectors include banking and telecommunications, with companies such as KFH, NBK, Boubayan Bank, Zain, Agility, Al-Mabaneh, Al-Khaleej, Al-Tijari, Burgan, and Ooredoo.

While only four sectors closed with an increase in performance since the beginning of the year -- consumer goods, health care, consumer services, and insurance -- banks, industry, financial services, and others still lead the sectors with losses.

Investment portfolios and funds are showing significant interest in reducing losses and achieving balanced closings by the end of the year. Some may fully compensate for their losses, and there are expectations that certain investment portfolios will adjust their plans and outlook toward annual closings in the remaining eight trading sessions of the year.

Major investment institutions are working to achieve balance in their components, focusing on companies that provide returns to shareholders.

The banking and service sectors have been particularly targeted for



People walk past the New York Stock Exchange, Monday, Dec. 11, 2023, in New York. Stocks drifted higher in afternoon trading Monday on Wall Street ahead of the Federal Reserve's last meeting of the year. (AP)

Global inflation to ease at 6.9%

Stock markets rally globally in '23

NEW YORK, Dec 18, (AP): It's been a great year for stock markets around the world.

Wall Street's rally has been front and center, with the U.S. stock market the world's largest and its clear leader in performance in recent years. The S&P 500 is on track to return more than 20% for the third time in the last five years, and its gangbusters performance has brought it back within 2% of its record set at the start of 2022. The Dow Jones Industrial Average closed at a record high Wednesday.

Even in Japan, which has been home to some of the world's most disappointing stocks for decades, the market marched upward to touch its highest level since shortly after its bubble burst in 1989.

Across developed and emerging economies, stocks have powered ahead in 2023 as inflation has regressed, even with wars raging in hotspots around the world. Globally, inflation is likely to ease to 6.9% this year from 8.7% in 2022, according to the International Monetary Fund.

The expectation is for inflation to cool even further next year. That has investors feeling better about the path of interest rates, which have shot higher around much of the world to get inflation under

control. Such hopes have been more than enough to offset a slowdown in global economic growth, down to an estimated 3% this year from 3.5% last year, according to the IMF.

This year's glaring exception for global stock markets has been China. The recovery for the world's second-largest economy has faltered, and worries are rising about cracks in its property market. Stocks in Hong Kong have taken a particularly hard hit.

This year's big gains for global markets may carry a downside, though: Some possible future returns may have been pulled forward, limiting the upside from here.

Europe's economy has been flirting with recession for a while, for example, and many economists expect it to remain under pressure in 2024 because of all the hikes to interest rates that have already been pushed through.

And while central banks around the world may be set to cut interest rates later in 2024, which would relieve pressure on the economy and financial system, rates are unlikely to return to the lows that followed the 2008 financial crisis, according to researchers at investment giant Vanguard. That new normal for rates could also hem in returns for stocks and make markets more volatile.

acquisition, as they offer cash distributions and free grants to shareholders annually.

Stocks listed on global emerging markets indices boast the highest li-

quidity in circulation. Medium and large-cap stocks stand out as targets for individuals and local medium and small portfolios, resulting in increased transaction intensity.

Greek parliament passes gov't's 2024 budget

The Greek parliament on Sunday evening approved the government's 2024 budget, the first in 14 years with Greek debt listed at investment grade.

The budget passed on a 158-142 vote in the 300-member body, with only lawmakers from the governing conservative New Democracy party voting for it. In a separate vote, the defense budget was approved 249-51, an unusually wide margin.

A relatively low-key debate over the budget lasted five days.

The budget forecasts 2.9% growth in the economy for 2024, up from a projected 2.4% in 2023, which is four times faster than the Eurozone average. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said he hoped the economy could grow at least 3%, based on strong investment spending, forecast to rise 15.1%. Greece's gross domestic prod-

uct, adjusted for inflation, was predicted to top 200 billion euros (\$218 billion) for the first time since 2010, when Greece had to be rescued after defaulting on its debt.

Inflation was forecast to average 2.8%, slightly higher than initial estimates, mainly because of persistently high food prices. The government expects to spend about 2.5 billion euros in subsidies to prop up lower incomes hit by inflation, including high electricity prices. (AP)

The Netherlands, S. Korea step up partnership

The Netherlands and South Korea are stepping up cooperation in the field of semiconductor chips as part of a deepening "strategic partnership," caretaker Prime Minister Mark Rutte said.

The Dutch leader spoke at a meeting with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol during his two-day state visit. Their meeting came a day after Yoon visited the headquarters of semiconductor chip machine maker ASML.

"Our countries are now going to step up our cooperation in this field. This is a promising initiative, and it is also, I believe, a real win-win situation," Rutte said.

As part of the visit, South Korean nuclear power company KHNP signed a contract to carry out a feasibility study into the construction of two new nuclear power plants in the southern Dutch town of Borselle. U.S.

company Westinghouse and France's EDF will soon sign similar contracts, the Dutch government announced.

Borselle, near the border with Belgium and the North Sea coast, is home to the Netherlands' only nuclear power station.

"Nuclear energy helps us on our way to a CO2-free energy system," Dutch Climate and Energy Minister Rob Jetten said in a statement. (AP)

Lula says move will 'facilitate investment'

Brazil approves a major tax reform overhaul

RIO DE JANEIRO, Dec 18, (AP): Brazil's lower house has approved a major reform of the nation's notoriously complicated tax system in a major victory for left-ist President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who threw his weight behind the proposal.

The long-awaited tax reform aims to simplify the system, widely considered overly burdensome for both individuals and businesses, and boost economic growth that has drifted between downturns and doldrums for the last decade.

The reform will "facilitate investment," tweeted Lula, who celebrated the proposal's approval late Friday and thanked Congress.

The reform - initially approved by deputies in July - had to be voted on again after the Senate made changes to the text before sending it back to the lower house.

The constitutional amendment passed easily by greater than 3-to-1 margins in both rounds of voting. When results appeared on the giant television screen in Congress, lawmakers reacted with cheers and applause.

"After more than 40 years, the country will have a modern, lean and efficient tax system that will change the country's economy," Speaker Arthur Lira tweeted, adding that it's not "the perfect system, but one that can be approved."

Relations between Lula and Congress, dominated by Conservative lawmakers, have been strained. This week, Congress overturned a veto by Lula so that it can reinstate legislation that undoes protections of Indigenous peoples' land rights.

And passage of the tax reform followed record allocations of funds to lawmakers for projects in their home states, revealing the government's reliance on grants to drum up votes to advance its economic agenda.

But the adoption of the tax reform is nonetheless a win for Lula, whose administration made approval a priority.

It follows another recent victory for the president, who nominated Justice

Minister Flávio Dino to the Supreme Court. The Senate approved that choice on Wednesday, despite opposition from lawmakers close to former far-right leader Jair Bolsonaro.

The tax reform will merge the five main levies into two value-added taxes: one federal and another to be shared between states and municipalities.

Under the current system, the five main taxes on consumption are collected at different levels of government, with the 27 federal entities and more than 5,500 municipalities imposing their own, frequently updated levies.

The system generates differences of interpretation, leading to time-consuming lawsuits and requiring companies to heavily staff accounting departments. That reduces budgets for areas like research and development and deters foreign investment.

The reform will now be signed into law in a joint session of Congress expected to take place next week.



Farmers with tractors take part in a protest rally organized by the German Farmers' Association in Berlin, Germany, Monday, Dec. 18, 2023. Farmers are gathering in Berlin to protest against planned cuts to tax breaks for diesel used in agriculture, part of a deal reached by the government to plug a hole in the country's budget. (AP)

Govt acts to plug hole in economy

Farmers protest against plan to cut 'tax breaks' for diesel

BERLIN, Dec 18, (AP): German farmers gathered in Berlin on Monday to protest against planned cuts to tax breaks for diesel used in agriculture, part of a deal reached by the government to plug a hole in the country's budget.

Leaders of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's three-party coalition last week agreed on measures to fill a 17 billion-euro (\$18.5 billion) hole in next year's budget, saying they would achieve that by reducing climate-damaging subsidies and slightly reducing some ministries' spending, among other measures.

That was necessary after Germany's highest court annulled an earlier decision to repurpose 60 billion euros originally meant to cushion the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic for measures to help combat climate change and modernize the country. The maneuver fell foul of Germany's strict self-imposed limits on running up debt.

As more details of the deal have emerged, so has discontent, notably over a plan to cut tax breaks for agricultural diesel and scrap an exemption from car tax for farming vehicles.

Even Agriculture Minister Cem Özdemir has protested. He told ARD television that farmers have "no

alternative" to diesel.

"I'm not shutting myself off from us having to save, but it must be done in a way that we take people along with us - and farmers are the ones who supply us with food," Özdemir said. "These cuts ... overburden the sector."

Farmers in tractors streamed into the capital on Monday for a protest at the Brandenburg Gate.

Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck, a member of Özdemir's Green party, warned against picking apart last week's budget deal and said that anyone wanting to reverse planned cuts must come up with a way to finance doing so which is acceptable to all.

"As politicians, we are obliged to enable an overall solution," Habeck told German news agency dpa. "What politicians can't do is shirk responsibility and only say where savings shouldn't be made."

Habeck's Economy Ministry faces criticism from within the governing coalition over another aspect of the budget deal - an abrupt end to subsidies for buying new electric cars, which originally were due to stay in place until as late as the end of next year.

The ministry announced on Saturday that no new applications would be accepted after Sunday night.

Storied US Steel to be acquired for more than \$14 bln by Nippon Steel

PITTSBURGH, Dec 18, (AP): U.S. Steel, the Pittsburgh steel producer that played a key role in the nation's industrialization, is being acquired by Nippon Steel in an all-cash deal valued at approximately \$14.1 billion.

The transaction is worth about \$14.9 billion when including the assumption of debt. The price tag for U.S. Steel is nearly double what was offered just four months ago by rival Cleveland Cliffs. U.S. Steel, which rejected that offer, confirmed the offering price from Nippon early Monday.

U.S. Steel will keep its name and its headquarters in Pittsburgh, where it was founded in 1901 by J.P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie.

Soaring prices have helped fuel consolidation in the steel industry this decade. Steel prices more than quadrupled near the start of the pandemic to near \$2,000 per metric ton by the summer of 2021 as supply chains experienced gridlock, a symptom of surging demand for goods and the lack of anticipation of that demand.

Nippon, which will pay \$55 per share for U.S. Steel, said Monday that the deal will bolster its manu-

facturing and technology capabilities. It will also expand Nippon's production in the U.S. and add to its positions in Japan, India and the ASEAN region.

Nippon said the acquisition is anticipated to bring its total annual crude steel capacity to 86 million tons and help it capitalize on growing demand for high-grade steel, automotive and electrical steel.

"The transaction builds on our presence in the United States and we are committed to honoring all of U.S. Steel's existing union contracts," Nippon President Eiji Hashimoto said in a prepared statement.

U.S. Steel CEO David Burritt said that the sale is beneficial to the United States, "ensuring a competitive, domestic steel industry, while strengthening our presence globally."

The acquisition has been approved by the boards of both companies and is targeted to close in the second or third quarter of 2024. It still needs approval from U.S. Steel shareholders.

Shares of United States Steel Corp. soared more than 27% before the opening bell Monday.

European Central Bank keeps its key interest rate at a record high and said it will leave it there as long as needed to battle back inflation, signaling that cuts are not around the corner despite expectations it will act next year to support the shrinking economy.

It follows similar decisions this week by the U.S. Federal Reserve, Bank of England and Swiss National Bank to leave rates unchanged. The Fed went further by signaling it could make three interest rate cuts next year.

The ECB gave away little about its future moves after keeping its benchmark rate at 4%, reiterating that it will make decisions based on the latest information on how the economy is doing.

"Should we lower our guard? We ask ourselves that question. No, we should absolutely not lower our guard," bank President Christine Lagarde said at a news conference, speaking hoarsely and coughing at times because she said she was recovering from COVID-19 but was no longer contagious.

Polymakers "did not discuss rate cuts at all, no discussion, no debate on this issue," she said. Lagarde also stressed that future decisions will ensure that rates "will be set at sufficiently restrictive levels for as long as necessary."

Inflation

Central banks worldwide drastically raised rates to contain inflation that broke out in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. They're now trying to balance keeping rates high for long enough to ensure inflation is contained against the risk that higher borrowing costs could throw their economies into recession.

Inflation has fallen more than expected in the 20 European Union countries that use the euro currency, to 2.4% in November from a peak of 10.6% in October 2022. That's not too far from the ECB's goal of 2% considered best for the economy.

That has led analysts to predict the ECB will cut rates next year, though the timing is not certain and forecasts range from March to September for the move.

While inflation is down following a record pace of rate hikes, economic growth has lagged because the cost of borrowing has surged for things like home purchases and business investment in new offices and factory equipment. The eurozone saw economic output shrink 0.1% in the July-to-September quarter.

Meanwhile, wages are still catching up to higher prices in shops, leaving European consumers less than euphoric even as European city centers deck themselves in Christmas lights.

Germany's economy seen shrinking again in the current quarter

BERLIN, Dec 18, (AP): Germany's economy is likely to shrink again slightly in the current fourth quarter, the country's central bank said Monday, while a survey showed business confidence retreating unexpectedly.

Europe's biggest economy contract-



The European Central Bank is pictured in Frankfurt, Germany, Wednesday, July 26, 2023. 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. (AP)

Guidelines around a new tax credit for sustainable aviation fuel is issued by the Treasury Department

WASHINGTON, Dec 18, (AP): Long-awaited guidance around tax credits for aviation fuel that reduces emissions of greenhouse gases compared with conventional fuel was issued by the Treasury Department.

Environmentalists said they were concerned that the guidelines could pave the way for credits for fuel made from corn, sugar cane and other crops, which they consider unsustainable sources.

Producers of sustainable aviation fuel will be eligible for tax credits ranging from \$1.25 to \$1.75 per gallon.

Congress approved the credits as part of President Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, which included provisions designed to boost cleaner energy. The credits are designed to increase the supply and

reduce the cost of sustainable fuel, which is far higher than regular jet fuel.

On a key issue, the Treasury Department accepted a model for measuring the emissions-reduction of fuels that is being developed by the Energy Department and is supported by the ethanol industry.

However, Treasury said the Biden administration plans to update the Energy Department model for measuring emissions reductions by March 1, leaving the eventual outcome uncertain.

The Environmental Defense Fund said it would withhold final judgment on the guidelines until March, but said it worried that they could put the U.S. out of step with international standards.

food, clothing. So, you have got to be careful now."

That lingering inflation being felt across the eurozone is what the ECB is trying to stamp out.

The bank's messaging Thursday showed that "there's still a long way to go before the ECB starts cutting rates," said Carsten Brzeski, chief eurozone economist at ING bank. "It should also be clear that the end of a hiking cycle does not imminently lead to a cutting cycle."

Brzeski said he sees the first rate cuts in June.

On the other hand, inflation was

"Our initial assessment is that this would be a blank check for fuels made from sugar cane, soybean and rapeseed - none of which are sustainable or consistent with Congress' intent," the group's senior vice president, Mark Brownstein, said in a prepared statement.

Ethanol supporters counter that the Energy Department model provides a precise way to measure the carbon-reduction benefits of agricultural feedstocks used in sustainable aviation fuel.

Around 2% to 3% of global greenhouse gas emissions come from aviation, according to estimates, but that share is expected to grow as air travel continues to boom. Widespread use of electric-powered airplanes is generally considered decades away.

likely to be "quite a lot lower" than the ECB expects, so the first cut of a quarter-percentage point could come in April, with four more such cuts more to follow, said Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist at Capital Economics.

Higher interest rates combat inflation by increasing the cost of borrowing throughout the economy, from bank loans and lines of credit for businesses to mortgages and credit cards. That makes it more expensive to borrow to buy things or invest, lowering demand for goods and easing prices.

again slightly in the fourth quarter of 2023" as a result of weak performances in industry and construction

Two consecutive quarters of contraction is a common definition of recession, though the economists on a panel that declares recessions in the

eurozone use a broader set of data, including employment figures.

Germany is the only major economy expected to shrink this year, according to the International Monetary Fund, which foresees a decline of 0.5%. The German government has forecast a decline of 0.4%.

SECURITY

Business Plus



Red Sea shipping faces unprecedented challenges

Houthi assaults raise alarms for global trade



The USS Mason, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, passes a dock in Norfolk, Va., April 8, 2021. Officials said the USS Mason shot down a suspected Houthi drone flying in its direction during an incident in which two missiles fired from territory held by Yemen's Houthi rebels missed a commercial tanker loaded with jet fuel near the key Bab el-Mandeb Strait last week. (AP)

Houthi interference with navigational rights and freedoms in the waters around the Arabian Peninsula, particularly the Red Sea, is unacceptable

LONDON, Dec 18, (AP) Yemen's Houthi rebels have escalated attacks on ships passing through the Red Sea during the Israel-Hamas war, raising concerns about the impact on the flow of oil, grain and consumer goods through a major global trade artery.

Israeli-linked vessels have been targeted, but the threat to trade has grown this week as a Norwegian-flagged oil tanker was struck and missiles were fired at a vessel carrying jet fuel toward the Suez Canal, where about 10% of the world's trade passes through.

Here are things to know about the recent attacks and the impact on global shipping:

The Houthis are Iranian-backed rebels who swept down from their northern stronghold in Yemen and seized the capital, Sanaa, in 2014, launching a grinding war against a Saudi-led coalition seeking to restore the government.

The Houthis have sporadically

targeted ships in the region over time, but the attacks have increased since the start of the war between Israel and Hamas.

They have used drones and anti-ship missiles to attack vessels and in one case used a helicopter to seize an Israeli-owned ship and its crew.

In recent days, they have threatened to attack any vessel they believe is either going to or coming from Israel. That's now escalated to apparently any vessel given the attacks this week, with the Houthis also hailing vessels by radio to try to convince them to change course closer to the territory they control.

"The numerous attacks originating from Houthi-controlled territories in Yemen threaten international navigation and maritime security, in grave contravention of international law," the European Union foreign policy office said Wednesday.

Houthi "interference with navigational rights and freedoms in the waters around the Arabian Penin-

sula, particularly the Red Sea, is unacceptable."

The Red Sea has the Suez Canal at its northern end and the narrow Bab el-Mandeb Strait at the southern end leading into the Gulf of Aden. It's a busy waterway with ships traversing the Suez Canal to bring goods between Asia and Europe.

A huge amount of Europe's energy supplies, like oil and diesel fuel, come through that waterway, said John Stawpert, senior manager of environment and trade for the International Chamber of Shipping, which represents 80% of the world's commercial fleet.

So do food products like palm oil and grain and anything else brought over on container ships, which is most of the world's manufactured products.

Some Israeli-linked vessels have apparently started taking the longer route around Africa and the Cape of Good Hope, said Noam Raydan, senior fellow at the Washington

Institute for Near East Policy. That lengthens the trip from around 19 days to 31 days depending on vessel speed, increasing costs and adding delays, she said.

The global oil market has shrugged off the most recent attacks. Prices have fallen, and the market is more worried about weak demand in major economies.

The single biggest immediate impact of the Houthi escalation has been increased insurance costs.

The attack and attempted strikes this week show the increased threat to vessels in the Red Sea and represent a "significant impediment" to commercial shipping in the region, said Munro Anderson, head of operations for Vessel Protect, which assesses war risks at sea and provides insurance with backing from Lloyd's, whose members make up the world's largest insurance marketplace.

"The latest incident represents a further degree of instability facing

commercial operators within the Red Sea which is likely to continue to see heightened rates across the short to medium term," he said.

Insurance costs have doubled for shippers moving through the Red Sea, which can add hundreds of thousands of dollars to a journey for the most expensive ships, said David Osler, insurance editor for Lloyd's List Intelligence, which provides analysis for the global maritime industry.

For Israeli ship owners, they have gone up even more - by 250% - and some insurers won't cover them at all, he said.

While shippers are applying a so-called war risk charge of \$50 to \$100 per container to customers bringing over everything from grain to oil to things you buy off Amazon, that's a low enough fee that it should not drive up prices for consumers, he said.

Osler expects insurance costs to keep rising but said the situation would have to get a lot worse - such as the loss of several ships - to raise prices considerably and make some ship owners rethink moving through the region.

"At the moment, it's just an inconvenience that the system can handle," he said. "Nobody likes to be paying hundreds of thousands of dollars more, but you can live with it if you have to."

Unlikely, experts say. The Houthis have no formal naval warships with which to impose a cordon, relying on harassing fire and only one helicopter-borne assault so far. Meanwhile, U.S., French and other coalition warships patrol the area, keeping the waterway open.

Still, the attacks are making the shipping industry nervous, and "it's not being taken lightly," said Stawpert of the shipping chamber. But "you'll still see there's an awful lot of trade going through the Red Sea because it's such a crucial supply line for Europe and Asia."

He noted that the Houthi's area of influence in the waterway also remains limited.

"I just don't see there being a possibility of the Houthi shutting transport through the Red Sea," he said. It is "simply not how the shipping industry works. It's not how we respond to threats like this. We will do everything we can to mitigate any such threats and keep trade flowing."

That's been on display in other conflicts like the war in Ukraine, with the closure of some parts of the Black Sea, Stawpert said.

He doesn't see a threat to shipping in general or closure of Red Sea routes, but "if that were to arise as a potentiality, I think we would see a much more robust reaction from navies in the area."

Urgent need for stronger measures

Shortcomings in Federal school cybersecurity protection

By Nir Kshetri

University of North Carolina – Greensboro

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

Lack of cybersecurity skills among existing staff hinders the development of strong cybersecurity programs

In August 2023, the White House announced a plan to bolster cybersecurity in K-12 schools - and with good reason. Between 2018 and mid-September 2023, there were 386 recorded cyberattacks in the U.S. education sector and cost those schools \$35.1 billion. K-12 schools were the primary target.

The new White House initiative includes a collaboration with federal agencies that have cybersecurity expertise, such as the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, the Federal Communications Commission and the FBI. Technology firms like Amazon, Google, Cloudflare, PowerSchool and D2L have pledged to support the initiative with training and resources.

While the steps taken by the White House are positive, as someone who teaches and conducts research about cybersecurity, I don't believe the proposed measures are enough to protect schools from cyberthreats. Here are four reasons why:

Cyberattacks on K-12 schools

increased more than eightfold in 2022. Educational institutions draw the interest of cybercriminals due to their weak cybersecurity. This weak cybersecurity provides an opportunity to access networks containing highly sensitive information.

Criminals can exploit students' information to apply for fraudulent government benefits and open unauthorized bank accounts and credit cards. In testimony to the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Social Security, a Federal Trade Commission official noted that children's Social Security numbers are uniquely valuable because they have no credit history and can be paired with any name and date of birth. Over 10% of children enrolled in an identity protection service were discovered to have loans.

Cybercriminals can also use such information to launch ransomware attacks against schools. Ransomware attacks involve locking up a computer or its files and demanding payment for their release. The ransomware victimization rate in the education sector surpasses that of all other surveyed industries, including health care, technology, financial services and manufacturing.

Schools are especially vulnerable to cyberthreats because more and more schools are lending electronic devices to students. Criminals have

been found to hide malware within online textbooks and essays to dupe students into downloading it. Should students or teachers inadvertently download malware onto school-owned devices, criminals can launch an attack on the entire school network.

When faced with such an attack, schools can be desperate to comply with criminals' demands to ensure students' access to learning.

K-12 schools' poor cybersecurity performance can be attributed, in part, to lack of staff. About two-thirds of school districts lack a full-time cybersecurity position. Those with cybersecurity staff often don't have the budget for a chief information security officer to oversee and manage the district's strategy. Often, the IT director takes on this role, but they have a broader responsibility for IT operations without a specific emphasis on security.

The lack of cybersecurity skills among existing staff hinders the development of strong cybersecurity programs.

Only 10% of educators say that they have a deep understanding of cybersecurity. The majority of students say that they have minimal or no knowledge about cybersecurity. Cybersecurity awareness tends to be even lower in higher-poverty districts, where students have less access to cybersecurity education.

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency plans to provide cybersecurity training to an additional 300 K-12 schools, school districts and other organizations involved in K-12 education in the forthcoming school year. With 130,930 K-12 public schools and 13,187 public school districts in the U.S., CISA's plan serves only a tiny fraction of them.

The FCC has proposed a pilot program that would allocate \$200 million over three years to boost cyberdefenses. With an annual budget of \$66.6 million, this falls short of covering the entirety of cybersecurity costs, given that it will cost an estimated \$5 billion to adequately secure the nation's K-12 schools.

The costs encompass hardware and software procurement, consulting, testing, and hiring data protection experts to combat cyberattacks. Frequent training is also needed to respond to evolving threats. As technology advances, cybercriminals adapt their methods to exploit vulnerabilities in digital systems. Teachers must be ready to address such risks.

How much should schools and districts be spending on cybersecurity? Other sectors can serve as a model to guide K-12 schools.

One way to determine cybersecurity funding is by the number of employees. In the financial services

industry, for example, these costs range from \$1,300 to \$3,000 per full-time employee. There are over 4 million teachers in the United States. Setting cybersecurity spending at \$1,300 per teacher - the low end of what financial firms spend - would require K-12 schools to spend a total of \$5 billion.

An alternate approach is to determine cybersecurity funding relative to IT spending. On average, U.S. enterprises are estimated to spend 10% of their IT budgets on cybersecurity. Since K-12 schools were estimated to spend more than \$50 billion on IT in the 2020-21 fiscal year, allocating 10% to cybersecurity would also require them to spend \$5 billion.

Another approach is to allocate cybersecurity spending as a proportion of the total budget. In 2019, cybersecurity spending represented 0.3% of the federal budget. Federal, state and local governments collectively allocate \$810 billion for K-12 education. If schools set cybersecurity spending at 0.3%, following the example of federal agencies, that would require an annual budget of \$2.4 billion.

By contrast, a fifth of schools dedicate less than 1% of their IT budgets - not their entire budgets - to cybersecurity. In 12% of school districts, there is no allocation for cybersecurity at all. (AP)

editor's choice



Television

Susan Lucci honored

'General Hospital' dominates Daytime Emmys with 6 trophies

LOS ANGELES, Dec 18, (AP): Thorsten Kaye and Jacqueline MacInnes Wood of "The Bold and the Beautiful" won lead acting honors at the Daytime Emmy Awards on Friday night, when "General Hospital" collected six trophies, including four for acting.

Kaye, who plays Ridge Forrester on the CBS soap, wasn't on hand to accept.

"Thorsten would have thanked me because I help him through everything," joked co-star John McCook, last year's lead actor winner who presented the lead actress award this year.

MacInnes Wood collected her third trophy for her role as Steffy Forrester, the daughter of Ridge.

"Wow! Awesome! Oh my gosh," MacInnes Wood said. "I'm so grateful for this ride."

"General Hospital" capped a dominating night by winning outstanding drama series.

"This is really a special night and I feel very appreciative and a little anxious," executive producer Frank Valentini said. "We'd like to dedicate this to Sonya Eddy and N'Neka Garland, we love you so much."

Eddy won supporting actress honors for her 16-year role as no-nonsense head nurse Epiphany Johnson on the venerable ABC show. She died in December 2022 at age 55 from an infection after surgery.

Garland worked as a producer at "General Hospital" for 22 years before dying of a heart attack in March at age 49.

Robert Gossett, who plays Marshall Ashford on "General Hospital," claimed the supporting actor trophy. He also won last year in the guest performer category for the same role.

Eden McCoy won for outstanding younger performer as Josslyn Jacks. The 20-year-old actor debuted on "General Hospital" in 2015. Her mother, Natasha McCoy, died of cancer in November.

"This is for and because of my mother," McCoy said. "It's not lost on me what an absolute privilege it is to be able to do something, not only I like to do but love to do for a living, and I love what I do. It's really easy to be grateful on nights like this, but I am grateful every day."

Alley Mills, best-known for her role as the mother on "The Wonder Years," won for guest performance on a daytime drama. The 72-year-old actor began playing Heather Webber on "General Hospital" when the role was recast last year.

Her husband, actor Orson Bean, was killed in 2020 after being hit by two cars while crossing a street in the Venice neighborhood of Los Angeles.

Achievement

"I had just lost my beloved husband - it was pretty traumatic - and then I get asked to play a seriously traumatized person who kills a lot of people, but she's got a heart of gold," Mills said. "And she's barreling towards the light all the time and it gave me that ability to keep going and barrel towards the light. The world is so screwed up right now that all I can say to all of you traumatized people out there, just keep barreling towards the light."

"General Hospital" also won for its directing team. Susan Lucci received the Lifetime Achievement Honor for her 40-year run as Erica Kane on "All My Children." The actor, who turns 77

next week, was nominated 18 times in the lead actress category without winning before she ended the wait in 1999.

Shemar Moore, who shouted, "The streak is over!" when presenting her with the trophy back then, returned to introduce her. "The Young and the Restless" was honored for outstanding writing team.

Kelly Clarkson earned her third consecutive trophy for a daytime talk series and won as daytime talk host. The singer, who didn't attend, moved her syndicated show from Los Angeles to New York this year.

"It's a pleasure to work with her. She makes it fun, she's a joy every day and that makes it a little easier," executive producer Alex Duda said. "She wanted me to thank all of our viewers for sticking with us on this migration as we moved."

"Entertainment Tonight" won its eighth trophy as outstanding entertainment news series. Kevin Frazier and Nichelle Turner, who hosted Friday night, came out of the audience to accept.

A show produced by Los Angeles Lakers superstar LeBron James has won a Daytime Emmy.

"Recipe for Change: Standing Up to Antisemitism" won for outstanding daytime special at the Creative Arts and Lifestyle ceremony Saturday in Los Angeles.

The YouTube Originals special was executive produced by James and his business partner Maverick Carter as well as three others. It was hosted by Ilana Glazer, Moshe Kasher and Idina Menzel.

James has previously won three Sports Emmy awards, including one this year for "The Redeem Team" about the 2008 US Olympic men's basketball team.

Variety



This image released by Apple TV+ shows Mark Wahlberg in a scene from 'The Family Plan.' (AP)

Film

Wahlberg on his mission to build Hollywood 2.0

Heartwarming comedy in 'Family Plan'

LOS ANGELES, Dec 18, (AP): Mark Wahlberg knows as well as any parent that it's hard to find a movie everyone in the household wants to watch - especially with teenagers around. It's part of the reason he latched on to "The Family Plan," a charming action-comedy about a former assassin turned suburban dad whose past catches up with him. It's streaming on Apple TV+ on Friday.

"You always have movies that parents can go to with the kids and they'll tolerate them because the kids really want to see it or vice versa," Wahlberg told the AP. "But this really felt like it was a movie that actually was for the whole family."

Early in "The Family Plan," his character is attacked in a grocery store and he must fend off the assailant with his 10-month-old in a baby-carrier on his chest. With his minivan cover blown, he then must convince his wife and teenagers to embark on a cross-country road trip to outrun the danger that he's also desperately trying to keep secret from them.

The grocery store fight with the baby needed to be a big, tone-setting moment. Director Simon Cellan Jones, a veteran television director whose credits include "Boardwalk Empire," thought it was a "fantastic concept. It was a real spin on an action movie scene."

But he also wanted to use real babies rather than dolls. That, everyone quickly found, would prove immensely difficult.

"The baby's supposed to be enjoying seeing daddy in action. The baby and the audience are the only ones privy to that. But getting (the twins) to chuckle or laugh while somebody's kicking or flinging us around, that was next to impossible," Wahlberg said. "I thought we were in trouble."

Then in the editing room, they were relieved to discover that the babies had in fact performed. As Wahlberg said, the twins knew when to turn it on. "I'm very proud of that scene," Cellan Jones

said. Wahlberg called on Michelle Monaghan to see if she'd want to star opposite him as his wife, a character eager for more spontaneity in their life. The two had enjoyed working together on the Boston Marathon bombings drama "Patriot's Day" - and he even calls her "captain fun" on set - but Monaghan was mostly excited to get a comedy.

"It was truly one of the funniest scripts I've read in a long time," Monaghan said. "Creatively, I was super excited because it has a lot of facets of what I like to do as an artist with action and comedy. There are inventive, high-octane action sequences. But, at the heart of it, is this really, really sweet family that you're rooting for."

Attract

They filmed much of the movie in Wahlberg's new hometown of Las Vegas, where he dreams of creating a Hollywood 2.0 with tax credits, a studio and more affordable housing and better quality of life for crews. He and his family relocated from Los Angeles last year, and he's already made two movies there.

"People know how serious we are, but you can't put the carriage before the horse," Wahlberg said. "There are tons of talented people here, but also to attract new people you have to make sure that there is a guarantee you work for X amount of time. And (the state) wants to make sure that if they're giving up the tax credit that people are going to come."

"We're getting close," he added. "I think they're very excited to create a new industry outside of gaming."

Wahlberg has another movie with Cellan Jones on the way too, "Arthur the King," based on the true story of an adventure racer who befriends a stray dog who accompanies his team on a 435-mile journey through the Dominican Republic.

"It's a very different movie," Cellan Jones

laughed. "It's about finding heroes in unlikely places... And if you like dogs, you're going to love this movie."

Like "The Family Plan," Wahlberg also produced "Arthur the King," which will be released theatrically from Lionsgate in March. When it comes to questions of theatrical versus streaming, he said he's just rolling with the punches and trying to stay ahead of the curve.

"In a perfect world, we all wanted to hold on to theatrical as much as possible. But people decided long ago how and where they wanted to consume their content," Wahlberg said. "And working with a company like Apple is very exciting to me."

Besides, he found the living room television was actually the perfect place to watch "The Family Plan."

"I went to watch the first cut of the movie in my home and, it's PG-13, there was only one F-bomb, so it was safe to turn on in the living room as opposed to hiding somewhere. And then slowly but surely everyone was sitting around the TV watching and enjoying the film, without any devices or distraction," Wahlberg said. "It was nice to see that."

Also:

LOS ANGELES: Artificial intelligence is at the heart of "The Creator," Gareth Edwards' visually dazzling sci-fi epic which begins streaming on Hulu on Wednesday. John David Washington plays a retired special forces operative enlisted to help find the creator of advanced AIs after a nuclear bomb destroys downtown Los Angeles. In my review, I wrote that "even if it is a somewhat convoluted and silly mishmash of familiar tropes and sci-fi cliches, it still evokes the feeling of something fresh, something novel, something exciting to experience and behold - which is so much more than you can say about the vast majority of big budget movies these days."

who's the next big movie star. Is it all about the old-school leading men? Chalamet is definitely that."

For Warner Bros., it's the first in a trio of high-profile holiday releases, to be followed by "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom" on Dec. 22 and another musical, "The Color Purple" on Dec. 25.

The only other new wide release

NEW YORK: "Wonka" debuted with \$39 million in box office sales in US and Canadian theaters over the weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday. That made it a strong start for the Timothee Chalamet-starring Willy Wonka musical that underscored the young star's draw.

Musicals have been tough sells in theaters in recent years, so much so that Warner Bros. downplayed the song and dance elements of "Wonka" in trailers. Instead, the studio emphasized Chalamet, the 27-year-old actor who, with "Wonka," notched his second No. 1 movie following 2021's "Dune." The earlier film recorded a \$41 million opening.

While "Dune" was a sprawling and star-studded sci-fi adventure, "Wonka" relies chiefly on Chalamet's charisma.

"Wonka," which cost about \$125 million to produce and played at 4,203 locations, was also the first big Hollywood release to launch following the end of the SAG-AFTRA actors' strike. Chalamet hosted "Saturday Night Live" just days after the strike ended. In his opening monologue, he sang to the tune of "Pure Imagination" about "returning to this magical world where actors can promote their projects."

"It shows you the power of a star, and it also shows you the power of a star going out and working a movie," said Jeffrey Goldstein, distribution chief for Warner Bros. "Having him out there after the strikes were over was a win for him and a win for the movie."

Goldstein expects "Wonka" to be the go-to choice from families over the holidays. Its main competition for kids will be Universal Pictures' animated "Migration."

"Wonka," directed by Paul King of "Paddington" and "Paddington 2," is a prequel to 1971's "Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory," with Chalamet starring as a young Wonka trying to open a candy store. Its ensemble cast includes Hugh Grant, Olivia Colman and Keegan-Michael Key.

Warner Bros. last revived Royal Doherty's classic with the 2005 Tim Burton-directed "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," starring Johnny Depp. It debuted with \$56.2 million and ultimately grossed \$475 million worldwide.

To reach those numbers, "Wonka" will need strong legs through the lucrative holiday moviegoing period. On its side are mostly good reviews (84% "fresh" on Rotten Tomatoes) and positive audience reaction (an "A-" CinemaScore). Chalamet is also drawing younger ticket-buyers. Moviegoers under the age of 25 accounted for 36%



Colman



Chalamet

of the audience, which was split evenly between 51% females and 49% males. "Wonka" added \$53.6 million in overseas ticket sales.

"Chalamet is a true movie star who's been developing his craft and his reputation over many years," says Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for Comscore. "Everybody's looking for

who's the next big movie star. Is it all about the old-school leading men? Chalamet is definitely that."

For Warner Bros., it's the first in a trio of high-profile holiday releases, to be followed by "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom" on Dec. 22 and another musical, "The Color Purple" on Dec. 25.

The only other new wide release

in theaters was "Christmas With the Chosen: Holy Night," from Christian-theme distributor Angel Studios. It debuted with \$2.9 million in sales through 2,094 theaters.

"The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes" again ranked second this week with \$5.8 million in its fifth week of release. (AP)

People & Places

Art

Collector surge

Ugandan art boom mirrors African rise

KAMPALA, Uganda, Dec 18, (AP): Lilian Nabulime hasn't forgotten the time in the 1990s when the Ugandan capital had just one commercial art gallery, a small space that emerging artists struggled to get into.

Now, there are at least six in Kampala, including one whose curator recently exhibited the sculptor's contrarian work.

Nabulime's show, which has attracted audiences for its conspiratorial take on the peculiarities of urban "gossip," might never have happened if she hadn't approached Xenson Art Space and asked for the opportunity to exhibit her work. Her work includes terracotta works topped with the deformed facial features of gossip bearers.



Nabulime

"Nobody ever comes to me and says, 'Oh, can we show your work?'" she said, sitting amid her sculptures. "For me, I just decided and said, 'Let me go and exhibit my work.' I asked for the exhibition, and they gave me the space."

Her solo show, which will last until Dec. 20, exemplifies an expanding artistic landscape that allows more room for local artists who once struggled for space. Nabulime, who teaches sculpture at a prestigious art school in Kampala, is among a growing list of artists whose body of work contributes to a feeling among curators of an exciting moment for Ugandan art.

Their sense of cheer mirrors a similar trend across Africa that's fueled not just by an explosion of compelling new work but also by the growing ability of curators from the continent to reach new collectors at a time of rising global interest in modern African art.

There are fresh signs of this momentum. The Ivorian painter Aboudia was the world's bestselling artist in 2022, selling two more artworks than the popular Damien Hirst, according to the Hiscox Artist Top 100 survey. And in November, an artwork by the Ethiopian-born artist Julie Mehretu fetched \$10.7 million at auction, a new record for an African artist.

Curators

In addition to the annual Art Auction East Africa in Kenya - during which dead and living artists are valued if not rediscovered - the most ambitious curators from Africa are accredited to attend events such as the influential Art Basel.

"Let us have more curators so that they can show other people's work," Nabulime said, speaking of the growing number of gallerists in Kampala. "In Uganda, if we are to have more work on the international market, we have to have more curators who are well connected."

Daudi Karungi, an artist and entrepreneur who founded Kampala's Afriart Gallery in 2002, spoke to the AP of his struggle to nurture talented artists from hungry beginnings to a level of professionalism where their work is properly documented and accessible to global collectors.

One of Africa's most prominent art spaces, Afriart Gallery runs a training program for artists, with the most successful among them now able to show their work abroad. Karungi usually invites some of his artists to join him at art fairs abroad, a key element in giving them international visibility, he said.

"We are now doing shows with artists in other places in the world," he said. "We are publishing books about these artists because some of the things that we need to correct is that we need to write our own stories. We are doing that kind of work for now, and all so far is good."

Those artists not represented by Afriart Gallery have choices, including an alternative space in a disused banking hall in the central district of Masaka, the scene now of a vibrant artistic community that was unimaginable five years ago. A painter born and raised there, Godwin Champs Namuyimba, has had some of his pieces sold for six figures at auction in Europe despite being largely unknown at home.

The regular art auction in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital, also has been critical in the reappraisal in recent years of Ugandan artists such as Geoffrey Mukasa, a painter who was underappreciated in his lifetime and died poor but now commands hefty prices.

Many of Mukasa's works remained unsold by the time he died in 2009, but his work is now acknowledged as "timeless," said Danda Jaroljmek, an influential curator whose Circle Art Gallery in Nairobi puts on the annual auction.

"We were able to source works and to be able to put them in the auction and introduce them to a new audience," she said, adding that the auction creates a "secondary market" for collectors.

Artists

Jaroljmek described the Kampala art scene as more intellectually engaged in ways that the Nairobi scene isn't. That's partly because a prominent art school at Uganda's Makerere University has proved a pivotal "central location" in educating artists, she said.

Yet Uganda's collecting class remains minuscule, with new shows patronized by hip youngsters and expatriates. Gallerists still struggle to make sales, relying mostly on collectors outside Uganda who may spot desirable artworks through promotional materials before making offers.

These poor circumstances vex artists, despite optimism by curators and others who say more and more Ugandans are starting to appreciate art as an attractive investment option.

In 2022, a small group of Ugandans formed the Contemporary Art Society of Uganda, whose goal is to promote the emergence of private and corporate art collections in this East African country of 45 million people. Each of the group's members is asked to collect at least one artwork by a Ugandan each year, creating opportunities for emerging artists.

Ugandan attorney Linda Mutesi, an art collector who helped launch the Contemporary Art Society of Uganda, said that collecting for her and others has become a principled effort aimed at retaining Africa's most unique cultural resources.

"Over the years, the African middle class has been awakened to the things around them, the beauty around them and the issues that surround them, and as you can see, it's always been the expatriates that sort of come to our countries and take all this art away," she said.

"I feel that we are approaching collecting of art as an intervention. We are sort of safeguarding and saying, 'Hey, let's not have this continue. Let's not have the bleeding of these works, all this intellectual property leaving the continent. Let's keep it here.'"



This image released by Prime Video shows Alan Ritchson in a scene from 'Reacher.' (AP)

Television

Actor shares insights into the iconic character

Ritchson on bringing Reacher to TV

LOS ANGELES, Dec 18, (AP): There's a common phrase associated with Jack Reacher in Lee's Child's books: "Reacher says nothing." Saying nothing, however, can be terrifying for Alan Ritchson, who plays Reacher on TV.

"He's socially awkward, very stoic, very cerebral and none of those things should make for an interesting character," Ritchson recently told The Associated Press. "As I play Reacher, I swear there's not one scene where I feel like, 'That was the most interesting scene of all TV.'"

"And then like the director, Sam Hill will come out, 'It was so good! Oh, it's so muscular and it was so full and like, it was right there, and we could just feel it coming out of your pores!'"

"I was just standing there," deadpans Ritchson.

Reacher is a former US Army officer who travels the country with only a toothbrush and wants no attachments or possessions. Nomad life leads Reacher to constantly meet new people and be in different environments, providing "Reacher" an easy set up for his anthology format. He also can't help but step in when he notices trouble brewing, which is often, but often laments that he doesn't want to be involved.

While the series' debut season was based on Child's first Reacher novel "Killing Floor," season two is actually adapted from the 11th book in the series called "Bad Luck and Trouble." In season two, debuting Friday, Reacher reunites with three Army comrades to track down the people who have been targeting and killing members of the elite group they once served in. (They're played by Serinda Swan, Shaun Sipos and Maria Stan who,

spoiler alert, viewers will recognize from season one.)

"Reacher is such a strong character he really is the bow of a ship just carving through the water," said Sipos. "You need characters that cause him to behave slightly differently that you see different sides to him."

Swan believes viewers will get used to Reacher interacting with (mostly) new characters each season. "Our job, was to make sure that the people that came in for season two didn't feel a deficit, like you will miss the first characters, just as you will miss our characters in the next one, but casting and the storytelling means each season you should actually start to be excited because you know that you're going to be able to fall in love with new people."

Ritchson spoke to The Associated Press about the show and the books. Answers are condensed for clarity and brevity.

AP: Season one of this show was a hit, but I feel like it was kind of a quiet release. Do you think the success was a surprise?

Ritchson: It was interesting. The fact that the guy they got to play Reacher was not really a household name, a little less recognizable, it was a little harder to get people to talk to us. I think Amazon took a risk. But then when people watched the season and the numbers came in, it started to get treated differently.

AP: For season two did you feel nervous about the new setting and new cast or were you confident viewers would take to it like they did season one?

Ritchson: The thing I love is in season one, Reacher was the mystery. We're getting a chance to see what it's like when he's got his family around

him and in a way that really ups the stakes as well. But it also makes it a lot of fun to see what he's like in a more familiar, comfortable environment.

AP: The show has already been renewed for a third season. It must be so interesting to be in on those discussions of which book to cover next.

Ritchson: There are so many options. There was a lot of discussion and I think every year there's going to be a lot of discussion. Myself included, I've read every book. A lot of people involved in this with a much higher pay grade than mine have read the books. Everybody's got their favorites. Everybody wants to see their favorite story come to life on screen.

AP: What is it about this character that people enjoy?

Ritchson: He really brings to life in us the desire that we all have to see justice done in a world that is so unjust, in a world where law is so cumbersome and clumsy and slow and he's instant righteousness. I think we're fascinated by that. There's a lot of wish fulfillment in that for us, at least for me.

AP: Do you think he's almost a superhero?

Ritchson: We shot a crowbar fight in season one, where I got hit in the head with a vase (made of sugar glass) and ended up in a pool with the gunman. I was in so much pain after filming. I had a beanie on and that sugar vase hit so hard when I took the beanie off, I had blood pouring out of my head. So I called (executive producer) Don Granger and I was like, "OK, question. I'm feeling it. I feel it everywhere. So, like, is Reacher limping or what's his pain level?"

And there's like a slight pause and Granger goes, "Yeah, he's fine. He's kind of like a superhero so he's OK."



Walker Scobell poses for photographers upon arrival at the premiere of the television series 'Percy Jackson and the Olympians' in London Saturday, Dec. 16. (AP)



Streisand



Biden

Variety

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden sat down on Friday with former late-night television host Conan O'Brien for an interview on the comedian's podcast.

Conan O'Brien, the former host of NBC's "The Tonight Show" and "Late Night," was spotted by reporters in the White House briefing room ahead of the interview, but was coy when asked about the purpose of his visit to the White House. "They won't let me take questions," O'Brien said. "But boy, do I have the answers to everything."

The White House later confirmed that Biden was interviewed by the comedian for his podcast "Conan O'Brien Needs a Friend."

O'Brien said he's previously visited the White House and is in thrall of its history.

"I'm a huge history buff slash nerd. So believe it or not, I like read a lot of books about the White House," O'Brien told reporters. "Every time I come here, I mean, just I get the same feeling - just like this is amazing. It's absolutely incredible."

The episode will be available Wednesday for download and will also air on SiriusXM's Conan O'Brien Radio channel. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Andre Braugher died from lung cancer, a representative has said recently.

When the Emmy-winning actor who starred in the series "Brooklyn Nine-Nine" and "Homicide: Life on the Street" died Monday at age 61, his representatives said only that he had been through a brief illness, but his publicist Jennifer Allen gave the cause on Thursday.

Braugher generally revealed little about his private life, and his death was unexpected for many of his co-stars. He told the New York Times in 2014 that he stopped smoking and drinking years ago.

The Chicago-born Braugher had his Hollywood breakthrough in the 1989 film "Glory" acting alongside Denzel Washington and Morgan Freeman.

He went on to play Det. Frank Pembleton, the lead role in the NBC police drama "Homicide: Life on the Street," for seven seasons. He would win the first of two career Emmys for his work on the show.

Braugher was nominated for Emmys 11 times, four of them for the comic turn he took as Capt. Ray Holt on "Brooklyn Nine-Nine," the Andy Samberg-starring series that ran for eight seasons on Fox and

NBC. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Barbra Streisand will receive the lifetime achievement award at the 30th Screen Actors Guild Awards.

The "Yentl" and "The Prince of Tides" star will be the 59th recipient of the SAG-AFTRA tribute on Feb. 24 at Los Angeles' Shrine Auditorium & Expo Hall, the guild announced Thursday. This year's SAG Awards, coming on the heels of the longest strike in SAG-AFTRA history, will be streamed live on Netflix.

In November, the 81-year-old Streisand published "My Name is Barbra," a

well-received nearly 1,000-page memoir that chronicles her rise from working-class Brooklyn to global fame.

"Ever since I was a young girl sitting in the Loew's Kings Theatre in Brooklyn, I dreamed of being one of those actresses I saw on the screen," Streisand said in a statement Thursday. "The movies were a portal to a world I could only imagine. Even though I was an unlikely candidate, somehow my dream came true. This award is especially meaningful to me because it comes from my fellow actors, whom I so admire."

Fran Drescher, SAG-AFTRA president, called Streisand "an icon and unparalleled

talent."

"Her enduring career is a testament to her genuine performances, connecting with audiences on a profound level," Drescher said in a statement. "She is a colossal icon with a relentless work ethic, evolving with each stage of her remarkable journey. We celebrate Barbra Streisand not just for her achievements but for the enduring legacy she has carved."

The honor will add to a long list of awards Streisand, an EGOT-winner, has received over her career, including two Academy Awards, four Emmys, 10 Grammys and a Tony award. (AP)

BERLIN: The Russian-African writer Masha Gessen received a German literary prize on Saturday in a ceremony that was delayed and scaled down in reaction to an article comparing Gaza to Nazi German ghettos. The comparison in a recent New Yorker article was viewed as controversial in Germany, which strongly supports Israel as a form of remorse and responsibility for murdering up to 6 million Jews in the Holocaust.

Disapproval of Gessen's criticism of Israel's treatment of Palestinians comes as Germany grapples with the fallout from the Israel-Hamas war, both pro-Palestinian protests and pro-Israel demonstrations in reaction to rising antisemitism.

Gessen was originally due to receive the Hannah Arendt Prize for Political Thought on Friday in the city hall of Bremen, in northwest Germany, but the sponsoring organization, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, and the Bremen Senate withdrew from the ceremony.

It took place instead in a different location on Saturday with about 50 guests crowded into a small event room and with police security, the German news agency dpa reported. (AP)



Whirling dervishes of the Mevlevi order perform during a Sheb-i Arus ceremony in Istanbul, Turkey, Sunday, Dec. 17. Every December a series of events are held to commemorate the death of 13th century Islamic scholar, poet and Sufi mystic Jalaladdin Rumi in different cities of Turkey. (AP)

The Conversation

Truth vs. falsehood: Call for regulation and responsibility

Health misinformation rampant on social media: experts

By Monica Wang
Boston University

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

The global anti-vaccine movement and vaccine hesitancy that accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic show no signs of abating. According to a survey of US adults, Americans in October 2023 were less likely to view approved vaccines as safe than they were in April 2021. As vaccine confidence falls, health misinformation continues to spread like wildfire on social media and in real life.

I am a public health expert in health misinformation, science communication and health behavior change. In my view, we cannot underestimate the dangers of health misinformation and the need to understand why it spreads and what we can do about it. Health misinformation is defined as any health-related claim that is false based on current scientific consensus.

Vaccines are the No. 1 topic of misleading health claims. Some common myths about vaccines include:

■ Their supposed link with human diagnoses of autism. Multiple studies have discredited this claim, and it has been firmly refuted by the World Health Organization, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

■ Concerns with the COVID-19 vaccine leading to infertility. This connection has been debunked through a systematic review and meta-analysis, one of the most robust forms of synthesizing scientific evidence.

■ Safety concerns about vaccine ingredients, such as thimerosal, aluminum and formaldehyde. Extensive studies have shown these ingredients are safe when used in the minimal amounts contained in vaccines.

■ Vaccines as medically unnecessary to protect from disease. The development and dissemination of vaccines for life-threatening diseases such as smallpox, polio, measles, mumps, rubella and the flu has saved millions of lives. It also played a critical role in historic increases in average life expectancy - from 47 years in 1900 in the U.S. to 76 years in 2023.

Beliefs

Beliefs in such myths have come at the highest cost.

An estimated 319,000 COVID-19 deaths that occurred between January 2021 and April 2022 in the US could have been prevented if those individuals had been vaccinated, according to a data dashboard from the Brown University School of Public Health. Misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 vaccines alone have cost the U.S. economy an estimated US\$50 million to \$300 million per day in direct costs from hospitalizations, long-term illness, lives lost and economic losses from missed work.

Though vaccine myths and misunderstandings tend to dominate conversations about health, there is an abundance of misinformation on social media surrounding diets and eating disorders, smoking or substance use, chronic diseases and medical treatments.

My team's research and that of others show that social media platforms have become go-to sources for health information, especially among adolescents and young adults.

However, many people are not equipped to maneuver the maze of health misinformation. For example, an analysis of Instagram and TikTok posts from 2022 to 2023 by The Washington Post and the nonprofit news site The Examination found that the food, beverage and dietary supplement industries paid dozens of registered dietitian influencers to post content promoting diet soda, sugar and supplements, reaching millions of viewers. The dietitians' relationships with the food industry were not always made clear to viewers.

Studies show that health misinformation spread on social media results in fewer people getting vaccinated and can also increase the risk of other health dangers such as disordered eating and unsafe sex practices and sexually transmitted infections. Health misinformation has even bled over into animal health, with a 2023 study finding that 53% of dog owners surveyed

in a nationally representative sample report being skeptical of pet vaccines.

One major reason behind the spread of health misinformation is declining trust in science and government. Rising political polarization, coupled with historical medical mistrust among communities that have experienced and continue to experience unequal health care treatment, exacerbates preexisting divides.

The lack of trust is both fueled and reinforced by the way misinformation can spread today. Social media platforms allow people to form information silos with ease; you can curate your networks and your feed by unfollowing or muting contradictory views from your own and liking and sharing content that aligns with your existing beliefs and value systems.

By tailoring content based on past interactions, social media algorithms can unintentionally limit your exposure to diverse perspectives and generate a fragmented and incomplete understanding of information. Even more concerning, a study of misinformation spread on Twitter analyzing data from 2006 to 2017 found that falsehoods were 70% more likely to be shared than the truth and spread "further, faster, deeper and more broadly than the truth" across all categories of information.

The lack of robust and standardized regulation of misinformation content on social media places the difficult task of discerning what is true or false information on individual users.

We scientists and research entities can also do better in communicating our science and rebuilding trust, as my colleague and I have previously written. I also provide peer-reviewed recommendations for the important roles that parents/caregivers, policymakers and social media companies can play.

Below are some steps that consumers can take to identify and prevent health misinformation spread:

■ Check the source. Determine the credibility of the health information by checking if the source is a reputable organization or agency such as the World Health Organization, the National Institutes of Health or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Other credible sources include an established medical or scientific institution or a peer-reviewed study in an academic journal. Be cautious of information that comes from unknown or biased sources.

■ Examine author credentials. Look for qualifications, expertise and relevant professional affiliations for the author or authors presenting the information. Be wary if author information is missing or difficult to verify.

■ Pay attention to the date. Scientific knowledge by design is meant to evolve as new evidence emerges. Outdated information may not be the most accurate. Look for recent data and updates that contextualize findings within the broader field.

■ Cross-reference to determine scientific consensus. Cross-reference information across multiple reliable sources. Strong consensus across experts and multiple scientific studies supports the validity of health information. If a health claim on social media contradicts widely accepted scientific consensus and stems from unknown or un reputable sources, it is likely unreliable.

■ Question sensational claims. Misleading health information often uses sensational language designed to provoke strong emotions to grab attention. Phrases like "miracle cure," "secret remedy" or "guaranteed results" may signal exaggeration. Be alert for potential conflicts of interest and sponsored content.

■ Weigh scientific evidence over individual anecdotes. Prioritize information grounded in scientific studies that have undergone rigorous research methods, such as randomized controlled trials, peer review and validation. When done well with representative samples, the scientific process provides a reliable foundation for health recommendations compared to individual anecdotes. Though personal stories can be compelling, they should not be the sole basis for health decisions.

■ Talk with a health care professional. If health information is confusing or contradictory, seek guidance from trusted health care providers who can offer personalized advice based on their expertise and individual health needs.

Severe obesity increasing in young kids

NEW YORK, Dec 18, (AP) - A new study adds to evidence that severe obesity is becoming more common in young US children.

There was some hope that children in a government food program might be bucking a trend in obesity rates - earlier research found rates were dropping a little about a decade ago for those kids. But an update released Monday in the journal Pediatrics shows the rate bounced back up a bit by 2020.

The increase echoes other national data, which suggests around 2.5% of all preschool-aged children were severely obese during the same period.

"We were doing well and now we see this upward trend," said one of the study's authors, Heidi Blanck of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "We are dismayed at seeing these findings."

The study looked at children ages 2 to 4 enrolled in the Women, Infants and Children program, which provides healthy foods and other services to preschool-aged children in low-income families. The children were weighed and measured.

The researchers found that 2.1% of kids in the program were severely obese in 2010. Six years later, the rate had dipped to 1.8%. But by 2020, it was 2%. That translates to about 33,000 of more than 1.6 million kids in the WIC program.

Irreversible

Significant increases were seen in 20 states with the highest rate in California at 2.8%. There also were notable rises in some racial and ethnic groups. The highest rate, about 2.8%, was in Hispanic kids.

Experts say severe obesity at a very early age is nearly irreversible, and is strongly associated with chronic health problems and an early death.

It's not clear why the increase occurred, Blanck said.

When WIC obesity rates dropped, some experts attributed it to 2009 policy changes that eliminated juice from infant food packages, provided less saturated fat, and tried to make it easier to buy fruits and vegetables.

The package hasn't changed. But "the daily hardships that families living in poverty are facing may be harder today than they were 10 years ago, and the slight increases in the WIC package just weren't enough," said Dr. Sarah Armstrong, a Duke University childhood obesity researcher.

The researchers faced challenges. The number of kids in WIC declined in the past decade. And the study period included 2020, the year the COVID-19 pandemic hit, when fewer parents brought their children in to see doctors. That reduced the amount of complete information available.

Despite its limitations, it was a "very well done study," said Deanna Hoelscher, a childhood obesity researcher at the UTHealth Houston School of Public Health. "It gives you a hint of what's going on."

What's happened since 2020 is not yet known. Some small studies have suggested a marked increase in childhood obesity - especially during the pandemic, when kids were kept home from schools, eating and bedtime routines were disrupted and physical activity decreased.

"We are thinking it's going to get worse," Hoelscher said.

A new study ties the COVID-19 pandemic to an "alarming" increase in obesity in US children and teenagers.

Childhood obesity has been increasing for decades, but the new work suggests an acceleration last year - especially in those who already were obese when the pandemic started.

The results signal a "profound increase in weight gain for kids" and are "substantial and alarming," said one of the study's authors, Dr. Alyson Goodman of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

It's also a sign of a vicious cycle. The pan-

Study reveals pandemic's toll on children

Therapy cuts relapse risk

FDA approves 'new drug' for aggressive childhood cancer

LOUISVILLE, Ky., Dec 18, (Agencies): WorldMeds has announced that the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved IWILFIN (eflornithine) 192 mg tablets, a groundbreaking oral maintenance therapy for high-risk neuroblastoma. IWILFIN is indicated to reduce the risk of relapse in adult and pediatric patients with high-risk neuroblastoma who have demonstrated at least a partial response to prior multiagent, multimodality therapy, including anti-GD2 immunotherapy.

According to the American Cancer Society, 700-800 cases of neuroblastoma are diagnosed in the US each year, with 90% of diagnoses coming before age 5. Over 50% of these cases are classified as high-risk. High-risk neuroblastoma is a challenging disease, with a high mortality rate driven primarily by the risk of relapse after achieving remission. Approximately half of children with high-risk neuroblastoma do not survive beyond five years from diagnosis. Although existing treatments are effective in helping patients achieve remission, patients lack options to sustain it. Avoiding relapse is crucial to improving survival rates.

"We are thrilled to announce the FDA approval of IWILFIN, which provides a new and much-needed treatment option for children with high-risk neuroblastoma," said Breck Jones, Chief Executive Officer of US WorldMeds. "The goal for treating these young patients is to prevent relapse, and advancing therapeutic options is critical to this mission. IWILFIN offers new hope and improved outcomes for these vulnerable children."

Survival

The approval of IWILFIN is based on the results of a multi-site, single-arm, externally controlled study of children with high-risk neuroblastoma who received IWILFIN as maintenance therapy following standard of care treatment, including immunotherapy. The study demonstrated that the addition of IWILFIN improved event-free survival (EFS) and overall survival (OS) in patients with high-risk neuroblastoma. At four years following immunotherapy, EFS in the IWILFIN-treated

patient group was 84% compared to 73% of patients in the external control group, and 96% of patients treated with IWILFIN were alive compared to 84% of external control patients. This corresponded to a 52% reduction in the risk of relapse and a 68% reduction in the risk of death. Across additional analyses to confirm the results of the externally controlled study design, the relapse risk reduction ranged from 57% to 41% and death risk reduction ranged from 71% to 55%.

IWILFIN is taken orally, with or without food, twice daily for two years. IWILFIN is generally well-tolerated, with side effects typically manageable through dose modifications. The most common side effects are hearing loss, otitis media, pyrexia, pneumonia, and diarrhea. Important Safety Information can be found below.

US WorldMeds partnered with the Beat Childhood Cancer Research Consortium at Penn State University, which conducted the preclinical and clinical research to help advance this vital therapy. The Consortium represents a group of over 50 hospitals that offer collaboration through a network of childhood cancer clinical trials.

"Our partnerships were instrumental in bringing IWILFIN through the FDA registration process," said Kristen Gullo, Vice President of Development and Regulatory Affairs at US WorldMeds. "We are thankful for the dedication of our partners, specifically the Beat Childhood Cancer Research Consortium, who work tirelessly to improve treatment outcomes for pediatric cancer patients. This FDA approval represents a beacon of hope for the high-risk neuroblastoma community and a significant step forward in the fight against this devastating disease."

"After diligent efforts for the past decade, I am both humbled and overjoyed to see this product that holds the potential to evolve the standard of care for high-risk neuroblastoma come to fruition," said Giselle Saulnier, MD, Chair and Founder, Research "I extend my deepest gratitude to every individual and institution that contributed to this extraordinary endeavor.

demc appears to be worsening the nation's longstanding obesity epidemic, and obesity can put people at risk for more severe illness after coronavirus infection.

The CDC on Thursday released the study, which is the largest yet to look at obesity trends during the pandemic.

It found:

■ An estimated 22% of children and teens were obese last August, up from 19% a year earlier.

■ Before the pandemic, children who were a healthy weight were gaining an average of 3.4 pounds a year. That rose to 5.4 pounds during the pandemic.

■ For kids who were moderately obese, expected weight gain rose from 6.5 pounds a year before the pandemic to 12 pounds after the pandemic began.

■ For severely obese kids, expected annual weight gain went from 8.8 pounds to 14.6 pounds.

The rate of obesity increased most dramatically in kids ages 6 to 11, who are more depend-

ent on their parents and may have been more affected when schools suspended in-person classes, the researchers said.

The research was based on a review of the medical records of more than 432,000 kids and teens, ages 2 to 19, who were weighed and measured at least twice before the pandemic and at least once early in the pandemic.

Some limitations: It only included children who got care before and during the pandemic, the researchers said. And it also did not offer a look at how obesity trends may have differed between racial and ethnic groups.

Earlier this week, the CDC said the number of states in which at least 35% of residents are obese increased last year by four.

Delaware, Iowa, Ohio and Texas joined the list. In 2019, there were 12 states - Alabama, Arkansas, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia.

Those results was based on surveys where adults described their own height and weight, and are not as accurate as medical records.

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Odermatt wins back-to-back giant slaloms

Swiss skier extends win streak in discipline to 6 races



Switzerland's Marco Odermatt speeds down the course during the first run of an alpine ski, men's World Cup giant slalom race, in Alta Badia, Italy, Monday, Dec. 18, 2023. Inset: Odermatt celebrates on the podium after winning the race. (AP)

Skinner named Most Outstanding Player

Texas defends NCAA volleyball title

TAMPA, Florida, Dec 18, (AP) — Madison Skinner had 16 kills and Ella Swindle became the fourth true freshman setter to lead her team to a national championship as Texas defended its NCAA Volleyball title by dominating No. 1 overall seed Nebraska 3-0 on Sunday.

With Skinner, named the Most Outstanding Player with 34 kills in the Final Four, the Longhorns (28-4) ran their tournament winning streak to 12 by becoming the first team to win consecutive championship matches 3-0. Texas won its fourth NCAA crown 25-22, 25-14, 25-11 by sweeping the Cornhuskers (33-2), who had lost just one set in the tournament.

Texas returned 11 players off its championship team, although MVP Logan Eggleston graduated. The experience showed against a Nebraska team that was trying to join the 1985 Pacific team as the only champions without a senior.

The young Cornhuskers were out of sync most of the day, with much of the

credit going to the Longhorns' service game that produced a championship-match record 12 aces.

The match ended on an ace by Asjia O'Neal, giving her a career-high five. Skinner had a career-high six aces in a 3-1 semifinal win over Wisconsin. Keonilei Akana, who played her first two seasons at Nebraska, ended the 2022 tournament with an ace for a 3-0

VOLLEYBALL

sweep of Louisville and had two more against her former team on Sunday.

Skinner hit .273 with the 16 kills and seven errors on 33 total attempts. Jenna Wenaas added nine kills, hitting .293. Swindle had five kills, hit .333 and had 21 assists with seven digs. O'Neal, had four kills and hit .375. The sixth-year senior and daughter of former NBA player Jermaine O'Neal had just four errors in six NCAA tournament matches.

Skinner won a national championship as a freshman at Kentucky in 2020 by beating Texas. She won her third title, as did Longhorns' coach Jerritt Elliott.

Texas was No. 1 in the preseason poll but lost three of its first eight matches and fell out of the Top 10 while Nebraska opened the season with 27 straight wins and moved from fifth to first, staying there despite a 3-0 loss to Wisconsin.

Nebraska entered its 11th final leading the nation in hitting percentage defense at .135 and held its first five tournament opponents to .098 but Texas hit .264, including .481 in the final set. Meanwhile, the Cornhuskers, who hit .278 for the year, hit a season-worst .013, which was the best for the Longhorns this year. Harper Murray had seven kills for Nebraska, which had 20 kills and 19 attack errors. The Cornhuskers had only one block after recording eight blocks in the first set of their semifinal sweep of Pittsburgh.

LA VILLA, Italy, Dec 18, (AP) — Olympic champion, World champion. And virtually unbeatable on the World Cup circuit.

When it comes to giant slalom, Marco Odermatt is completely dominant.

The Swiss skier won the Alta Badia giant slalom for the second time in two days on Monday and extended his winning streak in the discipline to six races.

Odermatt established a big lead in the opening run down the steep and icy Gran Risa course. Then he added to his advantage in the second run to finish a massive 1.05 seconds ahead of Marco Schwarz and 1.22 ahead of Zan Kranjec.

"Two amazing days," Odermatt said. "It's so nice to come here into the finish with another victory, in the Dolomites with the last sun of the day."

It was Odermatt's fourth victory in Alta Badia, where Marcel Hirscher holds the record of six victories - won consecutively from 2013-18; and his 27th win overall on the World Cup circuit. Alberto Tomba also won four times on the Gran Risa.

SKIING

"It's nice to be part of history," Odermatt said.

Schwarz, who plans to enter every race across all disciplines this season, is second in both the GS and overall standings behind Odermatt. He trails by 92 points in the overall.

"Hopefully it's going to be a good battle for the whole season," Schwarz said.

It marked the fifth time that Kranjec finished third in Alta Badia.

Filip Zubcic was approaching Odermatt's pace in the first leg before he made a costly mistake. Then the Croatian dropped from second to fourth in the second leg, 1.36 behind.

Combined world champion Alexis Pinturault finished fifth.

Austrian skier Stefan Brennsteiner lost control in the opening run and slid backwards into the safety nets but appeared to avoid serious injury.

Joan Verdu, who recently became the first Andorran skier on a World Cup podium, also had trouble and went out midway down during the morning leg. River Radamus was the top American finisher in 14th.

The men's circuit resumes with a night slalom in Madonna Di Campiglio on Friday.

Oosthuizen makes it 2 in a row in SA

Langer and son overcome odds, win another PNC Championship

ORLANDO, Florida, Dec 18, (AP) — Bernhard Langer capped off his memorable, record-setting season by teaming with his son to post a 13-under 59 in 30 mph wind for a two-shot victory Sunday in the PNC Championship.

Langer and son Jason, who works for an investment bank in New York, had 10 birdies in 11 holes to overcome a three-shot deficit early. Langer tied the PNC Championship record with his fifth

GOLF

win - three with Jason, two with older son Stefan. Raymond Floyd also won five titles.

Tiger Woods and 14-year-old son Charlie tied for fifth after a 61. The highlight was Charlie chipping in for birdie on the ninth hole with a celebration that looked very much like his father, who could only smile.

David Duval and son Brady finished birdie-eagle to be runner-up.

The 66-year-old Langer, a two-time Masters champion, earlier this year set the PGA Tour Champions record with his 46th career victory.

In Heritage Del Ombre, Mauritius, Louis Oosthuizen won the Mauritius Open for his second title in two weeks, closing with a 3-under 69 to hold off Laurie Canter.

Oosthuizen had gone five years without winning and then picked up two in a row, winning last week in the Alfred Dunhill Championship.

Both tournaments were co-sanctioned by the European tour and Sunshine tours.

His latest win came at Heritage La Reserve Golf Club, which Oosthuizen helped design. Canter pulled ahead briefly on the front nine when Oosthuizen had two early bogeys. But the former British Open champion ran off four birdies in a seven-hole stretch around the turn. He led by one going to the par-5 18th, where a birdie gave him a two-shot win.

Sebastian Soderberg closed with a 63 and tied for third with Jacques De Villiers (71) and Daniel Brown (65).



Oosthuizen



Bernhard Langer, right, and son Jason, left, hold trophies after winning the PNC Championship golf tournament, Sunday, Dec. 17, 2023, in Orlando, Florida. (AP)

Notre Dame dominates Purdue 76-39

LSU women roll past Northwestern St

BATON ROUGE, La., Dec 18, (AP) — Angel Reese scored 25 points and 14 rebounds, Aneesa Morrow had 16 points and 14 rebounds and No. 7 LSU slogged its way to an 81-36 victory over Northwestern St. on Sunday.

It was the 11th straight win for the Tigers (11-1) after the defending national champions lost their season opener to then-No. 20 Colorado on Nov. 6. Northwestern St. dropped to 4-6. Mikaylah Williams finished with 14 points, despite missing her first eight field goal attempts. Flau'jae Johnson added 13 points, five steals and five assists.

Sharna Ayres led Northwestern St. (4-6) with 10 points.

Notre Dame 76, Purdue 39

In South Bend, Ind., Star freshman Hannah Hildalgo had 23 points, 10 rebounds, eight assists and seven steals and even threw in a blocked shot and Notre Dame dominated in-state rival Purdue after the Fighting Irish unveiled a statue of legendary coach Muffet McGraw outside Purcell Pavilion.

Maddy Westbeld added 15 points and 12 rebounds for the Fighting Irish (8-1), who have won eight straight. Natalija Marshall continued her stellar play off the bench with 14 points on 7-of-10 shooting. Notre Dame finished at 51% despite going 3 of 11 on 3-pointers.

Virginia Tech 84, Rutgers 59

In Piscataway, N.J., Matilda Ekh made seven 3-pointers and scored 27 points, Georgia Amoore added 18

BASKETBALL

points and eight assists and Virginia Tech beat Rutgers to give Hokies coach Kenny Brooks 500 career wins.

Kaylene Smikle led the Scarlet Knights (6-8) with 22 points, her sixth game scoring 20-plus this season. Kasandra Brown added 15 points and Chyna Cornwell had nine points and 11 rebounds.

Virginia Tech (8-2) hit 17 3-pointers - including five by Amoore - and limited Rutgers to just 15 field goals on 50 attempts (30%). Olivia Summiel made 4 of 4 from behind the arc and scored all of her 18 points in the second half for the Hokies.

Marquette 99, Appalachian St 91

In Milwaukee, Wis., Jordan King scored a season-high 29 points and Frankie Hottinger grabbed a career-high 21 rebounds as Marquette topped Appalachian State.

King moved into third all-time in career games played by starting in her 135th game for Marquette (11-0), hit a career-high six 3-pointers and topped 20 points for the 15th time in her ca-

Colorado St rallies past CSU-Pueblo

No. 16 Illinois leads from start to finish with a victory over Colgate

CHAMPAIGN, Illinois, Dec 18, (AP) — Coleman Hawkins scored 16 points and Quincy Guerrier and Marcus Domask each scored 15 to help Illinois lead from start to finish in a 74-57 victory over Colgate on Sunday.

Terrance Shannon Jr. had 14 points despite not scoring in the second half for the 16th-ranked Illini (8-2). The Big Ten's second-leading scorer had 20 or more points in

six of his last seven games.

Colgate (6-5), which has qualified for the NCAA Tournament four times in five years, was led by Jeff Woodward with 14 points. Keegan Records, the preseason Patriot League Player and Defensive Player of the Year, was held to nine points.

Colorado St 86, CSU-Pueblo 54

In Fort Collins, Colorado, Isaiah Stevens had 18 points to move closer to taking over as the program's all-time leading scorer and Colorado State shook off a sluggish start to roll past Division II CSU-Pueblo.

BASKETBALL

Nique Clifford, Taviontae Jackson and Patrick Cartier each finished with 13 points. Clifford also had nine rebounds. Colorado State (10-1) held a 36-12 advantage in points in the paint.

Armon Muldrew led CSU-Pueblo (6-5) with 16 points, while Brevin Walter contributed 13.

The Thunderwolves held the lead for 26 seconds in the first half. But the Rams used their size and speed to pull away. Colorado State led by as many as 24 in the first half.



Illinois' Terrence Shannon Jr. (0) blocks the shot of Colgate's Brady Cummins during the second half of an NCAA college basketball game Sunday, Dec. 17, 2023, in Champaign, Illinois. (AP)

reer, Liza Karlen scored 24 points, topping 20 points in a game for the fifth time this season. Mackenzie Hare added 13 points.

Creighton 89, Drake 78

In Des Moines, Iowa, Emma Ron-siek scored 25 of her 31 points in the second half. Lauren Jensen added 22 points, and Creighton defeated Drake.

Morgan Maly finished with 19 points, seven rebounds and four assists for the Bluejays (8-2).

Drake (6-4) kept pace in the second half, including a 31-30 advantage in the third quarter. The Bulldogs hit on 65% of their shots in the quarter and Creighton made 68%. Drake's Katie Dinnebie scored 17 of her 26 points in the second half.

Gonzaga 83, S.D. State 58

In Spokane, Wash., Eliza Hollingsworth had 17 points and 12 rebounds, Yvonne Ejim scored 16 points and Brynna Maxwell added 15 to help Gonzaga (11-2) cruise to a win over

South Dakota State. Hollingsworth shot 6 of 9 from the field and 3 of 4 from 3-point range and finished with two steals and two blocks.

Brooklyn Meyer, who went into the game leading the Jackrabbits - and the Summit League - in scoring (17.0 per game), rebounding (9.8) and blocks (2.3), had just two points, on 1-of-5 shooting, and a rebound at halftime. The sophomore finished with four points and two rebounds - both season lows - in 25 minutes.

Florida State 76, Drexel 56

In Philadelphia, Ta'Niya Latson scored 22 points to guide Florida State over Drexel.

Latson made 7 of 16 shots with a 3-pointer and 7 of 9 free throws for the Seminoles (8-3). She added three assists, three steals and blocked two shots. O'Mariah Gordon finished with 14 points and seven assists. Sara Bejedi scored 11 and Makayla Timpson had 10 points and six rebounds.

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French league leaders miss chance to go seven points clear

Mbappé scores but PSG concede late equalizer at Lille

PARIS, Dec 18, (AP) — French league leaders Paris Saint-Germain missed the chance to move seven points clear after conceding a sloppy stoppage-time equalizer in a 1-1 draw at Lille.

Star striker Kylian Mbappé's penalty gave PSG the lead in the 66th minute before Canada striker Jonathan David leveled four minutes into injury time.

SOCCER

Still, with Monaco and Nice losing their games, PSG are five points ahead with one round of matches left on Wednesday before the mid-season winter break.

PSG substitute Marco Asensio's poor pass was intercepted by Rémy Cabella, whose deflected shot was well saved by goalkeeper Arnau Tenas. But the alert David got ahead of central defender Marquinhos to head in the goal that ensured Lille stays in fourth place after 16 matches.

Mbappé was kept quiet until a penalty was awarded when defender Bafodé Diakité impeded defender Lucas Hernandez. Goalkeeper Lucas Chevalier guessed the right way but was beaten by Mbappé's power and precision.

It took Mbappé's league-leading goal tally this season to 16 and it was also the 17th goal he has been involved in against Lille during his career - 11 goals and six assists. But



PSG's Manuel Ugarte fights for the ball with Lille's Angel Gomes during the French League One soccer match between Lille and PSG at the Pierre Mauroy stadium in Villeneuve d'Ascq, northern France. (AP)

as so often in recent seasons, Mbappé's goals paper over cracks in the PSG team, notably when it comes to defending a lead and coping under pressure.

Brest are proving the surprise team in the league this season and are in fifth place on goal difference behind Lille after winning 2-0 at Nantes in an earlier game.

Brest's fourth win in the past five games had left Lille needing at least a draw to reclaim fourth. PSG midfielder Vitinha's angled shot was saved by Chevalier in the 36th min-

ute of an even first half, where Edon Zhegrova was dangerous down the right for Lille.

In the lunchtime kick off, Brest scored in quick succession early in the second half through midfielder Hugo Magnetti and Benin striker Steve Mounié following a corner.

Before the game, Nantes fans held a minute's silence for a supporter from the Brigade Loire ultras group who died after being stabbed before a home game against Nice on Dec. 2.

His face was projected on the stadium's big screen at Stade de la Beaujoire and Nantes players warmed up with his name - Maxime - written on their training tops.

Before the game, his name was also carried on a giant banner held by Brigade Loire ultras and other home fans as they walked to the stadium from the location in Nantes where he was fatally stabbed during an altercation.

Marseille continued their improvement under coach Gennaro Gattuso by beating last-place Clermont 2-1 at home for a fourth straight league win.

Defender Michael Murillo fired Marseille ahead in the 26th after being set up by in-form striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang.

Amine Harit doubled the lead in the 42nd when he followed up after Iliman Ndiaye's shot had been saved following a pass from Aubameyang, who went close moments later.

Striker Jim Allevinah scored for Clermont in the 58th.

Inter open up 4-pt lead 'atop' Serie A

Motta gets the better of his mentor Mourinho

ROME, Dec 18, (AP): What a luxury for Inter Milan midfielder Nicolò Barella.

When his first pass for Lautaro Martinez was blocked, he sent his second attempt toward Marcus Thuram and watched as the France international quickly deposited the ball into the net.

Lautaro and Thuram have taken over from Napoli's Victor Osimhen and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia as Serie A's most dangerous strike pairing - and they're a big reason why Inter are starting to open up a gap at the top of the Italian league standings.

Lautaro and Thuram scored in each half as Inter won 2-0 at Lazio and the Nerazzurri moved four points ahead

of second-place Juventus, which were held to a 1-1 draw at Genoa.

Inter have lost only once this season - to Sassuolo in September.

Lautaro showed off his attacking instincts by intercepting an ill-advised back pass from Lazio fullback Adam Marusic to put Inter ahead. Then Thuram finished off the counterattack inspired by Barella.

Lautaro now has 15 goals and two assists in the league. Thuram has seven goals and six assists.

Lautaro celebrated his goal by revealing an undershirt with a dedication to his hometown of Bahia Blanca, Argentina, which was hit by a deadly storm.

It was also an emotional victory for Inter coach Simone Inzaghi, who played most of his career at Lazio and began his coaching career with the Roman club.

Lazio ended with 10 men following a red card for Manuel Lazzari for protesting.

Maurizio Sarri's Lazio dropped into the bottom half of the table.

Bologna coach Thiago Motta got the better of his mentor as his team beat Jose Mourinho's Roma 2-0 to surge up into fourth place and the Champions League spots.

Motta played under Mourinho when Inter Milan won a treble of titles in 2010.

Roma were missing Romelu Lukaku, who was suspended, and Paulo Dybala, who was injured. The Giallorossi dropped down to seventh.

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Nikola Moro put Bologna ahead toward the end of the first half by finishing off a swift counterattack. Then a cross from Lewis Ferguson produced an own-goal from Rasmus Kristensen after the break.

Bologna have not played in Europe since featuring in the Intertoto Cup in 2002.

Before kickoff, family members of Sinisa Mihajlovic were invited onto the field to mark the one-year anniversary of the former Bologna coach's death from leukemia.

Bologna fans also chanted Mihajlovic's name in the closing minutes.

"The victory is for Sinisa," Motta said. "I'm sure he's watching us."

Added Mourinho about Motta, "He'll always be one of my kids."

Mourinho put on midfielder Renato Sanches to start the second half and then - clearly unhappy with his performance - took him off after just 19 minutes.

Afterward, Mourinho stated publicly for the first time that he wants to extend his contract at Roma.

Lucas Beltran scored a late goal with the help of a deflection in Fiorentina's 1-0 win over Hellas Verona as the Viola moved into sixth.

Also, Domenico Berardi struck twice as Sassuolo came back from two goals down for a 2-2 draw at Udinese.



Inter Milan's Lautaro Martinez, (left), challenges for the ball with Lazio's Mario Gila during a Serie A soccer match between Lazio and Inter Milan, at Rome's Olympic Stadium. (AP)

Second-place Bayern visit Wolfsburg

Leverkusen aim to take unbeaten run into 2024

DUESSELDORF, Germany, Dec 18, (AP) — Xabi Alonso and his Bayer Leverkusen team have already secured top spot in the Bundesliga for the winter break. Now they need one more good result to take their record unbeaten run into the new year, too.

Even Harry Kane - on the best scoring run ever for a new Bundesliga arrival - hasn't been able to get Bayern Munich into their usual top spot going into the three-week break.

Leverkusen's 3-0 win over Eintracht Frankfurt on Sunday was composed and clinical. In fact, the performance had everything that was missing from Bayern's 5-1 loss to the same opponents the week before. Nigerian striker Victor Boniface was again the star for Leverkusen. He finished with a goal and an assist, and the other goal was scored by Jeremie Frimpong on the rebound from Boniface's shot.

"It's been good, a big credit to the coach, the staff, all the players," Boniface said of Leverkusen's season so far. "Everyone is giving 100% to achieve something like this and we are really proud of ourselves."

Leverkusen's record in all competitions for the 2023-24 season is 21 wins, three draws, no losses. That makes it the only unbeaten team in any of Europe's five biggest leagues, all the more impressive given that Leverkusen were in the relegation zone when Alonso took charge 14 months ago.

The last test of 2023 before the winter break is at home Wednesday against Bochum, while second-place Bayern visit Wolfsburg.

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Now that Leverkusen look like a true title contenders, racking up points before the winter break takes on extra importance because Leverkusen could miss up to five players in January and February during the African Cup of Nations.



Bayern's Harry Kane, (left), makes an attempt to score during the German Bundesliga soccer match between Bayern Munich and Stuttgart in Munich, Germany. (AP)

That includes Boniface, whose strong form for Leverkusen has put him firmly in contention to start for Nigeria. He made his debut for his country in September and has played all five games since.

In Boniface's absence, Leverkusen will need to lean on Patrik Schick, who has struggled with injuries since his breakout European Championship campaign for the Czech Republic two years ago, but has scored three times in eight games since his return in October. Filling in for the impres-

sive Edmond Tapsoba and Odilon Kossounou in defense will be especially tricky too.

Kane scored twice in Bayern's 3-0 win over Stuttgart to become the fastest player ever to 20 Bundesliga goals, needing just 14 games to achieve the feat.

Bayern are four points off Leverkusen but have one more game to play because of a game against Union Berlin that was rescheduled for Jan. 24 because of heavy snow.

It's a measure of Leverkusen's achievement that Bayern already have 35 points and still aren't top. At the same stage of the season last year, Bayern had 31 from their opening 14 games and led by four. Only a dramatic slide in the second half of the season allowed Borussia Dortmund to get close to challenging Bayern for the title.

Bayern's squad won't face the same impact from international tournaments in the new year, though right-back Noussair Mazraoui is expected to play for Morocco at the African Cup of Nations and central defender Kim Min-jae will be in action for South Korea at the Asian Cup. The return of Matthijs de Ligt to the squad against Stuttgart after a knee injury, even if he was only an unused substitute, is an encouraging sign that Bayern will have cover for Kim.

After the three-week winter break, the Bundesliga resumes Jan. 12 when Bayern hosts Hoffenheim.

Relief for Ten Hag, Man U hold Liverpool to 0-0 draw at Anfield

LIVERPOOL, England, Dec 18, (AP) — Manchester United held Liverpool to a 0-0 draw in the Premier League as Jürgen Klopp's team was knocked off the top of the table by Arsenal.

Erik ten Hag's United soaked up the pressure at Anfield and goalkeeper Andre Onana pulled off a string of saves to earn a valuable point in a match that saw Diogo Dalot sent off in stoppage time for dissent.

Arsenal had provisionally moved to first place after a 2-0 win against Brighton earlier in the day. The Gunners are one point above second-place Liverpool ahead of their visit to Anfield next Saturday.

United were routed 7-0 on their last trip to Liverpool in March and went into this game with speculation hanging over Ten Hag's position after 12 defeats in all competitions and elimination from the Champions League.

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But United produced one of its most battling performances of the campaign to frustrate their fierce rivals, and had a chance to score a winner through Rasmus Hojlund's close-range effort in the second half.

It was Liverpool, however, which dominated with 69% of possession, and 33 shots compared to six from United.

Onana kept out the home team's best chance of the first half when pushing Virgil van Dijk's header over the bar and he also held out Mohamed Salah's low effort from distance before the break.

United appeared intent on frustrating Liverpool and the Anfield crowd, which created a hostile atmosphere.

As the clock ticked on, it was a tactic that worked as Liverpool struggled



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah, (left), and Manchester United's Alejandro Garnacho challenge for the ball during the English Premier League soccer match between Liverpool and Manchester United at the Anfield stadium in Liverpool, England. (AP)

to create clear chances for much of the game.

In the second half Salah had another long-range effort saved and Trent Alexander-Arnold fired narrowly wide from distance with a chance that looked to have Onana beaten.

United's best opening came when Hojlund had a sight of goal from a tight angle and Alisson saved.

From then on, the game opened up and when a promising United break came to nothing, Salah forced Onana into another save as the keeper pushed away a curling shot from inside box.

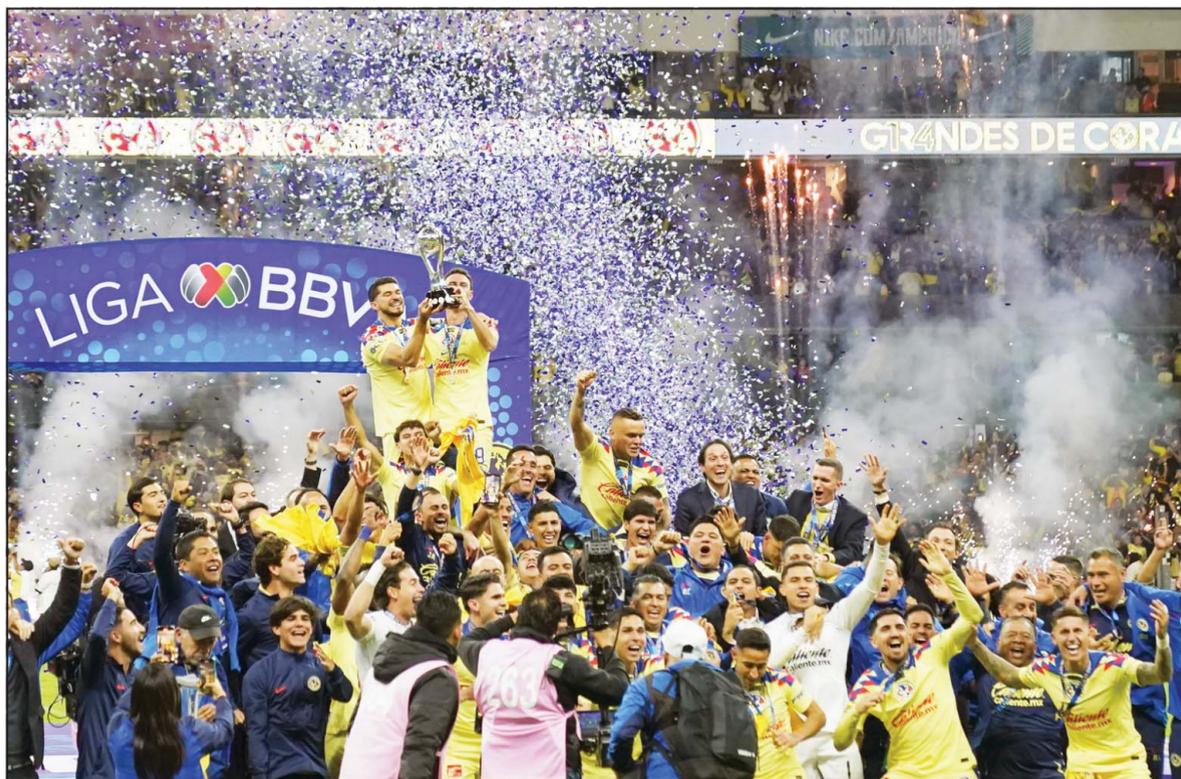


Austria's Marco Schwarz speeds down the course during the first run of an alpine ski, men's World Cup giant slalom race, in Alta Badia, Italy. Schwarz finished second. (AP)
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Sports

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Napoli drawn against Barca in CL round of 16



America's players celebrate with the trophy after defeating Tigres in the Mexican soccer league second leg final match at Azteca stadium in Mexico City. America won 4-1 on aggregate. (AP)

Alaba injures knee

Real Madrid have depleted defense

MADRID, Dec 18, (AP): Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti has some tinkering to do with his defense after yet another serious injury blow.

Central defender David Alaba became the third Madrid player to sustain an anterior cruciate ligament injury on Sunday, having to be substituted before halftime in the team's 4-1 win against Villarreal in the Spanish league.

The Austria international is expected to undergo surgery on his left knee in the coming days and is not likely to play again this season.

"We are really sad about it because he is another player that we will lose," Ancelotti said. "I've never had three of my players get cruciate injuries in four months, it's incredible."

Goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and defender Eder Militão also underwent surgeries to repair their knee ligaments this year, while midfielder Eduardo Camavinga and forward Arda Güler sustained other knee problems that sidelined them for significant periods. Also out for Madrid are forward Vinicius Júnior and right back Dani Carvajal.

The injury setbacks have left Ancelotti in a tough spot, having to find ways to rebuild the squad entering the decisive second half of the season.

Madrid visit Alaves on Thursday for their final match of the year. Early next year Madrid begin their Copa del Rey campaign and play in the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia. In the Champions League, Madrid will face Leipzig in the round of 16.

The defense is likely to make Ancelotti lose some extra sleep. In addition to the many other absentees, left back

SOCCER

Ferland Mendy had to be replaced at halftime on Sunday because of a muscle ailment. Ancelotti downplayed the problem, but it wasn't clear when Mendy would return to action.

Nacho Fernández replaced Alaba on Sunday, but the only other central defender currently available for Ancelotti was Antonio Rüdiger.

Ancelotti said he may need to use midfielder Aurélien Tchouaméni in the middle of the defense. The France international is just returning from a foot injury, though, having made his first appearance since October as a late substitute against Villarreal on Sunday.

"Tchouaméni is our first option," Ancelotti said. "Of course, it isn't his natural position, but this is an emergency and I think he can fill in."

Ancelotti will likely complete the squad with some reserve-team players, and the club may also sign someone during the winter transfer window. Ancelotti said Militão and Courtois could potentially make it back to the squad before the end of the season, but did not offer any other detail on a timetable.

"We'll come back stronger," Militão said after Sunday's match while sending his support for teammate Alaba on social media.

Curry's 3-pointer streak ends at 268 games

Giannis passes Abdul-Jabbar for Bucks' career rebounding record

MILWAUKEE, Dec 18, (AP): Giannis Antetokounmpo had 26 points and 17 rebounds, breaking Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's Milwaukee rebounding record, and Damian Lillard scored 39 points in the Bucks' 128-119 victory over the Houston Rockets on Sunday night.

Antetokounmpo's highest rebounding total of the season allowed him to pass Abdul-Jabbar after he had already moved past the Hall of Famer for the team scoring record. Antetokounmpo broke Abdul-Jabbar's record with a rebound of Tari Eason's missed shot with 7:46 left in the fourth quarter. It was his 14th rebound of the game and gave him 17,162 in 11 seasons with Milwaukee.

Antetokounmpo also is the Bucks' career leader in assists, joining Michael Jordan (Chicago), LeBron James (Cleveland) and Kevin Garnett (Minnesota) as the only players to lead a franchise in all three categories.

The Bucks are 1907. They won their 13th straight home game and improved to 14-1 at home while snapping the Rockets' five-game winning streak.

Fred VanVleet led the Rockets with 22 points. Dillon Brooks was ejected after picking up two technical fouls with 38.9 seconds left, and Rockets coach Ime Udoka also was whistled for two technicals after coming out on the court.

Warriors 118, Trail Blazers 114

In Portland, Klay Thompson scored 28 points on a night Stephen Curry's NBA-record 3-pointer streak ended at 268 games and Golden State held off Portland for its second straight victory. Curry was 0 for 8 from 3-point range, 2 for 12 overall and scored seven points. He began the streak Dec. 1, 2018, at Detroit.

Andrew Wiggins, who was recently taken out of the Golden State's starting lineup, had 25 points and seven rebounds to help the Warriors win consecutive games for the first time since the end of a five-game winning streak in early November. Jerami Grant led Portland with 30 points.

Pelicans 146, Spurs 110

In San Antonio, CJ McCollum scored 29 points, Brandon Ingram added 26 and New Orleans set a franchise record with 22 3-pointers in rolling past Victor Wembanyama and San Antonio.

Wembanyama had 17 points and 13 rebounds in front of

former San Antonio All-Star Tony Parker, his childhood idol in France and later mentor. Wembanyama's eighth consecutive double-double surpassed the previous NBA record by a teenager of seven straight set by Dwight Howard with Orlando in 2005.

The Spurs unveiled a Hall of Fame designation on Parker's retired jersey during a halftime ceremony. Parker was inducted in August with San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich and former Spurs assistant Becky Hammon, along with Pau Gasol, Dwyane Wade and Dirk Nowitzki.

Celtics 114, Magic 97

In Boston, Jaylen Brown scored 17 of his 31 points in the fourth quarter and Boston beat Orlando to improve to 14-0 at home. Boston is off to its second-best start at home, behind the 1957-58 club that opened with 17 straight wins. The Celtics have won five straight overall to improve to 20-5, a half-game ahead of Minnesota for the NBA lead.

BASKETBALL

Jayson Tatum added 23 points, Kristaps Porzingis had 15 points and 10 rebounds, and Jrue Holiday scored 14 points for Boston. Paolo Banchero had 36 points and 10 rebounds for Orlando.

Suns 112, Wizards 108

In Phoenix, Devin Booker shook off a subpar shooting night, scoring 11 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter, and the Phoenix Suns overcame a 16-point deficit to beat the Washington Wizards 112-108 on Sunday night.

Kevin Durant led the Suns with 28 points, including a dunk on a three-point play in the final minute. Jusuf Kuric had 17 rebounds. Booker also had eight assists.

Phoenix outscored Washington 31-19 in the fourth to snap a two-game losing streak and stay above .500 at 14-12.

Daniel Gafford had 26 points and 17 rebounds for the Wizards, who dropped to 4-21 in a failed bid to win consecutive games for the first time this season. Washington beat Indiana on Friday night after losing 15 of its previous 16 games.



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry (front), is defended by Portland Trail Blazers forward Toumani Camara (right), and forward Jerami Grant (left), in the closing seconds of the second half of an NBA basketball game in Portland, Ore. (AP)

Man City get Copenhagen

NYON, Switzerland, Dec 18, (AP): Manchester City got a kind draw for the round of 16 in the Champions League. Paris Saint-Germain's opponent could have been much tougher, too.

City will continue their title defense against Copenhagen, which are making their first appearance at this stage since 2011. The Danish champions qualified ahead of Manchester United in group play. Paris Saint-Germain weren't pun-



The UEFA Champions League trophy is pictured during the UEFA Champions League 2023/24 round of 16 draw at the UEFA headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland. (AP)

SOCCER

ished as hard as they could have been for finishing second in their group. The French champions, still without a Champions League title under their Qatari ownership and eliminated in the last 16 for the past two years, will face a Real Sociedad team playing in Europe's top competition for the first time in a decade.

The draw for the two-legged round of 16 was made Monday at UEFA's headquarters, with the standout matchup being Napoli vs. Barcelona - two of the late Diego Maradona's former clubs. Barcelona haven't advanced beyond the round of 16 since the 2019-20 season.

Real Madrid, seeking a record-extending 15th European Cup title, will play Leipzig while Inter Milan, last season's beaten finalists and another high-profile group runners-up, play Atletico Madrid.

It's also Porto vs. Arsenal, PSV Eindhoven vs. Borussia Dortmund and Lazio vs. Bayern Munich.

In the last 16, teams cannot play an opponent from their own country or a team they already faced in the group stage. There's no country protection after that.

The round of 16 will be played from Feb. 13-14.

Borussia Dortmund's list of problems grew longer Monday as the German club confirmed winger Karim Adeyemi could be out for sev-

eral weeks with an injury he sustained against Paris Saint-Germain last week.

Dortmund said the injury was a "partial tear" of syndesmosis tissue, a type of joint between bones. Adeyemi took a heavy blow to the ankle against PSG last week but played on and scored in a 1-1 draw before eventually going off hurt as Dortmund topped its Champions League group.

Dortmund said Adeyemi will "not be available in the coming weeks." While much of his time out injured is likely to be covered by Germany's winter break, Adeyemi has already missed Saturday's 1-1 draw with Augsburg and stands to miss Tuesday's game against Mainz as Dortmund seek to end a five-game winless run in all competitions.

Dortmund's success in Europe has been accompanied by difficulties in domestic competitions. Edin Terzic's team is fifth in the Bundesliga and 13 points off leader Bayer Leverkusen, with one win from its last seven league games.

Germany international winger Adeyemi had been a standout performer in Dortmund's Champions League campaign with two goals and an assist in the last three group games.

Champions League round of 16 draw

NYON, Switzerland, Dec 18, (AP): Draw made Monday for the Champions League's round of 16 (matches to be played from Feb. 13-14)

Porto vs Arsenal
Napoli vs Barcelona
PSG vs Sociedad
Inter vs Atletico

PSV vs Dortmund
Lazio vs Bayern
Copenhagen vs Man City
Leipzig vs Real

Milan pitted vs Rennes

Feyenoord meet Roma in playoffs

NYON, Switzerland, Dec 18, (AP): Feyenoord and Roma will meet in the playoffs to enter the Europa League's round of 16 in a repeat of their title match in the UEFA Conference League in 2022.

Roma won that match 1-0 in Tirana to give Jose Mourinho another European trophy.

The draw on Monday pitted the teams who finished second in their



In this file photo, Roma's head coach Jose Mourinho calls out to his players during a UEFA Europa League group G soccer match between Roma and Sheriff, at Rome's Olympic Stadium. (AP)

Europa League groups with the clubs who were third in the Champions League groups.

AC Milan stayed alive in European competition by beating Newcastle in their final Champions League group game and were rewarded with a two-legged match against Rennes. Milan are a seven-time European champions but have never won the second-tier Europa League or its predecessor, the UEFA Cup.

Other highlights included Shakhtar

SOCCER

Draw for EL knockout round playoffs

NYON, Switzerland, Dec 18, (AP): Draw made Monday for the knockout round playoffs in the Europa League and Conference League (matches to be played from Feb. 15)

Europa League:

Feyenoord vs Roma
Milan vs Rennes
Lens vs Freiburg
Young Boys vs Sporting
Benfica vs Toulouse
Braga vs Qarabag
Galatasaray vs Prague
Shakhtar vs Marseille

Conference League:

Sturm vs Bratislava
Servette vs Ludogorets
Saint-Gilloise vs Frankfurt
Beti vs Dinamo
Olympiacos vs Ferencvaros
Ajax vs Bodø
Molde vs Legia Warsaw
Haifa vs Gent