



Page 2

HH the Amir

ARAB TIMES



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condolences

Pages 2-6

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2023 / JUMADA AL THANI 7, 1445 AH

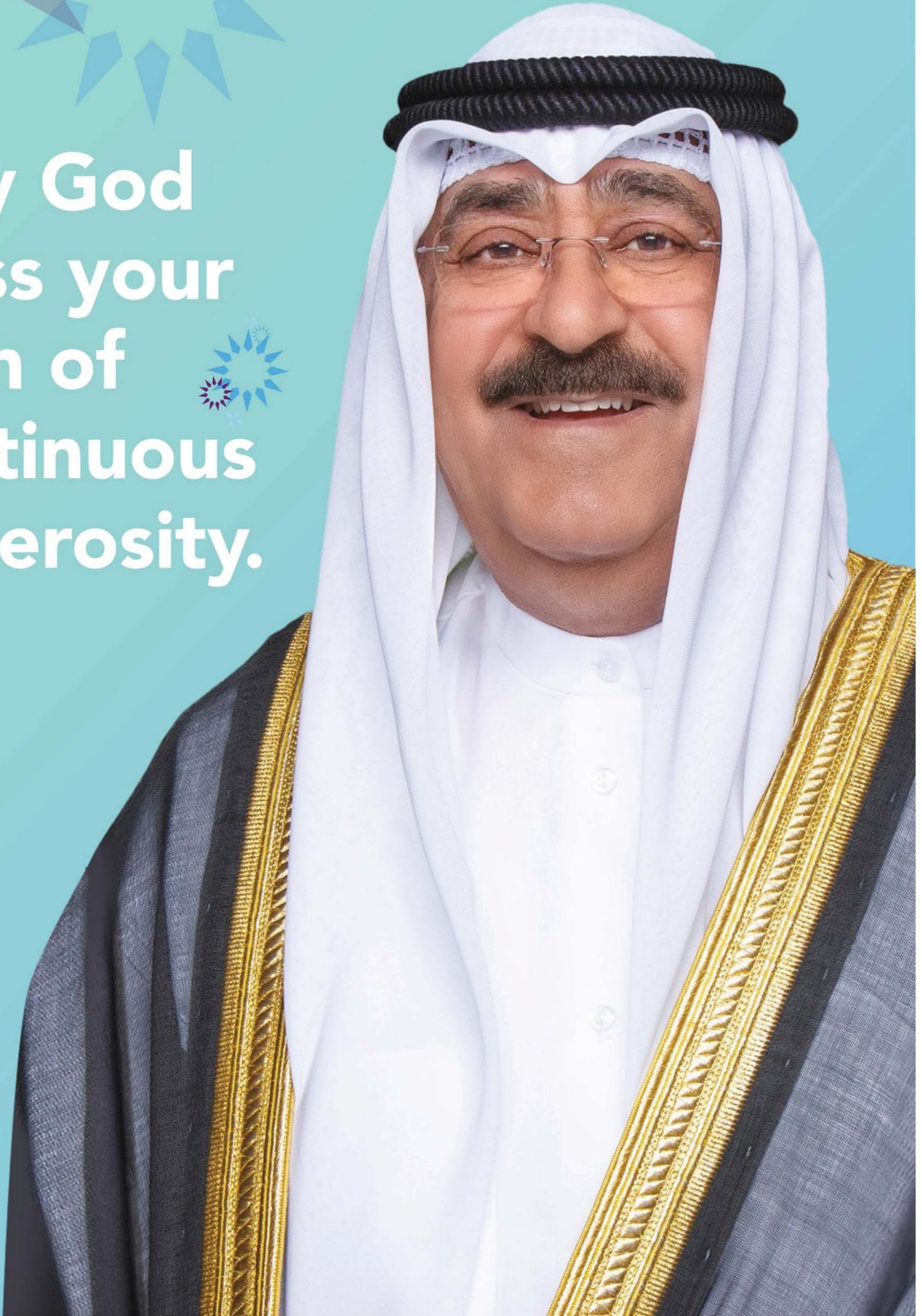
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May God
bless your
path of
continuous
generosity.



 zain

HH Sheikh Mishal to swear in today as 17th Amir at special Assembly session

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah will take a constitutional oath at a National Assembly's special session on Wednesday, as the 17th Amir of the State of Kuwait.

On Monday, Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun called for the special session upon the request of the government in line with Article 60 of the Constitution. According to the article, before assuming his powers, the Amir shall take the following oath at a special sitting of the National Assembly.

"I swear by Almighty God to respect the Constitution and the laws of the State, to defend the liberties, interests and properties of the people and to safeguard the independence and territorial integrity of the Country."

The special session also came in line with Article 72 of the National Assembly statute, which called for a special session upon the request of the government or 10 members of the parliament, stating the reason for the session within a period of 48 hours.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is the 17th leader of Kuwait after the passing of Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah last Saturday.

Also last Saturday, the Cabinet had named His Highness Sheikh Mishal as the Amir of Kuwait in accordance with Article four of the Constitution and succession law 4/1964.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal, born 1940, is the seventh son of Kuwait's 10th ruler Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah who led the country between 1921 and 1950.

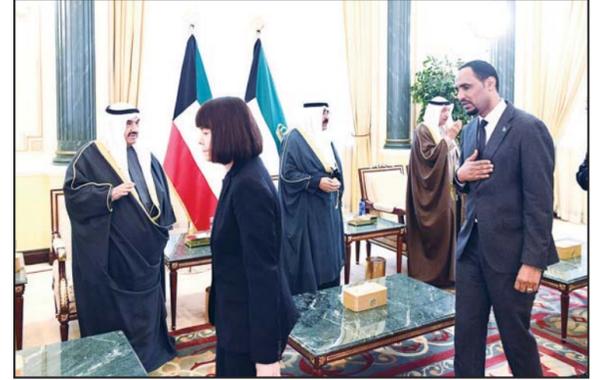
His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal had held several post during the last six decades chiefly amongst them the Crown Prince, which he attained when he took constitutional oath on October 8th, 2020 during a special session of parliament.



Amiri Diwan photos
His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives state's officials.



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



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

World mourns alongside Kuwait

Amir thanks local and global figures for condolences

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah extended his thanks and appreciation, on Tuesday, to top Kuwaiti officials for their condolences and sincere sentiments on the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Amir thanked National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Sadoun, National Guard Chief His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah as well as to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime

Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Amir also expressed his thanks to the Ministers, Members of Parliament, to citizens and nationals alike, editors-in-chief of local newspapers, media channels, civil society institutions, and charitable societies.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal stated that this reflects the depth of connections between the Kuwaiti people, and highlights their devotion, wishing them all good health and wellbeing.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also expressed on Tuesday his sincere thanks

and appreciation to leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC), heads of the brotherly Arab countries and the leaders of friendly countries of the world, and to the Secretary General of the United Nations and to Secretary General League of Arab States.

His Highness also extended thanks to the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the President of the Arab Parliament, the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Director of the World Health Organization (WHO), the Director of the United Na-

tions World Food Program (FAO), and the Executive Director of the United Nations For Children (UNICEF).

He also expressed thanks to the Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA), to the Director of the United Nations Development Organization, to all heads of organizations and agencies of the United Nations, all organizations of the League of Arab States, heads of diplomatic missions accredited to the country, to heads of institutions and charitable societies outside the country.

Continued on Page 6



خير خلف.. لخير سلف

تقدم شركة الاتصالات الكويتية stc

ممثلة بمجلس إدارتها وجميع موظفيها بخالص التهئة

إلى حضرة صاحب السمو

الشيخ مشعل الأحمد الجابر الصباح

أمير دولة الكويت

بمناسبة توليه مقاليد الحكم، سائلين المولى عز وجل أن يوفقه في مواصلة مسيرة البناء والتنمية لما فيه خير لدولتنا الحبيبة الكويت وشعبها الكريم.

stc

Weather

Expected weather for the next 24 hours:

By Day: Warm with light variable wind to light to moderate southeasterly wind, with speeds of 06-28 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

By Night: Rather cold to cold and

partly cloudy with light to moderate southeasterly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 08-28 km/h with and a chance for scattered light rain with a chance for fog forming over some areas..

Station Max Exp Min Rec
Kuwait City 22 16

Kuwait Airport	24	11
Abdaly	23	08
Jahra	24	12
Salmiyah	19	17
Nuwaisib	25	13
Wafra	25	11

Prayer Timings	
Fajr	05:12
Sunrise ..	06:37
Zohr	11:45
Asr	14:35
Maghrib ..	16:53
Isha	18:15

Local

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diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Plan to streamline ration food supplies a strategic decision?

"THE minister of commerce and industry recently took a ministerial decision to cancel more than 42 food items listed on the ration card, starting from the beginning of next year (2024). This decision was issued after an extensive study by the Permanent Committee for Regulating Categories of Food and Discounted Materials," columnist **Musa Behbehani**, wrote for **Al-Rai** daily.

"Indeed, this is the worthy strategic decision, and it would be preferable if all additional goods in the supply centers were canceled, because one of the tasks of the Ministry of Commerce is to provide only the main food supplies, which are: (rice, sugar, lentils, dry milk, paste, oil), and there is nothing wrong with coordinating with the company. Mills to add: (flour and pasta), and work to provide these basic goods and materials at appropriate prices to meet the country's need for them, not to mention combating unjustified high prices, and determining them through an extensive study to ensure their stability.

"Indeed, it is strange. Is it reasonable for all these items to be added and stacked to reach more than 100 items in catering centers? So why is this the case?"

"Isn't this a huge burden on the supply department? Doesn't this matter require the provision of larger warehouses, refrigerators, and air conditioning units, and an increase in the number of accounting, auditing, and inventory employees, and additional responsibility on the employees entrusted with these tasks!"

"Not to mention the delay in disbursing rations, which causes the consumer to wait a long time to receive his food supplies, we hope that firm decisions will be taken from several quarters.

"There is a greater role required of the Ministry of Commerce, which is to monitor price manipulation for various types of goods. Inspection campaigns on sales centers must be tightened and intensified to monitor any violations in raising prices. It is preferable to set the profit margin so that it does not exceed 20 percent as a maximum and impose large fines on those who exceed the limits. It is possible to use information technology to create a special website for the Ministry of Commerce in which the selling prices of various commodities in the country are published.

"It has a prominent role in providing various food commodities at competitive prices through understandings with suppliers to obtain special prices and discounts for those products, not to mention its role in the Union of Associations to provide various commodities at economical prices.



Behbehani

"When government lands and multiple holdings of livestock and barns were allocated at nominal prices, and subsidized fodder was provided to breeders with the aim of exploiting them in raising livestock and preserving the sustainability of livestock (camels, sheep, poultry, birds), then the exploiters of those holdings were required to provide the foodstuffs produced by these livestock and birds. At reduced prices, achieving self-sufficiency of these goods in addition to eggs.

"But...unfortunately, these properties have turned into rest houses, chalets, warehouses, workshops, housing for large and legitimate workers, and offices belonging to some companies..."

"Thus, these holdings deviated from their purpose for which they were distributed under the eyes of the law!"

"The areas that are exploited for growing and producing these agricultural and fishery products, raising poultry, livestock, and cows, raising race horses and camels, and apiaries for beekeeping and honey production, are regulatory plots that have been approved by the General Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources with the aim of achieving self-sufficiency in these products to achieve food security in the country.

"These bodies are required to be firm in implementing the laws related to these matters, to stop all these violations that we mentioned above, and to correct the course and reorganize in a way that achieves the purpose for which these vouchers were granted and distributed, as well as stopping the external export of livestock and birds until reaching producing large quantities of it in excess of the needs of citizens and residents of Kuwait and then allowing the surplus to be re-exported."

Also:

"The 44th Gulf Summit convened in Doha, Qatar, amid an extraordinary and sensitive backdrop, primarily marked by the condemnable Zionist aggression against the Gaza Strip. Notably, the summit included the participation of the Turkish president and was followed by President Putin's visits to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The summit's decisions, along with these significant events, rendered it historic and multifaceted," columnist **Dr Noura Saleh Al-Majim** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"While the Zionist aggression against Gaza dominated discussions and decisions, it also underscored the broader messages and aspirations of the GCC countries on the Gulf, regional, and global stages.

"A crucial message emanating from the summit was the establishment of a unified Gulf stance on the Palestinian issue, encompassing its principles and comprehensive resolution. The summit decisively affirmed the com-

mitment to a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the two-state solution. The GCC countries denounced the Zionist entity's policy of violence and displacement on occupied territories and categorically condemned its brutal aggression on Gaza.

"This unequivocal and forthright expression by the GCC countries demonstrated a resolute and independent position on the primary Arab issue. The Cooperation Council's stance avoided ambiguity, bias, or deference to influential international parties. It symbolized the GCC's commitment to an impartial and principled stance on the Palestinian matter, irrespective of specific countries' leanings.

"The GCC's growing independence, evident for nearly a decade, found confirmation in this summit. The presence of Turkish President Erdogan indicated the Council's expansion of political and economic cooperation, emphasizing a unified position aligned with the interests, security, and independence of its member states. Turkey, through President Erdogan, strongly condemned Israel's actions in Gaza, further underscoring the GCC's independent stance.

"President Putin's visit to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi the day after the summit added another layer to this independence. Despite Russia's alignment with Israel and its role in the Ukraine conflict, Putin's visit had multiple dimensions, from coordinating positions in OPEC Plus to economic and arms deals. It also had political implications, contributing to a balanced Gulf stance on the Ukrainian war.

"The Gulf countries may seek to leverage Russia's international influence to exert pressure on ending the Gaza conflict, a pivotal issue for the GCC at present. Additionally, the GCC's unified message may serve as a warning to Washington, signaling potential damage to strategic relations if absolute bias toward the Zionist entity continues. It also communicates that the GCC is open to cooperation and engagement without allegiance to any dominant power.

"In summary, the 44th Gulf Summit conveyed three key messages: a united Gulf position with inherent resilience despite occasional fissures, a steadfast and collective stance on the Palestinian issue based on international legitimacy, and a distinctly independent Gulf posture, showcasing the increasing influence and strength of the GCC countries. This independence is evident in political decisions that distance themselves from Washington's sway, expanding cooperative frameworks without favoritism toward one power over another.

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

World leaders' reps arrive in Kuwait to offer condolences

HH Amir Sheikh Mishal receives delegations

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport, Chinese President Xi Jinping's special envoy **Shohrat Zakir** and his accompanying delegation to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Zakir and his accompanying 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 Chinese delegation was received by Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah.

Morocco

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport representative of King Mohammed VI of Morocco Prince Rashid Bin Al-Hassan II and his accompanying delegation to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The delegation also extended their condolences to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber 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-Sabah, and to Al-Sabah family and Sheikhs.

South Korea

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport, South Korea Government Representative and Foreign Minister Park Jin and his accompanying delegation to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Jin and his accompanying delegation extended their condolences 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.

Canada

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport the President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency

Preparedness and Minister responsible for the Pacific Economic Development Agency of Canada Harjit S. Sajjan and his accompanying delegation to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad.

Sajjan and his accompanying delegation extended their condolences 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.

Japan

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport Japan Prime Minister's Special Envoy Dr. Mori Eisuke and his accompanying delegation to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad.

Eisuke and his accompanying delegation extended their condolences 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.

Pakistan

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport, Pakistan Prime Minister Anwar ul Haq Kakar and his accompanying delegation to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad.

Kakar and his accompanying delegation extended their condolences 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.

Algeria

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport representative of Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Prime Minister Nadir Larbaoui and his accompanying delegation to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The delegation also extended their condolences to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber 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-Sabah, and to Al-Sabah family and Sheikhs.

Djibouti

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport Djibouti Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Mahmoud Ali Youssef and his accompanying delegation to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Youssef and his accompanying 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.

Yemen

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport, Yemeni President of the Presidential Council Dr. Rashad Al-Alimi and his accompanying delegation to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The Yemeni 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.

Somalia

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport Somalia President Hassan Sheikh Mahmoud and his accompanying delegation to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The Somali leader extended his condolences 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.

Mauritania

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport Mauritania President Mohamed Ould Cheikh Ghazouani and his accompanying delegation to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The Mauritanian leader extended his condolences 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.



Kuwait's Permanent Delegate to the UN Ambassador Al-Bannai and others during the flags lowering at half-mast in honor of late Amir.

Kuwait's Ambassador Al-Bannai attends ceremony

UN flags fly at half-mast in honor of late Amir

By Abdullah Al-Enzi

Indian ambassador's condolence message

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: In his message on behalf of the Embassy of India in Kuwait, the Indian Ambassador to Kuwait, HE Dr Adarsh Swaika said: "I convey my deepest condolences on the passing way of the late 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 Indian envoy went on to say, "The bilateral relations between India and Kuwait continued to strengthen under his patronage.

"I convey my heartfelt condolences on behalf of the embassy and the vast Indian community living in Kuwait. "The Indian Embassy officials and the Indian community in Kuwait observed 2 minutes' silence to pay respects to the late Amir on Dec 17.

"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," the Indian envoy said.

NEW YORK, Dec 19, (KUNA): The UN flags were lowered to half-mast at the international organization headquarters in New York on Monday to mourn the death of Kuwait's late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The ceremony was attended by Kuwait's Permanent Delegate to the UN Ambassador Tareq Al-Bannai and

other members of the Kuwaiti mission at the UN.

In a press statement on Sunday, the UN said the late Amir 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.

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Kuwait's inability to tackle economic reforms sparks concerns

Experts warn of giving in to economically irrational populist demands

Kuwait's 'economic' slowdown stalls global remittance growth

Money transfers to South Asia expected to slow: WB

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: The World Bank attributed the slowdown in the growth of financial transfers from the Gulf, whether to Asia, Egypt or other countries compared to 2022, to the decline in economic growth in Kuwait and

Saudi Arabia by 2023, from 8 percent to 1.5 percent, and the decline in growth by half in the rest of the Gulf countries due to the decline oil prices and production cuts in the OPEC + countries, reports Al-Rai daily.

A recent World Bank report stated that after remittances to South Asia recorded a growth of 12.2 percent in 2022, it is likely to slow to 7.2 percent in 2023. This regional average is the result of high growth in half of the countries of South Asia -- Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka -- and low growth in the other half -- Afghanistan, Bhutan, the Maldives, and Pakistan.



KUNA photo
Riyadh Governor Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz offers condolences on the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, at Kuwait Embassy in Riyadh.

Riyadh Governor, his Deputy offer condolence on late Amir's demise

RIYADH, Dec 19, (KUNA): Riyadh Governor Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz and his deputy Prince Mohammad Bin Abdulrahman Bin Abdulaziz, offered on Tuesday condolences to Kuwait Ambassador to Riyadh Sheikh Sabah Al-Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, at Kuwait Embassy in Riyadh.

He said, "these good feelings from all representatives of the missions of brotherly and friendly countries alleviate our suffering in losing Kuwait Amir and confirm the position that Kuwait has reached to the world due to the wisdom of its leadership."

In a statement to KUNA, Sheikh Sabah Al-Nasser expressed his thanks to everyone who offered their condolences during the three days, and for their good feelings towards State of Kuwait and the late Amir.

He also affirmed that Kuwait would continue on the path of renaissance and progress under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Arab and international political and diplomatic figures also offered their condolences on the loss of late Amir at the embassy headquarters in Riyadh.



Congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait

Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

We wish the State of Kuwait and its people security and progress under His Highness the Amir's wise leadership

ALMAILEM GROUP مجموعة الميلم

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: Experts and economists have warned of the consequences of giving in to economically irrational populist demands and random parliamentary bidding, and the resulting catastrophic financial consequences that the public treasury may be unable to bear and push Kuwait towards a serious financial impasse that threatens its economic standing and sovereign credit rating, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Between a frustrating government inability to approve financial sustainability laws and a miserable failure to achieve tangible progress in the file of financial and economic reforms, the chaos of random parliamentary demands continues in light of the absence of economic logic in them and the lack of study of their financial cost, as if they suggest a destructive plan to drain the "generations" reserve, as the bill to cover increases and financial claims will not be able to be covered by a budget at \$200 per barrel of oil.

Reform programs

While the experts pointed out the state's limited ability to respond to ill-considered parliamentary demands with high costs, they stressed that all financial and economic data indicate that Kuwait's finances are on the verge of explosion, and it is only a matter of time, in the absence of real, implementable reform programs accompanied by a strong will.

To implement it on the ground, what increases the seriousness of the financial situation is that salaries and subsidies eat up about 80% of the country's budget, in exchange for modest spending on capital projects, which is often faced with many obstacles that hinder its path.

They warned that the deficit for the next fiscal year 2024-2025 may reach 6.1 billion dinars at an optimistic rate of oil prices of around \$80 per barrel, and rise to 9 billion dinars at a rate of \$70 per barrel, at which point salaries, wages and subsidies will constitute about 113% of the general budget revenues, and higher than that. For current expenses, without taking into account the cost of absorbing between 20,000 to 25,000 citizens coming to the labor market.

They reported that any cash spending in the form of increases or allocations that appear on the surface to be grants will not constitute any added value to the economy, but will evaporate in the market, which responds to every increase in a direct manner. An example of this is the increase in the housing loan, which was reflected in land prices in Kuwait.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al-Shall Economic Consulting Company, Jassim Al-Saadoun, said in a statement to Al-Qabas that in Kuwait, the government is leading the competition in adopting populist policies that completely accelerate the country's entry into a more severe contraction phase, coinciding with the deepening of the public finance crisis, and with an increase in the imbalance in pension funds.

He added, public administrations in other countries worry and perhaps panic when they issue indicators that confirm that their performance is the worst within their region, with all the risks it entails for the near future, and they begin to formulate scenarios that determine the size of the cost if their policies continue as they are, and then they begin to chart a way out of it, which is except for Kuwait, which we have not heard from its officials of jealousy or concern for it, which would lead to a move or even

a statement suggesting it is moving in that direction.

Al-Saadoun pointed out that what the public administration is supposed to know if it cares about the future of its country is that the deficit for the next fiscal year 2024-2025, at the same current level of public expenditures, will reach 6.1 billion dinars at an optimistic rate of oil prices of around \$80 per barrel, and will rise to 9 billion dinars when Average oil prices are around \$70.

At that level of oil prices, salaries, wages, and subsidies will become about 113 percent of the general budget revenues, and higher than that for current expenditures, and without taking into account the cost of absorbing between 20,000 and 25,000 citizens coming to the labor market, he said.

For his part, economic expert Muhammad Al-Qadi told Al-Qabas that with regard to the issue of prices and high prices and the demands made by a number of representatives to improve the standard of living and combat high prices, we must consider the issue calmly and fairly for the citizen, the consumer, and the state's budget and the extent of its ability to bear such demands with a careful and distant eye.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of Hayat Investment Company, Dr. Nabil Al-Mannai, said: Anyone who monitors the rates of growth and increase in government spending during the last 10 years, in addition to the policies of subsidies, employment, and wealth distribution, including social safety nets and how to penetrate them, will find that the state's finances are unsustainable.

Researcher in Islamic economics, writer Faisal Al-Zamil, said: Sustainable development is characterized by continuity and thus resembles a highway with no signals or intersections. The flow of traffic in it with complete smoothness provides the state with great potential to diversify the source of income.

Diversification

He went on to say, "I will stop at one axis of this continuity, which is trade exchange, which represented the main source of Kuwait's economy before the advent of the oil era, and it is wise for it to be developed during this era to achieve the required diversification of sources of income, and this requires a "strong infrastructure" that is commensurate with developments. Large in the world of communications, financing systems, storage complexes and effective presence in supply chains."

Former member of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, Ali Rashid Al-Badr, stressed that economic sustainability does not require issuing new laws that obstruct development and expansion, but rather requires an effective and logical government economic development policy, through which it diversifies the sources of the national economy and saves it from the dangers of relying on one depleted source. In the medium and long term, it is subject to severe fluctuations.

He added that Kuwait needs additional strong sources of income in addition to oil by creating and encouraging the establishment of national companies in multiple service fields that grow and expand abroad and exploit our human wealth, much of which is now being burned in administrative jobs, piling up in the towers of government institutions with little, even obstructive, productivity.

India's Parliament holds obituary reference, honors the legacy of Kuwait's departed Amir

On 18 December 2023, Obituary reference and observance of silence was undertaken in both the houses of India Parliament- Upper House (Rajya Sabha) and Lower house (Lok Sabha), paying condolences on the sad demise of the late Amir of State of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The text of the obituary reference made in Indian Parliament is:

"Hon'ble Members, I have to inform the House of the sad demise of the Amir of the State of Kuwait. We have learnt with deep sadness the passing away of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait. Sheikh Nawaf's contribution to the development and prosperity of Kuwait was considerable. Kuwait has lost a great leader. India has enjoyed close and friendly relations with Kuwait under the leadership of Sheikh Nawaf. The large Indian expatriate community in Kuwait will miss his care and concern. This House joins the ruling family of Kuwait, the leadership and the people of Kuwait in mourning the death of Sheikh Nawaf."



India's Parliament Chairman, Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar during the Obituary reference and observance of silence in the houses of India Parliament, on the sad demise of the late Amir of State of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Kuwaiti company secures contract in UAE

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: According to MEED magazine, Mohammed Abdul Mohsen Al-Kharafi & Sons Company has secured the contract for the construction of two residential towers in the Emirate of Al-Shaqa, flanking the Teatro 2 Arts Center, reports Al-Anba daily.

The Arad Real Estate Company has initiated the construction of Teatro 2 residences in the Aljada area, and the project involving two towers adjacent to the Teatro Arts Center will be undertaken by Al-Kharafi Company.

The completion date for the project is set for the end of 2024. The local architecture firm Dar Consult is serving as the project consultant. ARAD announced plans for Teatro 2, a new arts center in the Aljada community in

Sharjah, with Japanese architect Tadao Ando appointed as the design consultant.

The arts center, featuring a capacity of 2,000 seats, is slated for completion in 2027, spanning 24,154 square meters and comprising a hall, exhibition space, and an event area.

Tadao Ando is also the design consultant for ARADA's Armani Beach Residences project on Palm Jumeirah in Dubai. In January, ARADA awarded a 475 million dirhams (\$129 million) contract to Gulf Asia Contracting Company for the construction of The Vida Aljada Hotel complex, including a 175-room hotel, 255 residential units, and 149 hotel apartments in the Aljada Cultural District. The Naseej District, part of the project, also includes a museum.

'Sheikh Nawaf worked to consolidate foreign political approach of Kuwait'

Arab officials mourn Kuwait's late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19, (KUNA): Several Arab officials, while attending functions at Kuwaiti diplomatic missions abroad, expressed on Tuesday their sorrow over the death of the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

At the Kuwaiti embassy in the Republic of Austria, visiting Saudi Minister of Commerce Dr. Majid Al-Qasabi offered his condolences on the death of Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the late Amir of the State of Kuwait.

Al-Qasabi met with Ambassador to Austria Talal Suleiman Al-Fassam in the presence of the Saudi Ambassador, Dr. Abdullah Bin Khalid Tola.

He offered sincere condolences to the Al-Sabah family and to the Kuwaiti people on the death of Sheikh Nawaf, who passed away after a career full of achievement and giving.

Meanwhile, the Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the Russia Rashid Al-Adwani expressed on Tuesday his condolences on the death of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

He pointed out that Sheikh Nawaf also worked to consolidate the foreign political approach of Kuwait, which is based on peace, humanitarian work, and continuing to provide assistance to people and countries in need.

From Muscat, two Omani ministers offered condolences on the death of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at the headquarters of the Kuwaiti Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, Dr. Abdullah Al-Saidi and the Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment Promotion, Qais Al-Yousef, expressed in a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) their deep sorrow over this great loss.

The Kuwaiti embassies in Austria, New Zealand, Cambodia, and Indonesia held their respective functions to mourn the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah who passed away last Saturday.

The embassies each opened their condolences book for the late Amir and held a three-day mourning period.

In Austria, Ambassador of Kuwait Talal Al-Fassam remembered the Amir Sheikh Nawaf for his keen interest of the development of Kuwait and the welfare of its people.

He expressed his condolences to the Kuwaiti leadership and people on this great loss.

Similarly, a statement from the Kuwaiti Embassy in New Zealand said that the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad would always be remembered as a man of great vision and compassion for Kuwaitis and residents alike.

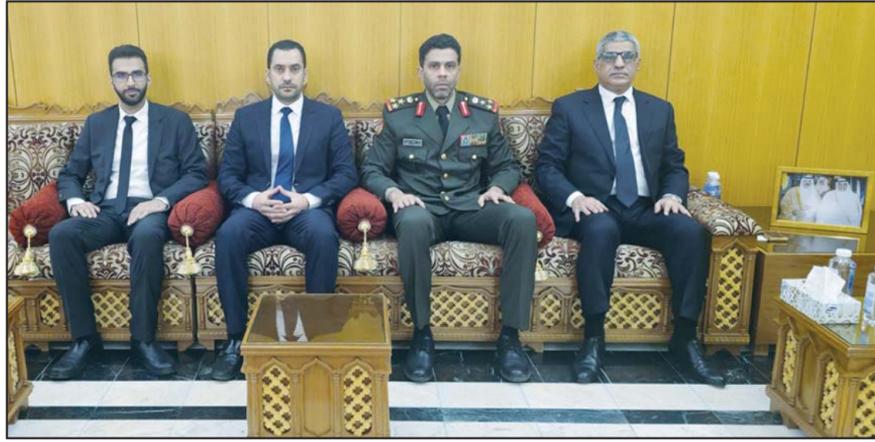
In Cambodia, the Kuwaiti embassy held a three-day mourning period with the Ambassador Mohammad Al-Hajri and embassy staff receiving officials offering condolences over the great loss of Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad.

To Indonesia, where the Kuwaiti embassy there released a statement lamenting the passing away of the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, announcing a three-day mourning period at the embassy in Jakarta.

The English-language printed press in Kuwait and other Gulf countries has highlighted the demise and funeral of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The newspapers have published long reports about the late Amir's life, the main events he had experienced and the visible marks he left behind for promoting Kuwait and its people, as well as his contributions for serving Arab and Islamic causes.

The newspapers' pages were dominated with reports eulogizing Sheikh Nawaf and photos of his funeral and burial, in addition to diverse editorials, and reactions by local and foreign leaders, sharing Kuwait's grief and distress.



Kuwait Ambassador to Russia Rashid Al-Adwani and Embassy Staff.

KUNA photo

Amir receives condolence cables

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday a cable from President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Vo Van Thuong, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In reply, His Highness the Amir sent the Vietnamese president a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing him good health and wellness.

Guyana

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday two cables from President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali and Vice-President Bharrat Jagdeo, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In reply, His Highness the Amir sent two cables to President Ali and Vice-President Jagdeo voicing thanks and appreciation for their sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies and wishing them good health and wellness.

Kazakhstan

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Tuesday received, at Bayan palace, Kazakhstan's Deputy Foreign Minister Murat Nurtleu and the accompanying offering condolences on demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The Kazakh deputy foreign minister and his entourage expressed consolations to senior Sheikhs, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the late Amir's family and Sheikhs.

Eritrea

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday a cable from the President of the State of Eritrea Isaias Afwerki, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In reply, His Highness the Amir sent the Eritrean president a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing him good health and wellness.

His Highness the Amir sent the vice-president of the United Arab Emirates a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing him good health and wellness.

Spain

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday a cable from the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Spain Pedro Sanchez, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In reply, His Highness the Amir sent the Spanish premier a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing him good health and wellness.

Iraq

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday a cable from the Grand Ayatollah Al-Sayyid Ali Al-Husseini Al-Sistani of the Republic Iraq, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In reply, His Highness the Amir sent the Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing him good health and wellness.

OIC

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday a cable from the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation Hissein Ibrahim Taha, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In reply, His Highness the Amir sent the OIC secretary general a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing him good health and wellness.

UAE

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday a cable from the President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In reply, His Highness the Amir sent the president of the United Arab Emirates a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing him good health and wellness.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal received a cable from Vice-President, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Presidential Court of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In reply, His Highness the Amir sent the vice-president of the United Arab Emirates a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing him good health and wellness.

Also, His Highness the Amir received a cable from the Vice-President, Prime Minister, and Minister of Defense of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In reply, His Highness the Amir sent the UAE premier a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing him good health and wellness.

Tatarstan

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday a cable from President of Tatarstan Rustam Minnikhanov, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In reply, His Highness the Amir sent the president of Tatarstan a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing him good health and wellness.

Turkmenistan

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday a cable from President of Turkmenistan Serdar Berdimuhamedow, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In reply, His Highness the Amir sent the president of Turkmenistan a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing him good health and wellness.

Cambodia

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday a cable from Cambodia King Norodom Sihamoni, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In the cable, King Sihamoni commended the late Amir's contributions to the promotion of bonds of friendship and cooperation between both friendly countries.

In turn, His Highness the Amir sent a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing good health for the King and prosperity to the kingdom.

Czech

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable on Monday from Czech President Petr Pavel.

In the cable President Pavel expressed; and on part of the Czech people, grave grief over the passing away of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Saturday, 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.

Comoros

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable on Monday from President of the Comoros Azali Assoumani.

In the cable President Assoumani expressed; and on part of the Comorian people, deep sadness over the passing away of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Saturday, 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.



**May Allah
Enlighten Your Path**

His Highness Emir of Kuwait
**Sheikh Meshal
Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber
Al-Sabah**
May Allah Preserve and Bless You

talabat

LOCAL

Amir thanks

Continued from Page 2

His Highness the Amir also extending his thanks to the heads of non-governmental organizations for their sincere condolences on the demise of late Amir His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah whether by attending and offering condolences or via condolence messages, phone calls, or statements.

His Highness, expressed appreciation to these initiatives that embody the bonds of historical and close relations that bind the State of Kuwait and all Arab and friendly countries, and to all international and regional organizations and agencies, as he wished everyone good health and wellness.

Earlier, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah along with Al-Sabah family continued to receive, Tuesday evening, at Bayan Palace, citizens offering their condolences on the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Earlier, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace, Justice Dr. Adel Majed Boursesli, the head of the Supreme Judicial Council and the Court of Cassation and members of the council.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal also hosted senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, heads of the diplomatic missions in the State of Kuwait, ranking chiefs of the Army, the National Guard, the Fire Directorate General and citizens.

They offered condolences over the death of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

King of Spain

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport Spain's King Felipe VI and his accompanying delegation to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The Spanish King and his accompanying delegation extended their condolences 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 Spanish delegation was received by Minister of Amiri Diwan Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Sabah.

Prince of Wales

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport William, Prince of Wales, along with Foreign Minister David Cameron, and their accompanying delegation to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The delegation also extended their condolences to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber 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-Sabah, and to Al-Sabah family and Sheikhs.

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

Prince of Bhutan

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Tuesday received, at Bayan Palace, envoy of the Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, Prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck, President of the Bhutanese Olympics Committee, and the accompanying delegation.

The visiting Bhutanese officials expressed consolations on demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

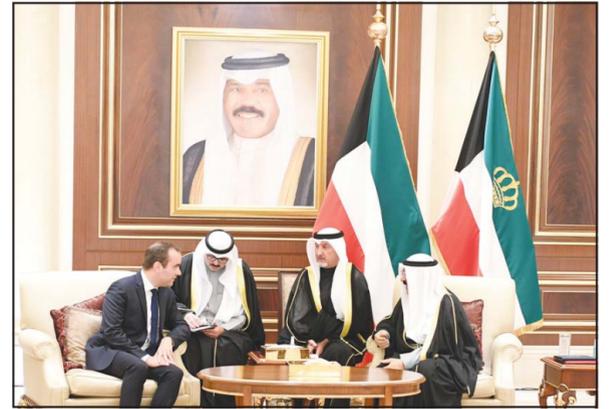
They also expressed solace to senior Sheikhs, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the late Amir's family and Sheikhs.

GCC chief

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah re-



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives GCC Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives French Minister of Armed Forces Sebastien Lecornu.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Spain's King Felipe VI.



Amiri Diwan photos
His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Prince of Wales.

ceived on Monday GCC Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi and GCC undersecretaries, who offered condolences over the passing away of the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

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

Arab Parliament Speaker

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Al-Sabah family Diwan in Bayan Palace on Monday Speaker of the Arab Parliament Adel Al-Asoomi and the accompanying delegation.

The Arab parliamentarian offered condolences on the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Al-Asoomi offered condolences to senior Sheikhs, 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 other members of Al-Sabah family.

Iraq's Alliance of National State Forces

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday the leader of the Alliance of National State Forces of Iraq Sayyid Ammar al-Hakim and his accompanying delegation, who are in Kuwait to offer condolences over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

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

Muqtada Al-Sadr's rep.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Sabah family Diwan in Bayan Palace the representative of Iraq's Muqtada Al-Sadr, Mustafa Al-Yaqubi who offered condolences on the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Al-Yaqubi also offered his condolences to senior Sheikhs, 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-Sabah, and Al-Sabah family members.

Kurdistan PM

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan region Masrour Barzani and his accompanying delegation who offered condolences to the Amir over the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Prime Minister Barzani and his accompanying delegation also extended condolences to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Mohammad 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 guests were received by Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Son of Bohra's Sultan

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Al-Sabah family Diwan in Bayan Palace, Tuesday morning, Dr. Husain Burhanuddin, son of the Sultan of Bohra, and the accompanying delegation, where he offered his condolences over the death of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

He also sent condolences 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, Al-Sabah family and multiple senior Sheikhs.

Bahr Al-Uloum Charity Foundation

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Tuesday received Dr. Ibrahim Bahr Al-Uloum, Chairman of Bahr Al-Uloum Charity Foundation (Iraq), and an accompanying delegation, who offered condolences on demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Dr. Al-Uloum and his entourage also expressed consolations to senior Sheikhs, Their Highnesses Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the late Amir's family and Sheikhs.

Turkiye's Parliament Speaker

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday Turkish Parliament Speaker Numan Kurtulmus and his accompanying delegation, who are in Kuwait to offer condolences over the passing away of the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The top Turkish lawmaker also extended condolences to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Al-Sabah Family.

The Turkish guests were welcomed by Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at the airport.

Italy Deputy FM

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday Italian Deputy Foreign Minister Edmondo Cirielli and his accompanying delegation, who offered condolences over the passing away of the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The Italian guests also extended condolences to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Al-Sabah Family.

Representative of Bangladesh Pres.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport Representative of the President of Bangladesh Mohammed Shahabuddin, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdul Kalam Abdul Momen and his accompanying delegation, who are in Kuwait to offer condolences to the Amir over the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The Bangladeshi guests also extended condolences to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Mohammad 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.

Kazakhstan Deputy FM

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Tuesday received, at Bayan palace, Kazakhstan's Deputy Foreign Minister Murat Nurtleu and the accompanying offering condolences on demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

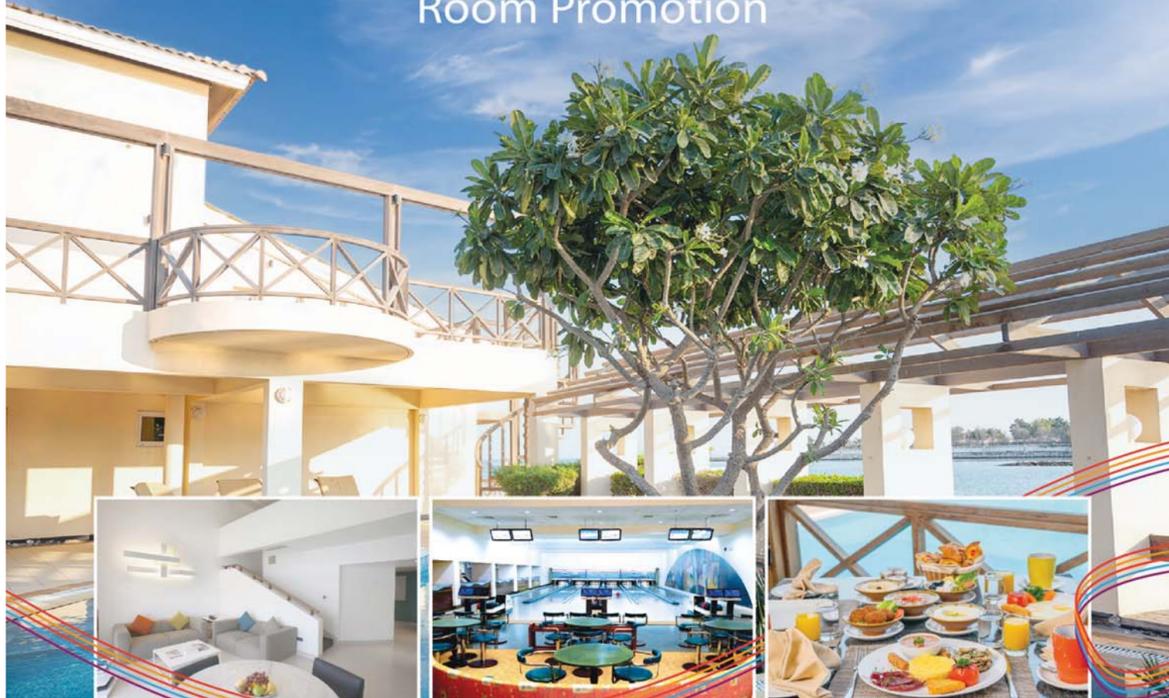
The Kazakh deputy foreign minister and his entourage expressed consolations to senior Sheikhs, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the late Amir's family and Sheikhs.



Celebrate
Bahain
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December

Room Promotion



Weekdays (Saturday - Wednesday)	
Queen Cabana (2 persons inclusive of breakfast) per night.	2 Bedroom Chalet (4 persons inclusive of breakfast) per night.
NOW	NOW
BHD 57.173/-net	BHD 128.000/-net
Weekends (Thursday & Friday)	
Queen Cabana (2 persons inclusive of breakfast) per night.	2 Bedroom Chalet (4 persons inclusive of breakfast) per night.
NOW	NOW
BHD 61.000/-net	BHD 136.198/-net

Promo period from 19th – 31st December 2023

Terms & conditions apply*

World News Roundup

Defense

Missile warning 'activated'

North Korea threatens more offensive actions

SEOUL, South Korea, Dec 19, (Agencies): North Korean leader **Kim Jong Un** threatened "more offensive actions" to repel what he called increasing United States-led military threats after he supervised the third test of his country's most advanced missile designed to strike the mainland U.S., state media reported Tuesday.

Kim's statement suggests he is confident in his growing missile arsenal and will likely continue weapons testing activities ahead of the 2024 U.S. presidential election. But many observers say North Korea still needs to perform more significant tests to prove it has functioning missiles targeting the U.S. mainland.

After watching Monday's launch of the Hwasong-18 intercontinental ballistic missile, Kim said the test showed how North Korea could respond if the United States were to make "a wrong decision against it," according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

Kim stressed the need to "never overlook all the reckless and irresponsible military threats of the enemies ... and to strongly counter them with more offensive actions," KCNA said.

The Hwasong-18 ICBM is a developmental, solid-fueled ICBM that is considered North Korea's most powerful weapon. Its built-in solid propellant makes launches harder for outsiders to detect than liquid-fueled missiles, which must be fueled before liftoffs. But many foreign experts say North Korea still has some other technological hurdles to master to acquire reliable nuclear-tipped ICBMs, such as one to protect warheads from the harsh conditions of atmospheric reentry.

KCNA said the Hwasong-18 missile - launched at a high angle to avoid neighboring countries - flew a distance of 1,002 kilometers (622 miles) for 73.5 minutes at a maximum altitude of 6,518 kilometers (4,050 miles) before landing in an area off the North's east coast. It said Kim expressed "great satisfaction" with the launch, which verified again the reliability of "the most powerful strategic core striking means" of North Korea.

It was the North's third test of the Hwasong-18 missile. Its two previous launches were in April and July. "Based on their statement, this looks to have been an exercise in signaling and a developmental test in one," said Ankit Panda, an expert with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "There's nothing new here technically as far as I can tell at this early stage, but they're certainly growing increasingly confident in their new solid propellant ICBM."

Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, said the North's latest ICBM test is another indicator of how far its missile engine technology has progressed, but added there are limits to what North Korea can learn from lofted trajectory firings. "Demonstrating warhead targeting and reentry capabilities would involve provocative launches across greater distances," Easley said. "So more significant tests of both technology and diplomacy are likely in the New Year."

KCNA said that a recent U.S.-South Korean meeting to discuss their nuclear deterrence plan openly revealed their intention to hold joint drills with a simulated nuclear attack on North Korea.

It referred to the second Nuclear Consultative Group meeting between senior U.S. and South Korean officials Friday. During their meeting in Washington, the two countries agreed to update their nuclear deterrence and contingency strategies and incorporate nuclear operation scenarios in their combined military exercises in the summer, according to officials in Seoul.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said during a Cabinet Council meeting Tuesday that a "nuclear-based, powerful Korea-U.S. alliance" would be formed soon.

The nuclear consultative body is responsible for sharing information on nuclear and strategic weapons operation plans and joint operations, though the U.S. will retain operational control of its nuclear weapons. The group's establishment was part of U.S. efforts to ease South Korean worries about North Korean provocations while keeping Seoul from pursuing its own nuclear program.

Also:

TOKYO: Japan, the US and South Korea announced on Tuesday that they have fully activated a mechanism to share real-time North Korean missile warning data, and jointly established a multi-year trilateral exercise plan, the three countries' defense chiefs said in a joint statement.

"The three countries established this mechanism to improve their ability to ensure the safety of their peoples by trilaterally detecting and assessing missiles launched by the DPRK (North Korea) in real-time," Japanese Defense Minister **Minoru Kihara**, US Defense Secretary **Lloyd Austin** and South Korean Defense Minister **Shin Won-sik** said, according to the document.

The announcement came after North Korea fired a solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile into the sea on Monday.

In addition, the three countries have established a multi-year trilateral exercise plan, which will begin in early 2024.



China-Russia military ties ups concern: The head of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said Monday he is "very concerned" about increased joint military actions by China and Russia in the region.

Adm. **John C. Aquilino** spoke in Tokyo as another regional concern, North Korea, conducted its latest intercontinental ballistic missile test, underscoring the advancement of its capabilities.

Aquilino is meeting with Japanese defense officials ahead of a joint exercise, Keen Edge 24, early next year.

He urged China to stop escalating maritime confrontations with its neighbors, and said its increasing military activity with Russia is a serious concern during Moscow's war in Ukraine.

"I view it as far beyond the marriage of convenience at this point in time" he said. "If you tied DPRK (North Korea) into that, the Russia-DPRK cooperation, and the fact that the only partner of the DPRK prior to that was (China), that's just a bad neighborhood and bad group to be in," Aquilino said.

North Korea has been pushing to expand cooperation with Russia and China. There have been concerns that the North has supplied missiles and other ammunition to Russia to support its war in Ukraine, in exchange for obtaining Russian missile technology. (AP)



A government worker looks at the debris of a house brought down in the earthquake in Jishishan county in northwest China's Gansu province Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023. Inset: In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, a child injured in an earthquake falls asleep after being treated and settled at a hospital in Jishishan Ba'o'an, Dongxiang, Salar Autonomous County in Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, northwest China's Gansu Province, Dec. 19, 2023. (AP)

China

Nation's deadliest quake in 9 years

China quake kills at least 126

BEIJING, Dec 19, (AP) - A strong overnight earthquake rattled a mountainous region of northwestern China, authorities said Tuesday, destroying homes, leaving residents out in a below-freezing winter night and killing 126 people in the nation's deadliest quake in nine years.

The magnitude 6.2 earthquake struck just before midnight on Monday, injuring more than 700 people, damaging roads and knocking out power and communication lines in Gansu and Qinghai provinces, officials and Chinese media reports said.

As emergency workers searched for the missing in collapsed buildings and at least one landslide, people who lost their homes were preparing to spend a cold winter night in tents at hastily erected evacuation sites.

"I just feel anxious, what other feelings could there be?" said Ma Dongdong, who said in a phone interview that three bedrooms in his house had been destroyed and a part of his milk tea shop was cracked wide open.

Afraid to return home because of aftershocks, he spent the night in a field with his wife, two children and some neighbors, where they made a fire to stay warm. In the early morning, they went to a tent settlement that Ma said was housing about 700 people. As of mid-afternoon, they were waiting for blankets and warm clothing to arrive.

The earthquake struck at a relatively shallow depth of 10 kilometers (6 miles) in Gansu's Jishishan county, about 5 kilometers (3 miles) from the provincial boundary with Qinghai, the China Earthquake Networks Center said. The United States Geological Survey measured the magnitude at 5.9.

State broadcaster CCTV said 113 were confirmed dead in Gansu and another 536 injured in the province. Thirteen others were killed and 182 injured in Qinghai, in an area north of

the epicenter, a local Communist Party official said at a news conference.

There were nine aftershocks by 10 a.m. - about 10 hours after the initial earthquake - the largest one registering a magnitude of 4.1, the Gansu official said.

Emergency authorities in Gansu issued an appeal for 300 additional workers for search and rescue operations, and Qinghai officials reported 20 people missing in a landslide, according to Chinese state-owned media.

The earthquake was felt in much of the surrounding area, including Lanzhou, the Gansu provincial capital, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) northeast of the epicenter. Photos and videos posted by a student at Lanzhou University showed students hastily leaving a dormitory building and standing outside with long down jackets over their pajamas.

Earthquake

"The earthquake was too intense," said Wang Xi, the student who posted the images. "My legs went weak, especially when we ran downstairs from the dormitory."

The death toll was the highest since an August 2014 quake that killed 617 people in southwest China's Yunnan province. The country's deadliest earthquake in recent years was a 7.9 magnitude quake in 2008 that left nearly 90,000 dead or presumed dead and devastated towns and schools in Sichuan province, leading to a years-long effort to rebuild with more resistant materials.

Li Haibing, an expert at the Chinese Academy of Geological Sciences, said that the relatively high number of casualties in the latest quake was in part because it was shallow. "Therefore, it has caused greater shaking and destruction, even though the magnitude was not large," he said.

Other factors include the quake's mainly vertical movement, which

causes more violent shaking; the lower quality of buildings in what is a relatively poor area; and the fact that it happened in the middle of the night when most people were home, Li said.

The epicenter was about 1,300 kilometers (800 miles) southwest of Beijing, the Chinese capital. The remote and mountainous area is home to several predominantly Muslim ethnic groups and near some Tibetan communities. Geographically, it is in the center of China, though the area is commonly referred to as the northwest, as it is at the northwestern edge of China's more populated plains.

Tents, folding beds and quilts were being sent to the disaster area, state broadcaster CCTV said. It quoted Chinese leader Xi Jinping as calling for an all-out search and rescue effort to minimize the casualties.

The overnight low in the area was minus 15 to minus 9 degrees Celsius (5 to 16 degrees Fahrenheit), the China Meteorological Administration said. The Beijing Youth Daily, a Communist Party newspaper, quoted an unnamed rescue coordinator saying there was a need for generators, long coats and fuel for stoves, among other items. The coordinator recommended sending halal food because of the ethnic makeup of the affected population.

At least 4,000 firefighters, soldiers and police officers were dispatched in the rescue effort, and the People's Liberation Army Western Theatre set up a command post to direct its work.

A video posted by the Ministry of Emergency Management showed emergency workers in orange uniforms using rods to try to move heavy pieces of what looked like concrete debris at night. Other nighttime videos distributed by state media showed workers lifting out a victim and helping a slightly stumbling person to walk in an area covered with light snow.



Greek's riot police HQ targeted:

Greece's antiterrorism squad is investigating after the national riot police headquarters was targeted Monday with a bomb that was defused before it could explode, as police union members protested increasing violence against officers in the force.

Authorities had been alerted after an anonymous caller warned a newspaper that the bomb would explode in 45 minutes and described where it had been planted. That gave bomb disposal experts time to find and defuse the device.

The bomb had been left in a copse near the riot police headquarters outside the city center and close to a university campus, police said. There was no claim of responsibility.

Such bomb attacks have long been associated with domestic far-left militants. (AP)



Hong Kong's Chief Executive John Lee arrives for a press conference in Beijing, Monday, Dec. 18, 2023. Hong Kong's leader John Lee is in Beijing for an annual duty visit and met with Chinese President Xi Jinping, as the landmark national security trial for prominent activist publisher Jimmy Lai started in Hong Kong on Monday. Lee criticized foreign governments for trying to exert influence on a national security case on trial in Hong Kong. (AP)



Navalny



Vucic

Europe

UN expert concern about Navalny:

The United Nations' special rapporteur for human rights in Russia said Monday that she is concerned about imprisoned Russian opposition leader **Alexei Navalny** after his legal team and allies reported they have been unable to locate him since making contact 13 days ago.

Navalny's allies said he failed to appear in court as expected Monday and they were still searching for him in Russia's extensive prison system.

Navalny's spokesperson Kira Yarmysh wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, that Navalny had multiple hearings scheduled, some of which were suspended since the unknown location of the politician who is President Vladimir Putin's fiercest foe precluded his participation in person or by video link.

Special Rapporteur Mariana Katzarova, an independent expert who reports on human rights in Russia for the U.N., said she was "greatly concerned that the Russian authorities will not disclose Mr. Navalny's whereabouts and well-being for such a prolonged period of time."

The situation amounts to an "enforced disappearance," Katzarova said. (AP)



Serbia's election sparks outcry:

Serbia's weekend snap election was held in "unjust conditions," with multiple reports of irregularities, international observers said on Monday, as opponents of populist President **Aleksandar Vucic** took to the streets claiming the vote was rigged.

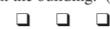
Political tensions spiked in the Balkan country over the parliamentary and local elections on Sunday. In Belgrade, several thousand people gathered in front of the state election commission headquarters, chanting "thieves," as opposition leaders moved to lodge formal complaints claiming fraud in the city election.

"We have hundreds and hundreds of complaints," said opposition politician

Marinika Tepic. She and several other opposition politicians will camp inside the building that's the seat of the state election commission. "We will stay here for a while."

At one point, protesters broke through a fence surrounding the building and one young woman tried to storm the entrance.

Protesters threw eggs, tomatoes and rolls of toilet paper at the building. (AP)



Berlin faces election rerun: Germany's Federal Constitutional Court on Tuesday ordered the 2021 national election to be partially repeated in the German capital because



Lava fountains are seen as volcanic eruption started, turning the sky orange, in Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Monday, Dec. 18, 2023. (AP)

oil down

The cost of Kuwaiti oil experienced a marginal decrease of four cents, reaching USD 78.91 per barrel on Monday, in contrast to the previous Friday's rate of USD 78.95 per barrel, as reported by the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Tuesday. Meanwhile, both Brent crude and West Texas Intermediate saw an increase, with Brent crude rising by USD 1.40 to settle at USD 77.95 per barrel, and West Texas Intermediate climbing by USD 1.04 to reach USD 72.47 per barrel. (KUNA)

Gulf countries lead 2024 global residential property investments

The inaugural "Housearch Investment Index" has highlighted the Gulf countries, with Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, particularly Dubai, securing top positions for residential property investment in 2024. This trend underscores the region's appeal as a stable and reliable investment haven, especially amidst cooling property markets in Europe and North America due to expected "higher-for-longer" interest rates. The United Arab Emirates, particularly Dubai, has long been a beacon for overseas property investment, renowned for its luxurious real estate offerings, favourable business environment, and near-zero tax regime. The recent influx of entrepreneurs and high-tech startups and high net worth foreigners, particularly post-Brexit as the attractiveness of London has been increasingly on the wane, has further invigorated Dubai's residential market. According to the Index's ranking, Oman and Qatar are also gaining traction, attracting global investors seeking reliable and stable cash flows. These

markets are emerging as attractive alternatives to traditional investment destinations, offering promising opportunities for portfolio diversification. Mark Wilson, Adviser to CEO and Head of Research at Housearch, said: "Oman and Qatar's strong showing in our 2024 Index reflects a growing investor confidence in the Gulf region as a whole. With gross rental yields ranging from approximately 6% in Qatar to up to 10% in some areas of Dubai, these markets offer lucrative opportunities for those seeking stable returns in the current economic climate. The Housearch Investment Index is designed to help private real estate investors to assess the investment attractiveness of residential property markets in 50 countries. The Index considers factors such as rental yields, peace and stability ratings, property rights, and economic growth rates. Its findings for 2024 reflect a shifting landscape in global real estate investment, with the Gulf countries rising as key players. (PRNewswire)

Market Movements

19-12-2023

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts
SAUDI	+37.12	11,713.46	PAKISTAN	-2,351.23	62,722.39
UAE	+6.98	3,997.58	EGYPT	-257.67	25,076.42
JAPAN	+460.41	33,219.39			
PHILIPPINES	+45.77	6,521.27			

Business

Kuwaiti banks see 3.8% surge in foreign deposits

Foreign currency deposits rise by 7.1% annually

By Ahmad Fathi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: During the initial ten months of 2023, local banks observed a noticeable surge in deposits with foreign banks, marking a 3.8 percent increase totaling 253 million dinars. The deposits grew from 6.614 billion dinars in December to 6.867 billion dinars in October. This upswing also displayed a substantial monthly leap of 20.7 percent, reaching approximately 1.178 billion dinars, compared to 5.688 billion dinars at the close of September. On a yearly basis, there was a 16.7 percent increase, equivalent to 985.3 million dinars, compared

to 5.881 billion dinars in October 2022.

Conversely, foreign banks experienced a 4.6 percent uptick in deposits with local banks over the initial 10 months of 2023, amounting to 3.7 million dinars. This increase propelled the deposits from 5.041 billion dinars in December 2022 to 5.272 billion dinars in October. While there was a slight annual decrease of 0.7 percent (0.7 million dinars) from 5.3 billion dinars in October 2022, there was a monthly surge of 4.6 percent, totaling around 234 million dinars, compared to 5.038 billion dinars at the end of September.

In the realm of foreign currencies, the private sector's deposits in foreign currencies within local banks witnessed a 3.4 percent increase, totaling 60.2 million dinars, rising from 1.774 billion dinars in December 2022 to

1.834 billion dinars in October. On a monthly basis, this marked a 10.1 percent increase, amounting to 168.5 million dinars, compared to 1.666 billion dinars in September. Annually, there was a 7.1 percent increase, equivalent to 122.7 million dinars, from 1.712 billion dinars in October 2022.

Meanwhile, deposits exchanged in the local interbank market (interbank) increased by 0.34 percent over 10 months, reaching 6.4 million dinars from 1.867 billion dinars in December. This also represented an 8.3 percent monthly increase of about 144.1 million dinars, compared to 1.73 billion dinars in September. On an annual basis, there was a 6.4 percent rise, totaling 112.6 million dinars, compared to 1.76 billion dinars at the end of October 2022. The Central Bank of Kuwait remains committed to facilitating cash flows and maintaining the Kuwaiti dinar's appeal as a lucrative and reliable savings option.

Blue-chip companies suffer from ownership saturation

Boursa Kuwait faces challenges amid 'global financial recovery'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: In contrast to the global recovery in financial markets since the 2008 financial crisis, the Boursa Kuwait faces numerous challenges as it enters the New Year 2024. Despite various attempts and opportunities associated with the market, it has struggled to absorb investor liquidity, necessitating an effective and radical approach to address these challenges. The market's significance in the equation demands corrective measures, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The market is witnessing a gradual decline in attractiveness for both investment and speculation. The pool of companies suitable for speculation is diminishing due to associated risks leading to delisting or suspension. Blue-chip companies, targeted by a substantial amount of liquidity, are also narrowing down, with many saturated in ownership. Larger, stagnant companies experience unsatisfactory turnover rates due to stable ownership and a limited capital base compared to the substantial liquidity seeking opportunities.

Yearly, substantial liquidity migrates in search of opportunities across the Gulf, regional, and global markets. As the stock market approaches 2024, investment managers, as described by Al-Jarida, highlight a multitude of serious challenges. The market's stagnation and lack of renewal and modernization have turned it into a reservoir freezing funds.

Upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that certain companies in the market, existing for 15 years, have not distributed profits to shareholders, relying solely on rumors or kinship relationships. Some of these companies report profits in the tens of thousands, a discrepancy not suitable for a listed company with millions in capital. The challenges prompting concern among investors and institutions require swift solutions, considering the fast-paced development of legislation, instructions, and regulatory laws.

The challenges that require attention and solutions can be outlined as follows:

Listing File -- The current market situation is unsatisfactory, with one active company unable to lead or absorb the entire market. Urgent renewal and replacement operations are needed to prevent market suffocation. A plan should be developed to list at least 10 companies annually, establishing a timetable for listing a company each month.

Investment Instruments -- The file of investment instruments has become complex. While other markets offer dozens of investment instruments, the Kuwait Stock Exchange, being the oldest and prestigious, only provides instant cash trading. There is a need to address this disparity and introduce a variety of investment instruments.

Inactive Trading Accounts -- Ninety-five percent of trading accounts, totaling 403.5 thousand, remain

stagnant and inactive due to serious issues affecting small investors. Companies exiting the listing booth led to a loss of 90 percent of their value. The Over-the-Counter (OTC) platform is complex, requiring flexible procedures. Simplifying processes, reducing fees, and linking the "stagnant" market to the shareholder registry through brokerage company applications can revive market activity.

Decline in IPO Market -- The Initial Public Offering (IPO) market has declined, losing its leadership position to more attractive markets. Local companies are now acting as investment and sales agents for Gulf, regional, and global opportunities. To regain competitiveness, the Kuwait market should rejuvenate its IPO market.

Disappearance of Bond Market -- The bond market, once active, has nearly disappeared. Major companies used it for expansion and long-term liquidity. Efforts should be made to revitalize the bond market, providing opportunities for liquidity diversification.

Lack of Sukuk Activity -- Despite global demand for Sukuk, there is a lack of interest, opportunities, and activity in the Kuwaiti market. Encouraging local participation and creating opportunities for Sukuk issuance can stimulate market activity.

Timidity in Investment Funds -- Investment funds have become timid, experiencing weak demand among individuals. Restoring investor confidence and promoting the benefits of investment funds can reinvigorate this essential market tool.

Decline in Acquisitions Market: The acquisitions market witnessed a sharp decline due to economic weakness, project decline, and group lethargy. Identifying and promoting convincing opportunities, despite economic challenges, can revitalize the acquisitions market.

Inactivity in Investment Companies -- Investment companies have become inactive, with some becoming dependent on specific investments or seeking roles in exit or management deals. Encouraging diversification and fostering an active role for investment companies can enhance market dynamics.

Disappearance of Capital Increases -- Capital increases, once a profitable channel for subscribers and companies, have disappeared. Their absence poses a threat to the banking sector. Encouraging controlled and beneficial capital increases can ensure sustainable profits.

The suitability of companies for speculation or investment, especially those not distributing profits or achieving positive performance for 15 years, raises questions. Current private sector deposits in the banking sector amount to 37.72 billion dinars (\$117 billion), reflecting limited opportunities in the existing financial tools and stock market. Addressing these challenges is crucial for the market's rejuvenation and sustained growth.

Settlement reveals app store concessions

Google settles for \$700m in antitrust case

SAN FRANCISCO, Dec 19, (AP): Google has agreed to pay \$700 million and make several other concessions to settle allegations that it had been stifling competition against its Android app store - the same issue that went to trial in a another case that could result in even bigger changes.

Although Google struck the deal with state attorneys general in September, the settlement's terms weren't revealed until late Monday in documents filed in San Francisco federal court. The disclosure came a week after a federal court jury rebuked Google for deploying anticompetitive tactics in its Play Store for Android apps.

The settlement with the states includes \$630 million to compensate U.S. consumers funneled into a payment processing system that state attorneys general alleged drove up the prices for digital transactions within apps downloaded from the Play Store. That store caters to the Android software that powers most of the world's smartphones.

Like Apple does in its iPhone app store, Google collects commissions ranging from 15% to 30% on in-app purchases - fees that state attorneys general contended drove prices higher than they would have been had there been an open market for payment processing. Those commissions generated billions of dollars in profit annually for Google, according to evidence presented in the recent trial focused on its Play Store.

Consumers eligible for a piece of the \$630 million compensation fund are supposed to be automatically notified about various options for how they can receive their cut of the money.

Another \$70 million of the pre-trial settlement will cover the penalties and other costs that Google is being forced to pay to the states.

Google also agreed to make other changes designed to make it even easier for consumers to download and install Android apps from other outlets besides its Play Store for the next five years. It will refrain from issuing as many security warnings, or "scare screens," when alternative choices are being used.

The makers of Android apps will also gain more flexibility to offer alternative payment choices to consumers instead of having transactions automatically processed through the Play Store and its commission system.



The Google sign is shown over an entrance to the company's new building in New York on Sept. 6, 2023. A federal court jury has decided that Google's Android app store has been protected by anticompetitive barriers that have damaged smartphone consumers and software developers, dealing a blow to a major pillar of a technology empire. (AP)

Apps will also be able to promote lower prices available to consumers who choose an alternate to the Play Store's payment processing.

Washington D.C. Attorney General Brian Schwab hailed the settlement as a victory for the tens of millions of people in the U.S. that rely on Android phones to help manage their lives. "For far too long, Google's anticompetitive practices in the distribution of apps deprived Android users of choices and forced them to pay artificially elevated prices," Schwab said.

Wilson White, Google's vice president of government affairs and public policy, framed the deal as a positive for the company, despite the money and concessions it entails. The settlement "builds on Android's choice and flexibility, maintains strong security protections, and retains Google's ability to compete with other (software) makers, and invest in the Android ecosystem for users and developers," White wrote in a blog post.

Although the state attorneys general hailed the settlement as a huge win for consumers, it didn't go far enough for Epic Games, which spearheaded the attack on Google's app store practices with an antitrust lawsuit filed in August 2020.

Epic, the maker of the popular Fortnite video game, rebuffed the settle-

ment in September and instead chose to take its case to trial, even though it had already lost on most of its key claims in a similar trial targeting Apple and its iPhone app store in 2021.

The Apple trial, though, was decided by a federal judge instead of the jury that vindicated Epic with a unanimous verdict that Google had built anticompetitive barriers around the Play Store. Google has vowed to appeal the verdict.

But the trial's outcome nevertheless raises the specter of Google potentially being ordered to pay even more money as punishment for its past practices and making even more dramatic changes to its lucrative Android app ecosystem.

Those changes will be determined next year by U.S. District Judge James Donato, who presided over the Epic Games trial. Donato also still must approve Google's Play Store settlement with the states.

Google faces an even bigger legal threat in another antitrust case targeting its dominant search engine that serves as the centerpiece of a digital ad empire that generates more than \$200 billion in sales annually. Closing arguments in a trial pitting Google against the Justice Department are scheduled for early May before a federal judge in Washington D.C.

to ensure it complies with the ITC order.

If the ITC's sales ban isn't overturned, Apple pledged to "take all measures" to resume sales of the Series 9 and Ultra 2 models in the U.S. as soon as possible.

The Apple Watch SE, which lacks the Blood Oxygen feature, will remain on sale in the U.S. after Christmas Eve. Previously purchased Apple Watches equipped with the Blood Oxygen aren't affected by the ITC order.

Blood Oxygen feature in patent dispute with Masimo

Apple to halt sales of its newest watches in US

CUPERTINO, Dec 19, (AP): If two of the latest Apple Watches are on your holiday shopping list, don't dawdle for much longer because the devices won't be available to buy in the U.S. later this week if the White House doesn't intervene in an international patent dispute.

Apple plans to suspend sales of the Series 9 and Ultra 2 versions of its popular watch for online U.S. customers beginning Thursday afternoon and in its stores on Sunday. The move stems from an October decision by

the International Trade Commission restricting Apple's watches with the Blood Oxygen measurement feature as part of an intellectual property dispute with medical technology company Masimo.

The White House had 60 days to review the ITC order issued on Oct. 26, meaning Apple could have kept selling the two affected models in the U.S. through Christmas. But the Cupertino, California, company said in a Monday statement that it is pausing sales early

NerdWallet

'40% of retailers impose return fees'

Navigating return fees, experts' tips for returns

By Kimberly Palmer

If you're someone who likes to return and exchange gifts after the holidays, prepare yourself: Making returns could feel a little different this year.

"It's going to be hard for consumers to navigate," says shopping expert Trae Bodge. "The return policies are all over the place." The biggest change, she adds, is that more retailers are charging fees for returned merchandise.

About 40% of online and brick-and-mortar retailers are charging fees for returns this year compared with 31% last year, according to David Morin, vice president of customer strategy at Narvar, which handles shipping, tracking and returns information post-purchase for online retailers. Those return shipping or restocking fees are generally \$3.99 to \$9.99, he says.

The good news is there are ways to minimize return fees and in some cases avoid them altogether. Here's what experts recommend.

Review return policies in advance

Because retailer return policies vary so much and many have recently changed, Morin recommends checking the return policy before you make any purchases, even if it's at a store where you've bought from before. "Many retailers are offering an extended return window during the holiday gift season, but always look at the fine print," he says.

In many cases, says Samantha Gordon, deals editor for Consumer Reports, return windows are shorter than in previous years. "A lot of retailers extended their return policies because of the pandemic, and we're seeing those accommodations go away," she says.

For shoppers, the return experience is a critical part of whether they enjoy their interaction with the retailer and become repeat customers, says Spencer Kieboom, co-founder and CEO of Pollen Returns, which partners with retailers to help them manage returns. For that reason, he says, "I always check the return policy."

Join the loyalty program

One of the easiest ways to avoid fees is to join a retailer or brand's loyalty program, which often comes with perks like free returns.

The only downside? Doing so means being on the receiving end of promotional emails about sales and discounts. If you want to limit the amount of marketing going into your primary email account, Bodge suggests setting up a separate email for shopping-related messages.

For Bodge, the pros of joining loyalty programs outweigh the cons. "You can earn points to get free things, you get access to exclusive sales and free merchandise. It's a good practice," she says.

Do the legwork yourself

Shoppers can also often avoid return fees by taking the item to the store themselves. "Most retailers are happy to have consumers visit their store," Morin says, so they generally make in-store returns free. Drop-off locations have become more prevalent, he says, for example with Whole Foods and Kohl's accepting Amazon returns for free.

Always keep the receipts, tags and original packaging until you know whether you'll be making a return.

Research items more before purchasing

Taking the time to select the correct item in the first place can negate the need for returns altogether, Bodge says. "If you're not sure about something, go into the store so you're not taking a chance," she says.

Gordon agrees: "Before you buy it, make sure you want it. Don't just buy the thing that's on sale." Similarly, if you're buying a gift, think carefully about the recipient's sizing and preferences before making your selection.

Budget for extra fees

Return fees are likely here to stay, so Bodge recommends preparing yourself, and your budget, for them. "Ultimately, you may have to pay a return shipping fee between \$5 and \$10 each time," she says. "We should expect to pay for returns for most retailers eventually." Morin agrees. "Free returns for everyone all the time is likely an unsustainable proposition," he says, especially given the widespread and growing prevalence of online shopping.

Factoring in those fees when making purchases can help reduce surprises later. "If you're placing an order online, you need to get into a different head space about returning," and go in knowing that free returns are less likely going forward, Bodge says.

Consider selling or gifting instead

Andrea Woroch, a money-saving expert, says that if making a return isn't possible or if you want to avoid the return fee, another option is to regift the item or sell it online. People can sell clothing and accessories on Poshmark, gadgets on eBay and toys or other goods on OfferUp or Facebook Marketplace, she says.

If you're regifting, just make sure the person actually would enjoy the item. Woroch adds: "Don't just pass something on to get rid of it." (AP)

'Japan ready to lead Asia in decarbonization'

Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida pledged to lead efforts to simultaneously achieve decarbonization, economic growth and energy security in Asia, an ambitious goal he set Monday at a regional climate summit attended by Southeast Asian leaders. Kishida told the summit of the Asia Zero Emission Community, or AZEC, that the initiative will create "a new, huge decarbonization market in Asia that will at-

tract global capital." Decarbonization in Asia will require 4,000 trillion yen (\$28 trillion), Kishida said, and promised to establish a new organization to support AZEC countries in their effort to implement policies needed to achieve carbon neutrality. Leaders of nine member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations except Myanmar, in addition to Australia, expressed commitment to

cooperate toward achieving carbon neutrality. The summit was held one day after Japan hosted a special summit Sunday commemorating 50 years of ties with ASEAN. As part of the AZEC initiative, Japan is offering to help other members with technologies to cut emissions, including co-firing technology using ammonia or hydrogen, as well as bendable and more mobile solar panels. (AP)

Japan's central bank maintains its negative interest rate

The Bank of Japan kept its longstanding easy credit policy unchanged on Tuesday, saying it will watch price and wage trends before raising its negative benchmark interest rate. The BOJ policy decision was widely expected. But investors and analysts believe the central bank is tip-toeing toward a shift due to price increases that have left inflation above its 2% target.

The U.S. dollar gained against the Japanese yen and stock prices surged after Tuesday's decision. The benchmark rate of negative 0.1% is meant to encourage banks to lend more and businesses and consumers to borrow more to spur the economy, the world's third-largest. The central bank also has purchased trillions of dollars worth of government bonds and other assets

as part of its strategy of injecting more cash to spur growth as the Japanese population shrinks and grows older. Inflation has risen in Japan but at a much slower pace than in the U.S. and other major economies, most recently at about 3%. At the same time, the U.S. dollar has risen against the Japanese yen as rates were raised to counter inflation that peaked at 9.1% in the U.S. (AP)

Diamond sector valued at \$4.5 bln annually

EU hits Russia's diamond industry with new round of sanctions over Ukraine war

BRUSSELS, Dec 19, (AP) - The European Union said Monday that it has imposed fresh sanctions on Russia over its war against Ukraine, targeting the lucrative diamonds industry, more than 140 officials and organizations, and closing loopholes that Moscow has used to bypass previous punitive measures.

goods so buyers can't sell them on to Russia, particularly "sensitive goods and technology" that could be used by the Russian armed forces in Ukraine.

Additional chemicals, lithium batteries, thermostats, certain electric motors that could be used in the manufacture of drones, and some machine tools and parts have been put on the EU's list of restricted items banned for export to Russia.

Imports into the EU of some goods that generate significant revenue for Russia also were tightened, including on copper and aluminum wire, foil, quantities of tubes and pipes above a certain limit, and restrictions on liquefied propane.

The EU also added 29 more "entities" - often organizations, agencies, companies or banks - alleged to be supporting Russia's military and industrial complex in the war against Ukraine. The entities and people whose assets have been frozen were not immediately named.

The sanctions were expected to be published in the EU's official journal shortly, which allows for them to formally enter force.

The 27 EU countries will now consider imposing sanctions against people who benefit from the seizure of European assets or parts of companies in Russia. The member states will also come under tighter control to ensure they are actively tracing the assets of people targeted for sanctions.

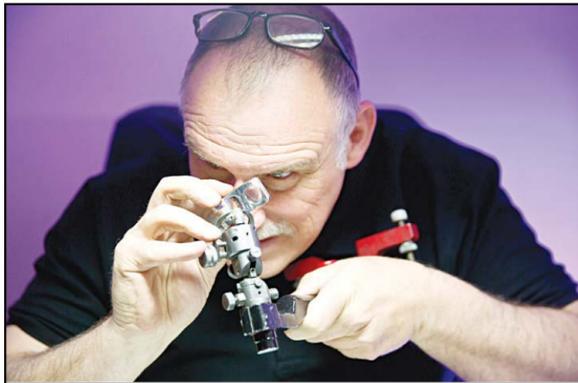
It's the 12th round of sanctions and restrictions that the EU has slapped on Russia since President Vladimir Putin ordered his troops into Ukraine almost two years ago. The measures have targeted the energy sector, banks, companies and markets, and made over 1,000 Russian officials subject to asset freezes and travel bans.

EU headquarters said the latest measures would "deliver a further blow to Putin's ability to wage war by targeting high-value sectors of the Russian economy and making it more difficult to circumvent EU sanctions."

The import, purchase or transfer of Russian non-industrial natural and synthetic diamonds and diamond jewelry will be banned starting Jan. 1. The ban applies to diamonds originating in Russia, exported from Russia and transiting through Russia, as well as Russian diamonds processed elsewhere.

The EU estimates the diamond sector to be worth around \$4.5 billion each year to Moscow.

The new round of sanctions also obliges EU companies to prohibit in their contracts the export of certain



A diamond cutter views facets of a diamond in Antwerp, Belgium on Friday, May 4, 2018. The European Union said Monday, Dec. 18, 2023 that it has imposed fresh sanctions on Russia over its war against Ukraine, targeting the lucrative diamonds industry, more than 140 officials and organizations, and closing loopholes that Moscow has used to bypass previous punitive measures. (AP)

'Mutually agreed to end deal'

Adobe calls off \$20 bln Figma deal amid antitrust concerns

BRUSSELS, Dec 19, (AP) - Adobe's planned \$20 billion acquisition of online design company Figma is being called off due to pushback in Europe over antitrust concerns, the companies said Monday.

into roadblocks in Europe over similar concerns of monopolies.

Biotech giant Illumina on Sunday said that 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. Late last month, European regulators said that Amazon's proposed acquisition of robot vacuum maker iRobot may harm competition.

In October, Microsoft completed its purchase of video game-maker Activision Blizzard for \$69 billion after a bruising fight with antitrust regulators in Europe and the U.S.

Last month the Markets Authority said that an early review of a potential tie-up between the two companies suggested a "substantial lessening of competition" in the global market for all-in-one product design software for professionals, as well as editing software.

Figma, founded in 2012, allows those who design interactive mobile and web applications to collaborate through multi-player workflows, sophisticated design systems and a developer ecosystem.

The companies announced the cash-and-stock deal in September 2022, seeking a path with Figma's web-based, multi-player capabilities to accelerate the delivery of Adobe's creative cloud technologies on the web.

"Although both companies continue to believe in the merits and procompetitive benefits of the combination, Adobe and Figma mutually agreed to terminate the transaction based on a joint assessment that there is no clear path to receive necessary regulatory approvals from the European Commission and the UK Competition and Markets Authority," Adobe and Figma said in a prepared statement on Monday.

The European Commission said Monday that it was aware of the decision to terminate the deal and that its investigation into the proposed transaction had now ended.

U.S. companies have regularly run



Photo shows an exterior view of the Adobe headquarters in San Jose, Calif. Adobe's \$20 billion acquisition of online design company Figma is being terminated due to regulatory concerns, the companies said Monday, Dec. 16, 2023. The cash-and-stock deal, which was announced in September 2022, was initially viewed as a way to have Figma's web-based, multi-player capabilities accelerate the delivery of Adobe's creative cloud technologies on the web, making the creative process more productive and accessible to more people. (AP)

UK plans to impose 'carbon tax' on imported raw materials from 2027

Nation faces criticism over environmental commitments

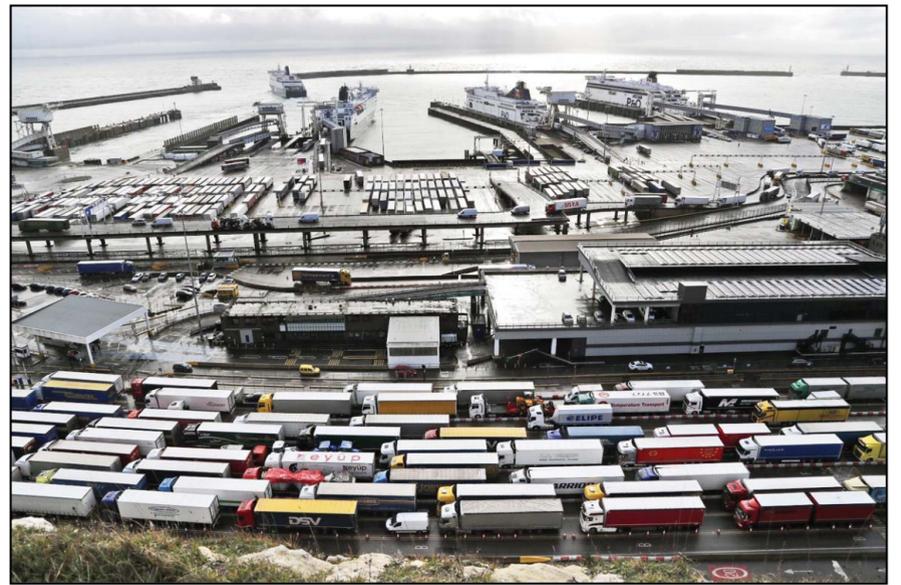
LONDON, Dec 19, (AP) - The British government announced Monday plans to charge a carbon levy on imported raw materials such as aluminum, iron, steel and cement from 2027, in an attempt to prevent firms being undercut by overseas producers.

However, the plan has come under criticism from the body representing British steel as being too sluggish, as it will come into effect one year after similar proposals from the European Union are implemented.

Announcing its plan, Britain's Treasury said the proposed new tax will level the playing field, helping greener domestic producers compete against higher carbon, but cheaper, foreign rivals.

For years, fears have been expressed that efforts to cut greenhouse gases in the U.K. are not being matched overseas, meaning that emissions are just being displaced to other countries without ambitious net-zero targets, leading to little global benefit.

"This levy will make sure carbon-intensive products from overseas - like steel and ceramics - face a comparable carbon price to those produced in the U.K., so that our decarbonization efforts translate into reductions in global emissions," Treasury chief Jeremy Hunt said.



Lorries queue at check-in at the port in Dover, Britain. (AP)

Britain's Conservative government has come under criticism over the past few months after Prime Minister Rishi Sunak watered down some of Britain's environmental commitments and said he was "not in hock to ideological zealots."

While the implementation of the so-called Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, or CBAM, has been widely welcomed, its start-date has

raised some concerns as the EU's similar proposal will come into effect in 2026. Though Britain fully left the EU at the end of 2020, more than four years after the Brexit referendum, it often shadows policy from its former partners on an array of policies.

"With over 90% of global steel production facing no carbon cost, it is only right that a new carbon border

policy is put in place to create a level playing field on carbon pricing," said U.K. Steel director general Gareth Stace.

"Despite the steel sector repeatedly warning officials how exposed the U.K. would be if it did not mirror the EU implementation timetable, government today seems to be actively planning for just that scenario," he added.

Investigates for hate speech and misinformation

EU probes Musk's X for potential social media law violations

LONDON, Dec 19 (AP) - The European Union on Monday made Elon Musk's online platform X the first tech company to face an investigation under Europe's tough new regulations designed to clean up social media and protect people from toxic online content.

"Today we open formal infringement proceedings against @X" under the Digital Services Act, European Commissioner Thierry Breton said in a post on the platform formerly known as Twitter. Musk, in response, questioned whether the EU would also scrutinize other social media sites.

The 27-nation bloc is ratcheting up the pressure on X after asking the company in October for information on its handling of hate speech, misinformation and violent terrorist content related to the Israel-Hamas war. The case presents the first test for the Digital Services Act, part of a set of pioneering regulations that the EU has drawn up to rein in the power of tech companies.

The European Commission, the EU's executive branch, "will now investigate X's systems and policies related to certain suspected infringements" of the DSA, spokesman Johannes Bahrke told a press briefing in Brussels. "It does not prejudice the outcome of the investigation."

The San Francisco-based social media platform says it is "committed to complying with the Digital Services Act, and is cooperating with the regulatory process. It is important that this process remains free of political influence and follows the law."

"X is focused on creating a safe and inclusive environment for all users on our platform, while protecting freedom of expression, and we will continue to work tirelessly towards this goal," the company said in a



Computer monitors and a laptop display the X, formerly known as Twitter, sign-in page, July 24, 2023, in Belgrade, Serbia. European Union authorities are looking into whether Elon Musk's online platform X breached tough new social media regulations, in the first such investigation since the rules designed to make online content less toxic took effect. European Commissioner Thierry Breton announced Monday, Dec. 18, 2023 the opening of 'formal infringement proceedings against X' under the Digital Services Act. (AP)

statement. Musk has touted the platform as a place for free speech to thrive, but changes that the billionaire Tesla CEO made to the site after he bought it a year ago - such as cutting the number of content moderators and restoring the banned accounts of divisive public personalities - have turned off users and advertisers, who have fled over concerns about hate speech appearing alongside their ads. He has also pulled the platform out of a voluntary EU pact against disinformation.

The EU's investigation will look into whether X failed to do enough to curb the spread of illegal content - such as hate speech or incitement of

terrorism - to its 112 million users in Europe.

That includes the effectiveness of X's tools for users to flag up illegal material in posts and ads so that it can be swiftly removed, as well as whether the company is following its own policies on restricting "sensitive content."

The investigation also will examine whether X's measures to combat "information manipulation," especially through its crowd-sourced Community Notes fact-checking feature, were effective within the European Union.

Another area of investigation is transparency. The EU said there are "suspected shortcomings" in research-

ers' access to X's publicly accessible data" as well as its ad database, both of which are required by the DSA.

Lastly, the investigation will look into whether users are being tricked by suspected "deceptive design" of X's interface, including for its blue check subscription service. The blue checkmarks once signified that the person or institution behind an account was genuine, such as a celebrity, athlete or journalist, but now merely indicate someone pays \$8 a month to boost their posts above unchecked users.

"Are you taking action against other social media?" Musk tweeted in response to Breton. "Because if you have those issues with this platform, and none are perfect, the others are much worse."

The EU has called out X as the worst place online for fake news, and officials have exhorted owner Musk to do more to clean it up.

Now, it's taking official steps under the Digital Services Act, a set of far-reaching rules designed to keep users safe online and stop the spread of harmful content that's either illegal or violates a platform's terms of service, such as promotion of genocide or anorexia.

A raft of big tech companies faced stricter scrutiny under the DSA took effect earlier this year, threatening penalties of up to 6% of their global revenue - which could amount to billions - or even a ban from the EU.

Fines are, however, considered a last ditch resort, and Brussels could first use "interim measures" to force companies to comply.

There's no deadline for a decision on the investigation into X, and the commission said it would continue to gather evidence, carry out interviews and conduct inspections.

DB eyes debt reduction

Deutsche Bahn seeks to sell Schenker logistics unit

BERLIN, Dec 19, (AP) - Germany's main national railway operator, Deutsche Bahn, on Tuesday launched an effort to sell its logistics unit, DB Schenker, as the company seeks to concentrate on its core business at home.

The state-owned parent company describes it as one of the world's top four logistics firms.

Deutsche Bahn issued an announcement that it's considering selling "the entire share capital of Schenker AG in an open, transparent and nondiscriminatory process" and called for potential bidders to indicate their interest by Jan. 15.

The company said that it would re-

tain all proceeds from a sale, which would go in large part to reducing debt, and that disposing of Schenker would "significantly accelerate" its focus on its core business. It already has sold several business units outside Germany, including European public transport subsidiary Arriva.

German authorities are keen for Deutsche Bahn to focus on improving service at home, where the railway has

struggled with growing reliability issues in recent years and needs significant investment.

The company said that a sale would also be good for Schenker itself.

"DB Schenker has contributed very positively to the DB Group's economic growth over the years," the company said in a statement. "However, the DB subsidiary will need more capital and flexibility for its own growth."

INNOVATION

Business Plus



Love it or hate it ... here to stay

Self-checkout going through a reckoning



A self-checkout station is shown at a Uniqlo store in New York on Wednesday, Dec. 6, 2023. Self-checkout faces a reckoning of sorts just as retailers are in the midst of their busiest time of the year. (AP)

NEW YORK, Dec 19, (AP): The promise of self-checkout was alluring: Customers could avoid long lines by scanning and bagging their own items, workers could be freed of doing those monotonous tasks themselves and retailers could save on labor costs.

All that has happened since the rollout of self-checkout but so has this: Customers griping about clunky technology that spits out mysterious error codes, workers having to stand around and monitor both humans and machines, and retailers contending with theft.

"Going to the grocery store used to be simple, and now it's frustrating," said Cindy Whittington, 66, of Fairfax, Virginia. "You're paying more. You're working harder to pay for merchandise at their store. And it's become an ordeal to check out. I should get a 5% discount."

In 2021, self-checkout usage represented 30% of transactions, almost double from 2018, according to a survey of retailers by FMI, an industry group. And 96% of retailers surveyed offer self-checkout.

But the technology is also facing

a reckoning amid the critical holiday shopping season. Some retailers are adding restrictions, while others are pulling out completely.

This past fall, Walmart removed self-checkout kiosks in three stores in Albuquerque, New Mexico as part of a location by location approach, but on the whole it is adding more than it is taking away. To reduce wait times, Target is now limiting the number of items to 10 that shoppers can scan in a handful of stores nationwide.

British supermarket chain Booths has been getting rid of its self-checkout at the majority of its stores for the past 18 months in reaction to customer backlash. A year ago, grocery chain Wegmans, citing "losses," discontinued its self-checkout app that lets shoppers scan and bag items while they shop. However, it continues to offer self-checkout registers at its stores.

Self-checkout, first tested in supermarkets in the late 1980s, gained momentum 20 years ago. But grocers ramped it up even more three years ago to address the pandemic-induced severe labor shortages.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics says technological advances such as self-checkout and online sales have been the main driver in the declining number of cashier jobs, although there are no precise estimates on how many cashiers have been replaced by self-checkout. According to Labor Department data, there are about 1.2 million people currently working as cashiers, compared to 1.4 million in 2019 and the BLS expects the number to fall by another 10% over the next decade.

"We are at an inflection point where if Americans are willing to do this and show an interest, then stores will probably expand it because they want to slash that labor cost," said Christopher Andrews, associate professor and chair of sociology at Drew University and author of "The Overworked Consumer: Self-Checkouts, Supermarkets and the Do-It-Yourself Economy."

"But right now they're just seeing downside. They're seeing frustrated customers. They're seeing increased costs and shoplifting."

Theft is indeed an issue. Andrews said a technology that relies on

shoppers to do their own scanning and punch in product quantities tempts even law abiding citizens to be dishonest. It's easy to just scan every other item or punch in codes for a cheaper item. Shoppers could also make honest mistakes, leading to losses for stores.

John Catsimatidis, chairman and CEO of Red Apple Group, owner of Gristedes and D'Agostino's food stores in New York City, said he has no interest in self-checkout because of theft.

"Anybody who does it might as well hit your head over with a pipe," he said.

Still, self-checkout isn't going away, especially with still stubborn labor shortages. And plenty of people love it.

Ellen Wulforst, 65, said using self-checkout brings back her childhood when she played with a toy register.

"There's something childish and fun about it," Wulforst said. "I get a big kick out of sliding the product across the reader, and it goes beep. There's a certain satisfaction to it."

For Robin Wissmann Doherty

of South Salem, New York, who has a progressive neurodegenerative disease and uses a walker, self-checkout makes her shopping experience easier.

The 67-year-old said she likes to shop at Stop & Shop because it has a "scan and go" technology that allows her to scan her items with a device as she shops and then tallies up her bill. She can either pay at a kiosk or at a manned register.

"The laser gun works for disabled people," she said.

Stew Leonard Jr., president and CEO of Stew Leonard's, a supermarket chain that operates stores in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey, said 25% of its customers use self-service. That number could be up to 50% in the next few years. He noted one-third of its registers are unmanned, but he's in a "holding pattern" and is thinking of limiting the number of items to be scanned.

Retailers have been adding cameras or sensors at kiosks to monitor shoppers.

Kroger, for example, has deployed artificial intelligence technology at a majority of stores that triggers alerts when something is amiss. For example, if a shopper fails to scan a particular item successfully, the system flags the error on the screen and prompts the customer to self-correct. If customers are unable to resolve the issue themselves, a light above the self-checkout blinks to attract workers' attention.

There have been inroads for more advanced technology.

Amazon's "just walkout technology" is in more than 70 Amazon-owned stores and more than 100 third-party retailers across the U.S., including airports. It uses sophisticated cameras and allows shoppers to enter the store with a credit or debit card or by simply hovering their palm over an Amazon One palm payment device, and then walk out without having to stand in line to check out. Japanese fashion retailer Uniqlo has RFID chips embedded in price tags to power a self-checkout system at its Fifth Avenue store in Manhattan, as part of a widescale rollout at its stores. Customers place their items in bins at self-service stations and pay without having to scan items.

Still, for some workers who were supposed to be liberated from the monotonous task of ringing up customers, the tedium just comes in a different form.

Bernadette Christian, 59, a worker at Giant Food in Clinton, Maryland, mans six self-service stations at once, and she's afraid to help or confront shoppers who she said have become angrier since the pandemic.

"It would be easy for us to be cashiers, and it would be a lot more safer in today's world," she said.

Late holiday shoppers find solace

Big retailers improving their delivery speeds

NEW YORK, Dec 19, (AP): Haven't ordered any of your holiday gifts yet?

Well, you might find solace in discovering some of America's biggest retailers are working to increase their shipping speeds to please shoppers expecting faster and faster deliveries.

Walmart, Target and Amazon are all-in on the shipping wars, a move retail experts say will help them maintain a competitive edge against low-cost Chinese retailers Shein and Temu. For Walmart and Target, their investments are also aimed at narrowing the gap in delivery speed with Amazon, which has set the standard for fast shipping and remains the king of speed.

Amazon packages have been arriving at the doors of Prime customers even faster this year under the company's new distribution model, which divides the country into eight regions and predominantly ships items from warehouses in those areas. The idea, according to Amazon, is to get ship-

ments to travel shorter distances with fewer touchpoints, which helps the company not only speed up deliveries but also cuts down on costs.

Previously, the Seattle-based e-commerce giant used to fulfill orders from warehouses across the country. In July, it said 76% of customer orders were being fulfilled within their region, up from 62% before the change.

"We remain on pace to deliver the fastest delivery speeds for Prime customers in our 29-year history," Amazon CEO Andy Jassy said in October during an earnings call with analysts.

Company executives have noted faster shipping is also being driven by Amazon's expansion of same-day delivery, which was first rolled out in 2015 to Prime members who currently pay \$139 a year for free two-day shipping and other perks. Same-day delivery sites are smaller warehouses that are located in metro areas and predominantly store the

100,000 products customers want. Amazon Vice President of Delivery Experience Sarah Mathew said the company currently has 55 of these sites in the country. And it has plans to double the number in the coming years.

"Psychologically, fast delivery is very important to the consumer when ordering online," said Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData Retail. "That is why everyone is trying to push out more into this space even though it's very expensive to support and it often requires a lot of new infrastructure."

To catch up, Walmart and Target have been pouring money into warehouse upgrades, new facilities or other efforts that they say will also help trim costs.

Walmart uses more than 4,000 of its stores across the country as fulfillment centers and delivery hubs for online orders. In November, the company said it would be adding 40 so-called parcel stations to stores in

nine states by the end of the year in an effort to process more goods and get them faster to customers. The nation's largest retailer said many of the stations - which are like mini post-offices that receive and deliver packages -- would be operating during the holiday season.

At the same time, the Bentonville, Arkansas-based company is working to overhaul its warehouses through automation to help speed up delivery to stores and customers.

Walmart is doing this in various ways: It's automating all 42 of its regional distribution centers, which hold non-perishable items and ship goods to replenish stores. Furthermore, it's building four automated warehouses that handle perishable items. And it's planning to add more than 100 smaller facilities that are connected to its stores and handle online orders.

Since last year, Walmart has also opened its first three fully automated "next generation" fulfill-

ment centers, which hold a deeper assortment of the most wanted items and cut down the number of steps it takes to pack and ship orders from 12 to five. The company has said these hubs, as well as changes to its transportation network, have made it able to "drastically increase" the number of orders it's able to ship the next day. The goal, Walmart says, is to double the number of customer orders fulfilled daily and expand next- and two-day shipping to nearly 90% of the US.

Meanwhile, Target is aiming to increase its shipping speed by augmenting its own warehouses, called sortation centers, with a \$100 million investment announced earlier this year.

Sortation centers receive packages for online orders from 30 to 40 surrounding Target stores that are sorted, batched and routed for delivery to local neighborhoods by a third-party carrier or Shipt, which Target owns.

Going to the grocery store used to be simple, and now it's frustrating

Psychologically, fast delivery is very important to the consumer when ordering online

editor's choice



Television

Farewell to a sports journalism icon

Gumbel and HBO's 'Real Sports' sign off after 29 years

NEW YORK, Dec 19, (AP) For the last few years of its life, HBO's "Real Sports" taped its episodes on the same Manhattan block where CBS' "60 Minutes" resides. They shared a sensibility along with a neighborhood. But while "60 Minutes" rolls along in its sixth decade, the monthly sports magazine helmed by Bryant Gumbel is calling it quits in its 29th year. The final, 90-minute episode premieres Tuesday at 10 p.m. Eastern. Sports was a lens through which the magazine looked at all manner of issues, winning awards for pieces on corruption at the International Olympic Committee, labor abuses as Qatar prepared for the World Cup, concussions in sports and children forced to be jockeys for camel races in the Middle East. "Real Sports" told some inspirational stories, like Mary Carillo's profile of the Hoyts, a father who ran marathons pushing the wheelchair of his son with cerebral palsy, and flashed humor. "I'm OK," Gumbel said before taping the last episode. "I'm sad, but everything has to end at some point and this is the right time for this to end." Backstage, a cart filled with champagne was wheeled down a hallway. Correspondents, producers and their families wandered through offices, saying farewells. Gumbel's wife, Hilary, and his grandchildren settled into seats in the control room to watch the final taping. Gumbel is 75, at the end of a contract, and HBO is now controlled

by a company, Warner Bros. Discovery, on the hunt for cost savings. While the show's exit makes sense, the fear is that a form of sports journalism is leaving for good, too. "It has been the gold standard in sports journalism on TV for the last three decades and it really is quite a loss," said Mark Hyman, director of the Shirley Povich Center for Sports Journalism at the University of Maryland. "It checked all the boxes - timely, ambitious, well-funded, independent." Increasingly, sports news comes from outlets owned by leagues, like the NFL or MLB networks, or networks whose businesses depend greatly on winning rights deals, he said. "The show tried to do some things in sports journalism that no one else was doing," Gumbel said. "I think it was one of the few avenues that could honestly explore issues without having to worry about ratings or sponsorships or relationships." "I've been on the other side of that coin," he said. "I've worked for networks who were what they would call now the 'broadcast partner' of a sports entity. And you'd only be a fool to think you can follow any story wherever it wants if it collides with that relationship. Life doesn't work that way." When athletes agreed to appear on "Real Sports," they knew they

were agreeing to a challenging interview, much like "60 Minutes" guests knew what they were signing up for, Carillo said. Now athletes can control their own messages through social media or outlets like The Players' Tribune, she said. "I wish we could have kept going," she said. "But times have changed." Carillo has been with "Real Sports" since 1997. Other prominent correspondents have included Jon Frankel, Andrea Kremer, Armen Keteyian, Soledad O'Brien and David Scott. The late sportswriting legend Frank Deford was on from 1995 to 2014. Bernard Goldberg was a prolific correspondent until a bitter exit in 2020. He said he got angry with something Gumbel said about the extent of racism in society and abruptly quit the show after 22 years. Goldberg said he canceled HBO the day he quit, hasn't seen a minute of "Real Sports" since and won't watch the finale. He declined further comment. Ask Gumbel about stories he did that have stuck with him, and he mentions one that resulted in the release of an athlete, Marcus Dixon, from prison and another about a recruiting scandal at St. Bonaventure University in which a university official committed suicide. "We offer a focus on how athletes impact their sport," he said. "What's more important to me, more lasting to me and more interesting to me is how sports impacts the people who try to play it, try to run it and try to govern it."

Relationship

Variety



This image released by Netflix shows Carey Mulligan as Felicia Montealegre, (from left), Zachary Booth as Mendy Wager and Maya Hawke as Jamie Bernstein in a scene from 'Maestro.' (AP)

Film

Stellar cast adds authenticity to Bernstein's saga

Theater icons illuminate 'Maestro'

PORTLAND, Ore.: Watching a countdown of the auction's final minutes on Monday, **Erin Holcomb** couldn't believe it: the sale price kept jumping for the rare, gold Nike Air Jordan 3s that were anonymously dropped in the donation chute of the **Oregon** shelter where she works in Portland. "In the last five minutes it went up and up, and every time we saw that number increase, there were tears and people clapping," Holcomb, director of staff ministries at the Portland Rescue Mission, told The Associated Press. The sneakers, one of just a few custom pairs that had been made for filmmaker **Spike Lee**, ultimately sold for \$50,800 - more than double the high end of the predicted sale price. All proceeds will benefit the Portland Rescue Mission, which has served people struggling with homelessness, hunger and addiction since 1949. "We couldn't believe it," Holcomb said. "The generosity of this moment has been a huge celebration for our whole organization." Some two dozen people, mostly staff, gathered Monday morning to watch the auction live on a big screen TV in one of the shelter's conference rooms, Holcomb said. Among them was **James Free**, a formerly homeless man who found the shoes while sorting through donations and brought them to the attention of the staff. Free has lived at the mission for the past few months as part of its long-term shelter program, Holcomb said. (AP)

MOSCOW: Russian authorities on Monday added popular detective novelist and dissident **Grigory Chkhartishvili** - known under the pen name **Boris Akunin** - to its register of "extremists and terrorists." On the same day that **Russia's** financial watchdog, Rosfinmonitoring, added the Russian-Georgian writer to the register, state media reported that a criminal case had been opened last week against Akunin for "discrediting the army." Discrediting the Russian military is a criminal offense under a law adopted after Russia sent troops into **Ukraine** in February 2022. The law is regularly used against Kremlin critics.

NEW YORK, Dec 19, (AP) Leonard Bernstein was a towering figure on Broadway. So it seems only fitting that the new film drama of him leans on the Great White Way to get the story right. Bradley Cooper's movie "Maestro" is studded with theater stars - 29 of the 38 principal cast members have a background in the theater, including Gideon Glick, Michael Urie, Greg Hildreth, Nick Blaemire, Ryan Steele, Zachary Booth and Gaby Diaz. Look closely and you'll find actor-turned-director Scott Ellis playing Bernstein's manager, Harry Kraut, and rising stage star Jordan Dobson - whose credits include "Bad Cinderella," "Hadestown" and, significantly, "West Side Story" - playing a young conductor. Casting director Shayna Markowitz said she didn't necessarily set out to land theater pros but it came naturally when she was trying to populate Bernstein's world authentically. "There's kind of this amazing synergy between casting theater actors to portray people of the theater world and of Lenny's world," Markowitz said. "I just feel like we got really lucky with just these wonderful New York actors that are here and that wanted to be a part of this." Markowitz worked with Cooper on telling the story of a conductor, composer, pianist who helped create such musical theater classic as "West Side Story," "Candide," "On the Town" and "Wonderful Town." Cooper stars alongside Carey Mulligan as Bernstein's wife. Some selections seem inspired, like the casting of dancer Ricky Ubeda by choreographer Justin Peck. In 2015, "So You Think You Can Dance" winner Ubeda made his Broadway debut when joining the ensemble of a revival of "On the Town" and in "Maestro" he can be seen in a dream sequence of, yes, "On the Town." But perhaps the best Easter egg is a scene in the

movie when the cast is rehearsing "Candide" with Cooper conducting. Actor June Gable approaches Mulligan's character to ask a question. Eagle-eyed viewers will recognize that's the same Gable who was nominated for a Tony Award in the mid-1970s for "Candide." "She knew Lenny Bernstein and so was having a full-on, out-of-body experience being in that scene with Bradley," said Markowitz. "She was like, 'It was crazy. I was crying. It was as if he was there.' So that was a cool moment." Casting directors like Markowitz use a service that alerts talent agents and managers about upcoming roles and she will makes up her own lists of actors she thinks would be perfect, which she did for "Maestro." "Every director works a little differently. Every project is obviously different and the needs are different. I adapt to how the filmmaker likes to work," said Markowitz. "I think you want to find the very best actors who are most suited for the roles. That never changes."

Broadway

Glick, who has appeared on Broadway in "Spring Awakening," "Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark" and was Tony-nominated for "To Kill a Mockingbird," auditioned on tape for the role of Tommy Cothran, music director at a radio station in San Francisco and a lover of Bernstein. "Bradley created a very loose and immersive environment that was very, very playful and it sort of reminded me of that stage in the rehearsal process when you're doing a play or a musical where you're not being result oriented and you're just exploring and taking chances," said Glick. "I think you can feel that in the film." Some parts in "Maestro" are very small roles - just a few seconds of film needing a day's work - but have deep significance for the theater commu-

nity, like the legendary songwriting team of Betty Comden and Adolph Green - played in "Maestro" by Mallory Portnoy and Nick Blaemire. "Actors sign on to do projects or audition for projects because they want to be a part of it. And so they understood the significance of both of those parts," Markowitz said. "Some actors just want to be a part of it no matter what and no matter how." Ellis, a multiple Tony Award-nominated director, was coaxed back to acting by Cooper, a friend and colleague who had worked together onstage, most notably on "The Elephant Man" on Broadway. Cooper thought his warm and loving relationship with Ellis could infuse the onscreen relationship he wanted to show between Bernstein and his manager. "It was so relaxed and an incredible experience and something way out of my comfort zone," said Ellis, who estimated he last acted 30 years ago. "I'm sitting there in a dressing room surrounded by these incredible actors who, as a director, I would go, 'God, I'd love to work with you on a piece.' But, all of a sudden, I realize, 'No, I'm just one of them.'" In many ways, "Maestro" is the latest artistic watering hole for Broadway veterans, joining "Law & Order," "Glee," "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel," "The Good Fight," "The Gilded Age," "Fosse/Verdon," "Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist," "Only Murders in the Building" and "Smash." Markowitz, who works across film and TV and who has cast "Dash & Lily," "Ocean's Eight," winning the inaugural BAFTA Award for best casting in 2020 for "Joker," said "Maestro" is special. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime milestone film for sure," she said. "I feel so lucky to have had this experience, and I'm so happy with how people are receiving it as this really special thing, because it's it's very special to me."

Akunin's placement on the register comes after one of Russia's leading book publishers, AST, last week announced that it was suspending the printing and sale of books by Akunin and another popular author, **Dmitry Bykov**, following their criticism of Russia's military action in Ukraine. The decision by AST followed



Lee Depardieu

the release of a prank call earlier in December in which the writers expressed support for Ukraine when speaking to pro-Kremlin pranksters known as Vovan and Lexus, who posed as Ukrainian officials. (AP)

Gerard Depardieu has been removed from Paris' most famous wax museum, following negative reactions from visitors over allegations about his conduct with women, the museum said Monday. The decision to remove the figure from the Grevin Museum, the so-called "Pantheon of wax celebrities," followed a recent report

on the actor on French television that has dented his reputation in France and around the world. The **France 2** documentary showed him repeatedly making obscene remarks and gestures during a 2018 trip to **North Korea**. Depardieu has also been under investigation for rape since 2020. He denies all charges. (AP)

People & Places

People

Marvel, Disney cut ties

Majors convicted of assaulting girlfriend

NEW YORK, Dec 19, (AP): Jonathan Majors was convicted Monday of assaulting his former girlfriend after a trial that he hoped would vindicate him and restore his status as an emerging Hollywood star. It did just the opposite: Marvel Studios and the Walt Disney Co. dropped him hours after the verdict.

A Manhattan jury found Majors, 34, guilty of one misdemeanor assault charge and one harassment violation stemming from his March confrontation with then-girlfriend Grace Jabbari. She said he attacked her in a car and left her in "excruciating" pain; his lawyers said Jabbari was the aggressor.

Majors, who was acquitted of a different assault charge and of aggravated harassment, looked slightly downward and showed no immediate reaction as the verdict was read. He declined to comment as he left the courthouse.

His lawyer, Priya Chaudhry, said in a statement that he "still has faith in the process and looks forward to fully clearing his name." While he was convicted of an assault charge that involves recklessly causing injury, she said his team was grateful for his acquittal on the other assault count, which concerned intentionally causing injury.

"Mr. Majors is grateful to God, his family, his friends and his fans for their love and support during these harrowing eight months," Chaudhry said.

Marvel and Disney immediately dropped the "Creed III" star from all upcoming projects following the conviction, said a person close to the studio who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak publicly on the matter.

Before his arrest, Majors had been on track to become a central figure throughout the Marvel Cinematic Universe, playing the antagonist role of Kang. Majors had already appeared in "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania" and the first two seasons of "Loki." He was to star in "Avengers: The Kang Dynasty," dated for release in May 2026.



Majors

Sentence

Majors, whose credits include "The Last Black Man in San Francisco," "Devotion" and "Da 5 Bloods," had been one of the fastest-rising stars in Hollywood. The Yale School of Drama graduate also starred as a troubled amateur bodybuilder in "Magazine Dreams," which made an acclaimed debut at the Sundance Film Festival in January and was set to open in theaters this month. Ahead of Majors' trial, Disney-owned distributor Searchlight Pictures removed "Magazine Dreams" from its release calendar.

Majors' sentencing was set for Feb. 6. He faces the possibility of up to a year in jail for the assault conviction, though probation or other non-jail sentences also are possible.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg said in a statement that the trial "illustrated a cycle of psychological and emotional abuse, and escalating patterns of coercion."

The dispute between Majors and Jabbari began in the backseat of a chauffeured car and spilled into the streets of Manhattan.

Jabbari, a 30-year-old British dancer, accused Majors of hitting her in the head with his open hand, twisting her arm behind her back and squeezing her middle finger until it fractured.

Majors' lawyers alleged that she flew into a jealous rage after reading a text message - from another woman - on his phone. They said Jabbari had spread a "fantasy" to take down the actor, who was only trying to regain his phone and get away safely.

But as Majors sought vindication from the jury, the trial also brought forth new evidence about his troubled relationship with Jabbari, whom he met on the set of "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania" two years ago.

Prosecutors shared text messages that showed the actor begging Jabbari not to seek hospital treatment for an earlier head injury. One message warned "it could lead to an investigation even if you do lie and they suspect something."

They also played audio of Majors declaring himself a "great man," then questioning whether Jabbari could meet the high standards set by the spouses of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Barack Obama. Majors' attorneys countered that Jabbari had surreptitiously recorded her boyfriend as part of a plot to "destroy" his career.

Over four days of tearful testimony, Jabbari said Majors was excessively controlling and prone to fits of explosive rage that left her afraid "physically quite a lot." She broke down on the witness stand as a jury watched security footage of him pushing her back into the car after the backseat confrontation. Prosecutors described the video as showing Majors "manhandling" her and shoving her into the vehicle "as if she was a doll."

Testimony

Majors arrived in the courtroom each morning carrying a gold-leaf Bible, accompanied by family members and his current girlfriend, actress Meagan Good. Expressionless for much of the testimony, he wiped away tears as Chaudhry urged jurors during her closing arguments on Thursday to "end this nightmare for Jonathan Majors."

Majors did not take the stand. But Chaudhry said her client was the victim of "white lies, big lies, and pretty little lies" invented by Jabbari to exact revenge on an unfaithful partner.

The attorney cited security footage, taken immediately after the shove, that showed Majors sprinting away from his girlfriend as she chased him through the night. Jabbari then followed a group of strangers she'd met on the street to a dance club, where she ordered drinks for the group and did not appear to be favoring her injured hand.

"She was revenge-partying and charging Champagne to the man she was angry with and treating these strangers to fancy Champagne she bought with Jonathan's credit card," Chaudhry alleged.

The next morning, after finding Jabbari unconscious in the closet of their Manhattan penthouse, Majors called police. He was arrested at the scene, while Jabbari was transported to a hospital to receive treatment for the injuries to her ear and hand.

"He called 911 out of concern for her, and his fear of what happens when a Black man in America came true," Chaudhry said, accusing police and prosecutors of failing to take seriously Majors' allegations that he was bloodied and scratched during the dispute.

In her closing arguments, prosecutor Kelli Galaway said Majors was following a well-worn playbook used by abusers to cast their victims as attackers.



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

Film

A shape-shifter supreme

Wright sees himself in 'American Fiction'

NEW YORK, Dec 19, (AP): Jeffrey Wright has played Jean-Michel Basquiat, Martin Luther King Jr. and Muddy Waters. He's played Colin Powell, a Dominican drug kingpin, Batman's Commissioner Gordon and a longtime inmate nearing release. He's played Bill Murray's neighbor, a Civil War-era former slave, James Bond's Felix Leiter, the nurse Belize in "Angels in America" and an android-human in "Westworld."

Across an expansive array of roles both small and large for more than two decades, Wright has been among the most malleable of actors, able to transform endlessly while still maintaining a singular, rigorously grounded screen presence. Is there anyone he can't play?

"Deniss Hopper said in 'Easy Rider,' 'If you name it, I'll throw rocks at it,'" Wright says.

Shape-shifting has been Wright's aspiration as a performer since, as a young actor, he was naturally drawn to performers like Gary Oldman, Dustin Hoffman and Peter Sellers. He admired their dexterity going from character to character.

"I thought that was the way to go about it," says Wright. "It seemed like it required some skill that was worth learning."

Even just in 2023, a spectrum of Wright's range is on display. He's the pastor, politician and Civil Rights activist Adam Clayton Powell Jr. in George C. Wolfe's "Rustin" and the inspiring military general of Wes Anderson's "Asteroid City."

But it's Cord Jefferson's "American Fiction" in which Wright gives one of the best performances of his career. And ironically, it's the role that required less metamorphosis than any ever has for Wright.

Performance

"There's a lot that's pretty close to me in this film. It's probably the performance that I could squeeze myself into with the least friction," Wright said in a recent interview. "My daughter saw the film last night and she said, 'There's so much of your humor in this.'"

In "American Fiction," Wright stars as Thelonious "Monk" Ellison, a frustrated and disillusioned author and college professor resentful of his his books being pigeonholed as African American fiction. In a drunken haze he sarcastically pens a book that plays up Black stereotypes ("My Pa-fology," under the pseudonym Stag R. Leigh), yet it becomes an unironic sensation with white publishing executives.

It's a deft satire of race and identity, adapted from Percival Everett's 2001 novel "Erasure," that Jefferson, in his directorial debut, surrounds with a rich, humanistic comedy of midlife crises and family dramas. Monk's mother (Leslie Uggams) is aging, his sister (Tracee Ellis Ross) dies unexpectedly and his brother (Sterling K.

Brown) is coming out.

"I saw the film last week in Brooklyn with an audience for the first time. And I looked at the screen at one point at this family and the extended family around it, and I said, 'Wow, what beautiful people,'" Wright says. "They're kind of extraordinary in their ordinariness. It's a family like any other family, it just happens to be inhabited by Black folks."

Wright, a longtime Brooklynite, recently met a reporter at a midtown hotel a few hours after he was nominated for a Golden Globe. A morning feast was laid out when a waiter entered with another plate. "More bacon?" said Wright, glancing at the thick-cut bacon already on the table. "Oh, regular bacon. The healthy stuff."

Wright has won a Tony, an Emmy and a Globe (all for "Angels in America"), among many other accolades. But a best actor Academy Award nomination for "American Fiction" - which many are predicting - would be his first Oscar nod.

Screenplay

"I don't think it's totally healthy to think about these things too much but they're there, so one does. I guess if they're handing these things out, yeah, sure, we'll take them," Wright says. "All in all, it's pretty cool, I reckon."

Jefferson, a veteran TV writer and former Gawker editor, wrote the screenplay to "American Fiction" with Wright in his mind. When he later met the actor for lunch to discuss the project, Jefferson confessed there was "no plan B."

"In thinking about him so early on the process, it's dangerous because there's a chance he's going to say no and then I'd be heartbroken," Jefferson says. "But I just really wanted to take a big swing. I knew he would be excellent in the role. I've always thought that Jeffrey has the capacity to be very funny. He's known as this excellent dramatic actor, but I also think he's a very funny guy."

Directors have occasionally written with Wright in mind; Anderson did for their first film together, "The French Dispatch." But that's rare. "So I've got to make myself available in a lot of different spaces," Wright says. "Being flexible as an actor has served me well."

Yet there was something different about "American Fiction." Wright is used to thinking that he's bound to be fired from every project. ("It keeps the blood running," he says, grinning.) But "American Fiction" felt uniquely comfortable.

"My perspective doesn't entirely align with Monk's, but certainly the frustrations that he encounters we share. What I was really drawn to more so than the social commentary elements were the family dynamics, particularly the relationship with the mother," says Wright, whose mother

died the year before he read the script. "There might be an impression of this film being comedic and satirical but there's a deep vein of simple humaneness inside of it that I appreciated."

Wright doesn't quite ascribe to Monk's ideas of racial identity. He describes his own outlook falling somewhere in between Monk's and that of Sinatra Golden, a rival, level-headed author in the film played by Issa Rae.

"One thing that Cord and I talked about was that Monk not be perceived as spouting the gospel, that he be flawed. We didn't want to make this film a celebration of the talented tenth," says Wright. "We wanted to be very careful that we, perhaps not he, not be perceived as classist. There's some class arrogance within Monk that I try seriously to avoid."

Generation

Wright, 58, was raised by his mother and aunt in Washington D.C. (His father died when he was young.) They were, he says, the first college graduates in their family. Just as formative to Wright was his grandfather, a Virginia farmer and waterman Wright describes as representing to him "what a man was to me in this world."

"I've done very well but a generation back, it's a much humbler way of life," Wright says. "So I wanted to make sure our overall story was even-handed and that Monk might have been in need of some evolution in his perspective."

Wright attended private school, studied political science at Amherst College and briefly sought an MFA at New York University before leaving to pursue acting full time.

"I had the opportunity to walk through many types of rooms, in a variety of stations," Wright says. "And it's always been important for me to feel comfortable in any of those rooms but maintain the common touch."

Steady as Wright's ubiquity has been in film and television, his path, like Monk's, has had its disappointments and sudden flushes of success. The births of his son (in 2001) and daughter (in 2005) diverted his focus. His role in Michael Mann's "Ali" also led to a prolonged African excursion trying to launch a global exploration company in war-torn Sierra Leone.

"I at one point became kind of disillusioned by this business that I'm in," Wright says. "There were some strange experiences that didn't match what I envisioned for this work. And so I kind of drifted away."

Wright never stopped working, but he only meaningfully reconnected with acting after finding similarly minded collaborators. To him, working with filmmakers like Jefferson has made all the difference.

"It's nice work if you can get, but it can be a mess, too, if you get it," Wright says, laughing. "It all comes down to who you're working with."



Actor Greta Lee poses at the 21st Annual Asian American Awards at the Beverly Hilton, Saturday, Dec. 16, in Beverly Hills, Calif. (AP)

Variety

NEW YORK: James McCaffrey, who voiced "Max Payne" in the popular video game franchise and also starred in television shows including "Rescue Me," has died, according to his agent. He was 65.

McCaffrey's talent agent David Elliot confirmed Monday that the New York native passed away Sunday surrounded by family and friends.

His wife, actor Rochelle Bostrom, told The Hollywood Reporter that he died at home in Larchmont, a New York suburb of Manhattan, following a battle with myeloma, a form of cancer that affects white blood cells.

Fellow New York actor and "Entourage" star Kevin Dillon was among those who took to social media to honor McCaffrey.

"#rip James McCaffrey we were lucky to have known you," he wrote Sunday in an Instagram post that included a photo of the two.

McCaffrey had a 35-year career in television and film that also included roles in the television shows "Blue Bloods" and "Suits."

On the FX drama "Rescue Me," he portrayed a New York City firefighter killed on Sept. 11 who appears to Denis Leary's main character, who is also a firefighter, over the series' seven-season run, which ended in 2011.

McCaffrey also famously voiced Max Payne, the former NYPD officer who becomes a vigilante after his family is killed, in the video game series of the same name during the early 2000s.

"Trained at the Actor's Studio, he never lost his love for creating characters; however, his good looks often pushed him toward leading man roles," Elliot wrote in a message. (AP)

LONDON: Comedian Russell Brand has been questioned for a second time by police investigating sexual offense allegations, British media reported Monday.

Brand, 48, was interviewed under caution last week over six "non-recent" allegations, the Press Association news agency reported. Brand was questioned by police in November over three other claims.

London's Metropolitan Police did not identify Brand but said in a statement that a man in his 40s attended a police station in south London for a second time on Dec. 14.

"He was interviewed under caution by detectives in relation to a further six, non-recent, sexual offenses," police said.

British police do not name suspects who have not been arrested and charged.

In September, British media outlets published claims by four women of being sexually assaulted or raped by Brand between 2006 and 2013, at the height of his fame. The accusers have not been named.

The comedian, author and "Get Him To The Greek" actor has denied the allegations, saying his relationships were "always consensual."

Two U.K. police forces, the Metropolitan Police and Thames Valley Police, launched investigations against Brand after the claims were published. The BBC, where Brand worked on radio

programs from 2006 to 2008, also launched a review into his behavior. (AP)

LEXINGTON, Ky.: One Kentucky family got a little something extra when they picked out their Christmas tree this year: an owl.

Lexington resident Michele White told WDKY-TV that it's a tradition for the family to pick out a Christmas tree every year and this year seemed no different. They had the tree in their home for four days and



McCaffrey



Brand

didn't notice anything unusual. "I have three dogs," White said. "We use this room nonstop: watch TV; the kitchen's right here; no indication."

Bobby Hayes, who owns Magic Carpet Cleaning and was at the home while the family was out, first noticed the bird after plugging in a piece of equipment and seeing the tree start to sway.

"The owl was literally sitting on a lower limb here," Hayes said. (AP)

Oral immunotherapy shows positive result

Early intervention curbs peanut allergies in babies: study

CLEVELAND, Ohio, Dec 19: Researchers from global health system Cleveland Clinic have found that starting peanut oral immunotherapy under medical supervision during infancy can improve a child's immune response to the food over time. The findings were recently published in the Journal of Allergy & Clinical Immunology: In Practice.

Cleveland Clinic is one of a few health systems in the US to offer oral immunotherapy for babies and toddlers who are allergic to peanuts. Through its Food Allergy Center of Excellence, children under age four have developed a tolerance for the food by eating tiny amounts of them in a step-by-step, controlled process.

Evidence

"We've seen how peanut oral immunotherapy is well-tolerated in toddlers, but there is limited real-world evidence available to demonstrate the benefits in babies," said Sandra Hong, M.D., allergist and director of the Food Allergy Center of Excellence at Cleveland Clinic.

"We leveraged data from infants in our program to better understand the safety and efficacy of this treatment in children 12 months and younger."

For the retrospective study, the research team reviewed data from 22 infants - ages 7 to 11 months - who received peanut oral immunotherapy at Cleveland Clinic's Food Allergy Center of Excellence. Through an allergist and parent - implemented plan, children were started on a daily dose of 18 milligrams (about twice the weight of a grain of table salt) of peanut protein in the form of peanut butter or peanut powder. Over six months, they were slowly given larger servings to consume every day until they reached a maintenance dose of 500 milligrams (the equivalence of two peanut kernels).

Treatment

Researchers found that all 22 babies in the cohort achieved this milestone. During treatment, more than half experienced mild allergic reactions which resolved on their own, and one required epinephrine. Around 27% of the babies had experienced no allergic reactions whatsoever.

"Safety is paramount. Each time babies were exposed to a larger amount of peanut protein, it was done under the careful supervision of an allergist," said Dr. Hong. "They were monitored for an hour in our office after the higher dose was given."

Upon completing peanut oral immunotherapy, 14 of the 22 babies received an allergy test to check their levels of peanut - specific antibodies. The results indicated that all 14 babies had a reduced sensitivity to peanuts.

Then, 11 of those babies participated in an oral food challenge where they were fed increasing doses of peanut protein up to 2,000 milligrams (about nine peanuts). After completing the challenge, 91% of them could tolerate peanuts without triggering any allergic reactions.

"Our study shows that the majority of babies were able to safely consume peanuts after oral immunotherapy," said Sarah Johnson, M.D., lead author of the study and a fellow at Cleveland Clinic. "Overall, this signals that age is a crucial factor to the success of this treatment. An infant's immune system is more adaptable, allowing them to develop tolerance to peanuts with less severe reactions and fewer side effects than older children."

While peanut oral immunotherapy holds promise in helping young children overcome peanut allergies, the treatment should always be done under the care of a trained allergist.

"At the end of the day, we want families to be safe," said Dr. Hong. "This is not something you try on your own because of the significant risk of triggering allergic reactions. When you have an allergist supervise the process, you are ensuring that any reactions your child experiences are quickly identified and treated."

The Conversation

Schools can help build resilience in students

Teaching positive psychology skills will help student mental health, happiness

By Kai Zhuang Shum

University of Tennessee

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

Youth mental health has worsened significantly over the past decade, but new interventions that teach positive psychology concepts in school may help.

American young people are reporting historically high levels of hopelessness, sadness and loneliness. According to the most recent data from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 20% of adolescents have seriously considered suicide - and suicide is the second-leading cause of death for children ages 10-14.

Perhaps even more alarming than the prevalence of youth mental health problems is the inaccessibility of mental health support for the many children who need it. About 60% of depressed adolescents do not receive any treatment - and around 950,000 children do not have health insurance that covers mental health services.

One solution is to provide mental health care in schools, where kids are. This is already happening. School counselors, psychologists and social workers provide support, teach coping strategies and work with caregivers to help students overcome mental health challenges. Such vital care is essential, but clearly more help is needed.

Research shows that students who have a positive outlook regarding their lives outperform other students academically and emotionally. You might wonder, can positive thinking be taught?

I study school-based positive psychology interventions. My colleagues have found that students who've been introduced to science-based ideas about happiness feel more satisfied with life, experience more positive than negative emotions and have fewer emotional and behavioral problems.

Psychologists began to study the science of happiness in the late 1990s. Prior to that time, most psychology researchers studied misery.

Psychologist Martin Seligman was such a scientist, having pioneered the concept of "learned helplessness." But a conversation with his young daughter, in which she demanded to know why he couldn't "stop being such a grouch," inspired him to start studying what makes people happy instead.

Interventions

Initial studies were conceptual in nature. But before long, researchers started to identify what makes people happy, the benefits of happiness and interventions to improve happiness.

Scientists identified three main predictors of happiness - genetics, life circumstances and purposeful activities - and potentially others, depending on one's culture. Of the big three, the first two are often out of an individual's control. But science has shown that people can adopt strategies to feel happier.

Achieving a state of flourishing - or feeling good and doing good - is the goal of positive psychology interventions. It can evoke positive feelings, increase engagement with life, strengthen positive relationships, move people toward purpose and help people achieve meaningful goals.

Positive psychology is now taught in some schools around the world, including in the U.S., Australia, Denmark, Israel, New Zealand, China and South Africa. Most interventions educate students about mindfulness and positive psychology concepts such as gratitude, kindness, optimistic thinking, utilizing character strengths

Healthy sleep crucial for teens' physical & cognitive and emotional development

By Joanna Fong-Isariyawongse, MD

University of Pittsburgh

Nearly three-quarters of high school students do not get enough sleep on school nights, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The National Sleep Foundation recommends that teens sleep for eight to 10 hours per night. But various factors hinder this, including early school start times and shifts in adolescents' circadian rhythms - the biological internal clock that regulates the sleep-wake cycle and repeats roughly every 24 hours. Healthy sleep is crucial for teens' physical, cognitive and emotional development. When teens don't get enough sleep, it can have lifelong impacts. They range from poor mental health to lower attendance and graduation rates.

As a neurologist specializing in sleep disorders, I have studied the profound importance of sleep in optimizing the body and mind. I believe insufficient sleep among adolescents is a public health crisis. This is why I reached out to my local state representative in Pennsylvania, Rep. Jill Cooper, a member of the House Education Committee, in October 2023 and pushed for legislative change. The resulting proposed bill would mandate that middle and high schools start no earlier than 8:15 a.m. by the 2026-27 school year.

While parents, educators and school administrators cannot alter biology, they can change school start times to allow students to obtain sufficient sleep for academic success and physical and mental well-being. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends pushing back school start times to 8:30 a.m. or later.

Around the world, school start times vary considerably, from 7 a.m. in Brazil to 9 a.m. in Finland. While I'm not aware of any global dataset or research on the relationship between school start times and academic performance, Finland was ranked No. 2 on the list of best educational systems in the Global Citizens for Human Rights report in 2020. Canada, where the average school day begins at 8:30 a.m., was ranked No. 4.

and hope. The idea is not just to teach students about positive psychology as a school subject but help them practice the skills that research suggests will help them flourish.

In typical programs, students first learn positive psychology concepts, then practice using them in real life with the help of trusted adults. For example, students discuss what gratitude means to them, then practice writing down three things they are thankful for every night before bed with the help of their caregivers. After a week, students discuss with adults at school how practicing gratitude affected their level of happiness.

A 2020 review of 57 school-based positive psychology programs showed more than half resulted in positive outcomes, including less stress, lower depression, less anxiety, fewer behavioral issues, better self-image, higher life satisfaction and stronger social functioning.

Calls for later school start times

Parents may notice that their kids, who were once early birds, start to sleep later and later as they hit their teen years. This is not just due to typical teen behavior like playing video games late at night, but rather it's a biological response.

During adolescence, changes in hormone levels, along with physical and brain maturation, lead to natural shifts in the circadian rhythm. The body tends to delay the release of melatonin, the hormone responsible for bringing on drowsiness at night.

Consequently, teens often find it challenging to fall asleep early, leading to a later bedtime. This delayed circadian rhythm also results in a preference for waking up later in the morning. These changes clash with societal and cultural expectations such as early school start times, often contributing to sleep deprivation among teenagers.

Academic

More than 80% of public middle and high schools across the United States start before 8:30 a.m., with 42% starting before 8 and 10% before 7:30. Consequently, bus pickup for some children can be as early as 5 a.m. in some districts. What follow are four negative outcomes associated with early school start times.

Numerous studies have linked early school start times to poorer performance on academic tests.

One study looked at school start times, graduation rates and attendance rates for 30,000 students in 29 high schools across seven states. It found a significant improvement in attendance rates, from 90% to 93%, and graduation rates, from 80% to 90%, four years after delaying school start times to 8:30.

Sleep deprivation has been shown to worsen memory, learning ability, attention span, creativity, school attendance and first-period tardiness - a perfect storm for poor academic performance.

A recent advisory from the US surgeon general raised the alarm on the harmful impacts of social media on youth mental health. Researchers have unearthed mounds of evidence on the negative effects, including poor body image. In these discussions, however, a simple yet power-

ful solution for improving mental well-being is often overlooked - the profound impact of sleep.

During REM sleep - or the dream state - our memories consolidate and we process emotions. Insufficient sleep increases the risk of depression, anxiety and suicide among adolescents. One study showed that for every extra hour of sleep among adolescents, their risk of suicide decreased by 11%.

Sleep is fundamental for physical well-being. For both children and adults, it plays a key role in essential bodily functions. During slow-wave sleep - or deep sleep - our bodies restore themselves: Our immune system strengthens to keep us healthy. And our waste-clearing lymphatic system eradicates neurotoxic proteins, which are linked to diseases like Alzheimer's.

Sleep deprivation is associated with higher rates of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular problems, chronic health conditions, physical injuries and weakened immune function. Sleep-deprived students are more likely to fall asleep when sedentary, such as when driving a car. Motor vehicle accidents related to driving while drowsy are especially prevalent among teen drivers.

Sleep-deprived students are also more likely to demonstrate aggression, struggle with social communication and engage in risk-taking behaviors. One study found that the amount of sleep that high school students get is directly related to their engagement in unsafe behaviors, such as substance abuse, risky driving, aggressive behavior and tendency toward self-harm.

The economic ramifications of this crisis may not be immediately obvious, but they are undeniable. Contrary to concerns that delayed school start times might increase transportation costs by changing bus schedules, a 2017 study conducted by the nonprofit RAND Corp. found that the economic benefits far outweigh the expenses.

The study showed that a universal shift to 8:30 a.m. school start times would result in an \$8.6 billion gain in the US economy over two years. Investing in delayed school start times, therefore, isn't a drain on resources. Instead, it contributes to a healthier future for generations to come. (AP)

them both feel happier. This student was also proud to be able to help their family.

We also found that some students believed the program helped them build positive relationships with others. One student shared, "It's really fun to see how others react when I'm being nice, such as giving a compliment," and that doing so helped them feel "nice inside." Another student agreed, saying making others feel good helped them feel happier.

Positive psychology training is only one piece of the solution for improving youth mental health. Children with severe issues need comprehensive treatment, which can include mental health counseling and medication.

Even though many important factors are out of a person's control, everyone has room for growth in happiness. My colleagues and I hope teaching positive psychology in schools will become a common practice in the future. (AP)

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From relegation battlers to high flyers

Brest fighting for European spots in French league

Allen rallies Portland St over Fresno State in OT



Michigan State's Malik Hall (center) drives between Oakland's Blake Lampman (right) and Jack Gohlke during the first half of college basketball. (AP)

Northern Illinois sees off Calumet 92-48

FRESNO, Calif., Dec 19, (AP): KJ Allen scored eight of his 15 points in a 10-0 run to close out overtime and Portland State rallied to beat Fresno State 75-72 on Monday night.

BASKETBALL

The Vikings (9-3) yielded the first seven points in the extra period and trailed 72-65 with 2:26 remaining. Allen hit a 3-pointer and a jumper before Isaiah John-

son's layup tied the game. Allen buried a 3-pointer at the buzzer for the win.

Allen made all three of his 3-point attempts and all four of his free throws for Portland State, adding eight rebounds. Jorell Saterfield and Bobby Harvey both scored 13 with Saterfield grabbing seven rebounds. Johnson pitched in with 12 points and five boards off the bench.

Reserve Isaiah Pope scored 14 to lead the Bulldogs (6-5). Enoch Boakye totaled 12 points, seven rebounds and four blocked shots. Isaiah Hill and Xavier Dusell both scored 10. Hill added eight assists and five boards. Eduardo Andre had 10 rebounds to go with eight points.

Isiah Kirby hit a jumper with 62 seconds remaining, forcing overtime with the final basket of regulation.

N. Illinois 92, Calumet 48
In Dekalb, Ill., Freshman Will Loving-Watts scored 23 points to lead Northern Illinois to a 92-48 victory over Calumet on Monday night.

Loving-Watts sank 9 of 16 shots with two 3-pointers, adding five steals for the Huskies (6-4). Zarique Nutter had 18 points on 7-for-8 shooting. Yanic Konan Niederhauser pitched in with 13 points, six rebounds and four blocked shots. David Coit scored 10 and Xavier Amos had 10 rebounds to go with six points.

Dorwynn Smith III led the Crimson Waves with 11 points off the bench.

BREST, France, Dec 19, (AP): Since coming back from two goals down to stun last season's runner-up Lens on the opening day of the season, Brest has continued to take the French league by surprise.

The result? With one match left to play before the year-end break, the small club from the Brittany region dreams about Europe.

After 16 rounds of matches, Brest boasts its best record ever at this stage of the French league season, with eight wins, four draws and only four defeats for a total of 28 points.

That's just nine points fewer than leader Paris Saint-Germain and its armada of stars. And four points fewer than second-place Nice ahead of Brest's game against local rival Lorient on Wednesday.

For its final league game of the year, PSG hosts Metz. Nice plays Lens and third-place Monaco travels to Toulouse.

Not many experts could have imagined such an ascending trajectory for Brest when the struggling side appointed Eric Roy as its coach in January, with hopes that the 55-year-old would help the club remain in the top division.

At the time, Brest sat in the relegation zone, two points from safety. The move seemed like a perilous gamble since Roy had been out of a coaching job for more than 10 years and a short stint at Nice. Less than a year later, Roy's has not only kept the club among the elite, but he has delivered much more than what was expected.

The coach has built a team renowned for its collective strength and ability to sustain long spells of pressure while being clinical up front.

"We're moving forward and try-



Brest's Kenny Lala, right, and Marseille's Iliman Ndiaye, left, fight for the ball during the French League One soccer match between Marseille and Brest in Marseille, France, Saturday, Aug. 26, 2023. With one match left to play before the year-end break, the small club from the Brittany region dreams about Europe. After 16 rounds of matches, Brest boasts its best record ever at this stage of any French league season, with eight wins and only four defeats for a total of 28 points. (AP)

ing to cultivate (a culture) of humility and of hard work, without forgetting that we can have ambition," Roy said.

At the club, no one embodies Brest's success better than Romain Del Castillo, who joined two years ago.

After several injury setbacks, the 27-year-old player born in Lyon is finally enjoying the best season of his career, with five goals and two assists so far.

Switching position from the left of the attack to a playmaking role has certainly helped the left-footed Del Castillo blossom, with his efficient dribbling game and excellent vision to create chances on display week in, week out.

"It's up to me to be a technical leader on the pitch, but also in the dressing room," Del Castillo said.

To build a stable future, Brest has recently renewed Del Castillo's contract, linking him to the club through to 2027.

Two other influential players - midfielder Pierre Lees-Melou and striker Jeremy Le Douaron - have also extended their deals.

Although Roy claims the club's ambition for the season remains to avoid relegation, the team can certainly have higher goals, with qualification for a European competition next season on everyone's mind.

"Europe seems a long way away," Roy said. "I like to do things step by step. Today, we're taking it easy, keeping our feet on the ground with a lot of humility. If there's a change in goals, we'll let you know."

Roy may need to issue an update very soon.

Kansas State thrash Oral Roberts 102-59

UCLA women ease past Ohio St

COLUMBUS, Ohio, Dec 19, (AP): Charisma Osborne scored 19 points, Lauren Betts had 17 and No. 2 UCLA beat No. 13 Ohio State 77-71 on Monday night.

Kiki Rice had 15 points and Gabriela Jaquez had 11 points for the Bruins (10-0), who overcame a sluggish first half and out-rebounded the Buckeyes 40-30.

Jacy Sheldon scored 30 points and Taylor Thierry added 20 for Ohio State (9-2).

No. 6 Southern California 93, Cal State-Fullerton 44

In Los Angeles, JuJu Watkins had 23 points, six rebounds and six assists, and Southern California routed Cal State-Fullerton.

McKenzie Forbes added 17 points and Taylor Bigby scored 15 points, making a career-high five 3-pointers, for the Trojans (9-0), who tied their season high in scoring.

Kathryn Neff led the Titans (4-5) with 14 points.

BASKETBALL

No. 12 Kansas State 102, Oral Roberts 59

In Manhattan, Ayoka Lee had 24 points and a career-high 21 rebounds to post her school-record 53rd career double-double, and Kansas State routed Oral Roberts.

Lee reached double figures in points and rebounds by early in the second quarter. She also finished with five blocks.

Gabby Gregory scored 16 points for Kansas State (11-1). Ruthie Udoumoh led Oral Roberts (6-4) with 15 points and 10 rebounds.

No. 16 Indiana 109, Evansville 56

In Bloomington, Ind., Yarden Garzon scored a career-high 30 points on 12-of-14 shooting. Mackenzie Holmes had 22 points and 10 rebounds for her 22nd career double-double, and Indiana beat Evansville.

Indiana (9-1) shot 71.7% from the field (38 of 53) for the highest single-game percentage by a Division I team this season. Indiana also tied a program record for points in a third quarter with 34.

Freshman Maggie Hartwig scored 13 points for Evansville (2-8).

No. 17 UConn 88, Butler 62
In Hartford, Conn., Freshman Ashlynn Shade scored a season-high 22 points. Paige Bueckers had 16 points and seven assists, and UConn beat Butler in the Big East opener for both teams.

Aubrey Griffin scored 14 points and Aaliyah Edwards had 12 points and 12 rebounds for UConn (8-3).

Rachel Kent and Caroline Strande each scored 13 points for Butler (7-4). Jordan Meulemans, averaging 11.1 points per game, was held to three points.

After yrs out of test cricket, Marsh is back in a 'big' way for Australia

MELBOURNE, Australia, Dec 19, (AP): Four years after being dropped as a test player for Australia due to a run of poor results, allrounder Mitchell Marsh made a telling return to form with a run-a-ball century against England at Headingley during the Ashes series in July.

His resurgence as a batter - and bowler - continues.

In the first cricket test against Pakistan in Perth, Marsh scored 90 and 63 not out to be named man of the match in the home side's 360-run win inside four days. The 32-year-old Marsh also claimed the crucial wicket of former captain and star batter Babar Azam in the first innings to further highlight his overall value to the team.

Marsh was dropped by selectors in December 2018 after a run of 11 innings saw him score single figures seven times -- including two ducks. His highest score during that streak was 45 runs.

Australia captain Pat Cummins says one key difference in the new-look Marsh is his willingness to play to his strengths, rather than try to imitate the batting style of others.

"I think he's just got a really clear process at the moment in whatever format it is," Cummins said. "He knows how to score runs, and you know he doesn't really care what it looks like."

"I think in the past you can get caught up in, 'There's a template of how you're meant to play test cricket or supposed to play test cricket and you've got to have a good forward defense'. I think Mitch has found a really good game plan."

CRICKET

Australia has won 15 tests in a row against Pakistan in Australia, and Cummins and Co. will hope to extend that streak in the Boxing Day test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground beginning Dec. 26. It's the second of three in the series, with the third set to start Jan. 3 in Sydney.

Off-spin bowler Nathan Lyon will enter the MCG match having taken test wicket No. 500 during the win in Perth.



Mitchell Marsh of Australia bats during play on the second day of the first cricket Test between Australia and Pakistan in Perth, Australia. (AP)

Also

DUBAI: Mitchell Starc became the most expensive signing in the history of the Indian Premier League on Tuesday, topping the record figure paid for Australia teammate Pat Cummins at the competition's auction a few hours earlier.

Starc, a left-arm pacer who was last in the IPL eight years ago, was bought by Kolkata Knight Riders for nearly \$3 million. That beat the fee paid by Sunrisers Hyderabad for Cummins, who went for nearly \$2.5 million.

Before this auction, the record signing was England bowler Sam Curran after he joined Punjab Kings for \$2.23 million last year.

It capped a spectacular year for Starc and Cummins, who are coming off winning the Cricket World Cup with Australia last month in the tournament in India.

Cummins and Starc also play in Australia's test team, which won the World Test Championship final in June before retaining the Ashes after a 2-2 draw in the series with England.



Ohio State's Jacy Sheldon, right, tries to dribble past UCLA's Kiki Rice during the second half of an NCAA college basketball game Monday, Dec. 18, 2023, in Columbus, Ohio. (AP)

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Atalanta second-half goal rush hammers Salernitana in Serie A

Girona dominate Alaves to reclaim Spanish league summit from Real

MADRID, Dec 19, (AP): Girona returned to the top of the Spanish league after a comprehensive 3-0 win over mid-table Alaves.

The result lifted Girona two points ahead of Real Madrid at the top of La Liga and nine clear of third-placed Barcelona.

Striker Artem Dovbyk grabbed a brace and winger Yan Bueno Cuoto dazzled on the right wing as Girona was far superior.

Alaves has gone 24 matches away from home without a win, the worst such run in the club's history.

The surprise title contender took the lead midway through the first half when Dovbyk was on hand to nod home a rebound after Antonio Sivera could only parry Cuoto's shot.

Cuoto was involved again four minutes before halftime when the tricky winger fed Portu, who spun and rifled in a low shot.

With an hour gone, Dovbyk made it 3-0 from the penalty spot after Cuoto was brought down in the box. It was the Ukrainian striker's 10th goal in 16 games. Only Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham has scored more.

SOCCER

Alaves was 13th place in La Liga, three points above the relegation zone. Its next match is at home to Real Madrid on Thursday. Girona is at Betis on the same day.

Atalanta recovered from conceding an early goal to score four times in the second half and hammer Salernitana 4-1 in Serie A.

The result lifted the team from Bergamo into seventh place, a point behind Fiorentina and Napoli. Salernitana remained on the bottom.

Salernitana came into the game with the worst away record in the league, having collected just two points from seven games and scoring a meager four goals.

But it threatened to end that appalling record with an early goal. After 10 minutes, **Lorenzo Pirola** snuck in between two defenders to head home a deep cross from the right.

However, the home side moved up a gear in a tremendous second half.

Luis Muriel equalized with a spectacular volley after 47 minutes and five minutes later Atalanta was ahead when **Mario Pasalic** cheekily slotted the ball between a defender's legs and past the unsuspected keeper.



Al Ahly's Emam Ashour vies for the ball with Fluminense's Jhon Arias (right), during the Soccer Club World Cup semifinal soccer match between Fluminense FC and Al Ahly FC at King Abdullah Sports City Stadium in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. (AP)

Belgian midfielder **Charles De Ketelaere** made it 3-1 eight minutes from time and **Aleksei Miranchuk** scored the last in the last minute.

Fluminense edge Al Ahly to reach Club World Cup final

Veteran Melo produces a standout moment

JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia, Dec 19, (AP): The wily guile of defender **Marcelo** won the penalty that helped send Fluminense's veteran team to the Club World Cup final after beating Al Ahly 2-0.

Marcelo's fine footwork at the edge of the Al Ahly penalty area teased forward Percy Tau into the tackle that put Jhon Arias on the spot to convert a 71st-minute penalty.

Fluminense sealed victory in the 90th, when substitute John Kennedy scored with a curling left-foot shot.

The Brazilian club will try to give South America just a second Club World Cup title in 17 years on Friday.

Al Ahly, whose noisy red-clad fans made up most of a near-35,000 crowd, will play a third-place game on Friday against the loser of the other semifinal. It is played on

SOCCER

Tuesday at the same King Abdullah Sports City stadium.

While Marcelo helped create for Fluminense at one end, the 40-year-old defender Felipe Melo and 43-year-old goalkeeper Fábio protected at the other.

Felipe Melo produced a standout moment of the first half, racing back toward goal to tackle Tau, who had been clear in space and was poised to shoot. Felipe Melo rose to his feet and shouted in satisfaction.

Fábio's calm and precise positional sense let him save repeatedly from Al Ahly's 18 goal attempts.

"Players like Marcelo, I think, were decisive, especially for the penalty," Fluminense coach Fernando Diniz said in translated comments. "Felipe Melo also played brilliantly, he was absolutely in control."

Fluminense and Al Ahly presented a throwback look at a competition dominated for two decades by the wealthiest European clubs who have hired waves of global talent.

A team of 11 South Americans including nine Brazilians started against 11 Africans including nine from Egypt for the Cairo club.

Veteran Brazil internationals Marcelo - a five-time Champions League winner with Real Madrid - and Felipe Melo are being rewarded again for coming home from

Injured Khan to miss tour, Haris rested

Pakistan recall Farhan after 5 years for T20 series

ISLAMABAD, Dec 19, (AP): Pakistan named several uncapped players and recalled opening batter Sahibzada Farhan for the first time in five years for the five-match Twenty20 series against New Zealand.

The 27-year-old Farhan scored 40 runs in three Twenty20s for Pakistan in 2018 but had been out of the selectors' favor since. The right-handed middle-order batter forced his way back into the national team after performing impressively in white-ball cricket over the last two domestic seasons as Pakistan aims to find the right combination in its middle-order batting for next year's T20 World Cup.

In the recent National T20 Cup at Karachi, Farhan scored 492 runs in 12 matches for Peshawar, including one century and four half centuries as he smashed 55 fours and 29 sixes during the tournament.

Pakistan T20 vice-captain Shadab Khan will miss the tour because of an ankle injury he sustained during the National T20 Cup while selectors also rested wicketkeeper-batter Mohammad Haris.

Fast bowlers Naseem Shah, Mohammad Hasnain and Ihsanullah, who all missed the 50-over World Cup in India, are still recovering from injuries and were not considered for selection.

Azam Khan, who has played five T20s for Pakistan, was among three wicketkeepers picked in the squad



Pakistan's cricket team's Chief Selector Wahab Riaz, speaks during a press conference, in Lahore, Pakistan, Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023. Pakistan named several uncapped players and recalled opening batter Sahibzada Farhan after five years for the five-match Twenty20 series against New Zealand. (AP)

of 17 with Mohammad Rizwan and uncapped Haseebullah the other options.

"Unfortunately Shadab twisted his ankle during the domestic season and he needs another two weeks of rehabilitation," chief selector Wahab Riaz told reporters in Lahore on Tuesday. "We know what Haris is capable of doing in international cricket. He is part of our plans, but we wanted to expand our pool of players and that's why we

have rested him."

Pakistan tried several batters like Khushdil Shah, Haider Ali, Shoaib Malik and Faheem Ashraf in its middle-order over the years, but Riaz said none could make an impact that forced the selectors to give chance to top performers of domestic cricket like Farhan and Haseebullah.

Fast bowler Abbas Afridi and legspinner Usama Mir, who has played 12 ODIs, were the other uncapped T20 players in the squad.

Riaz said the selectors were well aware of Azam Khan's fitness issues but wanted to give an opportunity to the youngster, who has been

CRICKET

scoring prolifically in T20 leagues around the world.

"You can't expect him (Khan) to reduce his weight by 10-15 kilograms in 10 days," Riaz said. "At times you have to prefer skill over fitness. We have seen that he is a very impactful batter at No. 6 and we want to give him a chance."

Squad: Shaheen Shah Afridi (captain), Aamir Jamal, Abbas Afridi, Azam Khan, Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Fakhar Zaman, Haris Rauf, Haseebullah, Iftikhar Ahmed, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Rizwan, Mohammad Wasim, Sahibzada Farhan, Saim Ayub, Usama Mir, Zaman Khan.

struck the left-hand post of goalkeeper Mohamed El Shenawy.

Arias finally scored his penalty after running at a curious angle parallel to the goal before he stopped, paused then placed a right-foot shot beyond El Shenawy diving to his right.

After the game, Diniz repeatedly cited the short-cut grass and slick, wet surface as being so different from the fields they find in Brazil that it caused his team to make too many mistakes in the first half.

A rare European element in the game was Al Ahly's Swiss coach, Marcel Koller, dressed all in black standing pitchside in stark contrast to the vivid scarlet-red outfit of Diniz, the coach who is doing double duty this season with the Brazil team.



Salernitana's Pasquale Mazzocchi, (right), and Atalanta's Charles De Ketelaere battle for the ball during the Italian Serie A soccer match between Atalanta and Salernitana at the Gewiss Stadium in Bergamo, Italy. (AP)

Best of the Rest

Contepomi takes over Pumas:

Argentina confirmed Felipe Contepomi as the new coach of the Pumas on Monday after assisting Michael Cheika for 18 months.

Contepomi was contracted to the 2027 Rugby World Cup in Australia.

The hall of fame flyhalf paid tribute to Cheika, calling it an honor to work under him as the attack coach and being "grateful for the extraordinary opportunity."

Cheika guided Argentina to the semifinals of the recent Rugby World Cup in France. He was an assistant and adviser to the team for two years before taking charge in March 2022.

Under Cheika, who made an effort to learn Spanish, the Pumas beat the All Blacks in New Zealand, the Wallabies in Australia, and England at Twickenham. They beat Wales in the World Cup quarterfinals and lost to the All Blacks in the semis.

"Having been the head coach of Los Pumas fills me with pride, and it is one of the experiences that I enjoyed the most in my career as a coach," Cheika told the Argentina Rugby Union website. "Although I was born in Australia, a big part of me will be Argentina. I am convinced that Felipe and his staff are going to lead the team in the best way."

Cheika also coached Australia to the final of the 2015 World Cup. (AP)

Man City fined \$150K: Manchester City was handed a fine of 120,000 pounds (\$150,000) on Monday for dissent shown to the referee by Erling Haaland and other players in an English Premier League game this month.

Haaland and teammates sur-

Larsson dies at 79

MALMO, Sweden, Dec 19, (AP): Bo Larsson, the Swedish soccer great who played 70 times for his country and at three World Cups, has died. He was 79.

The Swedish soccer federation announced the death of Larsson on Tuesday. No more details were disclosed.

Larsson, who could play in midfield or as a striker, featured at the World Cups in 1970, 1974 and 1978 and is regarded as one of Malmo's greatest ever players.

"Bosse" - as he was fondly known - scored 289 goals in 546 games for the southern club, where he won the league six times from 1965-77 and was the competition's top scorer three times. He also had a stint playing for Stuttgart in Germany between 1966-69 before returning to Malmo.

"For many, Bosse Larsson was the greatest MFF player of all time," Malmo wrote.

rounded the ref because the match official failed to play advantage for a potential scoring chance late in the 3-3 draw with Tottenham on Dec. 3 at Etihad Stadium.

City accepted it failed to ensure its players "did not behave in an improper way" during the stoppage-time incident, the English Football Association said.

Haaland was particularly angry with referee Simon Hooper's decision to not play advantage and continued his complaints after the final whistle, expressing his frustration in a post on X - formerly known as Twitter - when responding to video of the incident. Haaland didn't face separate action for his conduct.

Haaland was brought down by Tottenham defender Emerson Royal as City went in search of a winner after Dejan Kulusevski's 90th-minute equalizer. (AP)



Contepomi



Bayern's Thomas Mueller scores a goal that was later disallowed by a VAR decision during the German Bundesliga soccer match between Bayern Munich and Stuttgart in Munich, Germany. (AP)

Sports

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Pistons near NBA history with 24-game skid

Harden, Clippers win eighth straight

ATLANTA, Dec 19, (AP): Trae Young extended his recent hot streak with another double-double, scoring 31 points with 15 assists, as the Atlanta Hawks beat Detroit 130-124 on Monday night, handing the Pistons their 24th consecutive loss.

The Pistons' last win came on Oct. 28 against Chicago. Detroit is two losses away from matching the NBA's longest losing streak in one season.

The NBA record for the longest losing streak within a single season is 26, shared by the 2010-11 Cleveland Cavaliers and 2013-14 Philadelphia 76ers. The 76ers lost a record 28 consecutive games over the 2014-15 and 2015-16 seasons.

Cade Cunningham led the Pistons with a career-high 43 points. Bojan Bogdanovic had 25 points.

Clippers 151, Pacers 127

In Indianapolis, James Harden scored 21 of his season-best 35 points in the fourth quarter and had nine assists as Los Angeles extended the league's longest active winning streak to eight games by routing Indiana.

Kawhi Leonard added 28 points for Los Angeles and Paul George added

BASKETBALL

27 against his former team. Facing the league's second-worst defense, the Clippers matched their season-high point total for a half with 77 in the first on the way to their highest-scoring game of the season.

Benedict Mathurin had a season-high 34 points to lead Indiana. Isaiah Jackson scored 15 points while starting in place of injured two-time NBA blocks champion Myles Turner.

Knicks 114, Lakers 109

In Los Angeles, Jalen Brunson scored 11 of his 29 points in the fourth quarter, and New York overcame LeBron James' 109th career triple-double for a victory over Los Angeles.

Julius Randle had 27 points and 14 rebounds, and Immanuel Quickley scored 20 points while the Knicks hung tough in the fourth quarter and survived a rally led by James to earn their second road win over the Lakers in 2023. James had 25 points, 11 assists and 11 rebounds for the Lakers, who have lost three of four since winning the inaugural In-Season Tournament.

Timberwolves 112, Heat 108

In Miami, Anthony Edwards scored 32 points, Karl-Anthony Towns added 18 and Minnesota clamped down in the second half to beat Miami.

Naz Reid scored 15, Mike Conley added 12 and Rudy Gobert grabbed 16 rebounds for the Timberwolves.

Minnesota improved to 20-5, tying idle Boston for the NBA's best record. The Timberwolves gave up just 42 points in the second half, after trailing by as many as 17 points in the early going.

Bulls 108, 76ers 104

In Philadelphia, Coby White scored 24 points and Chicago held on to snap Philadelphia's six-game winning streak.

Former Sixer Nikola Vucevic chipped in 23 points while DeMar DeRozan added 15 for the Bulls.

Joel Embiid had 40 points and 13 rebounds, his 11th straight game with 30 or more points and 10 or more boards. Tyrese Maxey added 29 points in the 76ers' first loss to a team without a winning record this season after starting 12-0 against sub-.500 teams. No other Sixers player was able to crack double figures.

Cavaliers 135, Rockets 130, OT

In Cleveland, Donovan Mitchell scored 37 points, Sam Merrill had a career-high 19 off the bench and Cleveland earned its 11th consecutive overtime victory by beating Houston.

Merrill had five points and Max Strus added four in the extra period, when Cleveland outscored Houston 13-8 to match the second-longest OT winning streak in NBA history. New Orleans owns the record with 13 victories in a row from 2006-08.

Rockets center Alperin Sengun made one free throw with 36.8 seconds left in regulation to tie it. Caris LeVert missed a 3-pointer on the Cavaliers' subsequent possession and Sengun's fadeaway at the buzzer rimmed out.

Fred VanVleet had season highs of 27 points and 17 assists, along with eight rebounds, and Sengun had 24 points, eight rebounds and six assists. The Rockets are 2-10 on the road and 11-1 at home.

Thunder 116, Grizzlies 97

In Oklahoma City, Shai Gilgeous-



Utah Jazz forward Lauri Markkanen (23) defends against Brooklyn Nets guard Spencer Dinwiddie (right), drives to the basket during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Salt Lake City. (AP)



Philadelphia 76ers' Joel Embiid (right), goes up for a dunk against Chicago Bulls' Coby White during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Philadelphia. (AP)

Bayern extend Müller's contract by a year

MUNICH, Dec 19, (AP): Bayern Munich has handed experienced forward Thomas Müller a one-year contract extension through to the end of the 2024-25 season, putting him within sight of the club's all-time appearance record.

The new deal has the 34-year-old Müller in line to mark a quarter of a century at the club he joined at the age of 10.

"He's a leader both on and off the pitch, always a role model and incredibly valuable for the entire team," Bayern sporting director Christoph Freund said in a statement.

"Thomas pushes every team with his open and positive manner on and off the pitch. The way he plays is extremely clever, for the team, and he's very versatile in where he can play. Thomas is also almost never injured, always there - just quality and reliability personified."

Müller's contract was last renewed in May 2022 and had been due to run out at the end of this season. The one-year extension follows a similar deal handed to goalkeeper Manuel Neuer last month after his return to action following a broken leg.

Alexander had 30 points and nine rebounds in three quarters to help Oklahoma City beat Memphis in the Grizzlies' final game before Ja Morant returns from his suspension.

Gilgeous-Alexander hit a game-winner at Denver on Saturday night and followed it up by making 8 of 18 field goals and 13 of 14 free throws against Memphis.

Nuggets 130, Mavericks 104

In Denver, Jamal Murray finished with 22 points, going 4 for 4 from 3-point range, to help Denver race past short-handed Dallas.

Aaron Gordon tied a season high with 21 points, while Nikola Jokic added eight points, nine rebounds and seven assists in a game where the Nuggets starters got the fourth quarter off.

The Denver bench outscored the Mavericks reserves by a 62-34 margin to help the Nuggets bounce back from a home loss to Oklahoma City over the weekend.

Kings 143, Wizards 131

In Sacramento, Domantas Sabonis had his 35th career triple-double with 28 points, 13 rebounds and 12 assists as Sacramento beat Washington.

De'Aaron Fox scored 12 of his 30 points during Sacramento's 46-point

third quarter, and Keegan Murray added 25 on a night when six Kings scored in double figures. Harrison Barnes had 19, Kevin Huerter 14 and Malik Monk finished with 10 as Sacramento (16-9) won for the fourth time in five games.

Raptors 114, Hornets 99

In Toronto, Pascal Siakam scored eight of his 27 points in the fourth quarter, Gary Trent Jr. had season highs of 22 points and 10 rebounds, and Toronto rallied past a Charlotte team missing Miles Bridges and three other starters.

Bridges was denied entrance to Canada due to his past legal problems, a person familiar with the situation told The Associated Press. Hornets coach Steve Clifford would not comment on the reason for Bridges' absence before the game.

Jazz 125, Nets 108

In Salt Lake City, Collin Sexton and Talen Horton-Tucker scored 27 points apiece to lead Utah over Brooklyn.

Sexton had his fifth straight 20-point game to help Utah win for the third time in four games. Horton-Tucker also had a team-high six assists. Lauri Markkanen added 20 points and 10 rebounds, and Walker Kessler tallied 14 points, 14 rebounds and five blocks.

'Introduce player health and safety regulations'

Rebooted Club WC could change face of soccer and spark a player backlash

LONDON, Dec 19, (AP): A 32-team World Cup for clubs is FIFA's big play to change the face of soccer.

If successful, it could follow the English Premier League and Champions League as one of the most popular and lucrative sports competitions in the world, generating billions of euros (dollars).

Conversely, it could spark a backlash from players and coaches, who already complain about the congested match calendar.

"I am not against new competitions, I am against the lack of time to recover year by year. This should change," Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said on Monday, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where they aim to win the last Club World Cup before it is radically rebooted.

World players' union FIFPRO went further after FIFA announced the dates of the first edition of the expanded tournament, which will be hosted by the United States from June 15 to July 13, 2025.

"The extreme mental and physical pressures at the pinnacle of the game is the principal concern of players with multiple club and national team competitions, leading to exhaustion, physical injuries, mental health issues, diminished performance, and risks to career longevity," FIFPRO said.

On Sunday, FIFA said the dates would be "harmoniously aligned with the international match calendar" to ensure sufficient rest for players ahead of the start of domestic leagues.

But a significantly expanded tournament in 2025 means top players face three straight years of major competitions during the usual offseason, given the European Championship and Copa America are being staged in 2024 and the next World Cup is in 2026.

It is planned that the Club World Cup will be held every four years after 2025.

"Clubs play a fundamental role in world football, and the Club World Cup will be a major milestone in providing clubs from all confederations with a fitting stage on which to shine at the highest level of the game," FIFA President Gianni Infantino said.

It is a peculiar quirk of soccer that a global club event has never captured the imagination of fans and teams around the world.

In its current format, the European and South American champions enter at the semifinals stage and have to play

just two games to win the title.

More often than not, the final is between those two continents, with European teams dominating the modern era. Only Brazilian team Corinthians has broken Europe's winning run in 16 years.

The sense of formality likely hasn't helped the tournament capture wider interest, with teams from Asia and Africa not expected to upset giants such as Real Madrid, Barcelona and Liverpool.

The fact it is staged in the middle of the European season does not help.

SOCCER

The 32-team tournament addresses those issues, with 12 European and six South American teams participating. Asia and Africa will have four teams each, plus four from North and Central America and the Caribbean.

The tournament will be staged during the offseason for many leagues, which is when major tournaments are traditionally played. With no competition from the likes of the English Premier League, the Club World Cup has the potential to own the space around



Fluminense's John Kennedy celebrates after scoring his side's second goal during the Soccer Club World Cup semifinal soccer match between Fluminense FC and Al Ahly FC at King Abdullah Sports City Stadium in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Fluminense won 2-0. (AP)

— See Page 15