



Pages 15 & 16

soccer

ARAB TIMES

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE DAILY IN FREE KUWAIT

Established in 1977 / www.arabtimesonline.com



Page 14

basketball

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2023 / JUMADA AL THANI 11, 1445 AH

emergency number 112

NO. 18478

16 PAGES

150 FILS

Banking brilliance continues to shine

Kuwait notches up in Arab Economic Competitiveness

ABU DHABI, Dec 23, (KUNA): Kuwait has made progress in the Arab Economic Competitiveness Index for 2023, coming eighth in the macroeconomic index compared to the ninth place in the previous classification, the Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) said.

The AMF added in the seventh issue of the Arab Economies Competitiveness Report 2023, issued Friday that Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain occupied the advanced positions respectively in the Arab Economic Competitiveness Index.

Continued on Page 5



A Palestinian man mourns a relative killed in the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip outside a morgue, in Khan Younis on Saturday, Dec. 23, 2023. (AP)

Toll surpasses 20,000

UN gives nod to Gaza aid, omits call for hostility halt

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 23, (AP): The U.N. Security Council adopted a watered-down resolution Friday calling for immediately speeding aid deliveries to hungry and desperate civilians in Gaza but without the original plea for an "urgent suspension of hostilities" between Israel and Hamas.

The long-delayed vote in the 15-member council was 13-0 with the United States and Russia abstaining. The U.S. abstention avoided a third American veto of a Gaza resolution following Hamas' surprise Oct. 7 attacks inside Israel. Russia wanted the stronger language restored; the U.S. did not.

Still, "It was the Christmas miracle we were all hoping for," said United Arab Emirates Ambassador Lana Nusseibeh, who sponsored the resolution. She said it would send a signal to the people in Gaza that the Security Council was working to alleviate their suffering.

The resolution culminated a week and a half of high-level diplomacy by the United States, the UAE on behalf of Arab nations and others. The vote, initially scheduled for Monday, was pushed back each day until Friday.

A relieved U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield told the council, "This was tough, but we got there."

She said the vote bolsters efforts "to alleviate this humanitarian crisis, to get life-saving assistance into Gaza and to get hostages out of Gaza, to push for the protection of innocent civilians and humanitarian workers, and to work towards a lasting peace."

Severity of crisis

"It is hard to overstate how urgent this is," Thomas-Greenfield said. "This resolution speaks to the severity of this crisis, and it calls on us all to do more."

The vote came immediately after the United States vetoed a Russian amendment that would have restored the call to immediately suspend hostilities. That vote was 10 countries in favor, the U.S. against and four abstentions.

Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebeniza called the resolution "entirely toothless" and accused the United States of "shameful, cynical and irresponsible conduct" and resorting to tactics "of gross pressure, blackmail and twisting arms."

He said the resolution "would essentially be giving the Israeli armed forces complete freedom of movement for the clearing of the Gaza Strip." Russia would have vetoed it, he said, if it hadn't been supported by a number of Arab countries.

Thus the resolution was stripped of its key provision with teeth - the call for "the urgent suspension of hostilities to allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access, and for urgent steps towards a sustainable cessation of hostilities."

Instead, it calls "for urgent steps to immediately allow safe, unhindered and expanded humanitarian access, and also for creating the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities." The steps are not defined, but diplomats said it was the council's first reference to stopping fighting.

Ambassador Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian U.N. envoy, said it took the Security Council 75 days "to finally utter the words 'cessation of hostilities,'" stressing that the Palestinians and Arab nations supported the Russian amendment.

"This resolution is a step in the right direction" because of its important humanitarian provisions, Mansour said. "It must be implemented and must be accompanied by massive pressure for an immediate cease-fire."

Resolution 'insufficient'

Hamas called the resolution "an insufficient step" that "doesn't meet the requirements of the catastrophic state caused by the terrorist military machine in Gaza." The militant group accused the United States of defying the international community and blocking the council from demanding a halt to the war in the statement on its website.

Israel's U.N. deputy ambassador Brett Jonathan Miller criticized the Security Council for not condemning Hamas for its Oct. 7 attacks in which about 1,200 people were killed and about 240 taken hostage.

The resolution more generally "deplores all attacks against civilians and civilian objects as well as all violence and hostilities against civilians, and all acts of terrorism." It also demands the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

On a key sticking point concerning aid deliveries, the resolution eliminated a previous request for the U.N. "to exclusively monitor all humanitarian relief consignments to Gaza provided through land, sea and air routes" by outside parties to confirm their humanitarian nature.

It substituted a request to U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to quickly appoint a coordinator to monitor relief deliveries to Gaza that are not from the parties to the conflict - Israel and Hamas - to verify that they are humanitarian goods. It asks the coordinator to establish a "mechanism" to speed aid deliveries and demands that Israel and Hamas cooperate with the coordinator.

Miller said "humanitarian aid is pouring into Gaza every single day" and Israel is willing to increase the number of aid trucks entering the territory and the only roadblock is "the U.N.'s ability to accept them." He stressed that "any enhancement of U.N. aid monitoring cannot be done at the expense of Israel's security inspections."

Continued on Page 5

MPs highlight triumphs, stress gov't cooperation

Accountability, Kuwaitization in focus

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The lawmakers have affirmed that they exerted tremendous efforts to accomplish the sought after reform, clarifying they do not claim perfection.

The lawmakers made this assertion in a joint press statement issued recently, which they started with a congratulatory message for HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on taking the constitutional oath as per Article 60 of the Constitu-

tion, which is considered a contract between the people and their leader.

They also expressed condolences on the death of HH the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, pointing out that his term was really short; but it had major achievements including the reform process launched in the Amiri speech delivered on June 22, 2022.

They said the reign of HH the late Amir witnessed important legislative achievements, fighting corruption, and dismissal of influential individuals in order to put them away from the decision making process. They stressed that such an environment paved way for them to efficiently carry out their tasks and fulfill their constitutional oath to protect the people's interests. They added the legislative train must not stop just because of some executive decisions, considering the political leadership is not convinced about the feasibility of such decisions even if they are

among the functions of the executive authority as per Article 50 of the Constitution.

Article 50 states: "In conformity with the provisions of the Constitution, the system of government shall be established on the basis of separation and cooperation of powers. No Authority shall be allowed to waive all or part of its jurisdiction as prescribed in this Constitution."

They then confirmed their commitment to cooperate with the government, and that they have been doing so since the beginning of the 17th parliamentary term. They cited the two authorities' agreement on a clear legislative agenda, leading to the ratification of important bills. They called on the interim government to be committed to the agreed legislative plan and to attend the upcoming parliamentary session allotted for the discussion of urgent bills related to the citizens' standard of living and the retirees.

They pointed out that the ratification of 14 bills within four months is an unprecedented achievement; especially since these bills are on improving the citizens' living conditions, combating monopoly, and the implementation of economic and political reforms. They stressed that this is the response of the National Assembly to the demands of citizens, indicating this was done in accordance with the Constitution and the relevant regulations.

Restore

They added the ratification of the proposal to amend the Rehabilitation Law was the result of the unified position of the MPs despite the objection of the government; explaining it is aimed at protecting public interests to help those convicted of various crimes to merge with mainstream society, and restore their social and employment rights within a certain period.

On the other hand, MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri submitted a proposal to hold a special session to identify those who harmed the nation and the parties involved in the deal that HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah mentioned in his speech after taking the constitutional oath in front of the legislature on Dec 20, 2023.

MP Bader Nashmi Al-Anzi submitted a proposal to nationalize 100 administrative, marketing, financial and cybersecurity jobs as part of the State's policy on replacing expatriate employees with nationals. He disclosed that his proposal is aimed at preventing the leakage of confidential information and providing more job opportunities for citizens, while highlighting the main role of the Information Technology Sector in supporting the decision-making process.

MP Muhammad Al-Hewaila has proposed expediting the handover of Abu Halifa Park from the Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) to the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW). He pointed out the size of the land is estimated at 650,000 square meters and this is enough for the construction of 1,000 houses. He affirmed the cost is very low, since the land is near a number of public facilities.

MP Hamad Al-Elyan suggested transferring the Basic Education College from the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) to Abdullah Al-Salem University, and then restructure the college in order to include departments that could greatly contribute to the ongoing efforts to address the demographic imbalance issue and meet the manpower needs of the local labor market.



Photo by Rezk Tawfik

Kuwait experienced rain on Saturday as forecasted by the Meteorological Department. As evening falls, the temperature is expected to drop, bringing rather cold conditions with a potential for fog in certain areas. — See Page 2

Another vessel hijacked near Somalia

Houthi attacks reshape global shipping

CAPE TOWN, Dec 23, (AP): Another vessel has been hijacked near the coast of Somalia, a British sea trade monitoring agency said Friday, raising more concerns that Somali pirates are active again, nearly a decade after they caused chaos for international shipping.

A dhow trading vessel was seized by heavily armed people near the town of Eyl off the coast of Somalia, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations said. It cited military authorities as the source of the information.

The agency did not offer any details on who the hijackers were but said an investigation is underway.

The European Union's Naval Force reported that a Maltese-flagged merchant vessel was hijacked in the nearby Arabian Sea last week and moved to the same area off Somalia's coast. The bulk carrier Ruen had 18 crew onboard when it was hijacked near the Yemeni island of Socotra, around 240 kilometers (150 miles) off Somalia.

One crew member was evacuated to an Indian navy ship for medical care, the EU Naval Force said. Suspicion has also fallen on Somali pirates for that hijacking, although the EU force said the hijackers and their demands were unknown.

There has been a recent surge in attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea by Iran-backed Houthi rebels from Yemen, disrupting a major global trade route. The Houthis targeted Israeli-linked vessels over the Israel-Hamas war initially, but then escalated their attacks, hitting ships without clear ties.

The Pentagon said last month that five armed assailants who hijacked a commercial ship near Yemen and were captured by U.S. forces were likely Somalis and that attack - initially blamed on Houthi rebels - was "piracy-related."

Somalia's maritime police intensified its patrols following the announcement.

Attacks on vessels by Somali pirates peaked to more than 350

between 2010 and 2015, but had declined drastically since, largely due to patrols by U.S. and other allied naval forces.

The attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea by Yemen's Houthi rebels have rerouted a majority of global trade away from the crucial maritime artery for consumer goods and energy supplies, a shift expected to trigger delays and rising prices.

Oil, natural gas, grain and everything from toys to electronics typically travel through the waterway separating Africa and the Arabian Peninsula en route to the Suez Canal, where 12% of the world's trade passes.

Some of the world's largest container shipping companies and oil giant BP are sending vessels on longer journeys that bypass the Red Sea. In response to the growing impact to global trade, the U.S. and a host of other nations have created a new force to protect ships.

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

The Houthis are Iranian-backed rebels who seized Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in 2014, launching a grinding war against a Saudi-led

coalition seeking to restore the government.

The Houthis have sporadically targeted ships in the region, but the attacks have increased since the start of the Israel-Hamas war. They have used drones and anti-ship missiles to attack vessels and in one case used a helicopter to board and seize an Israeli-owned ship and its crew.

They have threatened to attack any vessel they believe is either going to or coming from Israel. That's now escalated to apparently any vessel, with container ships and oil tankers flagged to countries like Norway and Liberia being attacked or drawing missile fire.

The Houthis also have hailed vessels by radio to try to convince them to change course closer to the territory they control.

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

Continued on Page 5



A Tomahawk Land Attack Missile (TLAM) launches from the guided missile cruiser USS Cape St. George (CG 71), in operation in the Mediterranean Sea, on March 23, 2003. Japan's defense spending will surge more than 16% for 2024 under a record military budget approved, Dec. 22, 2023, by the Cabinet. (AP) — See Page 7

NewsWatch

ANKARA: The Turkish government has announced a visa-free regime for citizens of six countries in a move that mainly aims at promoting tourism in the country.

The six countries are: the United States, Canada, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Sultanate of Oman, under a decree published in the Official Gazette of Turkey. Citizens of these countries will be given the privilege of visa-free entry for tourist visits up to 90 days within any 180-day period. (KUNA)

ANKARA: Three Turkish soldiers were killed and four others wounded in a terrorist attack in northern Iraq near the borders with Turkey, the National Defense Ministry said on Friday.

The Ministry accused the separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is active in the border region, of perpetrating the attack.

A joint military-police operation continues across the borders to track down the terrorists, according to a statement from the Ministry. (KUNA)

BEIRUT: Heavy rainfall over Miziara town in Northern Lebanon have caused a landslide, killing four Syrian children, according to local reports.

Lebanese National Media Agency reported that the torrential rains last night caused collapse of a building roof killing four Syrian refugee children. (KUNA)

TUNISIA: Butter and milk shortages. Political party boycotts. Ongoing prosecutions of the president's critics.

This is the environment in which Tunisians will head to the polls on Sunday for the country's first local elections since President Kais Saied wrote a new constitution that voters approved last year. (AP)

Prayer Timings

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

Local

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

Expected weather for the next 24 hours:

By Day: Warm and cloudy to partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times southeasterly wind, with speed of 12-42 km/h with a chance for rain that

Weather

might be thundery at times.

By Night: Rather cold to cold with light to moderate southeasterly wind changing to wind, with speed of 12-32 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear with a chance for forming over some areas.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	24	17
Kuwait Airport	25	17
Abdaly	23	18
Jahra	25	16
Salmiyah	21	19
Nuwaib	24	18
Wafra	24	14

Bahrain, Jordan, Turkiye, Russia, Sweden, Norway, India felicitate HH Amir

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Thursday a cable of congratulations from Bahrain's King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa on assuming office.

In the cable, King Hamad expressed sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir, wishing him everlasting good health and success in leading the path of prosperity in the dear homeland.

In reply, His Highness the Amir sent a letter appreciating and lauding deep-rooted relations between the two Gulf countries, as well as wishing Bahrain all progress and prosperity under King Hamad's wise leadership.

Jordan

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Thursday a cable of congratulations from King Abdullah II of Jordan on assuming office.

In the cable, King Abdullah stressed continuing joint action to develop cooperation between the two countries in different fields, wishing His Highness the Amir everlasting well-being and success in continuing the process of prosperity and progress in the dear homeland.

His Highness the Amir replied in appreciation for the good sentiments, lauding deep-rooted and brotherly Kuwaiti-Jordanian ties and wishing the King everlasting good health, and the Hashemite Kingdom further progress and prosperity.

Turkiye

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Thursday a cable of congratulations from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on assuming office.

In the cable, Erdogan expressed keenness on continuing to develop and enhance friendly bilateral ties, wishing His Highness the Amir everlasting good health, success and progress.

His Highness the Amir replied with a cable thanking President Erdogan for such kind sentiments, commending deep-rooted ties between Kuwait and Turkiye.

Russia

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Thursday a cable of congratulations from Russian President Vladimir Putin on assuming office.

In the cable, Putin affirmed continuing

mutual action to develop the current cooperation between Russia and Kuwait in all fields, and working on enhancing peace and security in the Middle East region. He wished His Highness the Amir everlasting good health, progress and success.

His Highness the Amir sent a reply cable, expressing sincere thanks and appreciation for these good sentiments and lauding deep-rooted and distinguished relations between Kuwait and Russia.

His Highness the Amir also extolled mutual eagerness on enhancing and upgrading joint cooperation frameworks in all fields for wider horizons, wishing the Russian President well-being, and the Russia Federation progress and prosperity.

Sweden

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Thursday a cable of congratulation from King Carl XVI Gustaf on His Highness's inauguration, wishing His Highness success and good health.

His Highness the Amir sent a reply enclosed with sincere appreciation for the kind sentiments, wishing for even further bilateral relations and for the King good health and wellbeing.

Norway

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Thursday a cable of congratulation from King Harald V of Norway on His Highness's inauguration, wishing His Highness success and good health.

His Highness the Amir sent a reply enclosed with sincere appreciation for the kind sentiments, wishing for even further bilateral relations and for the King good health and wellbeing.

India

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Thursday cables of congratulations from Indian President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on assuming office.

In the messages, the Indian President and Premier wished His Highness the Amir success in continuing progress and prosperity in Kuwait, and well-being.

His Highness the Amir sent replies to both Murmu and Modi, thanking them for the good sentiments, and wishing them good health.



Sun shines through the clouds behind a beautiful mosque in an unidentified residential area of Kuwait.

KUNA photo

3,375 expats deported in Dec

'Iqama', labor law violators held in multiple raids

By Munaif Nayef

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Ministry of Interior has deported a total of 3,375 expatriates so far this month due to violations of the residency and labor laws.

According to informed sources, about 1,991 men and 1,384 women were referred to the deportation department by the various sectors of the Ministry of Interior. Majority of them were in violation of the residency and labor laws, while the others were either marginal workers or were in violation of public morals after they were caught in suspicious dens.

The sources affirmed that the security campaigns will continue to be held in all governorates and at different times in the morning and evening.

In a related context, the General Department of Public Relations and Security Media of the Ministry of Interior announced the arrest of 309 expatriates recently for violating the residency and labor laws.

Campaigns

It explained that the campaigns conducted by the General Department of Residency Affairs Investigations, represented by the Research and Investigation Department, the Control and Coordination Department, the Violators Follow-up Department, and the Financial and Administrative Services Department resulted in the arrest of 300 expatriates, who were in violation of the residency and labor laws, in Farwaniya, Khaitan, Al-Qurain Markets, Salhiya and Shuwaikh areas. Also, nine individuals were arrested for working in mobile groceries without obtaining the relevant licenses.

The arrested individuals have been referred to the concerned authorities for necessary legal action.

According to sources, the campaigns included representatives of Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) and Kuwait Municipality.

□ □ □

Kuwaiti dies in accident: A Kuwaiti citizen in his twenties died in a traffic accident that occurred on the Fifth Ring Road.

According to security sources, when the Operations Room of Ministry of Interior received information about a collision on the Fifth Ring Road, security forces and paramedics immediately rushed to the location and discovered that a Kuwaiti citizen had succumbed to the injuries he sustained in the accident.

His corpse was referred to Forensic Medicine Department and a case was registered.

□ □ □

5 years jail for Egyptian: The Court of Appeals, headed by Judge Nasr Salem Al-Heid, sentenced an Egyptian employee in the Ministry of Justice to five years in prison for tampering with judicial rulings and entering incorrect data to release defendants, thereby, making them believe that rulings were issued in their favor in exchange for bribes, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The same court sentenced an expatriate to 10 years in person who, along with other individuals, forged blood samples of expatriates suffering from contagious diseases in exchange for bribes to complete their residency applications. The defendant was convicted in absentia.

The court also sentenced three other employees to 10 years in jail with hard labor for forging and tampering with the analysis of blood samples to obtain residency permits for a number of expatriates, so the total number of individuals convicted in this case reached four.

□ □ □

Bribery case ruling Jan 11: The Court of Cassation decided to postpone until Jan 11, 2024 the announcement of its ruling on the bribery case of a Municipal Council member, a broker and a businessman, reports Al-Rai daily.

Case files indicate all the abovementioned individuals are involved in bribery in the processing of corporate land transactions. The Municipal Council member has been reported to have been caught in the act of receiving money in exchange for completing the transactions.

Earlier, the Court of Appeals sentenced the Municipal Council member the broker to 10 years in prison with hard labor. It also imposed a fine of KD240,000 on the Municipal Council member, while the broker was fined 360,000 thousand.

It sentenced the businessman to five years in prison with hard labor and fined him KD240,000.



Zain MAX TECH EXPO 2023



Zain MAX TECH EXPO 2023 stall at the fair.

'Welcome to Hall 6 in Kuwait Int'l Fair'

Zain latest products, solutions are offered at MAX TECH Expo

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Continuing to actively join the community's biggest tech gatherings, Zain has announced its participation in MAX TECH Expo, the newest technology event in Kuwait. Through its dedicated booth, the company offers customers and visitors a wide range of the latest digital solutions, smart devices, and competitive offers daily at Hall 6 of the Kuwait International Fair in Mishref until Tuesday 26 December.

Zain's participation in this event reflects its interest in being actively present at the biggest gatherings of the local tech community, where companies and entities from both the public and private sectors connect with customers and tech enthusiasts to showcase their solutions, present their products and services, and offer their exclusive promotions all under one roof.

In its dedicated booth at MAX TECH Expo, Zain offers a wide range of innovative products, smart devices, and digital solutions, covering every customer's needs. The company's offerings include smartphones, tablets, and accessories;

gaming consoles, PCs, and related gadgets; smart home and Internet of Things (IoT) devices, along with Zain's latest and most competitive offerings and promotional campaigns for postpaid and prepaid customers.

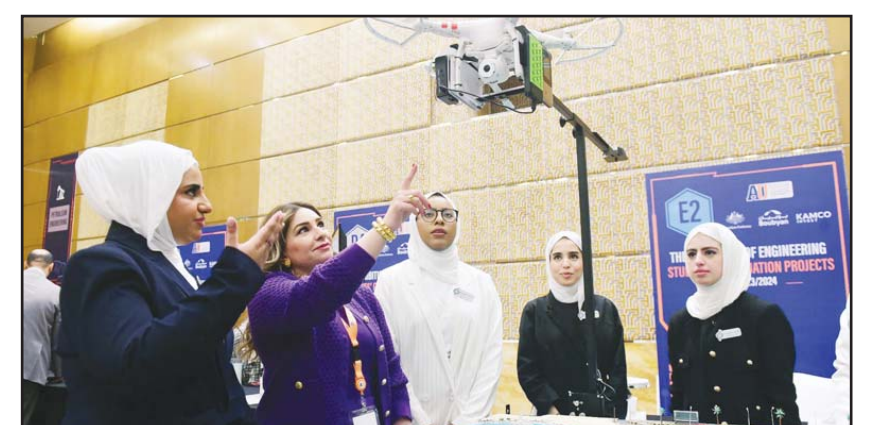
MAX TECH Expo features many tech companies and service providers, offering telecom and internet services, smartphones and computers, video game consoles and PCs, cameras and photography equipment, and more.

The event also features innovative solutions for smart homes, IoT devices, home entertainment systems, e-payment platforms, cybersecurity applications, cloud solutions, e-commerce platforms, networks and digital infrastructure systems, wearables, CCTV and security devices, audio equipment, and VR tech.

In addition, many ministries and government entities are present to showcase their successes in digital transformation. MAX TECH also targets gaming enthusiasts, with many e-sports championships and competitions being organized in six major online games. Winners are set to receive valuable cash prizes.



Dr Al-Muzaini: Empowering youth and building their capacities is the basis for enhancing water security.



M. Heba Abbas: Student projects in the spirit of sustainability with a focus on artificial intelligence.

KWA participates in grad projects

AU seeks more power for youths

By Suzanne Nasser

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Kuwait Water Association (KWA) participated in the exhibition of graduation projects belonging to the students of the College of Engineering at the Australian University (AU).

Representing the association was Eng. Heba Abbas who is the technical advisor and head of the Sustainability Committee at the association. She participated as an arbitrator for the graduation projects of students of Electrical and Electronics Engineering.

In this context, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Water Association Dr. Saleh Al-Muzaini said, "The efforts of the Australian University lie in empowering young people and developing their capabilities to face future challenges, especially with regard to water security and providing the elements of sustainable development."

The youth group in the association has always received special attention. From 2018 until now, it has been keen to organize

the annual Arab Youth Forum. This forum is considered as a platform for discussing the latest Arab youth innovations in water conservation and sustainability."

Meanwhile, Eng. Heba Abbas expressed her happiness in listening to the future leaders as they put Kuwait and its 2036 vision at the heart of their engineering projects and discussed their projects based on innovation and sustainability, taking into account the environmental, social and economic aspects of the project.

She said, "I felt very happy and proud as I listened to our students present various and innovative projects related to important environmental and national issues using artificial intelligence."

The number of projects presented at the exhibition was 22, and they included seven related to civil engineering, four related to electrical engineering, seven related to mechanical engineering, and four related to petroleum engineering". It is worth highlighting that Eng. Heba Abbas joined the Industrial Engineering Advisory Board at the College of Engineering at the invitation of the Australian University in October 2023.

Weather signals start of winter

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Al-Ojairi Scientific Center confirmed that the country experienced winter solstice -- the shortest day of the year -- on Friday; while the Meteorological Department forecasted scattered light to moderate rain in some areas from Friday evening until Saturday afternoon, reports Al-Rai daily.

According to the center, the winter solstice started at 6:28 am on Friday; indicating this signals the beginning of winter in the northern hemisphere. It explained that winter solstice is marked by a delayed dawn, as it coincides with the shortest day

of the year -- approximately 10 hours compared to 14 hours at night, as the Sun rose at 6:38 am the next day.

During the winter solstice, the Sun reaches its lowest point above the horizon at noon when it crosses the meridian and the human shadow on the ground at this time is the longest possible, the center added.

On the other hand, the Meteorological Department announced that the weekend weather was moderate to warm during the day and cool to cold at night, with scattered light to moderate rain in some areas from Friday evening until Saturday afternoon.

diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Storm brews under calm waters; Govt & Parliament friction seen

"MANY people tend to overlook critical thinking when assessing spoken words, often determining the credibility of the speaker based on factors like wealth, prominence, or political affiliation rather than the merit of their words. This tendency is succinctly captured in the Arab proverb, "Look at what was said, not at who said it," emphasizing the importance of focusing on content over the speaker's identity," columnist **Dr AbdulRahman Al-Jeeran** wrote for **Al-Rai** daily.

"However, evaluating words alone doesn't always eliminate the need to scrutinize the speaker. It becomes crucial to delve into the biographies of leaders, thinkers, and wise individuals to discern sincerity in claims of reform and anti-corruption efforts.

"The essence of a statement can significantly vary depending on the speaker's background and actions. For instance, a saying from the honorable companions may carry weight due to their devoted lives, while a similar statement from the Kharjites may lack substance if their actions contradict their words.

"Distinguishing between advocates of reform becomes essential by evaluating how they apply their principles personally and within their families. This scrutiny helps separate the trustworthy from those deserving doubt. The case of the Kharjites, who shifted their slogan from "There is no judgment except for God" to "There is no judgment except for money" after killing Othman bin Affan, illustrates the potential deviation from proclaimed principles.

"The article extends its analysis to Karl Marx, the leader of communism, questioning the sincerity of his advocacy for the principle "He who does not work does not eat." Despite championing the abolition of worker exploitation, Marx's own life contradicted this principle, relying on financial support from family members rather than sustaining himself through work.

"The author highlights the irony that Marx's seminal work, "Capital," often considered the holy gospel of communism, remained incomplete due to his reluctance to work. This fate, the article argues, is not unique to Marx but extends to numerous Islamic intellectual, movement, and revolutionary works that remain unread or unappreciated due to a lack of practical application. The overarching theme revolves around the discrepancy between espoused principles and actual behavior."

Also:

"The government and the Parliament find themselves in a challenging position, attempting to navigate turbulent waters. Despite their outward display of friendliness, issues are unfolding in a manner neither party desires," columnist **Hassan Al-Issa** wrote for **Al-Jarida** daily.

"The government rejected a draft law focused on amending articles related to the rehabilitation of convicts, citing concerns about potential infringements on human rights. Representatives in the legislative committee claim that the government initially expressed understanding of the proposed amendments during committee discussions.

"However, they were taken aback by the subsequent rejection, raising questions about the sincerity of the surprise. Al-Issa finds it unimaginable that the representatives were genuinely surprised, given the dynamics between the government and the council.

"If the government had the freedom to decide on this matter independently, it might not have hesitated to approve the necessary amendments. However, the reality is more complex, and the representatives face a dilemma. They can hold the government accountable for its stance on the draft law, potentially straining the relationship between the two chambers.

"Alternatively, they can show flexibility and understanding, closing the issue during the current session. Al-Issa notes that the state has been in a state of turmoil, lacking transparency and leaving critical matters unaddressed."

"We pray for the Amir of humility and grace, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah have mercy on him and may he rest in peace with friends, martyrs and the righteous," columnist **Tariq Edrees** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Then, we say with praise for Allah Almighty: "The Kuwaiti people will remember Dec 20, 2023 as the day of pledging allegiance and restoration of the spirit and respect for the one at the helm of government, and to the loyal and proud Kuwaiti people. It is a day of pure allegiance to the torch of light, and correction of national paths in all directions of the dear homeland -- Kuwait."

"Yes, on Dec 20, the torch was lit before the

bonafide people of Kuwait to correct all paths that have been tampered with for the sake of self-interests and political positions that are in conflict with the leadership's directives and the aspirations of the genuine Kuwaiti people who are righteous and loyal to their homeland and wise leadership.

"The lofty announcement of the approach of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may God protect and preserve him, comes as a balm to restore respect for Kuwait, its national identity, and its proud and loyal people, as well as to instill the spirit of optimism and joy in our hearts, and that of the promising youths among our sons, and in every patriotic seed in the womb of this generation.

"Let the final say come from HH the Amir, who champions the truth and the correction of all paths, declaring that with the help of Allah Almighty and the strength and support of the people, the correction of paths will be achieved in all directions to ensure the stability of Kuwait and its people. This is in addition to the achievement of the highest national interests with our support for the aspirations of our resolute leader.

"Our reputation is restored with this lofty speech, frank and pure like clear water, from the sources of wisdom and rationality, courage and determination. These are the qualities of His Highness the Amir, may God protect and preserve him. He is an asset of the nation in the era of correcting the situation and all political paths to achieve justice and equality, social, economic, developmental and humanitarian aspirations of this country and its generous and peaceful people.

"Yes, the Kuwaiti sun made the torch of light shine on Dec 20 to illuminate for us the path of stability and peace, correcting concepts and trends towards a dignified and stable life without impurities or exploitation of public interests, while emphasizing the depth of relations between the people and the rational and wise political leadership. May Allah bless us under our dear leadership, protect our beloved Amir of light and firmness -- Sheikh Mishal, and the entire Kuwait from all forms of harm, O Allah, Amen."

"In 2009, the Kuwait Society of Engineers organized a global conference entitled "Alternative Energy: An Option or a Necessity?" for which the preparations took about two years. HH the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah have mercy on him, supported and attended the conference," columnist **Afraah Jaseem Al-Saeedi** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"At the time, I was a member of a work team that consisted of dozens of volunteer engineers -- male and female -- tasked to organize this major event, which included the election of the president of the Union of Global Engineers. We visited State officials to personally invite them to the conference. Those in charge of the association then, provided the opportunity for young people to submit invitations. At the time, I was not a member of the association's board of directors, as I was a fresh graduate volunteer engineer.

"I remember that exact day when I received a call on the need to gather at the association's headquarters in order to go to Seif Palace to meet the HH the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and the then Crown Prince HH Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Indeed, the meeting took place with the most compassionate parents who had a tender smile.

"Our dialogue with HH the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah was full of expressions of encouragement for the ambitious Kuwaiti youths. He was proud of us as volunteers aspiring to raise the name of our country in international forums. After this interesting dialogue, a photo of the association's delegation was taken. I wished I could take a personal photo with him, but I was ashamed to ask His Highness, may Allah have mercy on him. Nevertheless, as soon as he saw me, he asked: "Can you see a picture of your soul?" I was very happy when he asked this question and how His Highness felt about me.

"On the passing of HH the late Amir of Humility and Tolerance Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah have mercy on him, I acknowledge that I was fortunate to meet His Highness, especially at the beginning of my professional journey, and over the course of 14 years. Whenever I see the picture in my office, I remember his firm words etched in my mind and conscience, which have always been my motivation.

"With the departure of His Highness, I would like to tell him that we are committed, and as he advised us, to keep Kuwait in our sights. We pray to Allah Almighty that our beloved His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah continue to inspire us. We also pray to the Almighty Lord to protect His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, while guiding him towards working for the good of the country and its people."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

300 arrested during security campaign

Acquittal in vehicle repair forgery permits

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Criminal Court ruled to refrain from issuing a verdict against an employee of the General Traffic Department for allegedly forging vehicle repair permits issued by the Ministry of Interior, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

The documents show the alleged suspect issued a repair permit for more than one vehicle that was submitted to a number of garages, and one of the garage owners filed a report that ended with him being referred to the competent authorities, which in turn referred him to the criminal court under the name of "forgery in an official document."

Defense lawyer Faisal Al-Mutairi pleaded orally explaining the circumstances of the case, that the accusation was based on suspicion, and that the incident officer had no certain evidence that the accused had falsified what was attributed to him, which was what the court was convinced of, and based on its convicting refrained from punishing the accused.

300 illegals arrested: The Residence Affairs Investigation

Department in cooperation with the Research and Investigation Department, the Control and Coordination Department, the Violators Follow-up Department, and the Financial and Administrative Services Department in Farwaniya, Khaitan, Al-Qurain Markets, Salhiya and Shuwaikh Industrial area have arrested of 300 residence and labor law violators, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

Those arrested have been referred to the deportation center.

Rumors rejected: A reliable source told the Al-Qabas that the rumors suggesting the escape of an unidentified person who was included in the recent amnesty decree are untrue.

The source emphasized that the information is baseless and lacks factual basis.

It should be noted that the Amiri pardon, announced by the Council of Ministers on November 27, resulted in the release of 30 citizens.



Kuwait Municipality field inspection team

KUNA photo

Municipality finds 20 violations of building & restoration work

Field tour conducted in Mubarak Al-Kabeer

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23, (KUNA): Kuwait Municipality disclosed on Thursday that it issued 20 warnings for non-compliance with construction and restoration work in Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate during the past week as part of a field inspection campaign targeting violations of construction work.

Muhammad Al-Marri, the acting director of the Engineering Audit and Follow-up Department in Mubarak Al-Kabeer Municipality, informed Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the inspection campaign aims to ensure compliance with all construction and restoration work laws and regulations set by Kuwait Municipality.

Al-Marri added that the field team conducted multiple inspection rounds in the Sabah Al-Salem area, focusing on private and investment housing to verify the electrical current delivery to a new building.

He noted that the field teams documented six various records of construction violations in Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate this week, emphasizing that increased construction rates, which may pose a real danger to the lives of citizens and residents, are among the primary issues faced by field teams.

Al-Marri highlighted that municipal inspectors prioritize increasing awareness of municipal laws and regulations during these field tours, emphasizing the importance of citizens understanding and complying with these regulations to avoid violating laws and contributing to the risk of increased construction rates.

It's worth noting that Kuwait Municipality initiated field inspection campaigns on December 11 to identify construction work violations, with plans for these inspections to continue until the end of the year to enforce laws and regulations aimed at preserving people's lives.

Inspection tour of dental clinics

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Assistant Undersecretary for Dental Affairs at the Ministry of Health Dr. Ahmad Asad inspected a number of dental clinics in various health zones as well as dental accident clinics and school programs.

The inspection tour is a continuation of the follow-up on the progress of work in health facilities during the morning period.

Dr. Asad observed the regular workflow in various dental clinics, and praised the level of coordination among the various sectors of the ministry to meet the needs and ensure the continuity of provision of health care services to the public.

Other Voices

'Learn and apply these traits'

Dr. Ross Cole, a psychiatrist from Harvard, delves into the concept of emotional intelligence in his article. Emotional intelligence refers to an individual's capacity to accurately perceive and assess human emotions, both within oneself and others.

This ability empowers individuals to comprehend the psychology of others, positively influence them, interpret non-verbal cues, and build stronger personal and professional relationships.



alsarraaf

To evaluate one's emotional intelligence, Dr. Cole suggests considering certain statements that may indicate a low level of this skill.

For instance, individuals who claim, "I don't change, this is who I am!" demonstrate a resistance to change, signaling low emotional intelligence. While holding strong convictions is crucial, openness to new possibilities and personal development is equally important.

Another red flag is when someone declares indifference to others' feelings, especially in a crisis. Ignoring others' emotions indicates a lack of empathy and

emotional intelligence.

Dr. Cole emphasizes the importance of expressing empathy, offering assistance, and apologizing during challenging times.

Harshly reprimanding others immediately after a mistake is another behavior at odds with emotional intelligence. Instead, individuals should seek understanding, explore reasons behind actions, and focus on the other person's life experience. Using language like, "I want to hear your point of view," fosters a more emotionally intelligent approach.

Refusing to forgive others and failing to empathize by putting oneself in another person's shoes are also indicators of low emotional intelligence. Accusing others of having irrational or extreme feelings without attempting to understand and address them gently reflects a lack of empathy.

While these tips may seem challenging, they underscore the importance of valuing human perspectives, listening to others, understanding their emotions, and avoiding judgment.

Dr. Cole acknowledges that these traits are often associated with advanced societies but encourages individuals to learn and apply them, especially since formal curricula often fall short in teaching these moral subjects.

e-mail: a.sarraaf@alqabas.com.kw

Citizen nabbed after hot chase

Stunt-biker assaults, abuses cops

By Munaf Nayef
Al-Seyassah Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Security forces nabbed a 30-year-old citizen for engaging in reckless activities along the Gulf Street where he performed stunts with his motorcycle and violated the red light, putting his life and that of other people in danger.

He also assaulted and insulted the security-men, prompting them to register a case against him at Maidan Hawally Police Station.

In detail, a security source revealed that a traffic investigation patrol was going around Gulf Street when they noticed a biker performing dangerous stunts with his motorcycle. A hot chase ensued as the officers followed him until he stopped at a traffic light. The traffic police then approached him to issue a ticket for his violation, but he attacked the officers and shouted expletives at them. The officers then requested for backup, leading to the

arrest of the citizen.

Abuse hurled at leaders: The Ministry of Interior has announced the arrest of an unidentified person responsible for creating video clips containing insults and offensive remarks directed towards the political leadership, reports **Al-Rai** daily.

The Public Relations and Security Media Department of the Ministry of Interior reported that "security services with appropriate jurisdiction monitored an account disseminating various video clips on certain social media platforms.

These clips featured an individual engaging in insults and offensive behavior towards the political leadership, constituting a violation of the internal state security law."

The statement added, "Following the acquisition of requisite legal authorization, the individual has been arrested and will be referred to the relevant authorities."



CELEBRATE in Style

MUGHAL MAHAL FAHAHEEL

AL-RAYAN FAMILY LOUNGE & FUNCTION HALL


WEDDINGS


SEMINARS


CONFERENCES


CELEBRATIONS

SEA VIEW | AMPLE CAR PARKING

For more enquires Call: 23911174 / 23911175 / 97644421

Email: fahaheel@mughalmahal.com | info@mughalmahal.com
www.mughalmahal.com

NY Islamic Cultural Center holds absentee funeral prayer for late Amir

MPW's senior officials praise speech of His Highness Amir

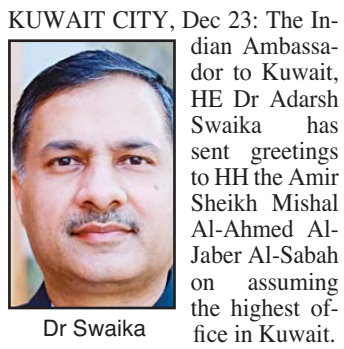
'... a roadmap for achieving comprehensive renaissance'

By Mohammad Ghanim
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff
KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Several senior officials of MPW praised the speech of His Highness the Amir, describing it as a roadmap for achieving comprehensive renaissance in the country.

In this regard, the Assistant Undersecretary for Coordination and Follow up at the Ministry of Public Works Muhammad Al-Barbar affirmed that the speech of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah can be considered as a beacon and guidance for everyone in the coming stage, adding that it is a roadmap to accomplishing integrated comprehensive progress in the country for restoring its status as the "Pearl of the Gulf".

Addressing His Highness the Amir, Al-Barbar said, "Walk with God's blessing. We are united behind your wise leadership to achieve what you aspire to".

Indian envoy sends greetings to HH Amir



Dr Swaika

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Indian Ambassador to Kuwait, HE Dr Adarsh Swaika has sent greetings to HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on assuming the highest office in Kuwait.

He 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 benefit of the country and the people.

Meanwhile, the Assistant Undersecretary for Oversight and Audit Sector at the Ministry of Public Works Eng. Ayman Al-Mousawi expressed appreciation for the directives contained in the speech of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah that reflect the insightful

The message read, "On behalf of the Indian Embassy and the Indian community in Kuwait, I extend sincere congratulations to His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al-Jaber Al Sabah, on assuming the highest office of the Amir of the State of Kuwait."

Earlier, the leadership and people of India had conveyed their felicitations to His Highness on taking over as the Amir of the State

of Kuwait.

Under his visionary leadership, "Kuwait is expected to take rapid strides towards further progress and prosperity.

And under his patronage, the India-Kuwait bilateral relations will continue to achieve new heights. The large Indian community in Kuwait looks forward to his continued benevolence. I wish His Highness good health and happiness."

vision, wisdom and desire to make Kuwait at the forefront of the developed countries with its enormous financial and human potential that is rarely available in other countries.

He stressed the need for everyone's alignment behind the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir in the next stage to complete the comprehensive development process in all fields.

Eng. Al-Mousawi congratulated His Highness the Amir on the assumption of the reins of power, and prayed that God Almighty will protect him

and guide him to fulfill the ambitions and hopes of the people of Kuwait.

Praising the speech given by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah during his constitutional oath-taking ceremony, the Assistant Undersecretary for Major Projects Sector at the Ministry of Public Works Mariam Al-Kandari congratulated His Highness the Amir and asked God Almighty to provide him with necessary assistance to bear the responsibility and accomplish the achievements in favor of the nation.



Consul General Al-Asfoor



Imam Ahmad Zaker

Condolences continue to pour in

NEW YORK, Dec 23, (KUNA): The Islamic Cultural Center of New York held on Friday absentee funeral prayer for the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Kuwait's Consul General in New York Azzam Al-Asfoor expressed, in statements to KUNA, sincere condolences to the political leadership, Kuwaiti people and the Al-Sabah Family over the death of the father of all, Sheikh Nawaf.

Al-Asfoor recalled the traits, stances and humanitarian role of Sheikh Nawaf, praying to Allah the Almighty to bestow mercy upon his soul and bring solace to all Kuwaitis.

Meanwhile, the Consul voiced sincere wishes to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to complete the path of goodness and development as well as maintain stability, security and prosperity in Kuwait, and protect it from all harm.

Ahmad Zaker, the center's Imam, and all worshippers prayed to Allah to bestow mercy upon Sheikh Nawaf's soul.

UAE

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has received two cables from the UAE Supreme Council Member and Ruler of the Emirate of Ras Al-Khaimah Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al-Qasimi and his Crown Prince Mohammad bin Saud bin Saqr Al-Qasimi, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In reply, His Highness the Amir sent Ras Al-Khaimah ruler and Crown Prince two cables of thanks and appreciation for their sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing them good health and wellness.

Germany

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad has received a cable from President of the Federal Republic of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In his cable, President Steinmeier recalled the late Amir's great role and legacy in serving his country.

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

health and wellness.

Belarus

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad has received a cable from the President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In his cable, President Lukashenko recalled the great legacy of the late Amir and his remarkable contributions to the development of relations between the friendly countries.

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

Gambia

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad has received a cable from President of the Republic of The Gambia Adama Barrow, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

President Barrow also congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal on assuming power, expressing best wishes from him and the Kuwaiti people.

In reply, His Highness the Amir sent the Gambian president a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies as well as his congratulation for him on ascending the throne, wishing him everlasting wellbeing and further progress and prosperity for his friendly country.

Tanzania

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad has received a cable from President of The United Republic of Tanzania Samia Suluhu Hassan, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing away of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In her cable, President Hassan recalled the great legacy of the late Amir and his remarkable contributions to the development of relations between the two friendly countries.

In reply, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal sent the Tanzanian president a cable of thanks and appreciation for her sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing her good health and wellness.

Increase on a monthly basis of 1.18% cited

Kuwait's foreign exchange reserves stand at KD12.45 bln at Nov '23 end

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Kuwait's foreign exchange reserves reached 12.45 billion dinars at the end of last November, an increase on a monthly basis of 1.18% and an increase of 145 million dinars during the month compared to 12.31 billion dinars last October, according to the Central Bank of Kuwait's monthly bulletin for November 2023, reports Al-Anba daily.

Since the beginning of the year, the foreign exchange reserve has declined by 672 million dinars, or by 5.12%, compared to the December 2022 levels, which amounted to 13.12 billion dinars. The country's foreign exchange reserve represents the total cash balances, accounts, bonds, certificates of deposit, treasury bills, and foreign currency deposits with the Bank of Kuwait . Central.

By calculating the liquid reserves, we find that they cover Kuwait's needs for imports for more than 13 months, which is 4 times the global average, as it is considered the safe limit for the liquid foreign cash reserves, not including gold, to cover 3 months of the average value of imports.

As usual in all previous years, Kuwait's gold reserves did not change, which stabilized at 79 tons, according to the World

Gold Reserve Council, and the book value of that amount of gold in Kuwait is 31.7 million dinars, according to the prices at the time of purchase and not the current market value.

According to the monthly bulletin, the bank's total assets reached 12.84 billion dinars, distributed among liquid foreign reserves, which represent the bulk of 12.45 billion dinars, in addition to gold reserves worth 31.74 million dinars and other reserves worth 360.8 million dinars.

Total assets witnessed a monthly increase last November by 1.5% compared to 12.65 billion dinars at the end of last October. Foreign assets measure the strength of the external financial position and the ability to resist pressures on the local currency.

In terms of cash in circulation, cash in circulation at the Central Bank of Kuwait increased during the month of November on a monthly basis by 1.22%, reaching the level of 1.98 billion dinars, compared to 1.96 billion dinars at the end of last October.

While government accounts declined by 16.5% on a monthly basis, reaching 1.67 billion dinars at the end of November, compared to 2 billion dinars at the end of last October.

CSC holds new training program

Low number of citizens registered during the 85th recruitment round

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The number of citizens who registered during the 85th recruitment round for government workers on Dec 1-15, 2023 is lower than the previous rounds for various reasons, reports Al-Anba daily quoting a reliable source.

The source clarified these reasons exclude the reluctance of citizens to work in the government sector; pointing out there are no new graduates as those who graduated in the first, second and summer semesters already registered in the previous recruitment rounds.

The source clarified the 85th recruitment round is for those who failed to register in the previous rounds, those who resigned from their jobs in the private sector, and those who fulfilled the age requirement and other conditions.

It has been reported that only 2,200 male and female citizens registered in the 85th round, compared to more than 7,000 in the previous rounds.

Meanwhile, the Civil Service Commis-

sion (CSC) is organizing a new training program for officials to learn modern management methods in delegation, empowerment and planning in order to prepare the second line of officials and qualify them to complete the job succession plan, reports Al-Anba daily.

The program aims to introduce the senior officials, including undersecretaries and assistant undersecretaries or those at the same job level, to the concept of future leaders and their role in the success of the institution. It seeks to develop and qualify future leaders to achieve the job succession plan; in addition to building the intellectual framework for modern methods of delegation, empowerment and planning to prepare the second line of officials.

The program highlights the importance of leadership development and its connection to other functions in human resources management, while enabling participants to develop and follow up individual development plans.

Kuwait City second worst city globally in terms of air quality

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Kuwait City ranked second worst city in the world in the latest Air Quality Index (AQI) with a score of 210; while the Bangladesh capital - Dhaka is in first place

with a score of 237 and Chengdu, China in third place with a score of 200, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

An AQI result between 51 and 100 indicates that the air quality

is moderate, it is classified as unhealthy for sensitive groups if the result is between 101 and 150 and a place is considered unhealthy if the result ranges from 151 to 200.

An AQI score of 201 to 300 is considered an emergency with health warnings, in which case children, the elderly and the sick are urged to limit their indoor and outdoor activities.



Celebrate
العيد
بالبهاين

December

Room Promotion



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

Promo period from 19th - 31st December 2023

Terms & conditions apply*

Kuwait notches

Continued from Page 1

Four Arab countries kept their positions for 2019-2022 compared with 2018-2021, while competitiveness position has improved in nine Arab countries, namely Jordan, the UAE, Algeria, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Libya and Yemen, the report of which KUNA obtained a copy said.

Competitiveness in four other Arab countries declined, it said, referring that the UAE keeps the first place Arab Economic Competitiveness Index, thanks to its advanced rank in macro-economic, and investment environment and attractiveness indices, followed by Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain.

On the monetary and banking sector index, Qatar ranked first, benefiting from its advanced position in the indicators of credit granted to the private sector and non-performing loans, it noted.

Kuwait obtained the second place in this index, as it made progress in non-performing loans decline and foreign assets growth rate indices, followed by Morocco, it stated.

The report went to say that Kuwait got the 11th position in the investment attraction and environment index, and the second in public revenue to the GDP index.

It report said that many Arab countries have adopted multiple national strategies and visions with the aim of enhancing productivity, improving the efficiency of produced goods, and focusing on productive sectors.

The Arab countries are seeking to develop service sectors, facilitate business environments, and boost infrastructure to address challenges that impede their competitiveness.

The report focused on Arab countries' national efforts aiming to achieve economic stability, and enhance sustainable economic development in order to improve living conditions for Arab citizens.

It indicated that Arab countries focus on education and workforce training to ensure providing required skills for the foreign sectors and services as well as improve massive infrastructure through major projects like port facilities, and logistics services.

The Arab Economic Competitiveness Index aims to measure the competitiveness of Arab countries in light of economic and international. It has two main indices: Macroeconomic sector, and environment and investment attractiveness index. Each index consists of a set of sub-indices.

Houthi attacks

Continued from Page 1

In fact, 40% of Asia-Europe trade normally goes through the area, including a huge amount of energy supplies like oil and diesel fuel for import-dependent Europe, said John Stawpert, senior manager of environment and trade for the International Chamber of Shipping, which represents 80% of the world's commercial fleet.

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

In all, about 30% of global container traffic and more than 1 million barrels of crude oil per day typically head through the Suez Canal, according to global freight booking platform Freightos Group.

Huge shipping container companies MSC, Maersk, CMA CGM Group

and Hapag-Lloyd, among others, are avoiding the Red Sea and sending their ships around Africa and the Cape of Good Hope. That adds what analysts say could be a week to two weeks to voyages.

Shippers amounting to 62% of global capacity are opting for the longer route, according to Freightos. That's lead the number of vessels moving through the Red Sea to drop by more than 40% in a week, said Project44, a tech company whose platform helps companies track shipments.

London-based BP also that it has "decided to temporarily pause all transits through the Red Sea," including shipments of oil, liquid natural gas and other energy supplies.

Depending on what companies decide to do, they will have to add more ships to make up the extra time or burn more fuel for the longer journey and if they decide to go faster to meet their itineraries - both of which would release more climate-changing carbon dioxide, said Simon Heaney, senior manager of container research for Drewry, a maritime research consultancy.

"The impact will be longer transit times, more fuel spent, more ships required, potential disruption and delays - at least in the first arrivals in Europe," he said.

That brings up the cost of shipping, but "I don't think it's going to go to the heights that it reached during the pandemic," Heaney said.

Supply chain disruptions increased as people stuck at home during the COVID-19 pandemic ramped up orders for all sorts of products, driving up consumer prices worldwide.

Stawpert of the shipping chamber said he would expect to see some price increases for consumers in the short term but that it depends how long the security threat lasts.

Project44 foresees higher gasoline prices because if the conflict drags on, a "major disruption to oil is anticipated" and that would push up the cost of crude. Oil prices already have been rising.

The company also expects products could be missing from store shelves after the busy holiday shopping season, with new shipments taking longer to arrive.

However, "one saving grace may be the timing, as December and early January are typically slow, post-holiday season times for ocean freight," Judah Levine, head of research for Freightos, said in a blog post.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced a security initiative to protect ships in the Red Sea that includes United Kingdom, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain.

Some of those countries will conduct joint patrols while others provide intelligence support in the southern Red Sea and the nearby Gulf of Aden, Austin said. The goal is to provide ships and other assets to help protect trade in the area.

It builds on the existing presence of U.S. and other coalition warships that patrol to keep the waterway open. The Houthis have no formal naval warships to use to impose a cordon, relying on harassing fire and only one helicopter-borne assault so far.

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

He expects those costs to keep rising.

UN gives

Continued from Page 1

Guterres countered at a press conference that it's a mistake to measure the effectiveness of the humanitarian operation in Gaza by the number of trucks.

"The real problem is that the way Israel is conducting this offensive is creating massive obstacles to the distribution of humanitarian aid inside Gaza," the U.N. chief said. He said the four elements of an effective aid operation don't exist - security, staff that can work in safety, logistical capacity especially trucks, and the resumption of commercial activity in the territory.

The secretary-general reiterated his longstanding call for a humanitarian cease-fire. He expressed hope that Friday's resolution may help this happen but said "much more is needed immediately" to end the ongoing "nightmare" for the people in Gaza.

Guterres has said Gaza faces "a humanitarian catastrophe" and warned that a total collapse of the humanitarian support system would lead to "a complete breakdown of public order and increased pressure for mass displacement into Egypt."

According to a report released Thursday by 23 U.N. and humanitarian agencies, Gaza's entire 2.2 million population is in a food crisis or worse and 576,600 are at the "catastrophic" starvation level. With supplies to Gaza cut off except for a small trickle, the U.N. World Food Program has said 90% of the population is regularly going without food for a full day - and Guterres said Friday that "four out of five of the hungriest people anywhere in the world are in Gaza."

More than 20,000 Palestinians have been killed since the war started, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. Hamas controls the Gaza Strip, and its Health Ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths. Thousands more Palestinians lie buried under the rubble of Gaza, the U.N. estimates.

The resolution reiterates the Security Council's "unwavering commitment to the vision of the two-state solution where two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders." That stresses "the importance of unifying the Gaza Strip with the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority."

Security Council resolutions are important because they are legally binding, but in practice many parties choose to ignore the council's requests for action. General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding, though they are a significant barometer of world opinion.

In its first unified action following the Hamas attacks, the Security Council adopted a resolution on Nov. 15 with the U.S. abstaining calling for "urgent and extended humanitarian pauses" in the fighting, unhindered aid deliveries to civilians and the unconditional release of all hostages.

The U.S. vetoed a Security Council resolution on Oct. 18 to condemn all violence against civilians in the Israel-Hamas war and to urge humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza. On Dec. 8, the U.S. vetoed a second council resolution backed by almost all other council members and dozens of other nations, demanding an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza. The 193-member General Assembly overwhelmingly approved a similar resolution on Dec. 12 by a vote of 153-10, with 23 abstentions.



Al-Seyassah file photo

A photo of some of the Al-Sabah family rulers.

1st ruler from Al-Sabah family assumed power in year 1756

A glimpse at Kuwait's 267-year Al-Sabah legacy

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: With the passing away of Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait bid farewell to its 16th Amir in 267 years since the first ruler from the Al-Sabah family assumed the reins of power in 1756, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

According to the Constitution, the Council of Ministers of Kuwait called on the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to be the 17th Amir of the country.

Sheikh Sabah bin Jaber Al-Sabah, who was born at the beginning of the 18th century, is considered the first ruler of the Al-Sabah family in Kuwait. He assumed power after a tribal alliance during the period from 1756 to 1776.

Sheikh Sabah bin Jaber was the first ruler of Kuwait, and with him began the political history of the Al-Sabah family, which has held the emirate of Kuwait since 1756. The emirate continued in his descendants, passing through Sheikh Mubarak Al-Kabeer (the 7th ruler who ruled from 1896 to 1915), who is considered the true founder of the state.

Abdullah Al-Salem ... Independence and the Constitution

Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, the 11th ruler of Kuwait, assumed the reins of power on February 25, 1950 and ruled the country until his death on November 24, 1965.

On June 19, 1961, Kuwait gained its independence from Britain. Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem was the one who signed the Declaration of Independence with the British High

Commissioner in the Arabian Gulf Sir George Middleton on behalf of the government of Kuwait.

He canceled the agreement signed by Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, the 7th ruler of Kuwait, with Britain on January 23, 1899, to protect it from foreign ambitions.

Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, the man of independence, established the parliamentary system of the state. During his reign, the constitution was approved, and the current constitution was issued after independence on November 11, 1962.

It officially came into effect on January 29, 1963, although Kuwait witnessed an active political life before independence, including the issuance of the first written constitution and the Shura (consultation) Council in 1921, and an elected legislative council in 1938.

The Kuwaiti Constitution, which was approved in 1962 and continues to serve as Constitution today, limited the names of the candidates to assume the emirate of Kuwait to the descendants of Mubarak Al-Sabah, as stipulated in the 1921 document, which was issued at the initiative of the people after the death of the 9th ruler of Kuwait Sheikh Salem bin Mubarak who ruled from 1917 to 1921.

According to the provisions of the Kuwait Constitution and the Emirate's Succession Law, article 4 of the Constitution and article 6 of the Emirate's Succession Law specify that "he be a descendant of Mubarak Al-Sabah."

This is a condition stipulated in the Constitution in article 4. This article also stipulates that, "If the position of the Amir becomes vacant, the Crown Prince will be named Amir."

Article Four of the Constitution and article One of the Emir-

ate's Succession Law stipulate that "Kuwait is a hereditary emirate of the descendants of Mubarak Al-Sabah."

Article 4 of the Emirate's Succession Law states that "if the position of the Amir becomes vacant, the Crown Prince will be named Amir."

Article 60 of the Constitution stipulates that "The Amir shall, before exercising his powers, take the following oath in a special session of the National Assembly - I swear by Almighty Almighty to respect the Constitution and the laws of the State, defend the people's freedoms, interests, and property, and safeguard the independence of the nation and the integrity of its lands."

A total of 16 rulers from the Al-Sabah family have ruled Kuwait since Sabah bin Jaber Al-Sabah from 1756 until today -

Sheikh Sabah I: 1756
Sheikh Abdullah I Al-Sabah: 1762

Sheikh Jaber I bin Abdullah: 1812
Sheikh Sabah II bin Jaber: 1859
Sheikh Abdullah II bin Al-Sabah Al-Sabah: 1866

Sheikh Muhammad I bin Sabah Al-Sabah: 1892

Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah (Mubarak Al-Kabeer): 1896

Sheikh Jaber II Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah: 1915

Sheikh Salem Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah: 1917

Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber: 1921
Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem: 1950

Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem: 1965
Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah: 1977

Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah: 2006

Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah: 2006

Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah: 2020

عمليات الخفجي المشتركة

AL-KHAFJI JOINT OPERATIONS




الشركة الكويتية لنفط الخليجارامكو لأعمال الخليج

KUWAIT GULF OIL COMPANY (K.S.C.)ARAMCO GULF OPERATIONS

TENDER ADVERTISEMENT

Aramco Gulf Operations Company Limited ("AGOC") and Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (K.S.C.) ("KGOC"), (Al Khafji Joint Operations) invites intending bidders to participate in the Tender No.: HT808IT23 - Lease and Maintenance of Broadband Wireless Data Link System in KJO.

Each intending bidder may purchase the tender documents upon payment of Saudi Riyals Four Thousand (SR 4,000) or Kuwaiti Dinars Three Hundred and Twenty (KD 320) only which is non-refundable by visiting our Contracts Department at Al- Khafji, Saudi Arabia, or KGOC's Main Office in Al- Ahmadi, Commercial Affairs Group. The bidder may visit our KJO website: www.kjo.com.sa and follows the path; E-Services □ Tendering □ Contractors □ Ongoing Tenders to review part of tender documents, before purchasing.

The sale of Tender Documents will be effective from December 24, 2023, until 10:00 AM, January 15, 2024.

Attending the Pre- Tender Meeting and Site Visit are Mandatory.

A Pre-Tender meeting will be held for interested bidders at the Information Technology Department (ITD), at Al-Khafji Joint Operations, Saudi Arabia, at 10:00 AM local time on January 15, 2024. A site visit will be held soon after the pre-tender Meeting.

The bid proposal shall be delivered by hand-delivery or thru courier service to the Contracts Department in Al- Khafji Joint Operations, Al- Khafji, Saudi Arabia on or before the closing date 14:00 Hours, Monday, February 12, 2024 of the time stipulated in the tender document.

For more Information, You May Contact The Following Nos.

Tel. No.: +966 (13) 765 4483E- Mail: ctdtenders@kjo.com.sa

Website: www.kjo.com.sa

عمليات الخفجي المشتركة

AL-KHAFJI JOINT OPERATIONS




الشركة الكويتية لنفط الخليجارامكو لأعمال الخليج

KUWAIT GULF OIL COMPANY (K.S.C.)ARAMCO GULF OPERATIONS

TENDER ADVERTISEMENT

Aramco Gulf Operations Company Limited ("AGOC") and Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (K.S.C.) ("KGOC"), (Al Khafji Joint Operations) invites intending bidders to participate in the Tender No.: GT804PC23 - Combined OND Projects - Package 02.

Each intending bidder may purchase the tender documents upon payment of Saudi Riyals One Thousand (SR 1,000) or Kuwaiti Dinars Eighty (KD 80) only which is non-refundable by visiting our Contracts Department at Al- Khafji, Saudi Arabia, or KGOC's Main Office in Al- Ahmadi, Commercial Affairs Group. The bidder may visit our KJO website: www.kjo.com.sa and follows the path; E-Services □ Tendering □ Contractors □ Ongoing Tenders to review part of tender documents, before purchasing.

The sale of Tender Documents will be effective from December 24, 2023, until 10:00 AM, January 10, 2024.

Attending the Pre- Tender Meeting and Site Visit are Mandatory.

A Pre-Tender meeting will be held for interested bidders at the Auditorium Hall, Office Park Building, at Al-Khafji Joint Operations, Saudi Arabia, at 10:00 AM local time on January 10, 2024. A site visit will be held soon after the pre-tender Meeting.

The bid proposal shall be delivered by hand-delivery or thru courier service to the Contracts Department in Al- Khafji Joint Operations, Al- Khafji, Saudi Arabia on or before the closing date 14:00 Hours, Monday, February 12, 2024 of the time stipulated in the tender document.

For more Information, You May Contact The Following Nos.

Tel. No.: +966 (13) 765 4483E- Mail: ctdtenders@kjo.com.sa

Website: www.kjo.com.sa

World News Roundup

Europe

Opposition boycotts vote

Albania's parliament lifts ex-PM Berisha immunity

TIRANA, Albania, Dec 23, (AP): Albania's parliament voted Thursday to lift the legal immunity of former Prime Minister **Sali Berisha**, who leads the opposition Democratic Party and is being probed for possible 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 didn't 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.

With the opposition refusing to participate, there were no votes against the move or any abstentions.

In October, prosecutors publicly accused Berisha of allegedly abusing his post to help his son-in-law, Jamarber Malltezi, privatize public land to build 17 apartment buildings. Prosecutors have yet to take the formal charges to the court and Berisha is still technically under investigation.

Berisha, 79, and Malltezi, 52, both have proclaimed their innocence, alleging the case was a political move by the ruling Socialist Party of Prime Minister Edi Rama. Prosecutors have said that if Berisha is convicted, he faces a prison sentence of up to 12 years.

Democratic Party supporters protested outside the parliament building Thursday with anti-government banners and "Down with dictatorship" chants. Berisha called on his supporters to join "a no-return battle" against the "authoritarian regime" of the Socialists.

"That decision won't destroy the opposition but will mobilize it, and under the motto 'Today or never,' it will respond to that regime," Berisha told reporters after the vote.

Prisoner exchange hampered: A Russian deputy foreign minister said that talks with the United States on a potential prisoner exchange that would free Americans held in Russia are hampered by publicity and an alleged disparity in the U.S. negotiating stance.

The U.S. State Department said last week that Russia rejected several proposals for freeing Paul Whelan, an American convicted of espionage, and Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, who was detained in March and is facing espionage charges.

"Here, as in many other areas, we observe the American traditional desire to get more for ourselves and give the minimum, as they say," Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said in an interview with the Interfax news agency that was published Friday.

The United States has declared both Whelan and Gershkovich to be wrongly detained, and their cases have attracted substantial media attention.

"The American media, in general, at the instigation of the current administration, are actually engaged in savoring these stories," Ryabkov alleged. "This is a very difficult process, even when it is conducted confidentially behind closed doors."

"It is interesting that the participants in these contacts on the American side insist on their complete confidentiality. We also adhere to this line, but then certain turns occur when the White House regularly makes leaks and begins to discuss sensitive issues in the public space," he said. (AP)

Indian travelers sequestered: About 300 Indian citizens heading to Central America were sequestered in a French airport for a third day Saturday because of an investigation into suspected human trafficking, authorities said.

The 15 crew members of the Legend Airlines charter flight en route from United Arab Emirates to Nicaragua were questioned and released, according to a lawyer for the small Romania-based airline. She said they are deeply shaken by what happened.

The flight stopped Thursday at the Vetry Airport in Champagne country for refueling, and was grounded by French police based on an anonymous tip that it could be carrying victims of human trafficking, the Paris prosecutor's office said. It said two people have been detained and special investigators are questioning the other passengers.

The unusual and sudden probe disrupted holiday weekend air travel as police cordoned off the airport and all flights in and out of the regional airport were halted, according to the administration for the Mame region. Some were rerouted. The airfield is used primarily for charter and cargo flights.

Police sequestered the passengers in the airport, where they have spent two nights on camp beds while the investigation continues, according to the Mame administration. It said they initially remained in the A340 plane, surrounded by police on the tarmac, but were then transferred into the main hall of the airport to sleep. (AP)

Bishops reject Pope's stance: In an extraordinary pushback against Pope Francis, some Catholic bishops in Africa, Poland and elsewhere say they will not implement the new Vatican policy allowing blessings for same-sex couples.

Others downplayed the policy approved this week by Francis as merely reaffirming the Vatican's long-standing teaching about marriage being only a union between a man and a woman.

The reactions show how polarizing the issue remains and how Francis' decade-long effort to make the church a more welcoming place for the LGBTQ+ community continues to spark resistance among traditionalist and conservative Catholic leaders.

Some of the strongest responses came from bishops in Africa, home to 265 million Catholics, or nearly a quarter of the world's 1.3 billion Catholics. Many of those Catholics live and their churches operate in societies where homosexuality is condemned and outlawed. (AP)



Berisha



A mourner cries in front of the building of Philosophical Faculty of Charles University in downtown Prague, Czech Republic, Saturday, Dec. 23, 2023. A lone gunman opened fire at a university on Thursday, killing more than a dozen people and injuring scores of people. (AP)

Czech Republic mourns victims in worst mass killing

The Czech Republic came to a standstill at noon Saturday as people across the country observed a minute of silence as part of a national day of mourning to honor the victims of the worst mass killing in Czech history.

National flags on public buildings were at half-staff and bells tolled at noon. A Mass at St. Vitus cathedral in Prague, the biggest in the country, was celebrated for the victims. President Petr Pavel and speakers of both houses of Parliament attended the service that was open to everyone.

"We're all still in a shock in our own ways," Prague Archbishop Jan Graubner said. "We need to clearly condemn what happened but we also need to look into the future."

"Nobody should be left alone in these tough moments," Charles University rector Milena Kralickova said in her remarks toward the end of the Mass. The shooting inside the university's Faculty of Arts on Thursday killed 14 people.

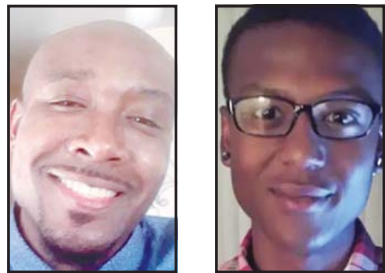
Similar religious services were held in other cities and towns, while Christmas markets in a number of places were closed or reduced their programs amid boosted security measures.

The shooting in the university at the heart of the Czech capital also wounded 25 people before the gunman killed himself. Police and prosecutors said they have evidence the 24-year-old shooter also killed his father earlier in the day and a man and a baby in Prague last week.

A sea of candles was shining at an impromptu memorial for the victims created in front of the university headquarters. (AP)



President Joe Biden reacts as he arrives during a visit to Children's National Hospital, Friday, Dec. 22, 2023, in Washington. President Biden joined his wife, first lady Jill Biden, to meet young patients and their families. The visit continued an 81-year annual tradition, dating back to first lady Bess Truman, of presidents' wives bringing holiday cheer to children who are too ill to be at home on Christmas. (AP)



Ellis

McClain

America

State's police in spotlight: A Washington state law aimed at improving police accountability is in the spotlight after three Tacoma officers were acquitted in the 2020 death of **Manuel Ellis**, a Black man who was shocked, beaten and restrained face-down on a sidewalk as he pleaded for breath.

The measure approved by voters in 2018 was designed to make it easier to prosecute police accused of wrongly using deadly force. Initiative 940, referred to as I-940, removed a requirement that prosecutors prove an officer acted with actual malice in order to bring a case - a requirement no other state had - and established that an independent investigation should be conducted after use of force results in death or great bodily harm, among other things.

The nearly three-month trial of the three police officers - Matthew Collins, 40; Christopher Burbank, 38; and Timothy Rankine, 34 - was the first to be held under the 5-year-old law. The trial over Ellis' death in Tacoma, about 30 miles (50 kilometers) south of Seattle, ended Thursday with their acquittal on various murder and manslaughter charges. (AP)

Paramedics convicted: Two Denver-area paramedics were convicted Friday for giving a fatal overdose of the sedative ketamine to **Elijah McClain** in 2019 - a jury verdict that experts said could have a chilling effect on first responders around the country.

The case involving the 23-year-old Black man's death was the first among several recent criminal prosecutions

Politics

Immunity claim heads to Appeals Court

SC rejects Trump's fast-track ruling

WASHINGTON, Dec 23, (AP): The Supreme Court said Friday it will not immediately take up a plea by special counsel Jack Smith to rule on whether former President Donald Trump can be prosecuted for his actions to overturn the 2020 election results.

The ruling is a scheduling win for Trump and his lawyers, who have sought repeatedly to delay the criminal cases against him as he campaigns to reclaim the White House in 2024. It averts a swift ruling from the nation's highest court that could have definitively turned aside his claims of immunity, and it further throws into doubt the possibility of the landmark trial proceeding as scheduled on March 4.

The issue will now be decided by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, which has signaled it will act quickly to decide the case. Special counsel Jack Smith had cautioned that even a rapid appellate decision might not get to the Supreme Court in time for review and final word before the court's traditional summer break.

Smith had pressed the Supreme Court to intervene, citing significant public interest in a prompt resolution to the case. The request to leapfrog the appeals court, which Smith himself acknowledged was "extraordinary," also underscored prosecutors' concerns that the fight over the issue could delay the start of Trump's trial beyond next year's presidential election.

The justices turned down Smith's

request in a single-sentence order Friday. As is customary, the court gave no explanation for the decision.

With the justices remaining out of the dispute for now, additional appeals are likely that could delay the case. If the appeals court, which is set to hear arguments on Jan. 9, turns down Trump's immunity claims, he could then ask for the Supreme Court to get involved - giving the justices another opportunity to decide if they want to weigh in.

Possibility

U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan has already put the case on hold while Trump pursues his claim that he is immune from prosecution. Chutkan has raised the possibility of keeping the March trial date if the case promptly returns to her court.

She earlier rejected the Trump team's arguments that an ex-president could not be prosecuted over acts that fall within the official duties of the job. "Former presidents enjoy no special conditions on their federal criminal liability," Chutkan wrote in a Dec. 1 ruling. "Defendant may be subject to federal investigation, indictment, prosecution, conviction, and punishment for any criminal acts undertaken while in office."

In a statement Friday, Trump insisted anew that he was "entitled to presidential immunity" and was looking forward to having his case heard before the appeals court.

There are still more Trump-related

cases that the Supreme Court, which includes three justices appointed by him, is poised to grapple with.

Trump's lawyers plan to ask the court to overturn a decision by the Colorado Supreme Court barring him from that state's ballot under Section 3 of the 14th Amendment, which prohibits anyone who swore an oath to support the Constitution and then "engaged in insurrection" against it from holding office.

And the court separately has agreed to hear a case over the charge of obstruction of an official proceeding that has been brought against Trump and more than 300 of his supporters who stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

In the current immunity case, Smith had tried to persuade the justices to take up the matter directly, bypassing the appeals court.

"This case presents a fundamental question at the heart of our democracy: whether a former president is absolutely immune from federal prosecution for crimes committed while in office or is constitutionally protected from federal prosecution when he has been impeached but not convicted before the criminal proceedings begin," prosecutors wrote.

Underscoring the urgency for prosecutors, Smith and his team wrote: "It is of imperative public importance that respondent's claims of immunity be resolved by this Court and that respondent's trial proceed as promptly as possible if his claim of immunity is rejected."

against medical first responders to reach trial, potentially setting the bar for prosecutors for future cases.

It also was the last of three trials against police and paramedics charged

in the death of McClain, who officers stopped following a suspicious person complaint. He was injected with the sedative after being forcibly restrained. The case received little attention until protests

over the 2020 killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

An Aurora police officer was convicted of homicide and third degree assault earlier this year, while two officers were acquitted. (AP)



A family of five claiming to be from Guatemala and a man stating he was from Peru, in pink shirt, walk through the desert after crossing the border wall in the Tucson Sector of the U.S.-Mexico border, Aug. 29, 2023, in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument near Lukeville, Ariz. Mexico's president said Friday that he is willing to help out with a surge of migrants that led to the closure of border crossings with the United States, but he wants the U.S. government to open talks with Cuba and send more development aid to migrants' home countries. (AP)

Chicago man exonerated: Darien Harris spent more than 12 years in an Illinois prison, convicted of murder in part on the testimony of an eyewitness who was legally blind.

Harris, who was released from prison on Tuesday, was convicted in 2014 for the 2011 fatal shooting of a man at a gas station on Chicago's South Side.

His case is the latest in a dozen exonerations this year in Chicago's Cook County, where defendants have been represented by attorneys with The Exoneration Project.

"It does seem in the past few months there have been a larger number than usual," said Lauren Myerscough-Mueller, a lecturer in law and staff attorney for The Exoneration Project at the University of Chicago Law School.

Since 2009, more than 200 people have been exonerated through the group's work, according to data from the organization.

About 150 of the convictions were tied to former Chicago police Sgt. Ronald Watts, who regularly framed people for drug crimes they didn't commit. Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx said in December 2022 that 237 convictions vacated in recent years were linked to Watts and his unit. (AP)

Africa

Mali recalls envoy

French military wraps up Niger withdrawal

ABUJA, Nigeria, Dec 23, (AP): France on Friday completed the withdrawal of its troops after they were asked to leave Niger by the country's new junta, ending years of on-the-ground military support and raising concerns from analysts about a gap in the fight against jihadi violence across the Sahel region of Africa.

The last French military aircraft and troops departed Niger by the Dec. 22 deadline set by the junta which severed ties with Paris after the coup in July, the French Army General Staff told The Associated Press by email. France already announced this week that it would close its diplomatic mission in Niger for "an indefinite period."

However, the country would continue to be involved in the Sahel - the vast expanse south of the Sahara Desert which has been a hot spot for violent extremism - although differently, President Emmanuel Macron said Thursday during a visit to a base in Jordan.



Macron

"I decided on some important reconfigurations," Macron said. "We will continue to protect our interests over there but our armies won't be as present permanently, will be less stationary and also less exposed," he said.

Niger's junta described the end of the military cooperation with France as the start of "a new era" for Nigeriens.

"Niger stands tall, and the security of our homeland will no longer depend on a foreign presence," it said via X, formerly known as Twitter. "We are determined to meet the challenges before us, by consolidating our national military and strategic capabilities."

But analysts say a vacuum will be created by the troops' departure. It will "leave Niger and the entire Sahel worse off" in terms of overall counterterrorism efforts as Niger was seen as the last remaining Western partner in the decade-long fight against jihadi groups in the region, said Ryan Cummings, director of Africa-focused security consulting company Signal Risk.



Mali recalls envoy in Algeria: Mali recalled its ambassador in Algeria after accusing it of interference in its internal affairs by meeting rebel leaders, officials said Friday, deepening diplomatic tensions between the two neighbors over efforts to end the armed rebellion in northern Mali.

Mali's junta said it was withdrawing Ambassador Mahamane Amadou Maiga from Algeria "for consultation with immediate effect," according to a letter from the Malian embassy to the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Algeria has been the main mediator in peace efforts between Mali and the local Tuareg rebels, whose separatist campaign in the north has thrown the country into a violent conflict for over a decade. In 2012, they dislodged the Malian military from the town, setting into motion a series of events that destabilized the country.

Algeria was key to the signing of a 2015 peace deal between Mali and the rebels - a deal that collapsed after both parties accused each other of failing to comply with it.

Earlier in the week, Mali summoned Algeria's top diplomat "to express strong protest following recent unfriendly acts of the Algerian authorities under the guise of the peace process in Mali," the government said in reference to the meetings.

"These acts are an interference in Mali's internal affairs," the Malian Information and Press Bureau said, urging Algeria "to prioritize dialogue with the Malian Authorities."

Algeria in response summoned Mali's top diplomat Thursday and urged the country to "join the efforts currently undertaken by Algeria to give (the agreement) new impetus," according to a statement by its foreign affairs ministry. (AP)



Kenya ex-minister charged with fraud: Kenya's anti-corruption commission Friday charged the country's former tourism minister and two others with economic crimes for the alleged fraud of tens of millions of dollars in inflated costs for the construction of a hospitality college.

Najib Balala, former principal secretary Leah Adah Gwiyo, and the managing partner of West Consults, John Odero, appeared before Principal Magistrate James Mwaniki in the coastal town of Malindi, where they denied the charges.

Balala is the first high profile person to be charged with corruption under President William Ruto's administration. The three were released after posting bail.

Thirteen other suspects are expected to be charged with corruption offenses and economic crimes for the alleged malfeasance that took place 16 years ago. Balala was then serving in the government of late President Mwai Kibaki.

The original cost of the Ronald Ngala Utalii College on the East African coast approved by the minister of finance was at around \$12.5 million but was inflated to more than \$66.7 million, according to an Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission statement. (AP)



CAR rebel attack kills 20: At least 21 people, including children and a soldier, were killed by rebels during attacks targeting a security outpost and a village in northern Central African Republic, according to local authorities.

"The rebels first attacked the army checkpoints, killing one person and wounding several others, before attacking the civilian population, killing about 20 people," Ernest Bonang, a federal lawmaker who represents Nzakoundou, the village attacked Thursday.

The assailants burned down houses in the village, which has been "emptied of its population," Bonang said.

The mineral-rich but impoverished Central African Republic has faced intercommunal fighting since 2013, when predominantly Muslim Seleka rebels seized power and forced then-President Francois Bozize from office. Majority-Christian militias later fought back, also targeting civilians in the streets.

The United Nations, which has a peacekeeping mission in the country, estimates the fighting has killed thousands and displaced over a million people, one-fifth of the country's population.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the latest attack, but locals blamed the 3R, or Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation group, one of many militia groups in northern CAR. The group claims to be fighting to protect the minority Peuhl population but has been accused of mass killings and looting of villages since it emerged in 2015. (AP)



In this undated photo provided Monday, Dec. 18, 2023, by the North Korean government, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, his daughter and an official watch what it says is an intercontinental ballistic missile launching from an undisclosed location in North Korea. (AP)

North Korea appears to be looking to make more bomb fuels

North Korea appears to have started operating a light-water reactor at its main nuclear complex in a possible attempt to establish a new facility to produce bomb fuels, the U.N. atomic agency and outside experts said.

If correct, the assessment would show that North Korea has taken a step to implement leader Kim Jong Un's repeated vows to build more nuclear weapons in response to what he described as intensifying U.S.-led military threats.

The International Atomic Energy Agency has observed increased levels of activity at and near the light-water reactor at the Yongbyon nuclear complex and since mid-October, a strong water outflow from its cooling system, IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi said Thursday.

The observations were consistent with the commissioning of the light-water reactor, or LWR, Grossi

said.

"The LWR, like any nuclear reactor, can produce plutonium in its irradiated fuel, which can be separated during reprocessing, so this is a cause for concern," he said. "I repeat that the further development of (North Korea's) nuclear program, including the construction and operation of the LWR, is a violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions and is deeply regrettable."

The IAEA has not had access to Yongbyon or other locations in North Korea since the country kicked out the agency's inspectors in 2009. The IAEA has said it uses satellite imagery and open source information to monitor developments in North Korea's nuclear program.

Observers say light-water reactors are best-suited for electricity generation, but North Korea could adapt one at Yongbyon to produce plutonium for

weapons. Shin Jongwoo, a military expert at the Seoul-based Korea Defense and Security Forum, said the Yongbyon complex isn't used for producing civilian energy so outsiders suspect the reported light-water reactor operation is related to the North's nuclear weapons program.

"North Korea has talked about bolstering its nuclear strength and building more tactical nuclear weapons to be mounted on ballistic missiles. So (the light-water reactor operation) is suspected to be activities" to extract plutonium, Shin said.

Plutonium is one of the two key ingredients used to manufacture nuclear weapons, along with highly enriched uranium. Yongbyon has long produced plutonium from its widely known 5-megawatt reactor, and the light-water reactor would be an additional plutonium-producing source. Yongbyon has an uranium-enrichment facility as well. (AP)

Japan

Defense spending to speed up strike capability

Cabinet okays \$56 bln military budget



A student helps his schoolmate set up games as they play online games via their smartphones during the annual World Robot Conference in Beijing on Aug. 17, 2023. China released draft guidelines Friday, Dec. 22, 2023 aimed at curbing excessive spending on online gaming in the latest move by the ruling Communist Party to keep control of the virtual economy. (AP)



Khan



Qureshi

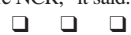
Subcontinent

India imposes construction limits: The Indian central government imposed restrictions on constructions and demolitions in the capital city as the air quality dipped into severe category.

The decision followed a meeting by Sub-Committee for invoking actions under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) of the Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas on Friday evening, according to a statement by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

Data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) showed that the air quality deteriorated to 409 this evening from 397 in the morning, the statement noted.

"Keeping in view the prevailing trend of air quality, and in an effort to prevent further deterioration of air quality in the region, the Sub-Committee today has taken the call to re-invoke all actions as envisaged under Stage-III of GRAP - 'Severe' Air Quality (AQI ranging between 401-450), today with immediate effect in the entire NCR," it said. (KUNA)



Khan ordered released on bail: In a surprise ruling, Pakistan's Supreme Court on Friday ordered the release of former Prime Minister Imran Khan and one of his party deputies on bail in a case involving the revelation of official secrets after his ouster last year.

But Khan - currently serving a three-year sentence in jail in a graft case - won't be freed right away because he still faces two other corruption cases.

Khan faces possible death if he is found guilty of revealing official secrets. Khan is accused of revealing a classified cable that was sent to Islamabad by Pakistan's ambassador in Washington when the former premier was in power. Khan says he didn't disclose the exact content of the cable.

Khan and Qureshi have been asked to

TOKYO, Dec 23, (AP): Japan's defense spending will increase more than 16% next year under a record military budget approved Friday that is intended to accelerate the deployment of long-range cruise missiles that can hit targets in China or North Korea.

The budget adopted by the Cabinet also will further fortify the military with F-35 stealth combat jets and other American weapons as Japanese troops increasingly work with allies and take on more offensive roles.

The 7.95 trillion-yen (\$56 billion) defense budget for the 2024 fiscal year that begins in March marks the second year of a five-year military buildup program under a new security strategy Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government adopted a year ago.

The reinforcement of strike capability the strategy envisions is a major break from Japan's postwar principle of limiting the country's use of force to self-defense. The defense budget is part of a 112.7 trillion-yen (\$794 billion) national budget plan and still needs the approval by the parliament.

Japan plans to spend 43 trillion yen (\$300 billion) through 2027 to bolster its military power and to nearly double its annual spending to around 10 trillion yen (\$68 billion), which would make Japan the world's third-biggest military spender after the United States and China.

The budget would boost Japan's arms spending for a 12th year. Last year, the government budgeted 6.8 trillion yen (about \$48 billion).

In another step underscoring a shift away from the country's self-defense-only principle, Japan partially lifted its ban on lethal weapons exports Friday by allowing shipments of weapons and components made in Japan under for-

well as development of next generation long-range missiles. Japan will also spend more than 80 billion yen (\$562 million) for the development of hypersonic guided missiles with a range of 3,000 kilometers (1,864 miles).

Defense Minister Minoru Kihara announced earlier this month a decision to bring forward deployment of some Tomahawks and Type-12s by the end of March 2026, a year before the original target. Officials said the step is a result of Japan facing its "severest" security environment in the postwar era that has also led it to increase joint operations with the U.S., Australia, Britain and other friendly nations.

Funding the surge in military spending as well as securing necessary personnel is not easy for Japan, a country with a rapidly aging and shrinking population. Defense Ministry officials said the budget addresses the cost impacts of a weaker yen and price increases through measures such as bulk purchases and long-term contracts.

It calls for spending 90 billion yen (\$632 million) on subsidies to strengthen Japan's feeble defense industry and allow more foreign arms sales.

The budget also includes 1.25 trillion yen (\$8.78 billion) to bolster Japan's missile defense systems, including construction of two Aegis-equipped warships for deployment in 2027-2028 at a cost of 373 billion yen (\$2.62 billion).

The warships are to have Lockheed Martin SPY-7 radar that officials say could locate harder-to-detect missile launches, including those on a high arc trajectory that North Korea has often used to test-fire missiles, including an inter-continental ballistic missile launched this week.

Some 734 billion yen (\$5.15 billion) is earmarked for Type-12 cruise missiles and U.S.-made Tomahawks as

submit surety bonds of 1 million rupees (about \$3,600) to secure bail.

Friday's ruling, which Khan's defense team viewed as a legal victory and a po-

litical boost, was issued over charges of the former premier revealing state secrets when he waved an allegedly confidential document, dubbed Cipher, last year at a rally



Afghan girls attend a religious school, which remained open since the last year's Taliban takeover, in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Aug. 11, 2022. Afghan girls of all ages are permitted to study in religious schools, which are traditionally boys-only, a Taliban official said Thursday Dec. 21, 2023. (AP)

following his ouster from power. The document hasn't been made public.

"The court's order is proof enough that the charges against Khan and Shahnawaz Qureshi were fabricated," Khan lawyer Salman Safdar said. Qureshi is a senior vice president at Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party. (AP)

Tensions rise in Kashmir: Anger has spread in some remote parts of Indian-controlled Kashmir after three civilians were killed while in army custody, officials and residents said Saturday.

Locals said the Indian army detained at least eight civilians on Friday for questioning, the day after rebels fighting against Indian rule ambushed two army vehicles in the southern Poonch district, killing four soldiers and wounding three others.

The districts of Poonch and Rajouri are close to the highly militarized line of control that divides the disputed Himalayan region between India and Pakistan.

Locals accused army personnel of torturing the three to death in a nearby military camp. The bodies were later handed to the local police who in turn contacted the families. Residents said the bodies bore marks of severe torture. The five other detainees were taken to an army hospital after they were severely tortured, their families said. (AP)

Kuwait oil up

The price of Kuwaiti crude oil went up by 33 cents to USD 81.98 per barrel on Friday, compared with USD 81.65 pb on Thursday, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Saturday. In international markets, the Brent crude oil future contracts fell by 32 cents to reach USD 79.07 pb, while the West Texas Intermediate crude dropped 33 cents to stand at USD 73.56 a barrel. (KUNA)

Turkiye raises interest rate

Turkiye's central bank hiked its key interest rate by 2.5 percentage points on Thursday as part of its efforts to combat high inflation that has left many households struggling to afford rent and essential items. The bank's Monetary Policy Committee raised its benchmark rate to 42.5%, delivering its seventh interest rate hike in a row to tame inflation, which rose to 61.98% last month. But the bank signaled that the rate hikes - which took borrowing costs from 8.5% to the current 42.5% - could soon end. "The committee anticipates to complete the tightening cycle as soon as possible," it said. "The monetary tightness will be maintained as long as needed to ensure sustained price stability." (AP)

Fed's favored inflation gauge tumbles in Nov

The Federal Reserve's preferred measure of prices fell last month, another sign that inflation is easing and that Americans should benefit from reduced interest rates and get relief from painful price shocks in 2024. Friday's report from the Commerce Department showed that U.S. consumer prices slid 0.1% last month from October and rose 2.6% from November 2022. The month-over-month drop

was the largest since April 2020 when the economy was reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic. Excluding volatile food and energy prices, so-called core inflation last month rose 0.1% from October and 3.2% from a year earlier. The numbers show somewhat more progress against inflation than economists had expected. Inflation is steadily moving down to the Fed's year-over-year target of 2% and

appears to be clearing the way for Fed rate cuts in 2024. That, in turn, could translate into lower rates on everything from mortgages to credit cards. Rates on loans for cars, homes and other larger purchases tend to track the direction of Fed monetary policy, so when benchmark interest rates are cut in the U.S., consumer costs typically fall and free up more money for households to spend elsewhere. (AP)

Market Movements

23-12-2023

UAE	- DFM	Change	Closing pts	PAKISTAN	- KSE 100	Change	Closing pts
JAPAN	- Nikkei	+0.44	4,022.92	SAUDI	- Tawadul	-1.98	61,608.15
PHILIPPINES	- PSEI	+0.09	33,169.05	EGYPT	- EGX 30	-0.69	11,621.93
		+0.49	6,501.00			-2.14	24,305.09

Business

ABK successfully completes KD 50m bond issuance

Issuance jointly led by ABK Capital, Kamco Invest, and Markaz

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) has achieved a new milestone with the successful issuance of KD 50 million Subordinated Tier 2 Bonds, set to mature over a 10-year period and callable after 5 years. This endeavor is anticipated to fortify ABK's capital base and propel the Bank forward while leveraging on the strength of the Kuwaiti economy.

Jointly led by ABK Capital, Kamco Invest, and Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz", the bond issuance garnered exceptional interest, oversubscribed by 2.2 times. This overwhelming response underscores the trust placed by investors in the quality of the offering,

the venerable reputation of the Bank, and the efficacy of the joint distribution by the lead managers.

The bond comprised two tranches: a Fixed Rate Tranche and a Floating Rate Tranche, each with a principal amount of KD 25 million. The Fixed Rate Tranche offers coupons at 6.25% per annum, while the Floating Rate Tranche offers a coupon rate of 2.25% above the CBK Discount Rate.

Capital Intelligence have conferred a 'BBB' rating with a stable outlook on ABK's Subordinated Tier 2 bonds, acknowledging the Bank's strong credit fundamentals, including high asset quality, robust coverage ratios, satisfactory capitalization, and an adequate liquidity and funding profile supported by a stable customer deposit base.

Commenting on the occasion, Abdullah Al Sumait, Acting Group Chief Executive Officer at ABK, said, "This accomplishment is a testament to the confidence investors have in ABK and our commitment to sustained growth and innovation. It highlights our commitment to maintaining a strong capital base and furthering our strategic



Dr. Husayn Shahrur, CEO of ABK Capital.

initiatives. We are grateful for the significant response received and look forward to utilizing this capital to drive our growth and support the development of Kuwait's dynamic financial landscape."

Dr. Husayn Shahrur, CEO of ABK Capital, said, "I am pleased with the resounding success of the Subordinated Tier 2 Bonds issuance, which follows ABK's significantly oversubscribed rights issue earlier this year that we also participated in. These ex-



Ali-Khalil

tremely well received issuances are a reflection of the market confidence in ABK's consistent performance. This achievement will undoubtedly bolster our growth strategy and support ABK's objectives." He added, "ABK Capital strives to continue building on its presence as a prominent and reputable investment company in Kuwait, and intends to leverage and enrich its clients' investment journey and aims to build even stronger long-term ties with them, through global partnerships and innovative investment solutions."



Mr. Abdulla Al Sumait – Acting Group Chief Executive Officer.

Faisal Sarkhou, CEO of Kamco Invest, said, "We take pride in our engagement in the Bank's two capital market transactions this year; the rights issue that was oversubscribed by 3.31 times during the third quarter along with this bond issuance. These milestone transactions reflect the resilience of ABK and demonstrate the confidence in both Kuwait's economic prospects and its banking sector. Our role as investment bankers in efficiently managing such transactions is vital for the growth of the capital markets in



Faisal M Sarkhou

Kuwait and the MENA region. We are grateful for the hard work of our Debt Capital Markets teams in this transaction as well as the collaboration of the Joint Lead Managers."

Ali Khalil, CEO of Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz", said: "As we complete yet another bond issuance, we are pleased that the transaction has received great attention from investors in view of the excellent reputation of ABK and the professional expertise of Markaz and the other lead managers.

Upswing translates to an annual surge of 36.2%

Volume of loans procured by local banks surges in 1st 10 months of yr

By Ahmad Fathi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The initial ten months of 2023 have witnessed a substantial upswing in the volume of loans procured by local banks in Kuwait from their foreign counterparts. The surge amounted to a notable 22.2 percent increase, reaching 240.2 million dinars. This surge marks a considerable shift from the 1.081 billion dinars recorded at the conclusion of December 2022 to an elevated figure of 1.321 billion dinars as of October 2023. This escalation indicates both a monthly spike of 5.9 percent, totaling 74.1 million dinars, and an annual surge of 36.2 percent, amounting to an impressive 351.2 million dinars in comparison to the corresponding period in October 2022.

Conversely, the borrowing activities of foreign banks from their Kuwaiti counterparts experienced a decline over the course of the ten-month span. This decline amounted to a decrease of 8 percent, totaling 173.9 million dinars. The overall figure retreated from the recorded 2.169 billion dinars in December 2022 to stand at 1.995 billion dinars by the end of October 2023. While there was a marginal 0.6 percent monthly uptick, representing 11.4 million dinars from September 2023, the annual drop reached 12.1 percent, equating to a decrease of approximately 275.6 million dinars relative to the scenario in October 2022.

In the realm of credit facilities and loans provided to non-residents, there was a discernible uptick over the ten-month period, reflecting a 5.5 percent increase amounting to approximately 186.2 million dinars. The aggregate sum ascended from 3.393 billion dinars in December 2022 to 3.579 billion dinars by the end of October 2023. On a monthly basis, this increase represented a modest 0.16 percent, equivalent to 5.8 million dinars, from the situation in September 2023. On an annual scale, there was a noteworthy 3 percent increase, constituting a growth of about 105 million dinars when compared to the status in October 2022.

This surge in mutual loans between local and foreign banks is occurring amidst successive increases in local and global interest rates. These increments are notably led by the US Federal Reserve, which is endeavoring to mitigate the strongest surge in inflation witnessed in more than four decades, thereby averting a potential recession



A residential development under construction in Eagleview, Pa., Friday, April 28, 2023. Homebuilders are stepping up construction of single-family homes following a steady decline in mortgage rates and broad expectation among economists that home loan borrowing costs will ease further in 2024. (AP)

Homebuilders step up construction of single-family homes as 30-year mortgage rate eases below 7 pct

LOS ANGELES, Dec 23, (AP): Homebuilders are stepping up construction of single-family homes following a steady decline in mortgage rates and broad expectations among economists that home loan borrowing costs will ease further next year.

Builders broke ground on single-family homes in November at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of about 1.14 million units, the Commerce Department reported this week. That's an 18% jump from October and a 42.2% increase from November last year. It also marks the fastest pace for single-family housing starts since

April 2022.

Single-family housing starts have now risen three months in a row and are outpacing home completions for the first time since the spring of last year.

Even with November's ramp-up, construction of single-family homes remains on pace for its second straight annual decline, with starts down 7.2% through the first 11 months of this year versus the same period in 2022.

Still, if mortgage rates continue to fall, that should spur more homebuyers to come off the sidelines and give builders more reason to accelerate

construction next year.

Another incentive: The inventory of previously occupied homes for sale is likely to remain constrained because many homeowners have locked in a mortgage rate well below where rates are today.

Consider, some 67% of U.S. homeowners with a mortgage have a 30-year fixed-rate home loan at 5% or less. Even with its recent decline, the average rate on a 30-year mortgage remains just under 7%, according to mortgage buyer Freddie Mac.

Several housing economists are projecting that mortgage rates will ease

in the world's largest economy. In response, most global central banks are aligning with the Federal Reserve's strategy by augmenting interest rates, aiming to uphold the strength and competitiveness of their respective currencies.

The Central Bank of Kuwait has actively pursued strategies to enhance cash flows between the banking sector and sectors of the national economy. Concurrently, it aims to maintain the attractiveness of the Kuwaiti dinar as a remunerative and reliable vessel for

savings. In alignment with this objective, the Central Bank raised interest rates seven times throughout 2022, closely mirroring the Federal Reserve's adjustments. These increments commenced from 1.50% and culminated at 3.50% by December 7, 2022.

'Israel-Hamas war could push Lebanon back into recession'

WASHINGTON, Dec 23, (KUNA): Four years into an economic and financial crisis, Lebanon's macroeconomic framework remains severely impaired, according to the latest World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor released on Thursday.

The spillover effects from the ongoing conflict in Gaza pose yet another large shock to Lebanon's precarious growth model.

Without the implementation of a comprehensive crisis resolution plan,

no long-term investment is feasible, and the country's physical, human, social, and natural capital will be further eroded, the report cautioned.

The Lebanon Economic Monitor (LEM) Fall 2023 "In the Grip of a New Crisis" provides an update on key economic developments and analyzes their implications for the country's outlook.

The Special Focus section titled "The Impact of the Conflict in the Middle East on the Lebanese Econo-

my," assesses the impact of the current conflict and its spillover on Lebanon's economy and its growth prospects amid a prolonged political and institutional vacuum.

Prior to the current conflict, economic growth was projected to expand in 2023, for the first time since 2018, by 0.2 percent.

The economy seemed to have found a temporary bottom, following years of sharp contraction.

Tepid growth was predominantly

caused by volatile drivers: a growth in consumption due to a strong summer tourism season; sizable inflow of remittances; increasing dollarization of salaries; and signs of stabilization in private sector activity.

With the onset of the current conflict and in the absence of broader economic stabilization, Lebanon's economy is now projected to be back in recession in 2023. Macroeconomic imbalances also persist, as the current account remains in sizeable deficit of 12.8 percent of GDP.

Other Voices

OPEC: Effectiveness in question

By Kamel Al-Harami
Independent Oil Analyst

With Angola leaving the oil organization, the question being raised is about the effectiveness of OPEC in supporting the oil prices.

Angola is not a major oil producer as it produces around 1.1 million barrels per day. It is aware that it cannot serve the purpose behind the frequent request for production cuts in its daily throughput, due to which it decided that it was better off being out of the oil group. This is leading us to the current level of oil prices and shows us how true the reflection of its true value is. It could be based on the current geopolitical situation of the recent attacks and disruption of ships moving through the Suez canal.

Oil currently stands at \$80 per barrel, due mainly to attacks on ships, without any reference to the oil fundamentals of supply and demand.

Oil supply is more adequate with OPEC+ producing 2.6 million barrels less, as group voluntary cuts are aimed to boost oil prices to the upper range of \$80. The increase of oil supply from non-OPEC producers is causing a nightmare for the organization. It will certainly weaken the oil price and bring it down to \$75 level in the coming months. The huge volume that will be pouring into the market from the USA, Canada, Brazil, and Norway will be here to stay, particularly with the surprising production of Brazil that will challenge the production of Kuwait, Iran and Iraq, and is expected to hit 4.5 million barrels per day.



Al-Harami

Considering the circumstances of the oil market today, Angola is concerned about being an effective OPEC member, as the organization is helpless in defending a certain price level for oil and is opting the production-cuts mechanism to stabilize the oil prices furthermore. Meanwhile, Brazil is seeking membership in the same organization but its arrival will be followed by asking it to reduce its production and recover the cost of its investments.

The question that is being asked by the newcomer is regarding the price level that OPEC+ is happy with, or the pricing criteria, besides its main purpose of stabilizing supply along with its oil prices.

Why for instance non-OPEC countries are producing without being bothered about the price level and are actually making mountains of cash, while OPEC+ does not seem to be satisfied and is constantly seeking high prices for the same barrel?

The reduction by OPEC+ is not that effective nowadays with the volumes coming from all over particularly from its own members like Iran and Venezuela that are hungry for additional income after years of boycott and decline in production.

The question is regarding the effectiveness of OPEC. If it had not reduced its volume by 2.6 million barrels per day, how low would the oil prices have gone? Would the other producers continue to have reduced production?

OPEC's effectiveness will be real the moment its members search and find other sources of income to rely on. Without an alternative, OPEC will not be that influential and effective in serving its members.

In conclusion, I would like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Email: naftikuwaiti@yahoo.com

Main market 'closes' with an increase of 76.71 points

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The main market index ("Main 50") ended the weekend trading session with an increase of about 104.7 points, while the general index of the main market closed with an increase of 76.71 points, under the influence of some transactions that witnessed heavy inactive stocks in the market, reports Al-Rai daily.

The Premier Market Index, whose components account for 87 percent of the total market value of listed companies, was the only one that contradicted the course of the Kuwait Stock Exchange indices Thursday, recording a slight decline of about 12.28 points, while the score of the general index of the Stock Exchange increased by about 10.8 points.

Stock market transactions during the weekend session were not without an intensification of buying and trad-

ing in stocks that were close to moving from the general market to the "Main 50" or from the "Main 50" to the Premier Market in light of the fulfillment of the technical conditions and requirements for that, while the week coincides next with the last trading of the year 2023, as some portfolios and funds are expected to compete to compensate for the declines in their investment positions and their concentrations in leading stocks in view of last month's closings.

The latest trading on the stock exchange resulted in an increase in the market value of all listed stocks by about 67.57 million dinars, bringing the total value to 40.58 billion dinars (still a decline of 13.2 percent on an annual basis, but the current month's performance resulted in an increase in value of 2.5 percent).

BUSINESS



Abdulwahab Al Rushood receiving the award from the Deputy Ruler of Sharjah, His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Salem bin Sultan Al Qasimi.



Abdulwahab Al Rushood, Khaled AlShamlan, Abdulaziz AlMarzooq, Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem and Kamel Kabar



Abdulwahab Al Rushood, Mohammad Alarbeen, Muhammad Al-Fares, and Abdulaziz Dhiyab



Ahmad Al-Sumait, Mohammad Alarbeen, and Mohamed Fahmi Amin Hamad receive the EMEA Finance Awards.



Meshal Alobaid receiving the Digital Transformation Award for Customer Experience in the presence of Khaled AlShamlan.



Ahmad Al-Sumait receiving the Baytak Award.

Reflecting its leadership in the Islamic finance sector

KFH caps off 2023 with 26 illustrious awards



EML23 Market Leader Corporate banking Kuwait



EML23 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Market Leader Kuwait



EML23 Digital solutions Market Leader Kuwait

EU agrees on compromise for overhaul of bloc's fiscal rules

France, Germany resolve differences

BRUSSELS, Dec 23, (AP): European Union finance ministers have sealed a deal to reform the 27-nation bloc's fiscal rules after France and Germany finally adhered to a compromise.

EU countries had been negotiating for months a reform of the bloc's fiscal rules limiting debt and deficits for member states, known as the Stability and Growth Pact.

The rulebook, which has often proved difficult to enforce and has served as a source of tension, was suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic but should be reactivated next year.

"Once this agreement is formalized into a general approach, which should happen very soon, negotiations can begin with the European Parliament so that EU Member States have clarity and predictability on their fiscal policies for the years ahead," said Valdis Dombrovskis, a European Commission executive vice president.

The deal was announced a day after France and Germany reached an agreement on the compromise put forward by Spain, which currently holds the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU. The two economic powerhouses had long remained at odds on how to support investment when budget deficits exceed the limits set by the EU.

"(A) historic agreement," France's Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire wrote on X, formerly Twitter. "After two years of intense negotiations, we have new European budget rules!"

Key targets from the old Stability and Growth Pact will remain. Under current rules, countries must aim to keep their government deficit below 3% of gross domestic product, and their public debt below 60% of GDP.

The central pillar of the overhaul,



A protestor holds a sign which reads 'stop austerity' during a demonstration against austerity measures in Brussels, Tuesday, Dec. 12, 2023. (AP)

Future support is up in air

EU pays final tranche of multi-billion support package to Ukraine for 2023

BRUSSELS, Dec 23, (AP): The European Union on Thursday paid the final tranche of a multi-billion-euro support package to Ukraine to help keep its war-ravaged economy afloat this year, leaving the country without a financial lifeline from Europe as of next month.

The EU has sent 1.5 billion euros (\$1.6 billion) each month in 2023 to ensure macroeconomic stability and rebuild critical infrastructure destroyed in the war. It's

also helping to pay wages and pensions, keep hospitals and schools running, and provide shelter for people forced from their homes.

To ensure that Ukraine has predictable, longer-term income, the EU's executive branch, the European Commission, proposed to provide the country with 50 billion euros (\$55 billion.) At a summit last week, 26 of the 27 nation bloc's leaders endorsed the plan, but Hungary imposed a veto.

compromise includes extra safeguards to guarantee debt reduction. Countries with debt ratios above 90% will need to cut debt by one percentage point per year. For member states with debt ratios between 60% and 90%, the reduction required will be 0.5% per year.

Greenlight for green tech

BYD to build first EV factory in Hungary

BUDAPEST, Hungary, Dec 23, (AP): One of the world's largest electrical vehicle manufacturers, China's BYD, will open its first European EV production factory in Hungary, the country's foreign minister said Friday, the latest step in the Central European nation's efforts to become a global hub for EV manufacturing.

BYD will construct the plant near the southern Hungarian city of Szeged, and is expected to provide thousands of jobs to the region, Foreign Minister Peter Szijjártó said in a statement posted to his Facebook page.

The project "will be one of the largest investments in Hungarian economic history," he said, adding that the government would provide financial incentives to BYD for building the plant, details of which he said would be released at a later date.

The plant's construction will "further strengthen the position of the Hungarian economy, further strengthen the foundations of long-term economic growth, and further strengthen Hungary's position in the global electric automotive transition," Szijjártó said.

Hungary in recent years has sought to become a global hub of lithium-ion battery manufacturing in an era where governments are increasingly seeking to limit greenhouse gas emissions by switching to electric cars.

China slams US for placing firms on export control list

TOKYO, Dec 23, (KUNA): China said on Thursday it firmly opposes the US placing 13 Chinese enterprises on its export-control "unverified list," state-run Xinhua News Agency reported. "The US practice disregards the facts and harms the foundation of bilateral cooperation, hinders normal economic and trade activities of enterprises, and undermines market rules and international economic and trade order. China firmly opposes this," the Ministry of Commerce said.

The ministry said the US should immediately stop its unreasonable suppression of Chinese enterprises, adding that China will resolutely safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese enterprises.

South Korea's Samsung, China's CATL and other companies have built factories around Hungary, prompting reactions from some local residents and environmental groups that worry about the consequences for the environment.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) wrapped up 2023 with 26 illustrious awards at the Group level from various local and international prestigious entities, affirming its achievement in the Islamic finance industry and showcasing its global leadership. Additionally, KFH concluded the year being ranked number one by the Banker magazine, adding to its impressive record of accolades and recognitions. KFH also concluded the year 2023 with 5th high rankings from Euromoney magazine.

The awards serve as a testament to the brand's robustness and the commendation KFH enjoys for its outstanding achievements across diverse domains. These encompass exemplary customer service, expertise in adopting cutting-edge technology, leading digital transformation and financial services in the banking sector, and a commitment to delivering superior digital products and services.

Acting Group Chief Executive Officer at KFH Abdulwahab Al Rushood said that the recent award secured by the KFH adds to its existing series of honors, reaffirming its prominent position among the world's most established financial institutions. He added that the awards highlight KFH's rich array of robust and diversified activities, its high liquidity levels, and its advanced and diverse banking services that align seamlessly with the latest global financial technologies and standards.

He explained that the success of the digital transformation strategy, which KFH was one of the first banks to adopt, was reflected in the series of innovative services and products that the bank has been unique in launching in recent years. This pioneering step has made KFH attract new segments of customers and enabled it to meet their changing requirements and achieve their satisfaction and strengthen its leading position in the market.

Al Rushood pointed out how KFH's early adoption of the digital transformation strategy contributed to its success, evident in a succession of groundbreaking services and innovative products exclusively launched by KFH in recent years. This unprecedented initiative not only attracted new customer segments but also empowered KFH to effectively address the evolving needs of customers, solidifying its leading market standing.

He further mentioned that the awards signify more than just an accomplishment; they serve as a motivation to strive for greater success in the future, adding that they stand as testament to KFH's capability to offer innovative solutions that cater to customers' needs and promote the local banking sector and the Kuwaiti economy.

World's Best Islamic Financial Institution

In recognition of its continued successes and operational progress at the regional and international levels, leadership in the Islamic finance market and excellence in the digital banking solutions, KFH bagged 2023 "World's Best Islamic Financial Institution" award from Global Finance magazine. In its sixteenth annual awards, Global Finance magazine announced six more awards for KFH: "Best Islamic Corporate Bank – Global," "Best Islamic SME Bank-Global," "Best Islamic Takaful-Global," "Best Islamic Project Finance Provider-Global," "Best Islamic Financial Institution - Middle East" and "Best Islamic Financial Institution in Türkiye".

In addition, KFH received Kuwait's Best Bank for Sustainable Finance in 2023 Award during the Investment Banks and Sustainable Finance Awards Ceremony hosted annually by Global Finance Magazine. KFH Capital, the investment arm of KFH Group, also picked up Kuwait's Best Investment Bank Award.

Bank of the Year
KFH scooped the "Bank of the Year 2023 – Kuwait" award from The Banker, the world's most prestigious banking magazine owned by the Financial Times Group.

Commenting on this achievement, Al Rushood said that the award further affirms KFH's prominence and expertise in Kuwait's banking industry. Additionally, it highlights KFH's significant role in being at the forefront of the Islamic banking sector and its ability to provide innovative banking solutions and services that cater to customers' needs.

Sustainability
KFH received "Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait" and "Best Islamic Bank for ESG- global category 2023" awards from Euromoney magazine during the



2023 Best Islamic Financial Institution



World Best Islamic Bank for ESG 2023



Brandon Hall Excellence award

annual Euromoney Awards for Excellence ceremony. The two awards came in recognition of KFH's contributions, prominent standing and leadership in the Islamic finance and banking industry locally and globally, its digital services and products, in addition to its outstanding efforts in deploying environmental, social and governance practices (ESG) in all banking business and activities.

Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Award

Adding to its record of triumphs, KFH was declared a winner of the 23rd edition of His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah Informatics Award for 2023 for the category of excellence in digital transformation in technical financial solutions.

Al Rushood stated that KFH stood out by launching various digital financial services at the banking level. These services included launching the "Zahab" digital platform, five digital portfolios, and for the first time in the Middle East, instant credit, and prepaid card printing service, in addition to the Liveness Face Matching service in branches, emergency cash, exceptional digital services for gold accounts (selling, buying, delivery, storing) as well as transferring funds from prepaid cards to the account. KFH also launched its first Shari'a-compliant digital bank in Kuwait, Tam Digital Bank.

Gulf Excellence Award

In recognition of its qualitative accomplishments and outstanding contributions to the business and banking sectors in Kuwait and the GCC countries, (KFH) won the Sharjah Gulf Excellence Award. Being the only institution to be nominated from Kuwait by the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) and selected by the award Board of Trustees, is yet another achievement to KFH's historic record.

Customer Experience Transformation

KFH bagged the 2023 Customer Experience Transformation award for its Call Center from the American technology company (Avaya) in partnership with the Middle East Telecommunications Company (METCO).

The award was based on several criteria including: providing a state-of-the-art digital Contact Center implementing the latest technology modules in the field that are based on novel self-services and digital applications, such as Dynamic Interactive Voice Response (IVR), Automated Number Identification (ANI), VIP Services, First Call Resolution (FCR), Automated Out-

bound Campaigner consisting of both Progressive & Preview in addition to other criteria.

Sukuk and products

KFH received seven prestigious awards from EMEA Finance Magazine at the fifteenth edition of the Middle East Banking Industry Awards, in recognition of its outstanding contributions to the Islamic finance industry and its leading role in the Sukuk market, innovation of financing solutions and products, and its successful acquisition of AUB-Bahrain.

KFH won "Best Islamic finance house", "Best financial institution Sukuk" for Dubai Islamic Bank's USD \$750mn Sukuk Deal, "Best financial institution Sukuk (US \$500 MN)" for First Abu Dhabi Bank's US \$500mn Sukuk Deal, "Best sovereign Sukuk" for Republic of Türkiye's US \$3bn 5-year Sukuk Deal, "Best superlational Sukuk" for Islamic Development Bank's US \$1.6bn Sukuk Deal, "Most innovative Sukuk" for PD His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Khalid Al Nahyan, "Best Financial Institution M&A Deal" for Kuwait Finance House's acquisition of Ahli United Bank.

Human Resources

KFH won three global awards in the Human Resources field for the year 2023 from Brandon Hall Group, a company specialized in the evaluation and performance assessment of banks, companies, and institutions around the world. KFH was awarded the gold medal in "Best Advance in Employee Recognition Program" category, a gold medal in "Best Unique or Innovative Talent Management Program" and a bronze medal in the "Best Advance in Employee Engagement" category.

Mastercard Award

KFH capped off its performance with yet another milestone from Mastercard, as it picked up the "Best Card Loyalty Program Design with Mastercard D&S in Kuwait" award for the Middle East region.

KFH has an outstanding history of accomplishments and stands out as a trailblazer in embracing cutting-edge technology for e-payment solutions amidst the rapid change in the field. It also launched various promotional loyalty campaigns encouraging customers to make their purchases using bank cards locally and abroad.

Stringent international criteria

All the awards KFH has received this year from prestigious global bodies specialized in business and finance were based on stringent and professional international criteria that measure factors such as quality, the bank's position, its contributions and financial indicators. Among the criteria were excellence, initiative and innovation in products and services, performance efficiency, geographical reach, shareholder rights indicators, strength of capital adequacy and total assets, customer satisfaction, and strategic relationships as per the recommendations made by juries composed of experts and analysts specialized in the Islamic banking sector from all over the world.

These criteria indicated that KFH is based on a solid foundation, and is characterized by high-level professional performance, systematic work, diversity, ability to compete, leadership in the Islamic finance industry globally, and excellence in providing an integrated system of banking and financing services which helped establish its leading position globally.

Number one in Kuwait

KFH was ranked number one in Kuwait among the top Islamic financial institutions in the world by The Banker, the world's most prestigious banking magazine owned by the Financial Times Group. The magazine affirmed the continuous progress of KFH, which is built on financial stability, robust operational performance, consistent growth in all indicators, in addition to its Sharia-compliant innovative solutions that cater to the banking and financial needs of businesses and individuals according to the highest global standards.

Market leader

Euromoney Magazine classified KFH as a market leader in 5 categories: digital solutions, corporate banking, investment banking, Islamic finance, and corporate social responsibility (CSR). These prestigious rankings emphasize the successful business model of KFH and its quality services, efficient digital transformation strategy and its leadership in different areas in a way that it strengthens its standing and strong brand as well as its solid financial position.

FINANCE

Business Plus



Staying merry on a budget

Experts share tips on stress-free holiday finances



The likeness of Benjamin Franklin is seen on U.S. \$100 bills, Thursday, July 14, 2022, in Marple Township, Pa. In preparation for 2024, you can shore up your finances by creating some financial New Year's resolutions for yourself. (AP)

6
During the holiday season, we often feel like not talking about money, not letting individuals know how much the gift we bought for them cost,

NEW YORK, Dec 23, (AP): The holidays are supposed to be a joyful time, but they can also be financially stressful. With gifts, social gatherings and plane tickets home, the costs can start piling up.

Household expenses continue to rise and many Americans are expressing concern about their financial futures, according to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. "Financial concerns are the number one anxiety-provoking issue (for the holidays)," said Dr. Petros Levounis, president of the American Psychiatric Association.

Here are recommendations from experts to reduce financial stress during the holidays:

In many families, the holidays mean going all out with gift giving. But this can quickly become stressful if your finances make it hard to keep up.

Managing expectations is key, according to Sarah Foster, a Bankrate.com analyst.

"During the holiday season, we often feel like not talking about money, not letting individuals know how much the gift we bought for them cost," said Foster, who recommends leaving aside taboos and talking about how much you can afford to give this year.

Setting a budget can help prevent stress during the holidays, Levounis said.

"Try not to spend beyond your

\$100, you're going to spend more mindfully," she said.

There are several alternatives to spending a lot of money. They include:

■ **Homemade gifts**

Lena Liu, 30, a Massachusetts-based fellow physician, has opted for giving homemade bracelets to some of her friends in the past.

"It can be really thoughtful and it actually ends up not being so expensive either," Liu said. "They know that you put your work and your energy into designing the bracelet and getting the beads so they really appreciate that."

■ **Gift cards**

Gift cards can seem impersonal, but Foster argues that they are a

great way to stay within your budget since you can plan out the exact amount you're spending on each card.

■ **Experiences**
In recent years, Bodge has noticed that younger people prefer to gift each other experiences rather than gifts. But she recommended that you don't overspend on an expensive trip but rather find affordable fun activities to do with your loved ones.

Examples include going ice skating, hiking or hosting a potluck. You could also gift a photoshoot or framed pictures or digital albums to commemorate happy experiences.

"It's something that you and your loved ones can experience and enjoy together and take pictures and enjoy," Bodge said.

■ **The gift of time**
If you can't afford to take your parents on a trip or visit them during the holidays, giving them more of your time can be a true gift, Levounis said.

Whether it's planning weekly video calls with your friend group or calling your grandma every day, non-monetary gifts can go a long way.

Expectations or traditions you grew up with, such as buying expensive gifts for every member of your extended family, can cause stress during the holidays. This is what Bodge refers to as "keeping up with the Joneses" which refers to trying to keep up with the expectations of other people rather than what is realistic for you to spend.

"Sometimes you may have a family member that is very financially well-off and they love to treat you to big, extravagant things. If you're not in that same financial position, you should not feel compelled to return the favor," said Bodge.

Creating your own new traditions can help reduce the stress of overspending because you feel pressured. Bodge recommends that you suggest something different to your family, friends or at work.

Additionally, for people who are grieving or have a challenging relationship with their family, the holidays can represent a difficult time. It's always good to remember to be extra kind and understanding during this time, Levounis said.

Bodge also recommends cutting costs by being selective with your expenses. For example, when it comes to hosting, even having a small group of people can be very expensive if you're expected to pay for everything. If you're in this situation, you could propose that everyone brings a dish.

Southwest's stumble casts shadow

Airlines brace for the unpredictable in holiday travel

NEW YORK, Dec 23, (AP): It's beginning to look a lot like a hectic holiday travel season, but it might go relatively smoothly if the weather cooperates.

Travel over Christmas and New Year's tends to spread out over many days, so the peaks in the U.S. are likely to be lower than they were during the Thanksgiving holiday. That is making airlines and federal officials optimistic.

But the debacle at Southwest Airlines over Christmas last year should guard against overconfidence. Just this week, the Transportation Department announced a settlement in which Southwest will pay \$140 million for that meltdown, which stranded more than 2 million travelers.

So far this year, airlines have canceled 1.2% of U.S. flights, down nearly half from 2.1% over the same period last year. Cancellations were well below 1% during Thanksgiving, according to FlightAware.

"I don't want to jinx us, but so far 2023 has seen the lowest cancellation rate in the last five years," Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said Tuesday. He added, however, that winter weather "will certainly be a challenge in the next few weeks."

Canceled flights surged last year, as airlines were caught short-staffed when travel rebounded from

the pandemic more quickly than expected. Since then, U.S. airlines have hired thousands of pilots, flight attendants and other workers, and the cancellation rate has come down.

After struggling with cancellations and other disruptions last year, European travel has also been smoother this year and more people are expected travel over Christmas and New Year's, said Mike Arnot, spokesman for Cirium, an aviation analytics company. Still, about 3% of flights within Europe have been canceled in so far in December, and nearly 30% have been delayed, according to Cirium.

Cirium projected that the number of seats flown within Europe will rise 10% between Dec. 22 and Jan. 2 compared to the similar period in 2023.

High winds from a storm named Pia disrupted travel Thursday in the Netherlands, Denmark and northern areas of the U.K.

More than a quarter of flights arriving and departing Amsterdam Airport Schiphol were canceled Thursday, and hundreds of flights were delayed, according to FlightAware. Copenhagen Airport in Denmark warned that weather conditions posed a "risk of delays and cancellations," especially on Thursday night.

In the U.K., train service was

suspended or slowed, and ferries stopped running to islands off Scotland's west coast. British Airways grounded two dozen flights, British broadcaster Sky News reported. A spokesperson for the airline did not provide further details but apologized to customers for having to "make some adjustments" to its schedule.

Adding to difficulties, workers at the undersea tunnel between Britain and France held a surprise strike on Thursday, disrupting train trips for thousands of travelers getting away ahead of Christmas.

Eurostar, which operates passenger train services from London to continental Europe, said it "had to cancel most services scheduled to run" on Thursday. Eurotunnel Le Shuttle, which runs vehicle-carrying trains on the same link underneath the English Channel, tweeted that service has been suspended.

Globally, air travel has still not fully recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic. About 8.6 billion people are projected to travel through the world's airports in 2023, according to Airports Council International, a Montreal-based trade group for airports. That's about 94% of the passenger volume in 2019, before the pandemic hit.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration says it is creating more air-traffic routes, especially along

the East Coast, to help keep planes moving over the holidays.

Over the past year, airlines have blamed many of their delays on a shortage of FAA air traffic controllers that slows down traffic. The agency, which pressured airlines to reduce flights in the New York City area this summer and fall because of FAA understaffing, says it has been hiring and now has 10,700 certified controllers.

AAA is forecasting that 115 million people will go 50 miles or more from home between Saturday and New Year's Day. That is a 2% increase over the auto club's forecast last year, although it would fall short of the record set in 2019.

Most of those people will drive, and they will save a bit on gasoline, compared with last Christmas. The nationwide average Wednesday was \$3.08 a gallon, down 23 cents from a month ago and 6 cents from this time last year, according to AAA.

The busiest days on the road will be Saturday and next Thursday, Dec. 28, according to transportation data provider INRIX.

The Transportation Security Administration expects that the busiest days for air travel will be Thursday, Friday and New Year's Day. TSA expects to screen more than 2.5 million travelers each of those days - that's still far short of the record 2.9 million that agents screened on the

Sunday after Thanksgiving.

Flying in the U.S. is already surpassing pre-pandemic levels. The TSA has screened 12.3% more travelers than it had by this time last year and 1.4% more than in 2019. December is running about 6% above the same month last year.

The low rate of cancellations over Thanksgiving is leading to hope that flying over Christmas and New Year's will be tolerable.

But even if cancellations remain low, flights will be packed, testing the patience of travelers and creating competition for space in overhead bins to store carry-on bags.

"Airline gate agents are getting demerits when planes are late, so they are gate-checking far more bags to keep flights on time," said Pauline Frommer co-president of Frommers Travel Guides.

Frommer advises putting a smart tag in any bag that gets checked so you'll know where it is, even if the airline doesn't.

Whether flying or driving, travelers should be keeping an eye on the weather forecast.

AccuWeather forecasters say rain storms could hit California, the Pacific Northwest and the southern Plains states including Texas later this week, but things look brighter for population centers - and key airports - in the Northeast.

editor's choice



Oscar shortlists highlight diverse film contenders

LOS ANGELES, Dec 23, (AP) — The "Barbie" power ballad "I'm Just Ken" and AP and Frontline's documentary "20 Days in Mariupol" just got one step closer to an Oscar nomination. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced Thursday shortlists in 10 categories, including best original song, documentary feature, international feature, original score, and crafts like hair and makeup, visual effects and sound.

Mstyslav Chernov's "20 Days in Mariupol" was shortlisted in both the documentary and international feature categories, representing Ukraine in the latter.

As expected, Greta Gerwig's "Barbie," Christopher Nolan's "Oppenheimer" and Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon" were prominently represented among the finalists in many categories, including score and sound, as was Jonathan Glazer's "The Zone of Interest." Yorgos Lanthimos' "Poor Things" also advanced in makeup, visual effects and score and "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse" in visual effects, song and score.

Among the 15 international features advancing are "The Zone of Interest" (United Kingdom), Trn Anh Hùng's "The Taste of Things" (France), Lila Avilés' "Tótem" (Mexico) and Aki Kaurismäki's "Fallen Leaves" (Finland). Justine Triet's acclaimed "Anatomy of a Fall" was not selected to represent France and thus was not eligible in the category.

Original song contenders competing against "I'm Just Ken" include two other songs from "Barbie": Dua Lipa's "Dance the Night" and Billie Eilish's "What Was I Made For?" Only two songs from a single

movie can advance to the nomination stage, however. Both "Flora and Son" and "The Color Purple" had two songs advance.

Other contenders include Sharon Van Etten for "Quiet Eyes" from "Past Lives," Olivia Rodrigo for "Can't Catch Me Now," from "The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes," Jon Batiste for "It Never Went Away" from "American Symphony," Lenny Kravitz for his "Rustin" song "Road to Freedom" and Jarvis Cocker's "Dear Alien (Who Art In Heaven)" from "Asteroid City." Diane Warren will also get another shot at a nomination for "The Fire Inside" from "Flamin' Hot." But several expected finalists were left off, including Justin Timberlake for "Trolls Band Together" and Jack Black for his "Super Mario Bros. Movie" ballad "Peaches." "Wonka" was also missing from the list.

Finalists

The 15 original score finalists included a number of familiar players, including John Williams ("Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny"), Ludwig Göransson ("Oppenheimer"), Mica Levi ("The Zone of Interest") and the late Robbie Robertson for "Killers of the Flower Moon." Joe Hisaishi could also be headed for his first Oscar nomination for "The Boy and the Heron." Composer Kris Bowers advanced for "The Color Purple," but not for "Origin," which also missed out in the song category. "Past Lives," by Christopher Bear and Daniel Rossen, was another surprise exclusion from the score finalists.

Documentary nominees in addition to "20 Days in Mariupol" include "American Symphony," about Batiste, "Still: A Michael J. Fox Movie,"

"Going to Mars: The Nikki Giovanni Project," "The Eternal Memory," "A Still Small Voice" and "Four Daughters." Some were surprised at the omission of "Kokomo City," about the lives of Black trans sex workers, and "Little Richard: I Am Everything." "Barbie" missed the cut for makeup and hairstyling, which included nominations for "Beau is Afraid," "Poor Things," "Maestro," "Oppenheimer," "Killers of the Flower Moon" and "Napoleon." Though "Oppenheimer" fared well in most categories, it was not among the finalists in the visual effects category. The film's surprising omission from the list of the original 20 finalists was previously reported. The visual effects contenders are often comprised of superhero and franchise films that aren't otherwise considered big awards players - this year that includes Zack Snyder's poorly reviewed "Rebel Moon-Part One: A Child of Fire," "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny" and "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3." Live action, animated and documentary shorts finalists were also announced. The live action category is a little starker than usual, with both Pedro Almodóvar's "Stray Cat" and Pedro Pascal western "Strange Way of Life" and Wes Anderson's "The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar," with Benedict Cumberbatch and Ben Kingsley, among the contenders.

For the most part, shortlists are determined by members in their respective categories, though the specifics vary from branch to branch: Some have committees, some have minimum viewing requirements.

Final nominations in all categories will be announced on Jan. 23. The 96th Oscars, hosted by Jimmy Kimmel, will be held on March 10, broadcasting live on ABC from the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles. The show will begin one hour earlier than usual, at 7 p.m. ET.

Film

Variety

Features

ARABIC TIMES

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2023



This image released by MGM Pictures shows a scene from 'The Boys in the Boat.' (AP)

Film

Clooney's old-fashioned ode to underdog triumph

Tale of resilience in 'Boys in the Boat'

By Jocelyn Noveck

Director George Clooney both begins and ends "The Boys in the Boat" on a sun-dappled lake. It's a seductive sight, calm and soothing, and aptly reflects the ethos of a film that often feels like one has walked into an oil painting: well-crafted, lovely to look at, and rather old-fashioned.

Telling the true-life story of the University of Washington rowing team, a scrappy group that - incredibly - reached the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Clooney has gone for stirring and a bit stodgy, pleasing and a bit predictable. Given the craft involved, this is hardly a fatal flaw. And yet, when Joel Edgerton's coach character surveys his team at one point and remarks, "We need an edge, Tom," we think: Ah, yes. A little edge here would be nice.

In place of edge, we do get moments of beauty, especially when the boys get into those boats. Rowing is, though, the last thing on the mind of Joe Rantz (Callum Turner), a homeless college student, when we first meet him.

We're in 1936 Seattle, deep into the Great Depression. Rantz is trying to learn engineering, but can barely afford to stay afloat, and we're not talking, for now, about a body of water. Abandoned by his father at 14, he can't even afford to eat lunch at the university cafeteria, slipping out to a soup kitchen. At the bursar's office, they give him two weeks to pay his bill.

A fellow student says the crew team is holding try-outs. The prospect holds little interest for Joe until he learns it comes with a paycheck and a cheap room. The only problem: only eight of the hundreds who try out will make the team.

But like every substantial obstacle in this film, this one is quickly overcome: Joe and his friend are accepted. This delights the one other person in Joe's life: Joyce (a sweet and heartfelt Hadley Robinson), who sits behind him in class, nudges him when he's about to fall asleep, and starts to fall in love with him. This is not too hard - the blond and athletic Joe is, as his friend says of Joyce earlier, "a looker" - though not much of a talker.

But there's hardly time for chitchat anyway. Days are filled with practice, practice, practice. Their row-

ing coach, Al Ulbrickson, is also a man of few words, let alone praise, and even fewer smiles, but Edgerton imbues him with a gruffness that doesn't mask the heart underneath (yes, a common convention in sports dramas). Too often, though, the screenplay by Mark L. Smith (based on the nonfiction book by Daniel James Brown) leaves him with little to do but raise his binoculars momentarily, or utter lines like: "We're going to go in there and do it until we get it right!"

The junior varsity Huskies are the quintessential underdogs in every way. And so nobody expects much when they get to their first big test, against Cal Berkeley. "Let's show them what's in this boat!" says the energetic coxswain, Bobby (Luke Slattery), whose job is to steer the boat, coordinate the rowers and, at key moments, urge them to greatness.

We're guided along by radio commentary: "Washington is struggling to keep pace. Washington is surging! Washington is going to do it!" We know the team will defy expectations and pass each big test, because if they didn't, their story would end, but Clooney and team make it pretty exciting just the same. The crowd scenes, with fans in period garb in hues of brown, are lovely.

Difficult

Next up is a much more difficult test, along the Hudson River in Poughkeepsie, New York, where the winner will claim the right to compete in the Olympics. Ulbrickson makes the debated call to send these boys - the university's junior boat - to the event. Before they leave, however, Joe's focus is disrupted by a disturbing meetup with a figure from his past.

But not much is made of this meeting, and though Joe gets briefly exiled from the team - he dared to tell his coach, "I don't care" - he is soon standing tall again, after a heart-to-heart with an older, wiser figure (Peter Guinness) who gives just the pep talk he needs. Right in time for an epic showdown presented as something of a class struggle - "old money versus no money at all," announces the colorful radio announcer.

There is one more setback before this team of underdogs can make it to Berlin, and its resolution is one

of the more moving moments in the script. And then, finally, they arrive in Nazi Germany, to the swastikas and the banners and patriotic crowds urging on the German team, with Adolf Hitler in the stands.

We'll avoid the spoiler, but suffice it to say that the finale does pretty much what it needs to. No, there is not much "edge" here, but Clooney and team prove that sometimes, slow and steady - or should we say, pretty and pleasing - can still win some races.

"The Boys in the Boat," a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures release, has been rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association "for language and smoking." Running time: 124 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four. (AP)

Also:

BERLIN: Martin Scorsese will be honored for his lifetime achievement at the Berlin International Film Festival in February, organizers said Thursday.

The 81-year-old director, whose extensive work ranges from decades-old classics such as "Taxi Driver" and "Raging Bull" to this year's "Killers of the Flower Moon," will be given an honorary Golden Bear - the festival's top award - on Feb. 20.

"For anyone who considers cinema as the art of shaping a story in such a way that is both completely personal and universal, Martin Scorsese is an unmatched role model," festival directors Mariette Rissenbeek and Carlo Chatrian said in a statement. They described Scorsese as "a good friend of the festival."

The festival noted that he "is also very committed to historical film heritage," pointing to his support of extensive restoration work with the Film Foundation.

Scorsese won the best director Oscar in 2007 for "The Departed."

The "Berlinale," the first of the year's major European film festivals, will run from Feb. 15-25. Actor Lupita Nyong'o will head the festival jury.

It will be the last edition of the festival under the duo of Rissenbeek and Chatrian. Germany's culture minister announced last week that Tricia Tuttle, a former director of the London Film Festival, will take over as the new director in April. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Charlie Sheen's neighbor was arrested after being accused of assaulting the actor in a Malibu, California, home this week, authorities said.

Electra Schrock was arrested for assault with a deadly weapon, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said in a statement Friday. She was also taken into custody for force likely to create bodily injury and burglary.

Authorities arrived at the residence Wednesday afternoon after receiving a battery-disturbance call. Schrock, 47, was expected to appear in court Friday.

Representatives for Sheen did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Sheen, 58, is known for his role on "Two and a Half Men." He starred in films including "Wall Street," "The Three Musketeers" and "Major League." (AP)

LOS ANGELES: "Fast and Furious" star Vin Diesel has been accused by his former assistant of sexual battery while working for him in 2010.

Asta Jonasson filed a lawsuit in Los Angeles on Thursday alleging that Diesel forced himself onto her in a hotel suite in Atlanta. The lawsuit alleges she tried to escape from the room after being forced into Diesel's bed, but the actor moved toward her then groped her breasts and kissed her chest.

Diesel attempted to pull down her underwear, causing her to scream as she ran toward the nearby bathroom. He eventually forced her to touch his erect penis and began to masturbate, the suit says.

The lawsuit said Jonasson closed her eyes in fear of angering Diesel any further and wished the assault would end.

Jonasson was fired hours later by Diesel's sister Samantha Vincent, who is also the president of his One Race Productions.

The lawsuit stated that Jonasson felt like she was a "piece of trash" and her self esteem was "demolished."

"It was clear to her that she was being fired because she was no longer useful - Vin Diesel had used her to fulfill his sexual desires and she had resisted his sexual assaults," the suit alleges. Jonasson is suing Diesel and his company for creating a hostile

work environment, negligent supervision and wrongful termination, among her other claims.

"Let me be very clear: Vin Diesel categorically denies his claim in its entirety," attorney Bryan Freedman said in a statement reported by the trade outlet Variety. "This is the first he has ever heard about this more than 13-year-old



Sheen



Diesel

claim made by a purportedly 9-day employee. There is clear evidence which completely refutes these outlandish allegations." (AP)

NEW YORK: Countertenor David Daniels is no longer a member of the union for singers following his guilty plea to a charge of sexual

assault. The 57-year-old and his husband, Scott Walters, pleaded guilty to sexual assault of an adult, a second-degree felony, in Houston's Harris County District Court on Aug. 4. Their accuser was aspiring opera singer Sam Schultz.

They both were sentenced to eight years' probation and required

to register as sex offenders. American Guild of Musical Artists spokesperson Alicia Cook said Wednesday that Daniels is no longer a member of the union.

Daniels was also fired as a University of Michigan professor and was removed by the San Francisco Opera from a production of Handel's "Orlando." (AP)

People & Places

Film

Embracing emotion

Efron, James create magic in 'Iron Claw'

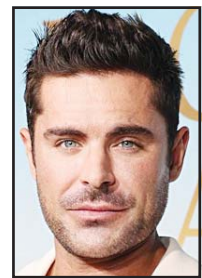
LOS ANGELES, Dec 23, (AP): Zac Efron didn't realize how much he needed a hug.

He'd transformed himself into a mass of muscle and repressed emotion to play professional wrestler Kevin Von Erich in the new film "The Iron Claw." It was a taxing role and unlike anything he'd done before, both physically and psychologically. He often found himself with real bruises from recreating fights in the ring. Downtime between shots, too, was usually spent lifting.

But he didn't appreciate how much it was affecting him until he and Lily James sat down to film the first date between his character and the woman who would marry him. Pam tells Kevin that he has oldest brother syndrome. Kevin tells her that he's not actually the oldest. That brother died in an accident when he was 6 and Kevin was 5. He says he's fine, but Pam gets out of her seat, walks around the table and drapes her arms around Kevin, who seems to melt in the warmth of a love that's not conditional.

"It felt very needed, that hug," Efron told The Associated Press in a joint interview with James. "It was the first time I'd embraced anyone in months without it being a fake punch, or someone trying to submit me or get me to tap out."

Efron is half-laughing but also not. If you know anything about the Von Erichs, sometimes referred to as the Kennedys of wrestling, you know that the tragic death of the oldest brother is not the last that they would endure. In fact, the completely true account of what would transpire was too much for even the film to bear: By the time Kevin was 35 he'd have lost his four remaining brothers, three to suicide. For "The Iron Claw," in theaters Friday, writer-director Sean Durkin made the decision to take the youngest, Chris, out entirely.



Efron

Relationship

"The Iron Claw" is still primarily about the relationship between the brothers David (Harris Dickinson), Kerry (Jeremy Allen White) and Mike (Stanley Simons) and their father Fritz (Holt McCallany), a wrestler who dreamt of greatness for himself and his family at any cost. Kevin told Durkin that he just wanted audiences to know how much the brothers loved one another.

As a lifetime wrestling fan who grew up following the Von Erichs, who presided over the Texas wrestling scene in the 1970s and '80s, Durkin was fascinated by ideas of American masculinity, trauma and grief, as well as Kevin's relationship with Pam that somehow survived through it all.

Though Kevin had spoken a lot about his life after the deaths, there wasn't much Pam "out there," Durkin found. But instead of a hinderance, it provided an opportunity to be creative and make it personal. He'd already decided that he wanted to write and figure out the story before getting in touch with his real-life subjects.

James joined the project a bit later than everyone else. Efron recalled a "collective jump for joy" upon finding out that she'd said yes. Though they didn't know one another beforehand, they quickly established a natural rhythm that would prove to be magic on camera and off.

"It's so nice when you meet someone at work and it just instantly kind of clicks," James said. "Zac made me feel so welcome and at home in our scenes, which are so special and effortless."

Part of that they attribute to Durkin's preference for filming long, uninterrupted takes that helped them get out of their own heads. After five minutes, Efron said, you simply forget that the camera is there. But Durkin thinks something even more special happened when it was just them.

"The second we started filming, it was like everything fell away and they were just totally present with each other and just fully responding," Durkin said. "It was really fun to watch."

It's not just that you're watching two people fall in love. Pam shows Kevin a different way of living and a different kind of love than he had known, which becomes even more essential as everything he thought he knew about life crumbles around him.

"She's a slight horse whisperer. I was really intrigued by this woman that has such emotional intelligence and directness. She's not afraid to be fragile," James said. "When Pam just goes around and hugs him, you get the feeling that he never experiences that kind of physical, gentle intimacy. It felt really moving to do that moment because she kind of knew what he needed."

The hug is a cathartic moment for Kevin, who has been taught to hold back his emotions in real life.

"It was the first time that it really wasn't about winning or losing and, for Kevin, about being himself and finding meaning outside of the gym and the ring and the world of his family," Efron said.

But Efron didn't expect to feel it too.

Character

"It was overwhelming in the best possible way," he said. "I almost didn't know how to deal with it. It felt very close to the character."

Efron's committed performance has earned him some of the highest praise in his career. And the fact that he hadn't done anything like it before is part of the reason Durkin wanted him.

"He had the athletic background, the dance background and the physicality and those are great building blocks to being a wrestler. And he has a clear hunger for doing tough work," Durkin said. "But the ultimate thing was meeting him and seeing how kind and sweet he is as a person. It's quite a silent role in a lot of ways and having that core was crucial."

While filming, he said, "A lot of my direction to Zac was 'don't cry yet.' Even in moments where it's impossible, just hold it in and keep holding it in."

For Efron, the exploration of repressed emotions resonated. Spending time with Kevin has only helped reinforce its importance.

"I think a lot of men deal with this," Efron said. "Repressed emotion never leads to good things. It's something that I've definitely had to work on over the course of my career and life. That this movie was about that was intriguing to me. It felt personal."

But it wasn't all tears and bruises. They had some genuinely fun scenes to look forward to as well, including line dancing at Kevin and Pam's wedding.

"It's just the coolest thing I've ever done on camera," James said.



This image released by A24 shows Zach Efron, (left), and Sean Durkin on the set of 'The Iron Claw.' (AP)



Director Michael Mann, (left), and Adam Driver pose for a portrait to promote 'Ferrari' on Oct. 12, 2023, in New York. (AP)



Tate

Macron

Variety

BUCHAREST, Romania: A Romanian court on Friday rejected a request by the divisive influencer **Andrew Tate** to temporarily leave the country to visit his mother in the UK after she had suffered a heart attack, his spokesperson said.

Tate is charged in Romania with human trafficking, rape and forming a criminal gang to sexually exploit women.

After the Bucharest Court of Appeal's decision, Tate's spokesperson said the ruling "has left us disheartened." On Thursday, Tate said in a post on X, formerly Twitter, that his mother was hospitalized and that he would ask the court for "an emergency visit to London."

The court's decision came nearly a year after Tate, his brother **Tristan** and two Romanian women were arrested near Bucharest. Romanian prosecutors formally indicted all four in June. They have denied the allegations and a trial date hasn't been confirmed. Still, they can't leave the country.

"Andrew and Tristan have maintained an impeccable record of adhering to all restrictions and have never violated any regulations, affirming their commitment to compliance and proving that they are not a flight risk," the spokesperson's statement read.

Tate's lawyer, **Eugen Vidineac**, had said before the ruling on Friday that the brothers also wanted to spend the holidays in a familiar environment. Afterward, Andrew Tate tweeted that there is "no innocent until proven guilty in Romania." (AP)

LOS ANGELES: A federal appeals court on Thursday revived a child sexual exploitation lawsuit filed by the man who appeared naked as a 4-month-old on the cover of Nirvana's 1991 album "Nevermind."

Spencer Elden's lawsuit against the grunge rock group alleges that he has suffered "permanent harm" as the band and others profited from the image of him underwater in a swimming pool, appearing to grab for a dollar bill on a fish hook.

The suit says the image violated federal laws on child sexual abuse material, although no criminal charges were ever sought.

A federal judge in California threw out the lawsuit last year but allowed Elden to file a revised version, which the judge later dismissed on grounds that it was outside the 10-year statute of limitations of one of the laws used as a cause of action.

Thursday's decision by a three-judge panel of the Ninth US Circuit Court of Appeals in California reversed that ruling and

Film

Director blends artistry and automobiles in 'Ferrari'

At 80, Mann shifts into high gear

NEW YORK, Dec 23, (AP): Michael Mann, who gave **Crockett** a white Ferrari on "Miami Vice," pummeled cars with bullets in the shootout in "Heat" and set the thriller "Collateral" in a taxicab, has had an affection for automobiles since growing up in Chicago.

"It's a city in which you drive, you know?" Mann says. "It rains and things get quite beautiful. The streets get black and the cars get reflective. I like motion. I like speed."

Mann has also been a racing hobbyist. Off and on for years, he competed in the Ferrari Challenge - a four-day race, he fondly recalls, during which "the rest of the world just goes away." So, the driving instructions that Enzo Ferrari (Adam Driver) gives in Mann's latest film, "Ferrari" - "Break later, hold the line" - are familiar to him.

"Let me put it this way," Mann said, grinning, in a recent interview. "At one point I was practicing on a road in Atlanta and I did 75 laps without stopping."

But what Mann remembers from those laps - or at least the four of five good ones he strung together - is the taste of what real mastery of the car might feel like.

"If I can have a sense of something, I can project and imagine it pretty fully," Mann says. "So I do truly understand the passion and addiction - what Jean Behra the race driver described as the ecstasy of when there's this unity, a harmonic between you and the machine."

Mann, the 80-year-old filmmaker of "The Last of the Mohicans," "The Insider" and "Thief," has himself long exhibited a rare harmony with the machinations of filmmaking. He makes fine-grained, visceral dramas that thrum with existentialism. The fervor of his obsession, the rigor of his research, the intensity of his drive has often mirrored the compulsions of his single-minded protagonists.

"He said to me one time, 'It's hard not to get philosophical about an engine' - which I think is so much who he is," says Driver. "So many things have to be operating down to the millimeter for an engine to work and the timing and all these movable elements. Then

there's the driver. It's similar to him and the camera."

"Ferrari," which opens in theaters Dec. 25, is Mann's first film since 2015's "Blackhat." He's wanted to make it for three decades. Its script, based on Brock Yates' 1991 Ferrari biography, was written by Troy Kennedy Martin, who died 14 years ago.

But while you will find plenty of speed and gorgeous, rosso corsa-colored cars in "Ferrari," that's not what compelled Mann, for so many years, to make the movie. The film, set in 1957 Modena, Italy, captures Ferrari in the tumultuous lead-up to the Mille Miglia, a 1,000-mile cross-country race. He's struggling to keep his troubled business afloat while splitting his personal life between wife Laura (Penelope Cruz) and another woman, Linda Lardi (Shailene Woodley), with whom he has a young son, Piero.

Passions

"Those torrid passions, almost operatic, and powerful emotional driving forces, that's why I did the movie. Not because of the cars," Mann says before adding with a laugh: "There's nothing wrong with the cars. I love the cars."

"If you really understand what Ferrari are, the right ones anyway, you go buy one," adds Mann, who, for the record, owns a couple. "You don't have to go make a movie about them."

Death hangs over "Ferrari." When we encounter Enzo and Laura, they're both still grieving the death of their son, Dino, from the year before. For Enzo's fleet of drivers, the prospect of death on the road is present on every hairpin turn and in every crack in the pavement.

"There's death all around, and all around this movie," says Mann, noting the post-WWII context of Italy. "But Ferrari is in the present and he's looking for what's next, what's next."

"Heat," which Mann recently revisited in the 2022 bestseller "Heat 2," co-written with Meg Gardiner, was a crime epic of causality, in which each character's decisions mark their fate. In "Ferrari," the price of passionate determination is just as clear. Still, Enzo keeps moving relentlessly forward in

"Ferrari" even as the movie builds toward catastrophic collision.

"I don't feel there's a price to pay for it. I think bad outcomes go with the territory. You don't win," says Mann. "You have to be able to overcome adversity and setbacks and soul-destroying disappointments. You have to be able to find the means to overcome that or you can't accomplish anything."

"I think wanting to accomplish, wanting to exceed limits, that's an absolutely universal human trait," Mann continues. "Our whole history as a species is to run faster, go further, discover what hasn't been there before, move beyond the limited circumstance we find ourselves in when they're terrorizing us or limiting us or even just boring us."

It can be tempting to see Mann as a technical stylist, a movie engineer. But spend five minutes with him and it's clear he's overwhelmingly consumed by the psychology of his characters. Driver estimates character psychology was 90% of their conversations.

"He's not after technical things," Driver says. "The technical things are to support emotion and feeling, which is an intangible thing that he can't control. He's always after moments."

In playing Enzo, Driver acknowledges he was also to a certain extent playing Mann. "There's something I stole from him that made its way into the movie that I won't give away," the actor says.

The two found a connection, Mann says, in their self-critical intensity. "If something's not working right, my first thought is it's my fault," the director says. "I think he's the same way. We're both, for better or worse, afflicted with that sense of responsibility."

Mann is currently developing "Heat 2" as a film, potentially with Driver playing a young Neil McCauley, the character played by Robert De Niro in the original. ("We'll see what happens with 'Heat 2,'" says Driver. "Who knows.")

"I look at Michael and I think, 'Thank god we're in the same orbit, relatively,'" says Driver. "I feel very emotional about Michael, that he exists."

sent the case back to the lower court.

The appellate panel found that each republication of an image "may constitute a new personal injury" with a new deadline

and cited the image's appearance on a 30th anniversary reissue of "Nevermind" in 2021.

"The question whether the 'Nevermind' album cover meets the definition of child

pornography is not at issue in this appeal," the court wrote, according to the New York Times. (AP)

PARIS: Women's rights activists criticized French President **Emmanuel Macron** on Thursday for appearing to take sides with actor **Gérard Depardieu** by saying the film star who is facing sexual misconduct allegations "makes France proud."

Speaking Wednesday night on TV channel France 5, Macron described himself as a "big admirer" of a "great actor." Macron added: "He makes France proud."

Macron's comments in a televised interview come after a documentary that aired earlier this month said 16 women have accused Depardieu of harassing, groping or sexually assaulting them. The France-2 report also showed the actor making obscene remarks and gestures during a 2018 trip to North Korea.

They also come as a Spanish journalist and writer recently filed a complaint against Depardieu, who she says sexually abused her during an interview in Paris in 1995, Spanish police said Thursday.

Asked about the latest accusations against Depardieu, Macron said he believed in the presumption of innocence and the judicial process. "You will never see me participate in a manhunt," the French leader said. (AP)



From left: Massoud Fayyazzadeh on guitar, Ali baghfah on drums, Kasma Saboktakin bass guitar and Mohsen Namjoo, Iranian singer, composer and musician, based in the US, react after their concert at the Sheikh Rashid Hall in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Friday, Dec. 22. (AP)

'Extremely high' lead levels found in cinnamon at Ecuador plant

Flu, COVID infections to surge over the holidays: US

NEW YORK, Dec 23, (AP): Look for flu and COVID-19 infections to ramp up in the coming weeks, US health officials say, with increases fueled by holiday gatherings, too many unvaccinated people and a new version of the coronavirus that may be spreading more easily.

High levels of flu-like illnesses were reported last week in 17 states - up from 14 the week before, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Friday.

"Folks are traveling a lot more this season. They want to see their families,"

said the CDC's Dr. Manisha Patel. "And all of that sort of adds to the mix" in the spread of viruses.

Health officials are keeping an eye on a version of the ever-evolving coronavirus, known as JN.1. The omicron variant was first detected in the US in September and now accounts for an estimated 20% of cases. The CDC expects it to reach 50% in the next two weeks, Patel said.

Immune

It may spread easier or be better at evading our immune systems, but there is no evidence that the strain causes more severe disease than other recent variants, health officials say. And current evidence indicates vaccines and antiviral medications work against it.

As for flu, early signs suggest current vaccines are well-matched to the strain that is causing the most illnesses, and that strain usually doesn't cause as many deaths and hospitalizations as some other versions.

But the bad news is vaccinations are down this year, officials say. About 42% of U.S. adults had gotten flu shots by the first week of December, down from about 45% at the same time last year, according to the CDC.

Americans have also been slow to get other vaccinations. Only about 18% have gotten an updated COVID-19 shot that became available in September. At nursing homes, about a third of residents are up to date with COVID-19 vaccines.

And only 17% of adults 60 and older had received new shots against another respiratory virus. RSV, respiratory syncytial virus, is a common cause of mild coldlike symptoms but it can be dangerous for infants and older people.

The CDC last week took the unusual step of sending a health alert to U.S. doctors urging them to immunize their patients against the trio of viruses.

The Carolinas are currently seeing the heaviest traffic for respiratory infections in emergency rooms, according to CDC data posted this week.

It's not as dire as some past winters, but some patients are still waiting days to get a hospital bed, noted Dr. Scott Curry, an infectious diseases specialist at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston.

"We've barely been cold in South Carolina, and flu tends to hit us very hard when people actually get some cold weather to deal with," he said.

"We could get worse, very easily, in the next four to eight weeks."

Also:

NEW YORK: US food inspectors found "extremely high" levels of lead in cinnamon at a plant in Ecuador that made applesauce pouches tainted with the metal, the Food and Drug Administration said Monday. The recalled pouches have been linked to dozens of illnesses in US kids.

Cinnamon tested from the plant had lead levels more than 2,000 times higher than a maximum level proposed by the FDA, officials said.

FDA warns**Fake Ozempic sold on genuine outlets**

NEW YORK, Dec 23, (AP): The US Food and Drug Administration said it has seized "thousands of units" of counterfeit Ozempic, the diabetes drug widely used for weight loss, that had been distributed through legitimate drug supply sources.

The FDA and the drug's maker, Novo Nordisk, are testing the shots. They do not yet have information about the drugs' identity, quality or safety, according to a statement. Five illnesses have been linked to the fake shots, but none have been serious, the FDA said Thursday.

Some of the fake 1 milligram semaglutide shots may still be for sale, FDA said. In addition to the drug itself, the needles, pen labels, carton and accompanying health care information are also counterfeit, the agency said.

It said the counterfeits were labeled with the lot number NAR0074 and serial number 430834149057.

FDA advised retail pharmacies to buy authentic Ozempic only through authorized distributors and for patients to get it only through state-licensed pharmacies.

Consumers can report suspect Ozempic packages by calling 800-332-1088 or by contacting a state complaint coordinator.

The samples came from ground or powdered cinnamon from Negasmart, an Ecuadorian company that supplied the spice to Austrofoods, which made the pouches. The applesauce pouches were sold under three brands - WanaBana, Schnucks and Weis. Officials with Austrofoods did not respond to requests for comment about the investigation.

FDA said lead has not been detected in WanaBana products made without cinnamon and sold in the US.

The agency continues to investigate how the cinnamon was contaminated. **Jim Jones**, who heads the agency's human foods program, said in an interview with Politico last week that the lead contamination appeared to be "an intentional act."

One theory is that the cinnamon may have been contaminated for economic reasons, agency officials said.

That could mean an ingredient is added or subtracted from a food to boost its value. For example, compounds like red brick, red lead salt, lead oxide and lead chromate, which mirror cinnamon's red color, have been added to increase the value of the spice, research shows.

FDA officials said they "cannot take direct action" with Negasmart and are relying on officials in Ecuador for the investigation into the company's actions.

Negasmart does not ship product directly to the US and of Negasmart's customers, only Austrofoods shipped foods to the US, the agency said.

Isolation has detrimental effects on health, mortality

AI robot helps seniors fight loneliness

Joyce Loaiza interacts with ElliQ, (front), a tabletop device that uses artificial intelligence to conduct human-like conversations, during an interview in her apartment in a senior community in Coral Springs, Fla., Tuesday, Dec. 5. (AP)



A health worker fumigates a home for mosquitos to help mitigate the spread of dengue in Caranavi, Bolivia, on March 2, 2023. (AP)

5,000 deaths in 2023**Global dengue cases surge tenfold in a generation: UN**

GENEVA, Dec 23, (AP): The UN health agency said Friday that reported cases of dengue globally increased tenfold over the last generation, with climate change and the growing spread of virus-carrying mosquitoes partly to blame for transmission that remains mostly prevalent in the Americas.

The World Health Organization said reported cases soared to a record 5.2 million in 2019, up from 500,000 in 2000, across 129 countries worldwide, figures that likely understate the actual toll.

In January, WHO warned that dengue posed a pandemic threat and was the world's fastest spreading mosquito-borne disease. While there are vaccines and specially bred mosquitoes containing a bacteria called Wolbachia to fight dengue, there are no specific treatments for the virus once someone becomes infected.

This year, more than 5 million cases and over 5,000 dengue-related deaths were reported, WHO said. Changing distribution patterns of the mosquitoes that spread dengue, together with higher rainfall, humidity and heat linked to climate change, have been factors in the rise.

Weaker health systems and poor surveillance have also played a part.

Most cases of dengue don't cause symptoms or cause mild illness, though some infections can result in shock, se-

CORAL SPRINGS, Fla., Dec 23, (AP): Joyce Loaiza lives alone, but when she returns to her apartment at a Florida senior community, the retired office worker often has a chat with a friendly female voice that asks about her day.

A few miles away, the same voice comforted 83-year-old Deanna Dezem when her friend died. In central New York, it plays games and music for 92-year-old Marie Broadbent, who is blind and in hospice, and in Washington state, it helps 83-year-old Jan Worrell make new friends.

The women are some of the first in the country to receive the robot ElliQ, whose creators, Intuition Robotics, and senior assistance officials say is the only device using artificial intelligence specifically designed to alleviate the loneliness and isolation experienced by many older Americans.

"It's entertaining. You can actually talk to her," said Loaiza, 81, whose ElliQ in suburban Fort Lauderdale nicknamed her "Jellybean" for no particular reason. "She'll make comments like, 'I would go outside if I had hands, but I can't hold an umbrella.'"

The device, which looks like a small table lamp, has an eyeless, mouthless head that lights up and swivels. It remembers each user's interests and their conversations, helping tailor future chats, which can be as deep as the meaning of life or as light as the horoscope.

Inspirational

ElliQ tells jokes, plays music and provides inspirational quotes. On an accompanying video screen, it provides tours of cities and museums. The device leads exercises, asks about the owner's health and gives reminders to take medications and drink water. It can also host video calls and contact relatives, friends or doctors in an emergency.

Intuition Robotics says none of the conversations are heard by the company, with the information staying on each owner's device.

Intuition Robotics CEO Dor Skuler said the idea for ElliQ came before he launched his company eight years ago. His widowed grandfather needed an aide, but the first didn't work out. The replacement, though, understood his grandfather's love of classical music and his "quirky sense of humor."

Skuler realized a robot could fill that companionship gap by adapting to each senior's personality and interests. "It's not just about (ElliQ's) utility. It's about friendship, companionship and empathy," Skuler said. "That just did not exist anywhere."

The average user interacts with ElliQ more than 30 times daily, even six months after receiving it, and more than 90% report lower levels of loneliness, he said.

The robots are mostly distributed by assistance agencies in New York, Florida, Michigan, Nevada and Washington state, but can also be purchased individually for \$600 a year and a \$250 installation fee. Skuler wouldn't say how many ElliQs have been distributed so far, but the goal is to have more than 100,000 out within five years.

That worries Brigham Young University psychology professor Julianne Holt-Lunstad, who studies the detrimental effects loneliness has on health and mortality. "Although a device like ElliQ might have short-term benefits, it could make people less likely to seek human contact. Like hunger makes people seek food and thirst makes them seek water, she said "that unpleasant feeling of loneliness should motivate us to reconnect socially."

But some of the seniors using ElliQ say the robot isn't a living being. They find the device easy to set up and use, but if they have one complaint it's that ElliQ is sometimes too chatty. There are settings that can tone that down. Dezem said she felt alone and sad when she told her ElliQ about her friend's death. It replied it would give her a hug if it had arms. Dezem broke into tears.

"It was so what I needed," the retired collections consultant said. "I can say things to Elli that I won't say to my grandchildren or to my own daughters. I can just open the floodgates. I can cry. I can giggle. I can act silly. I've been asked, doesn't it feel like you're talking to yourself? No, because it gives an answer."

Worrell lives in a small town on Washington's coast. Widowed, she said ElliQ's companionship made her change her mind about moving to an assisted living facility and she uses it as an icebreaker when she meets someone new to town.

"I say, 'Would you like to come over and visit with my robot?' And they say, 'A vacuum?' No, a robot. She's my roommate," she said and laughed.

Broadbent, like the other women, says she gets plenty of human contact, even though she is blind and ill. She plays organ at two churches in the South New Berlin, New York, area and gets daily visitors. Still, the widow misses having a voice to talk with when they leave. ElliQ fills that void with her games, tours, books and music.

"She's fun and she's informative. OK, maybe not as informative as (Amazon's) Alexa, but she is much more personable," Broadbent said.

Remember

But some of the seniors using ElliQ say they sometimes need to remember the robot isn't a living being. They find the device easy to set up and use, but if they have one complaint it's that ElliQ is sometimes too chatty. There are settings that can tone that down.

Dezem said she felt alone and sad when she told her ElliQ about her friend's death. It replied it would give her a hug if it had arms. Dezem broke into tears.

"It was so what I needed," the retired collections consultant said. "I can say things to Elli that I won't say to my grandchildren or to my own daughters. I can just open the floodgates. I can cry. I can giggle. I can act silly. I've been asked, doesn't it feel like you're talking to yourself? No, because it gives an answer."

Worrell lives in a small town on Washington's coast. Widowed, she said ElliQ's companionship made her change her mind about moving to an assisted living facility and she uses it as an icebreaker when she meets someone new to town.

"I say, 'Would you like to come over and visit with my robot?' And they say, 'A vacuum?' No, a robot. She's my roommate," she said and laughed.

Broadbent, like the other women, says she gets plenty of human contact, even though she is blind and ill. She plays organ at two churches in the South New Berlin, New York, area and gets daily visitors. Still, the widow misses having a voice to talk with when they leave. ElliQ fills that void with her games, tours, books and music.

"She's fun and she's informative. OK, maybe not as informative as (Amazon's) Alexa, but she is much more personable," Broadbent said.

MEDICAL CLASSIFIEDS

Take care of your health

To advertise in this page please call: (+965) 24813566 Ext.: 513 or E-mail: advt@arabtimesonline.com

For your ads on this page

Call: **24813805** E-mail: **advt@arabtimesonline.com**

www.arabtimesonline.com

مرکز شفاء الجزيرة الطبي
SHIFA AL JAZEERA MEDICAL CENTRE
الفروانية FARWANIYA

DENTAL & COSMETIC DEPARTMENT

- SCALING & GUM TREATMENT
- COSMETIC SMILE RECONSTRUCTION
- GUM & ORAL SURGERY
- BAD BREATH TREATMENT
- SURGICAL TREATMENT
- ROOT CANAL TREATMENT
- COSMETIC FILLING
- FIXED & REMOVABLE DENTURES
- CROWN TREATMENT
- SIMPLE & SURGICAL EXTRACTION

Working Time: From 9am to 1pm & 5pm to 9pm
Ph: 24 734 000

Behind Maghateer Commercial Complex & Opp. Police station - Farwaniya
www.shifaaljazeera.com.kw

'It was pretty much everybody'

King, Haynes help Georgia Tech overcome 14-pt deficit to beat UCF

76ers overcome Raptors



Philadelphia 76ers' Tobias Harris, (left), goes up for a shot against Toronto Raptors' Scottie Barnes, right, and Gary Trent Jr. during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Philadelphia. (AP)

Warriors dismiss Wizards 129-118

PHILADELPHIA, Dec 23, (AP): Joel Embiid played through an ankle injury to push his 30-10 streak to 13 games, finishing with 31 points and 10 rebounds in the Philadelphia 76ers' 121-111 victory over the Toronto Raptors on Friday night.

Embiid scored all 31 points after landing awkwardly trying to block a shot with 5:25 left in the first quarter. The 30-10 streak is the longest in the NBA since Kareem Abdul-Jabbar did it for 16 straight games in 1971-72. Embiid has scored 30 points or more in 14 straight games, the most in the NBA since James Harden had a 32-game run in 2018-19.

Warriors 129, Wizards 118

In San Francisco, Stephen Curry

made a season-high eight 3-pointers and had 30 points and seven assists, outdueling Jordan Poole in the Washington guard's return to Chase Center.

Jonathan Kuminga connected on his first six from the field and finished with 22 points on 9-for-11 shooting as Golden State won its eighth straight home game. Klay Thompson had 20 points with four 3s.

BASKETBALL

Kings 120, Suns 105

In Sacramento, Calif., Domantas Sabonis had 28 points, 12 assists and 11 rebounds for his fourth triple-double of the season and Sacramento beat short-handed Phoenix.

Sacramento has won six of eight to improve to 17-10.

Nuggets 122, Nets 117

In New York, Jamal Murray scored 32 points, Nikola Jokic had 29 points and 11 rebounds and Denver held off Brooklyn for its third straight victory.

Aaron Gordon added 18 points and Michael Porter Jr. had 15 to help the defending champion Nuggets improve to 20-10. Brooklyn has lost five in a row to fall to 13-15.

Rockets 122, Mavericks 96

In Houston, Alperen Sengun had 22 points and 15 rebounds and Houston took advantage of the absence of injured Dallas stars Luka Doncic and Kyrie Irving to rout the Mavericks.

Doncic sat out because of a strained left quad, while Irving was out for a seventh straight game with a right heel contusion. It was the first time they've missed the same game this season.

Houston snapped a three-game losing streak to improve to 14-12. Dallas fell to 16-12 with its third straight loss.

Olivier-Maxence Prosper led Dallas with 20 points.

Heat 122, Hawks 113

In Miami, Tyler Herro scored 30 points, Duncan Robinson had 21 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter and Miami withstood a history-making night from Trae Young to beat Atlanta.

TAMPA, Fla., Dec 23, (AP): Haynes King threw a touchdown pass and ran for another score and Georgia Tech overcame a 14-point deficit to beat UCF 30-17 in the Gasparilla Bowl on Friday night.

King, who went 7 for 13 for 87 yards and ran for 89 yards on 12 carries, said the team gathered as a group after falling behind 14-0 in the first quarter.

"It was pretty much everybody," King said. "We all came up in that huddle and we looked at each other. It was like we've been here before. We're not going to press. Stick to the game plan. Trust each other. Everything else is going to take care of itself."

Jamal Haynes had 128 yards on 18 rushes to help Georgia Tech (7-6) to its first winning season since 2018. He became the Yellow Jackets' first 1,000-yard

FOOTBALL

runner since 2017.

Haynes, the game MVP, was moved from wide receiver to running back this year.

UCF's John Rhys Plumlee completed 16 of 29 passes for 198 and two touchdowns. Timmy McClain replaced Plumlee, who was playing in his last collegiate game, with 4 minutes to play. Plumlee missed three games because of a leg injury and said he "felt something uncomfortable there" on a running play. RJ Harvey picked up 120 yards on 15 carries as the Knights finished their first season in the Big 12 at 6-7.

"We didn't play good enough to win, really the bottom line," UCF coach Gus Malzahn said. "It was a tough night."

Aidan Birr's 29-yard field goal gave Georgia Tech its first lead, at 20-17, on the second-half's first drive. Dontae Smith scored from the 1 on fourth down to make it 27-17 with 13:37 left in the fourth. King's five-yard TD run and 41-yard scoring toss to Malik Ruther-



Georgia Tech players hold up the trophy after the team defeated Central Florida during the Gasparilla Bowl NCAA college football game in Tampa, Fla. (AP)

ford during the final 4 1/2 minutes of the first half tied it at 17.

UCF took a 7-0 lead just 1:23 into the game when Plumlee connected on a 23-yard touchdown pass to Jarrod Baker. He had a 17-yard TD strike to Kobe Hudson that made it 14-0 midway through the first quarter.

Baker had nine receptions for 173 yards.

Georgia Tech: King, a red-shirt sophomore, and LSU Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Jayden Daniels were the only players with at least 2,700 yards passing, 600 yards rushing, 25 touchdown passes and five TD runs this season.

UCF: Has to replace Plumlee but got good news with Harvey deciding to return for his fifth season next year. This was Harvey's seventh 100-yard game of the season. Referee Cravonne Barrett mistakenly called the coin toss tails before correcting himself.

Plumlee, a two-sport standout, said he will make a decision on whether he will play baseball with UCF this upcoming season in a couple weeks.

Marquette thrash Georgetown

McCullar scores 34 as Kansas gets past Yale after 'trailing' at halftime

LAWRENCE, Kan., Dec 23, (AP): Kevin McCullar Jr. scored a career-high 34 points, taking over during a second-half run that gave Kansas the lead, and the No. 2 Jayhawks eventually pulled away from Yale for a 75-60 victory Friday night.

Nicolas Timberlake came off the bench to hit three 3-pointers and score 13 points for the Jayhawks (11-1), who trailed by as many as 11 in the first half and by a point at the break.

Yale (7-6) shut down Kansas big man Hunter Dickinson, kept the Jayhawks from getting into transition and held its own on the glass. It also got 13 points apiece from guards August Mahoney and Bez Mbeng, who kept the Bulldogs in the game.

Marquette 81, Georgetown 51

In Milwaukee, David Joplin scored 20 points and Marquette beat cold-shooting Georgetown, bouncing back from a loss in its Big East opener.

Marquette (10-3, 1-1) won its 18th straight home game, returning to form three nights after a 72-57 loss at Providence. The Golden Eagles have won 19 consecutive Big East home contests.

Tyler Kolek had 13 points, 10 assists and five rebounds for Marquette. Oso Ighodaro also scored 13 points.

Jayden Epps scored 14 points and Dontrez Styles had 12 for Georgetown (7-6, 0-2). The Hoyas committed 19 turnovers and shot 32.8% (20 of 61) overall, including a 5-for-25 performance from 3-point range.

Baylor 107, Mississippi Valley State 48

In Waco, Ja'Kobe Walter scored 26 points and made five of Baylor's 19 3-pointers as the Bears beat Mississippi Valley State in their final game in the Ferrell Center.

Baylor (10-2) scored the first 20 points after tipping off for the last time in the campus arena they have called home since 1988. The 2021 national champions finished with a 401-169 record there. Baylor's next game will be in the \$212 million Foster Pavilion, on Jan. 2 against Cornell.

Langston Love and Jayden Nunn each added 15 points for the Bears, who shot 67.2% overall (41 of 61) from the field and 63.3% on 3s (19 of 30).

Reginald Reynolds scored 14

points for Mississippi Valley State (0-12).

Illinois 97, Missouri 73

In St. Louis, Terrence Shannon Jr. had 30 points and 11 rebounds, Quincy Guerrier scored a career-best 28 points and Illinois beat Missouri in the Braggin' Rights rivalry game.

Coleman Hawkins scored 15 points for the Illini (9-2), who reclaimed the trophy they lost to the Tigers in lopsided fashion last year.

Sean East II had 15 of his 18 points in the second half to lead the Tigers (7-5), who lost their third straight. Missouri missed 16 of its first 17 tries from 3-point range and trailed 49-24 at halftime.

Colorado State 76, Loyola Marymount 67

In Los Angeles, Isaiah Stevens scored 19 points to break the career scoring record for Colorado State, which beat Loyola Marymount to remain perfect away from home.

BASKETBALL

Nique Clifford led Colorado State with 23 points, going 9 of 10 from the floor. Patrick Cartier added 14 points for the Rams (11-1), who improved to 5-0 in away and neutral-site games.

Stevens broke the record previously held by Pat Durham (1985-89) and now has 1,986 points in five seasons with the Rams.

Will Johnston scored 21 of his 27 points in the second half for Loyola Marymount (7-6).

BYU 101, Bellarmine 59

In Provo, Noah Waterman scored 15 points, Spencer Johnson and Trevin Knell had 14 apiece and BYU routed Bellarmine.

BYU shot 58% from the field in its third straight victory. Six players scored in double figures for the Cougars (11-1), who had 30 assists on 40 baskets.

Johnson had eight rebounds and seven assists. He also made three of the Cougars' 16 3-pointers.

Garrett Tipton led Bellarmine (4-10) with 21 points on 8-of-12 shooting.

Clemson 109, Queens 79

In Clemson, PJ Hall scored 27 points and Clemson bounced back from its first loss of the season by beating Queens.

Moore, Gatica cleared in doping case

LONDON, Dec 23, (AP): Tennis players Tara Moore and Barbara Gatica were cleared of doping allegations Saturday after investigators ruled that their positive tests for steroids stemmed from contaminated meat they ate while competing in Colombia, the International Tennis Integrity Agency said.

Both women had been provisionally suspended after their samples taken at a WTA tournament in Bogotá in April 2022 were positive for boldenone. Moore's sample also contained nandrolone.

The ITIA said an independent tribunal determined that Moore and Gatica "bore no fault or negligence for their adverse analytical findings and are therefore not subject to a period of ineligibility."

The tribunal found that "contaminated meat consumed by each player in the days before sample collection was the source of the prohibited substance(s)."

"The ITIA has issued, and will continue to issue, information concerning the risks of meat contamination in certain parts of the world to all players," the organization said in Saturday's announcement.

The suspensions were immediately lifted, although separately Gatica remained under a three-year ban for corruption offenses. Gatica is from Chile and reached a career-best WTA singles ranking of No. 201 in 2022.

Moore, a 31-year-old British player, had been suspended in May 2022 and immediately protested the findings, saying she has "never knowingly taken a banned substance in my career."

ARAB TIMES

Subscribe to our service "Arabtimes WhatsApp" to stay updated on the latest local and international news and events



To activate this Free Service:

1- Save our number on your contacts **92220947**

2- Send "Start" WhatsApp message to the number you saved.

www.arabtimesonline.com

arabtimeskuwait

arabtimeskuwait

arabtimeskuwait

Join us on Telegram



ALORF HOSPITAL is looking for the following:

QUALITY MANAGER

- * Must be 35-40 years of age preferably female, preferably Filipino or Indian
- * Degree in Hospital Administration, Business Administration or Quality Management
- * Must have 2 years experience in Quality Management and have experience in Accreditation process
- * Can understand Arabic and English Language (writing, reading and speaking) & have computer skills

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGER

- * Must be 35-40 years of age preferably female, preferably Filipino or Indian
- * Degree in Business in Administration or Human Resource
- * At least 2-3 years experience in HR or working as personnel department and have experience in Accreditation
- * Can understand Arabic and English Language (writing, reading and speaking) & have computer skills

Send your resume to alorfmed@alorf.com

or contact **2 205 2555 ext. #740/741**

or **+965 6 708 6378**

look for Ms. Lynn



Players challenge for the ball.

Al-Fahaheel seek redemption against Khaitan

Al-Kuwait face crucial 'showdown' vs Kazma

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Al-Kuwait will face off against Kazma at Thamer Stadium in the Zain Premier League at 8:00 pm. The matchup is preceded by a clash between Al-Fahaheel and Khaitan at the Friendship and Peace Stadium at 5:30 pm.

SOCCER

In the first game, Al-Kuwait, led by Tunisian Nabil Maaloul with 22 points, aims to maintain positive results in the competition. Despite a narrow 3-2 win over Al-Jahra in the tenth round, Maaloul sees tonight's confrontation as the "first test" for "Al-Abyad." Victory over Kazma is deemed essential to successfully pursue a third consecutive title.

Despite the absence of key team members due to injury or suspension, including Tunisian Yassin Amri,

Youssef Nasser, Dhari Al-Otaibi, and Reda Hani, Maaloul relies on experienced players such as Ahmed Al-Dhafiri, Faisal Zayed, Tunisian Yassin Al-Khanisi, Amr Abdel Fattah, Bahraini Mohammed Al-Marhoon, and Mohammed Dahham.

Meanwhile, Kazma, currently sixth in the standings with 13 points, faces a period of imbalance. Coach Francisco Chalo acknowledges the challenges faced by the team, including a decline in the performance of foreign players and the absence of key team members. Kazma hopes to rebound from a heavy 5-2 defeat to Al-Kuwait in a previous encounter.

In the second confrontation, Al-Fahaheel, with 9 points, seeks its third victory in the competition and the second in a row. A win would help them move away from the "danger zone" and closer to the "warm zone." Al-Fahaheel aims for redemption against Khaitan, who previously defeated them with a clean triple.

Flaiteh named Secretary General of the Arab Ice Hockey Federation

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23, (KUNA): The Arab Ice Hockey Federation, recently established to promote the sport in Arab nations, has appointed Mishal Flaiteh, Secretary-General of the Kuwait Winter Games Club, as its Secretary-General for a four-year term, as announced by the Arab body.

During a recent meeting in Morocco, various committees of the Kuwait-based federation also saw



KUNA photo
Secretary General of the Kuwaiti Arab Ice Hockey Federation, Mishal Flaiteh.

the selection of their members, according to the federation's Chairman, Faheed Al-Ajmi of Kuwait, in a press statement on Saturday.

Furthermore, the federation is actively working on finalizing the agenda for Arab Ice Hockey championships, focusing on national teams and sports clubs. This initiative aims to enhance the skills of Arab male and female athletes, preparing them for upcoming continental and international competitions, Al-Ajmi explained.

He disclosed the federation's aspirations to foster collaborative efforts, encouraging shared experiences in training, refereeing, and sports management to boost and promote ice hockey across the Arab world.

ICE HOCKEY

In response, the newly appointed Secretary-General, Mishal Flaiteh, expressed his admiration for the nascent federation, recognizing it as a significant stride towards developing ice hockey in Arab countries. Flaiteh pledged dedicated attention to the sport's advancement, expressing gratitude to the federation's general assembly for the trust placed in him and promising his utmost commitment to the development of Arab ice hockey.

Best of the Rest

Suárez signs with Inter Miami:

The long-awaited reunion of Luis Suárez and Lionel Messi is now a reality, after the Uruguayan striker signed with Inter Miami on Friday for the 2024 season.

Suárez and Messi spent six seasons together at Barcelona, winning four Spanish league titles and nine other trophies - including a Champions League title - in that span. Suárez is coming off a season where he was best player and best striker in the Brazilian league with Gremio.

There had been speculation for months that Suárez would join Inter Miami, especially given his relationship with Messi. Inter Miami won its first trophy - the Leagues Cup - last season shortly after Messi arrived, his signing part of an overhaul that brought elite talent like Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba to the club, along with coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino. Busquets and Alba also played for Barcelona alongside Messi, and Martino is a former Barcelona coach. (AP)

Pak injury woes continue:

Pakistan spinner Noman Ali has become the second player in two days to withdraw from the touring squad for the remainder of the Australia three-test series due to illness and injury.

Ali, who didn't play in the 360-run defeat in the first test at Perth last week, underwent surgery for appendicitis in Melbourne on Saturday.

"Noman Ali complained of sudden and severe abdominal pain yesterday, leading to examinations and

scans in emergency that confirmed a diagnosis of acute appendicitis."

The latest blow for the tourists comes after fast bowler Khuram Shahzad, who took match figures of 5-128 in his impressive test debut in Perth, was ruled out for the remainder of the series with a rib stress fracture and muscle tear on Thursday. (AP)

Elgar retires: Dean Elgar has announced his retirement from international cricket after a test series against India concludes early next month.

Elgar, who has scored more than 5,000 runs with 13 centuries in his 84 tests, will play his final test at Newlands in Cape Town starting Jan. 3.

"As they say, 'all good things come to an end', and the Indian home series will be my last, as I have made the decision to retire from our beautiful game," the 36-year-old Elgar said. "The Cape Town test will be my last. My favourite stadium in the world. A place I scored my first Test run against New Zealand and hopefully my last too."

Cavin hired assistant: Vincent Cavin was hired Friday as an assistant to U.S. men's head coach Gregg Berhalter.

The 48-year-old Cavin had been with the Swiss soccer association as an assistant coach on the men's national team since 2014.

Cavin joins a staff that includes assistant coaches B.J. Callaghan and Mikey Varas and goalkeeper coach Fabian Otte. (AP)

New Zealand wins series

Bangladesh rout New Zealand by 9 wickets in 3rd ODI

NAPIER, New Zealand, Dec 23, (AP): Bangladesh needed only 15 overs with the bat to complete a nine-wicket win over New Zealand in the third one-day international Saturday, ending New Zealand's winning streak in ODIs at home at 17 matches.

After rolling New Zealand for 98 in 31.4 overs, captain Najmul Hossain Shanto made an unbeaten 51 from 42 balls and Amanul Haque 37 from 33 to lead Bangladesh to their first ODI win over the Kiwis in New Zealand in 19 attempts.

New Zealand won the three-match series 2-1 after winning the first match by 44 runs and the second by seven wickets. But Bangladesh gained a measure of revenge Saturday and primed themselves for the upcoming Twenty20 series, bowling New Zealand out for their lowest ever total in ODIs between the teams.

Earlier, Tanzim Hasan Sakib took



Bangladesh bowler Soumya Sarkar celebrates taking the wicket of New Zealand's Adam Milne during their third One Day International cricket match in Napier, New Zealand. (AP)

3-14 and Shoriful Islam 3-22 - both career bests - as Bangladesh rolled New Zealand cheaply to set up a dominant victory. Soumya Sarkar chipped in with 3-18 as New Zealand

fell below its previous lowest ODI score against Bangladesh of 162.

"The ball was nipping, the ball was swinging and I knew how we started would set the tone for my team," Sakib said. "I tried to bowl wicket to wicket and hold my line and length."

CRICKET

"The wicket really helped me. This wicket is good for pace bowlers and the wicket really helped me."

Bangladesh captain Shanto was delighted to be able to choose to field when he won the toss. The McLean Park pitch usually is one of the best to bat on in New Zealand with an average first innings score in ODIs of 239.

But the pitch was unusually well-grassed and Shoriful and Sakib took full advantage, crashing through the New Zealand top order to leave them reeling at 6-70.

Both bowlers tied the New Zealand batters down by bowling into the stumps and swinging the ball both ways. They hit excellent lengths and

the ball occasionally spat off a length which made the batters reluctant to play forcefully off the front foot.

The largest partnership in the innings was the 36 between Will Young (26) and Tom Latham (21) for the third wicket. Only two other New Zealand batters reached double figures.

Shoriful reproduced the form that saw him take two wickets in the opening over of the first ODI, dismissing Young, Latham and Mark Chapman (2). Both Latham and Chapman were bowled by deliveries which jugged back late between bat and pad.

Sakib maintained an exacting line, giving the batters no width and completing two maidens among his seven overs. He dismissed Rachin Ravindra (8) in the fourth over to begin the New Zealand collapse, then removed Henry Nicholls (1) and Tom Blundell (4).

When the two seamers had left the host's innings in tatters, Sarkar came on and took the wickets of Josh Clarkson (16), Adam Milne (4) and Adithya Ashok (10).

The last wicket fell to Mushfiqur Rahim who took 1-36.



New Zealand players pose with their trophy after winning the series against Bangladesh 2-1 after the third One Day International cricket match in Napier, New Zealand. (AP)

FIFA summit in Jeddah

Al-Shaheen highlights Kuwait's Vision 2030 for soccer

JEDDAH, Dec 23: Abdullah Al-Shaheen, Chairman of the Football Association's Board of Directors, actively participated in the third meeting convened by the Executive Office of the Asian Football Confederation in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

The President of the Federation and member of the Asian Confederation's Executive Office, Abdullah Al-Shaheen, was also present at the 2023 FIFA summit meeting held in Jeddah. During the summit, Al-Shaheen provided FIFA President Gianni Infantino with updates on the Kuwaiti Federation's 2030 vision. He outlined the concrete steps taken to implement its core pillars and highlighted the Federation's achievements in establishing robust administrative governance.

In response, Infantino expressed FIFA's commitment to providing necessary support for the Kuwaiti Federation in realizing Vision 2030 and advancing Kuwaiti football.

SOCCER

Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa, President of the Asian Football Confederation and First Vice President of FIFA, extended congratulations to Saudi Arabia for its remarkable success in hosting the Club World Cup. He emphasized that Saudi Arabia's hosting achievement is a triumph for the entire Asian con-

'It's unbelievable'

Schwarz wins night race to go top of overall and slalom standings

MADONNA DI CAMPIGLIO, Italy, Dec 23 (AP): Marco Schwarz's mission to challenge Swiss dominator Marco Odermatt for the overall World Cup ski title is on track.

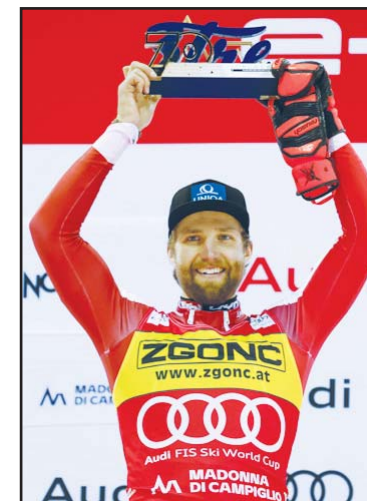
After eight races, the Austrian skier has become No. 1 in the season standings.

For Schwarz, a former slalom specialist who turned into an all-event skier, the lead is a first reward for his ambition to start in as many races on the 45-event calendar as possible.

Schwarz won a night race in Italy to take the lead, also in the slalom standings. He improved from sixth position after the opening leg to win by 0.25 seconds from Olympic champion Clement Noel.

The Frenchman was the first-run leader, and aiming for only his second victory since winning Olympic gold in February 2022.

British skier Dave Ryding posted the second fastest time in the final run and climbed from 15th to third place



Austria's Marco Schwarz holds up the trophy as he celebrates on podium after winning an alpine ski, men's World Cup slalom, in Madonna di Campiglio, Italy. (AP)

for his seventh career podium finish.

In the overall standings, Schwarz overtook two-time defending champion Odermatt by eight points. The Swiss skier does not compete in slaloms.

"For sure, it's one of the best Christmas gifts so far to win this classic here in Madonna. It's unbelievable," Schwarz said.

SKIING

"But I have not thought about the overall World Cup for a second. It's only the start of the season, there are still a lot of races. But you need the big points, like 'Odi' is getting them in giant slalom and the speed events."

Odermatt won his second overall title last season when he racked up a men's record of 2,042 points, 702 more than runner-up Aleksander Aamodt Kilde.

Schwarz finished last season in seventh, nearly 1,200 points behind Odermatt.

Still, the Austrian hoped to close the gap in this campaign by competing in more events than Odermatt. With 180 points from two slaloms, his strategy is working so far.

The Austrian's results in the other six races include two more podiums and a fourth and a fifth place. And Schwarz was leading the season-opening giant slalom when it was cancelled due to bad weather.

In the discipline standings, Schwarz passed teammate Manuel Feller who won the only previous slalom. On Friday, Feller finished fifth.

Noel's first run on the Canalone Miramonti course didn't clock the fastest time in any of the four sections but he still built a lead of 0.37 seconds. He couldn't hold it in the second run.

"Second is a good position, but I hoped for a bit more after the first run," Noel said. "Marco was very fast. Maybe I can win again later in the season when Marco gets tired from doing all races."

Daniel Yule, who won the race last year for the third time, lost his balance and the Swiss skier missed a gate in his second run.

Henrik Kristoffersen, the slalom world champion and also a three-time winner of the night race, placed sixth.

The race was the sixth in eight men's World Cups in Italy within 16 days. Next up are a downhill and a super-G in Bormio next Thursday and Friday.



A group photo of members of the AFC Executive Office.



Al Ahly players pose with their third place medals after the Soccer Club World Cup final match between Manchester City FC and Fluminense FC at King Abdullah Sports City Stadium in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Al Ahly defeated Japan's Urawa Reds 4-2 in the third place match earlier. (AP)

Sports

Latest sports scores at — <http://sports.arabtimesonline.com>

Man City win maiden Club World Cup



Manchester City's Kyle Walker (center), lifts the trophy at the end of the Soccer Club World Cup final match between Manchester City FC and Fluminense FC at King Abdullah Sports City Stadium in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Manchester City won 4-0. (AP)

Al Ahly finish third

Villa miss chance to go top

JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia, Dec 23, (AP): Manchester City were just too good and a bit lucky for overmatched Fluminense in the Club World Cup final by winning 4-0 and taking a fifth title in 2023. In the third-place game earlier in Jeddah, African champions Al Ahly of Egypt won 4-2 against Urawa, the Asian champions from Japan. Those teams also will be at the expanded 2025 edition.

City led after just 40 seconds to make it a match mostly free of tension. Julián Álvarez followed up fastest to meet a rebound off a post from Nathan Aké's shot.

SOCCER

An own goal in the 27th by Fluminense captain Nino decided the game long before Phil Foden's goal in the 72nd, guiding an Álvarez pass into an open net. Álvarez struck again in the 88th.

It gave City a first Club World Cup title and Europe a 16th in 17 editions of FIFA's competition for continental champions.

Tempers flared after the game with City captain Kyle Walker confronting Fluminense players including veteran defender Felipe Melo. Walker appeared to take offense at rough tackling that forced key midfielder Rodri



Manchester City's Rico Lewis (right), vies for the ball with Fluminense's Marcelo during the Soccer Club World Cup final match between Manchester City FC and Fluminense FC at King Abdullah Sports City Stadium in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. (AP)

off the field injured.

Rodri later took part in celebrations with the trophy and received an award as best player at the tournament. City losses this season typically come when the Spaniard has missed games.

With Rodri in imperious form, City cruised to a second easy win in four balmy days in Saudi Arabia even without injured superstars Erling Haaland and Kevin De Bruyne. They also missed City's semifinals win over Urawa Red Diamonds on Tuesday.

Their expected absences could help explain about 4,000 empty seats among a crowd of 52,601 at King Abdullah Sports City, the Jeddah stadium which is planned to be used at the 2034 World Cup.

HANDBALL

Kuwait gear up for Asian Handball Championship

LJUBLJANA, Dec 23: The Kuwaiti handball team is intensifying its training at their overseas camp in Slovenia as part of their preparations for the upcoming Asian Handball Championship, scheduled to kick off in Bahrain on January 11 (serving as the 2025 World Cup qualifiers). Headed by coach Saeed Hegazy, the coaching team has structured the training regimen into two sessions – morning and evening – dedicating specific time slots for goalkeeper training. The morning session focuses on enhancing the team's physical attributes, while the evening session is dedicated to refining technical aspects.

Team director Abdulaziz Al Zaabi

emphasized the collective commitment to ensuring optimal preparation for the tournament. He highlighted the coaching staff's efforts to address any shortcomings identified during training sessions or friendly matches.

"We have a roster of talented players who are fully capable of shouldering the responsibilities at hand," Al Zaabi remarked, pointing out that despite the challenges, the opportunity to qualify for the 2025 World Cup finals is within reach.

Man U scoring woes continue with 2-0 loss at West Ham

LONDON, Dec 23, (AP): Manchester United's scoring woes continued in a 2-0 loss at West Ham in the Premier League on Saturday, with Jarrod Bowen and Mohammed Kudus netting second-half goals.

United has now failed to score in their last four games in all competitions - that hasn't happened since 1992 - and in five of their last six matches. Rasmus Hojlund, the club's \$82 million offseason signing, was hauled off in the 57th minute as his Premier League drought extended to 14 games.

SOCCER

What United would give to have a player in the scoring form of Bowen, who exchanged passes with Lucas Paqueta and bundled in a finish - at the second attempt - past goalkeeper Andre Onana to give West Ham the lead in the 72nd minute with his 11th goal in the league this season.

Kudus then pounced on a mistake by Kobbie Mainoo before being played through by Paqueta to drive home the second goal in the 78th. It was the Ghana international's fourth goal in as many games.

The late goals spoiled a composed debut for United by 19-year-old de-

fender Willy Kambwala, who was brought in to fix a center-back crisis and did little wrong alongside Jonny Evans - a player 16 years older.

It's the issues at the other end of the field that are likely to be really worrying United manager Erik ten Hag after the team's 13th defeat in 26 games in all competitions this season. With the win, West Ham moved ahead of United, which will be in eighth place for Christmas.

Aston Villa missed a chance to go top of the English Premier League when they drew with Sheffield United 1-1 in a game marked by late goals and more VAR disputes. Although Villa dominated, Cameron Archer put Sheffield ahead with three minutes left, only for Nicolo Zaniolo to equalize in the seventh minute of time added on.

Villa were superior throughout in front of a boisterous home crowd and they would rue the video referee for decisions that went against them.

Two penalty claims were rejected early in the first half and a Leon Bailey goal was chalked off after 59 minutes when the review spotted a foul on Sheffield goalkeeper Wes Foderingham.

Referee Anthony Taylor looked at another possible penalty for handball with 17 minutes remaining but again ruled against the home side.

When the deadlock was broken it

Fiorentina, Lazio win

Milan late goal rescues draw at 'bottom' club Salernitana

ROME, Dec 23, (AP): Fiorentina moved up to fourth in Serie A after winning at Monza 1-0, while Lazio climbed into the top half of the table with a comfortable 2-0 victory at struggling Empoli.

AC Milan needed a late goal to salvage a point at bottom club Salernitana and Genoa came from behind to beat Sassuolo 2-1.

AC Milan, three points ahead of Fiorentina. Lazio jumped two places

came at the other end. Former Villa striker Cameron Archer popped up with a clinical finish after good work from Gustavo Hamer on the left.

But just when Villa looked down and out it got the goal its play deserved. Douglas Luiz flighted a cross into the box and Zaniolo beat Foderingham to nod into the empty net.



Juventus' Dusan Vlahovic (left), jumps for a header with Frosinone's Simone Romagnoli during a Serie A soccer match between Frosinone and Juventus, at Benito Stirpe Stadium, in Frosinone, Italy. (AP)

into ninth.

A major shock was averted at Salernitana, where the home side led 2-1 with a minute left and looked like recording only its second win of the season.

Fikayo Tomori put Milan 1-0 up with a header after 17 minutes but Salernitana grew into the game and got the equalizer it deserved shortly before halftime when veteran Argentine defender Federico Fazio headed home from a corner.

Antonio Candreva put Salernitana ahead in the second half, but Milan substitute Luka Jovic scored in the last minute to secure a point.

SOCCER

Fiorentina's match-winner was Lucas Beltran but Monza goalkeeper Michele Di Gregorio will shoulder much of the blame. With six minutes on the clock, Di Gregorio tried to play the ball out but his pass was too close to Beltran, whose outstretched leg diverted the ball into the net.

In Empoli, Lazio returned to winning ways after two straight losses.

Matteo Guendouzi got the opener after eight minutes when he rifled home through a crowd of players following a goalmouth scramble.



West Ham's Mohammed Kudus (left), is challenged by Manchester United's Jonny Evans during the English Premier League soccer match between West Ham United and Manchester United at the London stadium in London. (AP)