



MP questions employment of non-Kuwaitis in Wafra joint oilfields

## Parliamentary committee tackles digitalization, cybersecurity bills



KUNA photo  
Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Tareq Albanna, addressed attendees during a special session of the UN General Assembly on Wednesday. The session was convened to honor the memory of the late Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — See Page 3

'Optimism ... hope'

### Ministry of Public Works pledges 'loyalty' to Amir

By Mohammed Ghanem  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: Leaders of the Ministry of Public Works expressed their sincere heartfelt congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of His Highness assuming the reins of power. They wished him success and progress for the good of the country and the people, and pledged loyalty to His Highness.

In this regard, the Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Works Eid Al-Rashidi congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on assuming the reins of power, and wished him success and progress for the advancement of Kuwait.

In a press statement, Al-Rashidi said, "We pledge loyalty to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. We also promise His Highness to exert more effort and give for the sake of Kuwait's elevation and progress."

Kuwait has come a long way in the process of construction and development. It needs all of us - the people of Kuwait - to redouble this effort and align behind our wise leadership to complete this development process that is unprecedented in the history of Kuwait. This will only be possible with the help of all the loyal people of Kuwait in various fields."

Meanwhile, the Assistant Undersecretary for the Administrative, Financial and Legal Affairs Sector at the Ministry of Public Works Kifayat Al-Najdi congratulated His Highness the Amir of the country Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of assuming the reins of government.

He called on Almighty Allah to guide his steps and grant him success for the good of the country and the people.

In a press statement, Al-Najdi said, "We pledge allegiance to His Highness the Amir, and we also pledge to him to double the effort and giving for the sake of our dear Kuwait and to complete the desired renaissance process with the help of the people of Kuwait in various fields."

Furthermore, the Assistant Undersecretary for the Planning and Development at the Ministry of Public Works and the official spokesman for the ministry Eng. Ahmed Al-Saleh congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of His Highness assuming the reins of power.

He said he prays Almighty Allah will grant His Highness the Amir success and guide his steps for the benefit of the country and the people.

In a press statement, Al-Saleh said, "His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah holds a prominent place in the hearts of all Kuwaitis. He is a leader with wisdom and sophistication that qualifies him to lead the country to safety during the next stage. It requires all of us to line up as one behind his wise and rational leadership in order to complete the development process that all the Kuwaiti people have always dreamed of, as they are loyal to their Amir and their dear homeland."

We pledge allegiance to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad for the sake of a bright future for the current and future generations together.

Kuwait has the human and financial potential that qualifies it to become a developed country. This will only be achieved through unity in support of our wise leadership, the rejection of all grudges, and the avoidance of achieving narrow interests at the expense of the homeland and the public interest."

Al-Saleh explained how much Kuwait is in need of a leader like His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad, who has the wisdom and sophistication that qualifies him to lead the stage with ability and competence towards stability and development.

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Strikes hit militants

### Rocket fired at Iraq air base

WASHINGTON, Dec 21, (Agencies): A 122mm rocket was fired at Al-Assad Air Base in Iraq without causing damage or injuries, stated the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) late Wednesday.

On social media platform "X", the CENTCOM posted that "approximately around 7:30am (Iraqi time), a 122mm rocket was launched at Al-Assad Air Base in Iraq."

"The combined joint task force located the point of origin and passed the location to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) who moved to the site to investigate," CENTCOM added.

The ISF seized a flatbed truck modified to launch up to five 122mm rockets that was located at the site.

The total number of targeted attacks the US Army was exposed to, in both Iraq and Syria, has increased to 74 attacks since October 17th, announced the United States Department of Defense (Pentagon).

In other news, Turkish warplanes carried out new airstrikes Wednesday against Kurdish militant targets in neighboring Iraq, the Turkish defense ministry said, a day after Turkish and Iraqi officials held high-level security talks in Ankara.

Turkey often launches strikes against targets in Syria and Iraq that it believes to be affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, a banned Kurdish separatist group that has waged an insurgency against Turkey since the 1980s.

According to a statement from the ministry, the fighter jets struck a total of 14 suspected PKK targets in northern Iraq's Gara, Hakourk and Qandil regions where the aircraft destroyed caves, shelters and warehouses used by the militants. Measures were taken to avoid harming civilians, historic or cultural heritage and the environment, the ministry added.

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: The parliamentary Digitalization Empowerment, Artificial Intelligence and Cybersecurity Committee on Thursday discussed two bills about electronic transactions, and its task to tackle digitalization and cybersecurity issues.

Representatives of the Justice Ministry, Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT) and Communications and Information Technology

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### Kuwait remains free of JN.1 variant

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: Kuwait's Ministry of Health said Thursday that JN.1 COVID-19 variant has not been detected as of

yet anywhere in the country, as opposed to confirmed cases regionally and globally.

A ministry statement indicated that the surfacing of such variants is "expected" yet "not alarming."

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## World lauds Kuwait's Amir

Local and global figures extend congratulations

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: Head of the Prime Minister's Office Abdulaziz Al-Dakhil Thursday extended his sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on assuming office.

He praised His Highness's great achievements and wished him further success in leading Kuwait and strengthening its status in the world.

Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi on Wednesday congratulated His High-

ness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on assuming office.

In a statement, the minister said that on behalf of his ministry he conveyed greetings and congratulations to His Highness the Amir.

A number of doctors and medical leaders extended their warmest congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for assuming the reins of power.

They called on him to be steadfast in continuing the path of his honorable predecessors and leaders to strengthen and elevate the status of Kuwait.

In this regard, the official spokesman for the Ministry of Health Dr. Abdullah Al-Sanad congratulated His Highness the Amir on assuming the reins of government of the country and taking the constitutional oath.

He asked Almighty Allah to guide His Highness the Amir to continue on the path of goodness, and complete the path of His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in leading the nation's ship to greater prosperity at various levels and fields.

In a press statement, Dr. Al-Sanad said, "We renew our pledge to work with sincere loyalty, effort and generosity behind the wise leadership of His Highness for the sake of elevating our dear homeland, and continuing the path of progress and prosperity."

We ask Almighty Allah to guide His Highness in his endeavors and steps, and to inspire him with guidance to serve the country and the servants, as well as to bring together the word of the nation for good."

Meanwhile, the Director of the Public Relations Department at the Ministry of Health Dr. Muhammad Al-Azmi congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad for assuming the reins of government, and prayed for his success in carrying the trust and completing the path of his fathers and grandfathers to raise the nation and its prosperity.

In a press statement, he said, "His Highness the Amir is the best successor to the best predecessor. He has a career full of achievements, successes, and distinguished stations in official positions that lasted six decades."

All the best to His Highness the Amir in leading the country the way his honorable predecessors led it. May His Highness continue their great contributions in making its history, building its glory, raising its flag, and strengthening its position regionally, Arably, and internationally."

Also, the internal medicine, endocrinology and diabetes consultant at Al-Sabah Hospital Dr. Adel Redha extended sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah for assuming the reins of government.

In a press statement, Dr. Redha explained that His Highness represents a follow-up and continuation of a "historic" process and efforts that are familiar and extended in time within a long path of golden decades for the rulers of the honorable Al-Sabah family, who founded the country, laid the foundations of the homeland, established its existence, built the foundations of its renaissance, and took the country to safety. They did this using the wisdom of decisions, the sincerity of intentions, the firmness in confronting it, and the balance of the situation.

He added, "We are therefore confident that the process will continue with all success with His Highness due to his extensive experience in giving and sincerity, refined by experiences and positions."

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AL's social affairs head congratulates Amir

### Kuwait affirms support to Palestinian people

NewsWatch

TOKYO: South Korea is considering various measures to contribute to maritime security in the Red Sea amid escalating Houthi attacks on commercial ships on the major sea route, the Defense Ministry said Thursday, according to Yonhap News Agency.

"We agree that freedom of navigation in the region should be guaranteed," ministry spokesperson Jeon Ha-kyu was quoted as saying at a press briefing in Seoul. "We will consult with related ministries to determine what support or contributions may be necessary, by taking into account our national interests and global status," Jeon said.

Tensions in the Red Sea have risen as Iran-backed Houthi militants in Yemen have been attacking commercial vessels in one of the world's most important waterways. (KUNA)

CANBERRA: Australia will send 11 military personnel to support a U.S.-led mission to protect cargo shipping in the Red Sea, but it won't send a warship or plane, the defense minister said Thursday.

Defense Minister Richard Marles said that Australia's military needs to keep focused on the Pacific region.

The United States announced this week that several nations are creating a force to protect commercial shipping from attacks by drones and ballistic missiles fired from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen.

Marles said that 11 military personnel would be sent in January to Operation Prosperity Guardian's headquarters in Bahrain, where five Australians are already posted.

"We won't be sending a ship or a plane," he told Sky News television. (AP)

CAIRO, Dec 21, (KUNA): Arab Ministers of Social Affairs affirmed on Wednesday their continued support for the people of the Gaza Strip as a result of the continuation of brutal Israeli practices until the situation stabilizes and the process of redressing the difficult social and humanitarian impacts in Gaza Strip begins.

This came in a statement by the Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Social Affairs Sector of the League of Arab States, Ambassador Hifa Abu Ghazala, at the conclusion of the 43rd session of the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs.

Abu Ghazala praised the keenness of many Arab countries to provide relief, social, humanitarian and health support to Gaza Strip and their keenness to follow up.

In this regard, Abu Ghazala thanked the Egyptian Minister of Social Solidarity, Nevin Al-Kabbaj, for her efforts in her capacity as Vice President of the Red Crescent to deliver aid to the Arab Council of Ministers of Social Affairs and Health, as well as aid to Arab countries and friendly countries, and her diligent follow-up of all relevant details.

Abu Ghazala explained that the Arab ministers approved a number of important decisions within the framework of the Council's jurisdiction, especially with regard to preparing for the upcoming Arab Summit in its (33rd) session in Bahrain, as well as the Fifth Arab Development Summit: Economic and Social in Mauritania.

She added that the Council also approved a number of strategies, plans and programs related to eliminating multidimensional poverty and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, including topics related to the elderly, family and childhood, in addition to providing support to a number of social projects in member states.

Earlier, Kuwait reiterated its staunch support to the Palestinian people in the face of crimes committed by the Israeli occupation against civilians, schools, hospitals and houses in Gaza Strip, the Gulf state's permanent representative to the Arab League said.

Egyptian Minister of Social Solidarity Nevin Al-Kabbaj said in her opening speech that this session was held in a delicate phase that witnesses unprecedented struggles and challenges because of the ongoing aggression on the Palestinian people in Gaza.

Al-Kabbaj noted that since the first day of the aggression, Egypt has sent 4000 shipments of humanitarian aid through Rafah crossing by the Egyptian Red Crescent Society, and continues sending aid for the people of Gaza until the situation calms down.

She added that this meeting is considered an opportunity for exchanging visions and expertise to support the sustainable development plan of 2030 that would benefit Arab citizens.



Photo by Mohamed Morsi  
One among numerous billboards across Kuwait extending congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on assuming leadership.



Palestinians mourn their relatives killed in the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip, at the hospital in Rafah, southern Gaza, Thursday, Dec. 21, 2023. (AP)

### 'Diplomatic efforts' could yield some relief for Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 21, (AP): The United States, key allies and Arab nations engaged in high-level diplomacy in hopes of avoiding another U.S. veto of a new U.N. resolution on desperately needed aid to Gaza ahead of a long-delayed vote now scheduled for Thursday morning.

The U.S. has been struggling to change the text's references to a cessation of hostilities in the Israel-Hamas war. Another sticking point is the inspection of aid trucks into Gaza to ensure they are only carrying humanitarian goods. The current draft proposes a U.N. role, an idea Israel is likely to oppose.

U.S. President Joe Biden told reporters on his way back from Milwaukee, Wisconsin late Wednesday afternoon that "we're negotiating right now at the U.N. the contours of a resolution that we may be able to agree to."

## Prayer Timings

Fajr ..... 05:13 Asr ..... 14:36  
Sunrise .. 06:38 Maghrib .. 16:54  
Zohr ..... 11:46 Isha ..... 18:16

# Local

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

## Weather

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

**By Day:** Warm and cloudy to partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times southeasterly wind, with speed of 15-45 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery later on.

**By Night:** Rather cold to cold and partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times southeasterly wind, with speed of 12-45 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	23	15
Kuwait Airport	23	10
Abdaly	24	10
Jahra	24	13
Salmiyah	20	17
Nuwaisib	25	12
Wafra	25	10

## Number of important files of office, martyrs and their families completed

# Martyrs' Office remembers achievements during late Amir's reign

By Abdul Nasser Al-Aslami  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: Director General of the Martyrs' Office Salah Al-Awfan recalled the achievements of the Martyr's Office during the reign of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad.

In a press statement issued recently, he affirmed the completion of a number of important files of the office and the martyrs and their families during his reign.

Al-Awfan explained that the achievements varied during the era of the late Amir, the most prominent of which is the naming of 54 parks in a number of areas after martyrs, as well as naming some important bridges after some

martyrs. Work is underway with the Ministry of Public Works to implement those names.

There were achievements presented by the Board of Trustees in the Martyrs' Office during the era of the late Amir, including amending the educational, health, and housing regulations to serve the families of the martyrs. Many of these regulations were more than 30 years old, and were not in par with the ages, needs and requirements of the families of the martyrs today.

During the late Amir's reign, the building of the Martyrs' Office opposite Mubarak Al-Abdullah, was completed. Also, structures for displaying names and pictures of martyrs are under construction in all squares of the cooperative societies.

The late Amir (May God have mercy on him) was keen for the Martyrs'

Office to provide distinguished care to the families of the martyrs, including their children and families. He honored those who excelled academically and practically among them, through the Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs who attended those events and provided distinguished care to the families of the martyrs.

Al-Awfan expressed great sadness over the death of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, and offered condolences on his behalf and on the behalf of the Board of Trustees and his colleagues in the office.

He said, "We console ourselves over the passing away of our father, His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad. He was the most beloved Amir who forgave and sought to reunite his people. He was loyal, faithful, and sincere, and spent his life tolerant, humble, prostrating, and kneeling."

# Two Saudis imprisoned for seven years for impersonating a Kuwaiti

Courts issue 486 verdicts in the name of HH Amir

## Other Voices

### Sulaiman and his noble silence

By Ahmed alsarraf

No Kuwaiti citizen has managed to elevate Kuwait onto the global cultural stage quite like the accomplished artist and director Sulaiman Yahya Al-Bassam.

However, a perplexity arises within me, primarily associated with the state of culture in my country. Each time I witness his productions, a sense of pride washes over me, accompanied by a profound melancholy and disquietude.

This stems from the almost deliberate oversight by the state machinery to accord him the respect and recognition he rightfully deserves. It is not merely for the brilliance of his theatrical endeavors or his meticulous craftsmanship but also for his selfless dedication, investing his time and resources to produce and direct outstanding international works.

His efforts are not solely driven by personal gratification or the pursuit of perfection in artistic creation but also by the altruistic motive of elevating the name of his country on the global stage.

His latest play, "Silence," which I had the privilege of witnessing about three weeks ago in a special screening at Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, was staggering in its magnificence and subject matter, stringent in all its dimensions.

This marked the fourth work I have observed by the artist and director Suleiman, and one cannot help but notice the extent of his commitment. It goes beyond presenting a comprehensive artistic piece, venturing into the realm of innovation, holding the audience's breath for over an hour, with all eyes captivated by the splendor of the performance, despite the stage being occupied by only one actress, a proficient international talent, and two musicians.



alsarraf

The genesis of this international work saw its first workshop held in Switzerland in October 2022. Subsequently, the crew moved to Tunisia, where the play was presented in collaboration with the Tunisian National Theater in March 2023, on the sidelines of the Tunis International Theater Festival. An open rehearsal was then staged on July 22, 2023, at the Fondazione Giugiaro Feltrinelli Theater in Milan, Italy, as part of the annual Summer Theater and Dance Festival.

Director Al-Bassam's connection with the Carthage Film Days in 2021, where his distinctive play "iMedia" received three well-deserved awards, paved the way for "Silence" to be showcased again in Tunisia at its international festival. Once more, it earned three international awards.

The play "Silence" transcends the ordinary, delving into the profound and harrowing repercussions of the human, security, and political tragedy that struck the core of Beirut and the souls of its inhabitants on August 4, 2020. This event marked the largest non-nuclear explosion in history, devastating everything and laying bare the wounds of Lebanon. The tragedy unveiled the extent of political corruption and the economic and social crises that befell this once-beautiful Arab homeland, rendering it leaderless, without banks, currency, independence, vision, or a foreseeable future.

"Silence" emerges as a testament to the director's commitment to political theater in the face of this extensive destruction and despair, which has left nothing untouched within the psyche of the Lebanese citizen. It is our hope that this work reaches and is presented in theaters across Arab countries, or what remains of them. Simultaneously, it is our fervent wish that international director Sulaiman Al-Bassam receives due recognition from the state, placing his name at the forefront of those deserving the state's accolades.

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'From crisis to strategy'

## Tracing the journey of KSE's restructuring

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: About 150 companies are currently trading on the Kuwait Stock Exchange, compared to approximately 220 stocks that were listed locally before the global financial crisis that erupted at the end of 2008, which constituted a sharp decline in the number of companies traded over the past 15 years, with 70 companies representing a third of the stock market's strength, reports Al-Rai daily.

In practice, the state of the large exit of listed companies from the stock exchange between 2008 and 2023 sheds light on the first-generation companies that were listed since the start of trading in the local stock market in 1984 and are still trading.

At the beginning, it must be noted that the current entity of the stock exchange began under the name of the Kuwait Stock Exchange or the Kuwait Stock Exchange, which is a stock trading market that includes 5 markets: the official, parallel, fractional, options and futures markets.

Looking at the list of the first generation companies in the stock exchange, it is clear that it includes 27 stocks that began trading in the Kuwait Stock Exchange on September 29, 1984, as these companies represent a historical operational legacy of the Kuwaiti capital market due to the weight they represent in terms of weight and market value, noting that there are other companies. She participated in the launch of the market in 1983, but left it in light of the repercussions of the financial crisis.

The list of the first companies listed on the stock exchange so far includes 8 banks: "NBK", "KFH", "Al Khaleej", "Tijari", "Kuwait United", "Al Ahli", "Burgan", and "KIB" (formerly International), in addition it includes 19 diversified investment companies - "Kuwait Investment Company", "Facilitations", and "KIPCO", in addition to 4 insurance companies: "Al-Khaleej Insurance", "Warba", "Kuwait Insurance", and "Al-Ahli".

In fact, the local stock market was established after the issuance of the law regulating financial trading in October 1962. However, it underwent several amendments, the most important of which was in the years 1983 and 1984, thus becoming the oldest stock market in the Gulf (following the Al Manakh Market).

The list also included 4 real estate companies: "Kuwait Real Estate", "United Real Estate", "Wataniya

Real Estate", and "Salhiya Real Estate", in addition to major industrial, service and investment companies, most notably "National Industries", "Gulf Cables", "Ships", and "Kuwait Cement", while it also included cinema, hotels, Agility (formerly public warehouses) and livestock companies.

These companies represent most of the stock market's current weight, which amounts to 40.23 billion dinars, while some parties retain historical contributions in those companies to recover their capital dozens of times since their founding, through distributions and returns decided by these various entities.

The responsible authorities currently allow listings between the first and main markets, while any company that meets the conditions is allowed to trade in the interface market, which accounts for about 80 percent of the stock market's weight.

Boursa Kuwait's journey towards privatization began in the fiscal year 2014 pursuant to a decision by the Board of Commissioners of the Capital Markets Authority. From this perspective came the need for a carefully developed strategy, not only based on the needs of the market, but including the opinions of various parties concerned with the capital market.

Based on a careful study of the market, it became clear to the Kuwait Stock Exchange that the main challenges facing the Kuwaiti market are the absence of incentives and the culture of listing, the decline in liquidity and valuation, the scarcity of research and reports covering the market, and the delay in the arrival of essential information due to manual disclosure.

In addition to the absence of secondary markets and good products, the difficulty of conducting large transactions, and the existence of a price unit system that does not contribute to bringing the seller and buyer closer together.

The strategy of the Kuwait Stock Exchange aims to develop a strong financial market that enjoys high liquidity and credibility through the implementation of a set of structural and technical developments and projects, which will enhance the position of the market locally, regionally and globally in a way that contributes effectively to achieving the "New Kuwait 2035" vision.

By Jaber Al-Hamoud  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: The Criminal Court sentenced two Saudi citizens to seven-year imprisonment for impersonating a Kuwaiti citizen who has been missing since 1995, and forging his citizenship and civil identification card.

During the court session, the court asked who the individual is who disappeared in 1995, and the first defendant replied that he is that individual. In response, the judge asked where he had been hiding, and the defendant replied that he had been traveling to different countries.

The court then asked the second defendant about his identity, and he said he is the individual who had disappeared in 1995, adding that he was living outside Kuwait.

Both defendants denied the accusations, and the court decided to send both of them to Central Prison.

It is worth highlighting that the Public Prosecution had charged the first suspect with committing forgery in official documents such as passport, birth certificate and civil identification card under the name of the missing Kuwaiti citizen, and claiming that they belong to him.

The second suspect was charged with forging official documents such as Kuwaiti citizenship file, passport and civil ID.

He was charged with giving false information to the employees of the concerned departments and taking advantage of their good faith to convince them that he is the son of the missing citizen.

On the first working day following the holiday period, Kuwaiti courts have issued 486 verdicts in the name of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, reports Al-Qabas daily.

A reliable source said, the Farwaniya courts issued 46 judgments in civil and commercial cases, along with 19 in appealed misdemeanor cases. Additionally, these courts issued 74 judgments in municipal cases and 75 in misdemeanor cases.

The source emphasized that the Hawalli Court issued 25 civil rulings and 27 criminal rulings, while the courts in the capital issued 50 verdicts in civil commercial cases, 4 administrative judgments, 21 in rental cases, and 7 grievance decisions.

Jahra courts issued 5 commercial verdicts and 16 criminal decisions, and the Ahmadi courts were responsible for 17 judgments in misdemeanor cases, 14 in labor cases, and 7 in commercial cases.

In family law, a total of 45 judgments were issued, with Hawalli courts delivering 15 rulings, Al-Ahmadi courts issuing 10, Farwaniya courts contributing with 9, and both the capital and Mubarak Al-Kabeer courts each providing 5. Jahra courts, on the other hand, issued just one verdict in family cases.

Furthermore, the President of the Court of Cassation issued a circular instructing the secretaries of the sessions and court typists to prioritize accuracy in the preambles of the rulings announced, effective from Dec 20, in the name of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, the Court of Appeals, presided over by Judge Nasr Salem Alheid, issued the first ruling under the name of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. It sentenced an employee of the Public Prosecution to five-year imprisonment for manipulating court verdicts and entering wrong data in order to ensure the release of some convicted individuals through the issuance of fake acquittal decisions.

The Court of Appeals also punished an expatriate worker to ten-year imprisonment for manipulating the blood tests results on chronic diseases of expatriates, which they used to obtain and renew residency.

## HH Amir receives congratulations

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21, (Agencies): The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, has congratulated the Amir of Kuwait His Highness, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of his assumption of office as the Amir of the State of Kuwait.

The message read, "Greetings and felicitations to His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for taking over as the Amir of the State of Kuwait. Confident that our relations will further strengthen in the coming years and the Indian community in Kuwait will continue to flourish."



Modi

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Wednesday a cable from the President of Bangladesh Mohammed Shahabuddin, congratulating him on taking the constitutional oath and becoming the 17th ruler of the State of Kuwait.

In the cable, he wished him good health and further success in leading the State of Kuwait into a much prosperous and promising future, and exploring ways to strengthen the bilateral relation that ties the two countries.

In return, His Highness the Amir sent a cable to Bangladesh's president expressing his utmost appreciation for the kind words and heartfelt sentiments.

Also, the Ambassador of Bangladesh in Kuwait Major General MdAshikuzzaman has sent a congratulatory message to HH the Amir, which says "On behalf of the people of Bangladesh, the Bangladeshi community in Kuwait and on my own behalf let me extend my heartfelt gratitude and felicitations to His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to be sworn as Amir of the State of Kuwait. Heartiest congratulations His Highness.

We hope that the time tested and cemented bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Kuwait will be further strengthened and will get extra momentum under the dynamic and visionary leadership of His Highness the Amir. Bangladesh will remain extremely committed to work shoulder to shoulder with Kuwait to maintain and strengthen our relations in coming days. We pray to Almighty Allah for the peace, prosperity and good health of His Highness the Amir."



Shahabuddin

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Wednesday a cable from the President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon, congratulating him on taking the constitutional oath and becoming the 17th ruler of the State of Kuwait.

In his cable, the President wished him good health and further success in leading Kuwait into a much prosperous and promising future.

In return, His Highness the Amir sent a cable to Tajikistan's president expressing his utmost appreciation for the kind words and heartfelt sentiments.



Rahmon

The Ambassador-designate of the Italian Republic, H.E. Lorenzo Morini, expressed his sincere congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on the occasion of His Highness assumption of power in the country.

As Ambassador designate in Kuwait, he pledges to make efforts to further strengthen bilateral relations and cooperation be-

tween the two friendly Countries.

He pointed out that the people of Italy and the people of Kuwait enjoy a deep traditional friendship and that the two Countries are working to achieve mutually beneficial goals in the most relevant fields of action.

His Excellency highlighted that Italy is committed to reinforce the ongoing cooperation with Kuwait in support of dialogue and stability at the international and regional level.

The Ambassador designate stressed that he also attaches great importance to the growth of bilateral trade and to an increased cooperation between Italian and Kuwaiti companies and private sector.

He concluded reiterating his commitment to work, under the leadership of His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, towards the further strengthening of bilateral relations and to the reinforcement of the strategic partnership between Italy and Kuwait.



Morini

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Thursday a cable of congratulation from President of Djibouti Ismail Omar Guelleh, on his inauguration, wishing His Highness success and good health.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal sent a cable to President Ismail in response, expressing his sincere appreciation for his kind sentiments, wishing him good health and wellbeing.



Guelleh

The Spanish Ambassador to Kuwait HE Moro Miguel Aguilar has congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah on the occasion of assuming power.

The message read, "Our warm congratulations to HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al Jaber Al Ahmed Al Sabah on his proclamation today at the National Assembly of Kuwait and our best, genuine wishes for success in his mandate at the new period, both for Kuwait and the Kuwaiti People and for the relations between our friendly nations."



Aguilar

On behalf of the government and people of the Republic of Korea, the ambassador Chung Byung-ha said, "I would like to extend to His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah my heartiest congratulations on his assumption of office as the Amir of the State of Kuwait.

"Korea and Kuwait have been enjoying excellent bilateral relations and cooperation since the establishment of their diplomatic ties in 1979, in many fields, including health, smart city, food security, education and others.

"I am confident that under His Highness the Amir's guidance and visionary leadership, our two friendly countries will be able to strengthen the existing ties and further upgrade our relations in all areas in the decades to come.

"I wish the HH the Amir continued good health, and success in his new responsibilities, and the State of Kuwait and its friendly people further progress and prosperity."



Byung-ha

## Court delays to Jan 11 to issue verdict in case filed against MC member over bribe

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: The Court of Cassation has adjourned to January 11, 2024 the pronouncement of ruling in the case filed against a member of the Municipal Council, a businessman, and a real estate broker who were accused of bribery to allocate plots to companies.

Earlier, the Court of Appeals had sentenced two of the defendants - the Municipal Council member and the real estate broker - to ten-year im-

prisonment. It imposed a fine of KD 240,000 on the Municipal Council member and a fine of KD 360,000 on the real estate broker. Regarding the businessman, the court sentenced him to five-year imprisonment and imposed a fine of KD 240,000.

The court also convicted the member of the Municipal Council of using the power granted to him to receive a bribe worth KD 100,000 in order to vote in favor of a transaction related to allocating plots for a particular company.



Members of Kuwait's mission to the UN attending the special General Assembly Session.

# UN pays tribute to late Amir

'Amir of wisdom, forgiveness and peace'

**NEW YORK, Dec 21, (KUNA):** The UN General Assembly on Wednesday held a special session to pay tribute to the late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

At the advent of the session, attendees observed a minute of silence to mourn and honor the late Amir who passed away on December 16.

In his speech, President of the UN General Assembly Dennis Francis said the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf's reign was marked by public service and a commitment to the principles of unity, dignity and solidarity, and, known for his diplomatic prowess nationally and abroad, he was revered as a unifier.

He went on to point out that the late Amir guided Kuwait towards progress and maintained its tradition of multilateralism.

Francis noted that Kuwait's election to the Human Rights Council is emblematic of the late Amir's vision for a more peaceful world. That vision will be instrumental in finding a lasting solution to the crisis in Gaza.

Voicing condolences to the Al-Sabah family, he called on the UN General Assembly to honor the Amir's legacy, stating: "May his great soul rest in peace."

For his part, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres described that the late Amir as the "Amir of wisdom, forgiveness and peace."

"Today, we are united in sorrow by the passing of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait. "I want to extend my sincere condolences to His Highness's family, and the Government and people of Kuwait. We stand with all of you today in mourning and memory."

### Dedicated

He pointed out that Sheikh Nawaf dedicated his life to the people of Kuwait. For nearly six decades, on the domestic and global stages, he served at the highest levels of Government, across a diverse range of ministerial positions.

"Far beyond Kuwait's borders, His Highness was a respected statesman. He was a determined champion of preventive diplomacy - an approach that helped define Kuwait's role across the Gulf region and around the world. He was a steadfast voice of regional and global stability, peace and multilateralism - the very values and goals that give life to this chamber.

"He was a generous humanitarian, helping to ease human suffering and mobilize support for millions of people in need around the region and the world. And his personal commitment to collective solutions to forge peace remains an inspiration," the UN chief added.

He urged all to follow his example by 'collaborating and compromising' for Peace.

Stressing that those qualities are "in tragically short supply", he urged those present to also remember their own obligations to be wise in decision and action, to be forgiving of one another and to be willing to collaborate and compromise to forge peace.

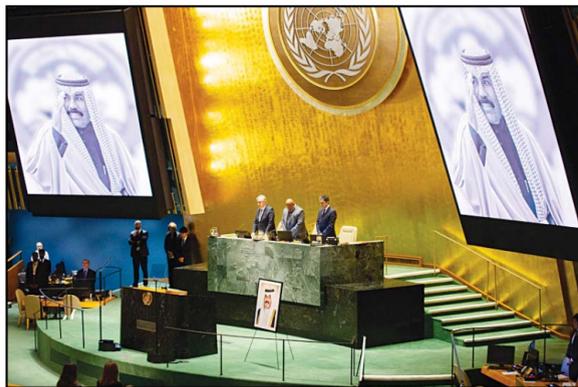
"This is our solemn responsibility," he underscored.

He also extended his best wishes to His Highness Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

"The United Nations will continue its strong partnership and friendship with the State of Kuwait, as we work to build a better, more peaceful and tolerant world for all people," he concluded.

Qatar's representative mourned the late Amir saying that "the Gulf family has lost one of its pillars".

Noting that the Amir contributed to regional unity and to Kuwait's renaissance, she said his personality



The UN General Assembly observes a minute of silence to mourn and honor Kuwait's late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

## Condolences

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21, (KUNA):** His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Wednesday a phone call from Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, expressing his heartfelt condolences on the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

During the phone call, His Highness the Prime Minister thanked and appreciated the kind words and sentiments expressed by the Qatari official, which reflected on the strong relations between the countries.

### Nepal

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Wednesday a cable of condolences from the President of Nepal, Ram Chandra Poudel, on demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Amir sent a cable appreciating the president's sincere sentiments and wishing him good health and wellbeing.

### France

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable of condolences from French President Emmanuel Macron on demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

President Macron hailed the late Amir's humanitarian efforts and his contributions to bolstering cooperation between the two nations.

His Highness the Amir sent a cable in response to the president's sincere sentiments and wished him

good health and wellbeing.

### Ethiopia

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable of condolences from Ethiopia Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali on demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The premier hailed the late Amir's humanitarian efforts and his contributions to bolstering cooperation between the two nations.

His Highness the Amir sent a cable in response to the premier's sincere sentiments and wished him good health and wellbeing.

### Japan

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Thursday a cable from the Emperor of Japan Naruhito, expressing condolences on the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In return, His Highness the Amir sent the Emperor of Japan a cable, appreciating his sincere sentiments and wishing him good health and wellbeing.

Also, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal received a cable of condolence from Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, expressing his sorrow over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In the cable, he remembered the late Amir's efforts to establish stability and peace in the Gulf and Middle East.

His Highness the Amir sent the prime minister of Japan a reply enclosed with the utmost gratitude for his heartfelt sentiments, wishing him good health and wellness.

was characterized by wisdom and justice, as well as a concern for the wellbeing, stability and advancement of his people.

Also voicing condolences was Egypt's representative, speaking for the Arab Group, who noted that everyone - nationally and internationally - knew the Amir as a noble gentleman who defended just causes - particularly that of Palestinians.

"No one can ignore his nobility and his wisdom," he said, recalling that, under the Amir's reign, Kuwait's commitment to multilateralism to achieve the goals of the UN Charter - even amid unprecedented challenges - was evident.

Other speakers also noted the Amir's legacy, spotlighting his contributions both at home and abroad and expressing condolences to his successor, family, country and people.

These included the representatives of Turkmenistan, speaking for Asia and Pacific States; Zambia, speaking

for African States; Sweden, for Western European and Other States; and the United States.

Thanking today's speakers for their sincere words and condolences, Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Tareq Albannai said that history books will "faithfully pay tribute to the memory of a just leader whose name and reign have been testimony to everything that is noble."

The Amir loved his people - and was loved by them - and when asked what his weakness was, answered that he was weak when he saw an old person asking for help or a sick child suffering.

History honors those who spend their lives serving people, he said, paying tribute to the Amir's memory and congratulating his successor.

"Kuwait will remain as you know it," he added - an active member of the United Nations and a defender of its noble mission of peace, tolerance and justice.

# diwaniya كيوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

## 'Elderly retirees feeling marginalized from right of securing beneficial loan'

"PROFOUND frustration looms among our esteemed elderly retirees, aged 70 and above, in our honorable country as they find themselves excluded and marginalized from the privilege of securing a beneficial loan, a right enjoyed by their counterparts," columnist **Abdullah Saud Al-Subaie**, wrote for **Al-Anba** daily.

"The lack of a logical justification or objective argument for this discrimination raises questions about the differential treatment of a segment that has dutifully served the country for decades in their advanced age.

"While many of our fellow citizens in the National Assembly advocate for improved financial well-being for retirees, addressing their needs in healthcare, social support, sports facilities, and psychological attention, the elderly retirees, myself included, have encountered disappointment when informed that good loans are restricted to those below the age of seventy.

"This restriction is perplexing and raises concerns. Are there distinctions among retirees based on age? Aren't they all covered under the umbrella of "social insurance"? Why are they deprived of this right while others enjoy it, especially when retirement salaries are distributed equally regardless of age or length of service?"

"The majority of elderly retirees face challenges due to this limitation, and they hope for a reconsideration of the approach to retirees as a unified group. They place their trust in their brethren, the representatives of the National Assembly, and officials in social insurance to bring about fairness and alleviate their struggles.

"Numerous retirees over the age of seventy require financial assistance for various life events such as weddings, home renovations, or basic needs.

"Without the support of the Social Security Corporation, how can they manage these expenses? In our benevolent state, we appeal for compassion towards this segment, which poses no burden to the government. We implore an end to the discrimination among retirees regarding access to good loans and other benefits.

"The retirement funds are securely stored in the insurance institution, and there should be no cause for concern. Granting a good loan to a seventy-year-old or older individual would serve as a lifeline, aiding them in navigating the challenges of living, rising prices, and family obligations.

"In conclusion, we earnestly hope that the esteemed Minister of Finance will ensure that these guidelines are formulated with kindness and sensitivity towards elderly retirees. May their equality be acknowledged, building upon recent positive initiatives in favor of retirees."

### Also:

"On the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3rd, Dar Al Othman extended honors to a group of students who emerged victorious in the sixth Holy Quran Memorization Competition for individuals with special needs, established by Mabarat Al Mumaytazin," columnist **Adnan Abdullah Al-Othman** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"The competition, held under the supervision of the Zakat House and in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, involved the participation of 1,000 male and female students from the Ministry of Special Education.

"Recalling a poignant trip to Morocco in 2015 to honor students with special needs and sponsored orphan children, the writer reflects on the exceptional determination and dedication displayed by these students despite their health challenges and disabilities. The article emphasizes the excellence witnessed during that trip, where students with various disabilities insisted on memorizing and contemplating the Quran.

"The competition initiated by the late Abdullah Abdul Latif Al Othman was inspired by this trip, aiming to support and encourage individuals from the category of people with determination to memorize the Quran. Each year, winners of the competition are honored, contributing to the enhancement of a competitive spirit and honorable faith among students.

"The competition is hailed as a successful and purposeful program stemming from the charitable work of the late Abdullah Abdul Latif Al Othman, who dedicated a third of his wealth to philanthropic causes. The writer expresses pride in the winning children, applauds their dedicated parents, and extends gratitude to sponsors and partners involved in the charitable initiatives.

"In conclusion, sincere thanks are extended to the ceremony's sponsor, Eng Hamad Abdul Latif Al-Barjas, Acting Director of the General Authority for Minors Affairs and Chairman of the Committee of Guardians. Recognition is also given to Nour Abdullah Al Othman, Dean of the Al Othman Family, the Guardians Committee, Zakat House, and the dedicated staff in the charitable sector of the Al-Othman family."

"The pure soil of Kuwait ... The people of Kuwait soaked this soil with their sweat and blood for generations, until Kuwait became the pride of the Gulf. God

willing, it will remain so as long as life continues," columnist **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Today, the 'Tharana-our' soil embraces another stature of Kuwaiti Amirs and symbols. It embraces the ascetic worshiper, the generous and kind Amir -- Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, just as it embraced his great ancestors, Amirs who succeeded in ruling Kuwait. Each one of them who assumed the rule of the emirate and the rule of Kuwait competed with the one before him, and embarrassed the one after him in serving Kuwait and its people.

"The loyal people of Kuwait rallied around their Amir, exchanging love with him, offering loyalty, listening to and obeying him. All these came from sincere hearts that believe in Allah Almighty, then in their homeland and its historical leadership, bidding farewell to those who left with prayers and tears, while welcoming with optimism those who come and they renew the pledge of absolute loyalty.

"We neither flatter nor exaggerate if we say that Kuwait means to us the ruling family -- the honorable Sabah Family. For us, they are Kuwait, the homeland. Our loyalty to Kuwait is our loyalty to the ruling family, without the slightest doubt. This is what we learned and demonstrated. This is the legacy of our ancestors who taught us that Kuwait is the ruling family and loyalty is an indivisible whole. There is no loyalty to one country and another loyalty to a ruler or president. Such specificity is found only in this country.

"An Amir has departed, a new Amir has been called, not a single soldier took to the street to impose security, nothing happened to disturb the peace of life and citizens were not asked to remain in their homes under the pretext of what is called 'curfew'. This is Kuwait Al-Sabah for those who do not know it. This is the peculiarity of Kuwait that has been distinguished since its inception. God willing, it will continue as long as life continues.

"A smooth transfer of power supported by the loyalty of every citizen -- young or old, unchangeable and unwavering, with firm roots in the richness of this nation. Praise Allah for the blessing of Kuwait. Praise Allah for the blessings of security, safety and well-being. May Allah protect Kuwait, its rulers and its people from all forms of evil and harm. Glory be to your Lord, Lord of glory above what they described."

"The cycle of seasons throughout the year, and autumn maintains its elevated status, both spiritually and aesthetically. As one eloquently put it, "The symphony of autumnal color is a treasure emerging from the heart of legend, with tree leaves dancing to its tones on their journey to a new world," columnist **Suad Fahd Al-Mojil** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"The myths from various cultures have woven intricate tales about autumn, with one of the most renowned being the Greek myth of Persephone. Hades abducts the beautiful Persephone, taking her to the underworld and making her its queen. Demeter, Persephone's mother, mourns her daughter's absence, causing the once green lands of summer to turn barren, except for the beautiful golden leaves. In a compromise between Zeus and Hades, Persephone splits her time between the underworld and the upper world, marking the fall and spring seasons.

"In Mayan civilization, the arrival of autumn is celebrated with the dance of the winged serpent, symbolizing the serpent's descent from the sky. Temples are designed to mimic the shadow of a moving serpent when sunlight reflects on their steps. According to Mayan legend, the winged serpent visits Earth twice a year, blessing it with fertility before descending into the underworld.

"Buddhists commemorate the autumn equinox by visiting the graves of ancestors, reflecting on those who have passed away, and celebrating the crossing of the legendary river, believed to separate upper and lower life.

"Amidst the many legends of autumn, the season's scent, colors, madness, and whimsy continue to inspire artists, thinkers, and spiritualists.

"For many, autumn brings the promise of stillness, psychological tranquility, and inner retreat, where wisdom and connection with the soul's underworld reside. It is a season of giving, creation, and fruitful creativity, contrasting with the bustling soul of the upper world or the summer season that often overlooks the dormant creativity within the human soul, found in the autumn of the spirit.

"Common to these myths is the depiction of two worlds -- the lower and the upper -- intertwined with stories of love, passion, and revenge. Whether it's Dumuzi and Inanna in Sumerian myth or Gibrán Khalil Gibrán's stories of autumn, these tales capture the essence of the season, where falling leaves symbolize a transition from noise and scattering dreams to a peaceful slumber on the ground.

PS: "Sincere condolences to Kuwait and the Al-Sabah family on the death of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah - may God have mercy on him."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

## Jordan plants 100 trees to mourn the late Amir

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21:** In a scene that reflects the feelings of brotherhood and loyalty to HH the late Amir of the State of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, some Jordanian groups took the initiative to plant 100 trees as a way of mourning the passing of His Highness the late Amir, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

Al-Hussein Youth City, which is at the center of the Jordanian capital -- Amman, has adopted the humanitarian initiative organized by the Office of the International Islamic Charitable Organization in Jordan, in cooperation with the Arab Society for the Conservation of Nature and with the participation of representatives of 12 accredited charitable societies.

The participants recalled the humanitarian and national roles played by HH the late Amir, as well as his commitment to strengthen relations with Jordan.

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## KOC stands out in operation, maintenance deals

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21:** The total operating and maintenance contracts in the oil sector amounted to 745.4 million dinars during the fiscal year 2022/2023, a decrease of 18.6% from the budget estimate of 915.8 million dinars, which is equivalent to 170.4 million dinars, according to the data made available, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

The data showed that the Kuwait Oil Company accounts for the largest share of operation and maintenance contracts, as their total actually reaches during the company's 2022/2023 fiscal year. 506 million dinars, compared to an estimated amount of 604.9 million dinars.

As for Kuwait National Petroleum

Company, its operating contracts amount to 155.9 million dinars, and the value of 59.4 million dinars with the Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC), 5.5 million dinars; Kuwait Oil Tanker Company, 7.3 million dinars, Petrochemical Industries Company 11.3 million dinars.

## Loses \$20 billion in one year from December '22 to December '23

# Kuwait projects market continues its long-term decline: MEED

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: The project market in Kuwait continued its long-term decline, losing \$20 billion, or 10.2% of its total value, in one year (from December 3, 2022 to December 1, 2023), noting that it recorded \$178 billion in the month of December, according to data related to the Med Projects Index, reports Al-Qabas daily.

MEED reported that the region's project market expanded at its fastest rate ever over the past year, with the value of the entire market growing by 21.4% to reach more than \$3.76 trillion, while the GCC market expanded by 26% to reach \$3.16 trillion.

This significant rise this year was driven by growth in most markets,

but led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which achieved growth of more than 31%, adding more than \$590 billion in value between them.

Saudi Arabia, the largest project market, added a value of \$425 billion, as activity was driven by a combination of expansion in the oil and gas business and pipeline from mega projects linked to Vi-

sion 2030. The project market in the UAE also expanded by \$165 billion; a rise in activity led by projects. Important new oil and gas and real estate market recovery and related activities.

The next most improved market was Oman, which grew by just under 30% and added \$51 billion in project value, driven by the launch

of plans for multi-billion-dollar hydropower projects in the Sultanate. The Omani projects market also outperformed the Qatari market in terms of the total value of active projects.

Qatar's project market grew by nearly 10%, adding value of \$19 billion in a sign that activity in the country is rebounding from a lull in project activity in the run-up to the

2022 FIFA World Cup. The Bahraini project market added \$10.5 billion. The value is approximately 17%.

Outside the Gulf states, the Iraqi project market grew by 7.5%, adding a value of \$22.6 billion. The Iranian project market, still affected by US sanctions, fell by 4.4%, losing nearly \$13 billion in value.

## Kuwait remains

### Continued from Page 1

The JN.1 variant shares similarities with previous Omicron strains in terms of high transmissibility and mild symptoms.

Informed sources from the health sector affirmed that no cases of the new COVID-19 variant has been detected in Kuwait, and that the epidemiological situation in Kuwait is stable currently. This is despite the warnings from the consultant of internal disease, gastroenterology, liver diseases and endoscopy Dr Fahad Al-Najjar about the growing number of COVID-19 cases and related death cases in some countries

Elsewhere, the Public Health Authority of Saudi Arabia has announced the rapid spread of the new COVID-19 variant called JN.1 in Saudi Arabia.

It is worth highlighting that the Saudi Public Health Authority (Weqaya) recently announced the increase in the number of JN.1 cases, which reached 36 percent.

On its X account, the authority explained that none of the reported cases required admission in the intensive care units, adding that the vaccine for COVID-19 works on JN.1 variant also.

It stressed that there is no cause for worry and no need to implement any strict measures. It also urged the public to ignore the rumors about the possibility of a new epidemic, and called on everyone to seek information from accredited sources only.

## Parliamentary

### Continued from Page 1

Regulatory Authority (CITRA) attended the meeting.

Meanwhile, MPs Adel Al-Damkhi and Shuaib Shaaban have submitted a proposal to allow civilians who applied as non-ranking officers at Kuwait Army and obtained higher studies certificates from Kuwait University or accredited universities to enroll in the academy for non-ranking officers in order to be appointed as staff sergeants.

On the other hand, MP Fahd Al-Masoud forwarded queries to Minister of Justice and State Minister for Housing Affairs Faleh Al-Raqaba about the number of reports on financial and administrative violations submitted to Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) in the last few years, number of cases referred to the Public Prosecution, steps that Nazaha has taken regarding these cases, and list of training courses that Nazaha organized to raise awareness on combating corruption in public institutions.

The lawmaker also asked Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and acting Minister of Public Works Jassem Al-Ostad if the Ministry of Public Works has a plan to maintain the roads throughout the country. If yes, he wants to know the date of implementation, duration and total cost. He requested for copies of the relevant contracts, plan B if any, and regular road maintenance reports including the dates and road number.

MP Mehalhal Al-Mudhaf asked Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of State for National Assembly and Cabinet Affairs Essa Al-Kandari about the decisions on the secondment and reshuffling of consultants and lawyers in public institutions including those who were seconded more than once and the institutions where they were seconded from Jan 1, 2018 till date; amount of allowances and other privileges granted to them; and number of seconded officials from June 31, 2023 till date including the institutions that requested their services and their secondment term.

Al-Mudhaf also asked Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah about the number of employees representing the ministry at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), subscription fees that the country pays to UNESCO, events and activities that the organization held in coordination with Kuwait this year, copy of the latest statistics issued by UNESCO on the number of children deprived of education in the country, ranking of Kuwait in the relevant index, if Kuwait joined the educational cities project, reasons if the answer is 'no', number of monuments recorded by UNESCO, if Kuwait requested the addition of new sites to the record, rank of Kuwait in the relevant index, and strategy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on increasing the number of Kuwaiti monuments registered in UNESCO. He forwarded the same queries to Minister of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research Adel Al-Manea and Minister of Information, Endowments and Islamic Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi

MP Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi asked Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of State for National Assembly and Cabinet Affairs Essa Al-Kandari about the dates for completing the study of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) on the establishment of the governmental training center, revision of the study by the Legal Advice and Legislation Department, approval of the study and referral of the relevant decree to the Council of Ministers, if the draft of the

study includes the amendment of the CSC decree or it will be totally new.

MP Muhammad Al-Mahan asked Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and acting Minister of Public Works Jassem Al-Ostad about the criteria and regulations adopted by the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy for the promotion of employees; number of supervisory positions filled from Jan 1, 2021 till date including the names, qualifications and experience of the promoted employees; number of vacancies that have yet to be filled and reasons for not filling them up; number of complaints filed by employees contesting promotion decisions; and measures taken to address these complaints.

MP Meteb Ayed Al-Anzi asked Al Ostad about the number of employees appointed at the Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) from June 1, 2023 till date including their names, job titles and qualifications.

MP Abdulhadi Al-Ajmi asked Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil and State Minister for Economic and Investment Affairs Saad Al-Barak about the number of non-Kuwaiti employees at the Wafra joint oilfields, reasons for appointing them despite the availability of qualified nationals, allowances and privileges granted to these expatriate employees, if it is true that the allowances of their Kuwaiti colleagues have been reduced, and training courses organized by Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (KGOC) for its Kuwaiti employees.

MP Khalid Al-Otaibi asked Minister of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research Adel Al-Manea about the number of schools that were closed after discovering their buildings are unsafe, if the plan adopted by the ministry in the last 20 years included a strategy for the renovation of closed schools, budget allocated for the renovation of schools that were closed for more than 10 years, and amount of budget increase for this purpose in the last fiscal year compared to the preceding year.

## Ministry of

### Continued from Page 1

He added, "Kuwait has made huge leaps on the path to renaissance through giant development projects in various fields, but it needs more and more. This will only be achieved by standing united behind our wise leadership and making more efforts and sacrifices."

Also, the Assistant Undersecretary for the Maintenance Engineering Sector in the Ministry of Public Works Eng. Asaad Al-Enezi congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of assuming the reins of government.

He prayed that Almighty Allah will grant him success, care for him, and guide his steps in the interest of Kuwait and its honorable people.

Al-Enezi said, "In this regard, we can only pledge to His Highness to listen, obey, and redouble our efforts in order to achieve the desired development goals. We have come a long way but more efforts and giving are required from us. We must stand behind the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir, who is keen to support and assist all the tireless development efforts that we have achieved, which will make Kuwait a global financial and commercial center."

In addition, the Assistant Undersecretary for the Sanitary Engineering Sector in the Ministry of Public Works Eng. Abdul Rahman Al-Enezi congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of assuming the reins of power.

He wished His Highness continued success and progress for the good of the country and the people.

In a press statement, Al-Enezi said, "His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad's assumption of the reins of power is a source of happiness and reassurance for all the Kuwaiti people because of the great position they hold in their hearts. He is truly the best successor to the best predecessor.

His Highness also has extensive experience and capabilities that enable him to lead the ship of Kuwait during the next stage. The country and the people are in need of a leader at this stage with the skill and wisdom of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad, who confirms day after day that the source of leadership in the honorable Al-Sabah family is never exhausted.

We say to His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad that we are the sons of the Kuwaiti people and we are behind your wise leadership, united in facing all challenges, until we achieve for Kuwait the growth, progress, prosperity, and development it aspires to.

This is especially since we have all come a long way on this path. In the next stage, we need more stability at the hands of His Highness so that Kuwait returns to its position as the "Pearl of the Gulf and the icon of modernity and contemporaneity" with its enormous material and human resources that are rarely available to any other country.

His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad's assumption of power has

created a state of optimism and hope among the Kuwaiti people who aspire to place their country in a leadership position under his wise and rational leadership of the country.

Perhaps his management of the state in recent years is the best evidence of his insightful vision and conscious, enlightened thought.

Therefore, we pray to Almighty Allah to grant His Highness success in what he loves and is pleased with, and to guide his steps on the path of truth for the benefit of the country and the people."

## World lauds

### Continued from Page 1

We ask Almighty Allah to preserve Kuwait and its people under the leadership of His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and to grant His Highness a long and comfortable life, abundant health, and continued well-being to complete the process of construction and renaissance that the rulers of the State of Kuwait from the honorable ruling family began. If these can be achieved during the reign of His Highness, all the hopes and aspirations of the Kuwaiti people would be fulfilled."

Meanwhile, Head of the Zain Center and Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Center for Ear, Nose, and Throat surgeries Dr. Mutlaq Al-Sihan congratulated His Highness the Amir of the country for assuming the reins of power.

He urged His Highness the Amir to continue leading the good, reconstruction, growth and development of the country, succeeding his honorable predecessors, and completing his great contributions in making its history, building its glory, raising its flag, and strengthening its position among the nations.

Dr. Al-Sihan congratulated His Highness and called on him to continue the process of development, prosperity and construction for the citizens with confident steps and optimism towards the future in order to achieve the requirements of Kuwait and its people.

He said, "Since he accompanied his brothers who were the former rulers of Kuwait, he got leadership experience in managing the country's affairs internally and externally. This confirms that His Highness the Amir of the country Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is the best successor to the best predecessor."

Also, the Director of the School Health Department Dr. Wafa Al-Kandari extended her warmest congratulations to His Highness the Amir of the country, affirming her complete confidence in his wisdom and wise leadership and his insightful vision to continue the process of taking the country to safety in light of the great circumstances and challenges that the country is going through at all local, regional and international levels.

In a press statement, she said, "We are happy with His Highness, who was known for his love for the people of Kuwait and his moderation and balance in dealing with matters."

Therefore, we are confident in the wisdom of His Highness and his ability to carry the banner and continue the path of greatness and loyalty in serving Kuwait and its people. We ask Almighty Allah to guide his steps and maintain security and safety in Kuwait."

Furthermore, the Cardiovascular Diseases Consultant at the Ministry of Health Dr. Farida Al-Habib extended sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir of the country for assuming the reins of government in succession of his honorable predecessors.

She said, "Dear God, our dear Kuwait is in safe hands, and the light of its renaissance path shines from the words of His Highness the Amir of the country. May You protect him, nurture him, and help him in every step inside and outside Kuwait."

In addition, Dr. Khalil Abdullah Al-Awadhi, Consultant in Kidney and Urinary Tract Surgery, extended congratulations to the shrine of His Highness the Amir of the country.

Praising his speech on Wednesday, Dr. Al-Awadhi said, "His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah gave a clear-cut and sublime speech in which he touched on the sites of the citizens' wounds and the nation's defects. We are in a new era in the history of Kuwait. So beware to anyone who seeks to harm Kuwait and its people, and whoever sees himself above the law.

We ask Almighty Allah to make His Highness pillar of justice, equality and prosperity to prevail in Kuwait, and to illuminate for us a path in which Kuwait becomes happy and important among the countries of the world. Thank you from the heart, Your Highness. May Allah honor you and humiliate those who are hostile to you."

He concluded by praying for His Highness the Amir, "O Allah, grant him success in all good things, bless him in every moment of his time, and make all of that what pleases You. Help him, empower him, and provide him with a good family. Repel evil deeds through him, and turn away from him the machinations of the schemers and the deception of the plotters. Make him a source of honor for Islam and the Muslims, and preserve him with your protection and care."

# PAHW to float two tenders for over 13K plots in S. Jaber Al-Ahmad City

Authority sets Dec 24 as date for floating bids

By Abdul Nasser Al-Aslami

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) announced the approval of the tender committee to issue two tenders for the construction, completion and maintenance of road works and infrastructure networks for 13,812 plots in the South Jaber Al-Ahmad Residential City project.**

In a press statement, the Deputy Director General for Control and Information Systems Affairs Amina Abdul Kareem Al-Awadhi revealed that PAHW has sent December 24, 2023 as the date for floating the two tenders.

She explained that the first tender is related to the construction, completion and maintenance of road works and infrastructure networks for 7,623 housing units located in the N5, N7, N9 and N10 suburbs.

The second tender is related to the construction, completion and maintenance of road works and infrastructure networks for 6,189 housing units located in the N4, N6, and N8 suburbs.

Al-Awadhi revealed that the closing date for the two tenders will be February 1, 2024, and the project implementation period is scheduled to be 900 days for each tender.

She went on to explain that the work of the two tenders will include the establishment of networks for rainwater, sewage, irrigation, treated water, fresh water, telephone lines, electricity and traffic works. It will also include application of three layers of asphalt on all the main roads in the project, installation of 15 irrigation tankers and construction of 600 electrical substations.

## Morocco

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Wednesday a cable of congratulations from Moroccan King, Mohammed VI, on occasion of office assumption.

King Mohammed wished His Highness the Amir all success in his endeavors and affirmed keenness on furthering cooperation between the two nations, while also wishing the Amir everlasting health.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal sent a cable in response to the King's kind sentiments, wishing him good health and wellbeing.

## UAE

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Thursday a cable of congratulations from President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, on his inauguration, wishing His Highness the Amir good health and all success in his reign.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal sent a cable in response to the UAE President, expressing sincere appreciations for his kind sentiments, wishing him good health and wellbeing and further progress and prosperity for his country under his wise leadership.

## Kuwait affirms

### Continued from Page 1

On her part, Assistant Secretary General and President of Social Affairs in the Arab League Haifa Abu Ghazala started her speech by expressing her condolences to Kuwait over the passing of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and wishing His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah success and prosperity.

She also said that the world is witnessing a human tragedy that would be printed in history and people's memories due to the vicious crimes of the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian people.

Abu Ghazala suggested forming an emergency committee in the Council of Ministers of Social Affairs that would make immediate and necessary decisions in the social and humanitarian fields, and that the council remains ongoing until the situation in Gaza stabilizes.

She expressed confidence that these difficult times will not stop the Council from continuing its work to promote joint Arab social development work in various social fields.



Al-Jarida photo

Two of the suspects with the contraband.

## 23 drugs pushers, addicts arrested

The Ministry of Interior in a swoop on drug addicts and peddlers has arrested 23 people in 19 cases and seized from them 27 kilograms of drugs, money and firearms, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The General Department of Narcotics Control said the people are of different nationalities and the drugs seized from them include shabu, hashish, chemical, mari-

juana and heroin and 24 thousand pills of various psychotropic substances, 25 marijuana seedlings, firearms, and ammunition in addition to an unidentified sum of money, believed to be proceeds from the sale of drugs.

During interrogation they admitted that the seized drugs belonged to them and confessed to consuming and trafficking in drugs.

## 'We always remember his closeness'

# Academicians mourn late Amir

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: A number of academicians expressed their sincere condolences on the death of His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah have mercy on him; recalling a number of his virtues and good qualities, in addition to his being a wise political man and a great leader of his country as he had many achievements at the local, regional and global levels, reports Al-Anba daily.

They highlighted how close His Highness the late Amir was to his people, as he always made sure to be present in their happy and sad occasions, congratulating them on their joys and sharing their sorrows. He loved his people, meeting them on many occasions and exchanging friendly conversations with them, just as a father talks to his children. They described him as the Amir of humility, forgiveness, love, mercy, peace and justice.

President of the Founding Council of Abdullah Al-Salem University Dr Moody Al-Hamoud told the daily: "In my name and in the name of the family of Abdullah Al-Salem University, all members of the Founding Council, professors, students and administrators; I extend my deepest condolences to all the people of Kuwait and to the honorable Al-Sabah Family on the death of HH the late Amir and our father Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah bless him with His vast mercy and grant him a spacious place in Paradise. The ascetic Amir was righteous to his country, was always concerned about the well-being of his people, and was keen on building communication and brotherhood bridges with other Gulf states and the Arab region."

Al-Hamoud spotlighted His Highness the Amir's commitment to improve the reputation of Kuwait at the international level. He recalled His Highness' stances in serving Kuwait since he was a Crown Prince until he became the Amir. "We always remember his closeness to the Kuwaiti people," he added.

Academic and political researcher Dr Ayed Al-Manna implored Allah to reward Kuwait, the Al-Sabah family, and the entire Arab nation; stressing His Highness the late Amir was a good man with good morals, polite, pious and pure. "The death of His Highness is a great loss for Kuwait, the region in general, and the humanitarian field, but this is his destiny and Allah's will. We ask Allah Almighty to have mercy on the deceased and to put him in His spacious Paradise," he asserted.

Al-Manna stated that His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, may Allah have mercy on him, ruled for a short period, yet he was known for adhering to the law and Constitution, and he worked hard to strengthen national unity. "He was

the Amir of pardon who overlooked some matters and rulings against politicians, tweeters and transgressors. He granted amnesty to many of them. He eased the burden of separation on several Kuwaiti families and restored unity of the people of the country by allowing those who left to return to the homeland, as well as those who were sentenced to imprisonment to leave prisons. He had a great paternal sense."

He affirmed: "We are also certain that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah will be the best successor to the best predecessor. He will lead the Kuwait ship toward safety, development, security and stability. He will protect it from any external dangers. He will forge fruitful cooperation with Gulf and Arab countries, and support just Arab causes."

Political Science Professor at Kuwait University Dr Haila Al-Mukaimi stressed: "We console ourselves on the death of His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Oh Allah, send him to the blessed house. Kuwait bid farewell to its Amir, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, may God grant rest to his soul. He left an indelible mark on many State institutions throughout his path of giving until he was crowned Amir. He was known for his generosity and tolerance until he became known as the Amir of Pardon."

Assistant Dean for Student Affairs at the Deanship of Student Affairs at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) Dr Yousef MUSAAD Al-Anazi offered his sincere condolences and sympathy to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah protect and preserve him; and to the Al-Sabah Family, people of Kuwait, and all Arab and Islamic peoples on the passing of HH the late Amir of Pardon and Humility, may Allah have mercy on him.

Acting Director of the Center for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies at Kuwait University and a member of the teaching staff at the College of Social Sciences in the same university Dr Yacoub Al-Kandari offered his sincere condolences to the Al-Sabah Family, the Kuwaiti people, and the Arab and Islamic nations.

He said: "Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad remains a national figure who entered the heart of every Kuwaiti. We felt deep sadness and pain over his death. He was one of the personalities known for many distinctive qualities as the ruler of Kuwait. All of us know and remember how he used to go to the mosque alone... without guards. He was close to his people in good and bad times. He was famous for his morals, justice, tolerance, kindness and generosity."

Head and members look forward to continued progress under new leadership

Municipal Council extends heartfelt congratulations to His Highness the Amir

By Inass Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: Head and members of the Municipal Council extended sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of him assuming the reins of government in the country. They praised his previous sincere efforts in managing the country's affairs, and wished him more success and progress in his next task.

In this regard, Head of the Municipal Council Abdullah Al-Mahri said, "We congratulate His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of him taking the constitutional oath and assuming the reins of government. We ask Almighty Allah to provide him with assistance and success in continuing the path of those who came before him for the good of Kuwait and its people."

Honored

Meanwhile, the Deputy Chairman of the Municipal Council Khaled Al-Mutairi said, "His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the country, I am honored to extend to your high office the most sincere expressions of congratulations and blessings on the occasion of your Highness assuming the helm of the emirate and the reins of government in the country."

"I ask Allah the Almighty to preserve you as a leader, an asset to our dear homeland, and a father and support for its loyal people.

"Over the past three years, Your Highness was the solid supporter and faithful advisor to the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah during the times that called for it.

"You carried by his side the burdens of that great responsibility to meet the aspirations and hopes of the nation and citizens, paint a bright picture for the future, and give priority to the supreme national interest.

"In conclusion, we ask the

Almighty that our dear homeland will achieve comprehensive development achievements in various areas and fields during your auspicious reign with the help of Allah Almighty, and then your rational policy, sound vision, and ambitious aspirations, so that our beloved Kuwait will move forward with steady and promising steps towards further development, progress and prosperity.

"May Your Highness enjoy abundant health and wellness. May you be preserved as a wise leader and shepherd of the development renaissance process, which is full of achievements that raise the status of the nation and elevate it.

"We renew our pledge, Your Highness, to continue working with sincere loyalty and giving behind your wise leadership for the sake of elevating our dear homeland and elevating its status and the dignity of its honorable people."

Furthermore, a member of the Municipal Council, Nassar Al-Muhaini Al-Azmi said, "I extend my warmest congratulations to our Amir and father, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He is truly the best successor to the best predecessor. O Allah, grant him success in all the good things and grant him a good and advising family, O Lord of the Worlds."

Another member of the Municipal Council Dr. Hassan Kamal extended his sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir of the country Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

He asked the Almighty Allah to grant His Highness good health and well-being and to inspire him to succeed and advance what is best for Kuwait and achieve its elevation and prosperity. He also asked Allah to make His Highness the best successor to the best predecessor, a wise leader and a pioneer to complete the process of renaissance and development and realize more achievements and progress for Kuwait under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir.

Kuwaitis spend 3.53 bln dinars on travel in 9 months this year

Q3 2023 sees 13.92% surge over previous quarter

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: The spending by Kuwaitis on travel in the third quarter of this year increased by about 13.92 percent compared to the second quarter of the same year, reaching 1.157 billion dinars compared to 1.016 billion in the previous three months from April to June.

According to balance of payments data issued by the Central Bank of Kuwait, spending on travel in the third quarter of 2023 recorded an increase of about 1.57 percent over its level in the same quarter of last year, which amounted to about 1.139 billion dinars, while Kuwaitis spent about 3.534 billion dinars on travel during the nine months.

The first months of this year, an increase of 13.65 percent compared to their spending during the corresponding period in 2022, amounting to about 3.112 billion.

Central Bank data showed that remittances from expatriates abroad during the third quarter of this year amounted to 867.7 million dinars, down by about 2.74 percent from their value in the second quarter, which amounted to 892.1 million, while they recorded a decline of about 31.46 percent compared to their value in the third quarter of the last year, amounting to 1.266 billion.

Remittances

As for the nine-month period, expatriate remittances during the period from January to September of this year recorded about 2.98 billion dinars, down by about 29.67 percent from their level in the first nine months of last year, which amounted to about 4.24 billion dinars.

The data revealed that the current account, which shows the summary of receipts and payments between the local economy and other economies with regard to transactions of goods, services and income, recorded a surplus during the third quarter of the current year amounting to about 4.72 billion dinars, bringing the total surplus achieved during the first nine months of the year. This year, about 12.22 billion dinars.

According to the data, the current account surplus decreased in the third quarter of 2023 by about 11.2 percent from its level in the same quarter of last year, amounting to 5.32 billion dinars, and it also declined during the first nine months of the current year by about 16.6 percent from its level in the corresponding period of 2022, amounting to about 14.66 billion dinars.

The value of Kuwait's merchandise exports during the third quarter of 2023 amounted to about 6.77 billion dinars, down by about 16.9 percent from their value in the second quarter of this year, which amounted to 8.15 billion dinars, while the value of merchandise exports during the period from January to September of the current year amounted to 19.52 billion dinars, down 18.6 percent from its level in the same period last year, amounting to 23.98 billion.

The value of Kuwait's oil exports during the months of July, August and September of this year reached approximately 6.28 billion dinars, declining by about 17 percent from their value in the same period in 2022, which amounted to about 7.57 billion, while the value of oil exports recorded a decline of about 19.6 percent during the nine months. The first of 2023 to reach 18.06 billion dinars, compared to about 22.46 billion in the same period of 2022.

The value of Kuwait's merchandise imports witnessed an increase in the third quarter of 2023 by about 15.8 percent to reach about 2.41 billion dinars, compared to 2.08 billion in the same quarter of last year, while the value of merchandise imports recorded an increase of about 15.5 percent



More than 129,000 thousand male and female students in the middle school and the tenth and eleventh grades begin the first semester exams.

Photos by Mahmoud Jadeed

Committees focus on fairness and discipline

Students kick off first semester exams

By Abdul Rahman Al-Shammari  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: Examinations for the first semester of the 2023/2024 academic year began for the intermediate level and the tenth and eleventh grades of the secondary level in both scientific and literary sections, for a total of 193,186 male and female students.

Yesterday morning, 129,503 students of intermediate schools from grades six to nine sat for the transfer tests.

A total of 63,683 male and female students in the tenth and eleventh grades in the scientific and literary sections applied for the exams. The number of tenth grade male and female students was 33,430, and the number of eleventh grade male and female students was 30,253.

The tenth grade students sat for the Biology test, and the eleventh grade science students sat for the Geology test. The literary students sat for the French language test, and the intermediate level students took their standard-

ized tests at the level of educational zones and private Arab schools. The testing committees witnessed the implementation of procedures to control the exam process and prevent cheating.

According to educational sources, instructions were issued to all heads of examination committees to avoid arbitrarily applying the cheating regulations or restricting students in a disruptive and confusing manner that may confuse students inside the examination halls, and to deal in accordance with the regulations and in a calm and smooth manner without affecting the students' concentration and the work of the committees.

Deficiencies

Inspection tours were carried out yesterday morning by a number of the ministry's leaders to check on the course of work of the examination committees and their discipline, record their observations, and address any deficiencies that may arise in terms of the examination questions or the work of observers in the committees.

Banks announce year-end closure from Dec 31-Jan 2

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: Director for Public Relations and Corporate Communications at Kuwait Banking Association Sheikh Al-Issa has announced that the New Year holidays for banks will be from Dec 31, 2023 to Jan 1, 2024, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a press statement, Al-Issa revealed that in coordination with the Central Bank of Kuwait, local banks will suspend their operations on Dec 31, 2023 as a rest day while Jan 1, 2024 is the official holiday; hence, the official working hours will resume on Jan 2, 2024.

She added the association congratulates His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the honorable Kuwaiti people and the banking sector employees, wishing them good health, wellness, success and prosperity.

during the first nine months of this year to reach About 7.54 billion dinars, compared to 6.53 billion in the same period last year.

Saudi Arabia officially designates yr 2024 as the 'Year of the Camel'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: The Saudi Council of Ministers, in a session chaired by King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, has officially designated the year 2024 as the 'Year of the Camel', reports Al-Jarida.

This decision underscores the Kingdom's commitment to caring for and advancing the camel sector, fostering investment opportunities, and promoting cultural and civilizational heritage.

The Ministry of Culture will oversee the "Year of the Camel 2024," implementing various initiatives and programs in collaboration with partners to emphasize the significance of camels and their connection to the Saudi identity. This initiative aims to enhance national efforts

in developing the camel sector and increasing its contribution to overall national development.

For the past four years, the Saudi Ministry of Culture has dedicated each year to celebrating a distinct Arab value or symbol, recognizing its influence and importance in the Arab cultural fabric and its contributions to human civilization.

The series began with the Arabic letter in 2021, highlighting its historical and aesthetic significance. In 2022, Saudi Coffee was celebrated, followed by Arabic Poetry in 2023. The naming of the "Year of the Camel" further reflects the Kingdom's commitment to preserving and promoting cultural elements that contribute to its rich heritage.

Arab Center's Board of Trustees deliberates future programs

GCC Center explores cutting-edge policies for AI integration in education

DOHA, Dec 21, (KUNA): A center affiliated with the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council engaged in discussions regarding the formulation of a policy framework for the integration of artificial intelligence in the realm of education. The primary objective is to establish comprehensive plans aimed at advancing the educational initiatives within member states based on sound scientific principles. This discourse unfolded during the 37th session of the Board of Trustees of the Arab Center for Educational Research for the Gulf States, hosted in the Qatari capital, Doha.

Dr. Muhammad Al-Sharika, the director of the center, conveyed to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that meeting participants proposed key themes for the center's future programs. These include topics such as risk management in education, the development of a policy framework for the application of artificial intelligence in education, instilling a culture of academic integrity among school students, and training specialists in member states in curriculum development and educational policy-making.

Dr. Al-Sharika further noted that attendees recommended conducting additional research on the relative weight of academic subjects, motivating teachers to engage in procedural research at the school level, and instituting an award at the level of member states focused on this subject. Emphasizing the pivotal role of the Arab Center for Educational Research for the Gulf States,



Gulf Cooperation Council charts a course for AI integration in education at 37th Board of Trustees session.

KUNA photo

he highlighted its contribution to shaping educational policies essential for the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, particularly in light of the significance of scientific research in advancing the educational and pedagogical processes.

The meeting's agenda covered various topics, including monitoring the implementation of recommendations from the 36th session, reviewing progress reports on the Center's programs for the financial cycle (2023-2024), encompassing 11 programs, seven studies, four reference manuals, and a training package. Additionally, the Council assessed reports on the Center's activities outside the approved plan and acknowledged the release of publications, including the third issue of the sixth volume of the magazine "Educational Futures" titled "Students' Mental Health: A Basic Goal of Education" and three studies on "Education During Crises," "Blended Learning," and "Cultural Commons among the Member States of the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States."

Council members expressed appreciation for the efforts of the Arab Center in implementing these programs, recognizing its crucial role in serving educational development and fostering collaboration among member states. The meeting concluded with gratitude extended to Qatar's Minister of Education and Higher Education, Buthaina Al-Nuaimi, and Undersecretary Dr. Ibrahim Al-Nuaimi for hosting the meeting and their steadfast support for the center. In his opening speech, Dr. Al-Nuaimi commended the center's significant role in studying the educational landscape and developing policies that align with global educational trends while facilitating the exchange of educational experiences among member states.

World News Roundup

# Biden needs new approach to Black voters

Democrats urged to rethink strategies

**ATLANTA, Dec 21, (AP):** Some top Democrats are worried that a dip in Black voter turnout, along with other challenges, could doom President Joe Biden and his party in 2024.

A group of Democrats is offering a new analysis of the most recent campaigns in Georgia and Michigan, pitching those battlegrounds as models for drawing in more Black voters next year and beyond. They argue that Democratic power players need to think - and spend money - in new ways, going beyond efforts that can be last-minute or superficial as they try to reassemble Biden's 2020 coalition.

"The days of the symbolic fish fry and one-time church visit are over," wrote the authors of the analysis by strategists widely credited for helping flip Georgia and Michigan to Biden. "Black voters have always required an approach to voter engagement as diverse as the Black voting coalition."

Biden has long depended on Black voters - first as a Delaware senator and most notably in the 2020 South Carolina primary, which delivered him a decisive win that led much of the Democratic field to consolidate behind him.

But just 50% of Black adults said they approve of Biden in a December poll by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs. That is compared with 86% in July 2021, with the gap fueling concerns about his reelection prospects.

The new report, shared exclusively with The Associated Press and being

presented privately to Democratic power players, contends as part of several recommendations that the left must regularly engage all Black voters, including the most reluctant, while amplifying arguments about abortion rights in Black communities.

Said Lauren Groh-Wargo, a leader of the push and longtime adviser to Georgia Democrat Stacey Abrams: "People need to see something different; they need to see you coming to them and asking for their vote in their cultural spaces."

The authors include veterans of Abrams' operation and Michigan's efforts to approve an abortion-rights referendum and re-elect Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. Abrams lost her second bid against Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, but Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock beat Herschel Walker to retain his Senate seat, bolstered in part by years of work by Abrams and other organizers.

The report explores why the two states' 2022 electorates differed from other racially diverse battlegrounds. The contributors want to share their conclusions with the party's biggest donors and top strategists, including those running Biden's 2024 campaign. One of Biden's top campaign aides managed Warnock's campaign.

Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin are the seven states that will be critical in deciding the Electoral College next year. Across those states in 2022, Black turnout dropped, on av-

erage, about 22% from the 2018 midterms, according to multiple Democratic firms' data analysis. Lagging Black support for Biden in any three of those states next fall could cut off his path to the required 270 electoral votes.

Michigan's Black turnout in 2022 was about 90% of its 2018 totals, according to the analysis. But among Black voters under 35, the 2022 turnout was 96% of 2018 levels - notably outpacing other battlegrounds, Georgia included. That bolstered Whitmer's nearly 11-point victory and the abortion rights referendum, which passed by 13 points. The analysis found Michigan's Black voters supported the initiative by a higher proportion than any other race or ethnicity; that finding was repeated recently in Ohio's abortion referendum, authors said.

Research

"We were open to the research that showed us just how much this would resonate in Black communities," said Michigan Democratic Chairwoman Lavora Barnes, the first Black woman to hold her post and a co-author of the report.

"We made it part of a broader message about rights and freedom," she added, saying Black Americans, because of their historical experience with oppression, are especially attuned to "having our rights taken away."

Whitmer, who embraced the non-partisan abortion-rights campaign, said the lessons must carry forward as some Republicans propose national abortion restrictions.

"My generation assumed that these rights would always be intact for us and our children," the governor, 52, said recently. "Lo and behold, here we are having to fight over and over again to protect these rights."



Biden



The choristers of St Paul's choir pose for the media as they prepare for Christmas services at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2023. (AP)

Black turnout in Georgia, meanwhile, was about 92% of 2018 levels; Black voters over 50 exceeded their 2018 marks.

If Georgia's Black turnout had tracked the 2022 battleground average, the analysis calculates that about 175,000 fewer voters would have cast November ballots. With Warnock winning more than 9 out of 10 Black votes, that shortfall almost certainly would have meant his defeat to Walker, the only GOP statewide nominee who lost in Georgia last year.

And if Black turnout in other 2022 battlegrounds reflected Georgia's,

Democrats almost certainly would have defeated Republican Sen. Ron Johnson in Wisconsin and may have won a North Carolina Senate seat, expanding their narrow majority, the authors argue.

Some recommendations from Georgia are challenging and expensive. Abrams' operation began a decade ago trying to expand voter participation in Georgia, focusing on Black and other nonwhite residents who rarely or never voted. Now Georgia's political footprint involves hundreds of paid canvassers, sophisticated digital outreach, voter registration drives and door-knocking

campaigns even in non-campaign years.

The report argues that the investment over time creates so-called "super voters" who make the Democratic investment worth it. The document details tactics Georgia and Michigan Democrats have used and that the authors say can be scaled in other states.

The authors note that in 2018, when Abrams first ran for governor, Georgia had more than 1.1 million Black voters deemed "low propensity" and unlikely to vote. After the 2022 election, that has dropped to between 700,000 and 800,000.

Europe

Is it a shift to the right?

## Macron defends divisive immigration bill

PARIS, Dec 21, (AP): French President Emmanuel Macron said Wednesday that a contentious immigration bill negotiated with conservatives is imperfect and needs some fixes but is "what the French wanted," and is not a victory for the far-right.

The president on a much-listened-to talk show explained and defended the divisive immigration bill that critics claim plays into the hands of Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Rally group at the National Assembly.

"It's the fruit of a compromise," Macron said. Tuesday's vote on the bill at parliament came after lawmakers from Macron's centrist alliance and the conservative Republicans party found a deal to allow the text to make its way through the legislative process, which many perceived as a sign of a shift of the government to the right.

Critics claim the bill in part mimics the far-right party's long-standing demand for "national preference" by which the French, not foreigners, must profit from the riches of the land.

The bill strengthens France's ability to deport foreigners considered undesirable and makes it tougher for foreigners to take advantage of social welfare, among other measures. Some decried it as a betrayal of French values.

It passed the lower house of parliament, the National Assembly, with a 349-186 vote late Tuesday. It had already been adopted by the Senate.

**Parliament lifts Berisha's immunity:** Albania's parliament voted Thursday to lift the legal immunity of former Prime Minister Sali Berisha, who leads the opposition Democratic Party and is accused of corruption.

Opposition lawmakers inside the hall boycotted the vote and tried to disrupt the session by collecting chairs and flares, but security guards stopped them. Berisha declined to take the floor to speak against the motion.

The ruling Socialist Party holds 74 of the 140 seats in Albania's national legislature, and 75 lawmakers agreed to grant a request from prosecutors to strip Berisha of his parliamentary immunity. Thursday's vote clears prosecutors to seek a court's permission to put Berisha under arrest or house arrest. (AP)

**Poland's media faces makeover:** Poland's new pro-European Union government has begun to wrestle control of the country's state media and some other state agencies from the conservative party that consolidated its grip on them during eight years in power.

The Cabinet of Prime Minister Donald Tusk, which took office last week, said Wednesday it had fired and replaced the directors of the state television and radio outlets and the government-run news agency. It seeks to reestablish independent media in Poland in a legally binding and lasting way.

Tusk's government has made it a priority to restore objectivity and free expression in state media, which the previous government, under the Law and Justice party, used as aggressive propaganda tools, attacking Tusk and the opposition and spreading its euroskeptical views. (AP)



A wreath is laid prior to a remembrance service at Tundergarth Church to mark the 35th anniversary of the Lockerbie bombing in Lockerbie, Scotland, Thursday, Dec. 21, 2023. Pan Am Flight 103 exploded over the town in Dumfries and Galloway, 40 minutes into its flight from London to New York. The bombing killed all 259 people aboard the plane and another 11 on the ground. (AP)

America

**US, Venezuela swap prisoners:** The United States freed a close ally of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in exchange for the release of 10 Americans imprisoned in the South American country and the return of a fugitive defense contractor known as "Fat Leonard" who is at the center of a massive Pentagon bribery scandal, the Biden administration announced Wednesday.

The American detainees were back on U.S. soil late Wednesday, White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said. Six of them arrived at Kelly Airfield Annex in San Antonio. (AP)

**Texas begins flying migrants:** Texas sent a plane with more than 120 migrants from the U.S.-Mexico border to Chicago in an escalation of Republican Gov. Greg Abbott's busing operation that has given more than 80,000 migrants free rides to Democratic-led cities across the country since last year.

The first flight, which Abbott's office said left from El Paso and arrived Tuesday, was arranged a week after Chicago's city council took new action over the busloads of migrants that have drawn sharp criticism from Mayor Brandon Johnson. The city has said bus operators began trying to drop off people in neighboring cities to avoid penalties that include fines, towing or impoundment. (AP)

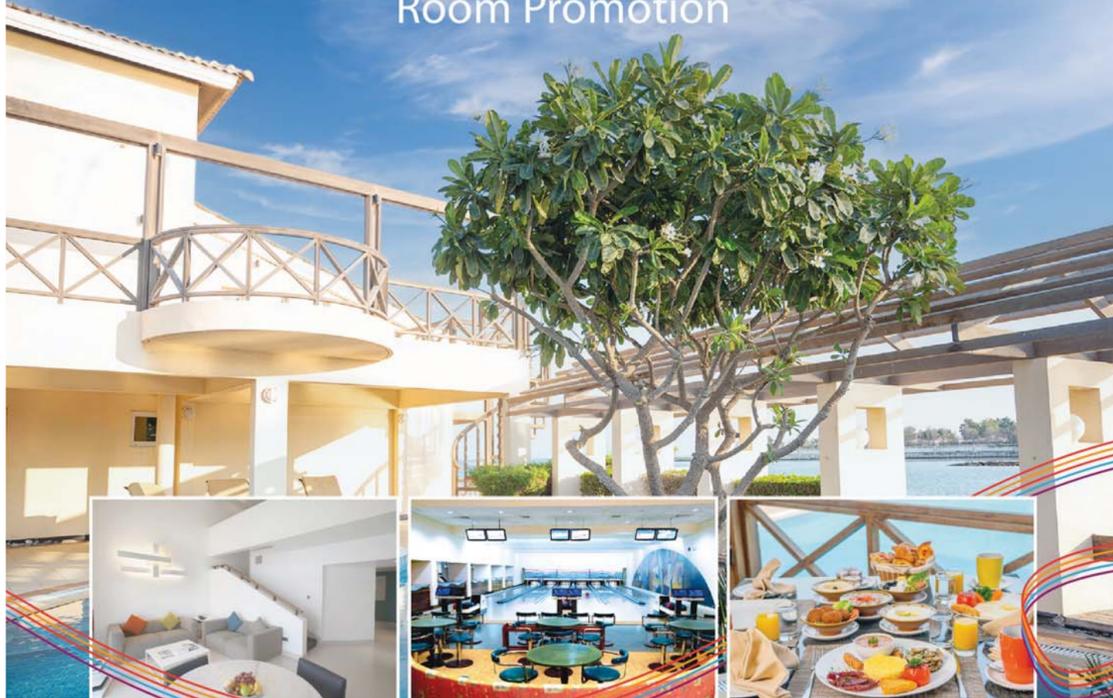
**Wisconsin Republican leader pivots:** The Republican leader of Wisconsin's Assembly who had threatened possible impeachment of a new liberal state Supreme Court justice over her views on redistricting now says such a move is "super unlikely." Assembly Speaker Robin Vos originally threatened to impeach Justice Janet Protasiewicz if she did not recuse herself from the redistricting challenge, which is backed by Democrats seeking to throw out Republican-drawn electoral maps. After Protasiewicz refused to step down from the case, Vos raised the possibility of impeachment based on how she rules. (AP)



Celebrate Eid al-Bayt al-Haram

# 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 19<sup>th</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023

Terms & conditions apply\*

## Asia

## Territorial tensions escalate

## Beijing-Manila bilateral ties at crossroads: Wang

BEIJING, Dec 21, (AP) — China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi says the country will maintain military pressure on the Philippines amid a dispute over sovereignty in the South China Sea that could involve U.S. forces defending their treaty partner.

In a phone conversation Wednesday with his Philippine counterpart, Enrique A. Manalo, Wang "warned that if the Philippine side misjudges the situation, goes its own way, or even colludes with ill-intentioned external forces to continue to stir up troubles, China will defend its rights in accordance with law and respond resolutely," the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

Wang's comments follow China's mobilization of its coast guard and maritime militia to block Philippine supply missions to support its soldiers and fishermen. China claims sovereignty over virtually the entire South China Sea, one of the world's most crucial waterways for shipping, putting it at odds with the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei, who all maintain claims over islands, reefs and undersea resources in the region.

In particularly sharp comments, Wang was quoted as accusing the Philippines of having "changed its policy stance

so far, reneged on the promises it has made, provoked troubles at sea, and undermined China's legitimate and lawful rights."

"Noting that the bilateral relationship now stands at a crossroads, with its future yet to be decided, Wang said the Philippine side must act with caution," Xinhua reported Thursday.

"Instead of continuing in the wrong direction, the Philippine side should return to the right path as soon as possible, with properly handling and managing the current maritime situation as a top priority," Wang was quoted as saying. Wang gave no details on what agreements Manila had allegedly abandoned.

Manalo's office described the conversation as a "frank and candid exchange," saying the sides had reached a "clearer understanding of our respective positions on a number of issues."

Territorial disputes have grown tenser as China seeks to cement its territorial claims in defiance of the U.S. and its allies, the Philippines, Japan, South Korea and close partner Taiwan, which China claims as a breakaway province and threatens to annex by military force.

**Kim again threatens use of nukes:** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said his country has a policy of not hesitating to launch a nuclear strike on its rivals if provoked, as he praised troops involved in its recent intercontinental ballistic missile test, state media reported Thursday.

Since adopting an escalatory nuclear doctrine last year, Kim has repeatedly threatened to use nuclear weapons preemptively. But many foreign experts say North Korea has yet to obtain functioning nuclear missiles and is also unlikely to use its nukes first because it's outgunned by the U.S. and its allied forces.

North Korea on Monday conducted its first intercontinental ballistic missile test in five months, calling the drill a warning over confrontational U.S. and South Korean moves. North Korea cited a recent U.S.-South Korean meeting on boosting their nuclear deterrence plans.

The North's Korean Central News Agency said Kim met troops from the General Missile Bureau on Wednesday to congratulate them on the launch of the developmental solid-fueled Hwasong-18 missile, the North's newest and most powerful ICBM.

During the meeting, Kim said the launch demonstrated the evolution of the North's nuclear doctrine and strategy "not to hesitate even with a nuclear attack when the enemy provokes it with nukes," KCNA said.

Kim said peace is guaranteed by a war posture of being willing to launch preemptive strikes on the enemy anywhere to make it feel fear, KCNA said.

Last year, North Korea adopted a law that stipulates a broad range of situations in which it can use nuclear weapons. Since the beginning of 2022, it has also test-fired about 100 ballistic missiles, many of them nuclear-capable weapons targeting the U.S. and South Korea. Monday's Hwasong-18 launch was the weapon's third test-flight this year.

The U.S. and South Korean governments have repeatedly warned that any attempt by North Korea to use nuclear weapons would result in the end of the Kim Jong Un government. The allies have also expanded their military training, which Kim views as invasion rehearsal. (AP)

**Outcry over church elder's detention:** Ding Zhongfu was awakened by loud pounding on his door. Five policemen greeted Ding, an elder in a Chinese church.

The officers pinned him to the wall that Thursday morning in November and interrogated him while searching the apartment he shared with his wife, Ge Yunxia, and their 6-year-old daughter.

Ding's family now pleads for his release after he was taken from his home in China's central Anhui province on suspicion of fraud. In their first public comments on the case, the family denies that Ding committed any fraud.

Instead, they told The Associated Press in an interview, it is part of a wider crackdown on religious freedoms in China.

Four others were detained, all senior members of the Ganquan church, a name that means "Sweet Spring," according to the family. All were taken on suspicion of fraud, according to a bulletin from the church.

"Under the fabricated charge of 'fraud,' many Christians faced harsh persecution," said Bob Fu, the founder of a U.S.-based Christian rights group, ChinaAid, who is advocating for Ding's release.

Police have started using fraud charges in recent years against leaders of what are known as house churches, or informal churches not registered with the government in China.

While China allows the practice of Christianity, it can only legally be done at churches registered with the state. Many who choose to worship in house churches say that joining a state church means worshipping the supremacy of the government and Communist Party over God, which they reject.

Beijing in the past several years has increased the pressure on house churches. In 2018, Chinese leader Xi Jinping issued a five-year-plan to "Sinicize" all the nation's officially allowed religions, from Islam to Christianity to Buddhism, by infusing them with "Chinese characteristics" such as loyalty to the Communist Party. Heading the call, local governments started shutting down house churches through evictions, police interrogations and arrests. (AP)



Wang



This image made from video shows helicopter dropping water on flames, thick black smoke billowing outside Perth, Australia, Thursday, Dec. 21, 2023. A wildfire burning out of control on the outskirts of the Australian west coast city of Perth on Thursday appeared to have destroyed or damaged a number of homes. (AP)

## Homes feared destroyed by wildfire burning out of control on Perth's fringe

A wildfire burning out of control on the outskirts of the Australian west coast city of Perth on Thursday appeared to have destroyed or damaged a number of homes.

An emergency warning was issued for the eastern suburb of Parkerville where the fire started on Thursday morning. The alert warned that the fire posed a threat to lives and homes.

Aerial video showed at least one house destroyed and others alight on Thursday. But the extent of the damage would not be known until inspection crews are able to survey the fire zone. There were no immediate reports of injuries.

Western Australia Premier Roger Cook described a "troubling situation" where Perth's urban fringe meets heavily wooded hills.

"We all have grave concerns for the fire and in Parkerville and our hearts go out to all those people who are involved in that incident," Cook told reporters.

Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner Darren Klemm said the

blaze continued to escalate despite the efforts of firefighters and water bombing aircraft. The fire had razed 90 hectares (220 acres) by early afternoon.

"We know that Parkerville is an area where we've had significant fires before, including loss of homes so the concern level is very high," Klemm said.

Power has been cut to more than 150 properties and several roads had been cut.

Parkerville resident Yvonne Blyth

said her car was packed with her children's Christmas gifts in case the family had to evacuate their home, which is set in a forest. The fire had come close but appeared to be moving away from her home of 18 years, she said.

"We've seen three or four fires now, but this was the closest one," Blyth told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

"We all love living in the forest, but this is the scariest part of living around here. It's absolutely terrifying," Blyth added. (AP)

## Subcontinent

## Bangladesh PM kicks off election campaign

## India's lawmakers protest suspension

NEW DELHI, Dec 21, (AP) — Dozens of opposition lawmakers suspended from Parliament by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government for obstructing proceedings held a street protest on Thursday accusing the government of throttling democracy in the country.

They briefly marched outside the Parliament building in New Delhi behind a huge "Save Democracy" banner and carried placards reading "Democracy is in danger." The suspensions came as legislators were due to debate a contentious criminal reform bill.

More than 140 opposition lawmakers were suspended from the two houses of Parliament over the past week for demanding a statement from Home Minister Amit Shah about a Dec. 13 security breach when two intruders stormed the chamber by jumping from the visitors' gallery and releasing yellow smoke canisters. They created panic among lawmakers and disrupted parliamentary proceedings.

One of the intruders jumped from seat to seat before he was overpowered by some lawmakers and security staff and was later arrested. The police have also arrested several of their accomplices outside Parliament. The intruders claimed that they wanted to highlight the government's attention to rising unemployment in the country.

The opposition lawmakers demanded a discussion in Parliament about the breach of security, but were accused of creating disorder.

Sharad Pawar, a top opposition leader, said the government's action marked the highest-ever suspensions of lawmakers in a session of Parliament.

Mallikarjun Kharge, the Congress party president, said "If the prime minister and the home minister won't speak in the parliament, then where will they speak?"

Government leaders asked the opposition members to wait for the findings of an inquiry set up to investigate the security breach. The opposition blocked the proceedings of Parliament for several days by raising anti-government slogans and carrying placards into the chamber.

**Imran Khan to contest elections:**

Pakistan's former premier Imran Khan will run in upcoming parliamentary elections from prison, his party said Wednesday, which legal experts said is possible while his appeal of his conviction in a corruption case is being considered.

"Imran Khan has decided to contest elections for three seats in the National Assembly," or the lower house of parliament, said Gohar Khan, head of the former premier's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party, or PTI. In Pakistan, politicians usually run for a seat from more than one constituency to expand their chances of winning.

The 71-year-old former prime minister, the country's most well-known opposition figure, is serving at a high-security prison in the garrison city of Rawalpindi. He was removed as prime minister in April 2022 following a vote of no confidence in Parliament by his political opponents.

Khan was disqualified from holding public office months ago. But he has challenged the ruling by the country's election commission.

Kanwar Dilshad, a former commission official, said Khan's political rivals may object to his filing of nomination papers.

"Imran Khan will have to fight a long legal battle to contest the elections, as technically he is eligible to run for the parliament, but practically there are multiple cases against him," Dilshad said.

This week, Khan for the first time used artificial intelligence to deliver a speech to supporters. The surprise development could help his party to win the upcoming elections in February, according to analysts. (AP)

**Hasina kicks off election campaign:**

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina formally kicked off her ruling Awami League party's campaign Wednesday amid an election boycott by the country's main opposition party.

Addressing a massive rally in the northeastern city of Sylhet, Hasina strongly criticized the Bangladesh Nationalist Party for refusing to participate in the Jan. 7 general election. She also blamed the party, which is led by former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, and its allies for recent acts of violence.

Hundreds of thousands of Awami League supporters cheered and raised their hands when Hasina asked if they would cast their ballots for the ruling party's candidates, the United News of Bangladesh agency reported.

The prime minister denounced the party of her archrival Zia after the country's railway minister alleged that arson and sabotage caused a fire on a passenger train that killed four people Tuesday. Hasina joined the minister Wednesday in accusing the Bangladesh Nationalist Party of being behind it.

"They thought that with some incidents of arson the government will fall. It's not that easy," United News of Bangladesh quoted her as saying.

"Where do they get such courage? A black sheep sitting in London gives orders and some people are here to play with fire. ... Their hands will be burned in that fire," Hasina said in an apparent reference to Zia's son, Tarique Rahman, who has been in self-exile in the United Kingdom since 2008. (AP)



A lawmaker holds a placard and join suspended lawmakers marching outside the Parliament House in New Delhi, India, Thursday, Dec. 21, 2023. Dozens of opposition lawmakers suspended from Parliament by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government for obstructing proceedings in the chamber held a street protest on Thursday accusing the government of throttling democracy in the country. (AP)



Tshisekedi



Burhan

## Africa

**Congo enters 2nd day of voting:** Congo entered its second day of voting Thursday after a chaotic rollout and lengthy delays forced the election's extension, drawing criticism from some opposition candidates as concerns mount that the logistical hurdles could challenge the result's credibility.

At stake is the future of one of Africa's largest nations and one whose mineral resources are increasingly crucial to the global economy. Congo has a history of disputed elections that can turn violent, and there's little confidence among many Congolese in the country's institutions. President Felix Tshisekedi, who is seeking his second and final five-year term, has spent much of his presidency trying to gain legitimacy after a disputed 2018 election.

There is no second round of voting and the winner, expected to be announced no later than Dec. 31, needs to get a majority of votes.

A fractured opposition makes Tshisekedi the likely favorite to win.

Some 44 million people - almost half the population - were expected to vote for Congo's next president. But many, including several million displaced by conflict in the vast country's east, found it difficult to do so. The fighting prevented 1.5 million people from registering to vote. (AP)

**300K Sudanese fled their homes:**

Fighting between Sudan's military and a notorious paramilitary group forced up to 300,000 people to flee their homes in a province that had been a safe haven for families displaced by the devastating conflict in the northeastern African country, the U.N. said Thursday.

The fighting erupted in the city of Wad Medani, the provincial capital of Jazera province, after the Rapid Support Forces attacked the city earlier this month. The RSF said that it took over Wad Medani ear-

lier this week, and the military said that its troops withdrew from the city, and an investigation was opened.

Sudan's war began in mid-April after

months of tensions between military chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan and RSF commander Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo. Both generals led a military coup in October



A fire fighting helicopter battles a vegetation fire on the slopes above Simon's Town, around 40 kilometres south of Cape Town, South Africa, Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023. More than 300 firefighters were battling a blaze on the slopes of a mountain near Cape Town in South Africa for a second day on Wednesday and residents were evacuated from at least one neighbourhood overnight, emergency services said. (AP)

2021 that derailed Sudan's short-lived transition to democracy following a popular uprising that forced the removal of President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019. (AP)

**Rwandan doctor gets 24-yr sentence:** A Rwandan doctor was sentenced by a Paris court on Wednesday to 24 years in prison for his role in the 1994 genocide in his home country.

Sosthene Munyemana, 68, was found guilty of charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and helping prepare a genocide.

His lawyers said that he would appeal the decision. Munyemana has never been detained, remaining free throughout the trial. He won't go to prison while an appeal is ongoing.

Munyemana, who moved to France months after the genocide and quickly raised suspicions among Rwandans living there, has denied wrongdoing.

The verdict comes nearly three decades after the genocide, in which more than 800,000 minority Tutsis and moderate Hutus who tried to protect them were killed.

At the time, Munyemana was a 38-year-old gynecologist in Tumba, in the southern university district of Butare.

He has been accused of co-signing in April 1994 "a motion of support" for the interim government that supervised the genocide and of participating in a local committee and meetings that organized roundups of Tutsi civilians. (AP)

## US dollar stable

The exchange rate of the US dollar against the Kuwaiti dinar was stable at KD 0.307 on Thursday, while the euro went down to 0.19 percent to reach KD 0.336, compared to Wednesday's rates.

The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) said in its daily bulletin that the exchange rate of the sterling pound went down 0.67 percent to reach KD 0.388 while the Swiss franc was stable at KD 0.356 as well as the Japanese yen at KD 0.002.

The exchange rates announced by the Central Bank of Kuwait are for the average currency rates for the day and do not reflect the actual buying and selling rates. (KUNA)

## oil price up

The price of Kuwaiti crude oil rose by USD 2.21 to USD 81.87 per barrel on Wednesday, compared with USD 79.66 pb on Tuesday, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Thursday.

In international markets, the Brent crude oil future contracts went up by 47 cents to reach USD 79.70 pb, while identical deals of the West Texas Intermediate crude increased 28 cents to stand at USD 74.22 a barrel. (KUNA)

## US expands Russian oil price cap sanctions

The U.S. imposed new sanctions on alleged violators of a \$60 per barrel price cap on Russian oil and tightened compliance rules for insurance firms and shippers, Wednesday.

Firms across the United Arab Emirates and Hong Kong were identified for economic sanctions, including UAE-based Sun Ship Management D Ltd., which Russian state-owned fleet operator Joint Stock Company Sovcomflot owns. Also sanctioned were Hong Kong-based Covart En-

ergy, which has increased its share of the trade of Russian oil since the price cap policy was implemented, and Hong Kong-based Bellatrix Energy.

Firm administrators were not available for comment to The Associated Press. The sanctions, which follow others imposed this year on shippers of Russian oil priced above the cap, block their access to their U.S.-owned property and prevent U.S. individuals and firms from doing busi-

ness with the groups.

The price cap coalition also announced Wednesday that it will soon require service providers, including shippers and movers of Russian oil, to receive attestations from their purchasers and sellers each time they lift or load Russian oil.

The coalition will also require insurance and freight firms to share these documents upon request with entities further down the supply chain, a Treasury news release states. (AP)

## Market Movements

21-12-2023

	PAKISTAN	KSE 100	Change	Closing pts	SAUDI	Tadawul	Change	Closing pts
↑			+274.32	62,850.09	↓		-80.97	11,621.93
							-8.96	4,005.32
							-535.47	33,140.47
							-532.47	24,305.09
							-51.52	6,469.23

# Business

## Swearing-in of His Highness the Amir activates financial portfolio

Focus shifts on blue-chip stocks

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21:** The Kuwait Stock Exchange received the swearing-in of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah before the National Assembly as Amir of the country, succeeding His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, with clear trading momentum, punctuated by active movements by financial portfolio and fund managers on the leading stocks.

The Kuwait Stock Exchange closed trading on Wednesday, the first session after returning from the mourning holiday, covered in green, as it recorded an increase in its first market index, reaching 72.49 points to close at the level of 7,503.48 points, an increase of 0.98 percent from the previous closing level in last Thursday's session.

The general index of the stock exchange achieved gains of 54.3 points to close at the level of 6820.01 points following active trading amounting to 54.4 million dinars, of which 46.12 million were for the interface market and 8.3 million for the main market shares, which closed up by 8.04 points.

The total market value of listed stocks recorded gains estimated at 319 million dinars, bringing their total to 40.559 billion dinars, while the investment community is expected to continue exploiting the available opportunities, with funds keen to close the annual losses they recorded until the end of last month through more momentum on their components of stocks. operational.

The pace of trading was not without optimism regarding the completion of economic reforms that the country will witness under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, which is expected to increase the rates of circulating liquidity paid by portfolios, local private and governmental institutions, in addition to foreign funds and entities.

Several investment portfolios intensified their purchases of medium- and small-cap stocks, while continuing to support their long-term strategic positions, which are represented in the shares of listed banks, service, real estate, and industrial companies.

The pace of trading began its dealings yesterday with a wave of activity during which the general stock market indices jumped clearly, while the attention of the financial and investment circles is turning to the annual closings of listed stocks, which will result in the financial reading of companies and funds that own major positions in listed companies.

It is usual for the last sessions of the year to witness more active movements by traders of all categories, for reasons represented in working to compensate for the decline in the value of stocks and shifting to (unrealized) investment profits at the level of major influential holdings.

There are only 6 trading sessions left until the annual closings, including today's session, as it is expected that the primary market components will dominate in attracting liquidity, but medium and small companies will also

## Long-term bond holdings reach \$37.62 bln

Kuwait records 21.2% dip in US Treasury Bonds, hits \$39.62 bln

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21:** Kuwait's possession of US Treasury bonds decreased by the end of last October by about 21.2 percent annually, equivalent to \$10.66 billion, reaching \$39.62 billion compared to its level in October of last year, which amounted to \$50.28 billion, reports Al-Rai daily.

According to what was published by Mubasher, citing the monthly report issued by the US Treasury Department, Kuwait's holdings of US bonds have declined since the beginning of this year by about 18.34 percent, equivalent to \$8.9 billion. It amounted to 48.52 billion at the end of 2022, and Kuwait's possession of bonds decreased on a monthly basis by 1.25 percent compared to its level last September, which amounted to 40.78 billion dollars.

The Kuwaiti holding of bonds varied between \$37.62 billion in long-term bonds and \$2 billion in short-term bonds.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia continued to occupy first place in the Arab world in possession of US Treasury bonds last October, amounting to about \$117.5 billion, while Japan topped the world's first place by possessing bonds worth \$1.098 trillion.

In general, US Treasury bonds in October 2023 amounted to about \$7.565 trillion, an increase of 6.06 percent from their level in the same month last year of \$7.133 billion, despite their decrease on a monthly basis by 0.51 percent.

It is noteworthy that what the US Treasury discloses in its monthly statements is countries' investments in US Treasury bills and bonds only, and does not include those other investments in the United States, whether governmental or private.

US Treasury bonds are a means of collecting funds and debts from countries and institutions, and the government repays them upon their maturity date, which varies according to the term of the bond.

be under the microscope due to considerations of the efforts of some of them to upgrade and join the interface market, where the annual review will be conducted in January and intervention. Its results will come into effect next February.

In fact, companies registered in the main market were able to achieve the rates required for promotion, while other stocks listed in the "General Main Market" were active and prepared to enter the "Main 50" index during the upcoming review.

## First phase targets 600k tons/year in green ammonia project

## ACWA Power and Egypt inks \$4 bln green hydrogen deal

**CAIRO, Dec 21, (KUNA):** Saudi ACWA Power and Egypt signed Wednesday a framework agreement for the development of the first phase of the green hydrogen project in Egypt with an investment of more than USD four billion.

The framework agreement lays out the development of the first phase of a green ammonia project with a capacity of 600,000 tons-per-year, with the

intention of scaling up to a second phase with a potential capacity of two million tons-per-year, the Egyptian Minister of Electricity Mohammad Shaker said in a statement.

For his part, Chief Executive Officer of ACWA Power Marco Arcelli said that ACWA Power is proud to bring its expertise in this new and exciting market to Egypt, as he praised this partnership for

producing the fuel for the future, which would bring great demand in Europe and the rest of the world.

Egypt is well-positioned to become one of the world's top producers of green hydrogen, and this latest project brings the total number of ACWA Power's assets in operation, under construction, and in advanced development in Egypt to five all renewable energy projects, he added.

## Annual home sales down 7.3% YoY

## US home sales rise 0.8% in Nov, beating expectations

**LOS ANGELES, Dec 21, (AP):** Sales of previously occupied U.S. homes rose in November, ending a five-month skid, as easing mortgage rates provided some breathing room for homebuyers.

Existing home sales rose 0.8% last month from October to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 3.82 million, the National Association of Realtors said Wednesday. That tops the 3.78 million sales pace economists were expecting, according to FactSet.

Sales were still down 7.3% compared with November last year, and are down 19.3% through the first 11 months of 2023 compared with the same period last year.

The pickup in sales helped push up home prices compared with a year earlier for the fifth month in a row. The national median sales price rose 4% from November last year to \$387,600.

The modest increase in sales arrives with mortgage rates in decline after a sharp runup that sent borrowing costs on home loans higher. The rising cost of borrowing money compounded hurdles for buyers because there are so few homes on the market, sending home prices higher as well.

The average rate on a 30-year mortgage has eased after climbing to 7.79% in late October to its highest level since late 2000. The average dropped to 6.95% last week, according to mortgage buyer Freddie Mac.

"Home sales always respond to lower interest rates," said Lawrence Yun, the NAR's chief economist, adding that he has "no doubt" that



A sale pending sign is displayed in front of a home in Sudbury, Mass., on Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023. On Wednesday, the National Association of Realtors reports on existing home sales for November. (AP)

home sales have hit their low point in the current housing market cycle.

Despite the recent decline, the average rate on a 30-year home loan remains sharply higher than just two years ago, when it was around 3%. The large gap between rates now and then is contributing to the low inventory of homes for sale by discouraging homeowners who locked in rock-bottom rates two years ago from selling.

Homebuyers in many markets continue to face a low inventory of available homes for sale. There were 1.13 million homes on the market by the end of last month, down 1.7% from October, but up 0.9% from November last year, the NAR said. Before the pandemic, there were

roughly twice as many homes on the market.

The available inventory at the end of last month amounted to a 3.5-month supply, going by the current sales pace. That's down 3.6% from the previous month, but up from 3.3% from November 2022. In a more balanced market between buyers and sellers, there is a 4- to 5-month supply.

"If the inventory levels were, say, 30% or 40% higher, surely home sales would be probably 10% or 20% above what (they are) today," Yun said. "A lack of inventory is clearly holding back some of the sales potential."

Homebuyers still had to navigate a competitive market due to the short-



Oil platforms are visible through the haze near the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary in the Gulf of Mexico, off the coast of Galveston, Texas, Sept. 16, 2023. Oil companies offered \$382 million for drilling leases in the Gulf Wednesday after courts rejected the Biden administration's plans to scale back the sale to protect an endangered whale species. (AP)

## Biden admin balances energy demands

## Oil companies bid \$382 mln for Gulf of Mexico offshore leases

**WASHINGTON, Dec 21, (AP):** Oil companies offered \$382 million for drilling rights in the Gulf of Mexico on Wednesday after courts rejected the Biden administration's plans to scale back the sale to protect an endangered whale species.

The auction was the last of several offshore oil and gas lease sales mandated under the 2022 climate law. It comes as President Joe Biden's Democratic administration tries to navigate between energy companies seeking greater oil and gas production and environmental activists who want to stop new drilling to help combat climate change.

Companies including Chevron, Hess and BP offered bids on more than 300 parcels covering 2,700 square miles (7,000 square kilometers), according to the U.S. Department of Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

The dollar amount of the successful bids marked a sharp increase from the previous sale in March 2023, when the Interior Department awarded leases covering about 2,500 square miles (6,500 square kilometers) for \$250 million.

The next sale will be conducted in 2025, to the frustration of energy companies and Republicans who say the administration is hampering U.S. oil production.

Wednesday's online auction was originally scheduled for September but got delayed by a court battle after the administration reduced the area available for leases from 73 million acres (30 million hectares) to 67 million acres (27 million hectares) as part of a plan to protect the endangered Rice's whale.

Chevron, Shell Offshore, the American Petroleum Institute and the state of Louisiana sued to reverse the cut in acreage and block the inclusion of the whale-protecting measures in the lease sale provisions.

A federal judge in southwest Louisiana ordered the sale to go on without the whale protections, which also included regulations governing vessel speed and personnel. Environmental groups appealed, but the New Orleans-based 5th Circuit Court of Appeals last month rejected their arguments against the sale and threw out the plans to scale it back.

The lease sale was required under a compromise with Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, a supporter of the oil and gas industry who

cast the deciding vote in favor of the landmark climate law. The measure was approved with only Democratic votes in Congress. Under the terms negotiated by Manchin, the government must offer at least 60 million acres of offshore oil and gas leases in any one-year period before it can offer offshore wind leases that are part of its strategy to fight climate change.

Only a small portion of parcels that are offered for sale typically receive bids, in areas where companies want to expand their existing drilling activities or where they foresee future development potential.

The administration in September proposed up to three oil and gas lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico over the next five years and none in Alaska waters. That was the minimum number the administration could legally offer if it wants to continue expanding offshore wind development.

Environmental groups criticized the five-year plan as a "missed opportunity" to stop the expansion of oil and gas drilling in the Gulf of Mexico and address climate change.

"New oil and gas operations (in the Gulf) will only bring more health risks to Gulf Coast communities and slow our transition to a clean-energy economy," said Earthjustice attorney Brettny Hardy.

The industry, meanwhile, said more sales are needed - and sooner.

"In our forward-thinking industry, securing new lease blocks is vital for exploring and developing resources crucial to the U.S. economy," said National Ocean Industries Association President Erik Milito. "The Gulf of Mexico is a prime economic engine and investment area, and this (lease sale) was the last chance for companies to secure leases in the near term."

Holly Hopkins, API vice president of upstream policy, called Wednesday's sale "a positive step after multiple delays," and noted that it generated the highest dollar value for bids in nearly a decade.

The results demonstrate that the oil and gas industry "is working to meet growing demand and investing in the nation's long-term energy security," Hopkins said. "Just as today's record U.S. production was supported by investment and policy decisions made years ago, new leasing opportunities are critical for maintaining American energy leadership for decades to come."

## CCI hits 110.7 in Dec

## US consumer confidence surges to summer levels

**WASHINGTON, Dec 21, (AP):** American consumers are feeling more confident than they have since summer, good news for businesses with the all-important holiday shopping season peaking.

The Conference Board, a business research group, said Wednesday that its consumer confidence index rose for the second straight month, to 110.7 in December from 101 in November. That's much better than analysts' forecasts of 104.5 and the highest reading since July.

Americans' expectations of a recession in the next 12 months declined to the lowest level so far this year.

The index measures both Americans' assessment of current economic conditions and their outlook for the next six months.

Consumer spending accounts for about 70% of U.S. economic activity,

so economists pay close attention to consumer behavior as they take measure of the broader economy.

The index measuring Americans short-term expectations for income, business and the job market shot up to 85.6 in December from 77.4 in October. It's the first time in four months that it's been above 80. A reading below 80 for future expectations historically signals a recession within a year.

The survey's write-in responses indicated that rising prices are still consumers' top concern, while worries over interest rates and geopolitical conflicts declined.

Consumers' view of current conditions also jumped this month, to 148.5, from 136.5 in November.

The survey also showed modest increases in consumers' intent to purchase homes, autos, appliances and spend on vacations.

### Toyota recalls 1M vehicles for airbag issue

Toyota Motor Co. said Wednesday it is recalling 1 million vehicles over a defect that could cause airbags not to deploy, increasing the risk of injury.

The recall covers a range of Toyota and Lexus vehicles with model years from 2020 to 2022. Included in the recall are Toyota Avalons, Camrys, Highlanders, RAV4s, Siennas and Corollas, plus some hybrids of those models.

The Lexus models in the recall include the ES250 sedan and the RX350 SUV, among others.

The vehicles being recalled have sensors in the front passenger seat that may have been manufactured improperly. Those sensors could potentially short circuit, causing the airbag system to not determine the occupant's correct weight and potentially not deploy in certain kinds of crashes.

Toyota and Lexus dealers will inspect the OCS sensors and replace them if necessary at no cost to owners. Toyota will notify customers by the middle of February 2024 if their cars are in the recall. (AP)

### Daihatsu suspends shipments amid testing scandal

Japanese transport ministry officials inspected Toyota subsidiary Daihatsu on Thursday, one day after officials announced it was suspending the small car unit's shipments of all vehicles in and outside Japan after an investigation found improper testing involving 64 models.

The safety test irregularities earlier this year prompted an independent panel investigation, which found widespread and systematic problems at Osaka-based Daihatsu Motor Co. It is

the latest of safety or other violations found at at least five of Japan's major automakers in recent years.

On Thursday, transport ministry officials began a deeper investigation at Daihatsu's offices over the systematic safety scandal that apparently persisted for decades.

"It's extremely regrettable," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said Thursday. "It damaged the trust of car owners and has shaken the foundation of the automobile

certification system." Hayashi urged Daihatsu officials to fully explain the situation.

So far, there have been no reports of accidents or deaths due to the fudging of those tests.

Toyota Motor Corp., citing results of the panel, said Wednesday that the Daihatsu probe found 174 new cases of irregularities in safety tests and other procedures in 25 test categories, on top of problems reported earlier. (AP)

## Americans have bought record 1 million-plus hybrids in 2023

# More US auto buyers are turning to hybrids as sales of electric vehicles slow

DETROIT, Dec 21, (AP) — America's automakers have staked their futures on the notion that electric vehicles will dominate sales in the coming years, spurred by buyers determined to reduce carbon emissions and save on fuel.

But so far, while EV sales are growing, their pace is falling well short of the industry's ambitious timetable for transitioning away from combustion engines. Instead, buyers are increasingly embracing a quarter-century-old technology whose popularity has been surging: The gas-electric hybrid, which alternates from gas to battery power to maximize efficiency.

So far in 2023, Americans have bought a record 1 million-plus hybrids - up 76% from the same period last year, according to Edmunds.com. As recently as last year, purchases had fallen below 2021's total. This year's figures don't even include sales of 148,000 plug-in hybrids, which drive a short distance on battery power before a gas-electric system kicks in.

Though electric vehicle sales are nearing an annual record of over 1 million this year, their year-over-year growth rate has begun to stall. EVs still account for only about 7% of all U.S. auto sales.

The slowdown has raised concern among automakers that buyer interest in EVs is faltering. Some companies are cutting production and scaling down plans for new battery or assembly plants.

The reasons why hybrids have quickly become the preferred choice for many buyers vary. They range from the higher prices of comparable EVs to concern about the scarcity of charging stations to a recognition that hybrids provide many of the same advantages without the hassles of EVs.

Ford, the nation's No. 2 hybrid seller behind Toyota, expects to produce enough hybrids to quadruple sales within five years. General Motors, which abandoned most hybrids in the U.S. four years ago in favor of EVs, now says it's considering bringing them back.

In the meantime, surveys show that consumers remain uneasy about either the availability of charging stations or the sale prices of EVs - even factoring in tax credits that the federal government makes available for EV purchases in many cases.

"Your standard hybrid makes the most sense to most people," said Ivan Drury, a director at the Edmunds.com auto website. "I think you'll find that people don't want to deal with the hassle or the difficulties of charging."

Hybrids do emit some tailpipe pollution. But because they burn less fuel than autos equipped solely with gasoline engines, their emissions are less. What's more, purchase prices for hybrids are akin to those of gas vehicles and typically far less than for comparable EVs.

"People are perfectly fine with a car that gets 45 or 50 miles per gallon, and you don't have to do anything" different from current behavior, said Scott Adams, owner of a Toyota dealership in suburban Kansas City.

Here are some key reasons why hybrids, which use both a gas engine and battery power to efficiently turn the wheels, have taken off this year:

#### Saving the planet

The proliferation of wildfires, heat waves and more intense storms has led more people to view climate change as a grave crisis, one they can help mitigate by burning less carbon-spewing fuel. Yet even among those people, some remain skeptical that an electric vehicle will allow them to travel long distances or tow trailers.

"People want to participate in this - the idea of reducing carbon," said Jack Hollis, who heads North American sales and marketing for Toyota, which leads in hybrid sales and has moved only gradually toward EVs. "I think the hybrid gives them what they're most looking for."

#### A lower price

EV prices have been dropping, mainly a consequence of federal tax credits and price cuts by Tesla, the market leader. Yet they're still pricier than hybrids or gas vehicles.

After peaking at nearly \$63,000 last year, the average EV sale price fell to just over \$60,500 in November, not including tax credits or prices from Tesla, which doesn't release them. Fewer EVs, though, will likely qualify for the tax credits in 2024 because of rules that will limit buyers from claiming a full credit if they purchase cars with battery materials from China or other countries that are considered hostile to the United States.

The average price of a hybrid has stabilized at roughly \$42,000. A typical hybrid costs somewhat more than its gasoline counterpart. A Toyota RAV4 hybrid with all-wheel-drive, for example, starts at \$32,825, \$1,600 more than a comparable gas version.

Like many hybrid buyers, Shalinder Singh, an Uber driver from Sunnyvale, California, said that for him, the gas savings helped tip the price equation in favor of a 2024 Honda CR-V hybrid over the corresponding gasoline model.

"The mileage for the hybrid is too good," said Singh, who makes frequent trips to San Francisco and San Jose.

The Environmental Protection Agency says a front-wheel-drive CR-V Hybrid gets 40 mpg in city and highway driving, 10 mpg better than the gas version. The owner of a hybrid CR-V who drives 15,000 miles annually would save \$450 a year on fuel over the gas model.

#### Lifestyle needs

Angie Rodesky, who recently moved to Jefferson City, Missouri, said her children wanted her to buy a Tesla to replace her old vehicle. Though she did consider an EV to help reduce emissions, she settled on a RAV4 hybrid because she travels frequently to see children in Florida and Delaware.

"I have a fear of plugging something in and not being able to travel as far, because it's a 16-hour road trip from Delaware to Missouri," Rodesky, 55, said. "I needed to make sure I had a vehicle that was comfortable to ride in and had good gas mileage."

After buying a 2023 model from Adams Toyota near Kansas City, she had to wait a month for it to arrive, mainly because of heavy customer demand for the vehicle.

Brad Sowers, owner of Jim Butler Kia and other St. Louis-area dealerships, said customers who consider EVs often ask for hybrids or other alternatives.

"They look at it as a baby step into the EV world," Sowers said. "They're saying to themselves, 'I can't really do 100% battery psychologically.'"

#### Colder weather

Dealers say many hybrid buyers appear to have done research and know that cold weather reduces the range of an EV battery. Tests conducted in Norway, where nearly 80% of new vehicles are electric, found that EVs lose between 10% and 36% of their range during winter.

Most U.S. EV purchases occur on the coasts, where charging stations are more prevalent and weather is often warmer. In the Midwest, where stations are farther apart, Sowers said consumers worry about decreased wintertime range.

"It's cold here," he said. "The (charging) infrastructure isn't that great."

#### Reliability

In its auto reliability survey this year, Consumer Reports found that hybrids were the industry's most reliable type of power system. Electric vehicles were least reliable. EVs contain glitch-prone new technology, Consumer Reports said. Hybrids have less.

And with hybrids having been sold in the United States for more than two decades, automakers have had time to refine the vehicles' engineering and construction. In general, vehicles that have been manufactured for longer periods are more reliable, said Jake Fisher, senior director of auto testing at Consumer Reports.

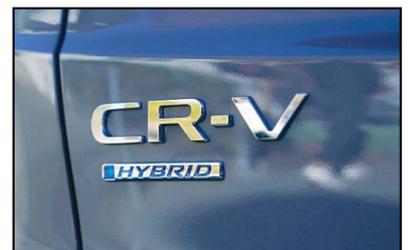
Analysts say they still think more EVs than hybrids will eventually be sold in the United States. With government help, the industry is moving to build many more charging stations. Ford, GM, Hyundai and others have reached agreements for owners of their vehicles to charge them at many of Tesla's widespread stations. The industry is standardizing its plugs to match Tesla's.

With direct-current fast chargers, charging times are becoming faster. Battery technology will likely improve cold-weather range, too.

In addition, next year, EVs' tax credits will be counted at the time of sale, thereby reducing the price and easing monthly payments. This year, buyers had to wait for income tax returns to receive their money. In addition, over time, tighter fuel economy and pollution regulations will likely compel automakers to sell more EVs.



Shalinder Singh poses for photos in front of a 2024 Honda CR-V Hybrid in Sunnyvale, Calif., Monday, Dec. 11, 2023. Like many hybrid buyers, Singh, an Uber driver, said that for him, the gas savings helped tip the price equation in favor of a Honda CR-V hybrid over the corresponding gasoline model. (AP)



# NHS faces disruption as doctors begin 3-day walkout in England

Longest-ever doctor strike in health service's history

LONDON, Dec 21, (AP) — Doctors in the early stages of their careers in England started a 72-hour strike Wednesday in their long-running dispute with the British government over pay levels.

Patients in Britain's state-owned National Health Service have been warned that there will be "significant disruption," with thousands of appointments and procedures postponed or even canceled. The strike began at 7 a.m. and will run until Saturday morning.

Tens of thousands of so-called junior doctors, which make up around half of the medical workforce in the NHS, will also go on strike for a six-day stretch early next year, the longest walkout in the health service's 75-year history.

They are seeking a 35% pay rise, a figure they say takes into account years of below-inflation rises and will prevent an exodus of staff to other countries. The government though is offering junior doctors an average increase of 8.8% and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has indicated there won't be more on offer.

"I obviously appreciate that people are upset about missing elective appointments and outpatient appointments, but if we don't act now then five or 10 years down the line there won't be any doctors left and those appointments will become much worse and much longer than

## British court rejects AI as patent creator

'Human-only rule'

LONDON, Dec 21, (AP) — An artificial intelligence system can't be registered as the inventor of a patent, Britain's Supreme Court ruled Wednesday in a decision that denies machines the same status as humans.

The U.K.'s highest court concluded that "an inventor must be a person" to apply for patents under the current law.

The decision was the culmination of American technologist Stephen Thaler's long-running British legal battle to get his AI, dubbed DABUS, listed as the inventor of two patents.

Thaler claims DABUS autonomously created a food and drink container and a light beacon and that he's entitled to rights over its inventions. Tribunals in the U.S. and the European Union have rejected similar applications by Thaler.

The U.K. Intellectual Property Office rejected Thaler's application in 2019, saying it's unable to officially register DABUS as the inventor because it's not a person. After lower courts sided with the patent office, Thaler took

his appeal to the Supreme Court, where a panel of judges unanimously dismissed the case.

The judges said DABUS is "not a person, let alone a natural person and it did not devise any relevant invention."

Legal experts said the case shows how Britain's laws haven't kept up with technology and that policies should be updated given the breathtaking recent developments made by artificial intelligence, underscored by generative AI systems like OpenAI's ChatGPT that can rapidly spew out new poems, songs and computer code.

"As AI systems continue to advance in sophistication and capability, there is no denying their ability to generate new and non-obvious products and processes with minimal, or perhaps even without any, ongoing human input," said Nick White, a partner at law firm Charles Russell Speechlys.

"Change may be on the horizon, but it will most likely come from the policymakers, rather than the judges," he said.

they are," said 30-year-old Hamish Bain on a picket line at University College Hospital in London.

NHS leaders have expressed "disappointment" that talks between the British Medical Association, which represents the doctors, and the government broke down and said that the fresh round of industrial action has come at the "worst possible time" for the health service.

"This is coming at the worst possible time of year for us where we are beginning to see those winter pres-

sures that we always see around the festive season, with flu cases and COVID cases on the rise," said Stephen Powis, national medical director for the NHS in England.

"So there is no doubt this is going to be a challenging period and we will see disruption once again," he added.

The more senior consultant doctors from the BMA in England have reached a deal with the government, with members currently voting whether or not to accept the deal. Specialist, associate specialist and

specialty doctors in England have also come to an agreement, which is being put to members.

While on strike, hospitals will provide minimal care similar to public holidays, when only emergency procedures are available and routine appointments or procedures are postponed or canceled.

The strikes across the NHS, which began last year, have so far affected more than 1 million appointments and procedures at a cost of around 2 billion pounds (\$2.5 billion).

Environmental groups challenge EU-backed Greek gas project

## EU court nullifies approval of French aid to Air France

BRUSSELS, Dec 21, (AP) — Low-cost airlines Ryanair and Malta Air won a court case Wednesday against the European Union's decision to approve billions of euros in state aid by the French government to Air France and holding company Air France-KLM during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ryanair has filed several court challenges against measures introduced by EU countries to help some airlines weather the fallout of coronavirus restrictions.

The Irish airline welcomed the decision and urged the European Commission "to order France to immediately recover this multi-billion euro illegal state aid package."

The bloc's 27 members must seek approval from the commission - which is the EU's executive branch - when granting financial support to companies. Many countries across Europe did so to help keep their airlines afloat during the pandemic.

Back in 2020, French authorities notified the European Commission of an aid measure of 7 billion euros (\$7.67 billion), which was supposed to solely benefit Air France, to the exclusion of all the other companies in the Air France-KLM group. A year later, France told the commission about plans for 4-billion-euro (\$4.38 billion) recapitalization of Air France and the holding company.

In both cases, the European Commission didn't raise objections.

But the European General Court ruled that the Air France-KLM holding and KLM "were capable of benefiting, at least indirectly, from the advantage granted by the state aid at issue" and annulled the European Commission's decisions.

"Where there are grounds to fear the effects on competition of an accumulation of state aid within the same group, the onus is on the Commission to exercise particular vigilance in examining the links between the companies belonging to that group," the court said.

Air France-KLM and Air France said they will consider whether to lodge an appeal before the Court of Justice of the EU.

"In parallel, they will contribute to any exchange between the French State and the European Commission with a view to the adoption of possible new approval decisions," the companies said.

The European Commission is also the EU's anti-trust watchdog. As pandemic restrictions in 2020 brought travel to a halt and threatened the existence of airlines, the commission eased its policies, approving billions of euros in support for national flag carriers.

Under a fast-track system set up during what the commission described as "an unprecedented crisis," Brussels

approved around 3 trillion euros in state support across all sectors in member nations. Ryanair believes that 40 billion euros was granted to Europe's airline sector alone.

#### Also

**ATHENS:** Five Greek and international environmental campaign agencies have launched legal action against a major natural gas project supported by the European Union as a regional alternative to Russian energy.

Greenpeace and the World Wide Fund for Nature led the request at Greece's highest administrative court, the Council of State, against a planned offshore natural gas storage and conversion plant, outside the northeastern port of Alexandroupolis.

The action was filed on Tuesday, the groups said in a joint statement.

The terminal, due to go online early next year, will operate on a modified tanker - also named the "Alexandroupolis" - to store liquefied natural gas and convert it into gas form, supplying the national distribution network.

The 288-meter (945-foot) long vessel arrived at its destination on Sunday, following a 10-month-long conversion at the Keppel shipyards in Singapore.

In their court challenge, the nature groups described the plant as "accident-prone" and said it posed a threat to the local marine environment that

includes a protected area.

"The installation in (protected) areas of such dangerous industrial units is expressly prohibited under current legislation," the groups said.

They also noted their opposition to a new, publicly backed investment in fossil fuel projects, which they argued would undermine global commitments to address climate change. Greece's government has won EU approval to provide more than 165 million euros (\$180 million) in state aid to the project, arguing that natural gas remains a key source of energy as countries transition to renewables.

Athens also backs broader Western goals to help reduce the historic dependence on Russian pipeline gas supplies by other countries in southeast Europe - a push that has gathered pace following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the disruption of global energy markets.

The project will redefine the port of Alexandroupolis "as a critical hub for the energy security of the entire central and southeast Europe," said Kostis Sifnaios, managing director of Gas-trade, the consortium that will operate the plant. His remarks came before the legal action was announced.

The new terminal, set to launch in the next three months following tests, will have a regasification capacity of up to 5.5 billion cubic meters a year.

## Educational icon T. Premkumar concludes chapter in Kuwait

## Kuwait Chapter Principals bid farewell to renowned educator

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: The Kuwait Chapter Principals bid a fond farewell to the renowned educator T. Premkumar, as he concluded his remarkable tenure in Indian Educational School, Kuwait.

The farewell event, held at the Oriental Palace on December 17, 2023, was a heartfelt tribute to Mr. Premkumar's exceptional contributions to the field of education and his influential leadership at Bhavans Kuwait and the Principals' fraternity.

The event commenced with a warm welcome by Dr. Binumon, the secretary of Gulf Sahodaya. In his address Dr. Binumon said: "Today we are gathered here to bid farewell to our esteemed colleague, Mr. Premkumar. It is with mixed emotions that we say goodbye to a person who has played a significant role in shaping our lives and careers." To reflect upon Mr. Premkumar's illustrious journey.

Dr. Binumon highlighted the remarkable achievements of Mr. Premkumar, emphasizing on his vast knowledge and extensive experience in the field of education. He commended Mr. Premkumar's unwavering dedication and tireless efforts, which significantly impacted on his school and its students.

Premkumar is the one and the only Principal who is actively involved in teaching grade 12 students and his students rave about his classes, and they regard and respect him, added Dr. Binumon. During his address, Dr. Binumon also emphasized that the prestigious CBSE award bestowed upon Mr. Premkumar, is a testament to his outstanding contributions in the field of education for four decades. As Chairman, Secretary, and Convener of Gulf Sahodaya Mr. Premkumar played a vital role in advancing the principals' community, fostering collaboration, and driving excellence in educational practices.

Dr. Binumon highlighted the significant role played by Premkumar in meeting the training needs of his teachers and the knowledge his teachers gained from him.

Mrs. Asha Sharma, a respected senior Principal in the Gulf and principal of LoA, took the stage to share her admiration for Mr. Premkumar. She praised his exceptional oratory skills, which captivated audiences and inspired countless individuals. Mrs. Sharma also acknowledged Mr. Premkumar's meticulous planning of conferences, ensuring that every detail was carefully considered to create impactful and enriching experiences for the participants. Furthermore, she commended his excellent training



A grand farewell – Kuwait Chapter Principals honor T. Premkumar for forty years of educational excellence.

skills, which empowered educators and students alike, leaving an indelible mark on the educational landscape in Kuwait. Mrs. Sharma was very particular in stressing the choice of words that Premkumar uses in his written and verbal communication. She also appreciated his promptness in replying to mails, his honesty, integrity and punctuality.

"As the Principal of New Indian School, I have had the privilege of working closely with Mr. Premkumar. Throughout our association, I have witnessed his simplicity, calm and composed demeanor, and remarkable leadership skills. He has been a guiding light, always steering me in the right direction and sharing his wide knowledge and expertise on CBSE-related matters. I am truly grateful for his mentorship and support," said Mrs. Anita Sadananda... Fr. Bosco, in his

heartfelt tribute, described Mr. Premkumar as a thorough gentleman who treats everyone with respect, be it a student, teacher, or parent. His composure and tranquility serve as an inspiration to us all, reminding us of the importance of maintaining grace and dignity in all circumstances. Sr. Cristy Maria, Principal of Carmel School, fondly recalls her association with Mr. Premkumar.

She praised him for his helpful nature and his unwavering support during times of need. "His guidance has been invaluable, and we are indebted to him for his selflessness," she said. Mr. Arul Thomas, expressing his gratitude, acknowledged that his current position as Principal is a direct result of Mr. Premkumar's motivation and encouragement. He thanked him profusely for the unwavering support and guidance that paved the way for his success. Dr.

Prashanth Vasudev, Principal of Gulf Indian School, commended Mr. Premkumar for his vast and in-depth knowledge on various subjects. His expertise has been instrumental in enriching the educational landscape and inspiring countless students and educators. "As we bid farewell to Mr. Premkumar, let us cherish the memories we have shared and the invaluable lessons we have learned from him," said.

Dr. Prashanth. Mr. Anoop, principal of New Gulf Indian School narrated his first meeting with Premkumar and that has left a lasting impression of the greatness of Premkumar in the field of academia.

Mr. Ravi Ayyanoli, the convener of the Kuwait Chapter spoke about his association with Premkumar who is his senior colleague and a good friend. He thanked Premkumar for all the guidance and support he extended to

him over the last decade.

Mrs. Sabahat Khan proposed a vote of thanks and she said: "His contributions to our professional growth and personal development will always be remembered and cherished. His unwavering commitment to excellence, passion for nurturing young minds, and tireless efforts to elevate educational standards will leave an enduring imprint on future generations. As Mr. Premkumar concludes his chapter at Bhavans Kuwait, his legacy will continue to resonate throughout the education sector in the Middle East. On behalf of the entire principals' community, I extend our heartfelt gratitude and best wishes to Mr. Premkumar as he embarks on a new chapter in his life. May his journey ahead be filled with joy, success, and fulfillment."

Premkumar, in his reply thanked the principals for arranging a befitting

farewell and taking time to attend the same. He also thanked Dr. Binumon for taking the lead role in making the event a memorable one for all. He thanked all the principals for supporting him during his tenure with Bhavans Kuwait and for making the conference under his secretaryship in 2017-18 a mega event.

He said, he has no regrets in taking this decision and he is leaving with only fond memories. Premkumar concluded by saying that today he feels like "Dobbin" the horse in Alfred Noyes's poem "The Dobbin".

Premkumar was presented with a memento by Fr. Bosco and a valuable gift by Mrs. Asha Sharma, on behalf of all the principals.

The event concluded with a sumptuous lunch hosted by the principals in honor of their dear colleague Premkumar.

## Bank announces 10 winners of KD 1,000

## Ahli United Bank congratulates the winners of Al-Hassad weekly draw

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: Ahli United Bank (AUB) congratulates the Winners of Al-Hassad Weekly Draw of Al-Hassad Islamic account, which was held on 20 December, 2023 at the bank's head office in the presence of a representative of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry as well as a representative from Deloitte as the external auditor to oversee the draws as per the instructions of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in this regard.

The Bank announced 10 Winners of KD 1,000 as follows: Yousef Kh A Al-Khamais, Mashaal Hadi Benaif Al-Azmi, Mehra Hadi Motlaq Al-Hajri, Baraah Moahmad Al-Habsha, Saad Faleh Saheb Al-Shammari, Zainab Ali Hasan Nekhi, Nashaat Moustafa Moursy El-Seidy, Amal Yousef Al-Hunaif, Nawal A E Makamis and Khuloud Ismael.

In its new package, Al-Hassad Islamic Saving Account presents a broader variety of rewards. Customers could now participate in the draw to win a monthly KD 100,000 prize, in addition to 10 weekly prizes of KD 1,000 each. The grand quarterly prize of KD 250,000 in cash for the winner remains the most important aspiration of customers. It is a real chance for them to realize their life dreams. In addition to this attractive package, there will be the annual expected profits on the basis of a Wakala contract that increases the attractiveness of the Al-Hassad Islamic Saving Account to customers.

Al-Hassad Account provides a suite of unique features, including the simplest and easiest savings program and a unique account-opening feature online with all ease with an instant deposit option.

To be eligible to participate in the draw, the customer should have a minimum balance of KD 100, whereby the customer has two chances to participate, with up to 30,000 chances per draw, in addition to rewarding annual profits.

**Al-Hassad**  
More draws and annual returns

Weekly	Quarterly	Monthly
KD 10,000	KD 250,000	KD 100,000

ahli united bank

Al-Hassad weekly draw flyer.

Every KD 50 invested entitles the customer to one chance in the draws, provided that to maintain his balance for at least fifteen days before the draw date. The longer the customer keeps his balance the bigger the chances of participation in the draw with every KD 50 in the account. Draws are held every Wednesday based on the draw scheme. On religious and national holidays, the draw is postponed to the next business day.

For more information on Ahli United Bank's products and services, customers are invited to visit any of the Bank's branches, dial the customer services "Hayakom" on 181 2000, or log on to the Bank's website at www.ahliunited.com.kw

## 20 customers winning cash prizes worth KD1,500 each

## KFH announces winners of Al-Rabeh draw

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced the winners of the AlRabeh draw with 20 customers winning cash prizes worth KD1,500 each for the 47th and 48th weeks of 2023. KFH announced Nawaaf Al-Aradah as the monthly winner of 1 Kilo Gram of KFH Gold for the month of November 2023.

The winners of KD 1,500 are: Mohammad Al-Enzi, Nasser Al-Duwaisan, Abdullateef Al-Mutairi, Mashan Al-Enzi, Anas Abu-Taleb, Maram Al-Shammari, Abdulmanee Al-Ajmi, Khaled Al-Enzi, Shaikh Salman Salman Al-Sabah, Kareema Essa, Khawlah Al-Subaieci, Ayman Al-Bastweasy, Khaled Al-Kandary, Huda Esawi, Saad Mutawa, Haief Al-Mutairi, Salem Al-Rasheedi, Jamal Al-Fahad, Bdreia Musallam, Mohammad Al-Zarei.

The AlRabeh campaign provides prizes and draws that offer customers several chances of winning "weekly, monthly and quarterly". The campaign crowns 536 winners throughout the year.

The draw took place under the supervision of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The campaign is part of KFH's ongoing efforts to offer exceptional products and services that meet customers' aspirations, enhance the Bank's leadership in the local and global markets, as well as reflect its excellence in offering innovative banking solutions as per the highest quality standards.

The Al-Rabeh account is a salary account available to customers wishing to transfer their salaries and manage their personal accounts. Customers can open Al-Rabeh account in any of KFH branches in Kuwait, or through the Bank's online channels. The account can be opened in the Kuwaiti Dinar and is targeted for customers wishing to transfer their salaries and manage their personal accounts. Salary transfer is a prerequisite for customers to enter the draw provided that the transfer of salary to Al-Rabeh account is constant.

Regarding the terms and conditions of the prizes and draws, a customer is able to deposit 3 salaries during the 3

Not only a winner...  
**536** Winners

Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly
KD 1,500	1 kg	KD 25,000

Your chance to win is bigger

The campaign visual

months prior to the draw, and the minimum balance of the account should not be less than KD 50 at the end of each month during the 3 months prior to the draw. Ten draws take place on a weekly basis for amount of K.D 1,500 for 10 winners each, 1 KG of KFH gold will be drawn monthly for one winner and K.D 25,000 for one winner every quarter, reaching a total number of 536 winners during the year.

KFH is keen to further meet customers' requirements and aspirations and their increasing needs as well as offer innovative and modern services, therefore achieving customer satisfaction, which is one of the fundamentals at KFH. The Bank has achieved a qualitative shift in the level of financial services by utilizing technology.

## The Conversation

## Unveiling the dark side of late-night scrolling

## How your brain falls victim to social media advertising

By Jusneel Mahal and Mend Mariwany

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



Ever found yourself scrolling through social media late at night and accidentally buying something you regretted? In this episode of The Conversation Weekly podcast, we talk to an advertising expert about recent research into how social media can overload our brains and make us buy products we don't need or want.

Matthew Pittman is a professor of advertising at the University of Tennessee in the US. In 2022, Pittman and his colleague Eric Haley, conducted three online studies on Americans aged 18-65 to examine how people under various mental loads respond to advertisements differently.

"Our brain has limited resources and it can also be taxed if we try to do too many things at once and once those resources are depleted, there are usually negative

consequences," says Pittman.

If you're on the fence about a purchase and you're under cognitive load and you see a lot of likes or a lot of comments, or maybe it's very attractive people in the ad that look happy ... click, I'm gonna purchase it.

Pittman found that those who weren't under cognitive load made more balanced purchasing decisions. But the group that they told to scroll through their Instagram feed for 30 seconds and then look at an advert was more susceptible to cues such as the comments and likes associated with it.

When asked to describe their rationale for buying a product, Pittman was surprised that those under a high mental load had diminished sentence and language capabilities. He found that Instagram put subjects in a mentally exhausted state because they were consuming different types of text, photos and posts.

People that were not under cognitive load gave grammatically normal sentences that flowed logically, such as this ice cream looked tasty, or I liked the colors, but when people were under cognitive load, even their sentences

were more fractured. Which explains why I can't explain to my wife why I consistently make stupid purchases.

Listen to the full episode of The Conversation Weekly to hear the different ways social media impacts our processing abilities and decision-making.

Matthew Pittman does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

This episode was written and produced by Mend Mariwany with production assistance from Katie Flood and our intern Jusneel Mahal. Eloise Stevens does our sound design, and our theme music is by Neeta Sarl. The executive producer is Gemma Ware.

You can find us on Twitter @TC\_Audio, on Instagram at theconversationdotcom or via email. You can also sign up to The Conversation's free daily email here. A transcript of this episode will be available soon.

Listen to "The Conversation Weekly" via any of the apps listed above, download it directly via our RSS feed or find out how else to listen here. (AP)

The DAI Education Team is taking a break... settling in for

**LOUD WINTERS NAP**

We'll be back in action Saturday, 13 January 2024. Activities in the new year will be posted on Instagram: dai\_education See you next year!

DAI education poster

# A helicopter father flies his duck family south in 'Migration'

By Jake Coyle

Illumination, maker of "Despicable Me," "Sing" and "The Super Mario Bros. Movie," has built its animation empire by mostly staying close to a child-like outlook. Illumination's in-house mascots, the Minions, are basically themselves careening toddlers.

But the studio's latest, "Migration," carries a faintly more parental perspective. Its central character is a father duck, Mack Mallard (Kumail Nanjiani), whose fears and paranoia have kept his feathered family rooted to a small New England pond. But after much cajoling from his wife (Elizabeth Banks) and two ducklings (Caspar Jennings, Tresi Gazal), Mack and company take flight for their first winter migration south to Jamaica.

"Migration" is vividly animated with warm cartoon tones that would do Daffy proud. But it never quite spreads its wings. Stories of overly cautious moms or dads turned adventurers are not exactly fresh material, even if it is atypical that a helicopter parent like Mack can actually fly.

Written by "White Lotus" creator Mike White, "Migration" - a family road trip movie sans the road - mostly comes off as a gentle suggestion to take that Caribbean vacation you've been putting off. White, having mocked lavish trips to Hawaii and Italy on his HBO series, has less satire for the Mallards' excursion to Jamaica - though the journey to get there is certainly perilous.

Once the family sets off, with Uncle Dan (Danny DeVito) in tow, their stops include a fearful night with a bug-eyed heron (Carol Kane) who makes them a bed in a frying pan; a New York encounter with a flock of pigeons and their tough-talking leader (Awkwafina); a parrot (Keegan-Michael Key) caged by a chef who specializes in duck à l'orange; and a cult-like farm where ducks are being ominously well treated.

### Creatures

These are not, you may be thinking, the most salient dangers that await most winged creatures making their way south. Loss of sanctuary or fluctuating climate are no issues here, though the duck à l'orange chef, who has his own helicopter, proves to be a surprisingly regular threat.

It's around then that "Migration" begins to feel more like a wild goose chase. That's not the worst thing for a holiday family movie, though it happens to make "Migration" very comfortably the second-best heron-featuring movie in theaters right now. Hayao Miyazaki's "The Boy and the Heron" is far richer in both its imagination and its menagerie of avian life.

Possibly sensing "Migration" needed a little boost, a "Despicable Me" short is playing along with it: "Mooned," in which the Minions get a taste of zero gravity.

"Migration" is directed by the French filmmaker Benjamin Renner, who crafted the enchanting 2012 film "Ernest and Celestine" with the

delicacy of a cherished children's book. That touch is harder to discern in "Migration." (For a truly magical French-made movie on the subject, seek out the 2001 documentary "Winged Migration.")

But considering migration today is a word so often accompanied by crisis, there's pleasant enough diversion in Renner's film. Like Illumination's "The Super Mario Bros. Movie," the movie's most abundant resource is its lush sense of color. Though that's not enough to turn the tide on the long-running duck season, wabbit season debate, the superb plumage of "Migration" makes for fine bird watching.

"Migration," a Universal release in theaters Dec. 22, is rated PG by the Motion Picture Association for action/peril and mild rude humor. Running time: 92 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four.

### Also:

**LOS ANGELES:** More than two decades after the release of "Chicken Run," Aardman Animations has returned to the adventures of its defiant feathered protagonist, Ginger, in the sequel "Chicken Run: Dawn of the Nugget." The 2000 original remains the highest grossing stop-motion animation flick ever with more than \$227 million in ticket sales. But "Dawn of the Nugget," which introduces an all-new voice cast including **Thandiwe Newton, Bella Ramsey and Zachary Levi**, debuted last week, on Netflix. In it, Ginger has escaped from Tweedy Farm and found sanctuary elsewhere, but again must lead the flock to freedom. (AP)

## Variety



This image released by A24 shows Lily James, (left), and Zac Efron in a scene from 'The Iron Claw.' (AP)

## Film

A must-watch wrestling saga on the Von Erich tragedy

# Efron gives his all in gripping 'Iron Claw'

By Jocelyn Noveck

It doesn't take long to understand the level of commitment Zac Efron brings to "The Iron Claw" as Texas wrestling brother Kevin Von Erich. Just one look at the taut mass of muscle and sinew he's become for the role will do the trick.

It's also clear from the get-go how invested writer-director Sean Durkin was in telling the true-life tale of the Von Erich family wrestling dynasty, which - shockingly, to those of us unfamiliar with the story - suffered a set of tragic losses almost too staggering to imagine. It's hardly a spoiler alert to say that Kevin, by 35, was the only surviving brother of an original six. (He is now 66). Indeed, so devastating is the story that Durkin felt the need to excise brother Chris, one of three lost to suicide, from this retelling entirely.

Durkin has said he was a committed wrestling fan from his childhood in England, where he scoured magazines to learn more about the exploits of the Von Erichs, who made their name in the colorful, high-flying, entertainment-heavy wrestling world of the '70s and early '80s. And from that affection stems perhaps both the strength and weakness of "The Iron Claw." It's a film that tells its stunning tale with heart and conviction, yet seems somehow reticent about pointing a truly critical finger at either the brutality of a sport that broke this family, or the man who seemed to give his sons no choice in the matter: family patriarch Fritz Von Erich.

It is with Fritz that we begin. In a 1950s-era prologue rendered in black-and-white, the eventual patriarch and promoter (an excellent Holt McCallany) is in the ring himself, displaying his famed "Iron Claw" maneuver: a punishing two-handed grip on a doomed opponent's skull, crushing it like a vice.

Waiting in the parking lot is Fritz's wife, Doris

(Maura Tierney) and their young kids. Doris is shocked that Fritz has acquired a spiffy new car to attach to their trailer, something they can't afford, but he tells her it's all part of the persona he's building: You need to be the toughest and the strongest, and then nothing will be able to hurt you.

Flash forward to 1979, and Fritz has passed the dream of becoming heavyweight champion onto his remaining sons. (One of them has died at a young age in a terrible accident.) Kevin is doing his best to be the son who gets there first. Among his exploits in the ring, Kevin climbs up on top of the ropes to attack from the air, leaping onto an opponent. These fight scenes are vivid and exciting, although if you're like me, eventually you'll be shouting at the screen, begging for it all to stop, lest one more son get hurt.

### Championship

But at the kitchen table, there's never talk of stopping. Fritz tells Kevin, David and Mike that they all need to work harder to win that coveted championship belt. Mike, the youngest, is interested in music, but Fritz doesn't care. Privately, Kevin seeks out his mother and asks her to intervene on Mike's behalf. But Doris relies only on her faith; this wrestling business is between the men, she says. (It is horrifying to watch her, powerless, as the sadness multiplies.)

Who will achieve Dad's dream first? Will it be David, who's a great talker and taunter in the ring? Or Kevin, who possesses great physical strength but is awkward and unable to master the art of self-promotion? Suddenly, brother Kerry, a discus thrower with Olympic hopes, enters the scene. When President Jimmy Carter declares the United States won't be sending a team to Moscow in 1980, Fritz decrees that Kerry (Jeremy Allen White) will join his brothers in the ring.

There are a few lovely scenes of the brothers bonding, playing football, doing what brothers do. But the pace of the film, with its wrestling sequences and successive tragedies, doesn't allow for much relationship development. An exception is Kevin's relationship with Pam (a lovely and soulful Lily James), who woos the shy Kevin and eventually marries him, their wedding a brief joyful moment (with an infectious family line-dancing scene).

But tragedy is not far off. For those unfamiliar with the Von Erich tale, we won't reveal more plot here, other than to say that loss does not soften Fritz. At one funeral, he orders his grieving sons to remove their sunglasses, then forbids them to cry.

Efron, with his rock-hard physique and '70s mullet, turns in some of the most affecting work of his career. White, too, is excellent if more inscrutable as Kerry, initially the golden boy until his own brush with disaster sends him into a downward spiral. Harris Dickinson as David and a heartbreaking Stanley Simons as Mike round out the strong ensemble. But the film does not spend a lot of time on the emotional tissue that connects the brothers, who seem more bound by loyalty and mutual hardship than anything else.

The film's emotional ending brings well-earned tears, thanks to Efron's delicate portrayal. But when we're informed by means of an epilogue that the Von Erich family in 2009 was admitted to the WWE Hall of Fame, it's hard not to consider a question that the film doesn't seem to be attacking head-on: Was any of this worth it?

"The Iron Claw," an A24 release, has been Rated R by the Motion Picture Association "for language, suicide, some sexuality and drug use. Running time: 130 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four. (AP)

**LOS ANGELES:** Greta Gerwig and Noah Baumbach are officially married, their representative told The Associated Press Wednesday.

The two filmmakers have been together for 12 years, have two children and collaborated on many films, including "Barbie," which they co-wrote and Gerwig directed. They met on Baumbach's "Greenberg" and went on to work together on films like "Mistress America" and "Frances Ha," which they co-wrote, Baumbach directed and Gerwig acted in.

Baumbach was previously married to and shares a child with **Jennifer Jason Leigh**.

Gerwig and Baumbach wrote "Barbie" during the pandemic, not knowing if it would ever actually get made. In a "60 Minutes" interview from earlier this year Baumbach said that Gerwig signed them up to write it without telling him and he even tried to get out of it. His attempts, he laughed, were unsuccessful because "Greta was persistent and Greta saw something," he said.

The film became a cultural phenomenon and the highest grosser of the year, with over \$1.4 billion in ticket sales, as well as a presumed Oscar contender. (AP)

**NEW YORK:** She's Barbie. He's just Ken. And now, it's Christmas.

On Wednesday, **Ryan Gosling** - the Ken to Margot Robbie's "Barbie" in the film - released the "I'm Just Ken" EP alongside collaborators **Mark Ronson** and **Andrew Wyatt**. It features the original Grammy-nominated, '80s-style power ballad from the movie, also titled "I'm Just Ken," as well as three remixes: the stripped down "I'm Just Ken (In My Feelings Acoustic)," the dance floor ready "I'm Just Ken (Purple Disco Machine Remix)," and the festive "I'm Just Ken (Merry Kristmas Barbie)."

The later was released with an official music video, where Gosling, Wyatt and Ronson are seen working on the holiday remix of the song in a studio drenched in Christmas lights with an impressive live band, bantering with one another. At one point, a goofy Gosling puts on a pair of sunglasses to get into character,



Gosling



Gerwig

telling Ronson he's doing so because "the world can have Ken's voice but only Barbie can have his eyes."

The trio are joined by a full band as well by two cellists, four violinists and a glockenspiel. Gosling's vocals are run through reverb - adding to the triumphant and whimsical reimagining.

"Merry Christmas, Barbie," he ends the song. "Wherever you are."

In July, Ronson, who worked as the executive producer of the "Barbie" soundtrack and also scored it alongside Wyatt, told the Associated Press he typically only contributes music to songs for film - but in the case of "I'm

Just Ken," couldn't shake a few lyrics that made the final cut, like its memorable chorus of "I'm just Ken, anywhere else I'd be a 10."

"I'm Just Ken" is up for best song written for visual media at the 2024 Grammy Awards as well as and the Golden Globe for best original song. (AP)

## People &amp; Places

## Books

## A status symbol

## 'Power Broker' author feels like a movie star

NEW YORK, Dec 21, (AP): Since the release a year ago of the acclaimed documentary "Turn Every Page," Robert Caro has been feeling a bit like a movie star. "I walk up Broadway and kids recognize me," the historian and author of "The Power Broker" says. "If I linger a bit, they start talking about a chapter that they like. It's so wonderful."

The 88-year-old Caro, winner of virtually every literary prize, has long held at least semi-celebrity status. His better known admirers range from Conan O'Brien to former Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, and impatient readers regularly send emails to his publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, asking for an update on his fifth and final Lyndon Johnson book. (Still no release date in sight, Caro says.)



Caro

On this December morning, he's seated at a small table in the gift shop of the New-York Historical Society, engaged in another kind of ritual for public figures: autographs, available to anyone who buys one of his books from the society's store or website. Caro has spoken around the country, and beyond, but he is also very much a New Yorker, a native Upper West Sider who used to visit the historical society as a kid and, for years, has lived close by. Every few weeks, he comes here and signs copies of his books, including the four Johnson volumes released so far and his debut publication "The Power Broker," the landmark Robert Moses biography that next fall will be featured at a society exhibit marking its 50th anniversary.

The signings are not public events, although one local resident, 28-year-old Shiloh Frederick, came in person so the author could autograph her copy of "The Power Broker." Frederick, who designs travel guides and other materials about New York City, has made several videos about Caro's epic narrative of Moses' reign as a municipal builder and its lasting impact.

## Inspired

"I was reading the book and it inspired all of these video ideas I wanted to share with other people," she tells Caro.

"That's the best thing I could hear," he answers. He signed dozens of books, which the society will ship to customers; he sometimes just includes his name and the name of the book's owner, and he sometimes adds a personal message. One book was ordered by a 90-year-old priest in Rhode Island to whom Caro wishes a happy birthday. For a reader self-identified as a "young budding historian obsessed with history," Caro inscribes, "To a fellow history lover." For Frederick, he writes, "To Shiloh, who really understands." "This is incredible. I am going to cherish this," Frederick says. "It's getting a place of honor on my bookshelf."

Historical society officials say "The Power Broker" is the most popular of the Caro books, understandable for a Pulitzer Prize winner that serves as an unofficial history of New York City in the 20th century. The NYHS, which acquired Caro's archives in 2019, is calling the fall exhibit "Truth to Power," featuring "interview notes, manuscript drafts, and other artifacts intimately connected with his writing process."

As well explained in "Turn Every Page," Caro and editor Robert Gottlieb fought bitterly while working on "The Power Broker," cutting hundreds of thousands of words from a book that still ran over 1,000 pages. The deleted sections, predating the internet era, have an aura among Caro followers that lost studio recordings might have for Beatles fans. Readers have long wondered if Caro preserved a chapter on the urban theorist and community activist Jane Jacobs, who successfully pushed back against Moses in the 1950s and '60s when he attempted to run an expressway through Lower Manhattan.

Caro grimaces when asked about the Jacobs section, not just because he's heard about it so often, but because, he says, he has no specific idea what's inside the boxes containing his "Power Broker" materials.

"I couldn't stand to look at the stuff, so I never opened the boxes," Caro says.

A society spokesperson declined to offer further details on the exhibit, saying it was too soon.

Interest in "The Power Broker" remains strong among the general public. The Moses biography has sold more than 17,000 copies this year, double the total of a decade ago, according to Circana, which tracks around 85% of print sales. During the height of the pandemic, "The Power Broker" appeared in the background during so many televised Zoom interviews, it became an unofficial status symbol.

## Responses

The book inspires responses in other formats Caro never imagined while writing it. This fall, Frederick used her Instagram page to help lead an effort to tear down monkey statues widely regarded as racist that Moses had placed in a Harlem playground. The podcaster Roman Mars plans a yearlong tribute to Caro's book on his show "99% Invisible," his guests including O'Brien.

"My show is about architecture and design, and 'The Power Broker' is basically the bible of this," Mars says. "It made people like me think about how cities are built, how highways are made."

As readers await - and have awaited for more than a decade - the final Johnson volume, Caro's appearance at the historical society is a break from what has been an intense few months of writing since Gottlieb's death in June. The author has been working closely with Kathy Hourigan, who has served as a second editor on his books since he began the Johnson series in the 1970s. Hourigan is retiring this year as vice president and managing editor of Knopf Doubleday, part of a wave of buyouts at the publisher, but she will remain with Caro on a freelance basis.

The most Caro can say about the fifth Johnson book is that it will be long, "very long." He has noted often that he already knows the last line, but that he does not work chronologically. He speaks of completing a "poignant" section on the funeral of Robert F. Kennedy, who was assassinated in 1968. But he is currently deep into the year 1965, when Johnson signed historic legislation on everything from voting rights to Medicare, while also making the ill-fated decision to send ground troops to Vietnam.

"The Vietnam War is so depressing. Honest to god, you find yourself just about crying to (hear about) these young kids who had to fight in the jungle," Caro says.

"The thing is," he says of Johnson and 1965, "it's everything about American power distilled through this one man, this one period."



Taylor Swift performs at the Monumental Stadium during her Eras Tour concert in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Thursday, Nov. 9. (AP)

## Music

## Exploring the unseen stories of music legends

## Music docus that hit the right note

LOS ANGELES, Dec 21, (AP): Looking for something to watch this holiday season? While Barbenheimer is enticing, 2023 was a great year for documentaries - particularly music documentaries, with titles that span the biggest names in the biz to considered studies of small, independent music communities.

So, hand us the remote: Here are some of The Associated Press' favorite music documentaries of the year - in no particular order - along with where to find them.

Was there ever a question of this film's placement on this list? "Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé" chronicles the superstar's 39-city world tour and the blood, sweat and tears required to make the larger-than-life production happen. It's a welcome peek behind the curtain, spearheaded by one of music's great perfectionists. And while Bey has been largely mysterious over the last decade - interviews are a rarity - here, she is a master of giving her audience just enough access, including a few moments with daughter Blue Ivy.

As AP's Jonathan Landrum writes in his review, the film doesn't shoehorn in every song; rather, "Renaissance" is more about getting a glimpse into Beyoncé's life - even for just a little bit."

**Where to watch:** "Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé" is still in theaters in the US. Find a screening here.

Those who managed to snag tickets to an Eras Tour concert are able to relive the experience by watching all three hours of "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour," a near-exact replica of her blockbuster performance compiled from several August shows at Southern California's SoFi Stadium. For those who didn't attend, this film is an opportunity to witness the magic. And for everyone, it gives viewers the best seat in the house. Just don't expect any narrative breaks or behind-the-scenes insights. This is the full concert on the silver screen - no more, no less.

**Where to watch:** "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour" is still in theaters. Find a screening here. You can also rent the film at Amazon's Prime Video.

A great documentary doesn't ask

to be the definitive work on a subject matter; instead, it allows insight and, ideally, a new framework in which to understand its topic. Across a respectable 90 minutes, Showtime's "Thriller 40" is a deep examination of the Michael Jackson record that changed pop music forever, with commentary from Mary J Blige, Usher, Mark Ronson, Maxwell, will.i.am, Brooke Shields and more, and directed by the influential cultural critic Nelson George.

**Where to watch:** "Thriller 40" is streaming on Paramount+ with Showtime.

In 2021, the rapper Biz Markie died. The "Clown Prince of Hip-Hop" was just 57. He left behind an incredible legacy, celebrated for his beatboxing prowess, turntable mastery and the 1989 classic "Just a Friend." The documentary directed by Sacha Jenkins chronicles the life and talent of Markie, an oft-misunderstood New York native who brought humor to the rap game. Viewers are offered a crash course in Markie through his comedic spirit and loved ones. Any scenes illustrating his final days in the hospital, for example, are done using a puppet - something he'd no doubt get a laugh from.

## Innovative

**Where to watch:** "All Up in the Biz" is streaming on Paramount+ with Showtime.

This documentary might be the least recognizable name on this list, and that's part of the appeal. "The Elephant 6 Recording Co." is a deep dive into one of the most influential indie rock collectives of the '90s, the Southern scene that birthed bands like Neutral Milk Hotel, Olivia Tremor Control, and Apples in Stereo.

It's a little sprawling and a lot strange, almost mirroring the avant-garde works of its psychedelic subjects. Consider this one, by first-time director Chad Stockfleth, is a welcome alternative to the pop star-focused (and produced) documentaries of the current moment, and a reminder that the most innovative art and music comes from community.

**Where to watch:** "The Elephant 6

Recording Co." can be rented or purchased via Apple TV and Amazon Prime Video in the US Outside the US, it's available to purchase from Vimeo On Demand.

Little Richard laid the foundation for rock 'n' roll; he is the music's history. So why isn't he the biggest name in the genre? Despite his revolutionary talent, Richard is more often than not remembered solely as the mastermind behind "Tutti Frutti." It's an unfortunate truth of white musicians appropriating the work of Black artists, which director Lisa Cortés works to highlight in the documentary "Little Richard: I Am Everything." The film gets at the heart of Little Richard's work, how he built his incredible persona, and all the ways in which the world chooses to under-celebrate him. With this film, it's impossible to continue down that path.

**Where to watch:** "Little Richard: I Am Everything" is streaming on MAX.

Released while BTS members are taking turns fulfilling South Korea's mandatory military service, Disney+'s "SUGA: Road to D-Day" follows the K-pop group's most elusive talent as he travels from Seoul to Tokyo, Las Vegas and beyond for his debut solo album under the Agust D moniker. In some moments, it's an expansive exploration of his self and his work; in others, it's a return to the Korean rap underground sensibilities that made him.

**Where to watch:** "SUGA: Road to D-Day" is streaming on Disney+. While there, fans can stream "BTS Moments: Beyond the Star," a documentary series spotlighting the entire seven-member group, as well.

Now here's a little something-something to wake you up before you go. Netflix released "WHAM!" earlier this year, an extensive documentary about the fabulous pop musical duo of George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley. It boasts of never-before-seen footage of the pair (collected before Michael died in 2016, of course), charting their explosive journey from teens with dreams to global icons.



Ruth Negga, a cast member in 'Good Grief,' poses at the premiere of the Netflix film at the Egyptian Theatre, Tuesday, Dec. 19, in Los Angeles. (AP)



Shakur



Poivre d'Arvor

## Variety

**PARIS:** A top French television presenter has been handed a preliminary charge of rape by a person abusing his authority as authorities investigate complaints by about 20 women who have accused him of sexual misconduct over a period of decades.

**Patrick Poivre d'Arvor** denies wrongdoing, and has sued 16 of his accusers. A revered personality who hosted France's most popular news program for more than two decades, he insists that the sexual encounters were consensual.

The prosecutors' office in the Paris suburb of Nanterre said Wednesday that Poivre d'Arvor was given preliminary charges of rape by a person abusing his authority for alleged actions dating from 2009. He was also named as an "assisted witness" in another alleged rape from 2004.

Both incidents involved author **Florence Porcel**, who filed legal complaints in 2021. The Associated Press generally doesn't identify those who say they have been victims of sexual wrongdoing, except when they publicly identify themselves.

Under French law, preliminary charges mean magistrates have strong reason to suspect wrongdoing but allow time for further investigation before deciding whether to send a case to trial. The "assisted witness" status also allows time for further investigation that could lead to eventual charges or to a case being dropped.

The Nanterre prosecutors' office said it that opened two preliminary investigations in 2021 into numerous accusations against Poivre d'Arvor, including Porcel's. One investigation, involving complaints by about 20 women, was closed and the other is ongoing, prosecutors said in a statement to the AP.

Poivre d'Arvor's lawyers said in a statement published online that he "firmly contests the facts alleged by Madame Porcel, as he has since the first day, and has provided numerous elements of material evidence."

Lawyers **Jacqueline Laffont** and **Julie Benedetti** noted that prosecutors recommended dropping the case, but the investigating judges unusually filed the charge anyway. (AP)

**GLENCOE, Ill.:** Chicago Botanic Garden is dazzling patrons and visitors from around the world with their fifth annual holiday display of light and music: Light-scape. Clusters of multigenerational households

push strollers, carry children and walk arm in arm with older relatives as they navigate the 1.3-mile (2.1-kilometer) experience in the village of **Glencoe**, near Chicago.

More than 22 light installations by various local and international artists light a

path through established gardens that snake around the Great Basin in the core of the garden's 385 acres.

Highlights of the experience include passing through the "Electric Ribbon Tunnel" created by Culture Creative; "Sea of

Light," created by UK artist Ithaca, which has 4,800 individually controlled balls of LED light; "Lilies," by UK artist Jigantics, with 22 illuminated 5-foot (1.5-meter) lilies that float in and around the darkness of the Great Basin; and "Laser Lake," projecting a rainbow of light dancing across the Great Basin. (AP)



Holt McCallany, (from left), Sean Durkin, Zac Efron, Kevin Von Erich, Jeremy Allen White and Stanley Simons attend the premiere of 'The Iron Claw,' Monday, Dec. 11, at the DGA Theater in Los Angeles. (AP) — Details Page 11

**LAS VEGAS:** A former Los Angeles-area gang leader charged with murder in the killing of hip-hop music icon **Tupac Shakur** in Las Vegas is deriding the case against him as the product of speculation and second-hand testimony as he asks a judge to put him on house arrest ahead of his trial.

A Jan. 2 hearing date was set Tuesday on **Duane "Keffe D" Davis'** bid to be released on no more than \$100,000 bail. His court-appointed attorneys wrote that the health of their 60-year-old client has deteriorated in jail and that he is not getting proper medical attention following a bout with colon cancer that they said is in remission.

"His diet and lack of exercise in the jail, given his age and medical history, is negatively impacting his health," deputy special public defenders **Robert Arroyo** and **Charles Cano** said in the bail motion filed Thursday before **Clark County** District Court Judge **Carli Kierny**. (AP)

## Lead poisoning tied to behavioral concerns, learning difficulties

## Parents of children sickened by lead fear for their future

NEW YORK, Dec 21, (AP) — When Cora Dibert went for a routine blood test in October, the toddler brought along her favorite new snack: a squeeze pouch of WanaBana cinnamon-flavored apple puree.

"She sucked them dry," recalls her 26-year-old mother, Morgan Shurtleff, of Elgin, Oklahoma.

Within a week, the family got an alarming call. The test showed that the 1-year-old had lead poisoning, with nearly four times as much lead as the level that raises concern. Only later did Shurtleff learn that the fruit puree Cora's grandmother bought at a Dollar Tree store may have been the cause.

"That was the scariest thing that ever happened to me," Shurtleff says.

Cora is among dozens of young kids across the US poisoned by lead linked to tainted pouches of the cinnamon-and-fruit puree.

The exact number of affected children is unclear. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports at least 205 confirmed, probable or suspected cases from 33 states. Using a different reporting method, the Food and Drug Administration counts at least 69 kids ages 6 and younger sickened in 28 states as of Dec. 14.

## Contamination

Tests show victims had blood lead readings up to eight times higher than the federal reference level of concern, health officials said. Samples of the puree showed lead contamination more than 200 times higher than the FDA allows.

The pouches were sold under three brands - WanaBana, Schnucks and Weis. The products were produced at a plant in Ecuador and first imported to the US in November 2022, the officials said.

Testing of cinnamon samples supplied to the factory showed "extremely high" levels of lead - more than 2,000 times higher than a proposed FDA maximum, the agency said.

FDA officials have raised the prospect that the contamination was intentional. One possibility is that the cinnamon was contaminated for economic reasons, the agency said. That could mean an ingredient such as lead may have been added to boost the value of the cinnamon.

Spices such as turmeric, cinnamon and paprika have been known to be mixed with lead chromate or lead oxide, compounds that mirror the spices' colors, said Karen Everstine, technical director for FoodchainID, a company that tracks food supply chains.

"The intent is not to make people sick. Nobody wants to do that because then they get caught," Everstine said. "What they want to do is make money."

That angers Shurtleff.

If it's true, "they made my child sick for a dime," she said. "The more I think about it, the angrier I get."

At the same time, she and other parents are most concerned about the lasting effects on their kids.

"I'm pretty worried, considering the effects are irreversible," said Shurtleff, who works as a nurse.

No amount of lead exposure is safe for children and the effects on brain development can show up years later, said Dr. Jennifer Sample, a pediatric toxicologist who consults for industry and academics.

"It's irritability. It's behavioral concerns. It's learning difficulties," she said.

When kids ingest lead, the heavy metal travels through the bloodstream and spreads to organs, including the brain, Sample explained. Once there, the lead substitutes inside cells for vital nutrients such as calcium and iron, causing permanent damage.

Because kids' brains are flexible and still growing, early detection and changes in diet may offset the harm, experts said. The children nevertheless will likely need years of monitoring and intervention.

"The effects in the brain at the cellular level are irreversible, but the downstream effects don't have to be," Sample said.

Lead poisoning can be treated with chelation, a therapy that uses drugs that bind to metals in blood to remove them from the body. But it's only used with higher lead levels and it's usually difficult to administer to the very young.

Instead, affected kids should eat a diet high in vitamin D, calcium and iron and be given a stimulating environment that encourages brain development.

The prognosis is sobering for families whose children were sickened.

Mustafa Al-Khaled, a Norfolk, Nebraska, civil engineer, sued WanaBana LLC because his 17-month-old son, Arian, was diagnosed with acute lead poisoning after eating the pouches regularly since August.

"As a parent, it's really hurtful to be in this situation," said Al-Khaled, who is among about a dozen parents of affected kids who contacted Ron Simon, a Houston food-safety lawyer who filed the case. "Why I'm here is to protect this child."

Al-Khaled and his wife, Dania, rushed Arian for testing in early November after learning that the WanaBana products had been recalled. They were already worried because Arian had been crying uncontrollably, losing weight and passing white-colored stool.

## Elevated

A test showed the boy's blood lead level was 15.3 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood. That's more than four times higher than the 3.5 micrograms per deciliter that the CDC uses to identify children with elevated lead levels.

Health officials in Nebraska retrieved samples of the WanaBana pouches from Al-Khaled's home. Test results are still pending.

"We're really worrying about the future," Al-Khaled said. "Is this going to harm him later?"

That fear is shared by Talia Hurdle, 29, of Mount Vernon, New York. Her 18-month-old son, Jamari, ate WanaBana apple cinnamon pouches two or three times a day for months, she said.

He's a picky eater, she explained, and the pouches that sold at the Dollar Tree for \$1.25 for a pack of three were an inexpensive way to give him food he liked. Jamari's blood level was 17.5 micrograms when he was first tested in September.

"It's sad because you give your baby stuff to help them continue to be healthy, but look what happened," Hurdle said.

A few weeks after Jamari stopped eating the puree, his lead level was down to 10.5 micrograms per deciliter. Levels dropped for Cora Shurtleff and Arian Al-Khaled, too, once they quit eating the pouches.

That's a good sign, said Sample, the toxicologist.

"These parents can breathe a sigh of relief that they're not going to be as harmed as they could have been with a longer exposure," she said.

Shurtleff worries that not all families know about the danger. The FDA said some Dollar Tree stores still have the fruit pouches on their shelves, weeks after they were recalled. Dollar Tree Inc. officials said in a statement they have added register locks to prevent sales of the products, instructed stores to destroy the affected packages and are working with a third party to confirm they're removed from shelves.

After Cora's diagnosis, Shurtleff was at work, preparing to give a vaccination, when she noticed her young patient was eating a WanaBana apple cinnamon pouch. She immediately told the parent about the recall.

"They were just in shock. They hadn't heard anything about it," Shurtleff said. "Then they were like, 'We still have some in our pantry. I guess we should throw it out.'"



Dr. Jennifer Gaubert, a physical therapist, helps introduce Freya Baudoin, 18 months, to her new mobility chair, at the Children's Hospital New Orleans Rehabilitation Center in Metairie, La., Monday, Oct. 30, 2023. Tulane science and engineering students are making the second batch of mobility chairs for toddlers, that will eventually go to pediatric patients at Children's Hospital. (AP)

## Measles threat looms

## US promotes vaccinations 'amid' parental opposition

NEW YORK, Dec 21, (AP) — When Idaho had a rare measles outbreak a few months ago, health officials scrambled to keep it from spreading. In the end, 10 people, all in one family, were infected, all unvaccinated.

This time, the state was lucky, said the region's medical director Dr. Perry Jansen. The family quickly quarantined and the children were already taught at home. The outbreak could have been worse if the kids were in public school, given the state's low vaccination rates, he said.

In Idaho last year, parents opted out of state-required vaccines for 12% of kids entering kindergarten, the highest rate in the nation.

"We tend to forget that diseases like measles and polio used to kill people," said Jansen, medical director of the Southwest District Health Department, which handled the outbreak in September.

All states require children to have certain routine vaccines to go to public school, and often private school and day care, to prevent outbreaks of once-common childhood diseases like measles, mumps, whooping cough, chickenpox and polio. All provide exemptions for children who have a medical reason for avoiding the shots. Most also offer waivers for religious beliefs. Fifteen allow a waiver for any personal belief.

## Misinformation

Last school year, vaccination waivers among kindergartners hit an all-time high: 3% in total, according to a recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report. Waivers for religious or person beliefs have been on the rise, driven by some states loosening laws, in others by vaccine misinformation and political rhetoric amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Idaho, "a parent only has to provide a signed statement," to get a waiver, the state's health department

said. A change in state law before the 2018-19 school year made it easier to get waivers. The state's exemption rate that year was 7.7%.

September's measles outbreak started when a resident of Nampa, the state's third largest city, returned home from a trip abroad. Measles is usually brought into the U.S. through travel since widespread vaccination has all but eliminated local spread of the disease.

## Immunization

It takes a very high level of vaccination - around 95% - to protect against the spread of measles and other diseases, experts say. During the pandemic, the national rate for vaccinations among kindergartners dropped to 93%.

Health experts say interventions on every level are needed to get more kids immunized: doctors talking to parents, social media campaigns, easier access to vaccines in some areas, enforcement by schools in others.

Last year, most states had an increase in waivers. Hawaii, which allows medical and religious waivers, saw rates double from the previous school year. Nearly 6.5% of kindergartners have an exemption for at least one required vaccine.

It's impossible to know the reasons behind a waiver, said Ronald Balajadia, immunization program manager for Hawaii State Department of Health. But misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines "has bled through to routine vaccines where normally people would have not had a question about," Balajadia said.

While some states have made it easier to opt out, others have clamped down. Connecticut eliminated its longstanding religious waiver for vaccinations in 2021, joining California, West Virginia, New York and Maine in allowing only medical exemptions.

## Students' service-learning project transforms lives

## Innovative chairs bring independence and joy to toddlers with special needs

NEW ORLEANS, Dec 21, (AP) — At 19 months old, Elijah Jack, born with no femur bone in one leg and a short femur in the other, is unable to walk on his own like most toddlers his age. Another 19-month-old, Freya Baudoin, born prematurely at 28 weeks and delayed in her mobility, has finally taken her first step.

Special needs children like these often take longer than most to become independently mobile, which can be a hardship for parents and others who care for them. Elijah is often carried because of his limb difference and clubfeet, meaning that instead of being straight, his feet are twisted inward and his toes point downward.

As a result, getting around on his own is a challenge.

That was until this past Spring. Elijah was one of the first recipients of a specially designed rolling chair built by a team of biomedical engineering students at Tulane University. Today, Elijah has mastered getting around on wheels - turning, stopping and steering all on his own.

## Safe

"He loves his chair," said Crystal Jack, Elijah's mom. "So, I get a lot of things done because I know in his chair, he's safe. He knows how to go around the house with it and everything, so I get a lot of things done now."

Before the chair, Jack said her son was able to scoot on the floor to get where he needed to go but the chair offers a whole new level of independence.

"Like I said we come a long way, but I'm blessed to have him," Jack said, smiling warmly as he moved back and forth around the living room of her mother's home in Ventress, Louisiana.

The Tulane students partnered with the nonprofit MakeGood in 2022 to design and produce the chairs to help toddlers (roughly ages 1-4) build independence and strength, and for some, prepare for a real wheelchair. While it remains difficult to access precise numbers for total wheelchair use among children, there were about 2.8 million wheelchair users in the US in 2002, of whom 121,000 were under 15 years of age, according to the US Census.

The students partnered with the nonprofits as part of a service-learning project - a graduation requirement at Tulane. But many say they had no idea when the project started the depth of impact their chairs would make in the lives of children in the community.

Dylan Lucia, a graduate student at Tulane from the San Diego, California area, said he chose the field of biomedical engineering to help people and this project has manifested that.

"Seeing that direct kind of patient feedback and seeing how much these (chairs) were improving their lives and helping them become a more independent person, even as a small toddler ... like, it was really, really endearing to see something like that and to see the positive change," Lucia said.

The chairs are particularly helpful for families whose children will eventually need wheelchairs. Noam Platt, director of MakeGood, said insurance companies typically don't cover the cost of a wheelchair for a child unless there is sufficient evidence that the child can use it effectively.

"These devices are used to create that evidence that their quality of life will be improved so they can get maybe a more durable assistive technology," Platt said.

Freya's chair was one of five made throughout several weekends early this fall at Tulane's Scot Ackerman MakerSpace, an enormous workshop with laser cutters, 3D printers and drilling and sewing equipment.

Students applied padding and safety straps to the chairs, and some required modifications to accommodate the needs of the children receiving them. For instance, Freya's chair needed a wider strap to help secure her torso, and another patient needed a space behind the chair big enough to hold his breathing vent. Freya's chair also had a bar added to the back, so that she could push it like a stroller. She took her first steps in early December after working with her physical therapist and her chair.

There's no word on how long Freya will have to use the chair but her mother said it has been more than a blessing.

"At first, we thought the muscle tone in her ankles wasn't strong enough for her to walk at all, but the neurologists recently told us everything is looking good and she should be walking on her own or with limited assistance soon," said her mom, Heather Hampton, of Metairie, Louisiana.

Hampton said Freya's able to push the chair like a stroller on her own. She wishes they could've gotten it sooner but understands the adjustments that needed to be made.

"We're just happy that she'll ultimately be able to get around and walk independently," Hampton said.

Platt said the mobility chairs' original design and plans came from TOM Global but the parts were purchased in the US or made and then assembled by hand at Tulane. The wood panels used for the chair's frame were laser cut and then sanded by students to buff out any splinters and rough edges. Padded seats were stuffed into fabric cushions sewn by students. Wheels were purchased online and then screwed into place.

## Therapy

Elijah has had his chair since the end of March. It was made in the first batch of about 10 chairs delivered to pediatric patients for use in occupational and physical therapy sessions.

"His chair shows him that, like, 'I could be up like other children.' You know, he don't let his (being) disabled get in the way," said Jack who added Elijah will likely need some type of mobility assistance for the rest of his life.

Bumpers were added to the bottom front of the most recent batch of chairs after parents from the first round said their furniture - and feet - were taking hits as their children became better and faster at using their chairs.

Platt said there have been two rounds, so far, of chair building and 15 chairs have been given away. But, he said they're aiming for at least 10 to 15 more by Spring 2024.

"We coordinate with our clinical partners to find kids that would be a good fit for these devices," he said. "We work with the clinical team to make sure each chair fits the individuals and make customizations if necessary."

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## Arizona rides massive second-half run to beat Alabama

## Davis scores 23 pts, N. Carolina knocks off unbeaten Oklahoma

## Celtics bounce back from 'tough' defeat

Sixers ease past Timberwolves

SACRAMENTO, Calif., Dec 21, (AP): Jaylen Brown and Derrick White each scored 28 points to help the short-handed Boston Celtics bounce back from a disappointing loss at Golden State with a 144-119 victory over the Sacramento Kings on Wednesday night.

Boston blew a 17-point lead before losing to the Warriors in overtime Tuesday night and played without leading scorer Jayson Tatum (ankle) and big man Al Horford (rest) against the Kings.



Sacramento Kings forward Trey Lyles, left, and Boston Celtics center Kristaps Porzingis (8) chase the ball during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Sacramento, Calif., Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2023. The Celtics won 144-119. (AP)

## BASKETBALL

## 76ers 127, Timberwolves 113

In Philadelphia, Joel Embiid scored a season-high 51 points and grabbed 12 rebounds, and the 76ers used a big fourth quarter to close out the Timberwolves.

Tyrese Maxey scored 35 points as Philadelphia (19-8) won for the seventh time in eight games, bouncing back nicely after a 108-104 loss to Chicago on Monday night.

## Clippers 120, Mavericks 111

In Dallas, Kawhi Leonard scored 30 points, and the Clippers held on for their ninth consecutive victory.

Norman Powell scored 21 points off the bench with Paul George sidelined by an illness, and James Harden had 17 points and 11 assists. The Clippers are on their longest winning streak since a 10-game run in 2015-16.

## Knicks 121, Nets 102

In New York, Julius Randle scored 26 points, Donte DiVincenzo added 23 and the Knicks beat the Nets for their first victory in Brooklyn in four years.

Immanuel Quickley had 19 points and Jalen Brunson finished with 16

points, eight assists and seven rebounds for the Knicks, who have swung New York's NBA basketball rivalry back in their favor with Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving no longer in town. The Knicks have won all three meetings since the Nets traded the two stars last season, after never beating the Nets when they were on the floor.

## Pacers 144, Hornets 113

In Indianapolis, Buddy Hield scored 25 points, helping Indiana stop a four-game losing streak.

Tyrese Haliburton had 19 points and 13 assists for the Pacers, who shot 61.3% from the field. Aaron Nesmith scored 19 points, and Myles Turner had 18.

## Bulls 124, Lakers 108

In Chicago, DeMar DeRozan had 27 points, nine assists and seven rebounds, and the Bulls beat LeBron James and the Lakers.

Chicago shot 54.5% from the field and had eight players score in double figures. Coby White had 17 points and reserve Ayo Dosunmu added 14.

Despite the continued absence of

All-Star guard Zach LaVine due to right foot inflammation, the Bulls opened a six-game homestand with their third win in four games.

## Nuggets 113, Raptors 104

In Toronto, Nikola Jokic had 31 points and 15 rebounds, and Denver won for the fifth time in six games.

Jamal Murray scored 20 points for the Nuggets, who evened their road record at 8-8. Aaron Gordon and Michael Porter Jr. each scored 12 points.

## Cavaliers 124, Jazz 116

In Cleveland, Sam Merrill set career highs with 27 points and eight 3-pointers, sending short-handed Cleveland to the victory.

Merrill buried three 3-pointers during a 17-2 run to open the fourth quarter, giving Cleveland its largest lead at 109-95. The reserve guard finished 9 of 16 from the field, including 8 of 14 beyond the arc, in a career-best 30 minutes.

Caris LeVert had 23 points for Cleveland, which made 23 3-pointers on a franchise-record 51 attempts.

PHOENIX, Dec 21, (AP): Arizona and Alabama traded missed shots and turnovers, neither able to get much of an offensive flow in an unfamiliar arena.

The Wildcats turned up the defensive pressure in the second half, sparking the offense in a run that changed the game.

Oumar Ballo had 16 points and 12 rebounds, Pelle Larsson added 16 points and No. 4 Arizona used a massive second-half run to beat Alabama 87-74 on Wednesday night in the Jerry Colangelo Hall of Fame Series.

Two of the nation's top three scoring teams engaged in a surprising defensive battle, trading missed shots and turnovers.

With Arizona fans making the Footprint Center sound like McKale Center West, the Wildcats (9-1) had them roaring with a 19-3 run to take a 10-point lead midway through the second half.

Caleb Love scored nine straight points to put Arizona up 84-72 and help the team avoid losing consecutive games for the first time in three seasons under Lloyd. The Wildcats lost by eight to top-ranked Purdue on Saturday.

## BASKETBALL

The Crimson Tide (6-5) arrived in the desert at the end of a brutal stretch of three games against top-10 teams for the first time in program history. Alabama failed in the first two, losing by six to Purdue and by three to No. 12 Creighton.

Poor shooting doomed the Tide in the third.

## North Carolina 81, Oklahoma 69

In Charlotte, RJ Davis scored 23 points and Armando Bacot added 14 points and eight rebounds and No. 11 North Carolina handed seventh-ranked Oklahoma its first loss of the season 81-69 at the Spectrum Center.

Cormac Ryan had 13 points and Harrison Ingram added 11 for the Tar Heels (8-3), who snapped a two-game losing streak.

Otega Oweh had 23 points and Javian McCollum had 14 for Oklahoma (10-1), which never led. The Sooners' loss leaves No. 3 Houston, No. 20 James Madison and No. 25 Ole Miss as the only unbeaten teams in Division I basketball.

It was the seventh straight game Davis has led the Tar Heels in scoring. He came into the game averaging 21.6 points per game.

The Sooners cracked The Associated Press Top 10 this week for the first time since February 2021, but struggled from the onset in their first meeting with North Carolina since a 72-60 loss in the 2009 NCAA Tournament's Elite Eight.



UConn guard Stephon Castle (5) blocks the shot of Seton Hall guard Kadary Richmond during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game in Newark, N.J., Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2023. (AP)

North Carolina's defense gave Oklahoma fits in the early going, holding the Sooners to 0 for 5 shooting from the field and forcing four turnovers while building a 12-2 lead. Davis got it going early with eight points during that stretch, including two 3s.

The Tar Heels led 36-28 at the break, holding the Sooners to 32.3% shooting from the field and 1 of 10 on 3-pointers.

## Villanova 68, Creighton 66

In Omaha, Eric Dixon made the go-ahead 3-pointer with 28 seconds left in overtime to finish his 32-point night and Villanova held off No. 12 Creighton 68-66 in the Big East opener for both teams.

The Bluejays (9-3) led by double digits until midway through the second half before Villanova (8-4) rallied to tie it and force overtime.

Alexander made two free throws to put Creighton up 66-65 with 42 seconds left. After a timeout, Villanova set up a play to have Dixon work around a screen and take a pass from Jordan Longino. Dixon got the ball in the corner and hit his 3 as Kalkbrenner

closed in on defense.

## Gonzaga 100, Jackson State 76

In Spokane, Graham Ike scored 22 points in 17 minutes. Braden Huff added 17 points off the bench, and No. 15 Gonzaga ran away in the second half for a 100-76 win over Jackson State.

The Zags (9-3) rebounded from their loss to No. 5 UConn last Friday and picked up a resounding victory in their last game before Christmas.

Ike and Huff were part of a dominant effort on the interior. Gonzaga scored 50 points in the paint and shot 52% as a team.

Nolan Hickman scored 18 points and Ryan Nembhard added 11 points and six assists. Anton Watson finished with 10 points, eight rebounds, six assists and two steals, and moved into second place on the school's all-time steals list, trailing only John Stockton.

The Bulldogs led 41-29 at halftime and started the second half on a 10-0 run, capped by a 3-pointer from Dusty Stromer. The Zags led by as many as 37 in the second half and improved to 19-0 all-time against current SWAC opponents.

## LSU thrash Coppin State 80-48

## NC St blows out Old Dominion 87-50 for another 12-0 'start'

NORFOLK, Va., Dec 21, (AP): Madison Hayes scored 17 points to lead six players in double figures and No. 3 North Carolina State ran away from Old Dominion 87-50 on Wednesday night.

Aziyiah James, from nearby Virginia Beach, added 16 points and Zoe Brooks had 11 assists as the Wolfpack (12-0) capped the fifth unbeaten non-conference schedule in its history and its third 12-0 start in the past 11 seasons under coach Wes Moore.

## Texas 105, UT Rio Grand Valley 51

In Edinburg, Rori Harmon scored 12 points and became the fastest Texas player to reach 500 assists and the Longhorns cruised to a win over UT Rio Grand Valley.

All 12 Longhorns scored, seven of them in double figures and three joined Harmon with 10 points.

Shaylee Gonzales, Aaliyah Moore and DeYona Gasta also had 12 points. Harmon had eight assists, giving the junior 501 in 79 games. Moore had nine rebounds.

## LSU 80, Coppin State 48

In Baltimore, Angel Reese scored 26 points in a victorious return to her hometown, and LSU beat Coppin State.

Reese, who was a high school star in Baltimore at St. Frances Academy, played two seasons at Maryland before transferring to LSU and winning a national title last season. She dominated the early going as the Tigers (12-1) took control and never really relinquished it.

## BASKETBALL

At 6-foot-3, Reese was at least 2 inches taller than every player on Coppin State's roster. She finished with six rebounds and five steals in addition to her game-high scoring total. Flau'jae Johnson added 18 points for the Tigers.

## Stanford 92, UC Davis 52

In San Francisco, Hannah Jump became Stanford's career 3-point leader when she hit from deep in the first quarter, and Kiki Iriafen had 20 points and 11 rebounds as Stanford powered past Northern California neighbor UC Davis.

Cameron Brink added 21 points, four rebounds and two blocked shots as the Cardinal (10-1) moved Hall of Fame coach Tara VanDerveer seven victories from becoming the winningest college coach ever. Elena Bosgana added 14 points and six rebounds as Stanford finished with six players scoring in double figures.

## Baylor 61, Providence 36

In Fort Lauderdale, Bella Fontleroy



North Carolina State forward Mimi Collins (2) defends against Old Dominion forward Brenda Fontana (55) during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2023, in Norfolk, Va. (AP)

scored 14 points, Sarah Andrews added 12 points and Baylor routed Providence in the West Palm Beach Classic.

The game was hampered by 40 fouls and 41 turnovers - with 27 miscues by the Friars. Baylor shot just 39% from the field and Providence didn't make its 10th field goal until the 5:36 mark of the fourth quarter.

## Kansas State 84, Southern 52

In Manhattan, Ayoka Lee continued her red-hot shooting pace and scored 20 points to lead Kansas State over Southern.

Lee made 8 of 10 shots, including 1 for 1 from 3-point distance, and made all three of her free throws. She has made 46 of 59 shots (78%) over the past four games and has scored 108 points in that stretch.

Serena Sundell had 11 points with seven assists and five rebounds for the Wildcats (12-1). Taryn Sides had 10 points, seven rebounds and four assists. The Wildcats shot 56.7% and scored 40 points in the paint.

## UConn 111, Toronto Metropolitan 34

In Toronto, Aaliyah Edwards scored 26 points and grabbed 10 rebounds in her homecoming, leading UConn over Toronto Metropolitan.

Behind Edwards, who was two shy of her career high while shooting 9 of 13 from the field plus 8 of 9 at the foul line, the Huskies (10-3) were never challenged.

Freshman KK Arnold scored a season-high 21 points for UConn. Ashlynn Shade had 20, Qadence Samuels set a season best with 18, and Paige Bueckers scored 11.

## Louisville 59, Washington 51

In Louisville, Olivia Cochran scored

14 points, Nyla Harris added 11 and Louisville stayed undefeated at home with a win over Washington.

Louisville closed the first half on a 6-0 run, with the last four by Sydney Taylor, and opened the second half by scoring five straight points for the first double-digit lead of the game at 26-26.

## Gonzaga 81, Arizona 69

In Phoenix, Yvonne Ejim scored 21 of her 27 points in the first half, Brynna Maxwell scored 14 of her 17 in a dominant third quarter and Gonzaga defeated Arizona in the Jerry Colangelo Classic.

The Bulldogs were 12 of 16 in the third quarter and were shooting 68% (28 of 41) entering the final 10 minutes.

Florida State 110, Alabama State 45

In Tallahassee, Ta'Niya Latson's 23 points led six players in double figures and Florida State coasted to a win over Alabama State.

The 110 points tied for the third most in Florida State history, behind the 114 in 1991 and 113 in 2022. The 65-point win was the sixth largest and biggest since winning by 66 in 2009. And the 14 3-pointers were one shy of a school record.

Cordasia Harris led the Hornets (0-10) with eight points. Alabama State shot 25%.

## TCU 96, Omaha 56

In Fort Worth, Sedona Prince scored 26 points and grabbed 17 rebounds, Madison Conner added 19 points and TCU beat Omaha for its record 12th-straight win.

TCU (12-0), which has won 13 of its last 14 games dating to the 2023 Big 12 Tournament, is off to its best start in program history.

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## Stuttgart up to third

## Unbeaten Leverkusen stay 4 points clear of Bayern for Bundesliga break

BERLIN, Dec 21 (AP) — Patrik Schick celebrated his first Bundesliga start of the season Wednesday with a hat trick as Bayer Leverkusen consolidated the top spot and set a record for games unbeaten with a 4-0 rout of Bochum.

Leverkusen stretched their unbeaten start to the season to 25 games across all competitions, beating the German record of 24 games without defeat set by Hamburger SV at the start of the 1982-83 season.

Hamburg's record stood at the time as 14 wins and 10 draws before a 2-1 loss at Hertha Berlin in the third round of the German Cup.

Leverkusen, meanwhile, have romped to 22 wins and three draws since the season began.

The team's win over Bochum kept them four points clear of 11-time defending champion Bayern Munich going into the winter break, though Bayern have a game in hand.

## SOCCER

Jamal Musiala scored in his 100th Bundesliga game for Bayern and Harry Kane got his 21st goal of the season for a 2-1 win at Wolfsburg.

Leverkusen coach Xabi Alonso opted to start with Schick in place of Victor Boniface for the first time in a Bundesliga game this season, and the move paid off with the Czech forward grabbing a first-half hat trick.

Schick opened the scoring with a penalty on the half-hour mark, converted Jeremie Frimpong's cross for his second two minutes later, then headed his third from Alex Grimaldo's corner before the break.

Boniface, whom Leverkusen will be without when Nigeria is playing at the African Cup of Nations next month, went on for Schick in the 67th and scored his 10th league goal of the season two minutes after that.

Musiala became the youngest player to clock 100 Bundesliga appearances for Bayern and the 20-year-old celebrated in Wolfsburg by heading the opener in the 33rd.

Kane made it 2-0 ten minutes later with a brilliant strike from outside the penalty area that curled inside the top



Bochum's Bernardo (left), challenges Leverkusen's Florian Wirtz during the German Bundesliga soccer match between Bayer Leverkusen and VfL Bochum at the BayArena in Leverkusen, Germany. (AP)

right corner.

Maximilian Arnold took note, and pulled one back for Wolfsburg with a similar effort before the break.

Stuttgart capitalized on Leipzig's draw the day before to move one spot to third with a 3-0 win over Augsburg. Also, both Eintracht Frankfurt

and Heidenheim scored stoppage-time goals to beat 10-man Borussia Mönchengladbach 2-1 and Freiburg 3-2, respectively.

Union Berlin forward David Datro Fofana finally scored his first Bundesliga goal to seal a 2-0 win over relegation rivals Cologne.

Fofana sank to knees after scoring with his 26th attempt at goal this season and covered his head as teammates jumped in to congratulate him.

## Barcelona end winless streak

Villarreal move further away from drop zone

MADRID, Dec 21, (AP) — It was yet another lackluster performance by Barcelona, drawing jeers from the home fans upset with the team's struggles against the only winless team in the Spanish league so far.

Some of the jeers came even after Barcelona found a way to beat last-place Almeria 3-2, a much-needed hard-fought victory that ended a three-game winless streak and moved the Catalan club back to third place.

Roberto scored twice and Raphinha once for Barcelona, which moved three points ahead of fourth-place Atletico Madrid. Almeria are the only team



Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski, (center), heads the ball ahead of Almeria's Edgar Gonzalez during the Spanish La Liga soccer match between Barcelona and Almeria at the Olympic Luis Companys stadium in Barcelona, Spain. (AP)

going for a ball inside the area.

Barcelona have won all of their eight home matches against Almeria in the league, but had lost their last game against the southern Spanish club in February. Barcelona had been unbeaten in their previous 13 matches against Almeria.

Fifth-place Athletic Bilbao defeated ninth-place Las Palmas 1-0 at home with Unai Gómez scoring the winner four minutes into stoppage time.

Villarreal moved further away from the relegation zone by defeating Celta Vigo 3-2 to end a three-match winless run in the league. Celta, which have only one win in their last 14 league games, stayed in 18th place, inside the demotion zone. Villarreal are 13th.

## Wilder and Joshua jostle for position

JEDDAH, Dec 21, (AP) — Deontay Wilder and Anthony Joshua were once the main characters in heavyweight boxing's soap opera.

Now they are extras. While Tyson Fury and Oleksandr Usyk continue preparations for a Feb. 17 unification bout in Saudi Arabia that will determine the division's first undisputed champion this century, Wilder and Joshua are in the kingdom this weekend and fighting simply to stay relevant.

Wilder, the WBC champion from 2015-20, was dethroned by Fury in February 2020 and has fought only twice since. What kind of shape will the 38-year-old American be in when he takes on Joseph Parker, the WBO champion from 2016-18?

After that comes the main event on what has been labeled the "Day of Reckoning" as Joshua, the former WBA, IBF and WBO titleholder, fights Otto Wallin, a New York-based Swedish journeyman. Joshua has underwhelming wins over Jermaine Franklin and Robert Helenius on his record since back-to-back defeats to Usyk that left his career at a cross-

roads.

Whether Wilder and Joshua have the belief after their damaging losses to become heavyweight champion again is open to question. They are most likely to fight each other next — provided they both win in Jeddah — and the winner of what would be a big-money bout would, in theory, be in position to challenge for a world title.

## BOXING

Maybe five or six years ago, but surely not anymore.

Not with Wilder having fought only Helenius since completing that trilogy against Fury in October 2021.

And not with Joshua appearing vulnerable and fragile after three losses in a five-fight span from 2019-22, crushing an aura he had built.

"I think he's lost his confidence and momentum," Wallin said of Joshua ahead of their fight, echoing the thoughts of many in boxing. "You can see the decline ... Joshua looks unsure of himself."

## Ethan Mbappé makes league debut

## Mbappé scores twice on 25th birthday as PSG sink Metz

PARIS, Dec 21, (AP) — Kylian Mbappé celebrated his 25th birthday with two goals as Paris Saint-Germain beat lowly Metz 3-1 to head into the winter break with a five-point lead in the French league.

The France star got a birthday bonus, as well, when his 16-year-old brother Ethan Mbappé made his league debut as a stoppage-time substitute.

Kylian Mbappé extended his league-leading tally to 18 goals. He has 21 goals overall this season, and since joining PSG from Monaco in 2017 he has netted a club record 233 goals in 282 appearances.

Mbappé's contract expires at the end of the season and he has yet to say whether he will sign an extension or leave on a free transfer, possibly to long-time suitor Real Madrid.

## SOCCER

Portugal midfielder Vitorinha guided in a cross from the left to put PSG ahead in the 49th minute following a drab first half and then provided the pass for Mbappé's trademark curling shot from the left of the penalty area into the top right corner in the 60th.

Although the shot was struck firmly and accurately, veteran goalkeeper Alexandre Oukidja was too far off his line and also jumped too early, allowing the ball to sail over him. After defender Matthieu Udol headed a goal back in the 72nd following poor PSG marking on a corner, Mbappé profited from a defensive error to round Oukidja in the 83rd and tap in for 3-1.

Metz are down in 14th place and fans may not feel overjoyed that coach László Bölöni chatted at length and then posed for a photo with Mbappé in the tunnel following the match.

Second-place Nice stayed five points behind PSG with a 2-0 home win over seventh-place Lens, which had not lost



PSG's Kylian Mbappe, (right), challenges for the ball with Metz's Habib Maiga, during the French League One soccer match between Paris Saint-Germain and Metz at the Parc des Princes in Paris. (AP)

in the previous 11 league games dating back to the previous defeat on Sept. 16. Nigeria striker Terem Moffi scored both goals late in the second half.

Wissam Ben Yedder is the only player to keep pace with Mbappé's scoring in recent seasons. The veteran striker scored both to reach eight

goals as third-place Monaco won 2-1 at Toulouse to remain two points behind Nice.

Fourth-place Brest have been a surprise this season and a remarkable individual performance saw 20-year Mali midfielder Kamory Doumbia score four times in the first half in a 4-0 home win over Lorient.

After holding PSG to a 1-1 draw at home last weekend, Lille lost 2-1 at Strasbourg and dropped down to fifth.

Sixth-place Marseille needed a header from midfielder Jordan Veretout to draw 1-1 at southern rival Montpellier, while Japan forward Keito Nakamura's first-half goal earned eighth-place Reims a 1-0 home win against Le Havre.

Rennes recovered from conceding an early goal to win 3-1 at rock-bottom Clermont and veteran striker Alexandre Lacazette's goal ensured 15th-place Lyon beat Nantes 1-0 for a third straight win under interim coach Pierre Sage.

The 18-team league resumes on Jan. 12.

## Thiago Motta making impact at Bologna

## Two-time defending champs Inter lose to Bologna in Italian Cup

ROME, Dec 21, (AP) — Wherever Thiago Motta went as a player, he won trophy after trophy.

After an injury-prone but winning start at Barcelona, he won a treble at Inter Milan and followed with a big haul of domestic titles at Paris Saint-Germain.

Praised for his versatility and dedication in midfield, Motta brings the same intensity to his coaching career and his impact this season at Bologna has been beyond expectations.

A perennial mid-table finishers, Bologna are up to fourth in Serie A and in position to qualify for the Champions League.

Motta defeated his mentor from his days at Inter when Bologna beat Jose Mourinho's Roma last weekend, then produced a 2-1 extra-time win over two-time defending champions Inter in the Italian Cup round of 16. Bologna, which last won the trophy in 1974, will face Fiorentina in the quarterfinals. The Tuscan team beat second-division Parma on penalties last week.

Dutch forward Joshua Zirkzee was the catalyst for the comeback victory at the San Siro, first providing a flying backheel assist for Sam Beukema in the 112th minute and then using a nutmeg to get by defender Francesco Acerbi and send Dan Ndoye alone on

goal four minutes later for the winner.

It was the second time this season that Bologna and Zirkzee produced a highlight at Inter, the Serie A leader.

Zirkzee equalized when Bologna came back from two goals down for a 2-2 draw against the Nerazzurri in October.

So it's no wonder why Bayern Munich included a buy-back clause when it sold Zirkzee to Bologna last year.

"Zirkzee has great potential and it's now vital for his development that he plays regularly," former Bayern sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic said when the deal was announced. "The agreement includes a buy-back clause because Joshua remains a very interesting player for us."

Midfielder Giovanni Fabbian is another young player making an impact under Motta. He, too, has a buy-back clause in his contract after coming through Inter's youth system.

Then there's attacking midfielder Lewis Ferguson, the highest scoring Scottish player in the Italian league in more than 60 years.

## SOCCER

Bologna also drew at Juventus 1-1 in August and held defending champion Napoli to a scoreless draw in September.

Motta stepped into a difficult situation at Bologna when he was hired to replace the fired Sinisa Mihajlovic shortly after the start of last season. Mihajlovic, who died a few months later after a long battle with leukemia, created a special bond with his players, who often celebrated victories under the coach's hospital room window when Mihajlovic was being treated.

Bologna finished ninth last season and is making the type of progress that Canadian executive Joe Saputo envisioned when he purchased the club nearly a decade ago.



Bologna's goalkeeper Federico Ravaglia saves the ball during an Italian Cup round of 16 soccer match between Inter Milan and Bologna, at the San Siro stadium in Milan, Italy. (AP)



Qadsia player sandwiched by opposing players.

# Sports

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Al-Kuwait take on Kazma in Zain Premier League

## Al-Qadsia look to extend winning streak against Al-Jahra

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: The upcoming Zain Premier League's eleventh round kicks off tomorrow with a single match at Mohammed Al-Hamad Stadium. Al-Qadsia and Al-Jahra will face off in what promises to be an exciting encounter at 5:30 pm.

The league action continues on Sunday with a doubleheader. First up is the clash between Al-Fahaheel and Khaitan at the Friendship and Peace Stadium. Following that, Kuwait takes on Kazma at Thamer Stadium in the second match of the day. The round concludes on Monday with two more matches. Al-Arabi squares off against Al-Shabab at Sabah Al-Salem Stadium, while Al-Salmiyah travels to face Al-Nasr.

Al-Qadsia, currently with 22 points, aims to temporarily regain the lead it held in the last two rounds. However, Al-Arabi and Kuwait managed to

surpass them each time. Coach Muhammad Ibrahim is optimistic about continuing the team's positive streak, seeking a third consecutive victory. Despite facing the bottom-placed Al-Jahra (two points), Ibrahim acknowledges the challenge ahead.

Al-Qadsia goes into the match without the suspended trio of Rashid Al-Dosari, Nayef Zuwaid, and Talal Al-Ansari, along with the injured pro-

### SOCCER

fessional Ibrahim Tandia. The team relies on key players such as Badr Al-Mutawa and Mohammed Khalil, who have been pivotal in controlling the midfield. Other standout players include Mohamed Sula, Daniel Gebula, Khaled Ibrahim, Eid Al-Rashidi, and Mubarak Al-Fanani. The team also welcomes back Youssef Ben Souda and Sergio Vitor.

Despite their position in the stand-

## Excitement builds up for Arab Elite Tennis Championship

DOHA, Dec 21: The third edition of the Arab Elite Tennis Championship is set for Sunday in Doha, Qatar, graciously sponsored by Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait and KGL. A total of 16 players, representing 8 Arab countries, will compete in this highly anticipated event.

The tournament organizing committee will convene for a press conference at the Dusit Hotel in Doha tomorrow to delve into the tournament's details. Following the press conference, the tournament draw ceremony will promptly take place. All matches of the championship will unfold on the courts of the Khalifa International Tennis Complex. Participation is exclusive to players boasting international rankings in the ATP.

The Arab Tennis Federation expressed its gratitude to the Chairman and members of the Board of Directors of the Qatar Tennis Federation for hosting the prestigious tournament in "Doha Al Arab." Special thanks were also extended to Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait, the primary sponsor, and KGL Company for their steadfast support and sponsorship for the third

consecutive year. The Federation further acknowledged the collaboration and commitment of BeIN Sports channels in broadcasting the final round matches. Participants in this esteemed Arab event started arriving in the capital, Doha with the remaining players scheduled to arrive today.

Lebanese tennis star Hani Habib, expressing eagerness

### TENNIS

for the competition, affirmed his readiness to participate. He looks forward to building on his past success, having clinched the title in the inaugural edition held in Kuwait in 2021. Habib expressed gratitude to the Arab Tennis Federation for their consistent efforts in organizing the tournament and extended appreciation to the Qatari Federation for hosting the event for the third consecutive year.



Former champion Lebanon's Hani Habib.

# Liverpool rout West Ham, advance to Cup semis



West Ham's Mohammed Kudus, (right), and Liverpool's Curtis Jones battle for the ball during the English League Cup quarterfinal soccer match between Liverpool and West Ham United at the Anfield stadium in Liverpool, England. (AP)

## Reds to play Fulham

**LIVERPOOL, England, Dec 21, (AP):** After finishing last season empty-handed, Liverpool kept their four-pronged trophy pursuit alive by advancing to the League Cup semi-finals with a 5-1 win over West Ham.

Curtis Jones scored twice, with Dominik Szoboszlai, Cody Gakpo and Mohamed Salah also getting goals in the largely one-sided game at Anfield.

Jarrod Bowen struck a consolation goal for West Ham. Liverpool will play Fulham in the two-legged semifinals, and second-division Middlesbrough will face Chelsea.

"The performance, the scoresheet, the result and the individual performances put together to make a team on the pitch," Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said. "We were brave in our positioning, our second ball game was exceptional. It was a really, really good performance from start to finish."

Liverpool can move atop the Premier League when it hosts first-place Arsenal on Saturday, is in the Europa League round of 16, and starts its FA Cup campaign next month.

Liverpool form this term is in stark contrast to last season when they inconsistency saw them miss out on qualification to the Champions League and fail to win a trophy.

Now they look set to mount a seri-

ous challenge for the title and is one round away from advancing to their first cup final of the campaign.

Having been held to a 0-0 draw by Manchester United on Sunday, the goals came flooding back for Klopp's team against West Ham.

Liverpool dominated the first half and took the lead through Szoboszlai in the 28th. The home team's pressing paid off as West Ham struggled to get out of their half and Szoboszlai's right-footed shot from about 25 yards (meters) powered into the bottom corner.

Liverpool could have scored a second later in the half, but Gakpo's header from inside the box bounced just



Salah

### SOCCER

past the post.

After the break, Darwin Nunez forced a save from Alphonse Areola with a shot that was headed for the top corner and Jones doubled the score in the 56th.

Nunez's clever pass split West Ham's defense and put Jones in position to fire through the goalkeeper's legs from a tight angle on the left.

Gakpo made it 3-0 in the 71st with a low shot from the edge of the area that nestled into the bottom corner.

Six minutes, later Bowen pulled a goal back for West Ham when he turned Jarell Quansah in the box and curled a right-footed shot past Caoimhin Kelleher.

Liverpool should have restored its three-goal advantage when Nunez's shot hit the post and rebounded into the path of substitute Salah. But the Egypt international fired wide from right in front of goal with Areola on the ground. He made no mistake in the 82nd - converting when he went one-on-one with the West Ham keeper.

## 'Governing bodies defy EU competition law'

# Super League revived by court ruling against FIFA and UEFA

BRUSSELS, Dec 21, (AP): Super League was revived on Thursday after the European Union's top court ruled UEFA and FIFA defied competition law by blocking the breakaway project.

The ruling was praised by Real Madrid which, along with Barcelona, is leading the fight to form a rival competition to the Champions League.

"It has been fully recognized that the clubs have the right to propose and promote European competitions that modernize our sport and attract fans from all over the world," Madrid president Florentino Pérez said. "Today, a Europe of freedoms has triumphed, and also football and its fans have triumphed."

However, it was a backlash by fans especially in England and Germany against the original project in April 2021 that helped to stop Super League within 48 hours, and no new clubs immediately came forward on Thursday to support Perez's vision.

The case was heard last year at the European Court of Justice after Super League failed to launch more than two years ago. UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin called the club leaders then "snakes" and "liars."

The company formed by 12 rebel clubs - now led by only Real Madrid and Barcelona after Juventus withdrew this year - started legal action and the court was asked to rule on points of EU

law by a Madrid tribunal.

Madrid-based A22 immediately announced new proposed competitions for men and women, saying young fans are "turning away" from soccer.

In a presentation streamed on YouTube, Reichart said there would be no

### SOCCER

permanent members of the new competition and they would remain committed to their domestic leagues. The league and knockout competition would also be played midweek so as not to impact domestic leagues. The clubs accused

UEFA of breaching European law by allegedly abusing its market dominance of soccer competitions.

The court acknowledged FIFA and UEFA were abusing a dominant position and their rules on approval, control and sanctions "must be held to be unjustified restrictions on the freedom to provide services."

Perez said, "Allow me to tell the European clubs that we are at the beginning of a new time in which we can work freely through constructive dialogue, without threats, without acting against anything or anyone and with the aim of innovating and modernizing football to continue, fueling the passion of the fans."

While clearing the way for Super League, the court also said it "does not mean that a competition such as the Super League project must necessarily be approved."

UEFA said it addressed last year "a historical shortfall within UEFA's pre-authorization framework" and pledged to continue defending the central role of governing bodies in the European sports model.

Two years after the original idea collapsed, Super League promoters presented in February a new proposal for a multi-division competition involving up to 80 European soccer teams and operating outside of UEFA's authority. The latest plans announced on Thursday would involve 64 men's teams and 32 women's clubs.

The European Club Association, which represents Europe's top football clubs, reiterated its staunch opposition to Super League.

"In short, the world of football moved on from the Super League years ago and progressive reforms will continue," the group said.

## Kuwait's Show Jumping League soars into second round

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: The Kuwaiti Show Jumping Equestrian League's third edition enters its second round today, commencing at 1:30 pm at the Kuwait Equestrian Center in Sabhan. The event, sponsored by Zain Company, boasts a significant turnout of male and female riders representing various local clubs.

### EQUESTRIAN

Competitions scheduled for today encompass varying heights, ranging from 70 cm to 135 cm. The action continues tomorrow at 11:00 am with four rounds featuring heights of 110 cm, 120 cm, 130 cm, and culminating in the grand prize round at an impressive 140 cm. The top performers in the first round stand to receive prizes totaling 10 thousand dinars.

Masoud Hayat, President of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation, expressed gratitude for the continued support



Masoud Hayat, President of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation.

from the government, including the General Sports Authority and the Kuwait Olympic Committee, as well as private sector companies such as Zain Telecommunications and KGL.

Encouraging equestrian enthusiasts to attend and support local riders, Hayat highlighted that the league championship consists of eight rounds, concluding on May 4. Additionally, the federation plans to organize international championships in the two- and three-star categories.

The refereeing committee, led by Raghad Al-Dabbous, includes members Lama Abdel-Aal, Dr. Yahya Al-Hadban, and Walid Al-Jassim. Philip Schwinder is responsible for track design, assisted by Abdulaziz Al-Ajeel, Ibtisam Al-Arouri, and Badr Al-Haifi serving as arena referees.

Ali Al-Kharafi of the Kuwait Equestrian Club emerged victorious in the first round of the tournament.

## Preparations underway

# Kuwait's Youth Volleyball team gears up for Gulf Youth Games

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: Nayef Al-Failakawi, a Board Member of the Kuwait Volleyball Federation and Chairman of the Training and National Teams Committee, disclosed plans for the initiation of training for the national youth team, comprised of individuals born in 2005. The training is scheduled to commence at 2:30 pm tomorrow at the Federation Hall in the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex. This preparatory effort aims to ready the

### VOLLEYBALL

team for their upcoming participation in the first Gulf Youth Games set to take place in Dubai, UAE, from April 16 to May 2.

Al-Failakawi outlined that the training program, under the guidance of the technical staff led by national coach Jassim Al-Tarrawa, assisted by Egyptian coach Osama Madkour, team doctor Dr. Moataz Ezz El-Din, and team supervisor Talal Jassim, will be conducted in two phases. The first group, consisting of players born in 2005 and university students, will commence training tomorrow following the completion of academic tests for eleventh and twelfth graders. Subsequently, the remaining players born in 2006 and 2007 will join the training sessions to



Nayef Al-Failakawi, a Board Member of the Kuwait Volleyball Federation and Chairman of the Training and National Teams Committee.

ensure their academic commitments are met.

The daily training regimen will persist in a single session until the team embarks on an external camp in Cairo, Egypt, for a duration of 15 days in the latter half of January. Al-Failakawi emphasized the diligent efforts of the Air Force Federation to meticulously prepare the team, aspiring for a noteworthy performance in the forthcoming Gulf Youth Games.