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Opinion

Dear government, in active development, do yesterday what tomorrow demands

■ Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

RECENT global developments require a shift in operational strategies, with urgency heightened by signs of a potential settlement to the war in Ukraine, which could end the conflict with Russia.

At the same time, new geopolitical dynamics, particularly in Venezuela, are expected to drive oil prices down.

This vulnerability was clearly demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the price of a barrel fell below seven dollars, causing huge deficits for oil-producing nations.

International instability, such as worsening global problems or new conflicts, poses a huge risk to sovereign wealth funds invested abroad, especially those in high-risk or unreliable portfolios, potentially leading to losses.

To reduce this exposure, governments are strategically diversifying their investments, with a key focus on maintaining a high percentage of investments domestically to ensure greater security.

Also, efforts to strengthen the internal economy are reflected in the establishment of local industries and service facilities, as well as the revitalization of agriculture to achieve a minimum level of food self-sufficiency.

These measures help bolster the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and mitigate the impact of regional or global crises.

This proactive, future-oriented economic vision is being adopted globally, guided by carefully selected domestic and international economic experts who are granted broad authority.

Their mandate is to boost national output and systematically reduce economic risks, moving beyond temporary, reactive measures.

Kuwait has been discussing diversification of income sources and development projects for 60 years, yet these remain largely aspirational, confined to paper.

The country continues to rely almost entirely on oil as its sole source of income. This leaves the national budget vulnerable to fluctuations in oil prices. A drop increases the deficit, and a rise offers little relief, failing to address the underlying dependency.

For example, when the price of a barrel reached approximately one hundred dollars, the overall situation was not significantly different from when it stood at forty dollars. This is due to the continued failure of successive governments to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to reduce the country's dependence on a single source of revenue.

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1st Deputy PM tours Abdali, 'strengthens' food security efforts

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah conducted a field security tour in Abdali as part of his commitment to monitoring security conditions and reviewing operations at vital sites related to food security and public services, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement issued on Friday, the Ministry of Interior explained that the tour included visits to several farms in Abdali, where Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef reviewed the ongoing efforts and received briefings on operational procedures and challenges facing farmers.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef affirmed the Ministry of Interior's support for all efforts that enhance security, stability, and serve the public interest.

He also visited the farmers' market in Abdali, where he reviewed its organization and operations, commanding its role in supporting local produce and strengthening the food security system. He emphasized the importance of following regulations and guidelines to ensure public safety.

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Holiday rush sees 154,000 travelers at Kuwait airport

Dubai, Istanbul, Jeddah among top New Year destinations



Photo by Samer Shiper

Kuwait security forces maintain order and safety outside Al Kout Mall in Fahaheel on New Year's Eve. — See Page 3

191 cameras installed

Cooperatives in Kuwait under 24/7 surveillance

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: Dr. Sayed Issa, the acting Assistant Undersecretary for Financial and Administrative Affairs at the Ministry of Social Affairs, says the ministry has completed the installation of 191 surveillance cameras across supply centers and central markets in all cooperative societies.

He explained in a press release that the system is designed to provide continuous administrative and security monitoring, with cameras connected to control rooms at the Ministry of Social Affairs in Abdullah Al-Salem, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in Saddiq, and the Ministry of Interior's Information Systems Center.

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Free gifts, sales dominate Nov promotions

Precious metals checks generate KD 308,600

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: Approximately 455 kilograms of precious metals were inspected in the month of November 2025, generating over KD 308,600 in inspection fees.

According to statistics issued by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the inspected metals included six types - gold, silver, gold set with precious stones, silver set with precious stones, and other metals.

Official ministry data showed that

around 213 kilograms of gold were inspected in November, generating more than KD 106,000 in fees, along with 149 kilograms of silver inspections generated KD 149,000. Also, approximately 28.1 kilograms of gold set with precious stones were inspected, generating KD 19,800 in fees, and 12.8 kilograms of gold set with diamonds, generating about KD 13,000 in fees.

The statistics also highlighted the inspection of 21.7 kilograms of silver inlaid with precious stones, valued at KD 5,400, and 29.7 kilograms of other metals, valued at KD 14,000, in addition

to 4.4 kilograms of plated accessories, valued at KD 448, and 1.6 kilograms of prayer beads, valued at KD 837.

In November, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry issued 441 promotional advertisements. Of these, 31 percent were for free gift distributions (136 transactions), 27 percent were emergency seasonal offers (119 transactions), 24.3 percent were sales promotions (107 transactions), and 10.7 percent were discounts on goods, services, and crafts (47 transactions).

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Jahra, EPA fine desert violators KD 250-5,000

By Suzan Nasser

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: Jahra Municipality, in cooperation with the Environment Public Authority (EPA) and with support from the Ministry of Interior, conducted a large-scale inspection campaign in the northern region (Subiya desert - the first and second bridges).

The campaign, which followed a recent visit by the Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs, Abdul Latif Al-Mishari, was carried out in implementation of his directives on addressing violations, regulating camping sites, and protecting the desert environment.

The campaign was led by Director of the Cleaning Department at Jahra Municipality and Head of the Northern Region Camps Committee Nawaf Al-Mutairi, with the participation of Director of the Desertification Department at EPA Ma'arib Al-Kandari.

Al-Kandari confirmed that the inspections resulted in the identification of 10 camps and the issuance of four citations against camps that were established in unauthorized locations or secured with concrete blocks.

In this regard, Al-Mutairi explained that the campaign also resulted in the impounding of six trucks equipped with diesel engines

Newswatch

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwaiti Minister of Information and Culture, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi opened on Thursday the "Kuwait Geopark" project, north of Kuwait Bay.

The scheme came within the framework of backing national projects to highlight the country's historic, geological and natural heritage, and boost educational and cultural tourism, the minister told KUNA and Kuwait TV in a statement during the inauguration.

The project shows the political leadership's attention to national projects, and the strategy of the Ministry of Information and Culture, and the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) to partake in national schemes.

It contributes to providing enough information about human and earth, he said, stressing the need of institutions' partnership - like Kuwait Oil Company - in implementing this project.

The project highlights Kuwait's identity and information, and enhances tourist side to provide all services, Al-Mutairi noted. (KUNA)

Kuwaiti visitors to Uzbekistan surge in 2025 as tourism peaks

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: Ibrahim Aliyev, Advisor at the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Kuwait, highlighted the importance of enhancing tourism cooperation between Kuwait and Uzbekistan.

Speaking at a press conference held to showcase Uzbekistan's rich and diverse tourism potential, he said the event provided an opportunity to review the achievements of Uzbekistan's tourism sector in 2025.

Aliyev explained that tourism is not only an economic driver but also a cultural window that reflects a country's history,



Aliyev

Continued on Page 5

Video triggers arrest

Illegal trade targeted in coordinated 'raids'

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: The Criminal Security Sector, represented by the General Department of Criminal Investigation's Land Border Investigations Department, seized a warehouse used for smuggling subsidized food supplies out of Kuwait.

In a press statement, the Ministry of Interior explained that the warehouse was discovered following a referral from the customs unit at the Salmi border crossing, where a vehicle attempting to leave Kuwait with concealed quantities

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KAPP opens tender for 23 public assets

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3, (KUNA): Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects (KAPP), in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, announced Saturday an invitation for the provision of advisory services relating to feasibility studies and tender documents for 23 projects involving state-owned real estate properties.

In a press release, it said it invited specialized local, regional, and international advisory firms and/or consortiums, in accordance with the provisions of Law No. (116) of 2014 regarding Public-Private Partnerships and its Executive Regulations, and pursuant to the procedures set out under Law No. (49) of 2016 regarding Public Tenders and its Executive Regulations.

The projects include Fahaahe Waterfront Development Project - "Al Kout", the Waterfront Development Project - Phase Five "Marina Mall", Number of Two (2) Construction Waste Treatment Plants, Al-Duwalia Center Project, Al-Mutahida Market, Al-Maseel Market, Al-Kabeer Market and Al-Watiya Market.

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culture, and national values to the world.

Approximately 1,000 Kuwaiti citizens visited Uzbekistan this year, double the number recorded last year.

The tourism companies in both countries are working to organize and widely promote special tourism programs for Kuwaitis, in addition to Jazeera Airways operating four weekly flights to Tashkent and Namangan.

Last year witnessed the implementation of major reforms in the tourism sector, along with the launch of new projects, improvements in service quality, and expanded international cooperation. These achievements are the result of the efforts of the staff and specialists working in the sector.

Aliyev went on to explain that Uzbekistan welcomed more than 11 million foreign tourists in 2025, an unprecedented record, averaging nearly one million visitors per month.

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Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:18 Asr 14:43
 Sunrise .. 06:43 Maghrib .. 17:02
 Zohr 11:52 Isha 18:24

Local

Condolences expressed with Swiss leader

Amir condoles with Bangladesh Pres. over passing of former prime minister

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable to President Mohammad Shahabuddin, of the friendly People's Republic of Bangladesh, to express sincere condolences for the passing of former prime minister Khaleda Zia. His Highness the Amir prayed for Allah the Almighty to bestow mercy upon the soul of the late premier and grant her family patience and solace.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also sent a cable of condolences to Bangladesh's President Mohammad Shahabuddin over the demise of former prime minister Khaleda Zia.

His Highness the Crown Prince prayed for Allah the Almighty to bestow His mercy upon Zia's soul and bring solace to her family.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdulla Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah then sent a cable to President Guy Parmelin, of the friendly Swiss Confederation, to express sincere condolences over scores of victims of a fire at tourist resort in Crans-Montana, southern Switzerland, on Thursday.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also sent a cable to President Guy Parmelin, of the friendly Swiss Confederation, to express sincere condolences over scores of victims of a fire at tourist resort in Crans-Montana, southern Switzerland, on Thursday.

Switzerland

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences to Swiss President Guy Parmelin over the victims of the fire that erupted at a tourist resort in southern Switzerland.

His Highness the Amir prayed for Allah the Almighty to bestow His mercy upon the souls of the dozens of victims, wishing a quick recovery.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also sent a cable to President Guy Parmelin, of the friendly Swiss Confederation, to express sincere condolences over scores of victims of a fire at tourist resort in Crans-Montana, southern Switzerland, on Thursday.

See Also Page 6

Well-planned development strategy

Kuwait Gov't masterminded multiple enterprises thru '25

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: The Council also required all entities to circulate the ministerial decision amending provisions of Decision No. 206 of 2009 on regulating construction works and attached schedules, and to publish them on official electronic websites nationwide.

Additionally, the government had instructed the ministry of commerce and industry to present a regular report about the strategic development supplies centers and the ministry of health to bolster the medical security system.

It also sought to attain a qualitative leap in the air cargo services as part of the approach to improve the business environment and facilitate commodities' movement.



Dr. Al-Masha'an

At the energy level, it assigned 12 government departments to facilitate the executive plan for energy transformation as part of the approach toward carbon neutrality by 2060, complying to international pledges in this regard.

The government had tasked Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy Dr. Mahmoud Boushehri to coordinate with Minister of Public Works Dr. Nora Al-Masha'an to achieve optimal usage of treated water, examining plans to form artificial lakes and build long canals to water the wildlife, fauna and flora.

With respect of human and social development, the cabinet focused on a package of key sectors covering health, education and housing. The ministry of education was tasked with completing implementing of the ministry's reforms, and the minister of health was asked to chart preliminary plans to establish Sabah Al-Ahmad Medical City and Al-Mutla' medical facility according to international criteria.

It also asked the ministry of health to present, every six months, a report about the file of treatment abroad, activating medical evacuation, building the virtual health office, financial settlements, signing of memoranda of understanding, liver transplants and various medical services.

Concluded

Other Voices

What does Shlomo Sand's book say?

By Ahmad alsarraf

The prominent Israeli historian Ilan Pappe said, "It is important to understand that the Zionists who established the State of Israel were secular and their goal was to modernize Judaism."

However, they used the holy book politically, not religiously, after realizing that many Christians would support their movement based on what was written in the Old Testament, and they succeeded in this.

Over time, they managed to convince the religious among them that colonizing Palestine was a religious mission, even though their goal was never to establish a religious state. It was always a colonial project, similar to other European colonial efforts, especially those targeting groups who felt unwelcome or wanted to escape problems in Europe. They decided to build a new life on someone else's land, choosing Palestine, in the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds, where people were already living. But they did not care, because the Zionist movement believed from the beginning that it had the right to remove Palestinians in order to build their desired 'European' state. They did not want the



local population."

Shlomo Sand, a professor at Tel Aviv University, is like Pappe, Benny Morris, Simcha Flapan, and Avi Shlaim. He was one of the Israeli historians who challenged traditional narratives of Israeli history and questioned the founding myths of Israel. They relied on declassified government documents, released three decades after Israel's establishment, and on extensive archaeological research, which found no evidence in Jerusalem or Palestine of Solomon's time or David's Temple, or of a historical entity called Israel, its people, or its land. Dismantling the founding myths of Zionism and Israel was therefore a difficult task for Sand.

In his books, "When and How Was the Land of Israel Invented?", "When and How Were the Jewish People Invented?", and "How I Stopped Being an Israeli", Sand denied the existence of a Jewish people exiled from their homeland into the Diaspora. He argued that most Eastern European Jews converted to Judaism at various points in history.

Sand has faced hatred and death threats because of his work. His book "When and How Were the Jewish People Invented?" has been translated into more than twenty languages, including Arabic and Chinese.

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Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: A significant decrease in temperature and rather cold with light to moderate freshening at times northwesterly wind, with speeds of 15-55 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear with a chance for rising dust over open

areas.

By Night: Cold to very cold with light to moderate freshening over coastal areas northwesterly wind, with speeds of 15-50 km/h with a chance for frost forming over agricultural and desert areas and some scattered clouds will appear.

Weather

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	22	13
Kuwait Airport	22	10
Abdaly	22	09
Bubyani	20	07
Jahra	22	13
Faillaka Island	20	09
Salmiyah	20	16

GAC, GCC customs in systems merger

DG visits Nuwaiseeb Customs Port on inspection trip

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3, (Agencies): The Kuwait General Administration of Customs (GAC) announced on Friday launching the first phase of e-linkage with the GCC Customs Union Authority to share customs information and documents.

In a press release, the GAC said the step came in line with ongoing efforts aiming to boost the Gulf customs integration and back the union's targets through the Gulf network.

As part of the targeted strategic projects approved by the union, the phase came in the context of the GAC keenness on developing action and enhancing institutional coordination and integration with GCC similar bodies, added the release.

This contributes to unifying measures, facilitating trade movement, and achieving the highest levels of efficiency and operational readiness in a manner that aligns with organizational frameworks approved by the union, it stated.

The project is a cornerstone towards moving to an integrated digital system that allows sharing information which supports applying and enhancing audit measures and shortens the time of releasing shipments and raising the efficiency of supply chains, the statement concluded.

Director General of the General Administration of Customs (GAC) Yousef Al-Nuwaif, accompanied by Deputy Director General for Research, Investigation, and Customs Ports Affairs Saleh Al-Omar, conducted an inspection tour of Nuwaiseeb Customs Port recently, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement, GAC explained that Al-Nuwaif and Al-Omar reviewed the workflow in various departments of the port, the inspection and auditing procedures in place, and the operation of technological systems supporting customs processes.

They received a briefing on the daily workload and work challenges facing the port and discussed several proposals aimed at improving the work environment, enhancing efficiency, and raising the level of operational readiness.

Al-Nuwaif emphasized the importance of balancing the facilitation of customs procedures with maintaining the highest levels of security.

He highlighted that developing the work environment and improving the efficiency of customs personnel are strategic priorities for the administration.

Meanwhile, Al-Omar stressed the need to continue efforts to combat smuggling and enhance coordination among field departments to ensure tighter control and improved operational efficiency at customs ports.

The tour is part of GAC's approach to strengthening direct



KUNA photo
Director General of the General Administration of Customs (GAC) Yousef Al-Nuwaif during customs inspection to airport terminals.

communication with field locations, understanding the needs of employees, and addressing challenges promptly.

Furthermore, Al-Nuwaif, accompanied by Al-Omar, also conducted an inspection tour of Terminals 1 and 5 at Kuwait International Airport.

In a press statement issued on Friday, GAC explained that the tour included visits to inspection centers and their specialized departments, where officials provided detailed briefings on operational procedures designed to ensure the quick inspection of passengers while complying with customs regulations.

Al-Nuwaif emphasized the importance of intensifying efforts and strengthening cooperation among customs departments to streamline passenger inspections and protect the country from smuggling attempts.

He praised the work of customs inspectors and their vital role in supporting the state's security and economic systems.

Al-Nuwaif also highlighted the continuation of field monitoring operations to enhance discipline, readiness, and overall performance, noting that GAC is advancing its development plans to keep pace with global challenges and evolving customs practices.

Several milestones achieved

Mol focus on maritime security in 2025

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: The year 2025 marked a significant milestone for the Ministry of Interior, as it continued to achieve security, administrative, and legislative milestones within a comprehensive vision aimed at strengthening state authority, enhancing security and stability, and modernizing the security apparatus to meet contemporary challenges.

On the administrative level, the ministry completed the process of filling leadership positions based on competence and experience.

This was accompanied by the implementation of a new organizational structure, approved in August, which included the appointment of an undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, two assistant undersecretaries for public security and support security services, and heads of various offices.

This contributed to reorganizing the security sectors, clarifying responsibilities, improving institutional efficiency, accelerating decision-making, and enhancing coordination among the different security agencies.

Also, Brigadier General Abdulwahab Al-Wahib was promoted to the rank of Major General and appointed as the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior.

On the security front, the ministry continued to enhance border protection, with a particular focus on maritime security.

In 2025, the General Directorate of Coast Guard underwent a comprehensive modernization of its maritime security system, including increased readiness, advanced monitoring and surveillance mechanisms, deployment of unmanned marine vessels, support for traditional maritime patrols, and reduced risks to personnel. These measures helped curb smuggling by up to 90 percent.

Legislatively, 2025 was marked by the enactment of piv-



Sheikh Fahad

otal laws that reorganized several vital sectors. These included amendments to the Nationality Law to preserve national identity and the new Traffic Law, passed in April, which introduced strict deterrents against reckless and irresponsible driving.

The Foreigners' Residence Law and its implementing regulations were also enacted, helping to regulate the labor market and monitor the status of expatriate workers. This was complemented by intensive security campaigns to deport those in violation of the residency laws.

In the area of drug control, the new drug law No. 159/2025 was introduced, imposing severe penalties on traffickers and dealers, including the death penalty and life imprisonment, as part of a comprehensive strategy to protect society and eliminate the sources of drug-related crimes.

The Ministry of Interior also focused on digital transformation and service development. The Sahel application now allows the registration of newborns' travel arrangements, eliminating the need for in-person visits.

In addition, the "Kuwait Visa" platform was developed for allowing tourists and visitors to enter the country through streamlined and organized procedures.

Under the direct guidance of the First Deputy Prime Minister, the ministry focused on consolidating the rule of law and building a modern, advanced security system.

By 2025, this system integrated strict enforcement of regulations, and enhanced security preparedness, and smart services, thereby enhancing security and stability, and supporting the state and society's aspirations for a safer, more organized future.

The First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef had personally led several large-scale security campaigns, emphasizing field presence and direct oversight. These efforts led to the apprehension of numerous violators, wanted individuals, and outlaws, while reinforcing the public's sense of safety and security.

Many people arrested as Mol seizes fireworks stored at multiple places

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: The First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef oversaw a security operation that led to the seizure of several sites used for illegally storing fireworks without the necessary permits, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Local population, posing a direct threat to lives and property, were confiscated.

Several individuals involved were apprehended, and all seized fireworks were confiscated. Vehicles used in the transportation and storage of the fireworks were also impounded, and the necessary legal measures were taken.

Three individuals involved in smuggling, importing, and storing fireworks remain at large in Kuwait. One of them is a public employee of the General Administration of Customs (GAC). Authorities are pursuing them through legal channels to arrest them.

In this regard, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef affirmed that the ministry is committed to conducting security operations with full determination, and will not tolerate any violations that endanger the security and safety of society.

He emphasized that the law will be strictly enforced against anyone who violates regulations or ignores official instructions.

In conclusion, the Ministry of Interior warned of the dangers of illegally possessing or trading fireworks, stressing that any violations will be met with strict legal action without leniency.

Upon searching him and questioning the contents of the bag, he revealed that it contained KD 50,000 from Iraq, which he had received from the eighth defendant to deliver to another individual.

The court found the eight defendants guilty of participating in the illegal money transfer operation and handed down three-year prison sentences.

When questioned, the man admitted he was scared and attempted to flee.

According to testimony from the

arresting officer, he was patrolling Jabiya when he observed an Egyptian expatriate exiting a building with a black plastic bag. The suspect appeared nervous when he noticed the officer, and dropped the bag before approaching the officer.

When questioned, the man admitted he was scared and attempted to flee.

LOCAL

diwaniya

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Global economy in 2026 will trudge on 2025 path

"THE global economy in 2026 does not appear to be significantly better than in 2025," former Director General of Arab Planning Institute Dr. Bader Othman Malallah wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"Most of the world's economies faced difficulties in 2025, and their effects are expected to continue into the new year. Expectations range from optimism to pessimism, with a middle-ground outlook appearing the most realistic.

"The pessimistic scenario suggests that 2026 will bring serious challenges, including an escalation of international trade wars, intensified competition in global ports, ongoing geopolitical tensions, supply chain instability, rising commodity prices, the possible bursting of the artificial intelligence bubble, slower global economic growth, and a decline in oil demand and prices.

"On the other hand, there is an optimistic scenario that many hope will materialize. However, if the pessimistic outlook prevails, the global economy may end up being in a difficult position.

"Overall, 2026 is expected to be a year of structural transformation in the global economy, marked by shifts in technology and production, as well as changes in markets, international trade, and economic partnerships. The effects of these transformations are likely to last for more than a decade.

"According to IMF estimates, the global economy is expected to experience slow growth of no more than one percent. This will have negative repercussions for investment and production, weakening and restructuring supply chains. Oil prices will also be affected and could fall to unprecedented levels over the next five years.

"The continuation of the trade war and the expansion of protectionist measures will place additional pressure on economic growth, investment, and labor markets.

"If this is accompanied by an escalation in geopolitical tensions, it could lead to higher commodity prices, placing a heavier burden on consumers, particularly in commodity-importing countries.

"Unlike many emerging economies, Kuwait's national economy enters 2026 in a state of relative stability, supported by low debt, strong financial reserves, accelerated economic and financial reforms, progress on strategic projects, and a high credit rating.

"However, this stability carries structural risks that limit the economy's ability to accelerate growth and achieve sustainable employment expansion, even though the projected growth rate is between 2.5 and 3 percent.

"The middle scenario is the most realistic. Despite its moderate and balanced nature, it still includes economic challenges that require attention and preparation. Kuwait's economy faces structural imbalances, with growth largely driven by oil revenues, limited economic diversification, a narrow economic base, and high levels of consumption.

"These realities make the national economy highly sensitive to fluctuations in the global economy. Therefore, we should not enter 2026, with its anticipated difficulties and challenges, without a clear vision, careful preparation, and readiness, lest we remain trapped in a cycle of reactive measures.

"The global economy is expected to grow between 2.5 and 3 percent, driven by China's economic growth, estimated at 4.5 to 5 percent.

"Major industrialized countries are expected to see growth ranging between 1 and 1.5 percent.

"While this will support international trade, it is unlikely to generate a high level of prosperity. Oil prices are expected to range between \$65 and \$80, below the equilibrium level, and will not produce a surplus. A small, manageable budget deficit is likely, but could negatively affect capital spending.

The following measures may be necessary:

- Further rationalization and control of spending
- Accelerating financial and economic reforms
- Improving the development plan

ning system and macroeconomic management

- Reviewing salary and wage increases to improve the standard of living

- Strengthening the domestic trade cycle through effective monetary policy and inflation control

- Expediting the establishment of a national management system for major projects

- Incentivizing the private sector to create job opportunities

- Accelerating economic diversification and broadening sources of income

- Improving governance in public administration.

"According to the realistic scenario, 2026 will not be a difficult or dangerous year, but it will test our ability to make the economy more resilient and enhance its capacity for sustainable growth.

"In Kuwait, we are not threatened by crises or economic collapse, but we face the risk of lost opportunities, wasted time, and slow decision-making and implementation."

Also:

"In recent years, the concept of self-confidence has changed significantly for many people," Public Relations Consultant Hala Bader Al-Humaidhi wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"Self-confidence is no longer measured by physical presence, the ability to face challenges, or resilience in difficult situations. For some, it has become difficult to image, the number of followers, and the fleeting impressions left online. This shift has created a clear gap between the self-confidence displayed on social media and the genuine self-confidence experienced in real life.

"On digital platforms, individuals have a high degree of control. They can carefully choose their words, refine their thoughts, delete what they dislike, rewrite their messages multiple times, or even withdraw silently, all without facing direct confrontation.

"This relatively safe environment produces a form of easy self-confidence that goes uncontested and unchallenged, a confidence based on appearance rather than genuine interaction. In real life, the story is completely different. True self-confidence emerges in uncomfortable moments, such as during serious discussions, when making crucial decisions, or in situations that require saying "no" clearly, without justification or fear of rejection.

"In real life, there is no time to edit, no way to hide behind a delete button. You are either present or you are absent.

"This is where true self-confidence, and not carefully crafted online confidence, is truly tested. The issue is not the use of social media itself, but the confusion between constant digital presence and genuine self-confidence.

"Many appear bold behind screens, expressing themselves easily and confidently, yet struggle in real-life settings, hesitating in meetings, avoiding confrontation, or unable to assert their needs.

"Over time, this contradiction becomes an internal burden, negatively affecting one's self-image and weakening relationships with oneself and with others.

"The pressure is even greater on younger generations, who grow up surrounded by idealized and filtered images of other people's lives. Constant comparison creates the false sense that self-confidence is something displayed and measured through interaction, rather than something developed through real-life experience.

"Here, confidence shifts from a mature, internal state to a fleeting, external performance that depends on the approval of others. True self-confidence is quiet and does not demand constant proof, admiration, or validation. It is built on self-awareness, genuine engagement with life, and the ability to act decisively in difficult moments, not in algorithms, or the number of views and likes.

"In an era of rapid digital transformation, redefining self-confidence has become essential, especially in workplaces and educational settings. Teaching emotional intelligence, communication skills, and resilience is no longer optional but a psychological and social necessity. Ultimately, confidence is measured not by what we show others, but by how we behave when no one is watching."

— Compiled by Simi K. Kutty

Minister suspends teachers pending misconduct probe

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: Minister of Education Eng. Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaei has suspended a male and a female teacher for three months and referred them to investigation, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In an official statement, the Ministry of Education explained that the male teacher was suspended after being found to have misused social media by publishing and photographing information related to exam papers. The female teacher was suspended and referred to investigation for engaging in behavior considered indecent and inconsistent with the ethical and moral standards expected of the teaching profession.

The ministry affirmed that it will not tolerate any violations or practices that compromise professional ethics or harm the educational process, stressing that laws and regulations will be applied firmly and fairly

to all.

Meanwhile, Minister Al-Tabtabaei issued several administrative decisions regarding appointments in educational zones. Mahmoud Abdul-Redha, Director of Educational Affairs in the Jahra Educational Zone, was also assigned to serve as Director of Educational Affairs in the Hawally Educational Zone.

Musaed Mohammed Nayef, Director of Educational Affairs in the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone, was assigned to also serve as Director of Educational Affairs in the Farwaniya Educational Zone.

Minister Al-Tabtabaei also issued a decision for transferring Saleh Salem Al-Hudaib to the supervisory position of Director of Educational Affairs in the Capital Governorate, canceling any previous conflicting decisions.



Top and above: Citizens and residents flock to Al-Kout Mall in Al-Fahaheel on New Year's Eve.

Photos by Samer Shaqair

Tight security during New Year celebrations

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: Concurrent with New Year's celebrations, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Major General Abdulwahab Al-Wuhail conducted an inspection tour of several security checkpoints and Souq Mubarakiya.

He was accompanied by Assistant Undersecretary for Public Security Major General Hamed Al-Dawas, Director of the Public Relations and Security Media Department Brigadier General Nasser Abu Salib, and other senior security officials from the Ministry of Interior.

Major General Al-Wuhail and his team reviewed the progress of field operations, the deployment of patrols, and the coordination mechanisms among security sectors.

According to a security source, all security leaders in the ministry's sectors were present in the field to oversee the New Year's celebrations and ensure they proceeded safely. This included extensive deployments in all governorates, shopping malls, camps, roads, farms, chalets, and gathering places, which reflected a high level of readiness and integrated security measures to guarantee public safety.

Drug abuse sees major dip

Carrot and stick policy working: experts

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: Kuwait is witnessing significant progress in combating drug abuse through an integrated health and legislative system that combines specialized treatment with newly enacted laws aimed at protecting families and ensuring social stability, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The law comes within a national framework designed to confront drug abuse and provide opportunities for recovery from addiction, particularly following the recent implementation of Decree Law No. 195/2025.

Two specialists in the field affirmed that integrating therapeutic, preventive, security, and legislative efforts offers a stronger and more effective foundation for addressing addiction to drugs and psychotropic substances from a treatment-based, rather than punitive, approach.

Director of the Addiction Treatment Center at the Ministry of Health, Dr. Hussein Al-Shatti, explained that the center plays a major role in reducing drug use and combating drug abuse in Kuwait by providing

ing gradual and comprehensive treatment programs based on scientific principles. These programs treat addiction as a chronic disease, from which recovery is possible through integrated therapeutic, psychological, and social support.

The center consists of two main buildings - the older building, which houses the first phase (detoxification) and the second phase (initial assessment), and the newer building, which functions as a halfway house for advanced treatment. The center has a capacity of over 500 beds, distributed across its various specialized wards.

Specialized

The center has specialized wards for different types of cases, including general wards for voluntary admissions, wards for patients referred by court order, wards for women, and wards for dual-diagnosis patients, those struggling with both addiction and a co-occurring mental illness such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. These cases require specialized care from both medical and technical staff.

Dr. Al-Shatti warned that certain drugs, such as methamphetamine (crystal meth), have become particularly dangerous, as even small amounts over short periods can trigger severe psychotic symptoms and complex psychological complications.

He revealed that the most commonly treated substances at the center currently include heroin, synthetic cannabinoids, and methamphetamine.

Dr. Al-Shatti explained that the treatment plan at the Addiction Treatment Center is not limited to medication. In its later stages, it also emphasizes behavioral, psychological, and social therapy through counseling sessions, group therapy, and structured rehabilitation programs.

The therapeutic relationship continues even after the patient leaves the center. The programs encourage patients to maintain follow-up care through outpatient clinics and ongoing support after discharge. He revealed that the center organizes a weekly initiative called the "Message Campaign," in which former recovering addicts share their experiences and advice with current patients to provide support and strengthen their confidence in the recovery process.

Dr. Al-Shatti emphasized that the recent amendments to Kuwait's drug laws provide substantial support to the treatment system, as they strike a balance between imposing stricter penalties for trafficking and promotion while expanding treatment options for drug users.



Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah receives two officials.

Joint efforts sought to enhance co-op sector

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah received Municipal Council member Walid Khalid Al-Dagher, and Chairman of the Financial and Administrative Committee of Firdous Cooperative Society Shoail Al-Rajhi recently at the Farwaniya Governorate headquarters.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, several topics of mutual interest were discussed during the meeting, and ways to enhance cooperation and coordination between the governorate and the cooperative sector were reviewed, with the aim of serving the residents of Firdous and supporting community and developmental initiatives.

The governor highlighted the importance of working closely with cooperative societies and supporting initiatives that benefit the community and reinforce the values of collaboration and joint effort. At the end of the meeting, Al-Dagher and Al-Rajhi expressed their gratitude to the governor for the warm reception, appreciating his dedication to supporting cooperation and serving the residents of the governorate.

Huge amount of 'hidden' cash found on passenger

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: The General Administration of Customs (GAC) has apprehended a passenger at Kuwait International Airport's Terminal 5, who had arrived from an Arab country, for carrying undeclared cash, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Officers seized US\$10,000, KD 1,467, and approximately half a million Syrian pounds from the individual. The passenger and the seized funds have been referred to the concerned authority for legal proceedings, following the preparation of a formal seizure report.



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New Accessibility Code officially part of nat'l building regulations

Council member praises Cabinet's directive

By Inas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: Head of the Municipal Council's Committee for Disability Affairs, Farah Al-Roumi, expressed her appreciation for the Cabinet's directive requiring all government ministries, agencies, and public institutions to fully comply with the provisions of the Building Code and the Kuwait Accessibility Code, which are based on the principles of universal design for persons with dis-

abilities.

In a press statement, Al-Roumi highlighted the committee's success in approving and incorporating the Kuwait Accessibility Code into the building regulations, in cooperation with relevant state authorities.

She noted that this step aims to enhance access to buildings and public facilities and ensure the availability of necessary services for persons with disabilities.

The Municipal Council approved the com-



Al-Mishari

mittee's recommendation to promote the social inclusion of people with disabilities. Following this, Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Abdullatif Al-Mishari issued a ministerial decree to formally approve the code.

This action officially incorporated the Kuwait Accessibility Code into the State of Kuwait's building regulations.

Al-Roumi highlighted that the implementation of the Kuwait Accessibility Code supports the state's efforts to achieve New Kuwait 2035 vision regarding people with disabilities.

She emphasized that adhering to the code is essential for enhancing public safety, promoting sustainability, and ensuring comprehensive accessibility and social inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

Ahmadi Governor hosts Tajikistan envoy



A commemorative plaque presented to the Ambassador.

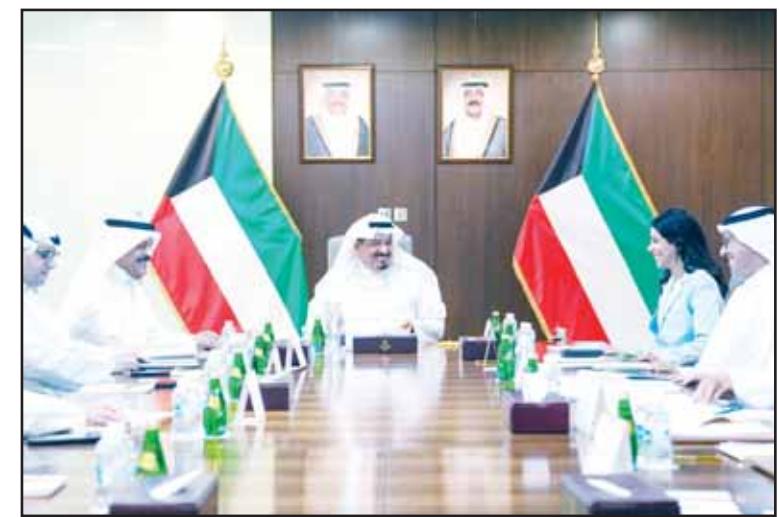
Ahmad Governorate

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Hamoud Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan to the State of Kuwait Dr. Zubaydulla Zubaydulla at his office in Ahmadi Governorate headquarters on Tuesday morning.

According to a press release issued by Ahmadi Governorate, the meeting, which was attended by Second Secretary Manuchehr Ikramov, included introductions and friendly discussions on the relations between the two countries and ways to enhance cooperation in various fields.

The governor welcomed the ambassador and wished him success in his duties and in strengthening relations between the two nations.

For his part, Ambassador Dr. Zubaydulla expressed his happiness and gratitude for the warm reception, and appreciation for the care and attention given to his diplomatic mission and the citizens of Tajikistan in Kuwait at both official and community levels.



PM Diwan photo
His Highness Sheikh Ahmed Abdulla Al-Sabah, Prime Minister, chairs the meeting of the Ministerial Committee to follow up on the implementation status of agreements and memoranda of understanding between Kuwait and China.

Vision 2035 in focus

Kuwait's 2025 year in review

Continuation

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3, (KUNA): Kuwait witnessed many events throughout 2025, including in the political, economic, security, social affairs and health fields, among which the signing of the completion operations of Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port with China. Following are major events of the year.

June 3: His Highness the Prime Minister receives Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Vice President, Deputy Premier and chief of presidential court, during his official visit to Kuwait.

June 4: Cabinet approves draft decree laws to amend the Penal Code to protect academic integrity and combat cheating in middle and high school exams, and increase court fees and deter frivolous lawsuits.

June 9: His Highness the Prime Minister chairs the coordination committee to follow up on services related to housing projects.

June 11: Cabinet approves donations to renovate the emergency department at Amiri Hospital by Abdullah Saleh Al-Shafan, rehabilitate Ward 10 at the Addiction Center by Kuwait Finance House.

June 17: Cabinet approves draft decree law amending Law No. (106) of 2013 on combating money laundering and terrorism financing.

June 19: His Highness the Prime Minister chairs a ministerial committee to follow up on agreements and MoUs between Kuwait and China. His Highness the Prime Minister also visited Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences.

June 22: His Highness the Prime Minister chairs the Supreme Defense Council meeting at Seif Palace to discuss regional developments.

June 23: His Highness the Prime Minister chairs meeting at Bayan Palace to discuss future infrastructure projects, especially power and water desalination plants.

June 24: Cabinet approves a draft law on international judicial cooperation in criminal matters to combat transnational crime and fulfill international commitments.

June 29: His Highness the Prime Minister chairs meetings to discuss infrastructure and transportation system reforms, and review the proposed framework for a new municipal law with the Minister of Municipality Affairs and Housing.

July 1: The Cabinet approved a draft decree-law of the new Civil Aviation Law, which stipulated that the Public Authority for Civil Aviation shall replace the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, in recognition of the government's urgent need for a modern and comprehensive legislative framework to regulate civil aviation in the State of Kuwait. The Cabinet approved a draft decree-law amending certain provisions of the Penal Code, and referred it to His Highness the Amir. The Cabinet approved a draft decree amending certain provisions of Law No. 13 of 1991 regarding weapons and ammunition, as part of the State's efforts to enhance public order and address acts of intimidation and threats in public spaces in line with current security developments.

July 8: The Cabinet approved the minutes of the Supreme Committee for Kuwaiti Nationality Affairs, which included revocation of Kuwaiti nationality from certain individuals, in accordance with citizenship Law.

July 22: The Cabinet approved the minutes of the Supreme Committee for Kuwaiti Nationality Affairs regarding cases of loss and revocation of nationality.

July 29: The Cabinet approved the minutes of the Supreme Committee for Kuwaiti Nationality Affairs concerning cases of loss and revocation of nationality.

July 31: His Highness the Prime Minister chaired a meeting at Bayan Palace with the Minister of Education, Jalal Al-Tabtabaei, to present the Education Reform Plan 2025-27.

Aug 4: His Highness the Prime Minister departed for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on an official visit.

Aug 12: The Cabinet approved a draft decree amending certain provisions of Law No. 1 of 1993 concerning the protection of public funds. The Cabinet approves a draft decree amending provisions of the Civil and Commercial Procedures Law issued by Decree-Law No. (38) of 1980, with the aim of accelerating litigation procedures and keeping pace with digital transformation.

Aug 19: The Cabinet approved the minutes of the Supreme Committee for Kuwaiti Nationality Affairs regarding cases of loss and revocation of nationality.

Aug 21: His Highness the Prime Minister chaired, at Bayan Palace, a meeting of the Ministerial Committee for Follow-Up on the Implementation of Agreements and MoUs signed between the governments of Kuwait and the People's Republic of China. His Highness the Prime Minister received at Bayan Palace Wang Jian, head of the delegation of China

Baowu Steel Group, and senior representatives of China Communications Construction Company, responsible for completing the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port Project.

Aug 26: The Cabinet approved a proposal by the Minister of Information, Culture, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, to establish Kuwait Sports Day on February 7, 2026, allowing broader and more active participation from all age groups and achieving the intended goals of the event.

Sept 1: His Highness the Prime Minister, in the presence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya, received Japanese Foreign Minister, Iwaya Takeshi, on the occasion of his visit to Kuwait to attend the 2nd Joint Ministerial Meeting of GCC-Japan Strategic Dialogue at Bayan Palace.

Sept 2: The Cabinet reviewed the minutes of the Ministerial Committee for Legal Affairs, which include several items, most notably a draft decree over the Unified System for International Land Transport among GCC States, as well as several draft decrees concerning MoUs between Kuwait and various countries in financial and economic cooperation.

June 19: His Highness the Prime Minister chairs a ministerial committee to follow up on agreements and MoUs between Kuwait and China. His Highness the Prime Minister also visited Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences.

June 22: His Highness the Prime Minister chairs the Supreme Defense Council meeting at Seif Palace to discuss regional developments.

June 23: His Highness the Prime Minister chairs meeting at Bayan Palace to discuss future infrastructure projects, especially power and water desalination plants.

June 24: Cabinet approves a draft law amending Law No. 106 of 2013 on combating money laundering and terrorism financing.

June 29: His Highness the Prime Minister chairs meetings to discuss infrastructure and transportation system reforms, and review the proposed framework for a new municipal law with the Minister of Municipality Affairs and Housing.

July 1: The Cabinet approved a draft decree-law amending certain provisions of Law No. 21 of 2015 concerning children's rights, to ensure the protection of rights provided for in the law particularly those related to national identity. The Cabinet approved a draft decree regarding regulations for the ownership of real estate by companies, real estate funds and investment portfolios in accordance with Decree-Law No. 74 of 1979 on the regulation of non-Kuwaiti property ownership. The Cabinet approved a draft decree amending certain provisions of Decree No. (37) of 1994 establishing the Kuwait Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies.

The Cabinet approved a draft decree amending certain provisions of the Unified Industrial Regulation Law for GCC States, along with several other draft decree, memoranda of understanding, and agreements between Kuwait and several countries.

Sept 11: His Highness the Prime Minister chaired a meeting of the Ministerial Committee for Follow-Up on the Implementation of Agreements and MoUs between Kuwait and the People's Republic of China, held at Bayan Palace.

Sept 16: The Cabinet approved a draft decree amending Law No. 114 of 2014 concerning health insurance for retired citizens, in view of its numerous shortcomings.

Sept 23: The Cabinet approved a draft decree amending Law No. 115 of 2014 establishing the Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport. The Cabinet approved the minutes of the Supreme Committee for Kuwaiti Nationality Affairs regarding cases of loss and revocation of nationality.

Sept 30: The Cabinet approved granting individuals whose nationality has been revoked (from both relevant categories) the right to trade, buy and sell shares, sukuk and securities in the stock exchange. The Cabinet decided to allow individuals whose citizenship has been revoked to continue repaying loans and financing contracts previously obtained from the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprise Development, under the same agreed terms. The Cabinet instructed the Central Bank of Kuwait to direct all banks in Kuwait to facilitate the opening and continuation of bank accounts for individuals whose nationality has been revoked. The Cabinet approved a draft decree amending certain provisions of the Expert Affairs Law (Decree-Law No. 40 of 1980), including the cancellation of the Expert Affairs Council and the transfer of its powers to the Director-General of the General Department of Experts, to achieve institutional rationalization, unify administrative authority and enhance technical specialization without affecting the functional guarantees of experts.

The Cabinet approved a draft decree amending certain provisions of Law No. (20) of 2014 on electronic transactions, aiming to expand the law's applicability to include all electronic records, documents, and transactions in civil, commercial, and administrative matters, including personal status, while ensuring equal legal effect between electronic and paper documents.

Aug 19: The Cabinet approved the minutes of the Supreme Committee for Kuwaiti Nationality Affairs regarding cases of loss and revocation of nationality.

Aug 21: His Highness the Prime Minister chaired, at Bayan Palace, a meeting of the Ministerial Committee for Follow-Up on the Implementation of Agreements and MoUs signed between the governments of Kuwait and the People's Republic of China. His Highness the Prime Minister received at Bayan Palace Wang Jian, head of the delegation of China

JANUARY



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People light candles near the sealed off Le Constellation bar in Crans-Montana, Swiss Alps, Switzerland, Friday, Jan. 2, 2026, where a devastating fire left dead and injured during the New Year's celebrations. Inset: People mourn behind flowers and letters near the sealed off Le Constellation bar, where a devastating fire left dead and injured during the New Year's celebrations in Crans-Montana, Swiss Alps, Switzerland on Friday. (AP)

Screams, smoke, chaos as families search for loved ones

New Year party turns deadly as Swiss bar fire kills 40

CRANS-MONTANA, Switzerland, Jan 3, (AP): Swiss investigators believe sparklers on Champagne bottles started a fire in a bar at an Alpine ski resort that left 40 people dead and another 119 injured during a New Year's celebration.

Most injuries, many of them serious, occurred when the blaze swept through the crowded bar in southwestern Switzerland in the early hours of Thursday.

Officials believe the sparklers, which shot upward, ignited the blaze when they came too close to the bar's ceiling. Authorities planned to look into whether the material on the ceiling that was designed to muffle sound conformed with regulations.

The Crans-Montana resort is best known as an international ski and golf venue. Overnight, the Le Constellation bar morphed from a scene of revelry into the site of one of Switzerland's worst tragedies.

Here's what we know:

The fire broke out about 1:30 a.m. Thursday during a holiday celebration inside the Le Constellation bar.

Two women told French broadcaster BFMTV they were inside when they saw a male bartender lifting a female col-

league on his shoulders as she held a lit sparkler on a bottle. The flames spread, collapsing the wooden ceiling, they told the broadcaster.

People tried to escape from a nightclub area in the basement, up a flight of stairs and through a narrow door, causing a crowd surge, one of the women said.

A young man at the scene said that people smashed windows to escape, BFMTV reported.

Gianni Campolo, a Swiss 19-year-old on vacation, rushed to help first responders. He described a scene of people trapped on the ground, severely injured and burned.

"I have seen horror and I don't know what else would be worse than this," Campolo told French broadcaster TF1.

Marc-Antoine Chavanon, 14, also hurried to join the rescue effort.

"People were collapsing. We were doing everything we could to save them," he told The Associated Press. "There was one of our friends: She was struggling to get out. She was all burnt. You can't imagine the pain I saw."

Investigators will examine whether sparklers were permitted for use in the bar. They will also look at the safety mea-

sures on the premises, including fire extinguishers, escape routes, and compliance with regulations, Valais canton Attorney General Béatrice Pilloud said Friday.

She also warned of possible prosecutions if there was any criminal liability involving individuals.

Swiss officials described the blaze as a likely flashover, meaning that it triggered the release of combustible gases that can ignite violently.

The injured suffered from serious burns and smoke inhalation. Some were flown to specialist hospitals across the country and elsewhere in Europe.

One aspect of the investigation is how the fire spread so fast, with a foam on the ceiling that was meant to muffle noise in focus.

A Swiss business register lists a French couple, Jacques and Jessica Moretti, as the owners of the Constellation.

Switzerland's Tribune de Genève newspaper reported that Jacques Moretti told it the bar had been checked "three times in 10 years" and that "everything was done within the standards."

They have two other establishments, one in Crans-Mon-

tana and another in nearby Lens. Investigators say they have been questioned, as have many others involved in the tragedy, as they gather information on what happened at the New Year's event and what work was carried out on the bar in the past.

Of the 119 injured, 113 have been identified, officials said Friday.

The injured include 71 Swiss nationals, 14 French and 11 Italians, along with citizens of Serbia, Bosnia, Luxembourg, Belgium, Portugal and Poland, Valais Canton police commander Frédéric Gisler said Friday. The nationalities of 14 people remain unclear.

The severity of the burns has made it very difficult to identify bodies, bringing more agony for families who now must hand over DNA samples to authorities.

Arthur Brodard, 16, from Lausanne is among the missing. He went to the bar with friends to celebrate the new year, and on Friday evening his mother, Laetitia, was in Crans-Montana and frantic to find him. She held out "a glimmer of hope" that he might be one of the six injured people who had yet to be identified.

Britain

Queen Camilla recalls assault: Britain's Queen Camilla on Wednesday spoke publicly for the first time about her personal experience of indecent assault, saying that speaking out was one way she could use her royal platform to shine a light on the epidemic of violence against women.

Camilla, who has made fighting domestic abuse one of her signature causes, recalled fending off a man who attacked her on a train in the 1960s when she was a teenager.

"I was reading my book, and you know, this boy, man, attacked me, and I did fight back," Camilla told the BBC. "And I remember getting off the train and my mother looking at me and saying, 'Why is your hair standing on end?' and 'Why is a button missing from your coat?'"

While the attack made her "furious," Camilla said, she kept it quiet for many years until she heard other women recount their own stories. (AP)

Channel Tunnel power fault fixed: Trains were running again Wednesday in both directions through the Channel Tunnel between continental Europe and the United Kingdom but problems remained after a day of travel chaos caused by power malfunctions.

The tunnel operator, Eurotunnel, said the 50-kilometer (32-mile) undersea link was back to "full capacity" after a power fault inside it was fixed overnight Tuesday. The short statement didn't detail the cause of the power failure.

But Eurostar, which runs passenger trains through the tunnel, warned of continued possible delays and cancellations because of "knock-on impacts" from the severe disruptions on Tuesday. Its website showed delays Wednesday to London-Paris, London-Brussels and London-Amsterdam trains in both directions and early morning cancellations. (AP)

Small boat migrant arrivals rise: A total of 41,472 migrants arrived on British shores in small boats in 2025, marking the second-highest annual figure on record, government data released on Thursday showed.

That figure represents a 13 percent increase compared with 2024, and is 9 percent lower than the all-time high of nearly 46,000 recorded in 2022.

At least 17 people lost their lives while attempting the Channel crossings in 2025, British media reported, citing French and British authorities.

The British Home Office in November unveiled a sweeping overhaul of the country's asylum system, under which people granted asylum would be required to wait 20 years before becoming eligible to apply for permanent settlement. (Xinhua)

New NYC mayor commutes subway, signals 'government for the people'

NEW YORK, Jan 3, (AP): Less than 24 hours after throngs of ecstatic supporters poured into Manhattan for his history-making inauguration, Zohran Mamdani began his first full day of work with a routine familiar to many New Yorkers: trudging to the subway from a cramped apartment.

Bundled against the frigid temperature and seemingly fighting off a cold, he set out Friday morning from the one-bedroom apartment in Queens that he shares with his wife. But unlike most commuters, Mamdani's trip was documented by a photo and video crew, and periodically interrupted by neighbors wishing him luck.

The 34-year-old democratic socialist, whose victory was hailed as watershed moment for the progressive movement, has now begun the task of running the nation's largest city: signing orders, announcing appointments, facing questions from the press - and answering for some of the actions he took in his first hours.

But first, the symbolism-laden day one commute.

Flanked by security guards and a small clutch of aides on a Manhattan-bound train, he agreed to several selfies with wide-eyed riders, then moved to a corner seat of the train to review his briefing materials.

When a pair of French tourists, confused by the hubbub, approached Mamdani, he introduced himself as "the new mayor of New York." They seemed doubtful. He held up the morning's copy of the New York Daily News, featuring his smiling face, as proof.

Mamdani, a Democrat, is hardly alone among city mayors in using the transit system to communicate relatability. His predecessor, Eric Adams, also rode the subway on his first day, and both Bill de Blasio and Michael Bloomberg made a habit out of it, particularly when seeking to make a political point.

Within minutes of Mamdani entering City Hall, the images of him riding public transit had lit up social media.

If the ride served as a well-timed photo-op, it also seemed to reflect



New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, center, joined by Ali Najmi, left, chair of the Mayor's Advisory Committee on the Judiciary, and Tascha Van Aken, right, commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Mass Engagement, holds up a signed executive order during a press conference in New York, Friday, Jan. 2, 2026. (AP)

Mamdani's pledge, made in his inaugural speech, to ensure his "government looks and lives like the people it represents."

His other early actions have also seemed to underscore that priority.

After centering much of his campaign on making rent cheaper for New Yorkers, Mamdani raced from his inauguration ceremony Thursday to a Brooklyn apartment building lobby, drawing boisterous cheers from the tenants union as he pledged that the city would ramp up an ongoing legal fight against the allegedly negligent landlord.

Mamdani's next action, meanwhile, showed the unusual scrutiny faced by his nascent administration, particularly around his criticism of Israel and outspoken support for the Palestinian cause.

In an effort to give his government a "clean slate," he revoked a slate of executive orders issued by Adams late in his term, including two related to Israel: one that officially adopted a contentious definition of antisemitism that includes certain criticism of Israel,

and another barring city agencies and employees from boycotting or divesting from the country.

The move drew swift backlash from some Jewish groups, including allegations from the Israeli government posted to social media that Mamdani had poured "antisemitic gasoline on an open fire."

When a journalist on Friday asked about the revoked orders, Mamdani read from prepared remarks, promising his administration would be "relentless in its effort to combat hate and division." He noted that he had left in place the Mayor's Office to Combat Antisemitism.

Mamdani also announced the creation of a "mass engagement" office, which he said would continue the work his campaign's field operation did to bring more New Yorkers into the political fold.

Ringed by supporters and passersby who stood several rows deep, phones in the air, to catch a glimpse of the new mayor, Mamdani then acknowledged the weight of the current moment.

Budanov named Ukraine presidential chief of staff

KYIV, Jan 3, (AP): President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday appointed the head of Ukraine's military intelligence as his new chief of staff, a move that comes as the U.S. leads a diplomatic push to end Russia's nearly 4-year-old invasion.

Announcing the appointment of Gen. Kyrylo Budanov, Zelenskyy said Ukraine needs to focus on security issues, developing its defense and security forces, and peace talks - areas that are overseen by the office of the president.

Zelenskyy had dismissed his previous chief of staff, Andrii Yermak, after anti-corruption officials began investigating alleged graft in the energy sector.

The president framed Budanov's appointment as part of a broader effort to sharpen the focus on security, defense development and diplomacy.

"Kyrylo has specialized experience in these areas and sufficient strength to achieve results," Zelenskyy said.

Budanov, 39, said on Telegram his new position is "both an honor and a responsibility - at a historic time for Ukraine - to focus on the critically important issues of the state's strategic security."

In his evening address, Zelenskyy announced further changes to his team, saying he had proposed Mykhailo Fedorov, the current minister for digital transformation, as the new minister of defense.

Fedorov, 34, is credited with spearheading the introduction of drone technology in Ukraine's army and introducing several successful e-government platforms in his current role.

He replaces Denys Shmyhal who took up the post last July in a major government shake-up. Zelenskyy thanked Shmyhal and said he would be taking up another role in government. He also credited the ministry for reaching a target production of more than 1,000 interceptor drones per day in December.

Earlier, Zelenskyy appointed Foreign Intelligence Service head Oleh Ivashchenko to replace Budanov as intelligence chief.

Budanov is one of the country's most recognizable and popular wartime figures. He has led Ukraine's military intelligence agency, known by its acronym GUR, since 2020.



Ukraine's military intelligence chief Maj. Gen. Kyrylo Budanov visits the Muslim Center for an iftar dinner during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in Kyiv, Ukraine, Thursday, March 13, 2025. (AP)



Japan's Emperor Naruhito, center left, waves with Empress Masako, center right, to well-wishers from the balcony during a public appearance for New Year's Day with his imperial family at the Imperial Palace, Friday, Jan. 2, 2026, in Tokyo. (AP)

More snow forecast for eastern, northern Japan

Japan's emperor greets New Year well-wishers

TOKYO, Jan 3, (Agencies): Japan's Emperor Naruhito and his family waved to a crowd of flag-waving New Year's well-wishers gathered at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo on Friday.

Standing with his wife Masako and the rest of the royal family, he wished a happy new year to people lined up below the palace balcony, some shouting, "banzai" - Japanese for "long live."

The annual New Year's appearance by the emperor and his family draws huge crowds to the palace's usually cloistered grounds in central Tokyo.

People stand in long lines, weathering the cold, for each of the five appearances during the day, as the imperial family remains relatively popular.

The emperor does not have political power but holds symbolic significance for Japan. He and his family are longtime advocates for peace, although World War II was fought in the name of Naruhito's grandfather Hirohito.

In a statement released in advance, Naruhito noted that last year marked 80 years since the end of that war. He stressed the importance of the message of peace, given that war and strife continued in parts of the world.

"I deeply feel it's important to continue with efforts among people for dialogue, trying to

deepen mutual understanding, so we can build a world of peace," he said in the statement.

In both the statement and comments Friday, he spoke about recent natural disasters such as earthquakes, heavy rainfall and snow, and forest fires. In 2024, the annual appearance was canceled because of a New Year's Day quake in the Noto Peninsula, a coastal area in central Japan, which killed hundreds of people. In 2021 and 2022, it got canceled because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Princess Aiko, the imperial couple's only child, appeared with her parents at this year's greeting, as did other relatives. She is at the center of a national debate about rules allowing only men to inherit to the Chrysanthemum Throne.

The presence of Naruhito's nephew, Hisahito, also drew attention, as he now takes part in adult imperial events and is a possible heir to the throne. He is second in line after his father, the emperor's brother.

Akihito, Naruhito's father and emperor emeritus who abdicated in 2019, was also there with his wife Michiko, the emperor's mother.

Also:

TOKYO: Japan's weather agency on Saturday warned that a strong cold mass over the nation

will bring more snow to the country's eastern and northern regions.

Snowfall has intensified in **Chugoku** and **Hokuriku** regions on Friday and Saturday due to the cold mass along with a winter-type pressure pattern.

As of 11 a.m. local time on Saturday, 81 cm of snow had accumulated in **Itiogawa** City, **Niigata** Prefecture, 76 cm in **Minakami** Town, **Gunma** Prefecture, 37 cm in **Minamiechizen** Town, **Fukui** Prefecture, and 29 cm in **Kitahiroshima** Town, **Hiroshima** Prefecture, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA).

Although the winter pressure pattern will gradually weaken, a cold mass over the nation will continue to bring more snow mainly to the Sea of Japan side of the country's eastern and northern regions, JMA said, adding that off-and-on snowfalls are expected there through Monday.

Since many people are returning home from their New Year holiday destinations, the agency warned that snow and ice on the roads could disrupt traffic, urging citizens to check out the latest weather and traffic information.

Weather officials also urged people to be on the alert for avalanches and power outages stemming from snow on utility cables.

US attack shakes Venezuela as Trump says Maduro captured

CARACAS, Jan 3, (AP): The United States hit Venezuela with a "large-scale strike" early Saturday and said its president, Nicolás Maduro, had been captured and flown out of the country after months of stepped-up pressure by Washington - an extraordinary night-time operation announced by President Donald Trump on social media hours after the attack.

Multiple explosions rang out and low-flying aircraft swept through Caracas, the capital, as Maduro's government immediately accused the United States of attacking civilian and military installations. The Venezuelan government called it an "imperialist attack" and urged citizens to take to the streets.

It was not immediately clear who was running the country, and Maduro's whereabouts were not immediately known. Trump announced the developments on Truth Social shortly after 4:30 a.m. ET. Maduro, Trump said, "has been, along with his wife, captured and flown out of the country. This operation was done in conjunction with U.S. Law Enforcement. Details to follow." He set a news conference for later Saturday morning.

The explosions in Caracas, Venezuela's capital, early on the third day of 2026 - at least seven blasts - sent people rushing into the streets, while others took to social media to report hearing and seeing the explosions. It was not immediately clear if there were casualties. The apparent attack itself lasted less than 30 minutes, but it was unclear if more actions lay ahead, though Trump said in his post that the strikes were carried out "successfully."

The Federal Aviation Administration issued a ban on U.S. commercial flights in Venezuelan airspace because of "ongoing military activity" ahead of the explosions.

The strike came as the Trump administration has escalated pressure on Maduro, who has been charged with narco-terrorism in the United States. The CIA was behind a drone strike

last week at a docking area believed to have been used by Venezuelan drug cartels - the first known direct operation on Venezuelan soil since the U.S. began strikes in September.

Trump for months had threatened that he could soon order strikes on targets on Venezuelan land following months of attacks on boats accused of carrying drugs. Maduro has decried the U.S. military operations as a thinly veiled effort to oust him from power.

Armed individuals and uniformed members of a civilian militia took to the streets of a Caracas neighborhood long considered a stronghold of the ruling party. But in other areas of the city, the streets remained empty hours after the attack. Parts of the city remained without power, but vehicles moved freely.

Video obtained from Caracas and an unidentified coastal city showed tracers and smoke clouding the landscape sky as repeated muted explosions illuminated the night sky. Other footage showed an urban landscape with cars passing on a highway as blasts illuminated the hills behind them. Unintelligible conversation could be heard in the background. The videos were verified by The Associated Press.

Smoke could be seen rising from the hangar of a military base in Caracas, while another military installation in the capital was without power.

"The whole ground shook. This is horrible. We heard explosions and planes," said Carmen Hidalgo, a 21-year-old office worker, her voice trembling. She was walking briskly with two relatives, returning from a birthday party. "We felt like the air was hitting us."

Trump is at his private club in Palm Beach, Florida, where he has spent the past two weeks for the holiday season. His public schedule showed he was set to receive an intelligence briefing on Friday evening, hours before the reported strikes. He offered no immediate comment on social media.



Residents evacuate a building near the Miraflores presidential palace after explosions and low-flying aircraft were heard in Caracas, Venezuela, Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026. (AP)

Lee's China visit seen as crucial for regional stability

China-South Korea ties key as protectionism rises

SEOUL, Jan 3, (Xinhua): As South Korean President Lee Jae Myung prepares to embark on his maiden visit to China since taking office, the timing could hardly be more consequential.

At a moment when trade protectionism is resurging, geopolitical tensions are increasing, and economic uncertainty clouds global recovery, China and South Korea -- two major economies in the Asia-Pacific -- face a shared responsibility to promote stability and confidence in the region.

Over the past three decades, China-South Korea relations have demonstrated that close neighbors with different ideologies and social systems can transcend differences through cooperation.

Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1992, the two countries have built deeply integrated industrial chains and supply networks, forming a mutually beneficial economic partnership that has weathered multiple global shocks. This foundation remains one of the most resilient pillars of regional economic cooperation.

Economic ties continue to serve as the cornerstone of the relationship. For over two decades, China has been South Korea's largest trading partner, while South Korea stands as one of China's most important economic partners.

This reflects a deep interdependence in manufacturing, technology and consumer markets. Any attempts to decouple or politicize these economic ties would run counter to the fundamental interests of both peoples.

The year 2025 marked the 10th anniversary of the China-South Korea Free Trade Agreement. According to China's General Administration of Customs, bilateral trade volume reached 298.9 billion U.S. dollars during the January-November period last year.

By expanding cooperation into emerging sectors



South Korean tourists visit Zhongshan Road in Qingdao City, east China's Shandong Province, Dec. 31, 2025. A group of over 100 South Korean tourists arrived in Qingdao on Wednesday for the New Year tour, with travel itineraries including health care, sightseeing in scenic spots and business districts, and cultural activities. (Xinhua)

such as artificial intelligence, biopharmaceuticals, green industries and the silver economy, both sides can align economic transformation with sustainable development. This is not only a pragmatic response to domestic growth challenges, but also a constructive contribution to regional and global economic recovery.

Beyond bilateral interests, China and South Korea are important stakeholders in upholding the multilateral trading system. As key Asia-Pacific economies, both countries benefit from open markets, stable supply chains and predictable rules.

In an era when unilateralism and "small yard and high fence" approaches are gaining ground, their cooperation demonstrates support of true multilateralism and inclusive globalization.



Revelers film and catch falling balloons as they celebrate the start of 2026 during the New Year countdown event held at a shopping mall in Beijing, early Thursday, Jan. 1, 2026. (AP)

Africa

Dozens missing in Gambia boat mishap: Dozens are missing after a boat carrying more than 200 migrants on their way to Europe capsized off the coast of Gambia, the West African nation's leader said late Friday, setting off a frantic search and rescue operation.

At least 102 survivors have been rescued and seven bodies recovered from the boat that capsized on New Year's Eve in northwest Gambia's North Bank region, Gambian President Adama Barrow said in a state broadcast. The emergency services were joined by local fishermen and other volunteers in searching for the victims, days after Wednesday's incident near the village of Jinack, he said.

Thousands of Africans desperate for better opportunities in Europe risk their lives traveling on boats along the Atlantic coast, one of the world's deadliest migrant routes that connects the West African coast across Gambia, Senegal and Mauritania. Many migrants seeking to reach Spain via the Canary Islands never make it due to high risks of boats capsizing. In August 2025, around 150 people were either dead or missing after their boat that came from Gambia capsized off the coast of Mauritania. (AP)

□ □ □

Nairobi building collapse traps 4: A multi-story building under construction in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, collapsed Friday, leaving at least four people believed trapped.

Rescue workers are digging through the rubble. The

building was in an area of Nairobi known as South C, according to the Kenya Red Cross, which said in a statement that a multi-agency response team was at the scene "managing the situation." Geoffrey Ruku, the Cabinet secretary in charge of public service, told reporters that four people were believed trapped.

Safia Ali Aden, the sister of one of those trapped, told reporters at the scene that her brother made a phone call "while under there."

"We are asking the government to be speedy in the rescue so we can find my brother alive," she said. (AP)



Sudanese army soldiers parade in the streets of Omdurman, a district of Khartoum, Sudan, Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2025, to mark the 70th anniversary of the Sudan Independence. (AP)

Subcontinent

Sri Lanka Navy seizes narcotics: The Sri Lanka Navy seized narcotics and contraband with an estimated gross street value exceeding 75 billion rupees (about 242 million U.S. dollars) and arrested 376 local suspects amid intensified nationwide drug-interdiction operations in 2025, official data showed.

The Navy said the operations were carried out through coordinated efforts with local and foreign maritime stakeholders as well as law enforcement agencies, targeting maritime and coastal drug-smuggling networks.

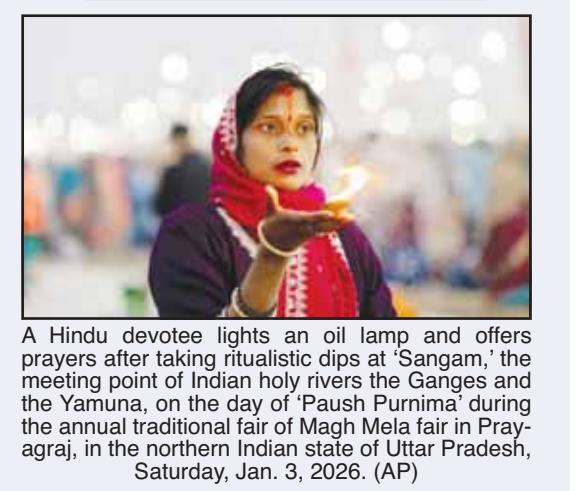
Substantial quantities of heroin, crystal methamphetamine, hashish, foreign and local cannabis, prescription drugs, foreign cigarettes, and Kendu leaves were seized during the year, said the Navy. It noted that the seized narcotics included more than 1,050 kg of heroin and over 2,982 kg of crystal methamphetamine. The Navy's operations are in line with Sri Lanka's national anti-drug campaign "A Nation United," which was launched in a bid to enhance the crackdown on drug-related crimes. (Xinhua)

Pakistan sentences journalists, YouTubers: A court in Pakistan's capital sentenced seven people, including three journalists, two YouTubers and two retired army officers, to life imprisonment on Friday, after convicting them of inciting violence during riots in 2023 and spreading hatred against state institutions.

An anti-terrorism court judge, Tahir Abbas Sipra, an-

nounced the verdict in Islamabad after completing trials held in absentia. None of the accused were present in court. They have been living abroad after leaving the country in recent years to avoid arrest.

Those convicted include former editor Shaheen Sehbai; two other journalists, Sabir Shakir and Moed Pirzada; YouTubers Wajahat Saeed Khan and Haider Raza Mehdi; and retired army officers Adil Raja and Akbar Hussain. (AP)



A Hindu devotee lights an oil lamp and offers prayers after taking ritualistic dips at 'Sangam,' the meeting point of Indian holy rivers the Ganges and the Yamuna, on the day of 'Paush Purnima' during the annual traditional fair of Magh Mela fair in Prayagraj, in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026. (AP)

Kuwait oil price down to \$59.07 pb

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3, (KUNA): The Kuwaiti oil price fell USD 1.09 to USD 59.07 per barrel (pb) on Friday, compared to USD 60.16 pb on Wednesday, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Saturday.

In global markets, the price of Brent crude went down by 10 cents to USD 60.75 per barrel, while the same occurred with the West Texas Intermediate, which fell by 10 cents to USD 57.32 pb.

Other Voices

OPEC+ urges discipline

Oil prices under pressure as global glut persists

By Kamel Al-Harami

Independent Oil Analyst

As the new year begins, concerns over oil prices this year are growing. A global glut and oversupply are keeping prices weak and are expected to do so for the remainder of 2025. Brent crude is trading at \$60 a barrel, while U.S. WTI is at \$57 a barrel, maintaining its usual differential against the benchmark of Brent North Sea crude oil.

While OPEC+ did not take any action last year to influence or stabilize oil prices, it maintained its stance of non-interference, allowing the market to self-correct. This comes despite the fact that OPEC+ countries are losing revenue and income and, for the third consecutive year, have been forced



to rely on borrowing.

With the global crude oil surplus exceeding four million barrels per day, it will be difficult for OPEC+ to address the oversupply on its own. Other oil producers will also need to cut their output, not for the sake of the organization, but to protect their own revenues and improve their balance sheets before the end of the year.

We are not asking non-OPEC+ producers to support OPEC+ for its sake, but for their own benefit. OPEC+ has already acted and is not in a position to reduce its production further. It is now up to non-OPEC producers to cut their output, knowing that the market is already flooded with oil, including volumes beyond their control, with little management.

Current oil demand stands at 104 million barrels per day, with expected consumption for the rest of the year around 105.5 million barrels per day. Meanwhile, crude oil supply ranges between 105 and 107 million barrels per day, creating a surplus. This excess supply is contribut-

ing to weak prices, averaging around \$61 per barrel.

The solution, as some anticipate, is to call on OPEC+ to reduce oil production, allowing non-OPEC+ producers to benefit from OPEC+’s action.

However, it may be time for OPEC+ to hold back and take no action, letting other producers face the same revenue pressures as OPEC+. If U.S. shale producers can survive at \$54 - \$55 per barrel, they must adapt. Low prices will limit their ability to explore and develop new fields, leaving them under the protection and umbrella of OPEC+.

Weak oil prices are worrisome for everyone. Controlling supply is a complex responsibility that requires coordination among all producers. It must not be exploited by sudden increases in production during periods of stable prices. All producers need to adhere to disciplined production levels and avoid taking advantage of the market or one another.

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The opportunity remains open to win six additional packages until the end of Jan

NBK announces names of the first six winners in FIFA World Cup 2026™ campaign, in collaboration with Visa

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) announced the names of the first six winners of its exclusive campaign in collaboration with Visa, which offers the Bank's customers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to attend matches of the FIFA World Cup 2026™, set to be held in Mexico, Canada, and the United States.

This campaign reflects the Bank's commitment to rewarding its customers with exceptional benefits and world-class experiences, underscoring its ongoing dedication to delivering best-in-class banking services and exclusive offers aligned with their interests and lifestyles.

The campaign offers 12 winners, each accompanied by a guest of their choice, the opportunity to attend the tournament through exclusive packages that include access to the opening match in Mexico, the final in New York, as well as selected semifinal, quarterfinal, and Round of 32 matches.

Prizes include business class flights with Qatar Airways, accommodation in luxury hotels, match tickets, and exclusive welcome gifts from Visa, delivering an unforgettable experience for winners and their guests at one of the world's premier sporting events.

The list of the campaign's first six winners included Fahed Abdulaziz Khaled Al-Abdulrazzaq, who secured the premier package to attend the opening ceremony in Mexico, while Bader Mathal Humaid Al-Sanea, Eisa Abdullateef Abdullah Al Awadhi, Ahmad Abbas Mahmoud Abu Samara, Bader Naser Bader Al-Dabbous, and Talal Al-Duajj each won packages to attend Round of 32 matches, marking the start of their countdown to an unparalleled global football experience.

The remaining six winners will be announced in February, when they will receive premium packages to attend the quarterfinals, semifinals, and the final match, completing an exceptional global experience for 12 winners and their guests.

NBK customers still have the opportunity to qualify for one of the remaining packages by registering through the dedicated campaign page and spending a minimum of KD 250 per month using eligible NBK Visa credit or prepaid cards during the campaign period, whether locally, internationally, or online. Each KD 1 spent locally earns 10 points, each KD 1 spent internationally earns 20 points, and any card issued during the campaign period grants the client an additional 50 points.

During the campaign period, NBK is offering the limited-edition NBK 247 Cash Back FIFA World Cup 2026™ prepaid card, which can be easily obtained through NBK Mobile Banking and added instantly to the digital wallet for immediate use, delivering a distinctive banking experience with a global sport-



ing dimension.

On this occasion, Mr. Hisham Al-Nusif, Chief, Consumer Banking at NBK, said: "At NBK, we are always keen to offer exceptional experiences to our customers, and this campaign in partnership with Visa clearly reflects that commitment. The FIFA World Cup 2026™ is not merely a sporting event; it is a global experience that brings together millions of fans from around the world, and we are proud to give our customers the opportunity to be part of these historic moments."

Al-Nusif noted that the packages awarded to the campaign's winners extend beyond match attendance to include business-class air travel, stays at luxury hotels, and exclusive gifts, offering a fully integrated and unforgettable experience for winners and their guests.

He invited all NBK customers to seize the opportunity while the campaign continues until the end of January and take part in this one-of-a-kind experience.

The campaign underscores NBK's approach to delivering the finest services and rewards to its customers, in appreciation of their continued support and loyalty, reflecting the Bank's leading position in the banking sector both locally and regionally.

In line with international standards of service excellence and sustainability

KFH receives the LEED Gold Certification

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has announced that the General Services Department received the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold Certification from the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). This global recognition affirms the compliance of KFH's several branches with the globally approved standards and the USGBC's requirements.

LEED Certificate is a globally recognized system for rating and classifying buildings based on their level of compliance with sustainability and energy efficiency standards. The certification assesses the quality of building design and operation in an environmentally responsible manner, covering key criteria including energy efficiency, water efficiency, carbon emissions reduction, indoor environmental quality, and the use of sustainable building materials.

Buildings awarded the LEED certification are characterized by several fundamental elements that provide them with a competitive advantage, in addition to being newly constructed buildings. These include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, lowering operating costs, and enhancing indoor environmental quality.

The internationally recognized LEED certification is granted through two closely



Ayman Altabtabaei

related entities, the USGBC which developed the LEED rating system and its core standards, and the Green Business Certification Inc. (GBCI), which is responsible for certification issuance, verification, and auditing services for projects worldwide.

KFH Executive Manager General Services, Ayman Altabtabaei, said that obtaining the certification for a number of KFH's branches represents significant op-

Business

Offshore exploration spurs energy growth

KOC enhances Kuwait's position with offshore exploration success

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3, (KUNA): The offshore exploration project currently being implemented by Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) represents a pioneering national step aligning with requirements of State of Kuwait's Oil Strategy 2040.

The project opens the door to applying the latest advanced technologies in offshore drilling and production, while also developing national capabilities and developing expertise of young professionals, thereby contributing to creation of new and high-quality job opportunities for Kuwaitis.

The project strengthens Kuwait's position as a reliable producer at global level and ensures continuity of new hydrocarbon resources to meet global market needs.

It also lays foundation for a new phase in offshore exploration and opens broad prospects for use of artificial intelligence and data analysis technologies in exploration and production operations.

The project contributes to developing new technical skills in offshore exploration, drilling and production, and creates diverse new job opportunities for national talents. It also supports the application of innovative technologies across all marine disciplines, including digitalization, learning how to use machines, AI, data analysis and interpretation.

Kuwait's offshore area has long been part of the country's oil plans, remaining for more than six decades a focal point of survey operations and continuous interest. Today, Kuwait's offshore dream has been realized through this strategic project.

A total of 18 exploratory wells have been identified in the offshore area.

The 3D seismic survey will play a pivotal role at this stage, with particular importance given to the two Jurassic wells (Nokhitha-II) and (Juliaia-III), as they pass through the largest Cretaceous reservoirs discovered so far, in addition to the possibility of conducting productivity tests during drilling.

Offshore exploration operations face several technical challenges, most notably transportation, marine pollution and preparation of drilling sites.

However, KOC ensured readiness of pollution-control equipment and provided necessary support for diving and sub-sea maintenance operations.

Marine tugboats were used to transport drilling rigs to drilling sites, carry out site clearance, positioning and platform stabilization, in preparation for diving operations and drilling, as well as to remove any objects that could obstruct work or damage the rig.

Another challenge was the absence of reference data from previous wells that could be used to develop a precise plan to avoid risks before they occur, which necessitated the preparation of a comprehensive well-drilling plan with precautions for worst-case scenarios.

During the drilling of the first two wells of the project, Nokhitha and Juliaia, workers found that formation pressures and temperatures were higher than expected, requiring provision of equipment capable of withstanding such complex conditions in future wells.

The Juliaia field is among the closest offshore sites to the shoreline, which requires special measures, including regular drills and inspections to prevent any leaks during or after operations, securing the drilling area within a radius of up to 500 meters from sea goers, and transporting drilling cuttings and fluids to specialized company-operated treatment facilities. In addition, the well is isolated and secured on seabed to avoid accidents and ensure that marine navigation is not disrupted.

Advanced mechanisms have been adopted to manage offshore well isolation operations, ensuring the highest levels of environmental and operational safety. These operations follow sequential stages beginning with exploration and development to determine the paths to be followed based on exploration results.

If results prove the presence of a productive well, it is secured on the seabed using special protective cages while ensuring future surface access. If drilling results indicate a non-productive well, it is fully isolated on the seabed.

Regarding future opportunities, KOC is studying the best available options for early production from discovered offshore wells, followed by implementation of suitable infrastructure and the establishment of production facilities.

Efforts are currently underway to identify the best means of implementing the second phase of the offshore exploration project in Kuwaiti waters.

The second phase of the offshore exploration project includes 17 wells. The company has reviewed well designs and offshore drilling rig specifications, as well as assessed logistical operations based on current experience, aiming to reach optimal specifications that help reduce operating costs and shorten operation timelines while maintaining quality in upcoming project stages.

KOC is also studying the best options for establishing a dedicated port for offshore operations with suitable capacity to serve drilling rigs.

BUSINESS

GCC banks loan-to-deposit ratio reaches record high on steady loan growth

By KAMCO Invest

Listed banks in the GCC continued to show strong performance in the form of steady loan growth during Q3-2025 resulting in a record high loan-to-deposit ratio. The growth in credit facilities was broad-based spread across most sectors and across the region backed by a strong pipeline of projects. The ratio, however, showed strong divergence across countries with Saudi Arabia registering the highest ratio during the quarter followed by Qatari banks while UAE and Bahraini banks showed a much lower ratio below the 70% mark. The elevated ratio in Saudi Arabia also highlights challenges on the liquidity front in the banking sector and also indicates higher external funding requirements in the near term in addition to the issuances in the current year via bonds and sukuk.

Lending growth reported by listed banks in the GCC registered an increase of 3.7%, one of the highest growths in more than four years, with net loans reaching USD 2.31 Trillion at the end of Q3-2025. The growth reflected resilient non-oil sector growth in the region with non-oil manufacturing consistently well above the growth mark for key economies in the region. Gross loans also showed a healthy growth of 3.6% during the quarter to reach USD 2.41 Trillion.

In terms of topline performance, aggregate banking sector revenues reached a new record high during the quarter at USD 36.8 Bn, after registering a three-quarter high sequential growth of 3.3%. The growth was led by a broad-based increase in revenues reported by banks across country aggregates. Qatar and Bahrain-listed banks led the way during the quarter with a strong sequential revenue growth of 5.9% and 5.0%, respectively, as compared to Q2-2025.

Net profits reported by listed banks in the GCC also reached a new record high of USD 16.6 Bn during Q3-2025, an increase for the third consecutive quarter, although the q-o-q growth was the lowest in the last three quarters at 2.2% while y-o-y growth stood at a strong 11.6%. The sequential increase was once again mainly led by a broad-based increase in revenues for the sector and lower cost-to-income ratio that more than offset an increase in impairments during the quarter. Loan impairments once again witnessed a double-digit increase reaching a three-quarter high level of USD 2.6 Bn during Q3-2025 vs. USD 2.4 Bn during Q2-2025.

Highlights - GCC Banking Sector

This report analyzes the financials reported by 56 listed banks in the GCC for the quarter ended Q3-2025. Data for individual banks has been aggregated to the country level. Some of the key observations from the most recent financial quarter for the GCC Banking Sector include the following:

Fed easing continues despite elevated inflation and data limitations...

After speculations since the longest running government shutdown on record in the US over the third installment of rate cut this year, the US Fed finally slashed rate for the third time last week. The speculations started as a result of hawkish concerns from some officials after the Fed implemented the second rate cut, also due to labor market concerns. Consensus estimates were volatile for the third rate cut but ultimately went above the 80% mark over the last two weeks with financial markets also factoring the cuts in the recent trading trends. The rate cut comes despite sticky inflation in the US and once again mainly reflects labor market concerns. A report from the OECD showed that inflation remains above 4% globally and just below 3.0% in the G7 countries, prompting many central banks to pause rate cuts. In addition, the uncertainty over the impact of tariffs has led to limited impact from the rate cuts as businesses are holding back investments waiting for clarity on government policies, thereby having a negative impact on the labor market.

The latest inflation data for the US showed annual CPI reaching 3.0% for the 12 months ending September-2025, a slight rise from 2.9% in August-2025, with the next update for November-2025 expected around mid-December. Core inflation also came in at 3.0% while monthly core prices rose 0.2%, slowing from previous months, driven partly by a cooler shelter index. The energy index witnessed an annual increase of 1.5% during September-2025. However, expectations for future inflation showed year ahead inflation remaining elevated at 3.2%, according to New York Fed's monthly survey of consumer expectations.

Inflation in the Euro-area rose to 2.2% in November-2025 as compared to 2.1% in October-2025 while core inflation remained unchanged at 2.4%. The higher inflation supports ECB view about keeping interest rates at current levels. Services inflation remained a concern for the ECB that reached its highest in seven months at 3.5% during November-2025. Moreover, the trend varied at the country level in the region with higher CPI in Germany, steady reading in France and easing in Spain and Italy. Based on the latest inflation data and strong private sector activity during November-2025 that points to an improving economy, the ECB would most likely keep interest rates unchanged at current levels this year as well as going into 2026.

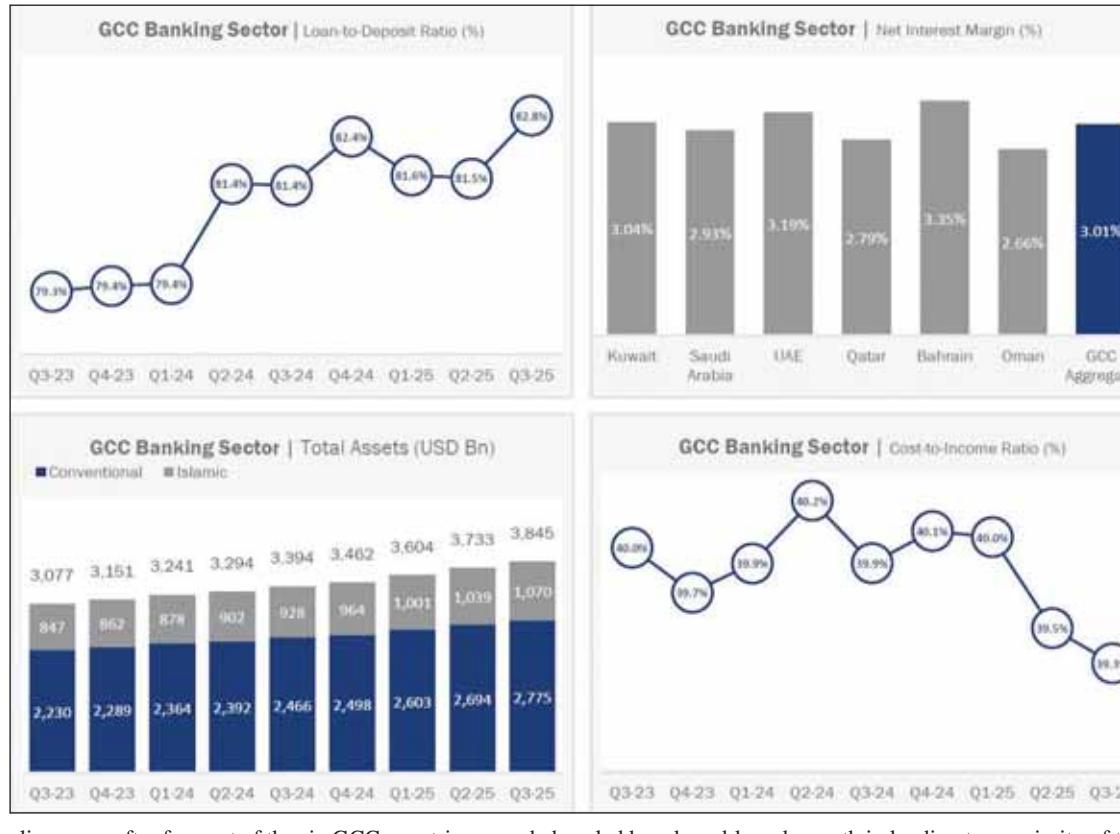
China, meanwhile, continues to face low inflation, contrasting sharply with global trends, driven by weak domestic demand, a property downturn, and an oversupply and intense price competition in many sectors, leading to falling consumer and producer prices. This has also impacted corporate profits and wage growth despite government efforts to stimulate consumption. While official CPI hovers near zero at 0.2% during October-2025 following two consecutive months of deflation, core inflation is slightly higher at 1.2%, and PPI prices remain negative at -2.1%, signaling broad-based price pressures. Economic growth also slowed down during Q3-2025 with GDP growing by 4.8% y-o-y vs. 5.2% during the previous quarter. At the sector level, manufacturing and trade activity remained strong in China offsetting weaknesses in construction (property) and weaker consumer spending, as authorities navigate supporting domestic demand amidst property sector woes.

The interest rate outlook for global central banks continues to remain uncertain but there is a growing undercurrent of hawkish pressure, especially in the US and Euro-area. Although focus remains on US Fed's speech this week, which is likely to be hawkish, his term ends soon and a new Fed chairman is likely to be appointed by February-2026. Speculations suggest that the new Fed chairman may favor rate cuts in 2026, but it would depend on economic data. This was also reflected in the latest expectations by swap market that have trimmed expectations for Fed cuts in 2026 factoring in two rate cuts next year. On the other hand, investors have started pricing in rate hikes by the ECB next year. Similarly, central banks in Australia and Canada are likely to increase rates next year due to improving economies while the Bank of England is widely expected to reach the bottom of its rate cutting cycle by next summer.

Central banks in the GCC are likely to follow the US Fed's rate path this week as well as next year as the currency pegs remain in comfortable position. However, the Central Bank of Kuwait is expected to follow an independent path and implement rate moves that more suited to the economy as the currency remains pegged to a basket of currencies. The bank has slashed its discount rate by 25 bps last year and another 25 bps this year despite cumulative cuts of 150 bps by the US Fed and 200 bps cuts to the ECB deposit facility announcement rate since last year.

GCC witnesses resilient growth despite oil price decline...

Data from GCC central banks once again highlighted the resilience of regional economies with continued growth in outstanding credit facilities. Total credit facilities, as seen from central bank published data, continued to show growth during Q3-2025 led by growth in all countries in the region. The lending growth in the region also reflected a q-o-q recovery in project awards during Q3-2025 although there was a sharp decline when compared to the corresponding quarter of last year. According to data from MEED Projects, the total value of contracts awarded in the GCC fell by 27.0% y-o-y in Q3-2025, reaching USD 54.8 Bn, the second-lowest figure recorded in the past ten quarters, compared to USD 75.0 Bn in Q3-2024. The y-o-y de-



cline came after four out of the six GCC countries recorded y-o-y declines in project awards. In terms of q-o-q performance, project awards were up by 52.3% during Q3-2025.

The healthy lending growth also reflected steady manufacturing activity in the region with data from Bloomberg (Markit Whole Economy Surveys) showed PMI figures stayed strong during the quarter above the growth mark of 50 for all the countries in the GCC that reported the number at the end of Q3-2025. Manufacturing activity in Saudi Arabia remained robust with PMI at 57.8 points during September-2025, followed by 60.2 points and 58.5 points during the next two months. The PMI for October-2025 was the second-highest growth in over a decade driven by surging new orders, output and employment signaling strong growth in non-oil private sector. The data also reflected strong domestic demand, increased foreign investment and increased growth in hiring in the Kingdom. The GDP data for the Kingdom also came in steady with Q3-2025 GDP up by 4.8% y-o-y driven by growth in both oil and non-oil sectors. Oil GDP was up by 8.3% y-o-y led by an increase in oil production, while the non-oil sector recorded a growth of 4.3%. Oil production increased by almost 11% y-o-y during Q3-2025 to average at 10 mb/d.

UAE also reported healthy PMI figure of 54.2 points in September-2025, the highest in seven months, as compared to 53.5 points during June-2025. The PMI for the two subsequent months also remained at healthy growth levels. The PMI figure for Dubai also showed steady healthy trend reaching 54.2 points at the end of September-2025 followed by 54.5 points for the next two months. Manufacturing activity recovered in Qatar with the PMI recorded at 51.5 points during September-2025, slightly below the activity during June-2025 at 52 points. The PMI data for Kuwait also showed manufacturing comfortably above the growth mark at 52.2 points in September-2025, a slight deterioration from 53.1 in June-2025, according to S&P Global. The PMI slightly increased to 52.8 points in October-2025 driven by strong new orders from marketing/procurement, improved output, and increased hiring.

In a recent report, S&P ratings underscored the steady growth trend in the GCC banking sector and said it expects regional banks' financial profile to remain stable in 2026 led by stable profitability, supportive asset quality and solid capitalization although geopolitical issues and oil price remain the biggest downside risks for the sector. On the liquidity front, the agency said that reliance on external funding is increasing in the GCC with Bahrain and Qatar still have the region's highest external debt (in the form of non-resident deposits) and believes that banks in Saudi Arabia would continue to tap international debt markets to raise the necessary funding. Economic growth is also expected to be slightly better in 2026 with Saudi Arabia and UAE benefiting from the efforts on economic transformation leading to faster growth in non-oil sector. Bank lending growth in Qatar is expected to benefit from the improving fiscal and external balances that would open doors for new investments. Similarly, implementation of reforms in Kuwait are expected to support banking lending in the near term.

Credit facilities show broad-based growth across GCC countries...

Data on outstanding credit facilities from GCC central banks showed a steady sequential increase of 3.0% during Q3-2025 reaching USD 2.08 Trillion as compared to USD 2.02 Trillion at the end of Q2-2025. The y-o-y increase was also strong at 9.9% during Q3-2025. At the country level, UAE registered the strongest quarterly growth of 5.3% followed by Saudi Arabia with a growth of 2.4%. The remaining countries also registered growth during the quarter, ranging from 1.2% to 2.2%.

According to data from SAMA, growth in outstanding credit facility in Saudi Arabia was at a seven-quarter low level at 2.4% during Q3-2025 reaching SAR 3.3 Trillion as compared to a growth of 2.7% during the previous quarter. The y-o-y growth stood at a strong 14.3% as Saudi Arabia was the only country in the GCC that has seen double-digit y-o-y growth in outstanding credit facilities since 2023. From among the prominent sectors, credit facilities to the Finance & Insurance sector witnessed the biggest q-o-q growth of 10.3% followed by loans to Utilities that grew by 5.6% during the quarter. Loans to Manufacturing also showed a healthy growth of 3.1% while individual loans increased by 1.9%. Loans for Building & Construction also showed healthy growth of 2.1%. Among the decliners, loans for Real Estate activity dropped 1.6% during the quarter. Real Estate mortgage loans showed a marginal growth of 0.6% after 2.0% growth in retail real estate loans more than offset the 4.2% decline in corporate real estate loans.

Sector level lending data for the UAE showed a broad-based growth across sectors, with the exception of personal loans for business purposes that declined by 3.1%. Loans for Agriculture, Utilities and to Government showed double-digit growth during Q3-2025. Among prominent sectors by size of loans, credit facilities for personal loans (consumption purposes) increased by 4.3% while loans to Construction & Real Estate, the second-biggest bucket among the sectors, increased by 3.1%. Loans to financial Institutions also showed a strong increase of 8.10%. The Q2-2025 credit sentiment survey from the Central Bank of UAE highlighted favorable economic conditions, higher household incomes, a supportive investment environment, and increased government expenditure that continued to underpin strong credit activity. On the business side, loan demand strengthened across most industries, especially in the construction sector, while mining and quarrying recorded a decline. On the personal lending side, credit cards, housing loans (owner-occupier and investment), and personal (other) loans recorded the highest demand growth during the quarter.

Meanwhile, banking credit facilities in Qatar also showed growth during Q3-2025 with an increase of 2.2% after seeing a flattish growth of 0.2% in the previous quarter. The increase was led by growth in lending to almost all the sectors in the economy. Loans to public sector recovered during the quarter by 6.7% after a decline of 2.8% in the previous quarter. The rest of the sectors witnessed marginal growth in lending.

Outstanding credit facilities in Kuwait showed consistent growth in lending to reach KWD 53.1 Bn at the end of Q3-2025, although the sequential growth reached a three-quarter low level of 1.3%. Nevertheless, the increase was

aggregate net interest income growth of 8.4% q-o-q to reach USD 2.7 Bn. Qatar was next with a growth of 5.6% with net interest income reaching USD 3.7 Bn followed by UAE and Bahraini banks with growth of 5.1% and 4.8%, respectively. Net interest income reported by UAE-listed banks was the highest in the GCC during the quarter at USD 8.0 Bn, almost in line with net interest income reported by Saudi-listed banks. The latter saw only a marginal improvement of 0.1% during the quarter.

The quarter also reflected a total of 125 bps in rate cuts implemented by almost all central banks in the GCC by the end of the quarter (in line with cuts by the US Fed), barring the Central Bank of Kuwait that slashed the discount rate by 50 bps since September-2024. The yield on credit also showed the impact of lower interest rates reaching 4.05% for the aggregate GCC banking sector at the end of Q3-2025 as compared to 4.10% at the end of Q2-2025 and 4.22% at the end of Q3-2024.

Revenue growth further supported by record high non-interest income...

Total revenues for the GCC banking sector once again showed healthy growth for the second consecutive quarter during Q3-2025. The growth came in at a three-quarter high level of 3.6% during Q3-2025 with total bank revenues reaching USD 36.8 Bn. The increase in revenues was led by growth in all markets in the GCC. Qatari banks registered the biggest sequential growth in revenues at 5.9% to reach USD 5.3 Bn during Q3-2025. Bahrain-listed banks were a close second with revenue growth of 5.0% reaching USD 1.0 Bn followed by UAE-listed banks that registered a growth of 3.4% with total revenues of USD 13.7 Bn, the highest in the GCC. Kuwaiti and Saudi-listed banks were next with revenue growth of 3.3% and 2.1%, respectively.

Aggregate non-interest income increased by 2.8% during the quarter to reach a new record high of USD 13.0 Bn, although the q-o-q growth moderated from 7.5% in the previous quarter. The increase in non-interest income was broad-based with five out of six country aggregates showing a q-o-q increase. Qatar-listed banks once again registered the biggest q-o-q growth in non-interest income at 6.5% to reach USD 1.6 Bn closely followed by Saudi-listed banks that reported a q-o-q growth of 6.4% to reach USD 4.1 Bn. Bahrain and Omani banks also registered healthy q-o-q growth in mid-single-digits while UAE-listed banks reported a growth of 1.3% to reach USD 5.7 Bn, the highest in the GCC. On the other hand, banks in Kuwait registered a 9.0% decline in non-interest income during Q3-2025, partially offsetting the overall growth.

Impairments increased for the second straight quarter...

Impairments booked by banks in the GCC once again increased during Q3-2025 after reaching a three-quarter low level in Q1-2025. Total loan impairment increased by 10.3% during the quarter to reach USD 2.6 Bn as compared to USD 2.4 Bn during Q2-2025. The increase reflected an increase in impairments booked by banks in Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain and Oman that more than offset a decline in the rest of the GCC countries. Impairments booked by banks in Kuwait reached USD 28.7 M during the quarter as compared to aggregate reversal of provision in the previous quarter at USD 44.0 M reflecting reversals by several large banks during Q2-2025. The increase in impairments in other markets were marginal. On the other hand, impairments booked by banks in Saudi Arabia and Qatar declined during the quarter partially offsetting the overall growth. Total impairments booked by Saudi-listed banks declined by 0.3% and reached USD 503.5 M, the lowest in four quarters, as compared to USD 504.7 M in Q2-2025. Similarly, impairments booked by banks in Qatar dropped by 15.6% to reach USD 814.1 M.

Despite an increase in quarterly impairments, the aggregate cost of risk (ratio of 12-month provisions vs. average loans) for the GCC banking sector declined marginally during the quarter to reach 0.45% as compared to 0.46% in Q2-2025. The low ratio as compared to historical levels indicates recoveries, strong economic indicators as well as stable asset quality. The ratio was highest in the case of Qatari banks at 0.85% in Q3-2025 vs. 0.83% during Q1-2025 reflecting higher impairments over the last twelve months, although there was a decline in impairments in Q3-2025. Bahraini banks were next with a cost of risk ratio at 0.6%, closely followed by Omani banks with the ratio at 0.53%. The ratio was the lowest in the case of Kuwaiti and Saudi banks at 0.26%, while UAE-listed banks showed slightly higher cost of risk of 0.49%.

Operating expenses sees broad-based increase during the quarter...

Aggregate operating expenses for listed banks in the GCC increased during Q3-2025 after seeing two consecutive quarters of declines during 1H-2025. Total operating expenses for the GCC Banking sector stood at USD 14.3 Bn during Q3-2025 with a q-o-q increase of 6.8% and a y-o-y growth of 9.6%. The q-o-q increase came after five out of six country aggregates showed an increase. UAE and Qatari listed banks showed double-digit q-o-q increase in operating expenses while the remaining markets registered relatively smaller increases. Saudi-listed banks reported the smallest increase in operating expenses at 1.4%. On the other hand, Kuwait was the only country which registered a decline in operating expenses by 1.9% during Q3-2025.

Meanwhile, despite a q-o-q increase in operating expenses, the aggregate cost-to-income ratio for the GCC banking sector declined marginally and stayed below the 40% mark during Q3-2025. The ratio declined by 20 bps to reach 39.3% at the end of the quarter as compared to 39.5% during Q2-2025. The decline reflected a drop in the ratio for four out of six country aggregates. At the country level, the aggregates for Kuwaiti and Saudi-listed banks showed a decline of 50 bps each while Bahraini and Omani showed marginal growth. Qatari banks continued to boast the lowest cost to income ratio in the GCC that reached an eight-quarter low level of 36.4% during Q3-2025.

NIM continued to slide led by the impact of rate cuts...

The aggregate net interest margin reported by GCC-listed banks continued to decline during Q3-2025 as a larger share of lending was repriced at the lower interest rates after the rate cuts announced during the second half of last year. The NIM at the GCC level reached 3.01% at the end of Q3-2025 falling marginally when compared to 3.05% at the end of Q2-2025. The ratio showed a broad-based decline falling in five out of six countries in the GCC. The ratio for Bahraini banks showed a marginal increase during the quarter to reach 3.35% at the end of Q3-2025. On the other hand, banks in the rest of the GCC countries registered declining NIMs.

Bahraini banks once ranked first in the GCC in terms of NIMs that reached 3.35% in Q3-2025 as compared to 3.25% during Q2-2025. UAE-listed banks followed with a NIM of 3.19% in Q3-2025 as compared to 3.26% in Q2-2025. The higher margins as compared to gulf peers reflect ample liquidity with low cost CASA deposits. The composition of loan book in the UAE also helped in generating relatively higher NIM as personal loans accounted for close to a quarter of total banking credit facilities in the country.

GCC banking RoE remained elevated...

Aggregate return on equity (RoE) for the GCC banking sector remained flat q-o-q during Q3-2025 marginally lower than one of the highest levels recorded during Q4-2024. Aggregate RoE stood at 13.6% during Q3-2025, also flat when compared to Q3-2024 levels. The flatness ratio reflected a fall in the case of four out of six country aggregates in the GCC that was fully offset by an increase reported by banks in the UAE. Total shareholder equity reached USD 484.8 Bn at the end of Q3-2025, registering a growth of 3.3% as compared to Q2-2025.

At the country level, UAE-listed banks once again topped in the region with the highest RoE at the end of Q3-2025 at 16.6% as compared to 16.4% during the previous quarter. Saudi-listed banks were next with an RoE of 13.0%, once again flat as compared to Q2-2025 followed by Qatari banks with an RoE of 12.3% recording a decline of 30 bps from the previous quarter. ROEs for Kuwaiti banks stayed elevated at a double-digit level of 10.6%, in line with the previous quarter.

US retailers close over 8,200 stores in 2025 amid tariff and debt pressures

LOS ANGELES, Jan 3, (Xinhua): U.S. retailers shuttered over 8,200 stores in 2025, one of the highest numbers ever recorded in the United States, as rising tariff costs, heavy debt burdens and shifting consumer habits continue to weigh on the sector.

It represents a 12 percent year-on-year increase from 7,325 store closures in 2024, down from nearly 10,000 in 2020 tracked by Coresight Research, a retail industry research firm.

The firm told CNN that last year's closures affected nearly every segment, including pharmacies, department stores, coffee shops, discount retailers and restaurants. TheStreet.com, a financial news and literacy website, said Tuesday that the downward trajectory observed in 2024 appeared difficult to reverse, even in 2026.

Listed company announcements and other publicly available information indicated that at least 30 U.S. retail chains filed for bankruptcy in 2025.

Several major retailers cited tariffs on imported goods as a primary factor behind their closures. Outdoor retailer Orvis announced 36 store closures by early 2026, with President Simon Perkins referring to an "unprecedented tariff landscape."

Similarly, children's clothing retailer Carter's unveiled plans to close 150 stores over the next three years, stating that "elevated product costs, in part due to the impact of higher tariffs" had significantly affected its operations.

The home decor chain At Home filed for bankruptcy in June 2025 and closed about 30 stores, with its chief executive citing "an increasingly dynamic and rapidly evolving trade environment."

The Tax Foundation, an independent research organization, estimated that the average American household faced an additional 1,200 U.S. dollars in

costs due to tariffs in 2025.

Heavy debt loads, often stemming from leveraged buyouts by private equity firms, were another major factor.

Craft retailer Joann shut roughly 800 locations after its second bankruptcy within a year, burdened by more than 1.1 billion dollars in debt under private equity ownership.

Pharmacy chain Rite Aid, once among the largest in the United States, closed nearly 1,300 stores and went out of business in October 2025.

Discount retailers were also hit hard. Big Lots filed for bankruptcy and closed more than 300 stores as lower-income consumers cut back on spending, while discount chain 99 Cents Only liquidated all 371 stores, eliminating 10,800 jobs. Bargain Hunt closed all 92 stores after filing for bankruptcy in February 2025.

According to S&P Global Market Intelligence, 717 U.S. companies had filed for bankruptcy by November 2025, the highest number in 15 years.

The discount sector underwent significant restructuring as well. Dollar Tree closed approximately 1,000 stores, selling its Family Dollar brand for approximately 1 billion dollars after acquiring it for 9 billion dollars in 2015. Dollar General closed 141 stores, citing the challenges of operating in urban areas.

Traditional department stores and apparel retailers continued their long-term contraction. Macy's announced plans to close 150 stores by the end of 2026 as part of its "Bold New Chapter" strategy. Discount luxury retailer Saks Off 5th announced 10 store closures beginning in January 2026 in cities including Austin, Chicago and Washington, as parent company Saks Global struggled with significant debt.

Pharmacy chains Walgreens and CVS pressed ahead with multi-year closure plans, dampening U.S. healthcare availability. Walgreens is closing 1,200 stores over three years, with approximately 500 shuttered in fiscal year 2025. CVS closed more than 270 locations in 2025, bringing the total closures since 2022 to more than 1,170. Researchers said these closures have created "pharmacy deserts," with 48.4 million residents living in areas with limited access to pharmacies.

Food and beverage retailers also retreated from urban areas amid changing work patterns. Starbucks closed approximately 400 stores as part of a 1 billion-U.S.-dollar restructuring, including 42 locations in New York City, where it lost its position as the largest coffee chain to Dunkin' Donuts, due to increased competition, remote work and higher operating costs.

Convenience store chain 7-Eleven closed more than 500 locations since 2024, citing declining foot traffic and falling cigarette sales. Fast food chain Wendy's announced plans to close 200 to 350 restaurants through 2026 after reporting a 4.7 percent decline in same-store sales.

Other sectors also reported notable closures. Kroger, the largest U.S. supermarket chain, announced plans to close 60 stores over the next 18 months. Target said it would end its partnership with Ulta Beauty in August 2026, closing approximately 600 shop-in-shop locations in the process.

Looking ahead, Forbes warned in an article that the vulnerability of specialty retail in the United States would reach a breaking point in 2026.

"High interest rates, persistent shifts toward online shopping, and aggressive competition from mass merchants and value retailers will push overleveraged companies into insolvency. Retailers carrying substantial debt loads face the greatest risk," Forbes predicted.

Trump delays furniture tariff hikes for one year

Keeping 25% duty

WASHINGTON, Jan 3, (AP): President Donald Trump signed a New Year's Eve proclamation delaying increased tariffs on upholstered furniture, kitchen cabinets and vanities for a year, citing ongoing trade talks.

Trump's order signed Wednesday keeps in place a 25% tariff he imposed in September on those goods, but delays for another year a 30% tariff on upholstered furniture and 50% tariff on kitchen cabinets and vanities.

The increases, which were set to take effect Jan. 1, come as the Republican president instituted a broad swath of taxes on imported goods to address trade imbalances and other issues.

The president has said the tariffs on furniture are needed to "bolster American industry and protect national security."

The delay is the latest in the roller coaster of Trump's tariff wars since he returned to office last year, with the president announcing levies at times without warning and then delaying or pulling back from them just as abruptly.

The Trump administration on Wednesday also signaled it may back away from a steep tariff proposed on Italian pasta that would have put the rate at 107%. The U.S. had threatened

to add a heavy tariff on Italian pasta makers after the U.S. Commerce Department launched what it said was a routine antidumping review based on allegations that the pasta makers sold product into the US at below-market prices and undercut local competitors.

A final decision on the sanctions was scheduled for Jan. 2, with the option of extending it.

The Commerce Department said

Wednesday that based on a new review, the rates would be lowered to between 2.26% and 13.89% for the pasta makers because they had addressed many of the department's concerns. A final decision is now set for March 12.

Italian farm lobby Coldiretti and another food industry association, Filiera Italia, welcomed the development. The two lobby groups had strongly objected to the original tariffs and urged the Italian government to reject the requests.

"Would you want this built in your backyard?" Larry Shank asked supervisors last month in Pennsylvania's East Vincent Township. "Because that's where it's literally going, is in my backyard."

A growing number of proposals

are going down in defeat, sounding alarms across the data center constellation of Big Tech firms, real estate developers, electric utilities, labor unions and more.

Andy Cengros, who helps lead the data center practice at commercial real estate giant JLL, counted seven or eight deals he'd worked on in recent months that saw opponents going door-to-door, handing out shirts or putting signs in people's yards.

"It's becoming a huge problem," Cengros said.

Data Center Watch, a project of 10aLabs, an AI security consultancy, said it is seeing a sharp escalation in community, political and regulatory disruptions to data center development.

Some environmental and consumer advocacy groups say they're fielding calls every day, and are working to educate communities on how to protect themselves.

"I've been doing this work for 16 years, worked on hundreds of campaigns I'd guess, and this by far is the biggest kind of local pushback I've ever seen here in Indiana," said Bryce Gustafson of the Indianapolis-based Citizens Action Coalition.

HieFo didn't immediately respond to a request for comment about Trump's order.

Emcore was a publicly traded company at the time of the HieFo deal, but was taken private last year by the investment firm Charlesbank Capital Partner.

HieFo was founded by Dr. Genzao Zhang and Harry Moore. According to a press release that came out after the deal closed, plans for the technology acquired from Emcore were to be overseen by largely the same team of employees in Alhambra, California.

Zhang, who was a vice president of engineering at Emcore before becoming HieFo's CEO, pledged to "continue the pursuit of the most innovative and disruptive solutions" with technology designed for purposes that would include artificial intelligence.

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The executive order cast a spotlight on a business deal that drew scant attention when it was announced in May 2024 during President Joe Biden's administration. The deal involved aerospace and defense specialist Emcore Corp. selling its computer chips and wafer fabrication operations to HieFo for \$2.92 million - a price that included the assumption of about \$1 million in liabilities.

But Trump is now demanding that HieFo divest that technology within 180 days, citing "credible evidence" that the current owner is a citizen of the People's Republic of China.

\$2.9 mln chip deal unravels

Trump cites security risk in China-linked chip deal

WASHINGTON, Jan 3, (AP): President Donald Trump on Friday ordered the unraveling of a \$2.9 million computer chips deal that he concluded threatened U.S. security interests if the current owner, HieFo Corp., remained in control of the technology.

The executive order cast a spotlight on a business deal that drew scant attention when it was announced in May 2024 during President Joe Biden's administration. The deal involved aerospace and defense specialist Emcore Corp. selling its computer chips and wafer fabrication operations to HieFo for \$2.92 million - a price that included the assumption of about \$1 million in liabilities.

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\$2.9 mln chip deal unravels

Customer backlash and tax credit expiry hit Tesla sales

Tesla loses title as world's biggest electric vehicle maker as sales fall for second year in a row

NEW YORK, Jan 3, (AP): Tesla lost its crown as the world's bestselling electric vehicle maker on Friday as a customer revolt over Elon Musk's right-wing politics, expiring U.S. tax breaks for buyers and stiff overseas competition pushed sales down for a second year in a row.

Tesla said that it delivered 1.64 million vehicles in 2025, down 9% from a year earlier.

Chinese rival BYD, which sold 2.26 million vehicles last year, is now the biggest EV maker.

It's a stunning reversal for a car company whose rise once seemed unstoppable as it overtook traditional automakers with far more resources and helped make Musk the world's richest man. The sales drop came despite President Donald Trump's marketing effort early last year when he called a press conference to praise Musk as a "patriot" in front of Tesla's lined up on the White House driveway, then announced he would be buying one, bucking presidential precedent to not endorse private company products.

For the fourth quarter, Tesla sales totaled 418,227, falling short of even the much reduced 440,000 target that analysts recently polled by FactSet had expected. Sales were hit hard by the expiration of a \$7,500 tax credit for electric vehicle purchases that was phased out by the Trump administration at the end of September.

Tesla stock fell 2.6% to \$438.07 on Friday.

Even with multiple issues buffeting the company, investors are betting that Tesla CEO Musk can deliver on his ambitions to make Tesla a leader in robotaxi services and get consumers to embrace humanoid robots that can perform basic tasks in homes and offices. Reflecting that optimism, the stock finished 2025 with a gain of approximately 11%.

The latest quarter was the first with sales of stripped-down versions of the Model Y and Model 3 that Musk unveiled in early October as part of an effort to revive sales. The new Model Y costs just under \$40,000 while customers can buy the cheaper Model 3 for under \$37,000. Those versions are expected



The Tesla logo is displayed at a Tesla dealership Thursday, March 13, 2025, in Miami. (AP)

to help Tesla compete with Chinese models in Europe and Asia.

For fourth-quarter earnings coming out in late January, analysts are expecting the company to post a 3% drop in sales and a nearly 40% drop in earnings per share, according to FactSet. Analysts expect the downward trend in sales and profits to eventually reverse itself as 2026 rolls along.

Musk said earlier last year that a "major rebound" in sales was underway, but investors were unruffled when that didn't pan out, choosing instead to focus on Musk's pivot to different parts of business. He has been saying

the future of the company lies with its driverless robotaxi service, its energy storage business and building robots for the home and factory - and much less with car sales.

Tesla started rolling out its robotaxi service in Austin in June, first with safety monitors in the cars to take over in case of trouble, then testing without them. The company hopes to roll out the service in several cities this year.

To do that successfully, it needs to take on rival Waymo, which has been operating autonomous taxis for years and has far more customers. It also will have to contend with regulatory challenges. The company is under several federal safety investigations and other probes. In California, Tesla is at risk of temporarily losing its license to sell cars in the state after a judge there ruled it had misled customers about their safety.

"Regulatory is going to be a big issue," said Wedbush Securities analyst Dan Ives, a well-known bull on the stock. "We're dealing with people's lives."

Still, Ives said he expects Tesla's autonomous offerings will soon overcome any setbacks.

Musk has said he hopes software updates to his cars will enable hundreds of thousands of Tesla vehicles to operate autonomously with zero human intervention by the end of this year. The company is also planning to begin production of its AI-powered Cybertruck with no steering wheel or pedals in 2026.

To keep Musk focused on the company, Tesla's directors awarded Musk a potentially enormous new pay package that shareholders backed at the annual meeting in November.

Musk scored another huge windfall two weeks ago when the Delaware Supreme Court reversed a decision that deprived him of a \$55 billion pay package that Tesla doled out in 2018.

Musk could become the world's first trillionaire later this year when he sells shares of his rocket company SpaceX to the public for the first time in what analysts expect would be a blockbuster initial public offering.

Features

ARAB TIMES
SUNDAY, JANUARY 4, 2026

Only small changes made to accommodate the weather

Rain soaks Rose Parade; snow squalls hit Midwest, Northeast

NEW YORK, Jan 3, (AP): Rain poured down on the iconic Rose Parade for the first time in 20 years, as flood warnings and evacuation orders in Southern California joined snow squalls and frigid temperatures in the country's midsection to mark the first day of 2026.

Marching bands, floats and throngs of spectators were soaked by one to two inches (2.5 to 5 centimeters) of New Year's Day rain at the 137th Rose Parade in Pasadena. The mercury stood at a chilly 58 degrees Fahrenheit (14.4 degrees Celsius) at the 8 a.m. start of the parade.

Across the country, in New York City, hats and gloves were as necessary as noisemakers at the city's New Year's Eve ball drop, where temperatures near freezing appeared to be the coldest in 10 years.

Hundreds of thousands of people gather along the nearly six-mile (10-kilometer) route in Pasadena, where the two-hour parade kicked



Left: The Band Directors Marching Band performs at the 137th Rose Parade in Pasadena, Calif. Right: The UPS Store float glides along the parade route at the 137th Rose Parade presented by Honda on Jan. 1, 2026, in Pasadena, Calif. The float earned the Director Award from the Tournament of Roses® and set a GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS™ title for the Largest Animatronic Fish. (AP)

off. Millions more watch on national television. Organizers at the Pasadena Tournament of Roses, the group that organizes the parade

ahead of the Rose Bowl college football game, said they made only small changes to accommodate the weather, such as the tops being up on



Right: The UPS Store float glides along the parade route at the 137th Rose Parade presented by Honda on Jan. 1, 2026, in Pasadena, Calif. The float earned the Director Award from the Tournament of Roses® and set a GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS™ title for the Largest Animatronic Fish. (AP)

convertibles carrying grand marshal Earvin "Magic" Johnson and other VIPs.

Rain forecasts for the Rose Pa-

rade, which had been dry for 20 years, grew all week. On Thursday, the National Weather Service issued a flood watch for all California

counties and a coastal flood advisory through Sunday afternoon along much of the Pacific Coast near San Francisco.

Meanwhile, residents in the areas hit hardest by last year's devastating Los Angeles-area wildfires were under evacuation warnings.

In New York City, the sun came out ahead of Mayor Zohran Mamdani's inaugural celebration, but other areas of the Northeast and Midwest were hit by an Alberta clipper storm and trailing Arctic front that brought snow squalls and high winds.

Conditions varied widely - from snow showers to heavier squalls - from Wisconsin through northern Illinois and Michigan and into northern New Jersey, southeastern New York and New England.

About a quarter of flights were delayed out of both San Diego International Airport and Boston Logan, according to the flight tracking website FlightAware.

Remarkable rebound

China box office up 22% on animation strength

BEIJING, Jan 3, (Xinhua): China's film market staged a powerful comeback in 2025, with annual ticket sales rising nearly 22 percent to approximately 51.83 billion yuan (about 7.37 billion U.S. dollars), fueled by an unprecedented animation boom that saw the genre claim nearly half of the total revenue, according to China Film Administration data released.

The remarkable rebound, which follows 2024's 42.5-billion-yuan total, was bookended by two record-shattering animated sequels: the homegrown phenomenon "Ne Zha 2" ignited the market early in the year, while Disney's "Zootopia 2" powered a year-end surge. Together, they turned 2025 into what industry analysts are calling "a banner year for animation," challenging simplistic narratives of a market turning inward and underscoring that regardless of origin, quality storytelling still reigns supreme.

Animation dominated like never before, making up 48.77 percent of the 2025 box office. Four animated features landed in the year's top 10, with "Ne Zha 2," "Zootopia 2," "Nobody" and "Boonie Bears: Future Reborn," placing first, second, sixth and ninth.

Leading the pack, "Ne Zha 2" -- a modern reinterpretation of a mythological rebel -- raged its way to a staggering 15.4 billion yuan on the Chinese mainland alone, and to 2.2 billion U.S. dollars globally, becoming the world's top-grossing animated feature.

It is "a miracle and a peak in Chinese cinema, a record that may remain unbroken for a long time," said Chen Xuguang, director of Peking University's Institute of Film, Television and Theatre.

"The sheer scale of 'Ne Zha 2' directly lifted the ceiling for what a single film can achieve in China," said Lai Li, an analyst at film data platform Maoyan, in an earlier note to Xinhua. "It set the tone for the entire year."

The animation wave crested again during the end-of-the-year moviegoing season. Disney's "Zootopia 2" delivered a stunning performance, becoming the highest-grossing imported animated film in China's history and the first imported title to cross the 1-billion-yuan mark in China since 2022's "Avatar: The Way of Water."

Haul

Its roughly 570-million-U.S.-dollar haul from Chinese theaters represented nearly 40 percent of its global total, far surpassing its North American earnings and firmly establishing China as the sequel's defining market.

"It highlights the enormous market foundation and consumption demand in China," said Zhang Jinfeng, deputy editor-in-chief of China Film News, in a television interview. The performance also reflects Chinese cinema's "open, inclusive attitude toward globally advanced cinematic achievements," he said, adding that China has become "a key engine for global box-office growth." The success of both blockbusters, despite their different origins, shared a crucial ingredient: a powerful emotional connection to contemporary audiences.

While "Ne Zha 2" tapped into a defiant, epic struggle, summer hit "Nobody" -- now China's highest-grossing 2D animation -- found its magic in the mundane. The tale of four lowly monsters clumsily impersonating the legendary heroes of "Journey to the West" mirror a modern working-class quest for dignity and meaning, striking a chord with viewers and critics alike, including Rao Shuguang, president of the China Film Critics Association.

"What matters is not the era in which a story takes place, but the era in which it is told," said the film's screenwriter, Liu Jia, who is also an associate professor at Beijing Normal University. "For me, that means observing the emotions of the times and embedding them into stories." The animation frenzy also sparked introspection in other genres. Yin Hong, vice chairman of the China Film Association, noted in a social media post that imaginative animation has become the clear favorite among youth, whose social media dominance dictates market trends. He contrasted this with an aging live-action sector, warning of contraction should it fail to attract younger audiences.

Beyond animation, the year saw multiple other bright spots. War films like "Dead to Rights" and "Evil Unbound," which respectively garnered over 3 billion yuan and 1.94 billion yuan, won success by adopting intimate, human-scale perspectives rather than grand narratives.



This photo taken with a mobile phone shows a movie poster at a cinema in Beijing, capital of China. (Xinhua)

Theatre



In this file photo, Alex Timbers poses for a picture under the marquee for 'Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson', one of the two shows he is currently directing in New York. (AP)

Director turns Broadway audiences into participants

Timbers runs four shows simultaneously

NEW YORK, Jan 3, (AP): Fifteen years ago, rising theater director Alex Timbers achieved a remarkable feat: Still only in his early 30s, he had two shows running simultaneously on Broadway. As 2026 dawns, Timbers has now eclipsed that mark - he has four.

Timbers' latest, "All Out: Comedy About Ambition," joins his currently running hits "Beetlejuice," "Just in Time" and "Moulin Rouge! The Musical," the 2020 best musical winner that also earned him a best directing Tony Award.

"If I step back and think about what unites the shows, it's probably they're all trying to be joy-forward experiences and shows where the audience is acknowledged," says Timbers, now 47.

Previous directors to enjoy four simultaneous Broadway productions include Joe Mantello in 2016, Casey Nicholaw also in 2016 and Susan Stroman in 2021. Trevor Nunn did it twice, in 1988 and 1995. (Timbers' quadruple ends Saturday when "Beetlejuice" ends its run).

Timbers' work often combines highbrow and lowbrow, sincerity and subversion. His four current Broadway works span a jukebox musical, a wacky movie adaptation, a spare and starry staged reading and a memory play-meets-biopic.

One of Timbers' hallmarks is immediately breaking

through the pretend wall between the actors and the audience, as when the ghoul Beetlejuice appears at the top of his show and comments, "A ballad already! And such a bold departure from the original source material."

"They're all sort of shows that involve almost direct address from the jump," Timbers says, "where there's a sort of an embrace of being there live. There is no sort of fourth wall."

Timbers had a breakout season in 2010 when two of his shows made it to Broadway: "The Pee-wee Herman Show" and "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson," which he wrote and directed. In the first, he juggled the late Paul Reubens, visual jokes and 20 puppets. The other was an emo-driven rock musical about the seventh U.S. president, who strutted about in tight pants and eyeliner.

Timbers went on to work on the adaptation of "Rocky" for the stage, the stripped-down Peter Pan story "Peter and the Starcatcher" and with Talking Heads frontman David Byrne on his "America Utopia." For "Here Lies Love," the immersive disco tale of Philippine ex-first lady Imelda Marcos, he literally broke the fourth wall by letting the audience dance with the stars.

"I think that there's something sort of more raucous, more anarchic, that a certain audience wants. Something that's vis-

ceral and joyful," Timbers says. "Where pop and high art meet, I think that's where a lot of the audiences want to live as well."

Timbers - currently at work on a "The Princess Bride" musical - suspects the audiences of Broadway's future are looking for the same kind of shows he looks for: out-of-the-box, slightly dangerous things that maximize the skills of the star and deliver joy.

"I think that younger audiences and audiences that don't traditionally go to theater aren't necessarily looking for shows that sit specifically in one genre. I think they're looking for things that maximize entertainment and emotion and connection," he says.

Timbers, a student of Broadway history, looks backward to the future, inspired by the long-running "Ziegfeld Follies" from the first half of the 20th century or "Hellzapoppin," a hugely popular musical revue in the 1930s that had comedy, music, clowns, audience participation and adult-themed content and dancing, capturing the zeitgeist by constantly changing with the times.

"It was all these different variety elements that felt in a way very populist, but also very sophisticated, like the coolest date night on Broadway," he says. "I want to chase what 'Hellzapoppin' was trying to do 90 years ago and what it did for audiences."

New Year travel stretches from ski resorts to tropical islands

SHENYANGHAIKOU, Jan 3, (Xinhua): This New Year holiday sees Chinese travelers heading to diverse winter destinations, seeking everything from northeastern ice and snow to southern sunshine and tropical beaches.

In Benxi Manchu Autonomous County, Liaoning Province, the Yunshan Ski Resort awakens for peak season of winter sports. Across its six winding runs, the snow lies thick and compact, offering ideal skiing conditions. After several runs on the advanced slope, tourist Lin Ruyu removed her gear to rest. "I've been skiing for four or five years. Today I did three or four runs on the most difficult slope -- it was truly exhilarating." Another attraction that drew her and five friends and family members to drive over 1,000 kilometers was the hot springs. Minutes from the ski resort, the Huaximu tourist complex offers a moment of relaxation. Its name, meaning "bathing in spring with flowers," captures the serene ambience. Steam drifts above the outdoor pools as snow gathers along their edges.

According to Xue Meng, a manager at the complex, the hot spring water comes from natural underground sources, maintaining a high, stable temperature year-round. The site also features milk baths, red wine baths, coffee baths and herbal pools to cater to various preferences.

To meet growing tourist demand, the ski resort and hot spring now offer a combined package. A shuttle takes visitors directly from the slopes to the pools. "Just fifteen minutes in the hot water can ease skiing fatigue," Xue explained.

This combination is particularly popular with families, noted Chen Bin, a manager at the ski resort. "More families are joining together," he said, adding that seniors often prefer the hot springs, while adults and children spend more time skiing.

From snow slopes to hot springs, this blend of harsh climate and thermal comfort is becoming a hallmark of winter tourism in northeast China. While northeast China grows its winter sports economy, several thousand kilometers south in the tropical

latitudes, local tourism is expanding ecological experiences built around marine and island scenery.

Off the southeastern coast of Hainan in south China, Boundary Island Tourist Attraction, located around 18 degrees north latitude, has become a favored escape for those seeking an oceanic and sunny winter.

The waters around Boundary Island Tourist Attraction remain clear in winter, providing excellent conditions for diving and snorkeling. Near the surface, coral reefs and tropical fish create a vibrant scene, enhanced by shipwrecks and submerged sculptures.

Yu Shiyu, from Changsha City in central China's Hunan Province, chose Hainan for a winter family trip. "I wanted to use the leisure time in winter to show my child the sea," she said. On the island, they enjoyed interactive experiences with rays and other marine life.

She found her stay in Hainan both pleasant and affordable, noting the hospitality of locals. "The locals are very welcoming.

Even taxi drivers spontaneously recommend where to eat or which activities suit children," she added.

The development of the Hainan Free Trade Port has drawn growing attention to the island, prompting sites to enrich offerings for both youth and families through outdoor activities and marine ecosystem education, according to Tu Mingyan, director for tourism planning of Boundary Island Tourist Attraction of Hainan.

Younger visitors are also drawn to adventurous experiences. Wang Guangshun, a tourist in Hainan, recently tried the via ferrata along Boundary Island's seaside cliffs, a climbing route equipped with steel cables, iron rungs and ladders fixed to rock surfaces. "I'd seen videos on social media, but the real scenery is even more impressive. Hanging above the sea, you get an unobstructed view of the vast ocean," Wang said.

From the snowy peaks of the northeast to the tropical shores of the south, Chinese travelers are actively shaping a new map of winter tourism.

Timeless charm of Lahore's winding streets and heritage homes



A vendor prepares traditional tea for his customers at his stall in an old neighborhood of Lahore, Pakistan. (AP)



Students walk through a street as they head to their school in an old neighborhood in Lahore, Pakistan. (AP)



People walk past heritage buildings, which are converted into modern restaurants, in an old neighborhood of Lahore, Pakistan. (AP)



Local residents walk through a market in an old neighborhood of Lahore, Pakistan. (AP)

LAHORE, Pakistan, Jan 3, (AP): In Pakistan, an old saying goes: "He who has not seen Lahore has not been born."

To feel its heartbeat, one must wander the city's winding alleyways that are alive with movement and color.

Centuries-old homes were built with small, weathered bricks instead of mud and lean gracefully into the streets, their walls etched with the delicate patterns of history. Many have been restored, painted with frescoes and motifs, allowing the grandeur of the Mughal era to shine anew.

The alleys are narrow, sometimes barely wide enough for one person to pass. But within these tight corridors flows a quiet, enduring rhythm of courtesy, as residents step aside for one another with an unspoken grace.

Music



In this file photo, Bad Bunny performs during the iHeartRadio Music Awards at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles. (AP)

A symbolic moment for Latinos

Bad Bunny eyes a record-breaking Grammy with *Debí Tirar Más Fotos*

NEW YORK, Jan 3, (AP): The Puerto Rican superstar Bad Bunny has redefined what it means to be a global giant - and he may once again make history at the 2026 Grammy Awards.

The artist born Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio is up for six awards at the Feb. 1 show, becoming the first Spanish-language artist to be nominated for album, song and record of the year simultaneously. His critically acclaimed album, "Debí Tirar Más Fotos," is only the second Spanish-language record to be nominated for album of the year. The first? Well, that also belonged to Bad Bunny, 2022's "Un Verano Sin Ti."

Win or lose, experts say Bad Bunny's Grammy nominations mark a symbolic moment for Latinos. Just a week later, after all, he'll headline the Super Bowl halftime show.

Vanessa Díaz, associate professor of Chicano and Latino studies at Loyola Marymount University and co-author of "P FKN R: How Bad Bunny Became the Global Voice of Puerto Rican Resistance," says Bad Bunny's nods extend beyond his own art and serve as a "very welcome recognition of Latin music that is growing."

"Music from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean has been shaping global music tastes since the 19th century," adds Albert Laguna, associate professor of ethnicity, race and migration and American studies at Yale. "Bad Bunny is another link in a much longer chain of the popularity of Caribbean music on a global stage."

Much of this music - particularly Latin trap and reggaeton, the genres Bad Bunny got his start in and continues to use in his new work - has been historically criminalized in Puerto Rico, not unlike hip-hop in the United States. Reggaeton in particular, Díaz points out, "comes from the most marginalized communities in Puerto Rico. And so, the fact that Bad Bunny is receiving nominations in three main categories, and this is an artist who came up with trap ... is the most groundbreaking thing about the entire situation."

Patricia Rivera-Rideau, associate professor of American studies at Wellesley College and co-author of "P FKN R," says that element is particularly noteworthy because institutions often ignore marginalized genres - including at the Latin Grammys, a sister award show to the Grammys.

A victory in the major categories could have "profound, symbolic meaning," she says. But with a caveat: "I'm interested to see if this is going to open doors for other people." After all, Bad Bunny himself isn't immune to the Recording Academy's institutional biases: He already has three career Grammys, but all have been in música urbana categories -

despite the fact that he is the most streamed artist on the planet.

Across "Debí Tirar Más Fotos," Bad Bunny and his producers weave traditional Puerto Rican folkloric styles into a hyper-contemporary context. Latin trap and reggaeton aren't abandoned but fused with música jibara, salsa, bomba, plena and even aguinaldo, a kind of Christmas music, in "Pitorro de Coco." While Bad Bunny's previous albums also fused different genres - including bossa nova, mambo, rock, merengue and more - this album's melange was more homegrown.

Laguna sees "Debí Tirar Más Fotos" as a direct challenge to the prevailing "formula for global pop stardom," which he describes as an artist making it locally, gaining traction and then "watering down" their sound into something commercial and palatable for a global audience.

"Bad Bunny went in the opposite direction. It's his most Puerto Rican album ever," says Laguna. He hopes it will communicate to other artists that they, too, can look to their ancestry and history for artmaking.

"There's so much amazing Latin music that has been overlooked and that's part of what is so beautiful about this moment," says Díaz. "And that's why it feels like a win for all Latinos."

The timing of the album's release and recognition, too, feels consequential. "The U.S. has a history of othering Latinos, othering the Spanish language. ... We're in a moment where that feels extremely acute," she continues. "For a community that is being targeted on such a deep level, it is a little bit of light, a little bit of faith that we can still carve out our place here."

Latinos and the Spanish-speaking community in the U.S. have grown increasingly wary amid growing anti-immigrant sentiment and raids, as President Donald Trump's immigration policies and executive actions have vastly expanded who is eligible for deportation and routine hearings have turned into deportation traps for migrants.

In an interview with i-D Magazine earlier this year, Bad Bunny mentioned that concerns around the mass deportations of Latinos factored into his decision not to tour in the continental U.S. (Hundreds of people have been detained in Puerto Rico itself since large-scale arrests began in late January.)

"The content of the lyrics - which are so steeped in the history of Puerto Rico, political histories, tourism and gentrification - there's so much rich political and historical content," Díaz adds. "This album is historic even without a Grammy win."

Betty Boop and 'Blondie' enter the public domain, accompanied by a trio of detectives

LOS ANGELES, Jan 3, (AP): Betty Boop and "Blondie" are joining Mickey Mouse and Winnie the Pooh in the public domain.

The first appearances of the classic cartoon and comic characters are among the pieces of intellectual property whose 95-year U.S. copyright maximum has been reached, putting them in the public domain on Jan. 1. That means creators can use and repurpose them without permission or payment.

The 2026 batch of newly public artistic creations doesn't quite have the sparkle of the recent first entries into the public domain of Mickey or Winnie. But ever since 2019 - the end of a 20-year IP drought brought on by congressional copyright extensions - every annual crop has been a bounty for advocates of more work belonging to the public.

"It's a big year," said Jennifer Jenkins, law professor and director of Duke's Center for the Study of the Public Domain, for whom New Year's Day is celebrated as Public Domain Day. "It's just the sheer familiarity of all this culture."

Jenkins said that, collectively, this year's work shows "the fragility that was between the two wars and the depths of the Great Depression."

Here's a closer look at what will enter the public domain on Thursday, based on the research of Jenkins and her center.

Betty Boop began as a dog. Seriously.

When she first appears in the 1930 short "Dizzy Dishes," one of four of her cartoons entering the public domain, she's already totally recognizable as the Jazz Age flapper later memorialized in countless tattoos, T-shirts and bumper stickers. She has her baby face, short hair with groomed curls, flashy eyelashes and miniature mouth. But she's also got dangling poodle ears and a tiny black nose. Those would soon morph into dangling earrings and a tiny white nose.

She started as essentially the Minnie Mouse to a popular anthropomorphic dog named Bimbo, whom she would eventually outshine - and push aside. She's got a supporting role in "Dizzy Dishes," performing a sultry song-

and-dance in a tiny black dress. She's not named, but sings "boop boop, a doop."

Jenkins suggests this canine Betty Boop could be rich for exploitation in new works, and has a free idea: "She was bitten by a radioactive dog, that's why she had this weird backstory," she said with a laugh. "This movie needs to be made."

The character was designed and owned by Fleischer Studios, and the shorts were released by Paramount Pictures. She was based at least in part on singer Helen Kane, known as the "Boop-Oop-a-Doop Girl," thanks to a hit 1929 song. Kane would lose a lawsuit over Betty Boop's character and use of the phrase. During the proceedings the defense alleged Black singer Esther Lee Jones used similar phrases first.

Artists are now free to use this earliest Boop in films and similar work. But making merch won't be free. In an important distinction often raised by Disney over Mickey Mouse, a character's trademark is distinct from the copyright of works that feature them. The Fleischer Productions

trademark of Betty Boop remains intact.

Boops and doops were apparently in the air in 1930. Blondie Boop-doo was, like Betty, a young flapper, and the central character of Chic Young's newspaper comic strip that debuted in 1930. It inspired a film series and radio show, and is still running today in papers that still have comics.

The strip followed her carefree breeze through life with her boyfriend, Dagwood Bumstead. The two would marry (and she would change her name) in 1933, and the strip would become the sandwich-heavy domestic comedy familiar to later readers. Though the strip was meant to be based on a woman's life, Dagwood would in many ways become its breakout star - a proto- Adam Driver, if you will, as the breakout star of "Girls."

Nine new Mickey Mouse cartoons also are becoming public domain, two years after "Steamboat Willie" made the first version of him public property. He's joined this year by his dog Pluto, who, in 1930, was known as Rover.

(He would get his long-term moniker the following year.)

The books entering the public domain this year open the door to three iconic detectives from the 20th century:

■ The teen sleuth Nancy Drew, whose first four books came in 1930, starting with "The Secret of the Old Clock." They were written by Mildred Benson under the pen name Carolyn Keene.

■ The middle-aged(ish) sleuth Sam Spade, who debuted via the full-book version of Dashiell Hammett's "The Maltese Falcon." (It had been serialized in a magazine the previous year.)

■ The elderly sleuth Miss Marple, who solves her first mystery in Agatha Christie's "Murder at the Vicarage."

A year after his "The Sound and the Fury" became public, William Faulkner's "As I Lay Dying" becomes public domain. It would help lead to his Nobel Prize in literature.

And kiddie lit legends Dick and Jane, who taught generations to read and became essential parody fodder for decades, become public via the "Elson Basic Readers" textbooks.

A year after their film debut, "The

Cocoanuts," entered the public domain, the Marx Brothers' beloved "Animal Crackers" joins it, as they entered their prime of high cinematic antics. The film finds Groucho, Harpo, Chico and Zeppo invading a Long Island society party celebrating an explorer of Africa.

Other movies entering the public domain include:

■ "The Blue Angel," the German film from Josef von Sternberg that emblazoned Marlene Dietrich's top-hatted image into film lore.

■ "King of Jazz," featuring the first screen appearance of Bing Crosby.

■ A pair of Oscar best picture winners, "All Quiet on the Western Front," which won in 1930, and "Cimarron," which won in 1931. The award was known as "Outstanding Production" then, and the Academy Awards eligibility period didn't sync with the calendar year.

The coming decade will bring a true bounty of Hollywood Golden Age films into the public domain. 2027 will be a truly monster year, literally, with the original versions of "Dracula" and "Frankenstein" among the titles due.

Variety

NEW YORK: They're going to light up 2026 like dynamite: K-pop group BTS' comeback has an official date.

According to a note shared to social media by the entertainment company BigHit Music, the mega popular group will return on March 20.

That's after a nearly four-year hiatus, as all seven members of BTS - RM, Jin, Jimin, V, Suga, Jung Kook and j-hope - completed South Korea's mandatory military service.

"March 20th comeback confirmed," BigHit Music wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

Rapper Suga was the last group member to be released - from his duties as a social service agent, an alternative

to serving in the military that he reportedly chose due to a shoulder injury. That was in June 2025. (AP)

NEW YORK: Here's to a lifetime of pink skies: The iridescent country singer Zach Bryan is married.

Bryan, 29, confirmed the news in an Instagram post shared. Beneath a photo of him holding his bride, Samantha Leonard, 28, he wrote the caption, "tougher than the rest," a reference to the Bruce Springsteen song of the same name. In the next slide of the two-frame carousel, Bryan shared a short clip of him covering the song.

It is unclear when the couple started dating or got engaged. Rumors of their relationship hit social media in August, when Leonard posted a picture of the pair embracing on a boat on her official Instagram account. (AP)

Where clean water flows, disease recedes

China's schistosomiasis control effort saves lives in Zanzibar

ZANZIBAR, Tanzania, Jan 3, (Xinhua): With a gentle turn of the tap, clean water gushes out -- a sight that villagers in Chaani had long thought impossible.

Located in Zanzibar's North Region on Unguja Island, Chaani struggled for decades with unsafe water sources. That reality began to change in 2025.

"For many years, water was our biggest problem," said 53-year-old Haji Makame Omari, a father of eight and resident of Chaani.

"We fetched water from rivers, and that is where we got infected with schistosomiasis. Now we no longer go there. We feel safe," he said, crediting a China-aided schistosomiasis control project jointly implemented with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Zanzibar government in Tanzania.

In Chaani, one of the project's beneficiaries, clean water now flows morning, noon, and night, a simple change that has transformed daily life and helped curb one of the region's most persistent diseases, schistosomiasis.

By combining safe water supply systems with disease treatment, snail control and health education, the project has significantly reduced infection rates while improving livelihoods.

Schistosomiasis, a waterborne parasitic disease, has long burdened Zanzibar, particularly rural areas, where residents relied on rivers and unsafe wells, exposing themselves to infection. Mothers like 30-year-old Mwanaisha Abdallah, also a Chaani villager, recall frequent hospital visits for their children due to water-related illnesses.

For women, who bore much of the burden of fetching water and caring for children, the change has been transformative. "Before, we struggled a lot," Abdallah said. "Now I just take my bucket, walk a short distance, and come back. I can grow vegetables, keep chickens, and wash clothes easily. Happiness in my family has increased." Behind the visible changes lies a decade-long cooperation effort.

According to Wang Wei, team leader of the 5-member Chinese expert group and a professor at China's Jiangsu



Residents get tap water on Pemba Island, Zanzibar, Tanzania, Jan. 1, 2026. (Xinhua)

Institute of Parasitic Diseases, the cooperation began after Zanzibar sought international assistance in 2014, when schistosomiasis prevalence remained high despite earlier control efforts.

"China's experience in schistosomiasis control had already proven effective and scalable," Wang said. "Based on shared commitment, China, the WHO, and the Zanzibar government signed a memorandum of understanding,

and the project was officially launched in 2016." According to project data, Phase I of the project, implemented on Pemba Island from 2017 to 2020, reduced infection rates in demonstration areas from 8.92 percent to 0.64 percent, meeting WHO standards for eliminating schistosomiasis as a public health problem. Phase II, launched in 2023, expanded coverage to Unguja Island.

The results have been striking. Baseline surveys

showed an infection rate of about 1.23 percent. After two and a half years, the latest data indicate a drop to just 0.15 percent, well below the WHO threshold of 1 percent.

A key innovation in Phase II has been the construction of safe water supply systems. Five projects -- four in Pemba Island and one in Unguja Island -- now serve about 30,000 people in total.

In Unguja alone, 18,000 residents benefit from clean, accessible water, cutting off disease transmission at its source while also reducing other water-related illnesses such as intestinal infections and cholera.

"This is a genuine livelihood project," Wang said. "It not only controls disease but also improves daily life." Rashid Kassim Juma, project coordinator from Zanzibar's Ministry of Water, Energy, and Minerals, described the initiative as "a big help from China." "Before, people fetched water from ponds and unsafe wells," Juma said. "Now they have fresh water. We are very thankful to China and hope to see more projects like this." Beyond infrastructure, the project has focused on sustainability. Community hospitals and volunteers were trained, health education bases and demonstration schools were established, and monitoring was gradually integrated into Zanzibar's health information systems.

The next milestone is set for January 2026, when a fully digital schistosomiasis surveillance and response system goes live. Once cases are detected at the community level, reports can be sent instantly via computer or mobile phone, triggering rapid responses and preventing outbreaks.

"This will be one of the first schistosomiasis information systems in Africa," Wang said. "It has the potential to be replicated in other Belt and Road partner countries." Back in Chaani, the impact is already visible. Small vegetable gardens have sprung up around homes, made possible by nearby water sources. The small square where the water tap stands has become one of the liveliest areas in the village.

"We are truly grateful," Omari said. "This water has protected our health and changed our lives."



Chinese Academy of Sciences photo
China's Experimental Advanced Superconducting Tokamak (EAST)

Key step toward efficient energy

China's 'artificial sun' exceeds fusion plasma density barrier

HEFEI, Jan. 3, (Xinhua): Researchers have identified a method to surpass the plasma density limit in experiments with the Experimental Advanced Superconducting Tokamak (EAST), known as the "artificial sun," providing a crucial physical basis for high-density operation in magnetic confinement fusion devices.

This research was conducted collaboratively by the institute of plasma physics at the Hefei Institutes of

and releases substantial energy onto the device's inner walls, thereby jeopardizing operational safety.

While long-term international fusion research has indicated that the physical processes triggering the density limit occur at the plasma-wall boundary region, the underlying mechanisms have remained unclear.

In this study, the Chinese research team developed a self-organized plasma-wall interaction theoretical model. Through this model, they identified the critical role of radiation instability induced by boundary impurities in triggering the density limit, thereby elucidating the underlying mechanism.

Building on this theoretical insight, researchers experimentally controlled the plasma to exceed the density limit and successfully guided it into a new "density-free zone." These results mark the first experimental confirmation of such a zone in tokamaks. This innovative work not only provides key insights into understanding the density limit but also establishes an important physical basis for high-density operation in tokamaks, according to the scientists.

Historically, researchers have acknowledged that plasma density has an upper limit. When this limit is reached, the plasma becomes unsta-

ble, escapes magnetic confinement, and releases substantial energy onto the device's inner walls, thereby jeopardizing operational safety.

With the expanded subsidies, some lower-income enrollees received health care with no premiums, and high earners paid no more than 8.5% of their income. Eligibility for middle-class earners was also expanded.

On average, the more than 20 million subsidized enrollees in the Affordable Care Act program are seeing their premium costs rise by 114% in 2026, according to an analysis by the health care research nonprofit KFF.

Those surging prices come alongside an overall increase in health costs in the U.S., which are further driving up out-of-pocket costs in many plans.

Some enrollees, like Salt Lake City freelance filmmaker and adjunct professor Stan Clawson, have absorbed the extra expense. Clawson said he was paying just under \$350 a month for his premiums last year, a number that will jump to nearly \$500 a month this year. It's a strain for the 49-year-old but one he's willing to take on because he needs health insurance as someone who lives with paralysis from a spinal cord injury.

Families forced to drop coverage as credits vanish
Health subsidies expire, leaving millions of Americans face steep insurance hikes in '26

NEW YORK, Jan 3, (AP): Enhanced tax credits that have helped reduce the cost of health insurance for the vast majority of Affordable Care Act enrollees expired overnight, cementing higher health costs for millions of Americans at the start of the new year.

Democrats forced a 43-day government shutdown over the issue. Moderate Republicans called for a solution to save their 2026 political aspirations. President Donald Trump floated a way out, only to back off after conservative backlash.

In the end, no one's efforts were enough to save the subsidies before their expiration date. A House vote expected in January could offer another chance, but success is far from guaranteed.

The change affects a diverse cross-section of Americans who don't get their health insurance from an employer and don't qualify for Medicaid or Medicare - a group that includes many self-employed workers, small business owners, farmers and ranchers.

It comes at the start of a high-stakes midterm election year, with affordability - including the cost of health care - topping the list of voters' concerns.

"It really bothers me that the middle class has moved from a squeeze to a full suffocation, and they continue to just pile on and leave it up to us," said 37-year-old single mom Katelin Provost, whose health care costs are set to jump. "I'm incredibly disappointed that there hasn't been more action."

The expired subsidies were first given to Affordable Care Act enrollees in 2021 as a temporary measure to help Americans get through the COVID-19 pandemic. Democrats in power at the time extended them, moving the expiration date to the start of 2026.

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Pages from the U.S. Affordable Care Act health insurance website healthcare.gov are seen on a computer screen in New York, Aug. 19, 2025. (AP)

Others, like Provost, are dealing with steeper hikes. The social worker's monthly premium payment is increasing from \$85 a month to nearly \$750.

Health analysts have predicted the expiration of the subsidies will drive many of the 24 million total Affordable Care Act enrollees - especially younger and healthier Americans - to forgo health insurance coverage altogether.

Over time, that could make the program more expensive for the older, sicker population that remains.

An analysis conducted last September by the Urban Institute and Commonwealth Fund projected the higher premiums from expiring subsidies would prompt some 4.8 million Americans to drop coverage in 2026.

But with the window to select and change plans still ongoing until Jan. 15 in most states, the final effect on enrollment is yet to be determined.

Provost, the single mother, said she is holding out hope that Congress finds a way to revive the subsidies early in the year - but if not, she'll drop herself off the insurance and keep it only for her four-year-old daughter. She can't afford to pay for both of their coverage at the current price.

Last year, after Republicans cut more than \$1 tril-

lion in federal health care and food assistance with Trump's big tax and spending cuts bill, Democrats repeatedly called for the subsidies to be extended. But while some Republicans in power acknowledged the issue needed to be addressed, they refused to put it to a vote until late in the year.

In December, the Senate rejected two partisan health care bills - a Democratic pitch to extend the subsidies for three more years and a Republican alternative that would instead provide Americans with health savings accounts.

In the House, four centrist Republicans broke with GOP leadership and joined forces with Democrats to force a vote that could come as soon as January on a three-year extension of the tax credits. But with the Senate already having rejected such a plan, it's unclear whether it could get enough momentum to pass.

Meanwhile, Americans whose premiums are skyrocketing say lawmakers don't understand what it's really like to struggle to get by as health costs ratchet up with no relief.

Many say they want the subsidies restored alongside broader reforms to make health care more affordable for all Americans.

Future polar amplification's physical mechanism revealed

Study finds Antarctic warming set to accelerate

BEIJING, Jan 3, (Xinhua): A new study has clearly confirmed that Antarctic amplification will take place in the future and also further revealed its physical mechanism.

The study, led by researchers of the Institute of Global Change and Polar Meteorology under the Chinese Academy of Meteorological Sciences (CAMS), was recently published in the journal Geophysical Research Letters.

Anthropogenic warming is projected to intensify disproportionately in polar regions relative to the global average -- a phenomenon referred to as polar amplification. While this effect has been established in the Arctic, the presence and drivers of its counterpart, Antarctic amplification, had previously remained uncertain and open to debate.

Based on observations from more than 200 stations in Antarctica and via China's first-generation of global atmospheric and land surface reanalysis products, the research team was for the first time able to detect a continent-wide warming signal across Antarctica.

The study demonstrates a robust warming signal over the Antarctic continent under the 2 degrees Celsius warming scenario of the Paris Agreement, with its overall warming magnitude being 1.4 times more than the average for the Southern Hemisphere.

Ding Minghu, head of the Institute of Global Change and Polar Research under the CAMS, stated that due to the isolating effect of the roar-



This photo shows a view of Damoy Point in Antarctica in the late evening of Dec. 14, 2025. (Xinhua)

ing westerlies in the Southern Hemisphere, human activities exert their influence primarily by transferring heat to Antarctica through the warming of the sea surface. This is the reason why Antarctic warming lags behind that found in other parts of the world.

Additionally, because of the continuous rise

in sea surface temperatures, Antarctic amplification will also gradually emerge in the future and its warming rate will accelerate, Ding noted.

This study reveals a substantial, yet previously underappreciated, future human impact on the Antarctic climate.

Vaccination drives reach 98%

Pakistan reports polio decline amid ongoing militant threats

ISLAMABAD, Jan 3, (AP): Pakistan reported fewer than half as many cases of polio in 2025 than the previous year, a sign of progress in its eradication campaign even as vaccinators faced repeated militant attacks, according to a statement from the government-run Polio Eradication Initiative.

The announcement came two weeks after Pakistan launched its final nationwide polio vaccination campaign of the year, targeting 45 million children.

Anwarul Haq, who is the coordinator of the National Emergency Operations Centre for Polio Eradication, told The Associated Press that authorities reported 30 cases of the potentially paralyzing disease in 2025, down from 74 a year earlier.

Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan are the only two countries in which polio has not been eradicated, according to the World Health Organization.

Pakistan's latest figures highlight both momentum and lingering risks in a campaign that has spanned decades. While vaccination coverage has improved and reported cases have fallen sharply, health officials say continued transmission in a small number of hard-to-reach areas means

the country remains vulnerable to setbacks unless immunization efforts are sustained.

Haq said Pakistan will launch its first anti-polio drive of the new year in the first week of February. He said no new infections have been reported anywhere in the country since September, attributing the decline to vaccination drives carried out during the year.

During the most recent vaccination drive, Haq said that more than 98% of the target population was reached. Access challenges persisted during vaccination campaigns, particularly in parts of the northwestern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where health workers have faced resistance and security constraints.

Militants have repeatedly targeted vaccination workers and the police assigned to protect them, falsely claiming the campaigns are a Western plot to sterilize Muslim children.

Authorities deploy thousands of police officers during each vaccination drive following intelligence warnings of possible attacks.

Since the 1990s, more than 200 polio workers and police officers guarding them have been killed in such attacks, officials say.

Khawaja set to retire from cricket

Rabada leads strong South Africa pace attack at T20 WC

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 3, (AP): Kagiso Rabada leads a strong South Africa pace attack for the T20 World Cup in February.

Rabada returned to competitive cricket on New Year's Eve in the SA20 with figures of 2-48 for MI Cape Town after being sidelined for almost 10 weeks due to a rib injury.

Anrich Nortje, Corbin Bosch, Lungi Ngidi, Marco Jansen and Kwena Maphaka were the other pace options picked in the squad on Friday.

Batters Dewald Brevis, Tony de Zorzi and Jason Smith, allrounders George Linde and Donovan Ferreira and fast bowlers Bosch and Maphaka will feature in their first World Cup.

Quinton de Kock, who recently reversed his retirement, was retained and among the seven Proteas players who lost the 2024 final to India in Barbados.

Notable players to miss out included Reeza Hendricks, Ryan Rickleton, Tristan Stubbs and Tabrazi Shamsi.

"We have had to make some big calls but we feel this group is the strongest and has every chance of suc-

ceeding in India and Sri Lanka," selection convener Patrick Moroney said in a statement. "We have assembled a world-class squad with some of the finest and most experienced players in the game, together with some of the best T20 youngsters coming through."

South Africa will be led by Aiden Markram, who is expected to open the innings with de Kock.

With the subcontinent pitches also expected to suit spinners, South Africa has gone with two experienced left-armers in Keshav Maharaj and George Linde. Markram and Ferreira were part-time spin options.

South Africa will host the West Indies for three T20s before its first T20 World Cup game against Canada in India on Feb. 9. Afghanistan, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates are also in the Proteas' group.

South Africa: Aiden Markram (captain), Corbin Bosch, Dewald Brevis, Quinton de Kock, Tony de Zorzi, Donovan Ferreira, Marco Jansen, George Linde, Keshav Maharaj, Kwena Maphaka, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Jason



Australia Usman Khawaja warms up during a practice session ahead of the fifth and final Ashes cricket test between England and Australia in Sydney, Australia. (AP)

Smith.

Meanwhile, veteran Australia batter Usman Khawaja has announced he

will retire from international cricket after the fifth Ashes test beginning Sunday at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

He didn't go quietly.

The Pakistan-born Khawaja, who was the first Muslim to play for Australia, used his retirement announcement Friday to criticize the "racial" stereotyping he experienced during his career.

It will be the 39-year-old Khawaja's 88th and final test - played at the ground where he began his first-class career. Khawaja scored his first Ashes century at the SCG with 171 against England in 2018.

It was also at that the SCG where he revived his career at age 35, scoring two centuries against England. That prompted one of the great late-career revivals, as Khawaja hit seven centuries in his next two years back in the side.

But Khawaja's position had come under scrutiny and criticism this season after being unable to open in the first Ashes test in Perth due to back spasms and then missing the Brisbane test with the injury.

He was then initially left out in Adelaide until Steve Smith's vertigo allowed Khawaja to return, before an

82 in the first innings there ensured he would stay in the side for the fourth test in Melbourne. Australia, with a 3-1 lead going into the fifth test, has retained the Ashes.

Khawaja said he felt he was treated "a little bit different, even to now," because of his Pakistan and Muslim background.

"Different in the way I've been treated, different in how things have happened," he said at a media conference in Sydney. "I had back spasms, it was something I couldn't control. The way the media and the past players came out and attacked me ... I coped it for about five days straight. Everyone was piling in."

"Once the racial stereotypes came in, of me being lazy, it was things I've dealt with my whole life. Pakistani, West Indian, colored players ... we're selfish, we only care about ourselves, we don't care about the team, we don't train hard enough."

Khawaja was criticized in the days leading up to the Perth match for golfing twice and not taking part in an optional training session.

Doncic & James lead late Lakers rally over Grizzlies

Thunder routs Warriors

LOS ANGELES, Jan 3, (AP): Luka Doncic scored 34 points - half on free throws - and LeBron James added 31 as the Los Angeles Lakers rallied to beat the short-handed Memphis Grizzlies to open a two-game set.

The teams will meet again Sunday in Los Angeles.

Doncic had eight assists and six rebounds. James had nine rebounds and six assists. The superstars dominated the fourth quarter, highlighted by a 12-2 run that put it out of reach. Doncic scored four points and assisted on two 3-pointers while James closed out the spurt with a basket.

The Grizzlies were missing six players, including Zach Edey. They had six players in double figures.

Thunder 131, Warriors 94

In San Francisco, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 30 points and seven assists, and the Oklahoma City Thunder dominated the short-handed Golden State Warriors.

Stephen Curry sat out because of a left ankle sprain and backcourt mate Jimmy Butler became ill earlier in the day. Draymond Green rested, while Jonathan Kuminga missed the game with back soreness.

That left Steve Kerr's starting lineup as Brandin Podziemski, Moses Moody, Will Richard, Guit Santos and Quinten Post.

Kerr was optimistic Curry would play Saturday against the Jazz.

Gilgeous-Alexander shot 10 for 20 with three 3-pointers and converted all seven of his free throws for his seventh game in the last nine with 30 or more points - and now three straight. He had 38 points on 13-for-21 shooting with five 3-pointers in the last matchup against the Warriors.

Suns 129, Kings 102

In Phoenix, Devin Booker scored 33 points, 20 in the first quarter, and the Phoenix Suns pulled away in the second half for a victory over the struggling Sacramento Kings.

Dillon Brooks scored 18 points and Mark Williams had 15 points and nine rebounds for the Suns, who have won five of their last six. They bounced back from Wednesday's loss at Cleveland. Booker, Brooks and Williams all sat the entire fourth quarter.

Collin Gillespie and Oso Ighodaro each had 15 points for Phoenix. Reserve Jamaree Bouyea scored 12 for the Suns, who led by 28 points late in the game.

Bulls 121, Magic 114

In Chicago, Matias Buzelis scored 17 of his 21 points in the second half, Kevin Huertas added 20 points, and the Chicago Bulls rallied to beat the Orlando Magic for their second straight win.



Orlando Magic forward Paolo Banchero, right, defends Chicago Bulls center Nikola Vucevic, left, during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Chicago. (AP)

Buzelis hit a pair of free throws with 22.8 seconds left to make 119-114, then pulled in his ninth rebound to send in Isaac Okoro for a game-sealing dunk with 4 seconds remaining. Buzelis also finished with a season-high seven assists.

Nikola Vucevic added 17 points and 10 rebounds and Ayo Dosunmu had 17 points as Chicago outscored Orlando 30-19 in the fourth quarter to climb back to .500. (17-17).

Paolo Banchero scored 31 points and Anthony Black added 18 for the Magic in a game with 19 lead changes.

Bucks 122, Hornets 121

In Milwaukee, Giannis Antetokounmpo dunked on a lob from Kevin Porter Jr. with 4.7 seconds remaining to give the Milwaukee Bucks a victory over the Charlotte Hornets.

Antetokounmpo had 30 points, 10 rebounds and five assists for his NBA-leading 158th game with at least 30 points, 10 rebounds and five assists. Antetokounmpo overtook Oscar Robertson and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who each accomplished that feat 157 times.

Blazers 122, Pelicans 109

In New Orleans, Deni Avdija had 34 points and 11 assists and the Portland Trail Blazers beat the injury-depleted New Orleans Pelicans.

De'Andre Hunter added 16 points and Jarrett Allen had eight points and 12 rebounds for the Cavaliers, who trailed 105-101 with 4:43 remaining before scoring 10 consecutive points.

Cavaliers 113, Nuggets 108

In Cleveland, Donovan Mitchell scored 33 points and Darius Garland had 18 points and eight assists as the Cleveland Cavaliers beat the short-handed Denver Nuggets.

De'Andre Hunter added 16 points and Jarrett Allen had eight points and 12 rebounds for the Cavaliers, who trailed 105-101 with 4:43 remaining before scoring 10 consecutive points.

Wizards 119, Nets 99

In Washington, Justin Champagnie scored a season-high 20 points and the Washington Wizards continued their recent improvement with a victory over the Brooklyn.

Alex Carr added 19 points and CJ McCollum scored 17 for the Wizards, who still have the second-worst record in the Eastern Conference (23-23) but have won four out of five for the first time since Feb. 8-16, 2023.

Garland's 3-pointer put them ahead for good with 2:13 left.

Zion Williamson scored 35 points for New Orleans, but needed more help to prevent the Pelicans from dropping their sixth straight loss. Tookie Jeremiah Fears scored 18 points.

Hawks 111, Knicks 99

In New York, Jalen Johnson had 18 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds in his seventh triple-double of the season, leading the Atlanta Hawks to a victory over the New York Knicks.

Nickeil Alexander-Walker scored 23 points and Onyeka Okongwu had 22 for the Hawks, while both Zacharie Rischer and Luke Kennard scored 12.

Jalen Brunson led the Knicks with 24 points. OG Anunoby had 19 points and 10 rebounds, and Mikal Bridges added 18 points.

Ariel Hukporti, who replaced Karl-Anthony Towns (illness) in the starting lineup, grabbed a career-high 17 rebounds for New York.

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Spurs 113, Nuggets 108

In Denver, DeMar DeRozan scored 24 points and Nikola Jokic had 21 points and 10 rebounds as the Denver Nuggets beat the San Antonio Spurs.

Knicks 113, Nets 108

In New York, Jalen Johnson had 18 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds in his seventh triple-double of the season, leading the Atlanta Hawks to a victory over the New York Knicks.

Warriors 113, Wizards 108

In Washington, Steph Curry scored 24 points and 10 assists as the Golden State Warriors beat the Washington Wizards.

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Warriors 113, Wizards 108

Al-Nasr eyes first win

Kuwait Club aims for sixth straight win

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff
KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: The sixth round of the general volleyball league continues today at the Volleyball Federation Hall in Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex with two exciting matches. The action starts at 5:30 PM as Burgan takes on Al-Nasr, followed by Kuwait Club facing Yarmouk at 7:30 PM.

In the fifth round last month, Kazma defeated Al-Nasr 3-0, while Burgan secured a 3-0 victory over Al-Shabab.

Currently, Kuwait Club leads the league with 14 points, followed by Al-Arabi with 13 points. Al-Sulabiya sits third with 11 points, Al-Qadsia fourth with 10, Kazma fifth with 8, and Al-Shabab sixth with 6. Burgan is seventh with 4 points, Yarmouk eighth with 3, Al-Nasr ninth, and Al-Sahel last with no points.

In the first match, Burgan aims for its second win of the preliminary round to climb the standings, while



Kazma spikes as Al-Sahel tries to defend.

struggling Al-Nasr looks for its first victory and a chance to halt Burgan's momentum.

In the second match, league leader Kuwait Club seeks a sixth straight win to strengthen their grip at the

top. It faces Yarmouk, who hopes to bounce back after a 3-0 defeat to Al-Arabi and challenge Kuwait Club despite the technical gap, aiming to maximize its performance in a tough encounter.

Al-Ettifaq edges past Al-Okhdood

Al-Nassr's unbeaten run snapped by Al-Ahli

RIYADH, Jan 3: Al-Ahli ended Al-Nassr's unbeaten streak this season by defeating them 3-2 in the 13th round of the Saudi Roshn League.

Ivan Toney was the star for Al-Ahli, scoring twice and assisting Merih Demir for the decisive third goal. Al-Nassr's defender Abdulilah Al-Amri scored both goals for his team. The match was full of drama: Al-Ahli raced to a 2-0 lead, Al-Nassr fought back to equalize, but Demir's second-half strike sealed the win for the "Raqi" side.

The game ended with tension, as Al-Ahli captain Ali Majrashi and Al-Nassr's Nawaf Boushal were both sent off in stoppage time. The victory lifted Al-Ahli to 25 points, moving them up to fourth place, while Al-Nassr remained at 31 points, temporarily staying at the top. Earlier, Al-Ettifaq defeated Al-Okhdood 2-0, and Al-Najma drew 2-2 with Al-Khaleej.

Today's fixtures include Al-Hazm vs Neom, Al-Qadsia vs Al-Riyadh, and Damac vs Al-Hilal.

Turkish defender Merih Demir



Al-Ahli celebrate their stunning triumph against Al-Nassr.

had some fun on social media following the match. He posted a graphic on his official X (formerly Twitter) account showing him reading a newspaper with a headline claiming Al-Nassr had not lost this season. The headline

was then humorously crossed out and replaced with a note stating Al-Nassr had yet to face Al-Ahli – a cheeky nod to the fact that Al-Ahli ended their rival's unbeaten run in their first meeting of the season.

Wawrinka starts farewell tour with thrilling victory

China tops Belgium as Zhang shines



Zhizhen Zhang of China plays a forehand to Zizou Bergs of Belgium during their match at the United Cup tennis tournament in Sydney. (AP)

The former world No. 31 has remodeled his forehand following a shoulder injury that sidelined him for six months.

Zhang unfurled his new-look forehand to devastating effect, but could not get a look into Bergs' formidable serve. The first set was inevitably decided in the tiebreak where Bergs came up clutch in key moments as he slid across the hardcourt.

In a mirror image, both players easily clinched their service games in the second set until the 12th game where an inspired Zhang had a couple of break points.

He was left flustered when he could not convert as Bergs forced another tiebreak.

After unforced errors proved costly in the first set tiebreak, Zhang was in the zone and sped to a 4-1 lead before forcing a deciding set much to the delight of the Chinese fans in the bleachers.

Zhang confidently moved around the court in the third set and finally cracked Bergs' serve in the 11th game to produce the first break of the match. Zhang then clinched victory with an ace before unleashing a fist pump to his compatriots

in the crowd.

"I'm super happy, I never gave up and I remained patient," Zhang said. "My team gave me a lot of confidence and there were a lot of Chinese people in the crowd."

Earlier, Zhu hoped to start the new season by recapturing the form that saw her rise to a career-high ranking of 31 in 2023.

But the 31-year-old was helpless against the accuracy of Mertens, who moved her from side to side by hitting the lines. 20th-ranked Mertens came out blazing as she won five of the first six games to set the tone.

Mertens, more noted for her doubles prowess, was in superb touch and capitalized on an error-prone performance from Zhu, who sprayed wide at the net to slump to a dispiriting 6-2, 6-2 defeat in one hour, 18 minutes.

"I'm very happy to be back and to start on a good note," said Mertens, who reached a career-high ranking of No. 12 in 2018. "The first match is about getting the balls and the mentality, so I'm very happy that I could close out this one."

Zhang and Zhu then teamed up to defeat Bergs and Mertens in a thrilling mixed doubles match, prevailing 5-7, 7-6 (5), 10-6 as China emerged victorious in Group B to open competition play in Sydney after the tournament started in Perth on Friday.

Zhang will be encouraged by his rousing performance in the men's singles that was marked by strong serving and crisp movement around the court.

The 29-year-old had been hoping to hit the ground running after an injury-plagued 2025 season saw him tumble to No. 410 in the rankings.

Scheib of Austria earns second place

Rast claims maiden World Cup GS

KRANJSKA GORA, Slovenia, Jan 3, (AP): Camille Rast celebrated briefly with both arms in the air after she crossed the finish line. Then she tapped the black mourning band on her left upper arm twice and made the sign of a heart with her hands.

Shortly after earning her maiden career win in a World Cup giant slalom Saturday, the Swiss skier dedicated the victory to the victims of the fire at a Crans-Montana bar.

"This week, in my hometown, there was a tragic accident and I think about those families. We race for them this weekend," said Rast, who was born in Vétroz, a village about 40 kilometers from Crans-Montana in the Canton of Valais.

"It was a difficult week. But sport has so many emotions, so I tried to do my best and give some good emotions to those people," she added.

The fire in the crowded bar in the Swiss ski resort left 40 people dead and more than 100 injured during a New Year's celebration.

Crans-Montana is set to host World Cup speed races for women on Jan. 30-31 and for men on Feb. 1, the last events before the Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics.

Rast's win came a week after she finished second in a GS in Austria for what was then her best career result in the discipline. Her two previous World Cup wins both came in slalom, most recently in January

2025, a month before she added the world title in that discipline.

Rast beat second-placed Julia Scheib of Austria by two-tenths, while Paula Moltzan finished 0.47 behind in third for the American's second podium result of the season.

Teammate Mikaela Shiffrin was just over a second behind in fifth, behind Olympic GS champion Sara Hector of Sweden, who posted the fastest second-run time.

Nina O'Brien in eighth and Elisa-

beth Bocock in 14th, matching her career best result from a GS in Sweden in March 2023, rounded off a strong showing by the U.S. ski team.

"It's a really fun team to be a part of," Moltzan said. "I mean, I never really know who is going to be quite the fastest in training, but I also feel that way on race day."

Moltzan raced with a bruised back following a nasty crash in last week's GS. Her career best result in the discipline is a second place, from

the season-opening race in October.

"I am actually happy and a bit relieved. Last week, it was extremely difficult for me. I'm still not feeling maybe a 100%. So to be able to pull it off feels really nice. I have some bruising on my spine," Moltzan said.

"Basically any time I hit a bump doesn't really feel that good. So lucky that the snow is actually quite smooth here, so it feels less painful."

Shiffrin holds the women's record of 22 World Cup wins in the discipline. But with six weeks to go until the Feb. 15 giant slalom at the Olympics, the 2018 gold medalist has not been on a GS podium for 11 World Cup races since January 2024.

Shiffrin suffered from PTSD last season following a horrifying crash at her home race in Killington in November 2024 and has been working her way back up the GS rankings since her return more than two months later.

"Happy and satisfied are different, because I would like to be faster, but I'm taking steps and I feel very good with that," Shiffrin told Austrian TV after the first leg when asked whether she was 100% happy with her run.

"Last year, I remember watching this race from home and I thought, 'Oh, I can't do that.' So, it's pretty incredible to be here one year later and to be in the mix with the fastest women right now."



Switzerland's Camille Rast celebrates on podium after winning an alpine ski, women's World Cup giant slalom in Kranjska Gora, Slovenia. (AP)

Nancy under extreme pressure at Celtic after loss to fierce rival Rangers

GLASGOW, Scotland, Jan 3, (AP): Wilfried Nancy's job as Celtic manager came under even more intense scrutiny Saturday after a 3-1 home loss to fierce Glasgow rival Rangers in the Old Firm derby, the biggest match in Scottish soccer.

It was a sixth loss in eight games under Nancy since his arrival at Celtic on Dec. 3 and the Frenchman cut a lonely figure after the post-match handshakes as he walked down the tunnel to a backdrop of jeers that greeted the fulltime whistle.

The result left Celtic on the same points as Rangers - though ahead on goal difference - and three behind surprise leader Hearts in a turbulent campaign in the Scottish Premiership.

Nancy left Columbus Crew in Major League Soccer for Celtic but lost his first four matches in charge - including a stunning defeat in the Scottish League Cup final. There were then back-to-back wins, only for Celtic to lose at Motherwell on Tuesday and then against its biggest foe to home.

"For me, nothing changes," Nancy said after the game against Rangers. "My focus is to help my players to be better, help my team start to be better, and to find a way to turn things around. We are really close to doing good things but (when) we concede goals sometimes it's difficult."

Trailing 1-0 at halftime, Rangers scored three goals in a 21-minute span from the 50th - leading to audible discontent among Celtic fans throughout the second half.

The BBC reported that Celtic supporters gathered outside their stadium after the game in protest at the club's board. Last month, chairman Peter Lawwell resigned and chief executive Michael Nicholson claimed three of his "colleagues" on the board were "assaulted" after the



Rangers' Mikey Moore celebrates scoring their side's third goal of the game during the Scottish Premiership soccer match between Celtic and Rangers in Glasgow, Scotland. (AP)

League Cup final, without disclosing further details.

Nancy cited "details at certain moments" as the reason for Celtic's problems.

"I see many, many good things - that's why the frustration is there because we deserve better," he said. "We have to stay together, and everything is going to move forward."

Celtic has been Scottish champion for 13 of the last 14 years.

Under Nancy, Celtic has conceded two or more goals in seven of his eight games in charge.

Best of the Rest

Ferrari thanks Zhou on exit: Ferrari issued a public message of thanks to Zhou Guanyu after the Chinese driver departed the Scuderia at the end of 2025.

Zhou, 26, served as Ferrari's F1 reserve driver last year alongside Antonio Giovinazzi, who is also part of the Scuderia's program in the World Endurance Championship.

"Grateful for Zhou Guanyu's commitment and contribution as Ferrari Reserve Driver this season! Wishing him all the best ahead," read Ferrari's message on Instagram. (Xinhua)

Paul exits WBA cruiserweight rankings: Jake Paul has slipped out of the WBA cruiserweight rankings after the YouTuber-turned-boxer was soundly beaten by former world heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua last month.

Paul's jaw was broken in two places and the American needed surgery to repair the damage after Joshua's sixth-round knockout victory in a heavyweight bout in Miami. Paul (12-2, 7 KOs) had entered the WBA's cruiserweight rankings at No. 14 in July shortly after he beat 39-year-old Julio César Chávez Jr. by unanimous decision in Anaheim, California. (Xinhua)

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Sports

Kuwait Club and Al-Arabi pull clear at top

Al-Qadsia struggle continues

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: The Zain Premier League standings remain unchanged at the summit, with Kuwait Club holding first place on 26 points and Al-Arabi close behind in second with 23. The latest round produced a flurry of goals – 20 in total – despite the opening two matches yielding just two.

In the 10th round, both Kuwait Club and Al-Arabi underlined their title credentials with emphatic victories. Kuwait Club overwhelmed Al-Tadamon 7-1, while Al-Arabi swept aside Al-Shabab with a commanding 5-0 win, keeping the title race firmly between the two leaders.

Kuwait Club once again dictated proceedings, showcasing its attacking strength as it continues its bid to defend the title and move closer to a record 21st league championship. Captain Yousef Nasser led the way with four goals, while Tunisian forward Yassine Khenissi also scored, maintaining his place atop the scorers' chart and becoming Kuwait Club's all-time leading foreign goalscorer with 79 goals, overtaking Brazilian striker Rogerio.

Al-Arabi responded strongly after recent setbacks, putting behind it the Amir Cup final defeat and last week's narrow 2-1 win over Al-Tadamon in a postponed league fixture, as it kept the pressure firmly on the leaders.

Al-Fahaheel was the standout movers of the round, climbing four places to third on 16 points following a 4-1 victory over Al-Jahra at the newly inaugurated Naif Al-Dabbous Stadium. The new venue has proven a lucky charm, with Al-Fahaheel winning both matches played there so far. For Al-Jahra, however, the situation continues to worsen, with the side remaining on seven points.

Al-Fahaheel also benefited from Al-Qadsia's continued struggles, as the latter was held to a scoreless draw by bottom-placed Al-Nasr. The result dropped Al-Qadsia to fifth on 15 points, while Al-Nasr collected a valuable point to move to four.

Once again, Al-Qadsia find itself effectively out of the title race for a 10th straight season, sparking growing frustration among their supporters, who had hoped for a return to glory but are now increasingly concerned about being



Kuwait Club players celebrate their big win over Al-Tadamon.

KUNA photo

dragged into a relegation fight.

Further results worked in Al-Fahaheel's favor, with Kazma and Al-Salmiya sharing a 1-1 draw. Kazma moved up to 15 points, while Al-Salmiya reached 13.

Al-Shabab slipped one place to seventh with 13 points, while Al-Tadamon's seventh defeat of the season deepened its woes, leaving it in a precarious position, struggling to break into the top six and edging closer to the foot of the table.

Al-Nasr battles Al-Sahel

Crown Prince Cup preliminary round begins

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 3: The 32nd edition of the Crown Prince Cup kicks off today with two preliminary-round matches. Al-Nasr faces Al-Sahel at Al-Sadaqa wa Al-Salam Stadium at 4:10 PM, followed by Al-Sulaibikhat against Kazma at 7:10 PM at Nasser Al-Othaimi Stadium.

Other first-round fixtures include Al-Fahaheel versus Al-Jazeera and Burgan against Al-Jahra on Monday. Tuesday sees defending champions Kuwait Club begin its campaign against Khaitan, while Al-Salmiya meets Al-Tadamon. The preliminary round wraps up on Wednesday with Al-Arabi taking on Al-Yarmouk and Al-Qadsia facing Al-Shabab.

Kuwait Club leads the list of the tourna-



The Crown Prince Cup trophy stands ready at the stadium.

ment's most successful clubs with 10 titles, one more than Al-Qadsia and Al-Arabi. Al-

Salmiya has won the cup twice, while Kazma has claimed it once.

In the opening clash, Al-Nasr and Al-Sahel come in with contrasting form. Al-Nasr, nicknamed "Al-Anabi," struggles in the Zain Premier League, sitting at the bottom with only four points from 30, leaving it in theoretical danger of relegation.

Al-Sahel, on the other hand, tops the Zain First Division and has been in strong form in the cup so far.

In the second match, Kazma aims to secure a win and contend for the title – the only cup it has won. Al-Sulaibikhat hopes to capitalize on its solid First Division performance, currently third, five points behind leaders Al-Sahel and three behind second-placed Al-Yarmouk, as it chases promotion and cup glory.

Kuwait faces Algeria in friendly ahead of Asian Championship

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

ZAGREB, Jan 3: Kuwait's national men's handball team kicks off its current training camp in Croatia with a friendly match against Algeria today. The team will then face Slovenia on January 6, Kosovo on January 8, and Georgia on January 10, before returning to Kuwait on January 11.

The team is preparing for the 22nd Asian Men's Handball Championship, which doubles as the World Cup 2027 qualifiers in Germany. Kuwait will host the tournament at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex from January 15 to 29. In the group stage, Kuwait has been drawn into Group 3 alongside the United Arab Emirates, Hong Kong, and India. The other groups are:

Group 1: Oman, Qatar, South Korea

Group 2: Bahrain, Jordan, China, Iraq

Group 4: Japan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Australia

Preparation for the Asian Championship began with Kuwait's participation in the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh last November. This was followed by an internal training camp in Kuwait, then a camp in Cairo where the team played two friendlies against Egypt, and now the ongoing camp in Slovenia and Croatia.

Handball Federation Secretary-General Qaid Al-Adwani, head of the Kuwaiti delegation in Croatia, confirmed that training is progressing according to the coaching staff's plan. The Slovenia camp focused on intensive training, building team cohesion, and improving fitness, while the Croatia camp emphasizes implementing the coach's offensive and defensive strategies.



Kuwait's national handball team intensifies strength training in preparation for upcoming competitions, focusing on power, agility, and teamwork

ing according to the coaching staff's plan. The Slovenia camp focused on intensive training, building team cohesion, and improving fitness, while the Croatia camp emphasizes implementing the coach's offensive and defensive strategies.

Al-Adwani praised the players for their dedication and discipline, highlighting their commitment to making the most of the camp ahead of the Asian Championship. He stressed that the team's goal is to advance from the preliminary round to the main stage and compete for one of four World Cup qualification spots for 2027, expressing full confidence in the "Blue Hand" players to uphold Kuwaiti handball's reputation on the continental stage.

Best of the Rest

Lens consolidate Ligue 1 lead: Lens consolidated its place at the top of Ligue 1 with a comprehensive 3-0 win at Toulouse.

Lens was four points clear of reigning champion Paris Saint-Germain, which plays city rival Paris FC on Sunday.

Wesley Said got the opener, the second half against a home side that played most of the match with 10 men after Emerson was red-carded for reckless play about midway through the first half.

Lens was the only team in Ligue 1 this season which hadn't dropped a point after leading and it never looked like surrendering its advantage against a side that struggled to make much of an impact. (AP)

Dimitar Penev dies at age 80: Dimitar Penev, the Bulgarian coach who guided his country's team to the semifinals at the 1994 World Cup in the United States, has died. He was 80.

The Bulgarian Football Union announced Penev's death on Saturday saying he died after a prolonged illness.

Penev, who was named the best Bulgarian coach of the 20th Century, is one of the most celebrated figures in Bulgarian soccer history.

Bulgaria's fourth-place finish at the '94 World Cup remains its biggest success. The team's impressive run was halted in the semifinals with a 2-1 loss to Italy. It then lost to Sweden in the third-place match. (AP)

Carlos released from Brazil hospital: Former Brazil and Real Madrid star Roberto Carlos has been released from hospital after heart surgery this week.

Hospital Vila Nova Star made the announcement without elaborating.

The 52-year-old Roberto Carlos had a heart obstruction detected on Monday and was advised to have a coronary angioplasty on the same day. The procedure is minimally invasive and widens blocked or narrowed heart arteries. The former defender was initially put in intensive care due to medical protocols. (AP)

Indonesia hires former Canada coach: Herdman: Indonesia has hired former Canada coach John Herdman to lead the men's national team after it failed to qualify for the 2026 World Cup.

The 50-year-old Englishman replaces Patrick Kluivert, who left as coach in October. (AP)



Aston Villa's Ollie Watkins, right, has a shot saved by Nottingham Forest goalkeeper John Victor during their English Premier League soccer match in Birmingham, England. (AP)

sea, has been reported to be a leading contender for the job.

On Sunday, though, McFarlane will lead the Blues at Etihad Stadium against a manager who has surpassed the 1,000-game mark in charge.

"The energy and enthusiasm in training was exceptional today," said McFarlane, who worked in City's academy in the 2020-21 season before moving to Southampton and then

Chelsea. "They seem really focused, they're really driven, hungry. They know we've got a massive game on Sunday, and we're going to have to be at our best."

Chelsea starts the second half of the Premier League season in fifth place. The Blues are three points back of fourth-place Liverpool but also just three points ahead of 11th-place Fulham.

The game at City is the first of nine matches for Chelsea this month in all competitions.

Chelsea is seeking a fifth full-time manager since the takeover of the club by American investors, fronted by Todd Boehly, in May 2022.

Maresca was in charge for 18 months and won the Conference League and Club World Cup in his first season at Chelsea.