

The Boston Globe

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MONDAY, JANUARY 1, 2024

‘The study is just the first step in improving our efforts.’

PARDIS SAFFARI, *director of economic opportunity and development in Cambridge*

In diverse city, study reveals a blind spot

Tiny portion of contracts in Cambridge went to firms owned by people of color

By Diti Kohli
GLOBE STAFF

Cambridge has long been hailed as a progressive bastion and home to among the more racially and ethnically diverse populations in Massachusetts. But a “disparity study” commissioned by the City Council has found that just one-half of 1 percent of some \$260 million in city contracts went to firms owned by

people of color over a recent five-year period.

It’s a disappointing “but not surprising” finding, business advocates say. Already, community leaders inside and outside of Cambridge City Hall are calling for change.

“The study is just the first step in improving our efforts,” said Pardis Saffari, director of economic opportunity and development in Cam-

bridge. “We’re hoping to not only work internally but also externally with the community to ensure that people are aware that the city is open and ready to do business with them.”

In a memo releasing the report last week, city officials pledged to expand contracting opportunities for businesses owned by people of color and women and help them find such opportunities.

Ordered in 2020, the study found that the city awarded just \$3.1 million to minority- and wom-

en-owned enterprises in contracts for city services between July 2016 and July 2021. Of that, more than half — \$1.7 million — went to businesses owned by white women.

Another \$1 million was spent with Asian-owned firms, and \$300,000 with Hispanic-owned firms. Around \$7,000 went to Native-American businesses, and less than \$60,000 to Black-owned businesses, despite Black people accounting for nearly 11 percent of the city’s population.

CAMBRIDGE, Page A9

US sinks 3 Houthi boats in Red Sea

Pentagon says commercial ship was being attacked

By David E. Sanger, Eric Schmitt,
and Vivek Shankar
NEW YORK TIMES

A clash between Iranian-backed Houthi fighters who were attacking a commercial freighter and US Navy helicopters responding to the ship’s distress call ended Sunday morning with the killing of all the crew members on three Houthi boats, the Pentagon said, a sharp escalation of violence at a moment when the White House is considering direct strikes on Iran’s proxies in the Middle East.

It appeared to be the first time that US and allied forces patrolling the Red Sea, a critical waterway for oil and other shipments, have engaged in a deadly firefight with the Houthis since their attacks on ships began in October, following the outbreak of the war between Israel and Hamas. President Biden has said he wants to avoid direct military attacks on the Houthis in Yemen, to avoid escalating a Middle East conflict that is already threatening to spread throughout the region.

But in the fight that broke out Sunday morning, Navy forces had little choice, at least according to the account given by US Central Command.

The Houthis had launched an attack on the freighter, the Maersk Hangzhou, a Singapore-flagged container ship, and were attempting to board it. As the ship’s security forces tried to hold

RED SEA, Page A6

BRIGHT LIGHTS, NEW YEAR



MATTHEW J. LEE/GLOBE STAFF

The new year arrived with holiday lights and fireworks as seen from Boston Common during the annual First Night celebration. An early fireworks display got going at 7 p.m., following the parade. This was the first year that City Hall Plaza was the center of events. **B1.**

A new year brings fresh challenges for the leaders of small cities across Massachusetts, which will swear in mayors, city councilors, and school committee members this week. **B1.**

Bailey Zappe threw three interceptions, and the Patriots lost to Buffalo, 27-21, leaving them with four wins and one game to go. **C1.**

The president of the Congo, Felix Tshisekedi, was declared the winner of the December presidential vote in an election marred by severe logistical problems, protests, and calls for its annulment from several opposition candidates. **A4.**

Many changes planned but little settled for English learners in Boston schools



ERIN CLARK/GLOBE STAFF

María Mejía talked with her son Joangel at a playground near his school. She is concerned that he’ll lose his understanding of Spanish.

Families fear bilingual skills loss for children

By Deanna Pan
GLOBE STAFF

A few months ago, María Mejía’s son traveled to her native Dominican Republic with his grandmother. Almost immediately, the 8-year-old wanted to go home, she said. No one spoke English, he complained. He felt uncomfortable in a country where Spanish is the dominant tongue. His admission nearly broke his mother’s

THE GREAT DIVIDE

Race, class, and opportunity in our schools

interpreter.

Mejía’s son is a second grader in the South End at Blackstone Elementary School, where 48 percent of the students are non-native English speakers and classes are taught entirely in English. Although

ENGLISH LEARNERS, Page A9

heart. “You can put the language in front of him and he won’t understand it,” Mejía, 45, of Roxbury, said through an

Finding lessons for life in accounting of 2023’s deaths

By Joseph P. Kahn
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

In the span of two weeks, the country lost three figures who for decades quietly reshaped the world around them and the world at large.

Mourned in swift succession in late November and early December were former first lady Rosalynn Carter, an advocate for mental health care and women’s rights who became one of the most influential first ladies in history before turning her sights to humanitarian needs across the globe; onetime secretary of state Henry Kissinger, primary architect of American foreign policy

under two presidents and adviser to several others; and Sandra Day O’Connor, the first female Supreme Court justice, who cast the pivotal vote in many key rulings during her 24 years on the court.

In this past year of volatility, of deepening divisions, of ancient animosities, and current bloodshed, their deaths offer us a chance at the dawn of a new year to consider, perhaps more than ever, what leadership, talent, and vision can accomplish for the greater good.

In that spirit, we remember scores of noteworthy individuals

DEATHS, Page A8



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

Among those who died in 2023 were (clockwise from top left): Tina Turner, Mel King, Henry Kissinger, Sandra Day O’Connor, and Tim Wakefield.



Starting fine

Monday: Variably cloudy. High: 37-42. Low: 24-49.

Tuesday: Plenty of sun. High: 39-44. Low: 29-34.

Sunrise: 7:13 Sunset: 4:22 Comics and Weather, **D4-5.**

Obituaries, **C12.**

VOL. 305, NO. 1

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Suggested retail price
\$3.50

