

## Local

# Kuwaiti short film 'The Gift' wins prestigious int'l award

## Only GCC movie to participate in 18th Vesuvius International Film Festival

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti short film 'The Gift' was awarded the best short drama at the 18th edition of the Vesuvius International Film Festival in Italy (an IMDb qualifier festival) on Dec 31, 2021. This was the only movie from the GCC region participating in the festival. The Gift ranked first among 40 other films in this category. Last Monday, 'The Gift' was also awarded as 'the Best Microfilm' at the independent shorts awards, Los Angeles.

The film is written and directed by Mohammed Al-Hamdi and stars Abdullah Safar, Sara Hashim, Caroline Saeed, Ghala Al-Hamdi and TV presenter Zamzam Salem. Yaqoub Muqadam is the shooting director. Its running time is 4:05 minutes. The plot revolves around the idea of a woman deciding to present her friend an unexpected gift on her birthday.

"As a pet breeder and lover of animals, I'm in contact with various animal rights organizations and volunteer committees. We always face the common problem of people abandoning their pets after adopting them for a short time, especially after they buy a pet as a gift for someone who is not interested in animals in the first place. Also, people buy animals as a trend for a few months and then throw them away," Hamdi told Kuwait Times.

### Animal care

Cats and dogs are most affected by this negligent behavior. "These animals are friends of humans. These animals have needs. They need health, mental and nutritional care. The rising cases of abandoned animals affected me greatly. So my way of support and providing help is through my hobby of directing and producing movies," stressed Hamdi.

From here came the idea of 'The Gift'. "The cast and crew, in addition to my family members, supported my idea. I present workshops as a certified media

trainer, and this movie was a practical application of my last workshop," he explained.

Initially, Hamdi didn't plan to participate in film festivals. "After I posted the movie online, I noticed 32 different accounts on Instagram reposted it. Then some officials from various film festivals contacted me and invited me to participate with this film. I participated in six festivals and even qualified for the finals, but didn't win. Finally, I won at the Vesuvius International Film Festival, which I consider a present for the New Year," he pointed out.

### Bigger role

Zamzam Salem had a bigger role in the movie than the lone scene at the end. "The cat seen at the end of the film was almost impossible to control and shoot. Zamzam controlled it and made the shooting possible," he said. This was the second time Zamzam worked on a film with Hamdi. "We are like one family. We share the same ideas and I trust his work, his choice of characters and his ideas, which encouraged me to participate in this movie. I love pets and the media, and this movie combined these two. The success of this movie is not in its running time, but the idea. The message of 'The Gift' is what matters," said Zamzam.

There are new movies in the pipeline. "I'm preparing short and long films in 2022. I will participate with two new short movies in upcoming film festivals. I'm also preparing to shoot full-length movies in September. This is a part of series of films on animals with the hashtag: We Are Their Voice," said Hamdi.

"In Kuwait we have many talented people in this field. Since they are producing movies, they will definitely improve. Most of the team that worked on this movie did this for the first time, including the cameramen, producers and some actors. The message of this movie is that animals are not random gifts to be discarded, but souls that need our care and love," he concluded.



The film's poster



Mohammed Al-Hamdi



Zamzam Salem

## NBK Academy celebrates 25th batch's graduation

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) Academy celebrated the graduation of the 25th batch, the 2nd in 2021, of newly hired employees who successfully met admission criteria for this intensive course, specially designed for fresh Kuwaiti university graduates.

The graduation ceremony was attended by Emad Al-Ablani, GM - Group Human Resources and Najla Al-Sager, Head of Talent Management, Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait, subject to all precautionary measures taken by the bank against coronavirus.

The Academy's training program, which lasted for four months, hosted 13 participants and covered various areas of the banking business, such as banking principles, risk management, financial accounting, marketing, negotiation, consumer and commercial lending, as well as training on creativity, innovation and design thinking. Various blend-

ed learning interventions occurred through in-person and virtual courses. Furthermore, their development continues through eLearning after the academy ends.

On this occasion, Najla Al-Sager, Head of Talent Management, Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "NBK Academy is one of the initiatives we are proud of, aiming to qualify professional national banking leaders."

NBK pays great attention to enhancing the skills of its employees, harnessing all its capabilities to contribute to their career development by providing training and development programs in cooperation with the most prestigious educational institutions, she added.

Sager emphasized that NBK's strategy to develop its human cadres is placed at the heart of its strategic plans, due to its belief that an efficient work team guarantees the provision of high-quality banking services of all kinds, and across the different markets, the bank operates in.

Launched 13 years ago, NBK Academy embodies the bank's strategy to recruit fresh graduate national talents as well as develop and qualify them to work in the banking sector. It is worth mentioning that the program content is regularly enhanced to keep pace with the latest international researches



and studies related to the banking sector and administrative sciences.

The Academy reflects NBK's vision to support sustainable human capital development as one of its top strategic priorities and a shared responsibility between the various governmental institutions and the private sector.

NBK Academy was launched in 2008 with a view to pave the way for fresh Kuwaiti graduates to join the banking services sector. The Academy provides graduates with the best training programs developed in cooperation with leading international institutions and universities to meet the demands of the labor market.

## Students struggle as Lebanon crisis...

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"All of this is additional cost," said 22-year-old Ghassan, a student at the Sagesse University.

Several institutions have set up special student funds in an attempt to maintain enrolment levels, said Jean-Noel Baleo, Middle East director of the Francophone University Agency—a network of French-speaking institutions. "Some universities are keeping students who cannot pay, which is a form of hidden bursary," he told AFP. But he said such Band-Aid fixes were barely slowing the decline of a higher education system that was once a source of national pride, and whose multilingual graduates flooded the region's elites.

"It's a collapse we're talking about, and there's more bad news on the way," said Baleo, who predicted the definitive closure of some universities and an

intensifying brain drain. Education Minister Abbas Halabi admitted he was largely powerless to stem the sector's crisis. "I tried to secure subsidies for the Lebanese University from foreign donors but at this stage they have not replied positively," he said. "The Lebanese state does not have the means."

Even as the financial meltdown threatens several pillars of the country's education system, Lebanon's political elite—widely blamed for collapse—have resisted reforms that would open the way for international assistance, and the cabinet has not met in three months. "Today, the easiest option is to set up online classes, even if that remains a difficult option. Rising transport costs make it the least-worth fix," Baleo said.

In the meantime, students like Tarek say the crisis is turning university life into an ordeal. "It's exhausting and depressing," he said. "I am considering quitting university... The wages are so bad that you're not even motivated to graduate to find a job," he said. Student Ghassan said he only wanted to graduate so it could help him leave the country. "All the youth want to leave because there's no clear future here," he said.— AFP

vessel's seizure has raised fears the seven-year war could spill over into the busy Red Sea shipping lane, a vital conduit for Gulf oil and cargo.

It prompted a coalition threat to bomb rebel-held ports including Hodeida, a lifeline for the shattered country where millions are teetering on the brink of famine. Hans Grundberg, the UN's special envoy for Yemen, also said violence was escalating with clashes in Marib and Shabwa provinces, air strikes in Sanaa and Ta'ez and fighting near Hodeida, as well as increasing drone and missile attacks on Saudi Arabia.

"We appear to once more be entering an escalatory cycle with predictable devastating implications for civilians and for the immediate prospects of peace," the Swedish diplomat told the Security Council. "I am worried that battles could intensify along other fronts." Yemen's civil war began in 2014 when the Houthis seized Sanaa, prompting Saudi-led forces to intervene to prop up the government the following year. The UN has estimated the war killed 377,000 people by the end of 2021, both directly and indirectly through hunger and disease.— AFP

## What's in Wordle? Five-letter puzzle...

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for everyone. Can't crack today's puzzle? You'll just have to wait until tomorrow for the next one.

Although the game itself is accessed on a website, rather than an app, players can generate a shareable widget, with six lines of colored squares indicating how many tries it took to solve the riddle — without giving away the day's answer, of course. After a couple of weeks, Drubin — like legions of players — took to sharing her results on social media under the hashtag #Wordle. And thus, a viral phenomenon was born.

### 'Just fun'

Part of what makes Wordle special is that it costs nothing to play — and is also, more unusually, ad-free. Its designer Josh Wardle, a software engineer based in Brooklyn but originally from Wales, has decided not to monetize the game. "I think people kind of appreciate that there's this thing online that's just fun," Wardle told The New York Times on Monday. "It's not trying to do anything shady with your data or your eyeballs."

While the game website — "powerlanguage.co.uk/wordle" — is free of ads or pop-ups, it did not take long for enterprising copycats to try to mimic the game concept, devising app store clones for purchase which have since been taken down. The lone app left standing is an unrelated game called "Wordle!" with an exclamation

mark, created by a teenager five years ago. Its developer Steven Cravotta, now 24, says he initially "had no idea what was going on" when his app starting logging more than 40,000 daily downloads. "I didn't know it was a craze," Cravotta told The Wall Street Journal.

### Bragging rights

For Mikael Jakobsson, a research coordinator for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Game Lab, Wordle falls into the "gap-filler" category, a game "that you can pull out when you're waiting for a friend or... for the bus." He puts its success partly down to how easy it is to share results with friends, either by social media or word-of-mouth.

When you crack the puzzle, "you feel very proud of yourself... You have that share button right there. So then you can brag a little bit about it, which we tend to like doing." Rachel Kowert, a psychologist specializing in video games, also points to the social comparison theory, which holds that everyone wants to evaluate themselves in relation to others. The temptation is such that tongue-in-cheek debates have sprung up online about muting friends who tweet out their "humble-brag" scores.

Another key part of the game's allure, says Kowert, is that being "limited to one a day gives you a sense of psychological scarcity." "You're not overdoing it in any one session, and it keeps you wanting to come back to continue to play day after day," she said. Wordle is already being adapted into other languages, including French, having swiftly conquered the English-speaking world — although, spoiler alert, the Wednesday word's American spelling triggered howls of online player protests from its creator's fellow Britons.— AFP

## UAE condemns ship seizure...

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The Iran-backed insurgents say the ship was carrying military hardware but the Saudi-led coalition fighting in support of the Yemeni government insists it was medical equipment.

"We condemn, in the strongest terms, the Houthi act of piracy against the civilian cargo vessel Rwabee off the port of Hodeida," Lana Nusseibeh, the UAE's permanent representative to the United Nations, told the Security Council.

"This is a dangerous escalation against the safety of maritime navigation in the Red Sea. It requires the adoption of a firm position by the Security Council," she said, according to a foreign ministry statement. The

## Lawmakers urge government to...

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Amendments to the press and publications law reduce the capital needed to establish a newspaper from KD 250,000 to just KD

100,000. The amendments to the audio-visual law scrap criminalizing remarks that could undermine relations with Arab countries.

In another development, the Health Ministry yesterday reported 4,883 new coronavirus cases, a new record high, with one death. The number of patients at intensive care units is 17 and those receiving treatment at hospitals increased to 213. The number of active cases climbed to 32,556 cases.