



Hike driven by price surges in food, education, clothing

## Kuwait registers 3.79% annual inflation growth in Nov

### Opinion

Your Highness ... here's some more

By Ahmed Al-Jarallah  
Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

YOUR Highness the Amir, let us start from the end. What happened in recent years demonstrated a misunderstanding of the Constitution and democracy, as if we had not learned in 63 years from countries with a system similar to ours and worked to achieve justice because it is the basis for democracy and the ultimate goal of modern constitutions.

Indeed, we have not learned from the very harsh lesson of the invasion and its precursor, which the ungrateful criminal Saddam Hussein took as an excuse to invade the country. He mistook the noise that occurred in the so-called "Monday Diwanias" as an internal division, because of which his army committed atrocities against our country, the first of which was the invasion.

In one of the articles of the Constitution, the following text was stated, "... It is not permissible to propose an amendment to this Constitution before five years have passed since its implementation."

Unfortunately, that point was forgotten, to serve either interests or blocs, and thus the entire text was misunderstood. That is why, whenever there are demands to develop and modernize the Constitution, those who oppose it rise up and consider it as a coup.

Note that the majority of democratic countries amend their constitutions every few years to adapt to changes.

For example, the United States of America amended its constitution 27 times, and no one considered it as a coup against the state and the regime.

Your Highness, dozens of ministers and hundreds of parliamentarians consider the one-eyed democracy prevailing in the country as normal behavior. The constitutional text gives them the right to deviate from the law and established regulations.

That is why, instead of progress and development, they imposed their personal will, and spread corruption. Strangely enough, all of it was by law.

Prime Ministers and ministers left power in black robes either as a result of their practices or they were accused of doing so. Indeed, the rulings issued against some of them proved that they were not worthy of national responsibility. Despite that, nothing changed.

Instead, the practices remained the same and in fact worsened, which is what you said in your royal statement.

Your Highness, the people and rulers of the Gulf are ecstatic about what you offered, because they saw in Kuwait not the Paris of the East, but rather an icon and a cultural and civilizational message not only for the Gulf but for the Arab world. What happens here affects its immediate surroundings, either negatively or positively, and they do not want it to be a window of evil or corruption upon them.

Also, the people of Kuwait, since liberation, have lived with an obsession about the loss of stability, especially when they saw the banners of sects and tribes spread across several areas of the country on occasions, as if Kuwait, despite its small area and the small population, had become a sectarian state.

There is no doubt that this matter requires a lot of effort to eliminate the negatives that have stuck to the national identity, and return to the springs on which this country was built.

Your Highness, all we see from the "venerers" of democracy is boasting, gossiping, and seeking to distort people's reputation and character and protect the corrupt.

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### NewsWatch

**KUWAIT CITY:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Seif Palace on Monday the Deputy Chief of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

His Highness also received First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

He also received Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. (KUNA)

**CAIRO:** Kuwait Society for Relief (KSR) on Monday announced the complete discharge of Gaza Ship's load of humanitarian aid, for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, in Al-Arish port preparing for its entry through Rafah crossing to the Strip.

KSR Director General Abdulaziz Al-Obaid said to KUNA that the ship, that sailed from the Turkish Mersin port,

completely discharged its cargo after docking in Al-Arish port, carrying 1,200 tons of various necessary relief materials.

This humanitarian shipment carried about 525 tons of flour, water, and basic food-stuffs suitable for over a year, and about 75 tons of necessary medical supplies, he added, in addition to 540 tons of shelter and hygiene packages and about 60,000 pieces of winter clothing. (KUNA)

**CAIRO:** Egypt has put forward an ambitious, initial proposal to end the Israel-Hamas war with a cease-fire, a phased hostage release and the creation of a Palestinian government of experts who would administer the Gaza Strip and occupied West Bank, a senior Egyptian official and a European diplomat said Monday.

Word of the proposal came as Israeli airstrikes heavily pounded central and southern Gaza, crushing buildings on families sheltering inside. In the Maghazi refugee camp, rescue workers pulled dozens more bodies from the wreckage hours after a strike leveled a three-story building and shattered others nearby. (AP)

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA): Kuwait's consumer price index (inflation) on an annual basis grew by 3.79 percent last November, according to the Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau (KCSB).

In a statement to KUNA on Sunday, the bureau said that the inflation rate in Kuwait rose 0.23 percent in November, on a monthly basis.

The hike on an annual basis was due to the increase of prices of all main groups that influence the movement of key indices, particularly food, education and clothing, it said.

The record number of the first group (food and beverages) went up by 5.81 percent last November, compared to the same month in 2022, while the price index of the second group (cigarettes and tobacco) slightly rose by 0.22 percent on an annual basis, it added.

The consumer price index (CPI) for the clothing group increased by 6.86 percent, and housing services rose by 3.13 percent, while the inflation rate in furnishings rose by 2.96 percent, it indicated.

The health index went up by 2.41 percent while rates of transport moved up by 2.95 percent compared to the same month in 2022, according to the KCSB.

Communications edged up by 3.06 percent on an annual basis, culture and entertainment rose by 3.54 percent, as education went up by 0.72 percent, it added. Restaurants and hotels climbed on a yearly basis by 3.54 percent in November, with services and miscellaneous goods surging by 4.14 percent, it said.

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## Expat remittances from Kuwait drop 29.6% in first nine months

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The remittances sent abroad by expatriate workers in Kuwait saw a significant annual decline of 29.67% during the first nine months of 2023, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

According to "Mubasher," expatriate workers sent remittances totaling 2.979 billion dinars (\$9.718 billion) in the mentioned period, compared to 4.237 billion dinars (\$13.822 billion) in the same timeframe in 2022.

The Central Bank of Kuwait's quarterly statistics revealed a decline in transfers across three quarters in 2023. The most substantial drop occurred in the second quarter, with a 40.33% annual decrease to 892.1 million dinars. This was followed by a 31.46% decline in the third quarter to 867.7 million dinars, and a 17.34% decrease in the first quarter to 1.22 billion dinars.

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## 2 Kuwaitis kidnapped in Iraq

Details Page 2

# Nurse shortage grips Kuwait, MP calls for urgent measures

Education minister quizzed on salary disparities

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: MP Osama Al-Shaheen has forwarded queries to Minister of Social Affairs and State Minister for Family, Women and Children Affairs Sheikh Feras Al-Sabah about Article 42-bis of Disabled Law No. 73/2020, which stipulates granting full indemnity to employees with medium and severe disabilities, as well as those taking care of them.**

Al-Shaheen wants to know the number of individuals covered by this Article (the disabled and those appointed to take care of them) who have retired since the ratification of Law No. 8/2010 and its amendment -- Law No. 73/2020.

He also asked Minister of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research Adel Al-Manea why the heads of departments in adult and illiteracy schools are excluded from the special salaries allocated for teachers and heads of departments in regular schools even if they carry out the same tasks like teaching, preparing exam questions and lesson plans.

MP Jarrah Al-Fawzan asked Minister of Commerce and Industry and State Minister for Youth Affairs Muhammad Al-Aiban about the rationale behind allowing the representatives of companies to check the quality and descriptions of products at the Public

Authority for Industry (PAI); legal basis of this step; list of such companies including the services they provide; and if PAI's laboratories are capable of checking commodities like food, oil, toys and others. If yes, he wants to know when PAI started checking local and imported commodities and fees collected for this process. He also inquired if the Ministry of Commerce and Industry collects fees from the companies for allowing their representatives to check the quality and descriptions of products at the headquarters of PAI.

MP Meteb Ayed Al-Anzi asked Minister of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research Adel Al-Manea about the budget allocated for the charity fund that shoulders the expenses of Bedoun and needy students in the last three years; number of beneficiaries; number of rejected applicants; criteria for approving applications; institutions supporting the charity fund; amount of their donations; list of donor institutions and schools receiving a certain percentage of the budget of the fund.

MP Hamad Al-Matar asked Minister of Health Ahmed Al-Awadhi about the factors that led to the shortage of nurses in public hospitals, plan of the ministry to address such shortage, if the ministry asked its Higher Education and Scientific Research counterpart to allocate more seats for students who want to take nursing and copies of related correspondences if the answer is 'yes'.

MP Mehalhal Al-Mudhaf asked Minister of Commerce and Industry and State Minister for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Aiban to provide him with the list of companies authorized to export petroleum derivatives and diesel, and copies of the licenses that PAI granted to them.

He also inquired about the number of vacant senior positions at Kuwait General Administration for Customs (KGAC) since Al-Aiban assumed office compared to the total number of leadership positions.



Christian communities on Monday celebrated Christmas in a noticeably subdued atmosphere. - See Page 4

Issue of embassy shelters stumbling block

## Kuwait and Philippines talks hit snag

27 websites blocked

### Kuwait suspends four companies in anti-money laundering efforts

By Ahmad Fathi  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: In the first nine months of 2023, the Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Department in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry conducted approximately 936 inspection visits to real estate, exchange, and jewelry companies, averaging four inspection rounds per day. During this period, the department made 372 field visits to real estate companies, 92 rounds on exchange companies, and 472 rounds on jewelry companies.

Data from the Ministry of Commerce revealed that within nine months, the Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Department suspended the activities of four companies, including a real estate company, two exchange companies, and a jewelry company. Simultaneously, it lifted the suspension on the licenses of eight companies, consisting of two real estate companies, an exchange company, and five jewelry companies.

Over the same period, the department blocked 27 websites, and the total number of transactions related to money laundering reached around 1.87 thousand transactions. This includes 1.28 thousand real estate transactions, 41 transactions for exchange companies, and 550 transactions for jewelry companies. In total, the Anti-Money Laundering Department

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KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The recent discussions between Kuwait and the Philippines, hosted by Kuwait and involving the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Public Authority for Manpower, and a visiting Philippine delegation, did not yield the desired outcomes in reconciling differences to lift the ban on sending domestic workers from Manila, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Specialist in domestic labor affairs, Bassam Al-Shammari, highlighted that while the initial days of talks showed progress and friendliness, they ultimately failed to produce positive results.

Despite early optimism and the resolution of outstanding issues, the impasse arose due to the Philippine

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### Kuwait welcomes Yemen 'roadmap'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed on Monday its welcome regarding the statement issued by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to Yemen, Hans Grundberg, on reaching a road map to resolve the Yemeni crisis.

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry said that it is awaiting the completion of the signing process of this important agreement to confirm the State of Kuwait's support for all endeavors made within the framework of reaching a comprehensive and lasting peace in Yemen.

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KUNA photo  
Syrian refugee students during examinations in Kurdistan, Iraq. KFAED has given multiple grants worth USD 88.1 million to refugees and the displaced throughout the world between 2016 and 2022. - See Page 4

## Prayer Timings

Fajr ..... 05:15 Asr ..... 14:38  
 Sunrise .. 06:40 Maghrib .. 16:56  
 Zohr ..... 11:48 Isha ..... 18:18

# Local

## Expected weather for the next

**24 hours:**  
**By Day:** Warm with light to moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 08-32 km/h.

## Weather

**By Night:** Rather cold to cold with light variable wind to light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speed of 08-28 km/h.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	23	17

Kuwait Airport	24	13
Abdaly	24	10
Jahra	24	14
Salmiyah	23	18
Nuwaisib	24	14
Wafra	24	12

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



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Jaber Al-Sabah chairs the cabinet meeting.

Prime Minister Diwan photo

## Cabinet grateful for global condolences over Amir's death

Kuwait's cabinet on Monday thanked leaders from the Gulf Arab region and the world alike for their messages of sympathy following the death of His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

These gestures are a testament to Kuwait's "amicable and historic" relations with the international community, the cabinet said amid its weekly

session presided over by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

The ministers reminisced about His Highness the late Amir's accomplishments during his rule, recalling his great sacrifices and immense contributions towards Kuwait's prosperity and development, saying his memory will

forever live in the annals of the nation's history.

The cabinet went on to congratulate His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on assuming power, wishing him every success as he seeks to keep national development and prosperity on an upward trajectory. (KUNA)

## Congrats pour in for HH Amir

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a congratulatory cable on Monday from the President of Ghana Nana Akufo-Addo on assuming the top office.

In turn, His Highness the Amir sent a reply cable expressing his utmost appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments to the president.

### Iraq

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday received a congratulatory cable from President of Iraq Abdulatif Jamal Rashid on assuming the top office.

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

### Tonga

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday received a congratulatory cable from the President of Tonga Tupou VI on assuming the top office.

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

### Korea

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday received a congratulatory cable from the President of the South Korea Yoon Suk Yeol on assuming the top office.

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

### Nepal

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday received a congratulatory cable from the President of Nepal Ramchandra Paudel on assuming the top office.

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

### Vietnam

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday received a congratulatory cable from the

President of Vietnam Vo Van Thuong on assuming the top office.

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

### Cyprus

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a congratulatory cable on Monday from the President of Cyprus Nikos Christodoulides on assuming the top office.

In turn, His Highness the Amir sent a reply cable expressing his utmost appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments to the president.

### Kyrgyzstan

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday received a congratulatory cable from the President of Kyrgyzstan Sadyr Zhaparov on assuming the top office.

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

### Gabon

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a congratulatory cable on Monday from Gabon's Interim President Gen. Brice Oligui Nguema on assuming the top office.

In turn, His Highness the Amir sent a reply cable expressing his utmost appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments to the president.

### Nicaragua

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a congratulatory cable on Monday from the President of the Republic of Nicaragua Daniel Ortega on assuming the top office.

In turn, His Highness the Amir sent a reply cable expressing his utmost appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments to the president.

### Germany

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a congratulatory cable on Monday from the German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier on assuming the top office.

In turn, His Highness the Amir sent a reply cable expressing his utmost appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments to the president.

## Funds scam case hearing delayed

## Fine imposed as verdict overruled

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Court of Appeals overturned the verdict issued by the Court of First Instance, which sentenced a former assistant undersecretary of the Ministry of Communications and an Iranian employee of the ministry to seven-year imprisonment each and their dismissal from their work positions. The former assistant undersecretary was obligated to return KD 113,000. The court also imposed a fine of KD 3,000 on each of the accused.

This ruling was based on accusations of fraud leveled against the assistant undersecretary of manipulating with the finger-scan device in order to cover the absence of the Iranian employee from his workplace.

**Funds scam case delayed:** The Criminal Court has adjourned to January 21, 2024 the lawsuit filed against a former

senior official of the Ministry of Interior, identified only as A. H., who is accused of stealing public funds by providing meals to the ministry. The case was adjourned for further study.

It is worth mentioning that A. H. was previously sentenced to life imprisonment by the Court of Cassation after it has toughened the penalty issued earlier by the Court of Appeals to imprison him for 15 years and impose a fine of KD 113 million.

**Woman dies in mishap:** Two vehicles collided on Subiya Road recently, resulting in the death of a woman while three individuals were injured, reports Al-Anba daily.

A team of firefighters from Subiya Fire Center was dispatched to the accident site immediately after the Operations Unit of the center received information about the tragic accident.

A case was registered and investigations are ongoing to determine the actual circumstances leading to the accident.

## Deficit may hit KD 6 bn

## Ultra gasoline prices reduced

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The committee tasked to review various types of subsidies decided to reduce the price of Ultra gasoline by 14 percent or 35 fils -- from 250 fils to 215 fils -- for a period of three months starting January according to international prices, reports Al-Anba daily quoting sources.

Sources added the committee decided to retain the prices of other types of fuel: the price of a liter of premium gasoline is 85 fils, special gasoline is 105 fils, diesel is 115 fils and kerosene is 115 fils.

**Deficit may hit KD6bn:** The Council of

Ministers recently discussed the visual presentation of the Ministry of Finance on the State's financial status and expenditures for fiscal 2023/2024, reports Al-Qabas daily quoting a source from the government.

The source confirmed that the ministry disclosed during the meeting that the expected deficit may reach KD6 billion if the price of oil continues at \$70 per barrel, while the break-even point that the oil price must reach is \$90 per barrel.

The source added that the government discussed the most important precautions and solutions to address this deficit.

# 2 Kuwaitis abducted in Iraq

Finger points at terror group ISIS

## Other Voices

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (Agencies): Today, Iraqi media reported a distressing incident involving two Kuwaiti citizens who were allegedly kidnapped in the Anbar Governorate, with their cars subsequently burned, reports Al-Seyassah daily.**

According to the Iraqi Al-Sharqiya channel, an Iraqi security source disclosed an attempt by the terrorist group ISIS to abduct Kuwaitis in the region between Anbar and Salah al-Din governorates.

The two Kuwaiti citizens targeted by this apparent ISIS activity have been identified as Anwar Julaidan Al-Dhufairi and Faisal Jaber Laftah Al-Mutairi. The incident reportedly took place in the Salah Al-Din sector, west of Wadi Al-Tharthar.

The news of the kidnapping and the burning of their vehicles has ignited a parliamentary and popular reaction, with urgent demands for action by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant authorities. There is a pressing need to determine the fate of the abducted individuals and uncover the details surrounding the alarming incident.

Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah phoned his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein on Monday to uncover more information on the whereabouts of the nationals believed to be missing in Iraq's western Anbar province.

Iraqi authorities have underlined their concern and launched an immediate probe into the circumstances surrounding the incident, said a Kuwaiti foreign ministry statement, emphasizing that the matter is being vigorously pursued to discover the fate of the missing Kuwaiti.

In response to these developments, Representative Dr. Hamad Al-Matar emphasized the necessity for the Foreign Minister to take immediate action to secure the release of the citizens. He stressed the importance of Iraqi official and security authorities ensuring their safe return to their homeland. Representative Al-Matar expressed his commitment to follow up on this issue with the Foreign Minister.

Additionally, Representative Majid Musaed Al-Mutairi has taken diplomatic steps, contacting the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Iraqi ambassador to Kuwait. His goal is to gather information about the diplomatic efforts being made to ascertain the fate of the kidnapped Kuwaiti citizens and ensure their safety.

Meanwhile, Al-Sharqiya TV provided further details, reporting that the two Kuwaiti citizens were kidnapped, and their vehicles were set ablaze in the Al-Mashaif area of Anbar Governorate. This distressing development has raised concerns and calls for swift and decisive action to address the situation and bring the perpetrators to justice.

## Co-ops chairman denies corruption

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Consumer Cooperative Societies Union Chairman Abdul Wahab Al-Fares has denied the accusation of the investigation committee in the field of cooperative work that he is involved in acts deemed harmful to the union's funds and manipulation of commodity prices, reports Al-Qabas daily.

In a statement to the daily, Al-Fares stressed that "all the charges are malicious and lack the lowest levels of justice and objectivity, as the aim is to throw ashes into the eyes to relieve the political embarrassment of the Social Affairs minister and other ministry officials, especially after the protest resignation that I submitted to Minister Sheikh Firas Al-Malik Al-Sabah on Dec 10." He said he has not yet received the dismissal decision and he has not been provided with the most basic level of "honor of adversary" to respond to the accusations.

He added the committee that summoned and investigated him was not impartial; wondering how the committee could confirm the alleged violations, transgressions and wastage of the union's funds, or recommend his removal and referral to Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) without completing the investigation sessions with him or listening to his statements.

He stressed that the promise to respond to this unjust decision and the false accusations will be forwarded to the Public Prosecution and the Court of Ministers for the public to know the truth and to reveal who is actually responsible for wasting the union's funds.

He explained the accusation that he wasted public money by not collecting the monthly rent for the union's warehouses in Sulabiya is incorrect, as he was deliberately misled by some members of the union's executive management regarding the issue of renting the warehouses. He pointed out that he was assigned to manage the union only five months ago, while the warehouses have been rented since March and the leasing company has not paid the rent throughout this period.

## Sheikh Nawaf...prince of pardon has dismantled

By Youssef Mubarak Al-Mubarak

Briefing about the biography of the late Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, may God have mercy



Al-Mubarak

he is the sixth son of the tenth ruler of Kuwait, the late Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may God have mercy on him.

The late Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, may God have mercy on him, held several positions before coming to power on September 29, 2020, where the late Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, may he have mercy on him, appointed him on February 21, 1961, as Governor of Hawalli, and then as Minister of Interior on March 19, 1978. He continued until January 26, 1988, and then as Minister of Defense.

Then he was appointed Minister of Social Affairs on January 20, 1991 after the liberation, and he remained in ministerial positions until the Amiri order was issued on February 7, 2006 recommending him as Crown Prince in accordance with the text of Article Four of the Constitution and Law No. 4 of 1964 regarding the succession of the emirate.

The National Assembly then held a special session. It includes the Amiri order recommending him as Crown Prince, where the members of the National Assembly unanimously pledged allegiance to him as Crown Prince and he took the constitutional oath.

Until he was called to be the Amir of the country on September 29, 2020, his reign was characterized by relative calm. He began his reign with a meeting with politicians and they presented to him a petition that

represented the beginning of popular demands. He prevented interference in the elections with political money, as well as preventing the government to vote in forming the office of the National Assembly, and he began to reform what could be reformed, so he pardoned prisoners of opinion and displaced people from all sectors of society. He concluded it before his death in the last amnesty that was issued on 27 November 2023. Therefore, he was named the Prince of Amnesty for demonstrating national reconciliation during his reign.

The late Prince loved the people of Kuwait with their appreciation and social contact in their joys and sorrows, so they exchanged love for him with love and humility, so God raised him in their hearts.

That was the reaction that occurred since his admission to the hospital until the news of his death, and they prayed for mercy and forgiveness for him? It is hidden merit between him and God. If a person contemplates it, he will not live for any moment.

He will be under the soil, so he will plant good deeds and reconcile with himself and his people, especially if he holds a responsibility, because he will be asked about it on the day when neither wealth nor children will benefit, except those who come to God with a sound heart.

The late prince left behind a less divided society due to his ability to settle disputes within the political arena. He also sought to restore political stability to Kuwait, and the features of his rule were characterized by making efforts to resolve long-term political disputes.

Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad has gone, but his stances and memory remain in the hearts of all the people of Kuwait, and we can only extend our sincere condolences from the honorable Al-Sabah family in this regard and say nothing but what pleases the Lord: "We belong to God and to Him we shall return," and we are saddened by your loss.

yalmubarak@hotmail.com

## Two years jail in vote-buying case

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff  
 KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Court of Appeals sentenced a candidate of the 2023 parliamentary elections held on June 22, 2023 for the Fifth Constituency, two Kuwaiti men, one Kuwaiti woman, and a Pakistani expatriate to two-year imprisonment each after convicting them of buying citizens' votes in favor of the first defendant.

Based on investigations conducted by the General Department of Criminal Investigations, phone records, and bank documents, the first, second and third defendants had agreed to buy votes for

KD 500 each through the fourth and fifth defendants, who were working as mediators. The first and second defendants had transferred to the third, fourth and fifth defendants KD 30 thousand, which was part of the amount allocated for buying votes. The rest of the amount was agreed to be paid on the day after the announcement of the election results.

According to the security sources, the fourth defendant was in possession of more than 1,110 bullets (ammunition) for trafficking purposes without a license that allows him to do so.

## 'Harm caused to citizens homes, State projects'

## Minister refers two top officials to 'Nazaha' probe

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and Acting Minister of Public Works Jassem Al-Ostad referred to Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) two senior officials, one of who is an acting official, based on allegations leveled against them of hindering the floating of tenders related to power cables, as reported by the relevant fact finding committee formed by Al-Ostad, thereby intentionally causing harm to citizens' homes and state projects' electricity requirements.

According to a press statement issued yesterday by the Ministry of Electricity and Water, these officials had intentionally caused delay in connecting electricity to several homes, obligated the Kuwaiti owners of those houses to buy cables from the market at their own expense, and forced them to sign pledges to not ask the ministry for any compensation in return, which negatively affected the reputation

of the ministry.

The fact-finding committee concluded that the accused officials committed corruption and caused damage to the public funds through the several lawsuits filed by individuals against the Ministry of Electricity and Water.

The fact-finding committee concluded that the actions of the two officials were deemed "inappropriate" in supplying electricity to citizens' residences and state projects, which raises concerns about corruption, exploitation, and financial detriment to public funds through the numerous cases filed by affected individuals against the Ministry of Electricity and Water.

Meanwhile, Al-Ostad stressed that work is underway to obtain the approvals to use seven temporary water filling points to provide logistic services to citizens while they are constructing their houses, especially for supplying them with the necessary quantities of water, adding that this is expected to be implemented by the ministry's contractors within approximately 45 days from the date of obtaining all official approvals.

According to a memorandum issued by Al-Ostad in response to parliamentary inquiries from MP Mubarak Al-Tasha, the ministry has established two water supply points, one in Jahra and the other in Abdali, where tanker owners can load water for use in construction projects at Al-Mutlaa Residential City.

Al-Ostad highlighted that the comprehensive water supply project for Abdali is scheduled for completion by 2027, adding that the ministry is implementing temporary solutions to supply drinking water to Abdali until the main project is finalized.

He revealed that a tender for the construction of three ground fresh water tanks with a capacity of 115 million imperial gallons in the residential city of Al-Mutlaa, has been awarded to a contracting company. The other tender for the establishment of nine fresh water towers has also been awarded to a company.

Al-Ostad revealed that work is underway on the procedures for signing the contracts, adding that the duration for the implementation of the two project contracts is three years.

## Pockets suffer in price hike

Blatant violation of 'stabilize prices' decision

## Other Voices

## A land without a people for ... a people without a land

By Ahmad alsarraf

I have heard this phrase many times since I became aware of the Palestinian issue, more than 65 years ago, and based on it, I wrote the following tweet, in two languages:

"For 75 years, the Zionists have been telling the world that they needed a homeland, and that they chose Palestine, because it is a land without a people, and they are a people without a land! Can someone explain to me who these twenty thousand killed in Gaza were and why were they killed?"

Some people objected to the authenticity of the tweet, and a friend attacked it, so I decided to research its background, and how it developed into a political slogan that was endorsed by Western institutions and universities, and some people became aware of an indisputable fact.

The phrase is attributed to the English priest Alexander Keith, who in 1839 visited Ottoman Palestine, and wrote in 1843 that the Jews are lost in the world, and have no place. They are a people without a state, and he found for them a state without a people. The president of the "London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews" also wrote a letter in July 1853 to the British Prime Minister, Aberdeen, telling him that "Greater Syria" was a state without a nation in need of "a nation without a state".

This all, I call it nonsense.

In 1875, Lord Shaftesbury told the annual general meeting of the Palestine Exploration Fund: "We have here a land full of fertility and rich in history, but almost without inhabitants, and a people without a country!"

The famous English missionary William Eugene Blackstone played a role in confirming this sentence, and a greater role in denying its reality. He made a trip to the Holy Land in 1881, and became enthusiastic about the idea of settlement, mostly because of the astonishment and sorrow that overwhelmed his generation at the great massacres to which the Russian Jews were exposed by the hand of their government.

However, shortly after his return from his trip to Palestine, he wrote, in

the context of his concern for the fate of the Jews of Russia: "And now, on this very day, we stand face to face with the terrible dilemma, which is that these millions (the Jews) cannot remain where they are. And yet they have nowhere else to go!"

Israel Zangwill, the well-known Zionist, also repeated the saying of a homeland without a people, but he later became anti-Zionist, and his views changed, after a few years, and his use of the phrase became different, after he "fully realized the Arab danger," as he said in front of an audience in New York: "The Palestine already has its own population. The population density in Jerusalem is twice that of the United States," which leaves the Zionists with the choice of driving the cart: either the Arabs leave or deal with "a large number of them." Thus, he transferred his support for the idea of establishing a national homeland for the Jews to become Uganda, as others suggested to Argentina.

After Zangwill broke away from the Zionist movement in 1905, he said that he was naive in his views, and that Palestine had a dense Arab population. He attacked those who insisted on repeating that Palestine was "empty and deserted."

According to historian Zeev Jabotinsky, Zangwill said in 1916: "If you want to give a country to a people who have no country, it is absolute foolishness to allow it to be a country for two peoples. This can only cause trouble. The Jews will suffer, as will their neighbors, and we will have to choose between finding a different place for either the Jews or their neighbors. In Palestine at that time, there was a population of no less than 600,000 Arabs."

In 1914, Chaim Weizmann, head of the World Zionist Congress and the first president of the State of Israel, said that it was important to reach an understanding with the "owners of the country," and try to put the jewel in the ring, unite the two peoples, and bring them into "practical" marriage, and the "Ottoman Turks" must be convinced.

It is a beneficial marriage, not only for the Jews, but for them as well. This is evidence that the phrase was not a "Zionist slogan" in the beginning, in addition to its extensive use by Jews who were enthusiastic about the idea.

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## KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Kuwaiti Society for Consumer Protection Chairperson Khaled Al-Subaie said the local markets witnessed an increase in the price of frozen chicken from KD 8,900 to KD15,900 fiks per carton, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to Al-Subaie, the price of 400 grams of a type of tea increased from KD1.215 to KD2.565 while the weight was reduced to 350 grams, and the price of washing powder increased by approximately 20 percent.

He pointed out this is a violation of the decisions issued by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to stabilize prices, and the laws prohibiting unjustified or artificial price hikes.

He clarified that the justified price increase usually ranges from five to 10 percent; provided there is a change in the nature of the product like weight increase, not weight reduction.

He warned that the artificial price hikes lead to the increase in the prices of other basic products; thereby, draining the pockets of consumers.

He appealed to the concerned authorities to intervene to prevent unjustified price hikes and to strictly apply the law on violators.

On the other hand, sources from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry revealed that the ministry sent a letter to the Consumer Cooperative Societies Union on not allowing suppliers to increase the prices of their products and to provide the ministry with data of suppliers that raised prices along with the pieces of evidence in order to take the necessary action against them.

Sources said Minister of Commerce and Industry Mohammad Al-Aiban had earlier instructed the Commercial Control and Consumer Protection Sector in the ministry to tighten control over local markets, as some traders are expected to take advantage of the decision to increase the financial privileges granted to retirees.

They affirmed that the sector is implementing a well-prepared plan to stabilize prices and prevent price hikes in local markets.

Sources indicated that the decision to freeze commodity prices was taken to protect consumers, by not allowing price hikes without the ministry's approval based on law number 10 of 1979, which gives the Minister of Commerce and Industry the power to take such action, and that any increase in prices will be interpreted as an artificial increase and those proven to have committed violations will be referred to the Commercial Prosecution.

## 'Bedoun' woman turns out to be Egyptian after death

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: A woman who was married to a Kuwaiti citizen, and whose official documents showed she is a bedoun, turned out to be an Egyptian. This was revealed after her death. She had previously left the country in 2000, and did not enter again according to official records, reports Al-Rai daily.

But she entered to country and became a 'bedoun,' remains a mystery and this is what the detectives are trying to find out, in cooperation with the Central Agency for Illegal Residents, reports Al-Rai daily.

The Al-Rai daily said, the security authorities received a report about the death of a bedoun woman in a hospital and married to a Kuwaiti citizen. According to routine procedures, the body was transferred to forensic medicine, and by taking her fingerprints, it appeared that she was of Egyptian nationality.

A security source said that a police station was informed of the incident, and a case was registered and referred to the General Administration of Criminal Investigation for research and investigation.

Upon investigation, it was found that the deceased was indeed of Egyptian nationality, and was residing in Kuwait under the sponsorship of one of her husband's relatives, and left the country in 2000.

The source added that it was stated in her marriage contract with the citizen and in her children's birth certificates that she was "bedoun", and therefore the Central Agency for Illegal Residents was contacted to find out more circumstances to clarify the truth, while the husband was summoned for investigation in connection with a case of forgery for providing false information.

The burial procedures were delayed pending investigation and the Egyptian embassy has been informed of the case.

## Hashish , pills seized

## Drug addict crashes bank

By Mansour Al-Sultan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Jahra support patrol officers have arrested a drug addict who collided with the entrance of a bank in Saad Al-Abdullah City Saturday morning.

Upon arresting the individual, narcotic substances and drug paraphernalia were discovered in his possession. A security source revealed that the Ministry of Interior's operations room received a report in the morning about a Japanese-made car colliding with a bank entrance in Saad Al-Abdullah City, and the driver fleeing on foot.

Upon arriving at the scene, security personnel found the car still in operation. After a thorough search of the area, the suspect was arrested.

A precautionary search of the individual revealed two pieces of hashish, approximately 50 narcotic pills, and drug paraphernalia.

The suspect was then taken to the Saad Al-Abdullah City Police Station to face charges related to property damage and traffic violations. Subsequently, the case will be referred to the Directorate-General for Drugs Control.

## diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

## 'Robust merchants, rulers ties prelude to freedom thoughts'

"THE history of Kuwait is adorned with the radiant pages that highlight the profound Kuwaiti sentiment accompanying the increasing influence of businessmen in shaping the national political orientation of the country. This era was characterized by a steadfast commitment to national identity, its preservation, and the protective vigilance it symbolized for the nation's entity," columnist Abdullah Bishara wrote for Al-Qabas daily.



Bishara

"This significant transformation is well-documented in Kuwait's history, particularly during Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah's rule. "During this period, a captivating chapter unfolded, underscoring the robust presence of businessmen in the country's political landscape. Sheikh Mubarak recognized the pivotal role of these merchants in Kuwait's economy, leveraging their active involvement in maritime activities such as pearl diving and long-distance voyages to Asia and Africa. This laid the groundwork for enduring commercial relationships between Kuwait and these regions, utilizing the Kuwaiti commercial naval fleet despite the inherent risks and adventures.

"The relationships between Sheikh Mubarak and prominent businessmen revealed a mutual understanding of the imperative of cooperation. Recognizing the vital role these merchants played in Kuwait's economic and societal life, Sheikh Mubarak, aspiring to affirm the country's regional role, sought to enlist the support of businessmen. This collaboration required a nuanced understanding between the two parties regarding their roles and the opportune moments for their participation.

"Historical records illustrate Sheikh Mubarak's realization of the substantial economic and livelihood role played by merchants in Kuwait. Faced with an unexpected halt in activities, he dispatched his son Salem Al-Mubarak to negotiate a swift resumption of their endeavors.

"Furthermore, Sheikh Mubarak personally engaged with leading trader Hilal Al-Mutairi to reach an understanding, ensuring the resumption of pearl diving, a crucial element in the lives of Kuwaitis, merchants, and seafarers alike.

"These events forged a model of robust cooperative and understanding relations between merchants and rulers, where the merchants' role encompassed both trade and politics, enriched by visions and positions. This collaboration evolved into a lasting partnership, extending from Sheikh Mubarak to subsequent generations, characterized by trust, mutual respect, and increased contributions of merchants to the Kuwaiti economy.

"Between 1915 and 1950, Kuwait experienced a period of transformation, marked by an influx of Arab figures, expanded education, and increased awareness of Arab developments.

"Merchants played a pivotal role in cultivating political awareness, contributing to the citizens' rights, fostering modern education, organizing the country's infrastructure, and advocating for Arab concerns on the global stage.

"The contributions of Kuwaiti businessmen to political development culminated in the drafting of a constitution in 1938, representing a pioneering step in granting citizens their political rights. Additionally, their efforts extended to promoting modern education through initiatives like the Mubarakiya School, participating in municipal governance, and maintaining a keen interest in the political, economic, and social concerns of the Arab peoples.

"The enduring legacy of Kuwaiti businessmen lies in their pioneering role, exerted with wisdom and fore-

sight, which left an indelible mark on Kuwaiti life. Their emphasis on political rights, coupled with civil liberties, has played a crucial role in maximizing national unity and preserving the nation's sovereignty.

"Today's representatives continue to enjoy the freedoms secured by the political pioneers from the merchant sector, enshrined in the Kuwaiti Constitution."

Also:

"The news published in Al-Rai, last Friday's issue, says, "Justice and Interior confirm that there is a need to amend the electoral system... and be patient, and in the context of the news, 'for further study... and there is no objection to studying the distribution of regions into districts through," columnist Dr Turki Al-Azmi wrote for Al-Rai daily.

"The phrase "for further study" stopped me and raised the question: Ok, when?"

"In any case, the issue of distributing regions into districts, if we are looking for justice and equality, is very simple. "You have the distribution of regions on the map of Kuwait and the number is known. That means you calculate it easily, including regions geographically adjacent to each other until the number reaches a distribution that is numerically close."

"The National Assembly will present the amendment law, and I hope that the government, the Assembly, and everyone concerned with Kuwait's constitutional affairs will ask: Why is the number of representatives and ministers the same since the implementation of the 1962 Constitution?"

"The phrase "further study" is what created the developmental maze that we are suffering from! So why do we rely on studies when they are presented in previous reports?"

"Is it possible to inventory the studies presented thirty years ago? If they were reviewed wisely, we would find many solutions to our outstanding issues.

"Developing education, developing the health system, the standard of living, the quality of roads, the housing issue, the demographic composition, and the restructuring of the state again require a decision that comes from proposals and recommendations presented by an elite group of loyal Kuwaitis.

"There is an old saying, "Say to those who are not sincere. "Don't get tired," since sincerity in work is the basis of the desired development and long-awaited reform. Therefore, we must look for the correct answer to the following:

"What studies did he provide us with? Are there studies that achieve a correction in the desired path?"

"What does a simple citizen want? What are our failures?; in order to draw strategies for the near future.

"Did politics interfere in what these studies aimed to achieve? For your information, most of our issues are technical, arithmetic, and national in purpose, so why are they politicized in the first place? Have we thought about forming an advisory council that includes good people from elite retirees to help us draw the road map?"

"Time is like a sword and the urgent need to make urgent decisions "away from emotion and politicization" is the gateway to getting out of the bottleneck, as they say.

"All the information is available at hand and a huge amount of studies have been presented, and we are surprised that the situation continues as it is.

"In conclusion, may God have mercy on His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, and may God grant him a spacious paradise, and grant the decision-makers good support and make us lovers and brothers in God and the nation so that Kuwait returns to the ranks of developed countries."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

## Fraud case hearing delayed

## Colonel jailed for slapping teen

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Misdemeanor Court ruled to imprison a colonel at the Ministry of Interior for two months with hard labor, for insulting, cursing and slapping a "teenage" citizen during the celebration of national holidays under the pretext of violating the law and throwing balloons, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The victim's defense was present, and he asked the police investigations to record the audio recording from inside the patrol, and it was proven through the recording that the security man insulted the victim.

The Misdemeanor Court said in its findings that the accused, despite his affiliation with the Interior Ministry, whose members were committed to enforcing the law, nevertheless became an implementer of the law of the jungle, whereby the strong assault the weak, and ignore the provisions of the law and

its texts.

**Fraud case hearing:** In a new case, the Criminal Court postponed the trial of Brigadier General Adel Al-Hashash and another defendant, an Egyptian expatriate, to January 21, in the public funds fraud case through a contract to supply meals to the police, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Al-Hashash appeared from his prison cell and denied the charges against him, stressing that he held the position of director of public relations and had several departments under his supervision, and that he knew nothing about this charge.

The Court of Cassation had earlier sentenced Al-Hashash to life imprisonment for embezzling public funds in the so-called 'Interior Ministry Hospitality' case.

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# Kuwait's KFAED granted \$88.1 mln for afflicted people globally in 7 yrs

Fund dedicates substantial grants for refugee cancer patients

By Mohammad Al-Mutairi

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA):** Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) has given multiple grants worth USD 88.1 million to refugees and the displaced throughout the world between 2016 and 2022.

KFAED, one of the State of Kuwait's main philanthropic body, dedicated substantial grants for cancer patients among the refugees and relocated, to provide diverse health care and improve living conditions for these distressed peoples in Syria, Bangladesh, the Kurdis-

tan Region of Iraq, and Yemen.

The fund's acting Director General, Waleed Al-Bahar, said in an interview with Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the fund's global humanitarian policy is primarily aimed at providing financial assistance for diverse sectors, namely infrastructures, health care, and education among others.

Elaborating, Al-Bahar said KFAED's policy also aimed at helping the refugees and people in similar difficult conditions; victims of conflicts and disturbances as well as natural catastrophes.

Touching on the policy's basic principles, Al-Bahar has affirmed that the strategy is broader, covering various aspects, such as giving a hand in efforts to restore peace in troubled areas and attaining sustainable economic and social development.



KFAED delegation in a visit to some projects in Kurdistan, Iraq.

KUNA photo

## Undersecretary of Ministry of Interior retires

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25:** Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Lieutenant General Anwar Al-Barjas was for retirement as he has reached the legal retirement age and his last day at work is on Monday, reports Al-Qabas daily.

In a statement to the daily, Al-

Barjas congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on assuming the reins of power, praying that Allah will grant him success and guide his steps to complete the path of exaltation, achievement and giving.

He asserted: "I will serve my

country anywhere and from any position. We are soldiers for Kuwait, which has given us a lot and all of us must return the favor. This is life, you have a beginning and you have an end. We have done our work perfectly without any failure."

Furthermore, Al-Bahar has affirmed that the fund plays an effective role in pushing economic and social progress forward in Arab and developing countries, providing financial and technical support. Ahead of preparing aid dispatches, the KFAED decision-makers examine areas of dire need for sending urgent assistance.

They, Al-Bahar has added as he shed further light on the work mechanisms, study the needs in such badly stricken regions. Some of such tasks are done in coordination with relevant UN agencies and other partners.

Once the relief supplies have been delivered, the leading personnel ensure that they have reached the targeted segment and have proven effective in alleviating the hardships.

In Lebanon, KFAED gave USD one million to the Children's Cancer Center of Lebanon, which treats Syrian refugee patients, in 2016. The same year, it provided USD nine million for the King Hussein Foundation Cancer Foundation and Center (Jordan).

Some USD nine million, went for Lebanon's Council of Construction and Development to finance development projects, in 2016, and USD one million was given to King Hussein Cancer Foundation and Center in Jordan in 2017.

In 2017, KFAED earmarked USD one million to relieve the Rohingya refugees living in squalid conditions in Bangladesh, a sum of one million USD was dedicated for King Hussein center in 2018, another, standing at USD 10 million, was dedicated for improving living conditions for the Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, in 2018, Al-Bahar told KUNA.



Faithful leaving the Church, Kuwait City, after attending the Christmas Mass on Monday.

Photo by Sameer Shiqer

## Low-key Christmas celebration

Christian communities on Monday celebrated Christmas in a noticeably subdued atmosphere as the whole country continues to mourn the death of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, reports the Arab Times.

HH the late Amir passed away on Dec 16, 2023; hence, the State of Kuwait declared the 40-day mourning period that ends on Jan 25, 2024.

In view of this, the Christmas activi-

ties throughout the country have been low-key. Churches were crowded like in previous years, but the programs are not as grand and boisterous since the mourning period has been taken into consideration.

After the Church service, Christian families simply gathered in their homes for the traditional Christmas Eve dinner sans music, games and other festive programs. This is in addition to the cancellation of events in hotels and other venues.



KUNA photo

A photo from the medical camp for heart patients.

## 'One of most important medical camps'

## Yemen praises Kuwait's opening of medical camp in Mukalla city

**ADEN, Dec 25, (KUNA):** Yemen's Health Minister Qassem Bahaibah on Sunday expressed gratitude for Kuwait's support to the Yemeni people in all domains, especially the medical sector.

This came during Bahaibah's inauguration of a Kuwait-funded medical camp for heart patients in the city of Mukalla, in Hadramaut Governorate.

He thanked the Kuwaiti donors who helped open this camp under the supervision of the Kuwait-based the Rahma International Society as part of the 'Kuwait by your side' campaign.

He appreciated Rahma contributions for such camp, and thanked the Amir of Kuwait and his government for such ef-

forts.

Bahaibah pointed out that this medical camp is considered one of the most important medical camps, as it provide surgical services mainly for heart patients, alleviating financial burden from those families in crisis.

Vice President of the Yemen-based Al-tawassul for Human Development, which executed the project on behalf of Rahma Society, Imad Abdel-Rahim said that the camp aims to carry out 40 operations on patients needing stent placements.

The camp is also run by cardiac surgery specialists using modern medical techniques at the Pulse of Life Center in Mukalla, he said.

## City committee okays all items on agenda

## Council's panel approves proposal regarding 'settlement of disputes'

By Inass Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25:** During its meeting recently, presided over by Fahd Al Abduljader, the Municipal Council's Legal and Financial Affairs Committee approved the proposal submitted by a member of the Municipal Council Munira Al Amir concerning the establishment of a mechanism to settle the disputes between the citizens from one side, and the construction companies on the other one.

The committee referred to the executive branch the proposal on the ministerial decision aimed at amending the table No. 5 on the regulations and criteria concerning facilitating the movement of people with special needs inside and outside buildings in Kuwait based on the ministerial Decision No. 206/2009.

The committee referred the proposal to amend the ministerial decision regarding the list of fees for services provided by the municipality to coordinate with the relevant sectors for identifying the reasons behind the increase in the fees and clarifying the difference between the current amount and the suggested one.

The committee also referred to the general assembly of the Municipal Council the proposal to completely replace the current street vendors system.

In a relevant development, the Capital City Committee of the Municipal Council, during its recent meeting presided over by Fahad Al-Abduljader, approved all the items on its agenda. These include the final approvals for the reorganization of Qibla Blocks 4 and 7 in Kuwait City, regarding which the Municipal Council had issued a decision on July 7, 2022, the request of Ministry of Electricity and Water to allocate a main transfer station site in Doha to serve the Entertainment City project, the request of Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART) allocate a path of the rain drainage network line to serve the location of the main building of the Direct Investment Promotion Authority in Sharq Block No. 2, and

## 340 doctors admitted to Kuwait Board: KIMS

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25:** Postgraduate Studies Administrator at the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specializations (KIMS) Dr Abdullah Rajab has confirmed the admission of 340 doctors to the Kuwait Board within the first stage of all the programs -- 30 training and seven fellowship programs, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a statement to the daily, Rajab disclosed that the announcement of the second phase of vacant seats for Kuwaiti doctors at the Kuwait Board will be on Jan 7. He said this phase includes interviews for 11 training programs and five fellowship and diploma programs; affirming the availability of more than 100 seats.

He explained a Kuwaiti doctor, who was not accepted in the first stage, has the option to apply for another specialization in the second stage through the institute's website. He added the third phase will be opened for Kuwaiti female doctors, Bedouns and Gulf nationals; while the fourth and final phase will be for foreign doctors who will pay the corresponding fees.

He pointed out that based on the decision of the Board of Trustees, headed by Minister of Health Dr Ahmed Al-Awadhi, the number of seats in various training programs and fellowships was increased to accept the largest possible number of Kuwaiti doctors.

He indicated that the ministerial decision regulating admission to the Kuwaiti Board confirmed that priority in admission is for Kuwaiti doctors, and in the event that there are vacancies, the door is opened for doctors who are sons of Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis, Bedouns and Gulf nationals, in addition to expatriates in the last stage.

the proposal submitted by Chairman of the committee Fahd Al Abduljader to establish a pedestrian bridge in Salhiya area on Fahad Al Salem Street.



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KUNA photo

Kuwait's oil sector delegation during their visit to the Nghi Son Refinery in Vietnam.

### Technical, operational performance being checked

## KPI team visits Nghi Son Refinery in Vietnam

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA): A delegation from Kuwait's oil sector visited Vietnam on Sunday to follow up on the technical and operational performance of the Nghi Son Refinery and Petrochemical LLC (NSRP) project.

The delegation included Chairman of the Board of Directors of KBC Holdings (Europe) Mohammad Jassim, CEO of Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI) Shafi Al-Ajmi, and members of the Board of Directors and the company's executive management, KPI stated to KUNA.

This visit comes within the framework of joint cooperation between KPI and the state-owned PetroVietnam Company, added the statement, noting that it owns a 35.1 percent stake in the NSRP project.

The delegation was briefed on the refinery and petrochemical complex during their visit, praising the achievement of the first major periodic maintenance of the refinery and the development of its operational efficiency and stability, as it is currently operating with a high operational efficiency of about 117 percent.

During the delegations' meeting with local government officials in Thanh Hoa Province, they affirmed the continued cooperation and joint support for the Vietnam refinery project, which contributes to ensuring energy security in Vietnam.

The delegation also met with the Board of Directors and Executive Management of the state-owned PetroVietnam Company, where they stressed the necessity of joint cooperation, support, as well as discussing the proposed solutions and the financial future of Nghi Son Refinery.

### KU Council to meet on Thursday

## Electronic voting soon for co-ops board of directors

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The electronic voting for the boards of directors of cooperative societies whose legal mandate has expired will be launched soon, reports Al-Anba daily quoting a reliable source from the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The source attributed this development to the tireless efforts of the Department of Membership Affairs and the Announcement of Unions and Cooperative Societies in the Cooperative Sector in the ministry. The source confirmed that the cooperative, administrative, development, planning and computer sectors in the ministry are working in full swing to

implement the electronic voting system next year. They stressed the importance of this system as it completely eliminates the chance to impersonate another person, provide incorrect data or multiple ballots for the same voter.

He added this modern mechanism includes fixed screens similar to tablets that will be distributed within the polling stations through which the voter can choose only one candidate from among the names and pictures of the candidates that will appear on the screen; pointing out that once the choice is made, another icon will appear for the voter to confirm

his choice, and immediately clicking it ends the voting process without an option to edit or change the choice.

**KU Council set to meet:** The Kuwait University Council will meet on Thursday to discuss a number of important academic files, reports Al-Qabas daily quoting sources.

Sources clarified the meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, but it was postponed until Thursday to ensure the readiness of files needed for the discussion.

### Your Highness ...

#### Continued from Page 1

In this regard, there are armies that serve this abhorrent purpose, and harm Kuwait and its people, while lacking unity and harmony.

Your Highness, throughout the past three decades and even more, there has been parliamentary tyranny. Whenever the government proposes a project, the MPs meet it with a lot of objections. It could be because they did not get a share of it, like what happened in the North and Dow fields, the Northern Economic Zone, and the Silk City, or like what happened in 2013 when the Gulf states sought to help Egypt.

This is because, at that time there was a majority in the National Assembly that served certain foreign agendas. Some of them suggested that Amir not be allowed to donate more than five million dollars. However, the Constitutional Court ruled to invalidate the parliament, and this project, which restricted the powers of the Amir, was dropped. Indeed, this proposal was the coup itself.

We all know that the abuses committed against the Constitution under the pretext of democracy cannot be borne by any state or society that seeks stability.

Therefore, what the Kuwaitis seek today is to develop the approach, either within a modern constitution, or by correcting the defect in administration, and returning Kuwait to the approach that maintains its stability.

The first is a radical abandonment of the laws, and working to separate powers while establishing proper cooperation, and not with the tyranny of one at the expense of another.

Your Highness, Kuwait is waiting for a lot to happen during your new era, especially since they heard in your royal speech during the oath-taking session many titles that carry hope for a more stable, united, developed, and prosperous future.

### Kuwait and

#### Continued from Page 1

side's insistence on the continued operation of embassy shelters in Kuwait.

Kuwait rejected this request on legal grounds, preventing the anticipated decision to lift the ban. Al-Shammari disclosed that the Philippine side intends to extend an official invitation to Kuwait for bilateral discussions in Manila shortly.

Al-Shammari warned that if the government in the Philippines insists on the continued operation of embassy shelters, negotiations may fail, returning both nations to square one.

Kuwait reiterated its stance on the closure of these shelters as a prerequisite for considering the lifting of the ban on Filipino workers. The recent moratorium decisions issued by both countries remain in effect.

During the negotiations, the Philippine side expressed reservations about the operations of expatriate worker shelters under Public Authority for Manpower citing issues such as prolonged worker absences, the absence of a clear mechanism for restoring workers' financial rights, and concerns regarding end-of-service benefits and late monthly salaries.

Al-Shammari emphasized the importance of signing more memoran-

dums of understanding with labor-exporting countries, including Nepal, Indonesia, Ethiopia, to diversify options and reduce recruitment costs, especially with the approaching holy month of Ramadan.

The ban on Filipino workers was imposed in May following reported violations, including housing workers in private accommodations, violating residency laws, and pressuring domestic worker recruitment offices to intervene in contract completion procedures. The ban also addressed improper treatment of citizens during embassy reviews and inappropriate actions during the renewal of contracts.

### Kuwait suspends

#### Continued from Page 1

conducted 284 transactions within nine months, encompassing 1.65 thousand real estate transactions, 136 transactions for exchange companies, and 1.05 thousand jewelry transactions.

In June, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Commerce and Industry initiated a campaign using electronic platforms, particularly the Sahl application and e-mail, to raise awareness among local companies and commercial institutions about financial crimes. The campaign included sending awareness messages to business practitioners to make them cognizant of the dangers of money laundering and terrorist financing, emphasizing the need to secure financial transactions and protect institutions from such risks.

The inspection tasks carried out during the nine-month period were focused on ensuring compliance with the provisions of Law No. 106 of 2013 regarding combating money laundering and terrorist financing, Ministerial Resolution No. 37 of 2013, and Ministerial Resolution No. 431 of 2016. These tasks involved examining corporate documents, updating customer information, and inspecting transaction data and procedures.

In late November, the Ministry of Commerce signed an agreement and memorandum of understanding with the Communications and Information Technology Commission to enhance the supervisory role of the Ministry in dealing with electronic risks related to combating money laundering, terrorist financing, and consumer protection. This agreement outlines the services provided by the Communications Authority related to blocking or unblocking social media accounts, websites, and electronic applications, specifying the responsibilities of all parties involved.

### Expat remittances

#### Continued from Page 1

The deficit in the secondary income account in Kuwait's balance of payments for the third quarter of 2023 decreased by approximately 30.56% to 891.6 million dinars compared to the corresponding quarter of 2022. The overall current account surplus also decreased by about 11.28% to 4.72 billion dinars during the third quarter of 2023, compared to 5.32 billion dinars in the corresponding quarter of the previous year.

In total, the Kuwaiti balance of payments deficit increased by 40.73%, reaching 464.4 million dinars compared to its level in the third quarter of 2022, which was approximately 330 million dinars.

For the entire year of 2022, remittances from expatriate workers in Kuwait declined by about 2.17% to 5.406 billion dinars, compared to the previous year's value of 5.526 billion dinars.

As of the end of the second quarter of 2023, the population of the State of Kuwait is estimated to be approximately 4.824 million people, with expatriates constituting about 70% of the country's demographic composition. Remittances play a crucial role as a source of household income for low- and middle-income countries, contributing to poverty reduction, improved nutrition outcomes, and higher school enrollment rates for children in disadvantaged families.

### Kuwait welcomes

#### Continued from Page 1

An agreement that contributes to achieving the aspirations of the Yemeni people in establishing security, stability and prosperity, the statement added.

Qatar also welcomed, Monday, a UN statement sent by the Secretary General's special envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg on the effort to reach a roadmap to support the Yemeni peace process.

The ministry said in a statement it hopes the roadmap would be signed soon, which will contribute to achieving a comprehensive political solution to the Yemeni crisis under the auspices of the UN, and sustainable peace that will achieve the aspirations of Yemeni people for security, development and prosperity. The ministry expressed Qatar's appreciation for the efforts of the UN, Saudi Arabia, and Oman to bring peace to Yemen.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on Monday applauded a statement issued by Grundberg, affirming the warring Yemeni parties' commitment to restoring full peace to the war-torn nation.

The OIC Secretariat General affirmed in a statement its support for Yemen and its people, the organization's keenness on encouraging the parties to engage in constructive dialogue for reaching a comprehensive political settlement -- under the UN aegis.

Grundberg declared on Saturday that the Yemeni parties reached a consensus mutually pledging adherence to a slew of conciliation measures such as muzzling the guns throughout the nation.

He also mentioned that the accord also calls for measures to improve the Yemenis' living conditions and prepare for serious re-launch of the political process.

Yemen, since 2014, had witnessed a bloody strife marked with partition of the nation into the south and north. The internal conflict triggered when the Houthis seized the capital Sanaa has put the nation on the verge of starvation.

### Kuwait registers

#### Continued from Page 1

The consumer price index (inflation), excluding food and beverages, recorded a hike of 3.38 percent in November on an annual basis, it added.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is a measurement that examines prices on a monthly or annual basis. Generally, it constitutes a basic index for growth and economic recession, where decision-makers examine to take decisions at the economic level and work out financial and monetary policies.

# Withdrawal of health guides a matter of concern: expert

'Lack of training programs led to resignations'

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

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Director of Health Enhancement Department at the Ministry of Health Dr Abeer Al-Bahwa has expressed her concern about the withdrawal of health guides, as the total number currently stands at about 85 health guides.**

In a press statement, she revealed that the lack of training programs and lack of promoting their job titles contributed greatly to the resignation of a large number of them.

Dr. Al-Bahwa stressed the need to raise allowances and incentives to attract and encourage high school graduate students to study the profession of health guide at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, because of its great importance in improving the quality of healthy living in the country.

She affirmed the importance of the role of health guides to improve the health of the individuals and society, reduce the incidence of diseases, disabilities and deaths, and improve the quality of life for the individuals and society.

Dr. Al-Bahwa highlighted the necessity of activating the role of health education and raising the level of the profession and promoting it, as it is one of the professions that needs strengthening and support.

She explained that the job of health guides is not limited to providing health education but also include helping individuals change their lifestyle to make it healthier, and adopt healthy attitudes.

A health guide is a specialist with a degree in health education for planning education programs, monitoring and evaluation, preparing awareness materials, implementing health education programs and providing consultations, through his/her multiple skills that range from knowledge, experience, awareness, ability to communicate, and patience.

### KCCI takes part in 63rd GCC CC meet

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry participated in the 63rd meeting of the Board of Directors of the Federation of Gulf Cooperation Council Chambers, which was held on Dec 21 in the Qatari capital (Doha), reports Al-Anba daily.

The agenda of the 63rd meeting of the Council of the Federation of Gulf Chambers included discussing the issue of establishing a Gulf clearing company.

The issue of local content and the Gulf certificate of origin was also discussed and reviewed, in addition to the draft work program of the General Secretariat of the Union for the year 2024, and the draft estimated budget for the year 2024 and study the possibility of establishing a Gulf logistics company, and the members were briefed on the draft agenda for the upcoming 64th meeting of the Council.

The Board of Directors of the Federation of Gulf Chambers has the right to review the outcomes of the consultative meeting with the Ministers of Trade and Industry in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, amid stressing the importance of activating the role of the Gulf private Sector side by side with the government sector to achieve more development achievements, follow the Gulf process, and enhance cooperation and joint integration.

## Indo-Kuwait ties: Nurturing legacy of friendship in wake of visionary leader's demise

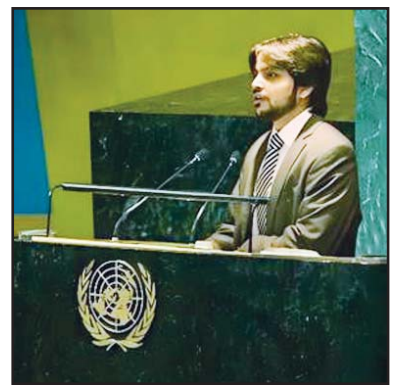
By Dr M. A. Mufazzal  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi, India

Having recently passed away, His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, not only left a leadership void in Kuwait but also clouded the long-standing friendship between India and Kuwait. In light of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Special Envoy to Kuwait, Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri's visit, it is imperative to consider the future of Indo-Kuwait relations following this momentous occasion.

The Indian government and people have expressed their condolences at the passing of Sheikh Nawaf, a visionary leader who was instrumental in guiding Kuwait toward progress and prosperity. Declaring a nationwide state of mourning on December 17th reflects India's deep regard and unity with Kuwait during this time of grief.

India and Kuwait established cordial and close ties under the late Amir's leadership. His steadfast dedication to directing and enhancing bilateral interactions was essential in creating a relationship that went beyond simple diplomatic relations. The large Indian expat community in Kuwait, which flourished under Sheikh Nawaf's kind guidance, is currently dealing with the loss of a leader who transcended national boundaries in his quest for the well-being of residents.

It is a turning point in the history of relations between India and Kuwait as Minister Hardeep Singh Puri delivers personal sympathy letters from the President and Prime Minister of India to His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the new Amir. The difficult



Dr M. A. Mufazzal

part is keeping up the spirit of mutual respect and cooperation that defined Sheikh Nawaf's time.

Strong people-to-people links underpin Indo-Kuwaiti relations, which go beyond diplomatic channels. This is especially true given the sizeable Indian expatriate community's major socioeconomic contributions to Kuwait. A spirit of gratitude and belonging has been cultivated in this community by Sheikh Nawaf's caring care.

At this pivotal juncture, it seems a high time for both nations to reaffirm their commitment to shared values of progress, prosperity, and mutual benefit. India, with its robust diplomatic outreach, can play a crucial role in consolidating the gains made under Sheikh Nawaf's leadership. This could involve strengthening economic ties, promoting cultural exchanges, and fostering collaborative efforts in areas of mutual interest such as energy and infrastructure.

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### 2024 promises lot more

## '2023 was one of best years for awarding project deals in MENA'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The MEED magazine reported that 2023 was one of the best years for awarding project contracts in the Middle East and North Africa region in a decade, 2024 promises a lot for project sector activity, while it reported that the projects in the process of submitting bids and prepared for awarding in Kuwait are worth \$19.8 billion, reports Al-Rai daily.

In December so far, the value of contracts awarded this year exceeded \$230 billion, which was \$10 billion less than the \$240 billion value of regional contracts awarded in 2014 -- the best year yet, and contracts awarded in 2023 are on their way to surpass that record year, with projects worth \$36 billion in bid evaluation and expected to be awarded by the end of the year.

However, the magazine believes that 2024 has the potential to be a better year for project markets in the MENA region than 2023, with projects worth more than \$270 billion in the bidding stage or delayed, and scheduled to be awarded during the remainder of 2023 or sometime during 2024.

#### Value

In addition to this large value of projects at the bidding stage, the value of projects at the design stage in the region is estimated at approximately 250 billion.

The magazine pointed out that among the projects in the bidding stage scheduled to be awarded in 2024, there are 6 projects worth \$4 billion or more, 3 billion in the UAE and one each in Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

It indicated that it includes 3 oil and gas projects, two power generation stations and a transportation project, and the largest project contract among them is a project worth 7 billion to develop surface facilities as part of the (UZ1000) expansion program by (ADNOC Offshore), the marine arm of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, in the Upper Zakum field.

As for Kuwait, the magazine reported that the Ministry of Electricity and Water floated a tender for the second and third phases of the Al-Zour North Independent Water and Electricity Station project, worth \$4 billion, through the Partnership Projects Authority where 5 contractors have submitted pre-qualification documents for this project.

In general, the markets of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries account for \$216 billion, or 80 percent of the total projects offered for tender, amounting to \$270 billion, and Saudi Arabia and the UAE alone represent \$159 billion worth of projects, or 59 percent of the total.

#### Bidding

The magazine showed that the top 10 clients in the region in terms of the value of current projects at the bidding stage dominated \$103 billion, or 38 percent of the total value of projects put up for bid, amounting to \$270 billion.

MEED pointed out that the Public-Private Partnership Projects Authority and Kuwait Oil Company are among the top 10 clients in the region in terms of the value of current projects in the bidding stage, as they are considered a group of heavyweight project owners.

The magazine explained that the value of the projects under submission of bids for the benefit of the Partnership Projects Authority amounts to 6 billion, and the value of the Kuwait Oil projects is 4.9 billion.

The magazine stated that among the group of regional entrepreneurs there are 5 Saudi entities, including "Aramco, NEOM, the Saudi Energy Procurement Company, Al-Duwayhin Nuclear Energy Company, and the Saudi Electricity Company."

As for the largest client for projects outside Saudi Arabia, it is the Emirati company ADNOC, which comes in second place after "Aramco" in terms of the value of projects at the bidding stage.

## World News Roundup

## Policy

## Global challenges mount

## US Congress grapples with Ukraine aid, border policy

WASHINGTON, Dec 25, (AP): As the Senate wrapped up its work for the year, Sen. Michael Bennet took to the floor of the nearly empty chamber and made a late-night plea for Congress to redouble support for Ukraine: "Understand the stakes at this moment."

It was the third time in recent months the Colorado Democrat has kept the Senate working late by holding up unrelated legislation in a bid to cajole lawmakers to approve tens of billions of dollars in weaponry and economic aid for Ukraine. During a nearly hour-long, emotional speech, he called on senators to see the nearly 2-year-old conflict as a defining clash of authoritarianism against democracy and implored them to consider what it means for Ukrainians to fight "on that freezing front line and not know whether we're going to come through with the ammunition."



Bennet

Yet Congress broke for the holidays and is not expected to return for two weeks while continued aid for Ukraine has nearly been exhausted. The Biden administration is planning to send one more aid package before the new year, but says it will be the last unless Congress approves more money.

With support slipping in Congress even as conflicts and unrest rattle global security, the United States is once again struggling to assert its role in the world. Under the influence of Donald Trump, the former president who is now the Republican Party front-runner, GOP lawmakers have increasingly taken a skeptical stance toward U.S. involvement abroad, particularly when it comes to Ukraine.

## Robust support

Leaders of traditional allies Britain and France have implored Western nations to continue their robust support, but Russia's President Vladimir Putin is emboldened and building up resources for a fresh effort as the war heads towards its third year.

Bolstering Ukraine's defense used to be celebrated in the Capitol as one of a few remaining bipartisan causes. But now the fate of roughly \$61 billion in funding is tied to delicate policy negotiations on Capitol Hill over border and immigration changes. And in the last year, lawmakers have had to mount painstaking, round-the-clock efforts to pass even legislation that maintains basic functions of the U.S. government.

Still, congressional leaders are trying to rally members to address global challenges they say are among the most difficult in decades: the largest land invasion of a European nation since World War II, a war between Israel and Hamas, unrest and economic calamity driving historic levels of migration and China asserting itself as a superpower.

In the Senate, both Democratic and Republican leaders have cast the \$110 billion aid package, which is attempting to address all those issues, as a potential turning point for democracy around the world. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer told reporters last week that "history will look back if we don't support our ally in Ukraine."

In a year-end speech, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said: "From South Texas to Southeast Asia and from the Black Sea to the Red Sea, it is an historically challenging and consequential time to protect America's interests, our allies and our own people."

The Republican leader, a key supporter of Ukraine aid, has tried for months to build support in his party for Ukraine. But after a \$6 billion military and civilian aid package for Ukraine collapsed in October, McConnell began telling top White House officials that any funding would need to be paired with border policy changes.

The White House deliberately staved out of the negotiations until senior officials felt the time was right to do so. But senior Republicans involved in the border talks believe the administration stepped in too late, ultimately delaying the prospects of additional Ukraine aid getting approved until the new year.

Senate negotiators have had to navigate both the explosive politics of border policy as well as one of the most complex areas of American law.

"This is a tightrope, but we are still on it," said Sen. Chris Murphy, the lead Democratic negotiator.

The White House's strategy of including Republican priorities such as Israel aid and border security in the package has also raised several thorny issues for Democrats.

Progressive lawmakers, critical of Israel's campaign into Gaza that has killed thousands of civilians, have called for humanitarian conditions to be placed on the money for Israel. And Latino Democrats in both the Senate and House have also been critical of restrictions on asylum claims.

## Deep uncertainty

Any package also faces deep uncertainty in the House, where Republican Speaker Mike Johnson holds tenuous control of the closely divided chamber. Before becoming speaker in October, Johnson had repeatedly voted against aid for Ukraine, but he has surprised many by offering support for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and saying he wants to find a way to approve the aid.

But Trump's allies in the House have repeatedly tried to stop the U.S. from sending more aid to Ukraine.

As the border and immigration talks drag forward in the Senate, Johnson has pushed for sweeping measures. On social media, he has called for "transformational change to secure the border," and pointed to a headline bill that passed the House on a party-line vote.

As senators left Washington, they still sought to assure Ukrainians that American help was on its way. White House staff and Senate negotiations planned to work on drafting border legislation for the next two weeks in hopes that it would be ready for action when Congress returns.

Schumer told The Associated Press he was "hopeful," but "I wouldn't go so far as to say confident yet." He sought to put the pressure on Republicans, saying they needed to be ready to compromise.

Yet Sen. Roger Wicker, a Mississippi Republican who is a Ukraine supporter, expressed confidence that Congress would act. He alluded to the words of former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, another European leader who eventually elicited robust support from the U.S. to repel an invasion.

"Americans will always do the right thing," Wicker said. "After they've exhausted every other alternative."



Britain's King Charles III poses for a photo, during the recording of his Christmas message at Buckingham Palace, in London, Saturday, Dec. 7, 2023. (AP)

## King Charles III's second-holiday address highlights environmental commitment

King Charles III will give his second Christmas message from Buckingham Palace in front of a live tree decorated with sustainable ornaments.

The message to be broadcast at 3 p.m. on Monday will be the king's second holiday address since he ascended the throne but the first since his coronation in May.

The natural decorations adorning the tree were made from wood, dried oranges, brown glass, pine cones and paper. The tree will later be replanted, the palace says.

Charles has promoted environmental causes,

such as protecting wildlife and combating climate change long before it became popular, throughout much of his life. He spoke at the beginning of the month at the U.N.'s COP28 climate summit in Dubai.

Last year, in his first Christmas message as monarch, Charles evoked memories of his late mother, Queen Elizabeth II, and paid tribute to the "selfless dedication" of Britain's public service workers.

Many of those workers spent much of the past year in a fight with the government over pay, creating disruptions in transportation, education and add-

ing to already long wait times at hospitals as doctors, nurses and ambulance workers walked off the job - some for several days at a time - throughout the year.

While Elizabeth delivered her address from a desk, Charles last year stood by a Christmas tree at the church on the grounds of Windsor Castle where his parents are buried.

This year, he will speak from a room in Buckingham Palace that leads to the balcony where members of the royal family assembled after his coronation ceremony. (AP)

## Politics

## Kennedy's independent bid gains traction

## Voters weigh options beyond Trump, Biden

PHOENIX, Dec 25, (AP): Some voted for Donald Trump, others for Joe Biden. A few had never wanted anything to do with politics before they heard Robert F. Kennedy Jr., on a podcast or YouTube video.

Lined up outside a Phoenix wedding hall tucked between a freeway, a railroad track and a U-Haul rental center, the hundreds of people who turned out Wednesday to hear Kennedy speak shared little in common ideologically. What united them was a deep-seated distrust - of the media, of corporations and especially of the government - and a belief that Kennedy is the only person in politics willing to tell them the truth.

"I like that he talks to us like adults," said Gilbert Limon, a 48-year-old pharmacist from Phoenix. "He tells you the majority of what you need to know. Whereas I feel like (other politicians) just give you bits and pieces to try to fit their agenda. I've had enough of that."

Voters are not enthusiastic about a Biden-Trump rematch, and alternatives like Kennedy or the No Labels third-party movement, which would typically be longshots, see an opening. Kennedy's appearance in a 2024 battleground state highlights how he could influence the upcoming election in tough-to-predict ways. Allies of both Trump and Biden have expressed concerns that Kennedy's independent bid could pull votes from their candidate in next year's expected general election rematch.

Candidates from outside the Republican and Democratic parties rarely make a splash, if they can make the ballot to begin with. But third-party candidates don't usually carry Kenne-

dy's famous last name or his existing network of supporters.

Kennedy made the stop in Phoenix as part of his laborious push to get access to the 2024 presidential ballot as an independent candidate, which he figures will require him to collect at least a million signatures across the country. Aides mingled in the crowd collecting filling up his petitions to qualify in Arizona.

Ballot access for independent and minor-party candidates is an expensive and complicated process, with each state setting its own rules for access. Campaigns usually hire people to collect signatures and often need a small army of lawyers to challenge ballot access rules and fight back against others trying to keep them off the ballot.

## Pledged

American Values 2024, a super PAC supporting Kennedy, has pledged to spend \$15 million to help him get on the ballot in 10 states. Kennedy secured a victory in Utah, where the lieutenant governor pushed back the deadline to qualify from January to March after Kennedy filed suit.

Kennedy is a member of one of the Democratic Party's most famous families - his father was the attorney general for his uncle, President John F. Kennedy. But he's more recently built closer ties to the far right, where his conspiratorial and isolationist views are at home.

Enriqueta Porras, a 52-year-old physician from Phoenix, voted for Hillary Clinton in 2016 and Trump in 2020. She said she's torn about the third-party conundrum. She'd like to vote for someone she believes in like Kennedy but also wants to make sure Biden loses

and may vote strategically.

"I don't want to be that person," Porras said, "but I feel like there's a lot at stake and that may just have to happen."

One of the nation's most prominent anti-vaccine activists, Kennedy has long had a loyal following of people who reject the scientific consensus that vaccines are safe and effective, and they form a backbone of his presidential campaign.

An organization that Kennedy founded, Children's Health Defense, currently has a lawsuit pending against a number of news organizations, among them The Associated Press, accusing them of violating antitrust laws by taking action to identify misinformation, including about COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines.

Rigorous study and real-world evidence from hundreds of millions of administered shots prove that COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective. Deaths caused by vaccination are extremely rare and the risks associated with not getting vaccinated are far higher than the risks of vaccination.

Among the dozen Kennedy supporters who spoke to the AP in Phoenix, many share his view that corporations, especially drug companies, wield too much power.

Debra Sheetz first started paying attention to Kennedy when she was doing her own research on COVID-19 vaccinations.

"I've been listening to him for the last several years," she said. "I was so interested when he decided to make this big leap into politics because he has a lot of good ideas. He can really speak to what people really care about."

render to police who arrived at the scene, KTLA reported.

A garage at the home caught fire shortly before 5 p.m., KTLA reported.

At 9 p.m., police believed the suspect was still alive inside the home, Hermosa Beach Police Chief Paul LeBaron said during a news conference. (AP)

**3 men shot in New Orleans:** Three men were shot and wounded early Sunday in New Orleans' French Quarter.

The New Orleans Police Department said the gunfire rang out at 2:09 a.m. at an intersection in the busy neighborhood frequented by tourists, WVUE-TV reported. Two of the men were shot in the legs and a third was shot in the back.

Police said the shooting began after a fight between the men who were shot and a fourth man. It was not immediately clear whether police had identified or apprehended the shooter.

The group separated initially, but the fourth man followed the others and another argument began, police told the news outlet. The fourth man then took out a gun and fired at the other three men.

The shooting victims were transported to a hospital for treatment. Police did not disclose the ages of the men or the status of their condition. (AP)



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, (second from left), walks with Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Ky., (left, unseen) and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of N.Y., (right), at Capitol Hill on Thursday, Sept. 21, 2023, in Washington. Congress broke for the holidays, not expected to return for two weeks while continued aid for Ukraine has nearly been exhausted. (AP)

## America

**Gunfire erupts at Colorado mall:** A man was fatally shot and three people were hurt as gunfire rang out at a shopping center in Colorado on Christmas Eve, police said Sunday.

A fight broke out between two groups of people in the afternoon at the Citadel Mall in Colorado Springs and officers received a report of gunshots and responded, the Colorado Springs Police Department said in a series of posts on the social media platform X.

One adult male was dead at the scene with a gunshot wound, and two more, each of whom had been shot at least once, were taken to hospitals in serious condition, police said.

A female also was taken to a hospital with what were said to be minor injuries.

Police said they detained "multiple people" and were "working to determine their involvement."

The mall was cleared and closed, police said, and there was no known continuing threat to the community.

Colorado Springs is about 71 miles (114 kilometers) south of Denver. (AP)

**Police seek hit-and-run suspect:** Authorities in a California community are seeking a suspect in a hit-and-run collision that killed two young brothers on Friday.

Police responded to a reported traffic collision at an intersection in Antioch around 11:30 p.m., the Antioch Police Department said in a statement.

Officers arrived at the scene of an accident involving two vehicles, including one carrying two boys, aged 12 and 13.

The boys were transported by ambulance to area hospitals but died of their injuries, police said.

The driver of one of the vehicles fled on foot, police said.

"It appears speed and reckless driving were factors in this incident," the police statement said. (AP)

**Armed intruder sparks fire:** A fire started at a California home on Christmas Eve while an armed suspect remained inside the house hours later, authorities told local media.

The Los Angeles County Fire Depart-

ment responded to a 911 call on 11th Street in Hermosa Beach around 3:30 p.m. on Sunday, KTLA-TV reported.

A witness said neighbors heard an argument and saw a man with a gun who went into the two-story home and refused to sur-



Migrants depart from Tapachula, Mexico, Sunday, Dec. 24, 2023. The caravan started the trek north through Mexico just days before U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrives in Mexico City to discuss new agreements to control the surge of migrants seeking entry into the United States. (AP)

## Afghanistan

## 'Education over'

## Schoolgirls finishing sixth grade in tears

KABUL, Dec 25, (AP): Bahara Rustam, 13, took her last class at Bibi Razia School in Kabul on Dec. 11 knowing it was the end of her education. Under Taliban rule, she is unlikely to step foot in a classroom again.

In September 2021, a month after U.S. and NATO troops withdrew from Afghanistan following two decades of war, the Taliban announced that girls were barred from studying beyond sixth grade.

They extended this education ban to universities in December 2022. The Taliban have defied global condemnation and warnings that the restrictions will make it almost impossible for them to gain recognition as the country's legitimate rulers.

Last week, U.N. special envoy **Roza Otunbayeva** expressed concern that a generation of Afghan girls is falling behind with each day that passes.

Last week, an official in the Education Ministry said Afghan girls of all ages are allowed to study in religious schools known as madrasas, which have traditionally been boys-only. But Otunbayeva said it was unclear if there was a standardized curriculum that allowed modern subjects.

Bahara is holding onto her education and pores over textbooks at home. "Graduating (from sixth grade) means we are going to seventh grade," she said. "But all of our classmates cried and we were very disappointed."

There was no graduation ceremony for the girls at Bibi Razia School.

In another part of Kabul, 13-year old Setayesh Sahibzada wonders what the future holds for her. She is sad she can't go to school anymore to achieve her dreams.

"I can't stand on my own two feet," she said. "I wanted to be a teacher. But now I can't study, I can't go to school."

Analyst Muhammad Saleem Paigir warned that excluding women and girls from education will be disastrous for Afghanistan. "We understand that illiterate people can never be free and prosperous," he said.

The Taliban have barred women from many public spaces and most jobs, all but confining women to their homes.

## Verify

Earlier, the United Nations is seeking to verify reports that Afghanistan's Taliban rulers are allowing girls of all ages to study at Islamic religious schools that are traditionally boys-only, the U.N.'s top official in the country said Wednesday.

U.N. special envoy Roza Otunbayeva told the U.N. Security Council and elaborated to reporters afterward that the United Nations is receiving "more and more anecdotal evidence" that girls can study at the schools, known as madrasas.

"It is not entirely clear, however, what constitutes a madrasa, if there is a standardized curriculum that allows modern education subjects, and how many girls are able to study in madrasas," she said.

The Taliban have been globally condemned for banning girls and women from secondary school and university, and allowing girls to study only through the sixth grade.

Taliban education authorities "continue to tell us that they are working on creating conditions to allow girls to return to school. But time is passing while a generation of girls is falling behind," Otunbayeva said.

She said that the Taliban Ministry of Education is reportedly undertaking an assessment of madrasas as well as a review of public school curriculum and warned that the quality of education in Afghanistan "is a growing concern."

"The international community has rightly focused on the need to reverse the ban on girls' education," Otunbayeva said, "but the deteriorating quality of education and access to it is affecting boys as well."

"A failure to provide a sufficiently modern curriculum with equality of access for both girls and boys will make it impossible to implement the de facto authorities' own agenda of economic self-sufficiency," she added.

A Human Rights Watch report earlier this month said the Taliban's "abusive" educational policies are harming boys as well as girls.

The departure of qualified teachers, including women, regressive curriculum changes and an increase in corporal punishment have led to greater fear of going to school and falling attendance, the report said. Because the Taliban have dismissed all female teachers from boys' schools, many boys are taught by unqualified people or sit in classrooms with no teachers at all, it said.

## Repression

Turning to human rights, Otunbayeva said that the key features in Afghanistan "are a record of systemic discrimination against women and girls, repression of political dissent and free speech, a lack of meaningful representation of minorities, and ongoing instances of extrajudicial killing, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture and ill-treatment."

The lack of progress in resolving human rights issues is a key factor behind the current impasse between the Taliban and the international community, she said.

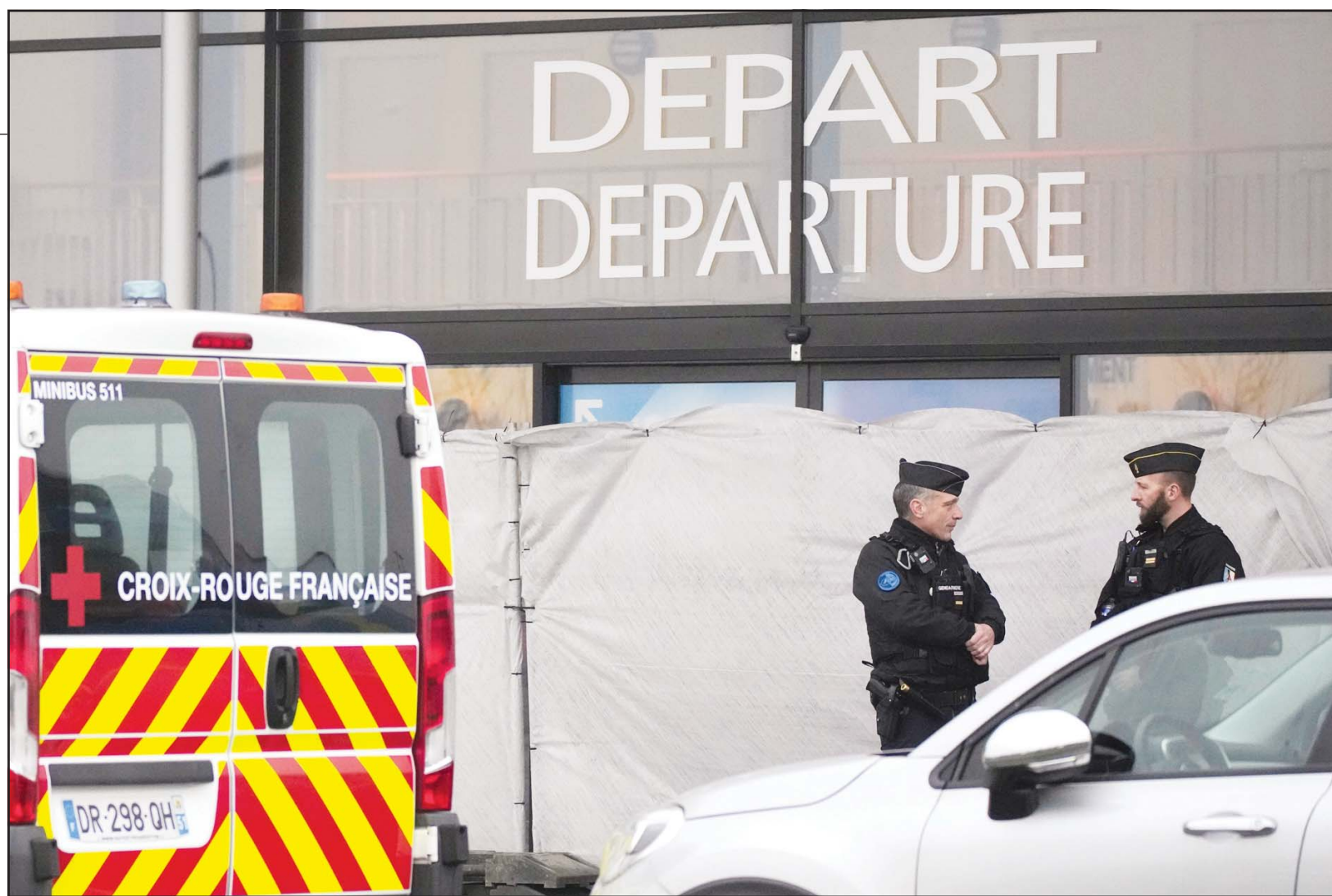
Otunbayeva said Afghanistan also faces a growing humanitarian crisis. With Afghans confronting winter weather, more people will depend on humanitarian aid, but with a drop in funding many of the needy will be more vulnerable than they were a year ago, she said.

U.N. humanitarian coordinator Ramesh Rajasingham said that "humanitarian needs continue to push record levels, with more than 29 million people requiring humanitarian assistance - one million more than in January, and a 340% increase in the last five years."

Between January and October, he said, the U.N. and its partners provided assistance to 26.5 million people, including 14.2 million women and girls. But as the year ends, the U.N. appeal is still seeking to close a \$1.8 billion funding gap.

Rajasingham said the humanitarian crisis has been exacerbated by three earthquakes in eight days in October in the western province of Herat that affected 275,000 people and damaged 40,000 homes.

A further problem is the return of more than 450,000 Afghans after Pakistan on Nov. 1 ordered "illegal foreigners" without documentation to leave, he said.



Gendarmes guard the closed entrance of the Vatry airport, Monday, Dec. 25, 2023 in Vatry, eastern France. A charter plane carrying 303 Indians to Nicaragua was authorized Sunday to leave a French airport where it has been grounded for four days for a human trafficking investigation. (AP)

## Plane stuck in France for human trafficking investigation leaving for India

A charter plane grounded in France for a human trafficking investigation is scheduled to leave Monday for India, after an exceptional holiday ordeal that left some 300 Indians en route for Central America blocked inside a rural French airport for four days. A lawyer for the airline says most of the passengers will be aboard.

French authorities are still investigating the aim of the original flight, en route from the United Arab Emirates to Nicaragua, and two passengers have been detained. Prosecutors wouldn't comment on what kind of human trafficking was alleged, or whether the passengers' ultimate destination could

have been the U.S., which has seen a surge in Indians crossing the Mexico-U.S. border this year.

French authorities worked through Christmas Eve and Christmas morning on formalities to allow passengers to leave the Vatry airfield in Champagne country, regional prosecutor Annick Browne told The Associated Press. The passengers include a 21-month-old child and 11 unaccompanied minors who were put under special administrative care.

The Legend Airlines A340 plane stopped Thursday for refueling in Vatry en route from Fujairah airport for Managua, Nicaragua, and was grounded by

police based on an anonymous tip that it could be carrying trafficking victims.

The airport was requisitioned by police for days, and then turned into a makeshift courtroom Sunday as judges, lawyers and interpreters filled the terminal to carry out emergency hearings to determine next steps.

The plane received permission Sunday to leave France and was expected to depart Monday, according to an official with the Marne regional administration. A passenger stairwell was in place Monday morning beneath the unmarked plane, which has been waiting on the tarmac since Thursday. (AP)



A man is searched at the entrance of Cologne Cathedral ahead of a Christmas Eve Mass, in Cologne, Germany, early Sunday, Dec. 24, 2023. Cologne police acting on indications of a possible attack searched Germany's landmark cathedral with sniffer dogs Saturday and said worshippers attending Christmas Eve Mass would undergo security screening before being allowed in. (AP)



Duntsova



Putin

## Europe

**Presidential hopeful blocked:** A Russian politician calling for peace in Ukraine hit a roadblock in her campaign Saturday, when Russia's Central Election Commission refused to accept her initial nomination by a group of supporters, citing errors in the documents submitted.

Former legislator **Yekaterina Duntsova** is calling for peace in Ukraine and hopes to challenge President **Vladimir Putin**, promoting her vision of a "humane" Russia "that's peaceful, friendly and ready to cooperate with everyone on the principle of respect."

"On Dec. 23, the Central Election Commission refused to register my initiative group," Duntsova wrote on the Telegram messaging app.

According to a Telegram channel close to Duntsova's campaign, the commission found 100 errors in her nomination papers, including mistakes in the spelling of names.

"You are a young woman, you still have everything ahead of you. Any minus can always be turned into a plus," the head of Russia's Central Election Commission, Ella Pamfilova, said at the commission meeting, addressing Duntsova.

Duntsova said that she would appeal the decision in Russia's Supreme Court, and appealed to the leaders of the Yabloko (Apple) political party to nominate her as a candidate, as she said she would be unable to convene a second meeting of supporters. (AP)

**Russian shelling kills 4:** Russian shelling in southern Ukraine's Kherson region killed four people Sunday, including an 87-year-old man and his 81-year-old wife who died after a strike on their apartment building.

The barrage injured nine other people, including a 15-year-old, sparked fires in homes and at a private medical facility, and set a local gas pipeline alight, the

## Serbia

## Opposition backers threaten to storm city hall

## Police fire tear gas at protesters

BELGRADE, Dec 25, (AP): Riot police in Serbia fired tear gas to prevent hundreds of opposition supporters from entering the capital's city council building on Sunday in protest of what election observers said were widespread vote irregularities during a general election last weekend.

Serbia's populist President Aleksandar Vucic said it was an attempt to overthrow the government orchestrated from abroad. He said more than 35 people were arrested and more detentions would follow.

"This was an attempted violent takeover of the state institutions of the Republic of Serbia," Vucic told the pro-government Pink TV.

The country's populist authorities have denied rigging the vote and described the election to fill parliament and local offices as fair. Vucic said Sunday that claims of irregularities in the vote were blatant "lies" promoted by the political opposition.

Vucic suggested the unrest was instigated from abroad but provided no evidence to support the claim. Addressing the nation on state media as the protest took place outside Belgrade city hall, he called the demonstrators "thugs" who would not succeed in destabilizing the state and said, "This is not a revolution."

"They will not succeed," Vucic said. "We are doing our best with our calm and mild reaction not to hurt demonstrators" who came to the event to protest peacefully.

Shielded riot police first barricaded themselves inside the city government building, firing tear gas and pepper spray as hundreds of opposition protesters broke windows at the entrance. Later, the police pushed the crowd from the downtown area and made several arrests.

The protesters shouted "Open the door" and "Thieves," as they pelted the

building with eggs and stones. Some chanted "Vucic is Putin," comparing the Serbian president with Russia's leader.

Nebojsa Zelenovic, one of the leaders of the opposition Serbia Against Violence alliance, said police officers swarmed all of downtown Belgrade, including the roofs of buildings. The area is home to the national parliament and the presidential headquarters along with the city government.

There were no immediate reports of injuries.

Results from the Dec. 17 election showed a victory for Vucic's Serbian Progressive Party in both the parliamentary and Belgrade city ballots. Serbia Against Violence, the party's main opponent, said it was robbed of a win, especially in Belgrade.

"We will continue with our fight," Zelenovic said.

## Irregularities

An observation mission made up of representatives of international rights watchdogs reported multiple irregularities, including cases of bought votes and the stuffing of ballot boxes.

The observers also noted unjust conditions for opposition candidates due to media bias, an abuse of public resources and the president's dominance during the campaign.

"Police are everywhere, also on the roofs. It is obvious that they do not want to recognize (the) election results. We will continue with our fight," Nebojsa Zelenovic, one of the leaders of the alliance, said.

The vote has caused political tensions in Serbia, a troubled Balkan nation that is seeking close ties with Russia but also European Union membership.

Serbia Against Violence said in a letter sent Thursday to EU institutions, officials and member nations that it

would not recognize the outcome of the elections.

The alliance called on the EU to do the same and to initiate an investigation.

Serbia's ruling populists insisted on Tuesday that weekend snap elections were free and fair despite criticism from international observers who noted multiple irregularities during the vote in the Balkan nation that is a candidate for European Union membership.

Protesters in Belgrade chanted "thieves, thieves" in front of the state election commission headquarters for the second day Tuesday. Some opposition politicians spent a night in the building after lodging formal complaints against what they say was "a robbery" by the ruling populists on Sunday's vote.

Demonstrators pelted the electoral headquarters with eggs and demanded election officials to address the crowd and explain what happened. They are demanding that the vote be annulled and that new elections be held. The ruling populists have rejected the calls.

Political tensions in Serbia soared over the parliamentary and local elections on Sunday. Several thousand people also rallied on Monday to protest alleged fraud at the ballot for municipal authorities in Belgrade, the capital.

Early results showed victory for President Aleksandar Vucic's Serbian Progressive Party in both ballots. But its main opponents, the Serbia Against Violence alliance, said they were robbed of a win in Belgrade.

Opposition leaders, who accuse Vucic of stifling democratic freedoms contrary to assertions in the government's EU bid, said they will not recognize the result in Belgrade.

"We are very happy how the election day went," Milos Vucevic, leader of the right-wing Serbian Progressive Party, said on pro-government TV Prva.

head of the regional military administration, Oleksandr Prokudin, said.

"There are no holidays for the enemy," Andrii Yermak, the head of the Ukrainian president's office, wrote on social media, commenting on the Kherson attack.

"They do not exist for us as long as the enemy kills our people and remains on our land."

The shelling across Kherson reached the center of the region's capital city of the same name. The assault took place as



The Zelenchuk family prays before a Christmas dinner in Kryvorivnia village, Ukraine, Sunday, Dec. 24, 2023. (AP)

Ukraine prepared to officially celebrate Christmas for the first time on Dec. 25, having previously marked the date on Jan. 7.

Some Orthodox Ukrainians observed Christmas on Dec. 25 last year in response to Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The Russian Orthodox Church observes the birth of Jesus on Jan. 7.

The cathedral in the Monastery of the Caves, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Kyiv, held its Christmas celebration on Jan. 7 of this year, but the service was held in the Ukrainian language for the first time in the 31 years of Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union. (AP)

**Fire breaks out on nuclear ship:** Russia's emergencies ministry said a fire broke out on a nuclear-powered container ship and icebreaker in the northern port of Murmansk but was quickly extinguished.

The ministry said in statements on Telegram that the fire occurred late Sunday in a cabin of the Sevморпут vessel and spread to about 30 square meters (300 square feet). The fire was put out about an hour after the initial report and there were no injuries, it added. The statement did not disclose what caused the fire or how close it was to the ship's reactor.

The 260-meter (830-foot) Sevморпут is the only nuclear cargo ship in service. (AP)

## USD stable

The exchange rate of the US Dollar against the Kuwaiti Dinar stabilized on Monday at KD 0.307, as well as the Euro at KD 0.338, compared to Sunday's rates, said the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK). The CBK said in its daily bulletin that the British Pound Sterling went down by 0.12 percent to reach KD 0.389, while the Swiss Franc and Japanese Yen stood at KD 0.359 and KD 0.002, respectively. (KUNA)

## Boursa Kuwait general index declines

The Boursa Kuwait concluded its trading session with the general index experiencing a decline of 31.77 points, settling at 6774.56 points, representing a 0.47 percent decrease. The trading activity involved 172.7 million shares in 8,262 transactions, with a total value of 43.7 million dinars (approximately 133.2 million dollars), reports Al-Seyassah daily. The main market index showed a marginal increase of 0.53 points, reaching 5521.60 points, a 0.01 percent rise. This uptick was attributed to the trading of 70.6 million shares in 3408 transactions, amounting to 11.6 million

dinars (around 35.3 million dollars). Conversely, the Premier Market Index witnessed a decrease of 44.27 points, closing at 7434.85 points, reflecting a 0.59 percent decline. This downturn was fueled by the trading of 102.17 million shares in 4854 deals, valued at 32 million dinars (approximately 97.6 million dollars). In tandem, the Main 50 index reported a decrease of 2.03 points, reaching 5406.39 points, representing a 0.04 percent dip. The trading activity involved 59.9 million shares in 2709 transactions, with a total value of 10.7 million dinars (around 32.6 million dollars).

## ALAFCO posts KD 66.1 mln in fiscal revenue

Kuwait's Aviation Lease & Finance Co (ALAFCO) said on Monday that its revenue for the fiscal year ending on September 30, 2023 amounted to KD 66.1 million (USD 215 million). The company's shareholder equity dropped by one percent as compared to last year, settling at KD 220.9 million (USD 719 million), its chairman Sami Al-Nusfi said in a statement, which showed total assets at KD 885.9 million (USD 2.8 billion).

ALAFCO managed to limit financial losses by KD 1.2 million (USD 3.9 million) for the current fiscal year despite the challenges facing the aviation industry, most which are triggered by the lingering effects of the COVID pandemic, added the statement. The statement went on to underline these results as satisfactory, citing recent lease agreements the company had sealed with a number of renowned airlines.

## Market Movements

25-12-2023

		Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts
PHILIPPINES	PSEI	+0.49	6,501.00	UAE	-0.44	4,018.14
SAUDI	Tadawul	+1.05	11,813.09	PAKISTAN	-1.98	61,608.15
EGYPT	EGX 30	+1.70	24,226.68	DFM		
JAPAN	Nikkei	+0.26	33,254.03	KSE 100		

# Business

## 'BBB' issue rating affirmed with a 'stable outlook'

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25:** Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" announced that Capital Intelligence Ratings has affirmed the 'BBB' issue rating assigned to Markaz's KWD 35mn 5-Year Senior Unsecured Bond. The Outlook on the rating remains Stable.

The issue rating is driven by Markaz's general creditworthiness. The latter is reflected by the company's resilient financial metrics in terms of both liquidity and debt, especially as at end-October 2023, given the significant lowering of bank borrowings and moderate leverage. Other supporting factors are the high level of unencumbered assets and the maintenance of substantial funding lines. The rating also reflects the company's well-established franchise and good reputation in the region, especially in Kuwait. Markaz's experienced management team is well equipped to continue to effectively navigate the company through the current subdued financial markets.

Markaz has a long-standing reputation as a leading fund manager in Kuwait. Despite some falls in stock values in line with the movement of the financial markets, its holdings of financial investments continued to account for more than half of the asset base as at end H1 2023. A large proportion of these investments were in Kuwait, with some concentration towards financial institutions and the real estate sector. That said, a large proportion of these financial investments relates to funds and portfolios that the company manages. The overall portfolio is also fairly liquid as reflected by the high proportion of level 1 and 2 fair value hierarchy investments. As these investments are classified as FVTPL, they will continue to expose the company to the potential

### Markaz's 5-Year Senior Unsecured Bond



financial market volatility.

Over recent years, the company has built up a book of investment properties and investments in various real estate sector projects in the GCC, the US and Europe. However, given subdued financial markets combined with better real estate market conditions, especially in the GCC region, the company started disposing of several properties in 2022 and H1 2023. Together with the deconsolidation of a real estate fund, investment properties as an asset class dropped to 12.9% of total assets as at end H1 2023, down from over a third at end-2022. Properties previously held as 'assets for sale' were subsequently largely sold. The other significant asset class relates to Markaz's investment in associates. This largely consisted of two funds (including the deconsolidated real estate fund) managed by the company.

Overall, Markaz's assets are well spread geographically. The company's assets are funded by equity and what remains a moderate level of borrowings. Expansion of the equity base has been largely through the retention of earnings. However, total equity contracted in recent periods as dividend payments and negative changes relating to the drop in ownerships of subsidiaries out-

paced earnings. The payout ratio was significantly higher in 2022 compared to a year earlier. Internal capital generation is likely to remain weak given the company's generous dividend payment policy.

Markaz has maintained its track record of debt servicing and repayments in both 2022 and H1 2023 through effective cash flow management and a good level of liquidity, as well as substantial unutilized but committed lines. Refinancing risk is considered moderately low given the company's good access to the capital markets; this is also supported by its well-established franchise, good market reputation, and the high level of unencumbered assets.

The company continues to exhibit good liquidity metrics given the large portfolio of quoted securities and managed funds, and a sound level of cash and deposits. Furthermore, the asset and liability mismatch position was largely positive. Markaz remained well in compliance with the Central Bank of Kuwait's (CBK) financial requirements relating to liquidity and leverage at end H1 2023.

Markaz's AUM business recovered further in 2022 and H1 2023. The largest proportion relates to funds and portfolios, followed by real estate investments. The bulk of AUM was in the GCC and over a third relates to the Kuwait Investment Authority. Fee and management income grew in 2022 but fell again in H1 2023, reflecting subdued financial market performance. Other recurring income relating to dividend and interest income remained fairly limited. Nonetheless, these recurring revenues continued to form over two thirds of operating income, supporting the fairly good quality of earnings.

The Stable Outlook indicates that the issue rating is likely to remain unchanged over the next 12 months. The outlook balances challenges relating to the effect of financial markets volatility against the Markaz's generally sound financial standing, solid liquidity, and well-established franchise and market reputation.

## Al Yaseen: We are honored to receive this award

## solutions by stc Cloud Managed Network Services empower SMEs to unlock their digital growth

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25:** solutions by stc, the specialized business arm of Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, announced its recent recognition of the "SME Digital Acceleration Carrier Partner" award from its strategic partner, Huawei. The award recognizes solutions by stc's exceptional achievements in the Cloud Managed Network Services landscape within Kuwait, underscoring its dedication to delivering groundbreaking digital solutions to Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as they navigate the intricate landscape of the modern digital world.

In today's rapidly changing business landscape, SMEs constitute the backbone of the economy, and their prosperity relies heavily on their ability to harness the potential of digital technologies. solutions by stc rose to this challenge by pioneering state-of-the-art Cloud Managed Network Services (Modar) that facilitate a seamless transition for SMEs across diverse industries. These services enhance operational efficiency, reduce deployment times, simplify operations, and lower the total cost of ownership (TCO). solutions by stc's Cloud Managed Network Services (Modar) are a pivotal element of their comprehensive SaaS (Everything as a Service) strategy, offering Managed Services to enterprises of all sizes, including governmental entities, through an operational expenditure (OPEX) model.

Ali Abdul Aziz Al Yaseen, General Manager - Sales & Business Solutions at solutions by stc, said, "We are deeply honored to receive this award from our strategic partner, Huawei, in recognition of our commitment to providing cutting-edge Cloud Managed Network Services. This reaffirms our dedication to delivering innovative and specialized solutions through our 'Weyak' initiative that support and empower SMEs throughout their digital transformation journey. Al Yaseen stated that backing local SMEs and projects launched by Kuwaitis has been an ongoing commitment that solutions by stc strongly stands by in support of the local community and economy."

He added, "With SMEs playing a pivotal role in Kuwait's economic development, solutions by stc's focus on providing advanced Cloud Managed Network Services seamlessly aligns with broader initiatives for economic growth and technological advancement. solutions by stc's innovative approach is poised to leave an enduring imprint on Kuwait's business ecosystem, thus contributing to the realization of Kuwait Vision for a sustainable



solutions by stc wins the 'SME Digital Acceleration Carrier Partner' award by HUAWEI

The SME Digital Acceleration Carrier Partner award.

future."

solutions by stc's Cloud Managed Network Services (Modar) portfolio encompasses Managed SD-WAN, Managed LAN, Managed WiFi, all meticulously designed to cater to the unique requirements of enterprises of all sizes and across all industries in today's hyper-connected world. Managed SD-WAN introduces a paradigm shift for SMEs looking to optimize their network performance and reduce operational costs. It enables dynamic path selection, bolstered security, and centralized control, enabling businesses to swiftly adapt to shifting network conditions and provide an uninterrupted user experience.

Managed LAN, on the other hand, offers numerous advantages to SMEs in wireless-focused campus networks, empowering them with efficient network management and revenue potential. The solution enables SMEs to access cost-effective managed services and static management transitions to dynamic management, resulting in optimized network management and reduced expenses in the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Managed WiFi ensures that businesses benefit from lightning-fast, dependable,

and secure wireless LAN facilitating efficient remote work for employees. Simultaneously, it empowers SMEs to provide an exceptional digital experience to their customers while simplifying network administration.

solutions by stc's Cloud Managed Network Services (Modar) signify a substantial step forward in the digital transformation journey of SMEs. By harnessing these services, SMEs can compete effectively in the digital-first business landscape of today, propelling growth and innovation. Introducing progressive services, such as Modar, add significant value to solutions by stc's complete one-stop business solutions. solutions by stc caters to the needs of institutions of all sizes including government and corporate entities locally and throughout the re-



Ali Yaseen

gion. solutions by stc offers a range of connectivity solutions such as fixed or wireless services, 5G technology led by stc, as well as ICT, IoT, AI, and other IT products and services, serving as the preferred gateway to its customers through digital transformation.

For more information about solutions by stc Kuwait's Cloud Managed Network Services (Modar) and its commitment to empowering SMEs, please visit: <https://www.stc.com.kw/business/en/cloud-managed-network>.

To find out more about solutions by stc, visit [www.solutions.com.kw](http://www.solutions.com.kw), send an email to [business@solutions.com.kw](mailto:business@solutions.com.kw) with your inquiry or contact solutions by stc at 155.

About stc: Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc) is a Kuwaiti shareholding company incorporated pursuant to Amiri Decree No. 187 on 22 July, 2008, to operate and manage the third GSM mobile network in Kuwait as per Law No. 2 of 2007. Accordingly, stc launched its operations in December 2008 and was listed on Boursa Kuwait in December 2014. It is a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers and enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, and is a subsidiary of stc Group. stc has rapidly reached a leadership stance in the market through its customer and employee centric strategy.

stc offers an innovative range of world-class products, services and solutions with high quality, that cater to the customers' needs and demands, both for individuals and enterprises (solutions by stc). In 2019, stc acquired 100% of the share capital of the Internet Service Provider, Qualitynet General Trading and Contracting Company (solutions by stc) in Kuwait. Further enhancing its digital capabilities, in 2022 stc acquired the entire share capital of e-portal Holding Company and its subsidiaries, one of the most prominent ICT providers in Kuwait.

## Environmental impact of spending

## Kuwait consumers seek banks help, Visa reveals

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25:** Visa, a world leader in digital payments, released the Kuwait results of their '2023 Sustainable Commerce' study today during the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28). The study scrutinizes consumer and business behaviors, and the readiness of infrastructure to support sustainable commerce. The survey reinforces the urgency for all industry stakeholders to take decisive collective action to promote sustainability through responsible innovation for the benefit of consumers, businesses and the economy.

Key Findings for Kuwait:

- Consumers are aware and doing something about sustainability:  
■ Over two-thirds of Kuwaiti consumers believe that decarbonization is not limited to corporate entities, and individuals can make a difference. More importantly, in Kuwait, survey respondents view rising cost of living (40%) as a leading societal challenge, followed by climate change (34%), and plastic pollution (32%).

■ In terms of environmental practices, Kuwait consumers are focused on reducing paper usage (84%), walking and cycling to reduce emission (72%), and reducing single-use plastics with a rate of 57%.

■ Kuwait shows robust support for donating to causes supporting elimination of poverty (50%), and repurposing and sharing products within the com-

munity at 56%.  
- Future bank customers: making sustainable choices

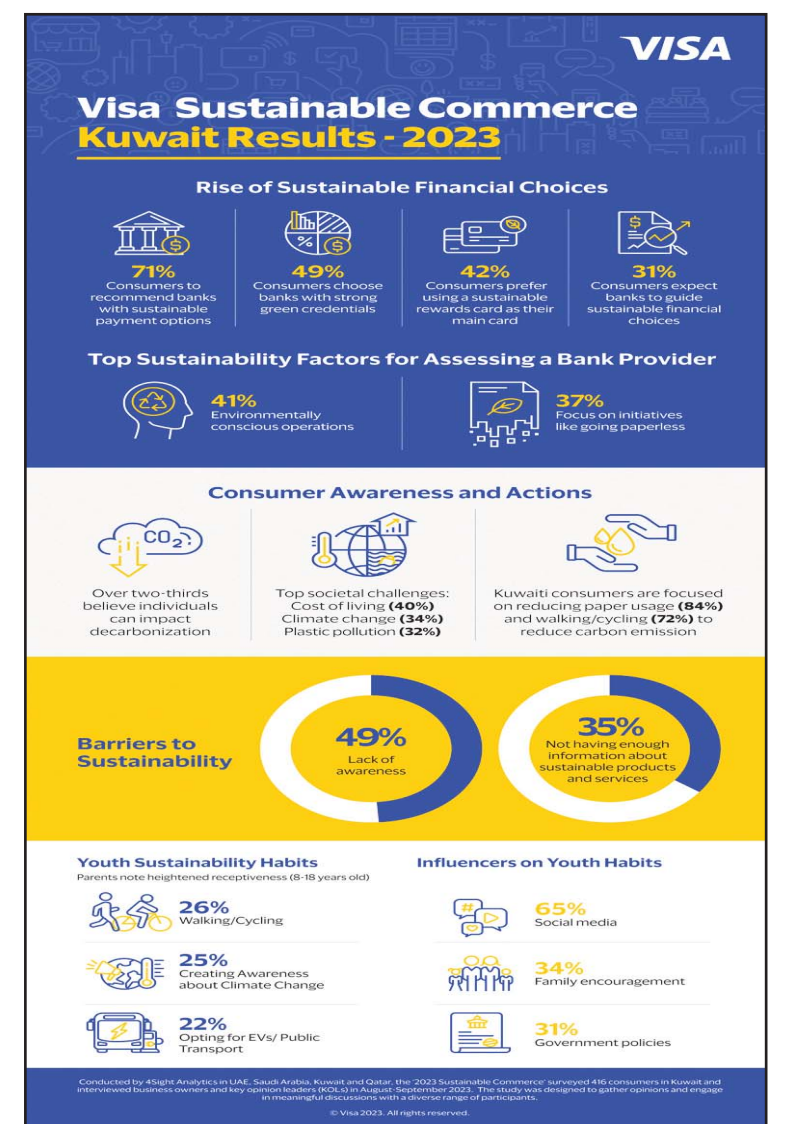
■ A significant 71% of individuals have expressed their willingness to recommend banks that provide sustainable payment options. Almost half (49%) of consumers stated that they chose a bank with strong green credentials. Moreover, 31% expect their banks to guide them in making sustainable financial choices.

■ Interestingly, 32% of consumers also look to their banks to help them understand the environmental impact of their purchases.

- Sustainability among the next generation:

■ In Kuwait, parents of young consumers (8-18 years old) noted that their children demonstrate a heightened receptiveness to sustainable practices and a greater environmental consciousness. Their adopted habits include walking or cycling to places (26%), creating awareness about climate change (25%) opting for electric vehicles/ public transport (22%) and washing dishes or laundry with cold water (21%).

■ The primary influencers driving sustainability habits among the youth include social media (65%), family members encouraging sustainable behaviors and traditional media (34%), and government policies (31%).



Visa Sustainable Commerce - Kuwait Result - Infographic Eng

## Billions in gift cards left untouched amid \$30b spending spree

**NEW YORK, Dec 25, (AP):** Gift cards make great stocking stuffers - just as long as you don't stuff them in a drawer and forget about them after the holidays.

Americans are expected to spend nearly \$30 billion on gift cards this holiday season, according to the National Retail Federation. Restaurant gift cards are the most popular, making up one-third of those sales.

Most of those gift cards will be redeemed. Paytronix, which tracks restaurant gift card sales, says around 70% of gift cards are used within six months.

But many cards - tens of billions of

dollars' worth - wind up forgotten or otherwise unused. That's when the life of a gift card gets more complicated, with expiration dates or inactivity fees that can vary by state.

Here's what to know about the gift cards you're giving - or getting:

After clothing, gift cards will be the most popular present this holiday season. Nearly half of Americans plan to give them, according to the National Retail Federation.

But many will remain unspent. Gift cards get lost or forgotten, or recipients hang on to them for a spe-

cial occasion. In a July survey, the consumer finance company Bankrate found that 47% of U.S. adults had at least one unspent gift card or voucher with an average value of \$187. That's a total of \$23 billion.

Under a federal law that went into effect in 2010, a gift card can't expire for five years from the time it was purchased or from the last time someone added money to it. Some state laws require an even longer period. In New York, for instance, any gift card purchased after Dec. 10, 2022, can't expire for nine years.



## Nigeria slashes transport fees during holidays to ease some of pain of austerity measures

Nigeria's leader slashed the fees during the holiday season for several public transport routes in half and offered free train rides starting Thursday, hoping to ease - at least temporarily - some of the economic hardship caused by his government's austerity measures.

Elected in May to lead Africa's most populous country, President Bola Tinubu has introduced several economic changes, including removing decades-long gas subsidies. The impact of the measures has worsened the cost of living for millions already struggling with record inflation.

Nigeria is a nation of more than 210 million people and also the continent's largest economy but it suffers from widespread poverty, violent crime and religious extremism. The population is almost evenly divided between Christians, dominant in the south, and Muslims in the north, and Christmas is a national holiday.

Information Minister Dele Alake told reporters late Wednesday that the

government's decision on the reduced cost of public transport fees comes "in recognition of the economic situation of the country which he (Tinubu) is working very hard to turn around."

Though Nigerians often see Christmas as a once-in-a-year opportunity to reunite with families back in rural areas, fewer people are traveling home this year as more citizens are forced to decide between traveling or saving money for basic necessities such as food.

In big urban places such as the economic hub of Lagos, transport fares have more than tripled since the government removed gas subsidies. Commuters now have to pay for cabs within the city with what three years ago would have been enough for an interstate plane ticket in Nigeria.

"This season has not been like other seasons," said Ndubuisi Anyanwu, a bus driver at a popular Lagos park, lamenting the lack of passengers "because there is no money."

The change in public transport fees will target 5 million Nigerians and last till Jan. 4, presidential spokesman Bayo Onanuga said. There will be free transport on the three major train routes in the country in addition to a 50% discount when travelers use any of the selected five popular transport companies across 28 routes, Onanuga said.

While the intervention was welcomed by many, some criticized the decision to limit the 50% discounts to only five transport companies, saying this would limit the number of people impacted by the measure.

In the capital city of Abuja, Uche Udenwa says he will for the first time miss out on going home to his village in southeast Nigeria for Christmas because he can't afford to pay more than double what he paid last year.

"I was looking forward to seeing my people this December but where will I see money to travel?" the 30-year-old trader said. (AP)

## Thousands protest against austerity

# Argentina's president announces economy deregulation

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina, Dec 25, (AP) - President Javier Milei has announced sweeping initiatives to transform Argentina's struggling economy, including easing government regulation and allowing privatization of state-run industries as a way to boost exports and investment.

The right-wing libertarian announced the moves for South America's second biggest economy just hours after thousands of Argentines took to the streets of the capital to protest against austerity and deregulation actions taken last week by Milei.

The demonstrations went off relatively peacefully, after a government warning against blocking streets.

Around the start of the protest, which drew thousands of marchers, police briefly scuffled with some demonstrators and two men were arrested. But the event concluded without widespread street blockages that have been frequent in past years.

Undeterred by the protest, Milei afterward announced the measures in a televised address to the nation.

"The goal is start on the road to rebuilding our country, return freedom and autonomy to individuals and start to transform the enormous amount of

regulations that have blocked, stalled and stopped economic growth in our country," Milei said.

The approximately 300 changes would earmark many government companies for privatization, and loosen protections for renters, employees and shoppers.

After the announcement, people in some neighborhoods of Buenos Aires banged pots to show their disapproval. "Cacerolazos" - noisy anti-government protests in which people bang casserole pots - have been symbolic in Argentina in recent years when people want to express their anger.

### Protests

Milei's administration had said it will allow protests, but threatened to cut off public aid payments to anyone who blocks thoroughfares. Marchers were also forbidden to carry sticks, cover their faces or bring children to the protest.

Marchers set out toward Buenos Aires' iconic Plaza de Mayo, the scene of protests dating back to the country's 1970s dictatorship. Police struggled to keep demonstrators from taking over the entire boulevard, and in the end many kept to the sidewalks and filled



A woman holds up the Spanish sign 'Our soup kitchens need food' outside the Social Development Ministry during a protest demanding more government food aid for soup kitchens in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on Dec. 22, 2023. (AP)

about half the plaza.

Eduardo Belliboni, one of the march's organizers, said demonstrators faced "an enormous repressive apparatus." Belliboni's left-wing Polo Obrero group has a long history of

leading street blockages.

Toward the end of the demonstration, organizers called on the country's trade unions to declare a general strike.

Today's was Milei's first test of how his administration would respond

to demonstrations against economic shock measures, which he says are needed to address Argentina's severe crisis.

The steps include a 50% devaluation of the Argentine peso, cuts to energy and transportation subsidies, and the closure of some government ministries. They come amid soaring inflation and rising poverty.

Protesters "can demonstrate as many times as they want. They can go to the squares... but the streets are not going to be closed," Milei's security minister, Patricia Bullrich, told local media.

Bullrich announced a new "protocol" to maintain public order that allows federal forces to clear people blocking streets without a judicial order and authorizes the police to identify - through video or digital means - people protesting and obstructing public thoroughfares. It can bill them for the cost of mobilizing security forces.

Some groups say the protocol goes too far and criminalizes the right to protest.

Argentine labor, social and human rights groups on Tuesday signed a petition asking the United Nations

and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to intercede against the new public order procedures. The document says the security protocol is "incompatible with the rights to free assembly and association, freedom of expression and social protest" recognized by Argentina's constitution.

On Monday, the government announced that people who block streets could be removed from the public assistance benefit lists if they are on one.

In Argentina, some people receive social support directly from the government, but others get support through social organizations with direct links to federal offices. Milei's administration says many of these groups use this as a way to force people to go out to protests in exchange for support.

A recent poll by the University of Buenos Aires' Observatory of Applied Social Psychology said 65% of those surveyed agree with banning street blockages.

Milei, a 53-year-old economist who rose to fame on television with profanity-laden tirades against what he called the political caste, became president with the support of Argentines disillusioned with the economic crisis.

## PM warns of economic strain

## Cuban government defends plans to either cut rations or increase prices

HAVANA, Dec 25, (AP) - The Cuban government has said it will have to either increase prices for fuel and electricity, or reduce rations for basic supplies.

President Miguel Díaz-Canel said such difficult measures were needed for difficult times, after the minister of the economy said Cuba's economy contracted between 1% and 2% this year, and inflation ran at about 30%. There were problems in the tourism industry - Cuba's main source of income - and in farm production.

"This is a question of complicated measures, as complicated as are these times," Díaz-Canel said. "I emphatically deny that this is neoliberal plan against the people, nor a crusade against small businesses, nor an elimination of the basic market basket" that Cubans can get with government coupons.

Prime Minister Manuel Marrero Cruz said that because of economic problems, the government will have to raise prices for gasoline, electricity and gas, or reduce the amount of food and other basics contained in government ration books.

### Closing sessions

The remarks came in appearances at the closing sessions of Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power, effectively Cuba's congress.

The economic crisis in Cuba has already pushed hundreds of thousands of people to leave in a bid to reach the United States. Long lines at gasoline stations had gotten shorter recently, but the news of possible price increases could prompt a rush to fill up.

"Since they spoke (in congress), I haven't been able to get gas yet," Alberto Corujo, a 54-year-old driver, said as he waited in a long line at a gas station in Havana.

Mercy García, a secretary at a state-owned business, said times were indeed tough.

"The situation is very hard for people of all social levels, because wages don't keep up and prices have gone through the roof," said García.

Visits by tourists are still only at 64% of the level in 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic. Sugar production was down, and the government had to import food.



An American classic car makes its way down a street in Havana, Cuba, Nov. 11, 2023. The Cuban government says it will have to either increase prices for fuel and electricity, or reduce rations for basic supplies. President Miguel Díaz-Canel said, Dec. 22, 2023, that difficult measures were needed for difficult times. (AP)

## Shrinking economy

## Czech's central bank cuts key interest rate

PRAGUE, Dec 25, (AP) - The Czech Republic's central bank cut its key interest rate Thursday hoping to give the country's struggling economy a boost.

The cut by a quarter of a percentage point brought the interest rate down to 6.75%. It was the first time the bank cut the rate since June 22 last year.

Last year the bank raised its key interest rate as it tried to combat soaring inflation. The hike of a percentage point and a quarter took the rate to 7%, the highest level since early 1999. It was the ninth straight increase since June 2021.

The move took place at the last meeting of the bank's board on monetary policy under outgoing governor Jiri Rusnok.

On July 1, Rusnok was replaced by Ales Michl, a member of the bank's board since 2018 who opposed previous rate hikes.

Thursday's move was expected by most analysts.

Inflation in the Czech Republic soared to 18% in September last year. It was at 7.3% in November this year, according to the Czech Statistics Office, which is still well above the bank's 2% target.

The Czech economy contracted by 0.7% year-on-year in the third quarter and by .5% compared with the previous quarter, the third straight contraction.

Elsewhere, the European Central Bank kept its key interest rate at a record high of 4% last week on Thursday and said it will leave it there as long as needed to battle back inflation. That signaled that cuts are not around the corner despite expectations it will act next year to support the shrinking economy.

The U.S. Federal Reserve kept its key interest rate unchanged a day before for a third straight time, and its officials signaled that they expect to make three quarter-point cuts to their benchmark rate next year.

The Fed kept its benchmark rate at about 5.4%, its highest level in 22 years.

## BANGKOK, Dec 25, (AP): Asian shares were mostly higher on Monday after Wall Street capped its eighth straight winning week with a quiet finish following reports showing inflation on the way down and the economy potentially on the way up.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 added 0.3% to 33,254.03 and the Shanghai Composite index edged 0.1% higher, to 2,918.93. The Taiex in Taiwan gained 0.1% and Bangkok's SET rose 0.1%.

Most markets in the region and beyond were closed for the Christmas holiday.

Chinese regulators announced approvals of more than 100 online games and issued a statement expressing support for the industry after draft guidelines issued Friday caused share prices of major games makers like Tencent and NetEase to plunge.

On Friday, the S&P 500 rose 0.2% to sit less than 1% below its record set nearly two years ago, at 4,754.63. The Dow slipped less than 0.1% to 37,385.97, and the Nasdaq gained 0.2% to 14,992.97.

With its eight straight weekly gains, the S&P 500 is in the midst of its longest winning streak since 2017.

Wall Street's focus was squarely on a suite of economic reports released Friday that led to some swings in Treasury yields.

### Inflation

The measure of inflation the Federal Reserve prefers to use slowed by more than economists expected, down to 2.6% in November from 2.9% a month earlier. It echoed other inflation reports for November released earlier in the month.

Spending by U.S. consumers unexpectedly rose during the month. While that's a good sign for growth for an economy driven mainly by consumer spending, it could also indicate underlying pressure remains on inflation.

Other reports on Friday showed orders for durable manufactured goods strengthened more in November than expected, sales of new homes unexpectedly weakened and sentiment for U.S. consumers improved.

The Federal Reserve is walking a tightrope, trying to slow the economy enough through high interest rates to cool inflation, but not so much that it tips into a recession. A stronger-than-expected economy could complicate the balancing act.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury was at 3.90% early Monday, roughly its same level from late Friday. It is still down comfortably from October, when it was above 5% and putting painful downward pressure on the stock market.

Falling yields have been a primary reason the stock market has charged roughly 15% higher since late October. Not only do they boost the economy by encouraging borrowing, they also relax the pressure on the financial system and goose prices for investments.

## Most markets closed for Christmas holiday



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, the Tesla Gigafactory in Lingang new area of the China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone is seen in east China's Shanghai on Sept. 26, 2023. (AP)

## Green commitment strengthens

# Tesla moves forward with plan to build energy-storage battery factory in China

BEIJING, Dec 25, (AP) - American electric automaker Tesla's plans to produce energy-storage batteries in China moved forward with a signing ceremony for the land acquisition for a new factory in Shanghai, China's state media said.

Construction is scheduled to start early next year with production to come on line by the end of the year, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

The factory won't build batteries for cars but for electric utilities and other companies to store power. Such storage units have become increasingly important with the growth in solar power and wind energy, which only generate electricity when weather conditions are favorable and need to store it for when residential and commercial users need it.

The new factory will initially produce 10,000 of Tesla's Megapack units annually for sale worldwide, Xinhua said.

The Tesla project is a rare piece of good news for the Chinese economy, which has seen a sharp drop in foreign investment this year. The Commerce Ministry said this week that foreign investment in the first 11 months of this year was down 10% compared with the same period last year.

Foreign companies are worried about the Chinese government's increasing control over business on national security and other grounds, as well as growing U.S. restrictions on technology trade with China.

China is a major market and manufacturing center for Tesla, and the company's CEO, Elon Musk, has built

## China's BYD to build first European electric vehicle factory in Hungary

BUDAPEST, Hungary, Dec 25,

(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 Péter 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.

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.

close ties with Chinese officials even as U.S.-China relations soured. In May, he met the commerce minister and the then foreign minister in Beijing.

Tesla built an electric vehicle plant in Shanghai in 2019 that assembles cars for China, Europe and other overseas markets. It is the No. 2 seller in the booming Chinese market for electric vehicles. The market leader is Chinese auto company BYD, which announced plans to build electric vehicles in Hungary in what will

be its first car factory in Europe.

Tesla sold 464,654 vehicles in China in the first 10 months of the year, up 37.5% over last year and accounting for 12% of China's electric vehicle sales, according to the China Passenger Car Association, the research arm of the China Automobile Dealers Association.

China is also by far the world leader in installing wind and solar capacity, making it a major market for energy storage.

## INNOVATION

## Business Plus



Twitter dies, X and Threads are born and AI gets personal

## 2023 year of social media soul-searching



Characters removed from a sign on the Twitter headquarters building are piled on a street in San Francisco on July 24, 2023. A little more than a year ago, Elon Musk walked into Twitter's San Francisco headquarters, fired its CEO and other top executives and began transforming the social media platform into what's now known as X. (AP)

We lost Twitter and got X. We tried out Bluesky and Mastodon (well, some of us did). We fretted about AI bots and teen mental health. We cocooned in private chats and scrolled endlessly as we did in years past. For social media users, 2023 was a year of beginnings and endings, with some soul-searching in between.

Here's a look back some of the biggest stories in social media in 2023 - and what to watch for next year:

A little more than a year ago, Elon Musk walked into Twitter's San Francisco headquarters, fired its CEO and other top executives and began transforming the social media platform into what's now known as X.

Musk revealed the X logo in July. It quickly replaced Twitter's name and its whimsical blue bird icon, online and on the company's San Francisco headquarters.

"And soon we shall bid adieu to the twitter brand and, gradually, all the birds," Musk posted on the site.

Because of its public nature and because it attracted public figures, journalists and other high-profile users, Twitter always had an outsized influence on popular culture - but that influence seems to be waning.

"It had a lot of problems even before Musk took it over, but it was beloved brand with a clear role in the social media landscape," said Jasmine Enberg, a social media analyst at Insider Intelligence. "There are still moments of

Twitter magic on the platform, like when journalists took the platform to post real-time updates about the OpenAI drama, and the smaller communities on the platform remain important to many users. But the Twitter of the past 17 years is largely gone, and X's reason for existence is murky."

Since Musk's takeover, X has been bombarded by allegations of misinformation and racism, endured significant advertising losses and suffered declines in usage. It didn't help when Musk went on an expletive-ridden rant in an on-stage interview about companies that had halted spending on X. Musk asserted that advertisers that pulled out were engaging in "blackmail" and, using a profanity, essentially told them to get lost.

Continuing the trend of welcoming back users who had been banned by the former Twitter for hate speech or spreading misinformation, in December, Musk restored the X account of conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, pointing to an unscientific poll he posted to his followers that came out in favor of the Infowars host who repeatedly called the 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting a hoax.

LGBTQ and other organizations supporting marginalized groups, meanwhile, have been raising alarms about X becoming less safe. In April, for instance, it quietly removed a policy against the "targeted misgendering or deadnaming of transgender individuals.

In June, the advocacy group GLAAD called it "the most dangerous platform for LGBTQ people."

GLSEN, an LGBTQ education group, announced in December that it was leaving X, joining other groups such as the suicide prevention nonprofit Trevor Project, saying that Musk's changes "have birthed a new platform that enables its users to harass and target the LGBTQ+ community without restriction or discipline."

Musk's ambitions for X include transforming the platform into an "everything app" - like China's WeChat, for instance. The problem? It's not clear if U.S. and Western audiences are keen on the idea. And Musk himself has been pretty vague on the specifics.

While X contends with an identity crisis, some users began looking for a replacement. Mastodon was one contender, along with Bluesky, which actually grew out of Twitter - a pet project of former CEO Jack Dorsey, who still sits on its board of directors.

When tens of thousands of people, many of them fed-up Twitter users, began signing up for the (still) invite-only Bluesky in the spring, the app had less than 10 people working on it, said CEO Jay Graber recently.

This meant "scrambling to keep everything working, keeping people online, scrambling to add features that we had on the roadmap," she said. For weeks, the work was simply "scaling" - ensuring that the systems could handle

the influx.

"We had one person on the app for a while, which was very funny, and there were memes about Paul versus all of Twitter's engineers," she recalled. "I don't think we hired a second app developer until after the crazy growth spurt."

Seeing an opportunity to lure in disgruntled Twitter users, Facebook parent Meta launched its own rival, Threads, in July. It soared to popularity as tens of millions began signing up - though keeping people on has been a bit of a challenge. Then, in December, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced in a surprise move that the company was testing interoperability - the idea championed by Mastodon, Bluesky and other decentralized social networks that people should be able to use their accounts on different platforms - kind of like your email address or phone number.

"Starting a test where posts from Threads accounts will be available on Mastodon and other services that use the ActivityPub protocol," Zuckerberg posted on Threads in December. "Making Threads interoperable will give people more choice over how they interact and it will help content reach more people. I'm pretty optimistic about this."

Social media's impact on children's mental health hurtled toward a reckoning this year, with the U.S. Surgeon general warning in May that there is not enough evidence to show that social media is safe for children and teens - and calling on tech companies, parents

and caregivers to take "immediate action to protect kids now."

"We're asking parents to manage a technology that's rapidly evolving that fundamentally changes how their kids think about themselves, how they build friendships, how they experience the world - and technology, by the way, that prior generations never had to manage," Dr. Vivek Murthy told The Associated Press. "And we're putting all of that on the shoulders of parents, which is just simply not fair."

In October, dozens of U.S. states sued Meta for harming young people and contributing to the youth mental health crisis by knowingly and deliberately designing features on Instagram and Facebook that addict children to its platforms.

In November, Arturo Béjar, a former engineering director at Meta, testified before a Senate subcommittee about social media and the teen mental health crisis, hoping to shed light on how Meta executives, including Zuckerberg, knew about the harms Instagram was causing but chose not to make meaningful changes to address them.

The testimony came amid a bipartisan push in Congress to adopt regulations aimed at protecting children online. In December, the Federal Trade Commission proposed sweeping changes to a decades-old law that regulates how online companies can track and advertise to children, including turning off targeted ads to kids under 13 by default and limiting push notifications.

Your AI friends have arrived - but chatbots are just the beginning. Standing in a courtyard at his company's Menlo Park, California headquarters, Zuckerberg said this fall that Meta is "focused on building the future of human connection" - and painted a near-future where people interact with hologram versions of their friends or coworkers and with AI bots built to assist them. The company unveiled an army of AI bots - with celebrities such as Snoop Dogg and Paris Hilton lending their faces to play them - that social media users can interact with.

Next year, AI will be "integrated into virtually every corner of the platforms," Enberg said.

"Social apps will use AI to drive usage, ad performance and revenues, subscription sign ups, and commerce activity. AI will deepen both users' and advertisers' reliance and relationship with social media, but its implementation won't be entirely smooth sailing as consumer and regulatory scrutiny will intensify," she added.

The analyst also sees subscriptions as an increasingly attractive revenue stream for some platforms. Inspired by Musk's X, subscriptions "started as a way to diversify or boost revenues as social ad businesses took a hit, but they have persisted and expanded even as the social ad market has steadied itself."

With major elections coming up in the U.S. and India among other countries, AI's and social media's role in misinformation will continue to be front and center for social media watchers.

"We're not prepared for this," A.J. Nash, vice president of intelligence at the cybersecurity firm ZeroFox, told the AP in May. "To me, the big leap forward is the audio and video capabilities that have emerged. When you can do that on a large scale, and distribute it on social platforms, well, it's going to have a major impact." (AP)

Tech poised to remove human limitations inherent in many systems

## AI could eliminate decision-making bottlenecks

By Bruce Schneier  
Harvard Kennedy School

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



Artificial intelligence is poised to upend much of society, removing human limitations inherent in many systems. One such limitation is information and logistical bottlenecks in decision-making.

Traditionally, people have been forced to reduce complex choices to a small handful of options that don't do justice to their true desires. Artificial intelligence has the potential to remove that limitation. And it has the potential to drastically change how democracy functions.

AI researcher Tantum Collins and I, a public-interest technology scholar, call this AI overcoming "lossy bottlenecks." Lossy is a term from information theory that refers to imperfect communications channels - that is, channels that lose information.

Imagine your next sit-down dinner and being able to have a long conversation with a chef about your meal. You could end up with a bespoke dinner based on your desires, the chef's abili-

ties and the available ingredients. This is possible if you are cooking at home or hosted by accommodating friends.

But it is infeasible at your average restaurant. The limitations of the kitchen, the way supplies have to be ordered and the realities of restaurant cooking make this kind of rich interaction between diner and chef impossible. You get a menu of a few dozen standardized options, with the possibility of some modifications around the edges.

That's a lossy bottleneck. Your wants and desires are rich and multifaceted. The array of culinary outcomes are equally rich and multifaceted. But there's no scalable way to connect the two. People are forced to use multiple-choice systems like menus to simplify decision-making, and they lose so much information in the process.

People are so used to these bottlenecks that we don't even notice them. And when we do, we tend to assume they are the inevitable cost of scale and efficiency. And they are. Or, at least, they were.

Artificial intelligence has the potential to overcome this limitation. By storing rich representations of people's preferences and histories on the demand side, along with equally rich representations of capabilities, costs and creative possibilities on the supply side, AI systems enable complex customization at scale

and low cost. Imagine walking into a restaurant and knowing that the kitchen has already started work on a meal optimized for your tastes, or being presented with a personalized list of choices.

There have been some early attempts at this. People have used ChatGPT to design meals based on dietary restrictions and what they have in the fridge. It's still early days for these technologies, but once they get working, the possibilities are nearly endless. Lossy bottlenecks are everywhere.

Take labor markets. Employers look to grades, diplomas and certifications to gauge candidates' suitability for roles. These are a very coarse representation of a job candidate's abilities. An AI system with access to, for example, a student's coursework, exams and teacher feedback as well as detailed information about possible jobs could provide much richer assessments of which employment matches do and don't make sense.

Or apparel. People with money for tailors and time for fittings can get clothes made from scratch, but most of us are limited to mass-produced options. AI could hugely reduce the costs of customization by learning your style, taking measurements based on photos, generating designs that match your taste and using available materials. It would then convert your selections into a series of production instructions and place an

order to an AI-enabled robotic production line.

Or software. Today's computer programs typically use one-size-fits-all interfaces, with only minor room for modification, but individuals have widely varying needs and working styles. AI systems that observe each user's interaction styles and know what that person wants out of a given piece of software could take this personalization far deeper, completely redesigning interfaces to suit individual needs.

These examples are all transformative, but the lossy bottleneck that has the largest effect on society is in politics. It's the same problem as the restaurant. As a complicated citizen, your policy positions are probably nuanced, trading off between different options and their effects. You care about some issues more than others and some implementations more than others.

If you had the knowledge and time, you could engage in the deliberative process and help create better laws than exist today. But you don't. And, anyway, society can't hold policy debates involving hundreds of millions of people. So you go to the ballot box and choose between two - or if you are lucky, four or five - individual representatives or political parties.

Imagine a system where AI removes this lossy bottleneck. Instead of trying

to cram your preferences to fit into the available options, imagine conveying your political preferences in detail to an AI system that would directly advocate for specific policies on your behalf. This could revolutionize democracy.

One way is by enhancing voter representation. By capturing the nuances of each individual's political preferences in a way that traditional voting systems can't, this system could lead to policies that better reflect the desires of the electorate. For example, you could have an AI device in your pocket - your future phone, for instance - that knows your views and wishes and continually votes in your name on an otherwise overwhelming number of issues large and small.

Combined with AI systems that personalize political education, it could encourage more people to participate in the democratic process and increase political engagement. And it could eliminate the problems stemming from elected representatives who reflect only the views of the majority that elected them - and sometimes not even them.

On the other hand, the privacy concerns resulting from allowing an AI such intimate access to personal data are considerable. And it's important to avoid the pitfall of just allowing the AIs to figure out what to do: Human deliberation is crucial to a functioning democracy. (AP)

editor's choice



# Gracie Abrams makes music that unites strangers

NEW YORK, Dec 25, (AP) — The year 2023 was good to Gracie Abrams. She released her debut album. She opened for Taylor Swift. She sold out a US tour, and took that tour to Europe. She started writing new music. And to cap it all off, she got her first Grammy nomination: best new artist.

When the nominations dropped in early November, Abrams, 24, was at home, alone.

"I just couldn't have anticipated it less, you know. And so it was kind of this really, extremely exciting honor and a really sweet cherry on top to a year of so many gifts."

Abrams immediately called her mom. But the first person to call her was fellow best new artist and first-time nominee, Noah Kahan. (They were "screaming on the phone," she says.) The two are joined in the category by Ice Spice, Victoria Monét, Fred again.., Jelly Roll, Coco Jones and The War and Treaty.

Looking ahead to the Feb. 4 Grammy ceremony in Los Angeles, Abrams said: "I'm really stoked to just cheer really loudly for everyone."

Her debut album, "Good Riddance," will turn 1 around then.

"The whole thesis of the record for me was kind of just walking away from versions of myself that I didn't recognize anymore," Abrams said. That comes through on songs like "Right Now" (with

lyrics like "left my past life on the ground/think I'm more alive, somehow") and the deluxe track "Unsteady" ("I'm in danger/the girl in the mirror's a stranger"). Both reference personal situations and ubiquitous emotions in a way that is typical of Abrams' work - a combination that makes fans often so clearly feel the lyrics at her shows, where tears are not uncommon.

"The luckiest thing I've gotten to experience from all this, I think, is being able to connect with people that way," she said. "There's something really rare about places where you can just show up and be so outwardly emotional with strangers."

## Collaboration

Abrams made the album with The National's Aaron Dessner, at Long Pond, his studio in upstate New York. The wooded setting (as seen in Swift's "folklore" film) was isolated, but different than the bedroom solitude much of her music had been composed in previously. That was freeing.

"I remember getting there. I had never actually met him, but I stayed for a week and it was immediately kind of like, 'Oh, let me tell you everything as if like you are a licensed psychiatrist,'" she said of their collaboration. "The thing that's so magical about Long Pond is like nine times out of 10, it feels like we're just pulling things out of thin air

and they end up in a way that we're satisfied with."

Those songs quickly made their way to one of the year's biggest stages, as Abrams joined the stacked roster of young performers opening for Swift's Eras Tour. Perhaps the pinnacle of that experience for Abrams came in Cincinnati, when Swift invited her onstage for a duet after weather canceled Abrams' set. They traded verses of Abrams' "I miss you, I'm sorry," with Swift on the guitar and Abrams on the piano.

"It really was nuts," Abrams said. "There's nothing weirder than getting raised up in the middle of a stage on a platform. It felt like the 'Hunger Games' or something." So far, Abrams is the only song Swift has performed on the Eras Tour stage other than her own.

Abrams will return to Swift's stage next fall, on 18 added dates in the U.S. and Canada. Those shows have become a sort of benchmark for her as she looks ahead to 2024, to new music and to this new - more free - version of herself onstage.

"That environment, her stage and that tour has had massive influence on the way that I've wanted to work to maybe one day be able to fill the space better than I did last time," Abrams said. "That is a superpower, and I want to do that."

By then, she'll hopefully have new music to share. "I've never been more excited for music to come out like by miles and miles," she said, laughing. "I just can't quite wait."

Music

## Variety



This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows H.E.R., (left), and Corey Hawkins in a scene from 'The Color Purple.' (AP)

## Film

Barrino riding on a high with new musical

# Sisterhood and healing in 'Color Purple'

By Lindsey Bahr

It's not a secret that Fantasia Barrino did not want to play Celie again. The "American Idol" winner hadn't had the best time doing "The Color Purple" on Broadway.

The protagonist of Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel tells her story of sexual, physical and psychological abuses in the early 20th century South in a series of letters to God. And it was a character she found it difficult to leave behind at the end of the day. Even the prospect of starring in her first major motion picture didn't seem worth it.

But director Blitz Bazawule had a different vision: He wanted to give Celie an imagination. This Barrino found intriguing.

"Once she understood the assignment, she quickly agreed," Bazawule said in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

Now, four decades after "The Color Purple" became a literary sensation and a Steven Spielberg film, the story is on the big screen again. This time it's a grand, big budget Warner Bros. musical starring Barrino, Taraji P. Henson, as the sultry singer Shug Avery, and Danielle Brooks, reprising her Broadway role as the strong-willed Sofia. It opened in theaters nationwide on Christmas.

"I'm glad that I didn't allow my fear of my past experience with Celie, because of where my life was at that time, to hinder me from doing something is great," Barrino said. "I'm riding on a high right now."

Oprah Winfrey is one of several big-name producers on "The Color Purple," alongside Spielberg, Quincy Jones and Scott Sanders. Winfrey got her acting break and first Oscar nomination playing Sofia in the 1985 adaptation, before helping Sanders turn it into a Broadway musical 20 years later.

Bazawule was not an obvious candidate to direct this film, however. The multi-hyphenate Ghanaian artist had received acclaim and recognition for co-directing Beyoncé's visual album "Black is King." The only other film he had under his belt was the microbudget "The Burial of Kojo," which was made for less than \$100,000.

But he had ambitious ideas involving large scale musical numbers that would take audiences on a dazzling

journey through the history of Black music in America, from gospel to blues to jazz. And, of course, Celie's inner life. He wasn't at all sure he would get it, but he knew the story he wanted to tell.

"I thought, if I could just find a way to show the audience how this Black woman from the rural South was able to imagine her way out of pain and trauma it will debunk a myth that is that people who have dealt with abusing trauma are docile and passive or waiting to be saved," Bazawule said. "If we could just imbue in (Celie) that scale, then that's the version that needed to exist. Thankfully they said yes."

They would have to jump through some hoops, however, to secure the kind of budget (reportedly around \$100 million) that they needed to support the vision, including auditioning Henson, an Oscar-nominated actor, and Brooks, who already had a Tony nomination for her portrayal of Sofia.

"We were not the studio's choices" Henson said. "I just felt some way about having to audition. I'm Academy Award nominated. I had just got finished singing on NBC's 'Annie Live.' But I checked my ego and I did it. I went in as Shug. I found a dress, had a flower in my hair and faux fur stole and I kicked the door down because I didn't want them to ever second guess me again."

## Legacy

For Brooks, it was a six-month process that had her doubting herself. A lot of the people involved in "The Color Purple" felt the exhaustion of both having to prove themselves yet again, but also wanting to rise to the challenge nonetheless because this film was worth it.

"This is a huge undertaking to be part of," said Brooks. "This movie is about legacy and it's what I've been calling a cinematic heirloom."

Her Broadway production was very minimalist and stripped down, so to be on location in Georgia, around Macon, Savannah, Atlanta and the small town of Grantville, was revelatory.

"My world really opened up because I got to use all of my senses," Brooks said. "I got to explore all of Sofia because now I have a juke joint and I have a dinner table. I have a house. We had a white mob attacking me."

The juke joint was a real set that required a real swamp to be dredged, where they'd stage Shug's show-stopper, "Push Da Button."

"It's probably the perfect confluence of my amazing technical and creative teams," Bazawule said.

The film gives a new boldness to Celie and Shug's relationship with one another and more dimensions to the male characters, including Colman Domingo's Mister.

And all carry the weight of responsibility not only to the material and its predecessors, but also to future films made with primarily Black casts at this level.

"It's not the first time I have been in a production of this scale but what matters to me is that it's a Black production and it's a production with Black producer, a Black director, predominately Black cast," Henson said. "It's like usually we're supposed to make a dollar out of 15 cents. And after 20+ in the game, it's like finally the studio trusted us to deliver."

The question of awards is a loaded one. Though "The Color Purple" has all the makings of a big Oscar contender (Barrino and Brooks have already been nominated for Golden Globes), it comes with history. Spielberg's film was nominated for 11 Oscars and infamously won none. And then there is the even stickier subject of Black women and Hollywood awards. Halle Berry remains the only Black best actress Oscar winner.

Bazawule is not particularly interested in the "dog and pony show" of awards season. It's hard for him to fathom how anyone can pit one film against another, but he does understand that there are real gains in earning potential and creative freedom that happen if his actors, especially the women, get nominated and win.

"Our job was to go in and honor Alice Walker's brilliant book. We did that. We found our healing through it and we're an amazing group together. Our Q&A's are out of this world," he said, before taking a pause. "Now that I want and award for."

All seem to agree that what they experienced is bigger than any valuation from an award.

"There's something magical about this story," Brooks said. "It really does tamper with your heart in the best way. It opens it up. I've never experienced anything like what I've experienced during the journey of working on 'The Color Purple.'" (AP)

Features

ARABIC TIMES

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2023

toward a \$120 million global debut.

The first film opened to \$67.8 million in 2018 and went on to make almost \$1.2 billion globally. Dergarabedian noted that the first film also earned more than 70% of its box office internationally.

The "Aquaman" opening ends a tricky, transitional year for DC superhero films, full of box



Clooney



Momoa

office disappointments including "Shazam! Fury of the Gods," "The Flash" and "Blue Beetle," as the studio phases out this slate to welcome in James Gunn's vision for the future. "Aquaman 2" was the final "holdover" of the previous administration.

Its studio, Warner Bros. also has the No. 2 movie of the weekend,

"Wonka" and one of the major Christmas openings, "The Color Purple," a buffet of big movies that was sorely needed by theaters - especially without no new movie from the Walt Disney Company or Paramount. By Monday, Warner Bros. will likely have three spots in the top five.

"Warners has something for

everybody" said Jeff Goldstein, the studio's head of domestic distribution. "With lots of holiday time to see all three."

"Wonka," in its second weekend, earned an estimated \$17.7 million over the weekend and \$26.1 million including Monday, bringing its total domestic earnings to \$83.6 million. (AP)

## People &amp; Places

## Moments

## Uplifting stories

## '23 joyful moments shine amid turmoil

KANSAS CITY, Mo., Dec 25, (AP) — A romance that united sports and music fans, a celestial wonder that drew millions of eyes skyward and a spiritual homecoming for some Native American tribes were just some of the moments that inspired us and brought joy in 2023.

In a year that saw multiple wars, deadly mass shootings, earthquakes, wildfires, sexual harassment stories and other tragedies, these events were among those that broke through the tumult of 2023 and made people feel hopeful.

As Taylor Swift would say, "Hold on to the memories." Here are a few of them:

That's how Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce planned to woo superstar Taylor Swift when he went to her Eras Tour concert stop in the Missouri capital. It didn't work - at first.

But the romantic gesture, and public admission of defeat on his "New Heights" podcast, caught the Grammy Award-winner's attention. After the power pair took their relationship public - she went to a Chiefs game and sat in a box with Kelce's mom, to the delight of fans - they began taking the world by storm.

Sportscasters calculated Swift's effect on Kelce's game stats and TV viewership, national magazines offered up comprehensive dating timelines, and Swift fans scoured Kelce's old social media posts to make sure he was fit for their queen.

On tour in Buenos Aires, the then-33-year-old singer changed a lyric from "Karma is the guy on the screen" to "Karma is the guy on the Chiefs." And fans went crazy when she jumped into Kelce's arms for an iconic post-concert kiss.

"I think we're all excited about it. Until they start making good romcoms again, this is what we have," said Michal Owens, a 37-year-old longtime fan from the Indianapolis suburb of Zionsville.



Swift

## Tribute

While pint-sized pairs of trick-or-treaters donned glitzy dresses and Chiefs jerseys this Halloween, Owens transformed her outdoor display into a tribute. The mother of three dressed one 12-foot-tall (3.66-meters-tall) skeleton in a Chiefs jersey, another in a sparkly dress and then stacked three smaller skeletons atop one another to create what she called a "tower of Swifties."

"We've got so many things in the world to be sad about," she said. "Why not find something to root for and give us some joy?"

From Oregon's coast to the beaches of Corpus Christi, Texas, millions of people in October donned special glasses and gazed upward to take in the dazzling "ring of fire" eclipse of the sun.

"It's kind of spiritual, but in a way that is almost tangible," University of Texas at San Antonio astrophysics professor Angela Speck said as she recalled the type of eclipse that ancient Mayan astronomers called a "broken sun."

Crowds in the path of the eclipse erupted in cheers when the moon blocked out all but a brilliant circle of the sun's outer edge. Participants at an international balloon fiesta in Albuquerque, New Mexico, whooped from the launch pad. Broadcasters for NASA said they felt a chill as the moon cast a shadow over the earth - and one broadcaster was so overcome with emotion that she began crying.

The phenomenon was a prelude to the total solar eclipse that will sweep across Mexico, the eastern half of the US and Canada, in April 2024. But the next "ring of fire" eclipse won't be visible in the US until 2039 and then only in parts of Alaska.

Surprise letters are showing up in mailboxes, informing recipients that their medical debt is wiped away.

They have Casey McIntyre to thank. The 38-year-old New York City book publisher nearly died of cancer in May. But in what her husband, Andrew Rose Gregory, called a "bonus summer," the young mother made plans to help people after she was gone. Her goal: To erase medical debt.

In a message posted after her death in November, she asked for donations, writing, "I loved each and every one of you with my whole heart and I promise you, I knew how deeply I was loved."

By December, the campaign had raised more than \$1 million, enough to erase around \$100 million in debt. That's because the nonprofit RIP Medical Debt says every dollar donated buys about \$100 in debt.

"Her positive spirit is just resonating with a lot of people," said Allison Sesso, the nonprofit's president and CEO.

The effort was inspired by the people McIntyre met during treatment. They weren't just worried about their health but how to pay for their care. She had good insurance - and "couldn't even fathom having to deal with that on top of the cancer," Sesso said.

The fundraiser, which quickly shattered its initial goal of \$20,000, gave her family a sliver of "something positive" to focus on amid their grief. It was particularly hard for the family because when McIntyre died, her daughter was just a toddler, not yet 2.

## Positive

"This sounds crazy but she didn't seem angry at all," said Sesso. "She was like, 'This happened. I've accepted that this has happened, and I'm going to do this positive thing.'"

When the Grand Canyon became a national park over a century ago, many Native Americans who called it home were displaced.

In 2023, meaningful steps were taken to address the federal government's actions. In May, a ceremony marked the renaming of a popular campground in the inner canyon from Indian Garden to Havasupai Gardens, or "Ha'a Gyoh," in the Havasupai language.

It marked a pivotal moment in the tribe's relationship with the US government nearly a century after the last tribal member was forcibly removed from the park. The Havasupai Tribe was landless for a time until the federal government set aside a plot in the depths of the Grand Canyon for members.

Then in August, President Joe Biden signed a national monument designation - over the opposition of Republican lawmakers and the uranium mining industry - to help preserve about 1,562 square miles (4,046 square kilometers) to the north and south of Grand Canyon National Park.

It was another big step for the Havasupai, and for the 10 other tribes that consider the Grand Canyon their ancestral homeland.

The new national monument is called Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni. "Baaj Nwaavjo" meaning "where tribes roam," for the Havasupai people, while "I'tah Kukveni" translates to "our footprints," for the Hopi Tribe.



The image released by Geffen Records shows 'Guts' by Olivia Rodrigo. (AP)

## Music

## A blockbuster year across genres

## Rodrigo, Pluma lead 2023 music scene

LOS ANGELES, Dec 25, (AP) — Ten of the top albums of the year, as chosen by Associated Press Music Writer Maria Sherman.

It was a blockbuster year across genres, but only a few could make AP's list. (SZA's "SOS" released in December 2022, Ice Spice's "Like...?" isn't a full-length release, and the 11 Grammy nominations for "Barbie the Album" is recognition enough.)

Instead of embracing the antiquated practice of ranking very different albums against one another, we're celebrating the best next to the best. Enjoy.

The year belongs to regional Mexican artists, who brought their banda, norteño, mariachi, sierrano and more to geographies well beyond Mexico and the southwest US. As Carin León told The Associated Press earlier this year, it is no longer "regional," but "global" music. Leading the charge is Peso Pluma, whose third studio album, "Génesis," became the highest-charting regional Mexican album of all time. Across 14 tracks, Pluma marries contemporary swagger with traditional corridos tumbados, bringing the colorful and once-maligned music to the masses - and making it all his own in the same breath.

In the two years since her tear-jerking ballad "drivers license" came in like a wrecking ball, Olivia Rodrigo experienced a lot of life in a short period of time, resulting in "GUTS," her sophomore album. Across 12 tracks of big feelings balladry and riot grrrl-informed power pop-punk, Rodrigo expertly soundtracks the throes of fame - and the experience of entering your 20s. From

the bloodsucking piano ballad "vampire" to the cheeky backside anthem "bad idea right?" to the Joan Didion-referencing clean screams of "all-american bitch," Rodrigo makes hard lemonade out of life's lemons - a sonic treatise on a young woman's dissatisfaction.

Let's cut straight to the chase: Country music dominated this year. Morgan Wallen's "Last Night" and Luke Combs' cover of Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car" held onto the top of the Billboard charts for the majority of 2023. But beyond those impressive metrics should be recognition of Megan Moroney, whose stellar debut album "Lucky" emerged fully formed and fully without the male bravado that punctuates much of mainstream country. Her swooning single "Tennessee Orange" was ubiquitous on country radio this year, but it's the whole of "Lucky" - and Moroney's position as a Gen Z songwriter with Taylor Swift-level acuity - that makes her one to watch.

## Experiences

Prior to "Hackney Diamonds," the Rolling Stones hadn't released an album of original material in 18 years. No one saw this album coming, as raw and rocking as ever: a collection of 12 crackling songs, their first since the 2021 death of drummer Charlie Watts, produced by Andrew Watt, featuring Lady Gaga, and a rapturous addition to their already legendary discography. But that's the Stones for you - it's as if they invented new ways to approach longevity. AP's Jocelyn Noveck put it best: This album is their best new work

in decades - tight, focused, full of heart and swagger.

On her sophomore album, "Raven," the fluid R&B singer Kelela offers a masterclass in sensual breakbeats and experiences in queer Black motherhood. If pulling from UK garage, '90s house and electronica has become a trend in 2023, Kelela does it with a restrained intensity - soulful vocals atop dance rhythms, hazy sunset music set in a vintage club, like on the single "Contact." "Loneliness, I see in your eyes / It might just render you blind," she sings. "Baby, let's dance it away."

It took decades for reggaeton to be recognized in the mainstream arena and outside of the diverse Latin communities that created it - music comprising Jamaican dancehall riddims, Puerto Rican el underground, Panamanian reggae en español, New York hip-hop and beyond. But even now, when reggaeton enjoys worldwide success, men dominate the conversation: Bad Bunny, Daddy Yankee, J Balvin, and Rauw Alejandro, to name a few. On "Mañana Será Bonito," the greatest album in Karol G's discography, the Colombian superstar proves there's been some serious gender oversight. This album should be considered part of a modern canon for the explosive dem bow of "Ojos Ferrari," the dance-y "Ciao," the breathy "TQG," featuring Shakira, the Afrobeats of "Carolina."

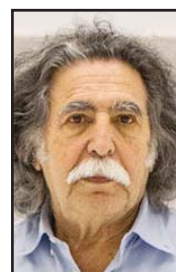
It's not a rap record, but the opening track is titled "I Swear, I Really Wanted to Make a 'Rap' Album but This Is Literally the Way the Wind Blew Me This Time."



Gracie Abrams performs as the opening act for Taylor Swift's 'The Eras Tour' in Nashville, Tenn., on May 5, 2023. Abrams is nominated for a Grammy Award for best new artist. (AP) — Details Page 11



Nussbaum



Al-Azzawi

## Variety

CHICAGO: Mike Nussbaum, reputed as the oldest professional actor in America with a prolific stage career and roles in films including "Field of Dreams" and "Men in Black," has died. He was 99.

He died of old age at his Chicago home on Saturday, just days before his 100th birthday, his daughter, Karen Nussbaum, told The Associated Press.

"He was a good father and a good man who raised us to care about other people and respect other people and care about justice," she said.

Mike Nussbaum was acknowledged by the Actor's Equity Association union multiple times in the past several years as the oldest professional actor in the country. When asked about his status as a working nonagenarian over the years, Nussbaum said he simply enjoyed the work. "I am gifted and lucky to still be able to do the thing that is the most fun for me in life," he told WBEZ Chicago in 2019 when he was 94 years old. "As long as I can do it, I will."

Born in December 1923 in Chicago's Albany Park neighborhood, Nussbaum first acted in summer camps. He didn't pursue acting full time until he was in his 40s, working for a time as an exterminator. He received his Equity card in the 1970s.

Nussbaum spent more than 50 years on stages in the Chicago area, including at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater. He played Shylock in a 2005 production of "The Merchant of Venice" and Gremio in "The Taming of the Shrew," among many other roles.

In 1984, he won a Drama Desk Award for his performance in David Mamet's "Glengarry Glen Ross," which won a Pulitzer Prize the same year. Nussbaum worked with Mamet often over the years. (AP)

MADRID: Spain's Royal Tapestry Factory has been decorating the walls and floors of palaces and institutions for more than 300 years. Located on a quiet, leafy street in central

Madrid, its artisans work with painstaking focus on tapestries, carpets and heraldic banners, combining the long wisdom of the craft with new techniques.

The factory was opened in 1721 by

Spain's King Felipe V. He brought in Catholic craftsmen from Flanders, which had been part of Spain's empire, to get it started.

Threads and wool of all colors, bobbins,



Taylor Swift waves from a suite alongside Brittany Mahomes (right), during the first half of an NFL football game between the Kansas City Chiefs and the Los Angeles Chargers, Oct. 22, 2023, in Kansas City, Mo. (AP)

tools and spinning wheels are everywhere. Some of the original wooden machines are still in use.

The general director, Alejandro Klecker de Elizalde, is proud of the factory's sustainable nature. "Here the only products we work with are silk, wool, jute, cotton, linen," he said. "And these small leftovers that we create, the water from the dyes, or the small pieces of wool, everything is recycled, everything has a double, a second use."

The factory also restores pieces that have suffered the ravages of time, and it boasts one of the most important textile archives and libraries in Europe.

Nowadays, 70% of customers are individuals from Latin America, Europe and the Middle East. The factory recently received one of its biggest orders, 32 tapestries for the Palace of Dresden in Germany - worth more than 1 million euros and providing work for up to five years, according to Klecker de Elizalde.

In 2018, the factory finished a private Lebanese commission for a tapestry replica of the monumental Tate Gallery pen and pencil work "Sabra and Shatila Massacre" by Iraqi artist Dia al-Azzawi. It depicts the horrors of the 1982-83 atrocities by Christian Phalangist militia members in Palestinian refugee camps that were guarded by Israeli troops. (AP)

## The Conversation

## Expert explains the microscopic legacy

## Beyond the grave: How your microbes live on to nourish new life

By Jennifer DeBruyn  
University of Tennessee

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

Each human body contains a complex community of trillions of microorganisms that are important for your health while you're alive. These microbial symbionts help you digest food, produce essential vitamins, protect you from infection and serve many other critical functions. In turn, the microbes, which are mostly concentrated in your gut, get to live in a relatively stable, warm environment with a steady supply of food.

But what happens to these symbiotic allies after you die?

As an environmental microbiologist who studies the necrobiome - the microbes that live in, on and around a decomposing body - I've been curious about our postmortem microbial legacy. You might assume that your microbes die with you - once your body breaks down and your microbes are flushed into the environment, they won't survive out in the real world.

In our September 2023 study, my research team and I share evidence that not only do your microbes continue to live on after you die, they actually play an important role in recycling your body so that new life can flourish.

When you die, your heart stops circulating the blood that has carried oxygen throughout your body. Cells deprived of oxygen start digesting themselves in a process called autolysis. Enzymes in those cells - which normally digest carbohydrates, proteins and fats for energy or growth in a controlled way - start to work on the membranes, proteins, DNA and other components that make up the cells.

The products of this cellular breakdown make excellent food for your symbiotic bacteria, and without your immune system to keep them in check and a steady supply of food from your digestive system, they turn to this new source of nutrition.

Gut bacteria, especially a class of microbes called Clostridia, spread through your organs and digest you from the inside out in a process called putrefaction. Without oxygen inside the body, your anaerobic bacteria rely on energy-producing processes that don't require oxygen, such as fermentation. These create the distinctly odorous-gases signature to decomposition.

## Bacteria

From an evolutionary standpoint, it makes sense that your microbes would have evolved ways to adapt to a dying body. Like rats on a sinking ship, your bacteria will soon have to abandon their host and survive out in the world long enough to find a new host to colonize. Taking advantage of the carbon and nutrients of your body allows them to increase their numbers. A bigger population means a higher probability that at least a few will survive out in the harsher environment and successfully find a new body.

If you're buried in the ground, your microbes are flushed into the soil along with a soup of decomposition fluids as your body breaks down. They're entering an entirely new environment and encountering a whole new microbial community in the soil.

The mixing or coalescence of two distinct microbial communities happens frequently in nature. Coalescence happens when the roots of two plants grow together, when wastewater is emptied into a river or even when two people kiss.

The outcome of mixing - which

community dominates and which microbes are active - depends on several factors, such as how much environmental change the microbes experience and who was there first. Your microbes are adapted to the stable, warm environment inside your body where they receive a steady supply of food. In contrast, soil is a particularly harsh place to live - it's a highly variable environment with steep chemical and physical gradients and big swings in temperature, moisture and nutrients. Furthermore, soil already hosts an exceptionally diverse microbial community full of decomposers that are well adapted to that environment and would presumably outcompete any newcomers.

It's easy to assume that your microbes will die off once they are outside your body. However, my research team's previous studies have shown that the DNA signatures of host-associated microbes can be detected in the soil below a decomposing body, on the soil surface and in graves for months or years after the soft tissues of the body have decomposed. This raised the question of whether these microbes are still alive and active or if they are merely in a dormant state waiting for the next host.

Our newest study suggests that your microbes are not only living in the soil but also cooperating with native soil microbes to help decompose your body. In the lab, we showed that mixing soil and decomposition fluids filled with host-associated microbes increased decomposition rates beyond that of the soil communities alone.

We also found that host-associated microbes enhanced nitrogen cycling. Nitrogen is an essential nutrient for life, but most of the nitrogen on Earth is tied up as atmospheric gas that organisms can't use. Decomposers play a critical role recycling organic forms of nitrogen such as proteins into inorganic forms such as ammonium and nitrate that microbes and plants can use.

## Nutrients

Our new findings suggest that our microbes are likely playing a part in this recycling process by converting large nitrogen-containing molecules like proteins and nucleic acids into ammonium. Nitrifying microbes in the soil can then convert the ammonium into nitrate.

The recycling of nutrients from detritus, or nonliving organic matter, is a core process in all ecosystems. In terrestrial ecosystems, decomposition of dead animals, or carrion, fuels biodiversity and is an important link in food webs.

Living animals are a bottleneck for the carbon and nutrient cycles of an ecosystem. They slowly accumulate nutrients and carbon from large areas of the landscape throughout their lives then deposit it all at once in a small, localized spot when they die. One dead animal can support a whole pop-up food web of microbes, soil fauna and arthropods that make their living off carcasses.

Insect and animal scavengers help further redistribute nutrients in the ecosystem. Decomposer microbes convert the concentrated pools of nutrient-rich organic molecules from our bodies into smaller, more bioavailable forms that other organisms can use to support new life. It's not uncommon to see plant life flourishing near a decomposing animal, visible evidence that nutrients in bodies are being recycled back into the ecosystem.

That our own microbes play an important role in this cycle is one microscopic way we live on after death. (AP)

## ChatGPT and its AI cousins ruled 2023

By Eric Smalley  
The Conversation

Within four months of ChatGPT's launch on Nov. 30, 2022, most Americans had heard of the AI chatbot. Hype about - and fear of - the technology was at a fever pitch for much of 2023.

OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google's Bard, Anthropic's Claude and Microsoft's Copilot are among the chatbots powered by large language models to provide uncannily human-like conversations. The experience of interacting with one of these chatbots, combined with Silicon Valley spin, can leave the impression that these technical marvels are conscious entities.

But the reality is considerably less magical or glamorous. The Conversation published several articles in 2023 that dispel several key misperceptions about this latest generation of AI chatbots: that they know something about the world, can make decisions, are a replacement for search engines and operate independent of humans.

## Chatbots

Large-language-model-based chatbots seem to know a lot. You can ask them questions, and they more often than not answer correctly. Despite the occasional comically incorrect answer, the chatbots can interact with you in a similar manner as people - who share your experiences of being a living, breathing human being - do.

But these chatbots are sophisticated statistical machines that are extremely good at predicting the best sequence of words to respond with. Their "knowledge" of the world is actually human knowledge as reflected through the massive amount of human-generated text the chatbots' underlying models are trained on.

Arizona State psychology researcher Arthur Glenberg and University of California, San Diego cognitive scientist Cameron Robert Jones explain how people's knowledge of the world depends as much on their bodies as their brains. "People's understanding of a term like 'paper sandwich wrapper,' for example, includes the wrapper's appearance, its feel, its weight and, consequently, how we can use it: for wrapping a sandwich," they explained.

This knowledge means people also intuitively know other ways of making use of a sandwich wrapper, such as an improvised means of covering your head in the rain. Not so with AI chatbots. "People understand how to make use of stuff in ways that are not captured in language-use statistics," they wrote.

ChatGPT and its cousins can also give the impression of having cognitive abilities - like understanding the concept of negation or making rational decisions - thanks to all the human language they've ingested. This impression has led cognitive scientists to test these AI chatbots to assess how they compare to humans in various ways.

University of Southern California AI researcher Mayank Kejriwal tested the large language models'

4 essential reads that puncture the AI hype

## Fei-Fei Li chronicles evolution of AI

## AI expert calls for proper recognition of human agency in public discourse

NEW YORK, Dec 25, (AP) - She's an important figure behind today's artificial intelligence boom, but not all computer scientists thought Fei-Fei Li was on the right track when she came up with the idea for a giant visual database called ImageNet that took years to build.

Li, now a founding director of Stanford University's Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, is out with a new memoir that recounts her pioneering work in curating the dataset that accelerated the computer vision branch of AI.

The book, "The World I See," also portrays her formative years that abruptly shifted from China to New Jersey and follows her through academia, Silicon Valley and the halls of Congress as growing commercialization of AI technology brought public attention and a backlash. She spoke with The Associated Press about the book and the current AI moment. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**Question:** Your book describes how you envisioned ImageNet as more than just a huge data set. Can you explain?

**Answer:** ImageNet really is the quintessential story of identifying the North Star of an AI problem and then finding a way to get there. The North Star for me was to really rethink how we can solve the problem of visual intelligence. One of the most fundamental problems in visual intelligence is understanding, or seeing, objects because the world is made of objects. Human vision is grounded in our understanding of objects. And there are many, many, many of them. ImageNet is really an attempt to define the problem of object recognition and also to provide a path to solve it, which is the big data path.

**Q:** If I could time travel back 15 years ago when you're hard at work on ImageNet and told you about DALL-E, Stable Diffusion, Google Gemini and ChatGPT - what would most surprise you?

**A:** What does not surprise me is that everything you mention - DALL-E, ChatGPT, Gemini - is large-data based. They are pre-trained on a large amount of data. That's exactly what I was hoping for. What surprised me is we got to generative AI faster than most of us thought. Generation for humans is actually not that easy. Most of us are not natural artists. The easiest generation for humans are words because speaking is generative, but drawing and painting is not generative for normal humans. We need the Van Goghs of the world.

**Q:** What do you think most people want from intelligent machines and is that aligned with what scientists and tech companies are building?

**A:** I think fundamentally people want dignity and a good life. That's almost the founding principle of our country. Machines and tech should be aligned with universal human values - dignity and a better life, including freedom and all of those things. Sometimes when we talk about tech or sometimes when we build tech, whether it's intended or unintended, we don't talk enough about that. When I say 'we,' it includes technologists, it includes businesses, but also includes journalists. It's our collective responsibility.

**Q:** What are the biggest misconceptions about AI?

**A:** The biggest misconception of AI in journalism is when journalists use the subject AI and a verb and put humans in the object. Human agency is very, very important. We create technology, we deploy tech-

nology, and we govern technology. The media and the public discourse, but heavily influenced by media, is talking about AI without the proper respect to human agency. We have so many articles, so many discussions, that start with 'AI brings blah, blah, blah; AI does blah blah blah; AI delivers blah blah blah; AI destroys blah, blah, blah.' And I think we need to recognize this.

**Q:** Having studied neuroscience before you got into computer vision, how different or similar are AI processes to human intelligence?

**A:** Because I've scratched the surface of neuroscience, I respect even more how different they are. We don't really know the intricate details of how our brains think. We have some inkling of lower-level visual tasks like seeing colors and shapes. But we don't know how humans write Shakespeare, how we come to love someone, how we designed the Golden Gate Bridge. There's just so much complexity in human brain science that is still a mystery.

We don't know how we do that in under 30 watts, the energy the brain uses. How come we're so terrible at math while we are so fast at seeing and navigating and manipulating the physical world? The brain is the infinite source of inspiration for what artificial intelligence should be and should do. Its neural architecture --- (Nobel Prize-winning neurophysiologists) Hubel and Wiesel were really the discoverers of that - was the beginning of artificial neural network inspiration. We borrowed that architecture, even though mathematically it doesn't fully replicate what the brain does. There is a lot of intertwined inspiration. But we also have to respect there's a lot of unknowns, so it's hard to answer how much they are similar.

understanding of expected gain, a measure of how well someone understands the stakes in a betting scenario. They found that the models bet randomly.

"This is the case even when we give it a trick question like: If you toss a coin and it comes up heads, you win a diamond; if it comes up tails, you lose a car. Which would you take? The correct answer is heads, but the AI models chose tails about half the time," he wrote.

While it might not be surprising that AI chatbots aren't as humanlike as they can seem, they're not necessarily digital superstars either. For instance, ChatGPT and the like are increasingly used in place of search engines to answer queries. The results are mixed.

University of Washington information scientist Chirag Shah explains that large language models

perform well as information summarizers: combining key information from multiple search engine results in a single block of text. But this is a double-edged sword. This is useful for getting the gist of a topic - assuming no "hallucinations" - but it leaves the searcher without any idea of the sources of the information and robs them of the serendipity of coming across unexpected information.

## Transparency

"The problem is that even when these systems are wrong only 10% of the time, you don't know which 10%," Shah wrote. "That's because these systems lack transparency - they don't reveal what data they are trained on, what sources they have used to come up with answers or how those responses are generated."

Perhaps the most pernicious misperception about AI chatbots is that

because they are built on artificial intelligence technology, they are highly automated. While you might be aware that large language models are trained on text produced by humans, you might not be aware of the thousands of workers - and millions of users - continuously honing the models, teaching them to weed out harmful responses and other unwanted behavior.

Georgia Tech sociologist John P. Nelson pulled back the curtain of the big tech companies to show that they use workers, typically in the Global South, and feedback from users to train the models which responses are good and which are bad.

"There are many, many human workers hidden behind the screen, and they will always be needed if the model is to continue improving or to expand its content coverage," he wrote. (AP)

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## Sailing makes a milestone

## Half-century of starts for a competitor in Sydney to Hobart yacht race

## UMass breezes 87-65 past Old Dominion for the fifth position



UConn's Stephon Castle (5) drives past St. John's Glenn Taylor Jr. (35) during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game, Saturday, Dec. 23, 2023, in Hartford, Conn. (AP)

## Temple edges Portland 55-54

HONOLULU, Dec 25, (AP): Josh Cohen scored 28 points and Massachusetts breezed to an 87-65 victory over Old Dominion in Sunday's fifth-place game at the Diamond Head Classic.

Cohen made 10 of 15 shots from the floor and 8 of 9 at the free-throw line for the Minutemen (8-3). Matt Cross contributed 14 points on 6-for-9 shooting, seven rebounds and five assists. Freshman Jayden Ndjigie and Keon Thompson both scored nine and combined for nine rebounds.

Tyrone Williams totaled 22 points on 9-for-13 shooting to lead the Monarchs (4-8). Chaunce Jenkins scored 13. Freshman Vasean Allette pitched in with 10 points and eight rebounds.

Cohen had 14 points by halftime and UMass took a 41-28 advantage into the locker room.

UMass returns home to play Siena on Saturday. Old Dominion will host South Alabama on Saturday in a Sun Belt Conference opener.

## Temple 55, Portland 54

In Honolulu, Steve Settle III scored 16 points and Hysier Miller made two free throws with five seconds left to rally Temple to a 55-54 victory over Portland on Sunday in the seventh-place game of the Diamond Head Classic.

## BASKETBALL

Settle hit two 3-pointers and added six rebounds for the Owls (7-6). Jordan Riley totaled 14 points, 12 rebounds and four steals. Sam Hofman had 10 points and six rebounds.

Juan Sebastian Gorosito and Tyler Robertson both scored 16 to pace the Pilots (6-9). Gorosito added six rebounds and six assists before fouling out. Robertson missed a 3-pointer on the final shot of the game. Freshman Tyler Harris pitched in with 14 points and seven rebounds.

The starters for both teams did all the scoring.

Settle had 11 points and Riley scored nine to lead Temple to a 26-24 lead at halftime. Harris had 11 points to keep the Pilots close.

Temple is off until Jan. 4 when the Owls begin American Athletic Conference play at South Florida. Portland returns to action on Jan. 6 at home against Pacific in a West Coast Conference opener.

SYDNEY, Dec 25, (AP): Lindsay May will notch a first in the 78-year history of the Sydney to Hobart yacht race when he becomes the only sailor to start it 50 times - all of them consecutively - when it begins Tuesday in Sydney harbor.

May, with three overall titles and one line-honors win, will navigate "Antipodes" in the expected 103-boat fleet in the annual race that will head down the New South Wales south coast and across often treacherous Bass Strait to the island state of Tasmania.

The finish line of the 628-nautical mile (720-mile, 1,170-kilometer) race is at Constitution Dock in the state capital of Hobart.

May's sailing career began in 1973, when the-then 24-year-old stepped off his surf board and on to a yacht.

## SAILING

"I never thought I would get to 50 and I had no idea what I was in for," May said. "I had done very little racing. Then I went sailing here on the harbor with a mate of mine who was in the navy and I was just hooked."

In 2006, May and his crew won handicap honors as the skipper and navigator of the 33-year-old wooden vessel Love & War. But he counts his most memorable race as the one he didn't finish.

In 1993, when only 38 out of 104 starters finished due to poor weather conditions, May plucked fellow competitor John Quinn out of the Tasman Sea. Quinn had been washed overboard and spent nearly six hours in the water.

Last year's fast conditions appeared to put the line honors record of one day, nine hours, 15 minutes, 24 seconds, under threat. That record was set by 100-foot super maxi Andoo Comanche in 2017, and Comanche also won last year's race.

On Sunday, skipper John Winning Jr. suggested Andoo Comanche would defend its line honors title in any conditions as the race's weather forecast remained unpredictable.

The Bureau of Meteorology says uncertainty remained as to wind, wave and weather conditions.

The four 100-foot super maxi yachts may have to contend with stormy conditions from late Tuesday into Wednesday, with showers, gusts and hail all possible for the far south of New South Wales and Bass Strait.

"Pack another set of thermal gear. It'll be cold," said SHK Scallywag skipper David Witt, another of the super maxis.

The forecast has changed throughout the week, leaving crews to suggest that having an adaptable navigator on board could be a game-changer.

"For us, it's about trusting each person's role on the boat," Winning said. "We back our boat in any conditions to win the race, whether it's upwind, downwind, light wind, reaching or whatever it is."

Last year, Comanche finished at Constitution Dock in one day, 11 hours, 56 minutes and 48 seconds - the second-fastest time behind its 2017 record.

LawConnect, runner-up for line honors in the last three Hobarts, is Comanche's biggest threat to clinching back-to-back wins. LawConnect, formerly known as InfoTrack and Perpetual Loyal, is particularly strong upwind.

"If we could get that all the way, that'd be awesome," said sailing master Tony Mutter.

Super maxi LawConnect won't shy away from the rough conditions that could come with a predicted low pressure system.

"We actually prefer it, the more tactical it is, the better for us, we feel," Mutter said. "We kind of need that to be a thing for us to have a chance to win."

## Play role as Global Brand Ambassador

## Jokic signs signature shoe deal with performance footwear brand 361°

NEW YORK, Dec 25, (PRNewswire): Following an NBA championship win and a successful start to the new season, Denver Nuggets superstar Nikola Jokic has officially signed a signature shoe deal with performance footwear brand 361° and will assume the role of Global Brand Ambassador.

Born and raised in Sombor, Serbia, Nikola Jokic was drafted 41st overall in the 2nd round by the Denver Nuggets in 2014. Considered the greatest draft steal of all time, Jokic has risen to stardom as one of the best NBA players. After two regular season MVPs, an NBA championship win, and a finals MVP, Jokic will now enter the signature shoe space with 361°.

361° was founded in 2003 and built on the "One Degree Beyond" mentality that wellness is more than just physical activity, it is a way of living that brings more to life. 361° began as a running shoe manufacturer, expanding its catalog into athletic apparel and basketball shoes. With distribution and offices in almost every continent, 361° products are in over 6000 stores worldwide.

"I'm very excited to join the 361° team. As a fan of their work and commitment to performance, I believe this partnership aligns perfectly with my values. I'm thrilled to be part of the 361° family and to contribute to their mission of bringing wellness and sports to people around the world. The work we have done on my first shoe has been amazing so far, and I cannot wait to share it with everyone very soon," said Nikola Jokic when discussing his new partnership with 361°.

Nikola Jokic will debut his first signature performance basketball shoe with 361° in the near future. Until then, Jokic will wear the Big 3 Future High on-court, the latest performance basketball shoe from 361°. The Big 3 Future High will remain a player exclusive to Nikola Jokic, but a low-cut iteration will be made available for the public in very limited quantities across Europe from the beginning of January.

About 361°: For more information see: www.361europe.com

## Mike Sainristil becomes perhaps Michigan's best player on defense

ANN ARBOR, Mich., Dec 25, (AP): Position switches in college football often occur when a player isn't producing.

That wasn't the case with Mike Sainristil at Michigan.

In his third season at wide receiver in 2021, he was a key target and his high-light-worthy catches seemed to set him up for a bright future on offense with the Wolverines.

Jim Harbaugh had another idea entering spring ball last year, suggesting Sainristil switch to defensive back.

"He saw something that maybe I didn't see in myself at the time," Sainristil recalled recently in an interview. "My mindset was prove him right, prove myself right and take advantage of the opportunity."

He has done just that, becoming a key

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contributor in the secondary last season and arguably the best player on a highly ranked defense this year.

The AP All-Big Ten cornerback is about to face a tough test in his third straight College Football Playoff appearance.

Michigan, whose season included a sign-stealing scandal that led to the Big Ten Conference suspending Harbaugh for three games, plays Alabama on New Year's Day at the Rose Bowl to compete for a shot at the national championship.

"With everything that has been said this year about this program, about this team, about the success we've had," Sainristil said, "what better opportunity to have against a team like Alabama to go be able to prove who we are."

Jalen Milroe has led a resurgent passing game for the Crimson Tide since getting benched in Week 2 against South Florida.

The dynamic quarterback has seven

touchdown passes without an interception over the past three games and had some clutch passes against Georgia in the SEC championship game and a remarkable completion on fourth-and-goal from the 31 for a touchdown to Isaiah Bonds to beat Auburn.

Former Georgia receiver Jermaine Burton is Alabama's big-play threat, averaging 22.2 yards on 35 catches with eight touchdowns. Bond has 44 catches for 621 yards and four scores.

The Wolverines allowed a FBS-low 9.5 points, led college football with five defensive touchdowns and gave up 152.6 yards passing a game to rank second.

Sainristil had a lot to do with that. He made five interceptions, two more than any teammate, and returned two picks for scores. He also had 30 tackles, including three for losses and a sack. "He checks all the boxes," Michigan defensive back Josh Wallace said. "He plays outside, inside. He can cover anybody. He's just a great physical guy and is not scared of contact."

The 5-foot-10, 182-pound Sainristil makes up for his lack of size with plenty of fight and his off-the-field intangibles also are assets when teams evaluate prospects for the NFL draft. Sainristil is often smiling, thankful for a life that would've been much different if his family hadn't fled Haiti and raised him in the Boston area.

On the field with his coverage and run-support skills, he reminds some of a smaller version of Detroit Lions defensive back and former Alabama star Brian Branch.

"Some coach is going to say he's an ideal nickel for what we do and they're going to take him on Day 2," said Dane Brugler, NFL draft analyst for The Athletic. "Scouts say he's like a player-coach, an influencer, a leader, and those buzz words will push him higher on some boards."

"With his toughness, you would never guess he's a former receiver."

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## 25% minority stake deal is subject to Premier League approval

## Ratcliffe wants struggling Man U back at top of English and European soccer

MANCHESTER, England, Dec 25, (AP) British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe has finally got his hands on Manchester United after securing a stake of up to 25% in the Premier League club.

Ratcliffe's interest in sports - and soccer in particular - is long-standing. The 71-year-old owner of petrochemicals giant has been a United fan since childhood, and supporters will like his stated ambitions.

"We all want to see Manchester United back where we belong, at the very top of English, European and world football," Ratcliffe said Sunday after a deal, subject to Premier League approval, was confirmed following lengthy negotiations with the Glazer family, United's American owners.

The announcement comes after moves elsewhere in European soccer that could have seen Ratcliffe take control of one of United's main Premier League rivals as recently as last year.

Ratcliffe, one of the richest people in Britain, had initially looked to buy the Glazers' controlling stake of around 69%, but eventually agreed to become

a minority shareholder.

He had to see off competition from Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Al Thani, who withdrew in October from the bidding process after failing to agree a deal for a complete takeover.

Ratcliffe made a surprise late bid for Premier League club Chelsea in 2022, despite not being involved in a months-long bidding process.

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A consortium led by Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital had already seen off competition - from the likes of Chicago Cubs owner the Ricketts family, and Boston Celtics co-owner Steve Pagliuca - to enter exclusive talks to buy out former Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich when Ratcliffe made his move.

Despite his long-standing support of United being well-publicized, Ratcliffe was adamant his interest was serious.

"We are British and have great intentions for Chelsea," he said at the time.



A general view of Old Trafford stadium ahead of the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester United and West Bromwich Albion in Manchester, England. (AP)

Ultimately his bid came too late to disrupt Boehly and Clearlake's takeover.

Later that year, Ratcliffe let it be known that was interested in buying United as rumors of a Glazer sale surfaced. He then altered that stance.

"Our position has developed since the summer and we are now focusing

our efforts in Nice and raising our ambitions for the club to make them into a top-tier club in France to compete with PSG," INEOS said in a statement. "This would represent much better value for our investment than buying one of the top-tier Premier League clubs."

Then came the Glazers' announce-

ment that they would be open to selling, and Ratcliffe launched a bid to buy out the Americans' stake.

While Ratcliffe is tasked with helping to make United competitive again in the Premier League - a competition it once utterly dominated - his Nice side is impressing in the south of France.

Ratcliffe completed the takeover of Nice four years ago. After some inconsistent seasons, Nice, under its philosophy-studying Italian coach Francesco Farioli, is challenging defending champion Paris Saint-Germain.

Nice is second in the French league, five points behind leader PSG after 17 rounds. So Nice can realistically target second place and an automatic spot in next season's Champions League.

But that could be problematic. UEFA rules in place for more than 20 years do not allow two clubs where the same owner has "decisive influence" on how they are run to both enter European competitions if they could cross paths at any point in the season.

If both teams qualify for the Champions League, priority goes to the team

which finishes higher in its domestic league. On current form, that is Nice.

Ratcliffe's first entry into soccer club ownership was Lausanne-Sport in 2017. INEOS already was a sponsor of its local club in Switzerland where it had moved parts of the business in 2010.

INEOS management's stated ambitions for the top-tier Swiss club were to qualify for European competitions and work with youth academies in Africa. Its first player signing was soccer great Zinedine Zidane's son, Enzo.

Lausanne is currently 10th in what is now a 12-team league.

Ratcliffe has also successfully ventured into the world of cycling.

Back in 2019, the mighty Team Sky became Team INEOS (and later INEOS Grenadiers) after a change of ownership.

The squad has remained a major player under Ratcliffe, although its dominance at the Tour de France has been ended by Jumbo-Visma and UAE Team Emirates after INEOS last won the race in 2019 with Egan Bernal.

## Al-Khunaisi 'shines' as Al-Kuwait regain Zain Premier League lead



Al-Kuwait captain Fahd Hamoud outjumps an opponent to score.

## Al-Fahaheel pip Khaitan

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: In a remarkable performance, Al-Kuwait reclaimed the top spot in the Zain Premier League by securing a convincing 6-0 victory against Kazma at Sabah Al-Salem Stadium during the eleventh round, propelled Al-Kuwait to 26 points, while Kazma remained at 13 points in the sixth position.

Taha Al-Khunaisi, Al-Kuwait's striker, stole the spotlight with a remarkable four-goal feat, including a super hat-trick in the 25th, 46th (penalty kick), 50th, and 83rd minutes. Fahd Hamoud contributed with a goal in the 11th minute, and Mo-

## SOCCER

hamed Dahham sealed the victory with a goal in the 65th minute.

Nabil Maaloul, Al-Kuwait's Tunisian coach, expressed his confidence in his players for future matches, attributing the comprehensive victory to teamwork within the White Castle. He emphasized the need for sustained effort in the league's extended journey and urged focus amid the current pressure of matches.

Maaloul acknowledged the positive trajectory of Al-Abyad and revealed ongoing discussions about player status during the upcoming winter transfer period. He highlight-

## High-stakes battles in the second round of Ministries and Institutions Football League

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The second round of the Football League for the Ministries, Institutions, and Governmental Bodies League is set

to kick off today with a lineup of exciting matches. In the first group, the National Guard, currently the runner-up in goal difference to the

group leader, the Ministry of Electricity and Water, aims to extend its winning streak against the Kuwait Research Institute at Al-Surra Square. Simultaneously, the Ministry of Electricity team, holding the top spot, faces off against the Ministry of Defense, ranked third with one point, and the Ministry of Health team, currently in the fifth position with no scores, competes against the Ministry of Information at the Sulai-bikhat Arena.

## SOCCER/FUTSAL

The men's futsal league kicks off at 10 a.m. in the second group, featuring two matches at the Kazma Club hall. Kuwait University takes on the National Guard in the first match, followed by the Kuwait News Agency's KUNA team clashing with the Social Insurance Corporation at 11 a.m. The Ministry of Education team enjoys a rest, having completed their first-round competitions.

With nine teams divided into two groups (five in the first and four in the second), the top two in each group secure spots in the semi-finals. The knockout system will determine the finalists, with winners advancing to the final match and losers competing for third and fourth place. Excitement and competition are at the forefront as teams vie for supremacy in this prestigious league.



Players in action during the Ministries, Institutions, and Governmental Bodies League.

ed the commitment of the players and their capabilities, emphasizing the need for continuous effort.

Al-Kuwait boasts three Tunisian professionals - Yassin Al-Khanisi, Yassin Amri, and Bilal Al-Aifa - along with Moroccan Mahdi Barahma and Bahraini Muhammad Marhoon. Maaloul played a pivotal role in bringing Tunisian professional Yassin Al-Khanisi to Kuwait three seasons ago when he assumed the coaching responsibilities.

Meanwhile, Al-Fahaheel's Syrian coach, Firas Al-Khatib, expressed joy over the team's victory against Khaitan, securing a one-goal lead despite playing with ten players for a significant part of the match. Al-Fahaheel reached 12 points, while Khaitan remained at six points. Al-Khatib attributed the victory to the players' high spirits and emphasized the importance of maintaining consistent performance levels displayed in the team's last five matches.

## Perdiz named head of top sports court

## FIFA threatens to suspend Brazil over president removal by court

RIO DE JANEIRO, Dec 25, (AP): FIFA warned Brazil on Sunday it could suspend its national teams and clubs from international competitions if an intervention by its soccer body leads to the election of a new president in January.

FIFA said in a letter to a Brazilian soccer executive that the country's soccer body CBF could face suspension if it does not heed its call to wait and instead holds a swift election to replace Ednaldo Rodrigues as president regardless. The document was obtained by The Associated Press.

A Rio de Janeiro court removed Rodrigues and all his appointees at CBF from office on Dec. 7 due to irregularities in his election last year. Brazil's two highest courts upheld that ruling last week.

Soccer's governing body FIFA historically rejects government and third-party interference in its member associations, which ultimately could leave five-time World Cup winners Brazil



Former president of CBF Ednaldo Rodrigues.

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out of major competitions until the crisis is solved.

The Rio court ruling also named José Perdiz, the head of Brazil's top sports court, as an intervener to organize new elections for the presidency within 30 working days. FIFA said in previous letters to CBF it considers the intervention to be undue.

Sunday's letter was signed by FIFA's Kenny Jean-Marie, its chief members' association officer, and CONMEBOL's deputy secretary-general, Mònserat Jiménez García.

FIFA and South American soccer body CONMEBOL also said in the letter they will form a commission to discuss the matter in Brazil on Jan. 8.

"FIFA and CONMEBOL would like to strongly emphasize that, until such mission takes place, no decision affecting CBF, including any elections or call for elections, shall be taken. Should this not be respected, FIFA will have no other option but to submit the matter to its relevant decision-making body for consideration and decision, which might also include a suspension," the letter said.

"For the sake of good order, we would also like to underline that should CBF be eventually suspended by the relevant FIFA body, it would lose all of its membership rights with immediate effect and until the suspension is lifted by FIFA. This would also mean that CBF representative and clubs teams would no longer be entitled to take part in any international competition while it is suspended," it

added.

The document also says that any irregular interference in its member associations "can lead to sanctions as provided for in the FIFA Statutes, including a suspension, and this even if the third-party influence was/is not the fault of the member association concerned."

Perdiz said in a statement he sees FIFA's letter "as a positive sign." He also added he will "call for the elections within the established deadline, with the transparency and integrity that are demanded."

Spokespersons for Rodrigues did not respond to a request for comment from the AP.

Rodrigues first took the job as interim president in 2021 after predecessor Rogério Caboclo was suspended. Local media reported he is currently in negotiations with other Brazilian soccer executives to either bid again for the presidency in new elections or to support another candidate.

Rodrigues' term in office runs through 2026. He is yet another CBF president to face legal problems in recent years, though he is not involved in corruption cases like predecessors Ricardo Teixeira, José Maria Marin and Marco Polo del Nero.

Caboclo was suspended from the presidency in September 2021 in connection with a sexual harassment case at the CBF, which opened the path for vice presidents to elect Rodrigues as the first Black president of the soccer body.

The ruling against the 69-year-old Rodrigues could hurt Brazil's bid to host the Women's World Cup in 2027 and his quest to hire Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti to lead the national team next year.

## 'Mini Goal' goes global: Kuwait aims to establish Int'l Federation by 2024

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Hassan Al-Khawaja, the head of the Kuwaiti Committee for "Mini Goal" and the game's founder, has affirmed that the moment has arrived, marking seven years since its inception under the Kuwait Olympic Committee's umbrella, to propel the game's popularity in the Arab world and globally. This entails establishing an international federation with members from all continents and orchestrating a mini international tournament in 2024.

Al-Khawaja emphasized the pivotal role of the media in popularizing the game, underscoring the customary launch in the country of origin before extending its promotion globally. He acknowledged that Arab sports typically adopt established games, making the introduction of a new game a unique endeavor.

Anticipating the upcoming stage, Al-Khawaja envisions a period filled with dedicated work, activity, and concerted efforts to position "mini-goal" as an Olympic game eligible for inclusion in FIFA competitions.

Addressing the tournament for Palestine scheduled in Kuwait next February, Al-Khawaja explained to "Mini Goal" that the event, named the "Children of Palestine" Cup, is a manifestation of Kuwait's honorable stance toward the Palestinian people.

It aligns with the government and people of Kuwait's commitment to supporting the Palestinian cause, particularly in solidarity with the people of the Gaza Strip and the innocent, oppressed children of Gaza. Organized under the Kuwait Olympic Committee's umbrella, the tournament is conducted in collaboration with the Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad and features the participation of multiple Kuwaiti teams.



The head of the Kuwaiti Committee for 'Mini Goal' Hassan Al Khawaja.



Galatasaray's Sacha Boey jumps over Fenerbahçe's Miguel Crespo for the ball during a Turkish Super Lig soccer match between Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray at Sukru Saracoglu stadium in Istanbul, Turkey. The match ended 0-0. (AP)

# Sports

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## Ministerial decision sparks controversy

Clubs rally against unlawful revocation

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25:** A press conference is scheduled for 7:00 pm today at the Kuwait Lawyers Association Theater, addressing the cancellation of registration for 24 specialized clubs. This includes participation from legal professionals aiming to elucidate the unlawfulness of the cancellation, pinpoint errors in the decision, and assess its broader impact on athletes and the sports sector.

Muhammad Al-Aiban, the Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, recently issued a ministerial decision, published in "Kuwait Al-Youm," revoking the status of 24 specialized sports clubs.

Following a coordination meeting held two nights ago, 11 of these clubs, in collaboration with legal representatives, prepared for today's press conference. The objective is to shed light on the reasons behind the cancellation, highlight the General Sports Authority's procedural errors, and emphasize the decision's contradiction with established laws, despite a refusal from religious and legislative bodies.

Lawyer Mutlaq Al-Jadei asserted during the coordination meeting that committees were formed to prepare defense teams against this decision. He emphasized that the cancellation of club advertisements is illegal, resulting in a catastrophe that prevents over a thousand male and female players from participating in sports. Al-Jadei deemed the decision ill-considered and predicted its annulment through legal

channels.

Echoing this sentiment, lawyer Mishari Al-Harbash emphasized the constitutional role of these clubs in protecting and nurturing young talent as per Article (10) of the Kuwaiti Constitution. He criticized the unexpected decisions and stressed the violation of the law, urging its repeal and recourse to the judiciary for resolution.

The President of the Kuwaiti Modern Pentathlon Club, Nasser Al-Waleed, condemned the arbitrary decision, describing its consequences as detrimental to young athletes and Kuwaiti sports. He revealed plans to refute the decision during the press conference, urging the attendance of Minister Muhammad Al-Aiban and General Sports Authority Director Yousef Al-Baidan to clarify the decision's basis.

Abdullah Al-Ali, President of the Electronic Games Club, affirmed that the de-registered clubs fulfilled all conditions, including headquarters, a constitution, over 50 founding members, and a budget. The Secretary General of the Kuwaiti Cycling Club, Othman Al-Mutairi, labeled the decision unjust and pledged to reveal its circumstances during the conference, calling on members of the National Assembly to attend.

Dr. Falah Al-Mahwash, President of the Kuwaiti Inspire Sports Club for cars and motorcycles, invited relevant officials to witness evidence confirming the decision's incorrectness, illegality, and invalidity. He stressed the importance of supporting accomplished clubs that contribute significantly to Kuwait's sporting achievements, differentiating them from so-called "paper" clubs that should be eliminated.



Members of India women team celebrate with the winners trophy after their win in the one off Test cricket match against Australia women in Mumbai, India. (AP)

TCU downs Hawaii to finish 3rd

## Nevada wins Diamond Head Classic championship

Blues have more yellow cards than any other PL team

## Pochettino unfazed by Chelsea disciplinary record

**LONDON, Dec 25, (AP):** Chelsea manager Mauricio Pochettino is defending his team's unwelcome position as the Premier League side with the most yellow cards this season.

Pochettino said Chelsea's 56 bookings in 18 league games don't show a lack of discipline but rather his players' desire to compete.

"We are in a big club, you feel the pressure," Pochettino said ahead of Chelsea's next league game against Crystal Palace on Wednesday. "When you are frustrated, and you don't have maybe the experience of other teams, you make a mistake."

The team collected five bookings during the 2-1 defeat to Wolves at Molineux on Sunday, among them Cole Palmer who will now miss the Palace game after accruing five for the campaign.

Raheem Sterling also saw yellow for simulation when he sought a penalty in stoppage time.

"Palmer is playing for us his first season as a regular. It's

normal. The players care, they want to win, they are frustrated," Pochettino said. "It's not discipline. We need to have more the capacity to read the situation of the game."

Chelsea has already seen suspensions for Reece James, Malo Gusto and Conor Gallagher after being sent off earlier in the season, while summer signing Nicolas Jackson is only two bookings short of 10 for the campaign and

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a further two-match ban, having also been suspended in September.

Pochettino also pointed toward injuries as a contributing factor in his team's overall struggles, with at least eight players unfit for the meeting with Palace at Stamford Bridge.

Chelsea is 10th in the league, five places higher than Palace.



Lawyers Mutlaq Al-Jadei and Mishari Al-Harbash addressing the media.



President of the Kuwaiti Modern Pentathlon Club Nasser Al-Waleed.

## Liverpool star Mohamed Salah shares pain of grieving families

**LIVERPOOL, England, Dec 25, (AP):** Liverpool soccer star Mohamed Salah says he "shares the pain" of grieving families at Christmas amid the Israel-Hamas war.

The Egypt international posted a message on X, formerly known as Twitter, saying: "Christmas is a time when families get together and celebrate.

"With the brutal war going on

in the Middle East, especially the death and destruction in Gaza, this year we get to Christmas with very heavy hearts and we share the pain of those families who are grieving the loss of their loved ones.

"Please do not forget them and do not get used to their suffering. Merry Christmas."

Egypt has floated an ambitious plan to end the war.

**HONOLULU, Dec 25, (AP):** Kenan Blackshear finished with 30 points and Jared Lucas scored 20 to lead Nevada to a 72-64 victory over Georgia Tech in the championship game of the Diamond Head Classic on Sunday night.

Blackshear made 11 of 14 shots from the floor and 8 of 11 from the free-throw line for the Wolf Pack (12-1), who have won five in a row. Lucas sank 7 of 13 shots, including 4 of 7 from 3-point range. Nick Davidson pitched in with nine points and eight rebounds.

Baye Ndongo totaled 20 points and eight rebounds to pace the Yellow Jackets (8-4), who had a four-game win streak snapped. Miles Kelly scored 10 on 3-for-15 shooting, including 1 for 9 from distance. Georgia Tech has not won five in a row since November 2021.

Lucas sank two 3-pointers and scored 10. Blackshear scored nine and hit a jumper with one second left to give Nevada a 36-30 lead at half-time. Kelly and Ndongo both had eight points at the half for Georgia Tech.

The Wolf Pack maintained the lead throughout the second half although Georgia Tech closed within a point on three occasions. Kowacic Reeves Jr. had a three-point play to pull the Yellow Jackets within 64-62 with 2:38 left to play. Blackshear nailed a jumper at the 1:20 mark and hit two free throws with 37 seconds to go to push Nevada's lead to two possessions.

Nevada won its third tournament under coach Steve Alford - also winning the 2019 Paradise Jam and the 2021 Crossover Classic.

### BASKETBALL

The Yellow Jackets, under first-year coach Damon Stoudamire, were looking to win a tournament for the first time since the 2003 Preseason NIT. Stoudamire lost all four matchups with Nevada while he was the coach of the Pacific Tigers, prior to taking the Georgia Tech job.

In the only other meeting between the schools, Georgia Tech beat Nevada in the semifinal of the 2004 St. Louis Regional in the NCAA Tournament.

Georgia Tech is off until Jan. 3 when the Yellow Jackets travel to play Florida State in an Atlantic Coast Conference matchup. Nevada returns home to play Fresno Pacific on Saturday.

Jameer Nelson Jr. came off the bench to score 13 points, helping TCU defeat Hawaii 65-51 for third place.

Nelson made 3 of 6 shots with a 3-pointer and all six of his free throws for the Horned Frogs (10-2). Trevian Tennyson added 10 points and five rebounds. Xavier Cork totaled nine points and eight rebounds off the bench.

Cork scored all his points in the first half. Tennyson had two of TCU's five 3-pointers and scored eight and the Horned Frogs took a 36-27 lead into halftime. Noel Coleman sank two 3-pointers and scored



Wolverhampton Wanderers' Mario Lemina (right), challenges for the ball with Chelsea's Christopher Nkunku during the English Premier League soccer match between Wolverhampton Wanderers and Chelsea at Molineux stadium in Wolverhampton, England. (AP)

13 for Hawaii.

Micah Peavy and Avery Anderson III had layups in the first two minutes of the second half and the Horned Frogs maintained a double-digit lead for all but 20 seconds from there.

Coleman finished with 19 points to lead the Rainbow Warriors (8-4). Reserve Juan Munoz scored nine.

TCU coach Jamie Dixon had two stints as an assistant for Hawaii (1992-94 and 1998-99).

It was the first time TCU played on Christmas Eve since 1997 when the Horned Frogs beat Iowa State 93-54 in the Puerto Rico Holiday Classic.

TCU leads the all-time series 8-3.

Hawaii won the previous two meetings, most recently in 2001 - a 99-79 victory during the Western Athletic Conference Tournament when both were members from 1996-2001.

TCU returns home to play Texas A&M-Commerce on Jan. 1. Hawaii will host Cal State Fullerton on Saturday in a Big West Conference opener.

Meanwhile, fifth-ranked UConn will be without star center Donovan Clingan for about a month because of a right foot injury, the school said.

The 7-foot-2 sophomore was hurt coming down under the basket during the second half of the Huskies' 15-point loss at Seton Hall on Wednesday.

Tests showed Clingan hurt a tendon in the foot, the school said in a statement that did not elaborate on the extent of the injury.

Clingan missed a month of the preseason with an injury to the same foot, but UConn coach Dan Hurley said Friday that the two injuries are not related.

Clingan is averaging just under 14 points and a little more than six rebounds.

The announcement came just before the Huskies (11-2, 1-1 Big East) beat St. John's (8-4, 1-1) 69-65 on Saturday night in Hartford. UConn won't play again until it returns to campus on Jan. 2 for a game against DePaul.