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## KUWAIT UPGRADES CIVIL IDs FOR FOREIGN INVESTORS, PROPERTY OWNERS

# Select expats to get smart IDs

Validity extended up to 15 years

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Youssef Saud Al-Sabah issued Ministerial Decree No. 10/2025 concerning the issuance of civil ID cards with electronic chips for specific categories of non-Kuwaitis, reports Al-Seyassah daily.**

Article 1 of the decree mandates the issuance of a new civil ID card equipped with an electronic chip for certain categories of non-Kuwaitis registered in the Civil Information System, in accordance with Paragraph 1 of Article 2 of Law No. 32/82 regarding the Civil Information System.

The targeted categories include:

■ Property owners in the State of Kuwait, whose civil ID cards will be valid for 10 years.

■ Foreign investors subject to Law No. 116/2013 on the Promotion of Direct Investment, whose civil ID cards will be valid for 15 years.

Article 2 of the decree grants the Director General of the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) the authority to amend the data printed on the new civil ID card or its components, define and update the information stored on the electronic chip and machine-readable zone, and determine or modify the procedures, documents, and requirements for issuing, renewing, or updating any card data, as deemed necessary in the public interest.

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### Opinion

■ **Ahmed Al-Jarallah**

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

## Kuwait needs to market its investment opportunities

THE concern about how a State can domestically invest its sovereign wealth, particularly if the national economy and size are seemingly too small to absorb vast capital, is easily addressed from several perspectives.

The real strength of a country is not determined by its physical size. Instead, it is measured by the quality of its strategic plans and projects, as well as the effective allocation of its funds.

For instance, some countries smaller than Kuwait have robust economies. Others have successfully utilized development projects to generate significant revenue, because they have a clear and well-defined economic vision.

Kuwait has the potential to become a global hub. This vision can be realized by establishing 50 to 100 diverse universities, attracting international students, provided they can operate with minimal regulatory hurdles.

Furthermore, there is a huge room for growth in medical tourism. Kuwait should aim for 30 to 50 specialized international hospitals, along with the necessary hotels to accommodate these visitors and others.

Another crucial, low-space-intensive sector is technology and software. Various

countries are heavily investing in this area, which Kuwait must also prioritize.

Finally, the industrial sector requires strong government encouragement to reduce dependency on imports—even for basic goods.

Instead of hindering industrialists, the government should ease current pressures and offer incentives to allow them to operate freely and boost local production.

Kuwait has enormous potential to diversify its economy and reduce reliance on public funds, mirroring the success of other Gulf countries.

The agricultural sector is a vital area for development, where there is scope for strengthening holdings to achieve self-sufficiency and revitalize exports—a practice

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## Kuwait shivers as cold lingers Wednesday



KUNA photo

Kuwait skyline gleams under a crisp winter Sunday, with the city's skyscrapers standing tall against cloudy skies.

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4, (KUNA): Acting Director of the Meteorological Department Dhirar Al-Ali forecasted that a cold, dry air mass will affect the country starting Sunday.

This is expected to bring lower night-time temperatures, with frost in some agricultural and desert areas until Wednesday.

Al-Ali explained to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that weather models indicate the

country is under the influence of a high-pressure system, which is accompanied by cold, dry air. He said moderate to brisk northwesterly winds are also anticipated, especially in coastal areas during the day.

He added wind speeds are predicted to decrease gradually, becoming light to moderate during the night in the following days. "Temperatures will drop to as low as three degrees

Celsius, particularly in desert areas. During this cold spell, maximum temperatures are expected to range from 14 to 17 degrees Celsius, while minimum temperatures will be between one and five degrees Celsius. Overall, the weather will be cool to cold during the day and cold to very cold at night. A slight, gradual temperature increase is expected to start on Thursday," he explained.

## Minister Al-Tabtabaei conducts inspection tours of exam centers

### Grade-12 exams begin for over 33,000 students

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Amid an atmosphere of discipline and organized procedures, approximately 33,400 grade-12 students in both the science and arts sections began their end-of-term exams for the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year on Sunday morning, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Science section students started with the Mathematics exam, while arts section students took their French language exam. The exam halls witnessed orderly student entry, which reflected the readiness of the facilities and the availability of all necessary organizational arrangements. This highlights the thorough preparations made by school administrations to ensure the smooth and efficient conduct of the exams.

Grade-12 science section exams are scheduled to continue until January 14, while the arts section exams will conclude on January 15.

Meanwhile, the Minister of Education Eng. Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaei conducted an inspection tour of several grade-12 examination centers in the



Ministry of Education photo

Minister of Education Eng. Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaei during an inspection tour of several grade-12 examination centers.

Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone on Sunday morning to monitor the progress of the first-semester examinations for the 2025/2026 academic year.

During the tour, Al-Tabtabaei affirmed that the Ministry of Education had completed all administrative and

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### Newswatch

**KUWAIT CITY:** The Minister of Foreign Affairs **Abdullah Al-Yahya** received on Sunday a written letter by the Omani Finance Minister **Sultan Al-Habsi** regarding ways to strengthen the close bilateral relations in various fields.

Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya received the letter during his reception of the Ambassador of **Oman** to Kuwait, **Dr. Saleh Al-Kharusi**. (KUNA)

□ □ □

**KUWAIT CITY:** Two decrees revoking Kuwaiti citizenship from 69 individuals were published on Sunday in the official gazette "Kuwait al-Yaum", reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The first decree - Decree No. 242/2025 - revokes citizenship from 65 individuals and those who acquired it through dependency. The second decree - Decree No. 243/2025 - revokes citizenship from four individuals and their dependents.

□ □ □

**KUWAIT CITY:** Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) has referred a supervisory employee and several other employees of the Ministry of Public Works to the Public Prosecution on suspicion of forgery, embezzlement, and facilitating the embezzlement of public funds, reports Al-Seyassah daily. Nazaha reaffirmed its commitment to continuing its efforts in examining, collecting evidence, and investigating all credible and complete information it receives.

The authority also praised the role of whistleblowers in reporting corruption, emphasizing its dedication to ensuring their protection and confidentiality in accordance with the law and its implementing regulations.



Photos circulating the internet show deposed Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro at the New York Stewart International Airport.

## Trump claims US already steering Venezuela transition

### Maduro arrives in US after stunning capture

CARACAS, Jan 4, (AP): Deposed Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro arrived in the United States to face criminal charges after being captured in an audacious nighttime military operation that President Donald Trump said would set the U.S. up to "run" the South American country and tap its vast oil reserves to sell to other nations.

Maduro landed late Saturday afternoon at a small airport in New York following the middle-of-the-night op-

eration that extracted him and his wife, Cilia Flores, from their home in a military base in the capital, Caracas - an act that Maduro's government called "imperialist." The couple faces U.S. charges of participating in a narco-terrorism conspiracy.

The dramatic action capped an intensive Trump administration pressure campaign on Venezuela's autocratic leader and months of secret planning, resulting in the most assertive American

action to achieve regime change since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Legal experts raised questions about the lawfulness of the operation, which was done without congressional approval. Venezuela's vice president, Delcy Rodríguez, meanwhile, demanded that the United States free Maduro and called him the country's rightful leader as her nation's high court named her interim president.

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## Pakistan-Kuwait ties strengthen across health, trade and logistics

By **Fares Ghaleb**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Pakistani Ambassador to Kuwait Dr. Zafar Iqbal highlighted the strong bilateral relations between Pakistan and Kuwait, affirming the strengthening of cooperation in vital sectors like health, maritime transport and logistics.

Iqbal told the newspaper that the important aspect of this collaboration is the healthcare field, taking into

consideration that more than 7,500 Pakistani doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals are currently employed in Kuwait and are highly valued for their skill and dedication. He confirmed the mutual interest in increasing this number and focusing on specialized medical and nursing fields to meet the demands of the Kuwaiti healthcare system.

He added that discussions are underway on the direct shipping route connecting Pakistan's Gwadar Port with Kuwait's Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port. He considers this a strategic initiative that will significantly boost regional trade, reduce transit times and costs, and establish Kuwait as a central logistics gateway linking Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

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3 1,100 mobile  
food trucks lose  
license



ABK demonstrates  
extensive support  
8 for 'Let's Be Aware'  
campaign through-  
out 2025

## Expats can now file 'health grievances'

By **Marwa Al-Bahrawi**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Minister of Health Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi issued several decisions, such as the formation of a committee tasked to resolve disputes related to the application of Law No. 1/1999 regarding foreign residents and visitors.

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Prayer Timings			
Fajr .....	05:19	Asr .....	14:44
Sunrise ..	06:43	Maghrib ..	17:03
Zohr .....	11:53	Isha .....	18:25

# Local

## Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

**By Day:** Rather cold and partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times over coastal areas northwesterly wind, with speeds of 10-40 km/h.  
**By Night:** Cold to very cold and

## Weather

partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 08-32 km/h.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec		
Kuwait City	18	09	Kuwait Airport	17 09
			Abdaly	17 04
			Bubyan	18 03
			Jahra	08 10
			Failaka Island	18 07
			Salmiyah	17 10

## TV, radio infrastructure upgraded in landmark Info Ministry 2025 achievements

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4, (KUNA): Kuwait's Ministry of Information recorded a series of landmark achievements throughout 2025, reinforcing its leadership across media sectors in conjunction with Kuwait's designation as Arab Capital of Culture and Media 2025, marking a pivotal milestone in national media history.

The ministry focused its 2025 efforts on upgrading television and radio infrastructure, accelerating digital transformation, enhancing national workforce efficiency, achieving unprecedented revenues, and strengthening regional and international media presence in alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035 and the ministry's 2021-2026 strategy.

Kuwait Television achieved a qualitative leap in 2025 through comprehensive modernization of multiple channels, emergency facilities, and transmission centers, introducing advanced lighting, smart cameras, and HD and 4K technologies to enhance production quality.

The Ministry also completed full technical readiness of Al-Akhbar Channel, launching a new visual identity and round-the-clock multilingual news service, supported by direct

connectivity with domestic and international correspondents for timely, professional coverage.

The Ministry also implemented a comprehensive emergency broadcasting plan ensuring uninterrupted transmission during crises, including backup studios, standby technical teams, and advanced fiber-optic connectivity, substantially improving operational resilience and broadcast continuity.

On the content front, the Ministry launched a renewed programming cycle supporting national production and Kuwaiti identity, an effort crowned by winning four awards at the 25th Arab Radio and Television Festival in Tunisia, including first prize for "Layali Kuwait."

Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi affirmed that these achievements reflect the ministry's vision of delivering balanced, responsible media that keeps pace with technological advancement while upholding professional integrity.

In the radio sector, the Ministry modernized broadcasting services by upgrading studios with Audio over IP technology and



Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi

enhancing digital archiving systems, improving sound quality, reducing disruptions, and preserving Kuwait's audio heritage through accessible modern platforms.

During 2025, Kuwait Radio adopted advanced digital control systems and networked

studio connectivity to enhance efficiency and uninterrupted broadcasting, while continuing multilingual news and awareness programming promoting national unity, sustainable development, and responsible media values.

The Ministry also strengthened outside broadcasting capabilities through modern mobile units and trained technical and media teams to ensure readiness for major national events and high-profile coverage requirements.

In print and local media, the Ministry finalized a new media regulation law in coordination with Fatwa and Legislation Department, aiming to modernize legislation, regulate audiovisual, print, and digital media, and promote responsible freedom of expression.

The Ministry also discussed launching a digital media diploma with the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training and the Kuwait Journalists Association to equip Kuwaiti youth with skills in digital content and tourism media.

Printed media services were digitized through the Kuwait Alyoum application and newspaper archiving projects, enhancing transparency and access, while supporting

Kuwait's regional media leadership as local outlets expanded reach and advertising revenues achieved notable growth.

Regionally and internationally, the Ministry intensified Kuwait's media presence by capitalizing on its Arab Capital of Culture and Media 2025 designation, officially launching celebrations on February 13 with broad Arab participation.

Kuwait was endorsed to chair the Executive Bureau of the Council of Arab Information Ministers for the next two years and received the Arab Media Excellence Award, affirming its leadership in responsible Arab media discourse.

Minister Al-Mutairi also chaired the Middle East Regional Committee of the UN World Tourism Organization and participated in global forums, promoting Kuwait's vision for leveraging technology and artificial intelligence in modern media.

These cumulative achievements underscored the Ministry of Information's commitment to digital transformation and sustainable media development, confirming its determination to build on 2025 successes under its forthcoming 2026-2030 strategy.

## Other Voices

### Diwan and dustur

By Ahmad alsarraaf

**H**ISTORIANS do not agree on a specific date for the establishment of direct Arab-Islamic rule over Iran (Persia), even when attributed to local families of Turkish or Persian origin.

It is known, however, that the conquest of Persia began during the reign of Caliph Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq and reached its peak under Caliph Omar ibn Al-Khattab, culminating with the fall of the Sasanian Empire and the death of Yazdegerd III in 651 CE (30 AH). Iran then came under the rule of the Caliphs, followed by the Umayyads and Abbasids, with Arab governors and rulers administering the region.



alsarraaf

Arab influence gradually declined, and by the early 19th century, the government had become predominantly Persian, though Arab influence remained. Arabic continued to be used in religion, science, and administration in important areas.

The major turning point came with the establishment of the Safavid dynasty in 1501 and Shah Ismail Safavi's decision to adopt Twelver Shi'ism as the official religion, replacing Sunni Islam.

This marked the beginning of a distinct political and religious identity, while Islam remained the official state religion. Linguistic studies show that Arabic vocabulary constitutes a high portion of Persian, estimated at around half of the total vocabulary.

Several efforts were made to reduce Arabic influence in Persian language, most notably by Reza Shah, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty and father of the last Shah. However, these attempts were largely unsuccessful. Linguistic change is difficult due to the thousands of Arabic roots embedded in Persian religious, legal, administrative, philosophical, and literary traditions.

Many Arabic words have become integral to Persian grammar and style, not merely decorative elements that can be removed. The centuries-long use of Arabic as a language of science and religion has created a vast cultural and literary heritage. Removing its vocabulary would sever ties with centuries of tradition and writing. Such a change is difficult to impose on writers, scholars, and the public.

Reza Shah's efforts to establish the "Iranian Academy," and later the Academy of Persian Language and Literature, to create Persian alternatives for foreign and Arabic terms also failed. Lasting success cannot be achieved through academies alone; it depends on the language actually used by the people. Many proposed alternatives remained limited to official or elite circles, while the public largely continued to reject them.

Arabic words in Persian are neither phonetically nor morphologically foreign. Having adapted to Persian metrical patterns, they are often easier and shorter than many artificial alternatives, making them more likely to endure in everyday use.

Attempting to replace thousands of words in the press, books, and education creates semantic confusion and places a burden on readers. Many writers therefore prefer to return to the traditional lexicon that is widely understood.

Ironically, in his efforts to glorify "Persian" and promote slogans like "Pre-Islamic Iran," Reza Shah found himself unable to avoid using Arabic words, and did so extensively.

The three powerful minorities - Turks, Kurds, and Arabs - played a major role in resisting forced Persianization projects, fearing that their languages and identities would be targeted next. Their opposition stemmed from political and identity-based motives, not merely linguistic concerns. For this reason, the project of "linguistic cleansing" remained largely an ideological effort rather than a true transformation of the Persian language or its everyday usage.

In contrast, the influence of Persian on Arabic is limited to a few hundred words, such as diwan (council), dustur (constitution), khandaq (trench), bustan (garden), tash (basin), tazaj (fresh), sijil (register), and band (paragraph). A greater number of Persian words, however, are found in Gulf dialects, including those of Iraq, Kuwait, and the western coast of the Gulf.



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KUNA photo  
Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Tareq Al Bannai expresses his views during the discussion organized by the UN Mission in Kuwait.

## Kuwait: UN cornerstone of multilateral diplomatic ties

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4, (KUNA): Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Tareq Al Bannai said Sunday, the United Nations constitutes the cornerstone of diplomatic engagement and multilateral action, affirming Kuwait's relationship with organization.

Al-Bannai made the remarks in a press statement on the sidelines of a panel discussion organized by the United Nations Mission in Kuwait within the fourth season of the Young Ambassadors Program, bringing together participants.

He noted that the discussion featured participation by the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Kuwait Ghada Al Taher, the United Kingdom Ambassador Qudsi Rashid, and Canada's Ambassador Tara Scheerwater, reflecting broad international engagement within the forum.

Al-Bannai explained that Kuwait's relationship with the United Nations spans human rights, sustainable development, political issues, and cooperation with the Security Council and other organs, stressing Kuwait's clear, consistent approach aligned with United Nations objectives.

He added that embedding sustainability begins at home and in schools, forming a lasting pathway toward the future, citing growing positive behavioral change and

environmental awareness among younger generations across Kuwaiti society in recent years.

For her part, United Nations Resident Coordinator Ghada Al-Taher said the session aims to equip youth with diplomatic skills for a changing world, emphasizing investment in a generation expected to lead the near future responsibly.

Al-Taher warned that by 2050 around 70 percent of the world's population will live in urban areas, posing serious challenges related to decent living, infrastructure, education, healthcare, and suitable environments amid increasing population density pressures.

She said the dialogue addressed urban stability, sustainable development pathways, Kuwait's international priorities, and its roles in sustainability, urban development, environmental protection, and climate change, through direct engagement with Young Ambassadors from diverse backgrounds globally.

The fourth season of the Young Ambassadors Program, aligned with Sustainable Development Goal Eleven on sustainable cities, is jointly organized by the United Nations Mission and the British and Canadian embassies, empowering youth through experience.

## Teamwork, redoubled efforts vital for progress: Al-Huwailah

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah stressed the importance of discipline and commitment to teamwork, indicating that the next phase requires intensified efforts and accelerated progress to meet the aspirations of the wise leadership and serve public interest.

Al-Huwailah made



Dr Al-Huwailah

the statement when she visited a number of ministry departments and sectors at the beginning of the year, as part of the direct field monitoring efforts and enhancement of the efficiency of institutional performance.

The visit aimed to review the workflow, assess the readiness of the departments and their operational plans for the next phase, and listen to employees' observations and suggestions to contribute to the development of services and achieve the goals of the ministry.

It is in line with the policy of the ministry on field presence and continuous evaluation, and to establish the principle of working from the field, which improves performance and raises the level of social services provided to beneficiaries.

## PAI shuts down 12 industrial plots

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The Public Authority for Industry (PAI) closed 12 industrial plots and imposed nine administrative penalties on violating companies and industrial establishments.

The violations include serious breaches of the terms of the usufruct agreement, failure to operate the project within the specified timeframe, changing the industrial activity without approval, subletting the plot, and other violations related to the environment or safety, such as fire safety.

The Authority gave the violators a maximum of one month to rectify the violations and warned of stricter measures if the violations are not rectified within the given timeframe. This is part of the stringent measures taken by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry against violating industrial plots.

It is worth noting that the ministry affirmed its commitment to zero tolerance for violations and the firm application of the law to regulate the industrial sector.

Last October, Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel issued a ministerial decree forming inspection committees comprised of representatives of several government agencies (ministries of Interior, Commerce and Industry, Kuwait Municipality, Environment Public Authority and Kuwait Fire Force) to conduct a comprehensive survey, monitor violations, such as changing the activity of the business, subletting, failure to operate and breach of contract terms, and take strict legal measures like the revocation of permits, with the aim of rectifying the situation and supporting compliant factories.

# No monopoly on gov't land

Fatwa Dept approves law

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The Fatwa and Legislation Department has approved the executive regulations for Law No. 126/2023, which targets the monopolization of vacant and undeveloped land, following its referral by the Ministry of Finance, reports Al-Seyassah daily.**

According to informed sources, the executive regulations are expected to be published in the official gazette "Kuwait Al-youm" in the second half of January, paving the way for the gradual collection of progressive fees starting February 1.

They confirmed that the regulations outline the mechanism for collecting the progressive tax, specify the entities responsible for overseeing its implementation, and detail the collection phases.

The sources also anticipated that the Ministry of Finance will step up awareness campaigns and media

briefings to answer questions from experts and relevant parties regarding the implementation process, the number of beneficiaries, and expected revenue, as well as to counter rumors and misinformation surrounding the law.

It is worth noting that the law against the monopolization of vacant land aims to address the housing crisis by imposing progressive annual fees on undeveloped residential land exceeding 1,500 square meters for encouraging construction and development.

The progressive fee will take effect starting February 1, 2026.

Important provisions of the law include an annual fee beginning at KD 10 per square meter for land exceeding 1,500 square meters, which will gradually increase up to KD 100 per square meter per year.

Lands without infrastructure services, those not yet subdivided or regulated by Kuwait Municipality, or those with zoning completed less than two years ago, are exempt from the fee.

The law also prohibits companies, banks, and sole proprietorships from owning or mortgaging vacant land designated for private residential use.

## Families leave with sponsor husband

### 39,487 expatriates deported for breaking laws in year '25

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: A total of 39,487 expatriates were deported from Kuwait in 2025 for reasons related to public interest, drug and psychotropic substance use, and violations of applicable laws and regulations, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to security sources, these figures reflect a firm security approach to enforcing the law, and highlight the authorities' commitment to strengthening security and stability and confronting anyone who disrupts public order or poses a threat to society.

Deportation decisions were issued after completing the necessary legal procedures and as part of ongoing security campaigns conducted by various security sectors in co-

ordination with relevant authorities to apprehend violators and pursue those who break the law.

Some deportees were residing with their families, and since these family members held residency permits sponsored by the deportees, they also left the country following the implementation of the deportation orders. Each case was determined based on the family's residency status.

The sources affirmed that security campaigns are ongoing and that authorities will continue taking deterrent measures against anyone who abuses residency or violates the law, while stressing that Kuwait welcomes all who abide by its regulations.

## Campaign targets violations of building demolition rules

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Kuwait Municipality's Public Relations Department announced the launch of a field campaign by safety departments in all governorates to monitor compliance with building demolition requirements, reports Al-Anba daily.

The campaign is being conducted in accordance with regulations governing demolition procedures for private, investment, commercial, industrial, and chalet properties, which must be carried out by classified demolition contractors and require an official demolition permit from the Municipality.

The department explained that the safety teams, staffed by national per-

sonnel, aim to ensure adherence to demolition requirements and procedures, take regulatory action against violators, and verify compliance with approved safety regulations and systems.

In this regard, the Director of the Safety Department at Hawally Municipality Eng. Khaled Al-Otaibi stated that the department's inspection team conducted a field tour during which several demolition sites were inspected.

He confirmed that the sites were found to be in compliance with safety requirements and held valid demolition permits to prevent accidents, adding that 16 safety permits were issued, including 12 for private housing and 4 for investment housing.



# Domino effect in rising ‘health fees’ for expats

“THE expatriate residents play a significant and vital role in the local economy. If we define the “economy” as production, factories, agriculture, services, crafts, money, consumption, and the country’s natural resources, we see that expatriates contribute substantially to it. This is evident in recent government decisions, such as raising health insurance fees for expatriates from KD 50 to KD 100. Such a move negatively affects expatriate residents and their families, and subsequently, citizens,” columnist **Ahmad Al-Dawas** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“Let’s look at some examples of the negative effects of certain government decisions. Every economic decision made by the government inevitably impacts the livelihoods of both citizens and residents. In an article we published in December 2014, we explained that raising fuel prices would lead to a “general increase in prices.” Merchants, manufacturers, and laborers would all raise their prices, which will in turn reduce a portion of citizens’ and residents’ incomes. This prediction proved accurate.



Ahmad Al-Dawas

“When the government raised diesel prices at the beginning of 2015, the cost of building materials such as concrete and sand surged. The price of constructing a house rose to KD 5,000, and some Iranian bakeries in certain cooperative societies were forced to close after kerosene prices increased. Another important point is that if the government raises health insurance fees to collect 200 million dinars annually from expatriates, it is doing so while undertaking major development projects. These projects are carried out by companies that rely on labor. Previously, the health insurance cost for 1,000 workers was KD 50,000, but now it will be KD 100,000 for the same workforce. This additional expense will increase companies’ bid prices, and ultimately, the government will bear the cost. This means that the funds collected by the Ministry of Health are spent by the government, generating no real revenue, while the people bear the burden.

“On an individual level, the decision to raise health insurance premiums for expatriates gives companies, shops, restaurants, and tradespeople an excuse to increase their prices. Citizens and residents purchase many goods, such as restaurant meals, and use the services of painters, carpenters, and mechanics. All of these providers are likely to raise their prices to offset the higher health fees, each claiming their costs have risen.

“This will result in what economists refer to as a “general price increase.” Both manufacturers and laborers will raise their prices, eroding a portion of income. Kuwait has never experienced inflation in its history, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, restaurant meal prices rose, and the price of a car tire increased from around KD 22 to KD 35, and even KD 56. Prices did not return to their previous levels. It is important to avoid setting the inflationary engine in motion, as many societies have suffered from its effects. We hope the government will carefully and calmly study its decisions, taking their negative consequences into account.

“God has blessed Kuwait with abundance, and the country is widely recognized as a symbol of humanity. It provides assistance worldwide through loans and grants. We urge the government to consider the circumstances of the expatriate community and avoid making life more difficult for them, as many are responsible for supporting families. If financial revenue is the goal, we hope the government will consider reducing the volume of loans it grants to other countries.”

## Also:

“Cosmetic surgery has seen a significant rise in popularity in recent years. It is no longer limited to women or purely therapeutic cases but has become a common means of enhancing appearance,” Kuwaiti lawyer **Sarah Al-Jassem** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“However, this widespread adoption has raised important questions about the limits of medical and professional liability, patients’ rights, and doctors’ responsibilities, especially in light of the recent increase in lawsuits related to cosmetic procedures. Cosmetic surgery is subject to strict medical liability rules, particularly because it is considered an elective procedure. The doctor is obligated to achieve the specific and expected result, not just to exercise due diligence.

“A doctor is legally liable if the agreed-upon result is not achieved, unless it can be proven that the patient’s own negligence contributed. This differs from traditional therapeutic procedures, where the doctor is generally only held accountable for medical errors. The Law Regulating the Practice of Human Medicine and Dentistry, along with other laws and regulations governing medical practice in Kuwait, establishes informed consent as a fundamental principle of patient care. This applies to medical treatments, cosmetic procedures, and other surgeries. The law requires physicians to obtain the patient’s signature on consent forms

and to fully inform the patient of all procedure details, potential risks, and side effects.

“Consent must be explicit and given by a patient with full legal capacity. The patient must clearly understand the nature of the procedure to be performed. Any failure to provide full disclosure, misrepresentation, or use of unlicensed or expired cosmetic materials can result in civil and criminal liability for the physician. Penalties may include fines, suspension, or revocation of the medical license, and in some cases, may even involve criminal charges and imprisonment.

“In cases of medical malpractice during cosmetic procedures, patients have the right to seek legal recourse and claim compensation, both material and moral, for physical or psychological harm or disfigurement. Conversely, a doctor is not legally liable for an unsatisfactory outcome if they can prove adherence to established medical standards, obtained proper informed consent, and did not commit negligence, malpractice, or gross professional error.

“The increased penalties imposed by the judiciary for medical errors and for clinics violating Ministry of Health regulations, together with the legal framework governing such cases, aim to balance an individual’s right to enhance their appearance with the protection of patients from exploitation or risk. Beauty should not come at the expense of safety or outside the bounds of the law, ensuring both societal protection and patients’ rights.”



“In Friday sermons throughout the Islamic world, there are often observations from worshippers about preachers, or vice versa, as if there is a conflict between the two sides,” columnist Eng. **Adel Al-Jarallah Al-Kharafi** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“However, the Quran is clear on this matter. It issues an explicit call to set everything aside for the sake of the Friday prayer, which holds great significance for Muslims. The Quran says, “O you who have believed, when the call is made for prayer on Friday, then proceed to the remembrance of Allah and leave off trade. That is better for you, if you only knew.”

“This is what I observed during my recent vacation in an Arab Islamic country. In the mosque where the prayer was held, a large crowd of different nationalities had gathered. During the sermon, the preacher prayed for the leaders of that country, but the congregation’s response was not as strong as expected. The ‘Ameen’ was faint, and only a few raised their hands in supplication. However, when the preacher prayed for the Muslims, the congregation’s response was strong and enthusiastic. The “Ameen” rang out loudly, and all hands were raised.

“Here, I paused to reflect on an undeniable fact - that country had opened its doors to all these people, offering them work and the opportunity to



Adel Al-Kharafi

improve their lives. Therefore, it was only appropriate to acknowledge this and pray for the country and its leaders, but this was not the case. In some instances, there is even a hidden negative sentiment among some people. We witnessed this during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and hostile attitudes still exist in some Muslim countries today.

“Everyone knows that the purpose of the Friday sermon has changed from what it once was before the age of technology and the spread of media and social platforms. In the past, the Friday sermon aimed to convey the message of Islam and guide the congregation. Today, however, for many people it has become merely a ritual. As a result, many wait outside the mosque during the sermon until the prayer begins, while others attend but do not listen attentively. This is undoubtedly a shortcoming, as the purpose of Friday worship is not limited to the prayer alone. Friday carries a deeper meaning, and the sermon is as instructive and necessary as ever, especially in this turbulent world where many issues are unclear to people.

“Praying for the leaders of a nation reflects a strong sense of belonging. As the saying goes, “Wherever your sustenance is, there is your homeland.” Therefore, those who provide for you deserve your prayers. This issue exists in many Muslim countries, as there is often no clear discourse explaining the relationship between loyalty to one’s homeland and loyalty to one’s adopted homeland. Updating this discourse has thus become essential. Islam, at its core, is a religion of humanity. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, “There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab, nor of a non-Arab over an Arab, nor of a white person over a black person, nor of a black person over a white person. The only criterion is fear of God Almighty. All people are from Adam, and Adam was created from dust.” This statement is both a call for equality among all people and a clear reminder to respect others.”

– Compiled by Simi K. Kutty

## Project to cut traffic congestion, improve flow

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah officially inaugurated the expansion project for the South Abdullah Al-Mubarak exit on Saturday evening.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, the ceremony was attended by the acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Works Engineer Eid Al-Rashidi, along with various security officials and representatives from the Ministry of Public Works.

Governor Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser highlighted that this development is an important part of the joint effort to upgrade the governorate’s infrastructure and road network, reduce traffic congestion and improve overall traffic flow.

Furthermore, he highlighted that the project reflects the relevant authorities’ commitment to implementing essential projects that benefit both citizens and residents.

Project officials stated that the exit expansion is designed to improve traffic safety and facilitate access to and from the area.

They also emphasized the ongoing collabora-



Farwaniya Governorate photo  
Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah is received with flowers upon arrival at the site.

ation between the Farwaniya Governorate, the Ministry of Public Works, and security agencies to ensure the project is completed on time and meets high-quality standards.

## GCC level award

### KFF captain wins Best Scientific Poster Prize

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Chief of the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), Major General Talal Mohammad Al-Roumi, received Captain Yousef Khatlan recently to congratulate him on winning first place in the Best Scientific Poster Award at the GCC level during GIS Day 2025, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.



Al-Roumi

Captain Khatlan received the award for his research paper titled “Analysis of Spatial Coverage Efficiency of the Riyadh Metro Network in Light of Population Distribution Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS).”

He had participated as a Master’s student in Geographic Information Systems and as a KFF representative. Major General Al-Roumi expressed pride in this achievement, praising the efforts of KFF members and their role in representing Kuwait with distinction at regional and international scientific forums.

He emphasized the KFF’s commitment to supporting national scientific talent and promoting excellence and innovation.

## 2 hurt in lift fall

### Worker dies in fire on ‘Al-Wafra’ farmhouse

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Fire engulfed a chalet on a farm in the Al-Wafra agricultural area on Saturday morning, resulting in the death of a worker, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

The Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) stated in a press release that firefighters from Al-Wafra Fire Station rushed to the location as soon as they received information about the chalet on fire, and quickly extinguished it.

The body of the deceased worker was handed over to the relevant authorities to complete the necessary legal procedures.

Meanwhile, two individuals sustained injuries when an elevator inside a building in Sabhan malfunctioned, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

According to informed sources, firefighters from Al-Bairaq Fire Station rushed to the building after receiving reports of the elevator malfunction. The two victims were quickly rescued and handed over to the relevant authorities for medical treatment. Investigations into the cause of the malfunction were launched.

### Partial traffic opening on Sabahiya street diversion

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The Ministry of Public Works (MPW), in coordination with the General Traffic Department, announced the partial opening of a traffic diversion on Street 9 in Sabahiya, between Blocks 4 and 5, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

The diversion, for traffic heading from the Teachers’ Roundabout to the Gas Station Roundabout, was opened at midnight on Saturday, January 3.

The Ministry of Public Works announced the continuation of asphalt paving work in Jaber Al-Ahmad, as part of new contracts for comprehensive road maintenance to fully rehabilitate roads according to the highest technical specifications and standards, reports **Al-Jarida** daily.

The work involves removing old asphalt layers, repairing subsidence and cracks, and maintaining rainwater drainage networks before laying new asphalt, ensuring improved road efficiency and extended lifespan.

These projects are carried out according to a specific timetable under direct engineering supervision, with full adherence to traffic safety measures to minimize disruption to traffic flow in the area.

The ministry highlighted that these comprehensive maintenance efforts are part of an integrated plan to develop road infrastructure in various governorates and enhance the level of services provided.

### Kuwaiti citizen perishes in multiple car flipover

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: A horrific traffic accident on Salmi Road resulted in the death of a Kuwaiti citizen in his 40s.

According to a security source, the Operations Unit at the Ministry of Interior received information that a vehicle rolled over on Salmi Road. Security and ambulance personnel rushed to the scene and confirmed the death of the citizen, whose body was transferred to the Forensic Department.

A case was registered and investigations are ongoing to determine the circumstances that led to the fatal accident.



**KFF conducts drill:** As part of the cooperation between the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) and the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), KFF conducted a practical exercise at the new Kuwait Oil Company Hospital, which involved evacuating the hospital, rescuing the injured, and controlling a simulated fire, all within the exercise scenario, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

These exercises, carried out by KFF, aim to ensure a rapid response to emergencies, protect lives and property, and maintain public safety in the country.

# 1,100 mobile food trucks lose license

No misuse, exploitation: Al-Ajeel



KUNA photo

Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Abdul Latif Hamed Al-Mishari talking to mobile food truck owners at the site.

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel conducted a field visit recently to the newly designated sites and spaces for mobile food trucks, reports Al-Seyassah daily.**

He was accompanied by Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Abdul Latif Hamed Al-Mishari and Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Mohammad Al-Mashaan.

In a press statement issued following the visit, Al-Ajeel explained that the ministry is continuing its regulatory efforts to develop the mobile food truck sector, aiming to create a fairer and more sustainable business environment and improve the quality of services provided. The ministry’s procedures are guided by a fundamental objective, which is supporting entrepreneurs and legitimate business owners who comply with the law and approved regulations. Protecting the interests of compliant entrepreneurs

is a top regulatory priority. He highlighted the importance of shielding serious business owners from practices that create unfair competition or harm their opportunities, ensuring that licenses are not exploited at the expense of those who follow the law.

The minister said the ministry has revoked over 1,100 mobile food truck licenses due to inactivity, expired licenses, or failure to meet regulatory requirements, as part of a comprehensive plan to streamline commercial registrations.

He stressed that while supporting legitimate projects, the ministry is enforcing strict oversight measures to address violations and prevent any misuse or exploitation of licenses.

Al-Ajeel noted that five new locations for mobile food trucks will be designated this month, which will be strategically distributed across several regions to ensure fair access and facilitate monitoring and regulation.

He concluded by reaffirming the ministry’s commitment to developing regulatory and oversight frameworks that serve the public interest and strengthen confidence in the business environment.



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# Council calls for wedding halls in housing projects

Al-Enezi urges land allocation and permits

**By Inaas Awadh**  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Citing Kuwait Municipality Law No. 33/2016, Municipal Council member Abdullah Al-Enezi submitted questions to Kuwait Municipality's executive body regarding the multi-purpose wedding halls included in the housing projects plan.**

He highlighted that these halls are vital facilities that serve the community's needs for social and cultural events, and provide an organized and safe environment that enhances public order and the aesthetic appearance of residential areas.

Al-Enezi stressed the importance of including these halls within the Public Authority for Housing Welfare's (PAHW) projects as part of

integrated community services, referring to a letter issued by PAHW on July 21, 2024.

He also called for coordination between the municipality, PAHW, and the Ministry of Social Affairs.

In this context, Al-Enezi directed four questions to the municipality regarding the allocation, transfer, and handover of land for wedding halls in various cities and residential areas, the issuance of building permits for these halls, and any future plans to allocate land for this purpose.

## Enhancing services and community cooperation

# Farwaniya Governor holds talks with Cooperative Society leaders

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah received the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Farwaniya Cooperative Society Fawaz Al-Murshad, who was accompanied by Director General Mubarak Al-Murshad, at the governorate headquarters on Sunday morning.



Farwaniya Governorate photo

Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi (center) with Fawaz Al-Murshad, Chairman of Farwaniya Cooperative Society, and Director General Mubarak Al-Murshad during a meeting at the governorate headquarters.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, the discussions during the meeting focused on strengthening cooperation and coordination between the governorate and cooperative societies to better serve the residents of Farwaniya Governorate.

They discussed several topics of mutual interest, including strategies to develop cooperative work to meet citizens' needs and enhance the quality of services provided.

Governor Sheikh Athbi highlighted the vital role of cooperative societies as important partners in serving the community and promoting social and economic stability within the governorate.

At the end of the meeting, Al-Murshad expressed his gratitude to the governor for the warm reception and his ongoing efforts.

He praised Sheikh Athbi's dedication to supporting cooperative work and his continuous engagement with community institutions to achieve the public good.

## Other Voices

# Remembering Begum Khaleda Zia

By Nasser Al-Hajeri

Bangladesh has lost one of its most influential national figures with the passing of Begum Khaleda Zia, the former Prime Minister of Bangladesh. Her life and leadership shaped key chapters of the country's modern political history and left a quiet but lasting mark on its relations with many countries, including Kuwait. Formed by difficult times, her journey from personal loss to national leadership remains one of the defining stories of Bangladesh's public life.

As Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia led Bangladesh during key periods of political change. She worked to strengthen democratic life, support state institutions, and give Bangladesh a clearer voice on the international stage. Her leadership style was firm yet deeply aware of the needs of ordinary people. She understood the importance of stability, national pride, and sovereignty, values that resonated strongly with many countries that shared similar histories.

Relations between Bangladesh and Kuwait developed steadily during her time in office. These ties were built on mutual respect, cooperation, and people to people connections. Thousands of Bangladeshi citizens have lived and worked in Kuwait for decades, contributing to its development while



Al-Hajeri

supporting families back home. Under her leadership, this relationship was treated with care and seriousness, recognizing both the human and diplomatic dimensions of the bond between the two nations.

In the early 1990s, at a sensitive moment following the liberation of Kuwait, Bangladesh took part in international efforts that supported Kuwait's recovery. This included assistance in clearing landmines left behind after the conflict. While this was only one chapter in a broader relationship, it reflected a spirit of solidarity and responsibility that defined Bangladesh's role abroad during her leadership.

Begum Khaleda Zia also played a wider role in promoting Bangladesh as a country committed to peace and cooperation. Her government supported international engagement, regional dialogue, and humanitarian efforts. Through these actions, Bangladesh strengthened its reputation as a nation willing to contribute beyond its borders.

Her legacy is not only found in policies or offices held, but in the long term relationships built on trust and shared respect. For many in Kuwait, her name is remembered with appreciation for a period when friendship between the two countries was reinforced through action and goodwill.

As Bangladesh mourns her passing, the world remembers a leader whose life reflected resilience, service, and a belief in constructive engagement. Her story remains part of the shared history between nations, and her memory will endure through the ties she helped strengthen.

## Eight-hour shifts applied across units

# MEWRE sets new shift system

By Mohammad Ghanem  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr. Adel Al-Zamel issued a decision on the organization of shift work for ministry employees under the shift system, effective from the beginning of March.

The newspaper obtained a copy of the decision, which stipulates in its first article that the shift system will be implemented in all organizational units,

with an eight-hour workday for three consecutive days followed by a day off, in accordance with Civil Service Council Resolution No. 12/2012 and its amendments.

The second article exempts from the provisions of the first article the organizational units that obtained approval from the Civil Service Commission (CSC).

The third article states that subsequent organizational decisions will be issued specifying the number of shift assignments and the appropriate job titles for each organizational unit.

## Over 700 violations seized

# MoCI steps up market inspections

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The Commercial Control and Consumer Protection Department at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry continued its intensive inspection campaigns in various sectors during November, which reflects the ministry's commitment to regulating markets and protecting consumer rights, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to statistics issued by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, a total of 702 seizure reports were issued during the month as part of field inspections covering various commercial and service activities.

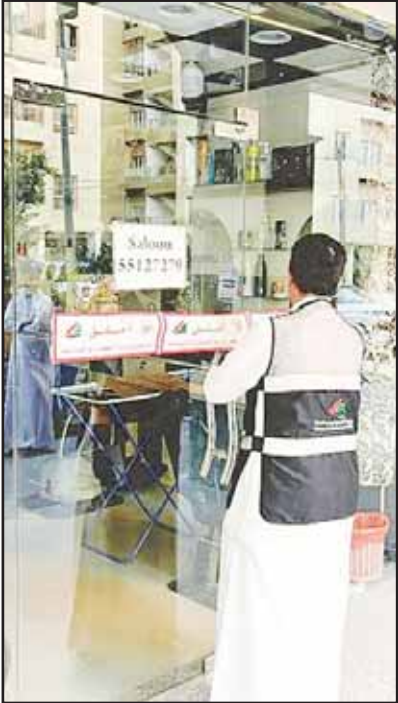
The ministry emphasized that these measures are in line with the enforcement of laws and regulations governing markets.

The number of licensing violations reached 120, which highlights ongoing oversight efforts to ensure establishments comply with legal requirements and to address any violations that may affect market integrity or consumer rights.

Regarding public engagement, statistics indicate that 189 direct complaints were received, along with 3,494 complaints and inquiries submitted through electronic channels, including the ministry's website, WhatsApp, and the Sahel application. This reflects the growing reliance of consumers on digital platforms for communication and reporting.

According to informed sources, these figures reflect an increasing consumer awareness of the importance of reporting violations, as well as the effectiveness of the ministry's electronic channels in facilitating communication and expediting follow-up and resolution processes.

The sources said the department



MoCI photo

Part of monitoring violations.

completed 30 additional transactions during the same period within its regulatory and oversight framework, adding that inspection teams continue to carry out their duties according to a flexible oversight plan that responds to market needs and developments.

They affirmed that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry is committed to strengthening proactive oversight, intensifying inspection tours, and enhancing complaint mechanisms, adding that these efforts contribute to maintaining a fair business environment, protecting consumers, and promoting transparency and order in the markets.

## Continued from Page 1

# Maduro arrives

Some Venezuelan civilians and members of the military were killed, said Rodríguez, who didn't give a number. Trump said some U.S. forces were injured, but none was killed.

Speaking to reporters hours after Maduro's capture, Trump revealed his plans to exploit the leadership void to "fix" the country's oil infrastructure and sell "large amounts" of oil to other countries.

After arriving at a small airport in New York City's northern suburbs, Maduro was flown by helicopter to Manhattan, where a convoy of law enforcement vehicles, including an armored car, was waiting to whisk him to a nearby U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration office.

A video posted on social media by a White House account showed Maduro, smiling, as he was escorted through that office by two DEA agents grasping his arms.

The Trump administration promoted the ouster as a step toward reducing the flow of dangerous drugs into the U.S. The president touted what he saw as other potential benefits, including a leadership stake in the country and greater control of oil.

Trump claimed the U.S. government would help lead the country and was already doing so, though there were no immediate visible signs of that. Venezuelan state TV aired pro-Maduro propaganda and broadcast live images of supporters taking to the streets in Caracas in protest.

"We're going to run the country until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition," Trump said at a Mar-a-Lago news conference. He boasted that this "extremely successful operation should serve as warning to anyone who would threaten American sovereignty or endanger American lives."

— See Also Page 7



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Continued from Page 1

Kuwait needs

that Kuwait historically engaged in (like exporting roses). Agricultural tourism is also a crucial source of financial return.

In addition to this, the pursuit of entertainment projects can help alleviate the fiscal burden on the State, as previously discussed.

It must be reiterated that Kuwait is not in a position worse than its neighbors, as Gulf countries worked hard to build diversified economies.

For example, non-oil revenues account for about 70 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and approximately 50 percent in Saudi Arabia.

The Cabinet members must take these facts into consideration. Considering all the necessary resources are available now, they are well-equipped to launch a comprehensive development plan aimed at revitalizing the national economy, and welcoming domestic and foreign investments.

This objective is achievable, as the nation’s expatriate workforce and visitors are considered important assets.

Other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations demonstrated this success by opening their borders to everyone and establishing diversified economies without creating hardship for their own citizens.

A crucial point is that those who constructed the towers, cities and factories in those countries did not take their creations with them. They eventually left, but the buildings and infrastructure remained.

In this context, I am reminded of the late Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum. In the early 1980s, when some influential figures from Dubai voiced objection to Kuwaitis purchasing land and developing properties in the Emirate, he offered a powerful perspective. His response to them was: “These people are building in Dubai, they will leave, but the buildings will remain.”

The priority should be marketing opportunities wisely and proudly, not obstructing economic activity. Wisely investing a significant portion of sovereign wealth is crucial. Transforming the North and South into dynamic economic zones will generate thousands of jobs, support domestic products, boost State revenues, and diversify income streams.

It is counterproductive to be stuck in outdated methods like simply raising public fees, which is akin to wasting resources and fails to build a productive economy.

For instance, when the Ministry of Health raised fees for residents, those subject to the increase inevitably raised their own prices. Ultimately, this burden falls on the government, not on companies or the general public.

Countless avenues exist to increase the national product. The key is having competent leadership capable of navigating this situation.

Select expats

Article 3 stipulates that all provisions of previous decisions regarding civil ID cards remain in effect, provided they do not conflict with this decree.

The decision will come into force upon its publication in the official gazette “Kuwait al-Youm”. The Director General of PACI, along with the relevant authorities, is responsible for its implementation within their respective jurisdictions.

Expats can

The assistant undersecretary for technical affairs chairs the committee, while members include the directors of the Health Insurance and Guarantee Department, Legal Affairs Department and Financial Accounting Department, a representative of the Insurance Regulation Unit, and a doctor representing the Medical Association.

Al-Awadhi instructed the undersecretary of the ministry to assign employees of the Health Insurance and Guarantee Department, nominated by the department director, to receive complaints. These employees must register the complaint with a serial number, refer it to the committee, provide the complainant with confirmation of registration, coordinate with the committee to schedule the first hearing and notify the opposing parties within two weeks of the registration. He also authorized the submission of complaints electronically.

If the complaint is against the ministry, the Health Insurance and Guarantee Department will notify the Legal Department about it. The director of the Legal Department will then assign one of his employees to represent the ministry before the committee, ensuring that a statement is submitted including the name of the person against whom the complaint is filed, his address, telephone number, email address, a detailed account of the complaint and its grounds, complainant’s requests and supporting documents.

In addition, Al-Awadhi set the prices of five nutritional supplements – ranging from KD2,500 to KD6,300, and 111 medications and pharmaceutical preparations – ranging from 500 fils to KD9.378.

He also issued Ministerial Decision No. 373/2025 on the adoption of the Document of Principles and Ethical Conduct for employees in the public and private health sectors. The decision mandates the directors general, hospital directors, department heads, and the Quality and Accreditation Department to monitor compliance with the document and immediately submit a report in case of violation.

The document aims to guide and support medical professionals, allied health professionals, students, trainees, and owners and managers of health facilities on various areas of practice, professional development, and sound decision-making. It helps create a safe and healthy work environment built on the principles of integrity, ethics, respect and professionalism. It promotes the concept of patient-centered healthcare, aiming for excellence in healthcare with the highest quality and safety standards. It will be updated as needed.

Grade-12 exams

technical preparations for the exams.

He emphasized the ministry’s commitment to providing a safe and well-organized educational environment in all educational zones, ensuring the smooth and orderly conduct of the examinations in accordance with the highest standards of fairness and equal opportunity, and thereby reinforcing the integrity of the exams.

Al-Tabtabaei highlighted that the start of Grade-12 exams marks the culmination of years of dedicated study.

He noted that these exams reflect an advanced level of academic and intellectual maturity in preparing students for the next stage of their education where their responsibilities expand, and enhancing their readiness to contribute actively to serving the nation and shaping its future.

The minister expressed hope for outstanding results that reflect the students’ hard work throughout their academic journey and extended his best wishes, affirming his confidence in their ability to successfully complete this important stage.

Al-Tabtabaei also conveyed a message of respect and appreciation to parents, praising their vital role as active partners in the educational process and recognizing the support, guidance, and psychological and moral preparation they provide for their children.

Pakistan-Kuwait

He said this objective is in line with the goals of Kuwait Vision 2035 for national economic diversification.

Following are excerpts of the interview:

**Question:** How do you assess the level of bilateral relations between Pakistan and Kuwait at present? What are the most important milestones of cooperation between the two countries?

**Answer:** The relationship between Pakistan and Kuwait is exceptionally strong and stable, founded on mutual trust. This bond has been strengthened significantly under the prudent leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and through the constructive policies implemented by the Kuwaiti government.

The two nations share a common perspective on various regional and international matters. The vital areas of successful collaboration include the long-standing partnership in defense and security, close coordination within the Organization of Is-

lamic Cooperation and other international platforms, Kuwait’s consistent support for Pakistan during challenging periods, and decades of beneficial cooperation in labor affairs.

Currently, the central goal is to build upon this robust political foundation by fostering a deeper and more extensive economic partnership.

**Q:** What are your priorities during your tenure in Kuwait in order to strengthen political, economic and investment cooperation between the two countries?

**A:** My priorities are clear, as I am keen on achieving results. These priorities include strengthening high-level political communication, expanding trade and investment opportunities, facilitating more Kuwaiti investments – both public and private – in Pakistan, and developing cooperation in the fields of energy, healthcare, logistics and skilled labor.

Kuwait is the eighth largest investor in Pakistan globally and the second among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. My goal is to build on this success by providing a stable, profitable and attractive investment environment for Kuwaiti investors.

**Q:** How do you describe the current state of trade between the two countries?

**A:** Trade between Pakistan and Kuwait is gradually growing. The potential remains great. Pakistan is a vast and diverse market, not only for energy-related products, but also for Kuwaiti non-oil goods and services.

On the other hand, Kuwaiti importers have access to high-quality Pakistani products at competitive prices, thereby, enhancing profitability and ensuring reliable supply chains. It is a win-win situation that requires improving direct communication between the business communities of both countries.

**Q:** Are there reciprocal visits planned between the two countries in the coming year?

**A:** There is active coordination between the two sides to advance meaningful exchange. Technical delegations are expected to visit soon to work on the necessary preparations for high-level interactions, focusing on practical results and tangible outcomes, not just protocol visits.

**Q:** Regarding medical personnel, how many Pakistanis work in the healthcare sector in Kuwait? Is there a plan to increase their number?

**A:** Currently, more than 7,500 Pakistani doctors, nurses and allied healthcare professionals are working in Kuwait. They have a good reputation due to their high level of professionalism. Pakistani healthcare professionals are being recruited continuously, with the potential to increase their number, particularly in nursing, specialized medical fields, and allied health professions, in accordance with the needs of the Kuwaiti healthcare sector.

**Q:** In light of Kuwait Vision 2035, what opportunities are available to Pakistani companies and investors in the Kuwaiti market?

**A:** Kuwait Vision 2035 opens broad horizons for Pakistani companies in infrastructure development, construction, healthcare, information and communication technology, engineering services, logistics and skilled labor.

Pakistani companies possess the competitiveness, experience and flexibility that qualify them to contribute effectively to Kuwait’s national development priorities.

**Q:** Is there a plan to strengthen cooperation in the fields of education, vocational training, and the exchange of expertise?

**A:** Yes, strengthening cooperation in education, vocational training, and skills development is a shared priority. There are opportunities for cooperation in technical training, health education, professional accreditation, and the exchange of expertise between academic and training institutions, in line with the needs of the Kuwaiti labor market and leveraging Pakistani human capital. The Embassy of Pakistan recently facilitated communication between higher education and scientific research institutions in both countries, as well as between relevant medical and engineering institutions.

**Q:** What are the prospects for cooperation between Kuwait and Pakistan in humanitarian and development fields at the regional and international levels?

**A:** The prospects are very promising. Kuwait and Pakistan share similar visions regarding humanitarian and development work and have a history of constructive cooperation. There is considerable potential for coordinating efforts or implementing joint initiatives through multilateral platforms in the areas of humanitarian relief, disaster response and development projects.

**Q:** You previously mentioned cooperation with Kuwait to establish a direct shipping line between Pakistan’s Gwadar Port and Mubarak Port. What is the status of these consultations?

**A:** The proposal for connecting Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port – a strategic hub in the Belt and Road Initiative linking Asia, the Gulf, Africa and Europe – with Gwadar Port is under technical and commercial review. The study focuses on economic feasibility and mutual benefit. This connection will transform regional trade by reducing shipping times and integrating supply chains, supporting Kuwait Vision 2035’s goal of establishing Kuwait as a regional logistics and re-export hub.

The Ambassador also affirmed that the Pakistani community, consisting of more than 100,000, is a vital contributor to Kuwait’s economy and society. “Pakistan highly values the care and protection extended to its citizens by Kuwait’s leadership and institutions. The Embassy works closely with Kuwaiti authorities on consular protection and labor welfare. Kuwait’s responsive governance in safeguarding workers’ rights is commendable. Pakistan has high regard for Kuwait, respecting its wise leadership, valuing its friendship, and appreciating the care shown to the Pakistani community. Pakistan is deeply grateful for Kuwait’s swift, generous humanitarian disaster assistance, reflecting its deep values. Kuwait is seen as a global model of peace, benevolence and generosity,” he added.

OIC solidarity against unilateral recognition

Kuwait upholds Somalia’s sovereignty

JEDDAH, Jan 4, (KUNA): The State of Kuwait has expressed its full support for the sovereignty, stability and security of Somalia, saying that the fellow Arab country’s land must be united and undivided.

Speaking to the open representatives-level meeting for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Consul General of Kuwait in Jeddah and Permanent Representative to the OIC Yousef Al-Tunaib condemned the Israeli occupation’s attempts to divide land in Somalia with its recognition of so-called “Somaliland”, stressing that it was a blatant violation of international law. He commended the OIC for holding this meeting to address this important issue and said that protecting member states was a vital gesture of solidarity.

He reiterated Kuwait’s categorical refusal of the Israeli occupation’s recognition of so-called “Somaliland” and condemned this unilateral and illegitimate step. The northwestern region is an integral part of Somalia and will remain so against all unlawful attempts, Al-Tunaib stressed.



KUNA photo  
Yousef Al-Tunaib, Consul General of Kuwait in Jeddah and Permanent Representative to the OIC

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People mourn during a memorial procession in Crans-Montana, Swiss Alps, Switzerland, Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, after a devastating fire in Le Constellation bar left dead and injured during the New Year's celebrations. (AP)

Bar managers under investigation after blaze kills 40

Tears, silence mark tribute for Swiss fire victims

CRANS-MONTANA, Switzerland, Jan 4, (AP): Hundreds marched in silence Sunday to honor the victims of the New Year's Eve fire at a bar in the Swiss Alpine resort of Crans-Montana, which left 40 dead and many severely injured.

Somber mourners, many with reddened eyes, filed silently out of the chapel to organ music after the hourlong Mass at the Chapelle Saint-Christophe in Crans-Montana. Some exchanged hugs, others applauded, before joining the silent march up the hill to Le Constellation bar.

Many hundreds of people, some cradling flower bouquets, walked in the dense snaking procession in the bright sunlight past shuttered stores. Up on the mountain overlooking the town, snow machines sent plumes of white flakes into the air.

At the top of the street, in front of Le Constellation that is still largely shielded from view by white screens, the swelling crowd stood in near total silence, some weeping. Then they broke out into sustained applause - hands in gloves and mittens against the cold - as a stream of mourners and well-wishers deposited flower bouquets at a makeshift memorial piled with flowers, cuddly toys and other tributes.

"We are going through a moment of crushing darkness but we are going through it together," one speaker said.

During the Mass, the Rev. Gilles Cavin spoke of the "terrible uncertainty" for families unsure if their loved ones are among the dead or still alive among the injured. "We pray for their



Bishop Monseigneur Jean-Marie Lovey, left, greets Nicolas Feraud, President of Crans-Montana ahead of a Sunday Mass at the Chapelle St-Christophe, dedicated to the victims of the fire at the 'Le Constellation' bar and lounge, in Crans-Montana, Switzerland, on Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026. (AP)

friends hard hit by misery on this day that was meant to be one of festivities and friendship," he said.

In the crowded pews, a grieving woman listened intently, her hands clasped tightly and sometimes clasping rosary beads, as speakers delivered readings in German, French and Italian.

Forty people died and 119 were injured in the blaze that broke out around 1:30 a.m. on Thursday at Le Constellation bar. Police have said many of the victims were in their teens to mid-20s.

By Sunday morning, Swiss authorities identified 24 out of the 40 fatalities.

ties. They include 18 Swiss citizens aged 14 to 31 years, two Italians 16 years old, one dual citizen of Italy and the United Arab Emirates also 16 years old, an 18-year-old Romanian, a 39-year-old French and a Turkish citizen, 18.

One of the victims was 16-year old Arthur Brodard, whose mother had been frantically searching for him.

"Our Arthur has now left to party in paradise," a visibly shaken Laetitia Brodard said in a Facebook story posted on Saturday night, speaking to camera. "We can start our mourning, knowing that he is in peace and in the light."

Brodard's frenzied search for her son reflected the desperation of families of the young people disappeared during the fire, who did not know whether their loved ones were dead or in the hospital.

Swiss authorities said the process of identifying victims was particularly hard because of the advanced degree of the burns, requiring the use of DNA samples. Brodard also had given her DNA sample to help in the identification process.

In her Facebook post, Brodard thanked those who "testified their compassion, their love" and to those who shared information as she anxiously searched and waited for news of her son. Other parents and siblings are still waiting in anguish.

Swiss authorities have opened a criminal investigation of the bar managers. The two are suspected of involuntary homicide, involuntary bodily harm and involuntarily causing a fire, the Valais region's chief prosecutor, Beatrice Pilloud, told reporters Saturday. The announcement of the investigation did not name the managers.

Investigators said Friday they believe sparkling candles atop Champagne bottles ignited the fire when they came too close to the ceiling of the crowded bar.

Authorities planned to look into whether sound-dampening material on the ceiling conformed with regulations and whether the candles were permitted for use in the bar. Officials said they also would look at other safety measures on the premises, including fire extinguishers and escape routes.

Congress left on sidelines after Venezuela raid

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

By Sarah Burns

Rochester Institute of Technology

Americans woke up on Jan. 3, 2025, to blaring headlines: "US CAPTURES MADURO, TRUMP SAYS," declared The New York Times, using all capital letters. The U.S. had mounted an overnight military raid in Venezuela that immediately raised questions of procedure and legality. Prime among them was what role Congress had - or should have had - in the operation.

Politics editor Naomi Schalit interviewed

political scientist Sarah Burns, author of the book "The Politics of War Powers" and an expert at Rochester Institute of Technology on the historical struggle between Congress and U.S. presidents over who has the power to authorize military action.



Trump

Is this a war?

I wouldn't call it a war. This is regime change, and whether or not it has a positive impact on the United States, whether or not it has a positive impact on Venezuela, I think the likelihood is very low for both of those things being true.

How does Congress see its role in terms of military action initiated by the United States?

Congress has been, in my view, incredibly supine. But that's not just my word. Having said that, it is true that Congress - in the House, predominantly - tried to pass a war powers act recently, saying that President Donald Trump was not allowed to do any action against Venezuela, and that failed on very close votes.

So you see some effort on the part of Congress to assert itself in the realm of war. But it failed predominantly on party lines, with Democrats saying we really don't want to go into Venezuela. We really don't want to have this action. Republicans predominantly were supporting the president and whatever it happens to be that he would like to do. Moderate Republicans and Republicans who are in less safe districts were and are more likely to at least stand up a little bit to the president, but there's a very small number of them.

So there may be an institutional role for Congress, a constitutional role, a role that has been confirmed by legal opinion, but politics takes over in Congress when it comes to asserting its power in this realm?

That's a perfect way of putting it. They have a legal, constitutional, one might even say moral, responsibility to assert themselves as a branch, right? This is from Federalist 51 where James Madison says "Ambition must be made to counteract ambition." So it should be that as a branch, they assert themselves against the president and say, "We have a role here."

In the 1940s, presidential scholar Edward Corwin said that in the realm of foreign policy, it is an invitation for Congress and the president to struggle. So it should be that Congress and the president are struggling against each other to assert, "I'm in charge." "No, I'm in charge." "No, I'm in charge," in an effort to create a balance between the two branches and between the two things that each of the branches does well. What you want from Congress is slow deliberation and a

variety of opinions. What you want from the president is energy and dispatch.

So certainly, if we have an attack like 9/11, you would want the president to be able to act quickly. And you know, conversely, in situations like the questions around what the U.S. is doing in Venezuela, you want slow deliberation because there is no emergency that requires energy and dispatch and speed. So the president shouldn't be entirely in the driver's seat here, and Congress should very much be trying very hard to restrain him.

What power does Congress have to restrain him?

They have to pass legislation. They aren't particularly well suited right now to passing legislation, so effectively there is not a very clear way for them to restrain the president.

One of the things that members of Congress have attempted to do several times, with very little positive impact, is go to the courts and say, "Can you restrain the president?" And political scientist Jasmine Farrier has written that the courts have regularly said to members of Congress: "You have the power to stop the president, and you are ineffective at that. And so if you want to stop the president, you shouldn't turn to us. You should work together to create legislation that would restrain the president."

What would such legislation do? Cut off money for troops? Is it finger-wagging, or is it something really concrete?

There are a few different tiers. Joint resolutions are finger-wagging. They just say, "Bad, Mr. President, don't do that." But they have no effect in law.

The War Powers Resolution, first passed in 1973, is a legitimate way of trying to restrain the president. Congress intended to say to presidents, "You cannot start a war and continue a war without our authorization." But what they said instead was "You could have a small war or a short war - of 60 to 90 days - without our authorization, and then you have to tell us about it." That just sort of said to presidents the opposite of what they intended. So President Barack Obama took advantage of that with the military engagement in Libya, as well as Trump in his first administration.

This is not a partisan issue. It's not Republican presidents who do it. It's not Democratic presidents who do it. It's every president since the War Powers Resolution was passed, and the only time that Congress has drawn down troops or drawn down money was the Vietnam War.

Other than that disastrous war, we have not seen Congress willing to put themselves on the politically negative side, which is taking money away from the troops. Because if you take away money right now, they're going to be harmed.

What is the War Powers Resolution?

The War Powers Resolution from 1973, also known as the War Powers Act, was Congress - during the Vietnam War - saying definitively to President Richard Nixon, "You have overstepped your bounds." They had explicitly said in law, you cannot go into Cambodia. And Nixon went into Cambodia.

So that was their way of trying to reassert themselves very aggressively; as I mentioned before, it didn't work effectively. It worked insofar as presidents don't unilaterally start wars that are large scale, the way that World War II was large scale. But they do have these smaller actions at varying levels. (AP)

— vSee Also Page 7

Heavy rain, high tides cause flooding along stretch of Northern California



Streets are filled with floodwater along the swollen Corte Madera Creek during a king tide event in Corte Madera, Calif., Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026. (AP)

CORTE MADERA, Calif., Jan 4, (AP): Heavy rain and high tides believed to be the most severe in two decades caused flooding in parts of Northern California on Saturday, prompting road closures and rescues of people trapped in cars.

Roadways through a 15-mile (24-kilometer) stretch from the Sausalito area to San Rafael were flooded after a downpour coincided with record-breaking "King Tides," Marin County

Sheriff's Sgt. Michael Dobbins said. Authorities were called to assist when cars got stuck in water as high as 3 and 4 feet (1.1 and 1.2 meters), Dobbins said.

"There is a lot of water in the roadways," Dobbins said, adding that the tides were reportedly the highest in more than two decades. "Along with heavy rains, it just created the perfect storm for flooding on the streets."

Authorities in the affected communi-

ties, which are north of San Francisco, asked people to stay home until waters recede. Some people kayaked along swamped streets, while others waded through water above their knees.

A flood warning was in place for the San Francisco area until 2 p.m. Saturday and an advisory until 2 p.m. Sunday, according to the National Weather Service, and repeated rounds of rain were expected throughout the state on Sunday and Monday.

To the south in Santa Barbara County, roads were closed due to flooding and a key highway was blocked near Goleta due to a series of mudslides. A man died after he was swept into a creek during the storm, the county sheriff's office said.

King Tides occur when the sun, moon and Earth are in alignment and the moon is in its closest position to the Earth, creating a stronger gravitational pull.

Kyiv hosts int'l advisers as peace talks intensify

KYIV, Jan 4, (AP): National security advisers from Europe and other allies visited Kyiv on Saturday to discuss security guarantees and economic support as a U.S.-led diplomatic push to end the nearly 4-year-old war in Ukraine intensifies.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, preparing to travel to Paris for a meeting with partners, said work on the peace proposals could now accelerate as Ukraine has shared all documents under discussion with the 18 national security advisers, including those on security guarantees.

"We expect that this further work will

now take place in the capitals of European countries as well as Canada, Japan and other representatives of the Coalition of the Willing," he said, referring to the approximately 30 countries who support Kyiv's effort to end the war with Russia on acceptable terms. "We are not allocating a great deal of time for this process," Zelenskyy added.

He said representatives from Ukraine's General Staff and military sector would meet on Monday in Paris, followed by a meeting Tuesday of European leaders, where he said he hoped documents on security guarantees would be finalized.



European countries national security advisers attend a security forum in Kyiv, Ukraine, Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026. (AP)

Europe

**Greece flights grounded:** All flights in and out of Greece were suspended on Sunday after a nationwide communications failure disrupted air traffic control systems, Greek state broadcaster ERT reported.

The problem occurred at around 9:35 a.m. local time (0735 GMT), affecting Greek airspace and halting arrivals and departures at Athens International Airport as well as regional airports. (Xinhua)

**11 seek Portugal seat:** A record number of 11 candidates in Portugal's upcoming presidential election kicked off their campaigns on Sunday.

The official two-week campaign period preceding the Jan. 18 election will see the contenders competing to capture voters' support. However, the broad field makes it unlikely that any candidate will capture more than 50% of the vote, leaving the two top candidates to compete in a runoff ballot on Feb. 8. (AP)

**Drone strike kills one:** One person was killed and two others wounded when a Ukrainian drone struck a car in the Russian border region of Belgorod, local officials said Sunday, ahead of peace talks to end the nearly 4-year-old war in Paris this week.

Belgorod regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said a young child was among the wounded. (AP)

**Avalanches kill 3 in Italy:** Three people were killed and several others injured after a series of avalanches struck the Italian Alps on Friday, local rescue services said.

One fatal incident occurred in Val Maira in the north-west Piedmont region, where an avalanche at an altitude of over 2,300 meters engulfed a German couple. A 50-year-old woman was killed, while her partner was hospitalized in critical condition, according to Italian media. (Xinhua)





A woman cries during a rally of supporters of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in Caracas, Venezuela, Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026, after U.S. President Donald Trump announced Maduro had been captured and flown out of the country. (AP)



F.S. of Berkeley holds a sign stating 'No Bombs' during a protest against the U.S. bombing of Venezuela and seizure of President Nicolás Maduro in San Francisco on Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026. (AP)



Venezuelans celebrate at the Obelisk in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026, after U.S. President Donald Trump announced that President Nicolas Maduro had been captured and flown out of Venezuela. (AP)

Fear in Caracas, celebrations in Miami as Venezuela’s strongman falls

# Venezuela in limbo after US ousts President Maduro

CARACAS, Jan 4, (AP): Venezuelans scrambled to understand who was in charge of their country after the U.S. military captured President Nicolás Maduro, ousting the strongman who had outlasted a botched coup attempt, several army mutinies, mass protests and economic sanctions in the vast nation of 29 million.

“What will happen tomorrow?” asked Juan Pablo Petrone, a resident of Venezuela’s capital of Caracas. As fear gripped the city, streets quickly emptied save for long lines snaking from supermarkets and gas stations. “What will happen in the next hour?”

President Donald Trump offered a shocking answer: The United States would take control of Venezuela, perhaps in coordination with one of Maduro’s most trusted aides.

Delcy Rodríguez, who is next in the presidential line of succession, served as Maduro’s vice president since 2018, overseeing much of Venezuela’s oil-dependent economy as well as its feared intelligence service. On Saturday, Venezuela’s high court ordered her to assume the role of interim president.

“She’s essentially willing to do what we think is necessary to make Venezuela great again,” Trump told reporters of Rodríguez, who faced

U.S. sanctions during Trump’s first administration for her role in undermining Venezuelan democracy.

In a major snub, Trump said opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, who was awarded last year’s Nobel Peace Prize, didn’t have the support to run the country.

Trump said Rodríguez had a long conversation with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio in which Trump claimed she said, “‘We’ll do whatever you need.’”

“I think she was quite gracious,” Trump added. “We can’t take a chance that somebody else takes over Venezuela that doesn’t have the good of the Venezuelan people in mind.”

Key Venezuelan officials appeared to have survived the military operation and held onto their jobs, at least for now. There was no immediate sign that the U.S. was running Venezuela.

Rodríguez tried to project strength and unity among the ruling party’s many factions, downplaying any hint of betrayal. In remarks on state television before the court decision, she demanded the immediate release of Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, and denounced the U.S. operation as a flagrant violation of the United Nations charter.

“There is only one president in this country, and his name is Nicolás Maduro,” Rodríguez said, surrounded by top civilian officials and military commanders.

Seeking to assuage the jittery public, Venezuelan military officials struck a defiant tone in video messages, lashing out at Trump and vowing to stand up to U.S. pressure.

“They have attacked us but will not break us,” said Defense Minister Gen. Vladimir Padrino López, dressed in fatigues.

Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello, among Maduro’s top enforcers, urged Venezuelans to “get out on the streets” to defend the country’s sovereignty.

Meanwhile, revelers chanted “liberty” and draped Venezuelan flags over their shoulders in South Florida on Saturday to celebrate the U.S. military operation to capture Nicolás Maduro and remove him from the country - a stunning outcome they had longed for but left them wondering what comes next in their troubled homeland.

For some Venezuelan natives, the military action - culminating months of stepped-up U.S. pressure - brought their dreams of reuniting with loved ones closer to reality after years of heartbreaking separations.

People gathered for a rally in Dorland - the Miami suburb where President Donald Trump has a golf resort and where roughly half the population is of Venezuelan descent - as word spread that Venezuela’s now-deposed president had been captured

and flown out of the country.

Outside El Arepazo restaurant, a hub of the Venezuelan culture of Doral, one man held a piece of cardboard with “Libertad” scrawled with a black marker. It was a sentiment expressed by other native Venezuelans hoping for a new beginning for their home country as they chanted “Liberty! Liberty! Liberty!”

“We’re like everybody - it’s a combination of feelings, of course,” said Alejandra Arrieta, who came to the U.S. in 1997. “There’s fears. There’s excitement. There’s so many years that we’ve been waiting for this. Something had to happen in Venezuela. We all need the freedom.”

For David Nuñez, the regime change offered hope for a long-awaited reunion with loved ones.

Nuñez said he fled to the United States six years ago after being persecuted in Venezuela for his political activism and has not seen his daughters - ages 8 and 17 - since then.

“The most important thing is that we’re going to be able to be with our families soon,” Nuñez said. “At least for me, I haven’t seen my daughters in six years so I have a lot of mixed feelings. I’ve cried a lot. I’m really happy because I know that I’m going to be able to return to Venezuela very soon.”

ereignty.

“These rats attacked and they will regret what they did,” he said of the U.S.

Some Venezuelans heeded his call, rallying in support of the government and burning American flags in scattered gatherings across Caracas on Saturday.

But most people stayed inside out of fear.

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In this photo released by the White House, President Donald Trump monitors U.S. military operations in Venezuela with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and CIA Director John Ratcliffe, center, at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Fla., Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026. (AP)

## US calls for end to violence

# Over 6,100 prisoners freed in Myanmar amnesty

BANGKOK, Jan 4, (AP): Myanmar’s military government granted amnesty to more than 6,100 prisoners and reduced other inmates’ sentences Sunday to mark the 78th anniversary of the country’s independence from Britain.

It was not immediately clear whether those released include the thousands of political detainees imprisoned for opposing military rule.

The amnesty comes as the military government proceeds with a monthlong, three-stage election process that critics say is designed to add a facade of legitimacy to the status quo.

State-run MRTV television reported that Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, the head of the military government, pardoned 6,134 prisoners.

A separate statement said 52 foreigners will also be released and deported from Myanmar. No comprehensive list of those freed is available.

Other prisoners received reduced sentences, except for those convicted of serious charges such as murder and rape or those jailed on charges under various other security acts.

The release terms warn that if the freed detainees violate the law again, they will have to serve the remainder of their original sentences in addition to any new sentence.

The prisoner releases, common on holidays and other significant occasions in Myanmar, began Sunday and are expected to take several days to complete.

Buses took prisoners out of Yangon’s Insein Prison after 11 a.m., where friends and families of detainees had waited since morning for the announced releases.

Among the first group freed from Insein Prison, according to the pro-army news outlet Popular News Journal, was Ye Htut, a former high-profile army officer who had served as information minister and presi-



A released prisoner, center, is welcomed by his family members after he was released from Insein Prison Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, in Yangon, Myanmar. (AP)

dential spokesperson in a previous military-backed government.

He was arrested in October 2023 and sentenced to 10 years in prison the following month after being convicted of sedition and incitement for writing Facebook posts that allegedly spread false or inflammatory news.

However, there was no sign that the prisoner release would include former leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was ousted in the military takeover in 2021 and has been held vir-

tually incommunicado since then.

The takeover was met with massive nonviolent resistance, which has since become a widespread armed struggle.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, an independent organization that keeps detailed tallies of arrests and casualties linked to the nation’s political conflicts, more than 22,000 political detainees, including Suu Kyi, were in detention as of last Tuesday.

Many political detainees had been held on a charge of incitement, a catch-all offense widely used to arrest critics of the government or military and punishable by up to three years in prison.

The 80-year-old Suu Kyi is serving a 27-year sentence after being convicted in what supporters have called politically tinged prosecutions.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio in a statement Sunday called for the military to cease violence, allow unhindered humanitarian access, release those unjustly detained and engage in dialogue to pursue a peaceful and long-term end to the crisis.

Myanmar became a British colony in the late 19th century and regained its independence on Jan. 4, 1948.

The anniversary was marked in the capital, Naypyitaw, with a flag-raising ceremony at City Hall on Sunday.

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President of the Republic of Korea Lee Jae Myung arrives in Beijing, capital of China, Jan. 4, 2026. At the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping, President of the Republic of Korea Lee Jae Myung arrived in Beijing on Sunday for a state visit to China from Jan. 4 to 7. (Xinhua)

# Seoul backs One-China stance as Lee meets Xi

HONG KONG, Jan 4, (AP): South Korean President Lee Jae Myung arrived in China on Sunday as Beijing looks to deepen ties with the nearby country after heightened tensions between China and Japan over Taiwan, a self-ruled island it claims as its sovereign territory.

Lee’s four-day trip is his first visit to China since taking office in June. It comes at a time of heightened tensions between China and Japan, after Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said in November that her country’s military could get involved if China were to take action against Taiwan.

China’s official news agency Xinhua reported on Sunday afternoon that Lee arrived in Beijing. During his stay, Lee will meet with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, their second meeting in just two months.

Ahead of his trip, Lee gave an interview to China’s state broadcaster CCTV at Seoul’s Cheong Wa Dae, the presidential office also known as the Blue House. Lee was quoted as saying that it was his first interview held in the presidential palace and that he hoped people would understand that his government cares about the relations between Beijing and Seoul.

In the interview, he assured that South Korea consistently respects the “One-China” policy when it comes to Taiwan, CCTV reported Friday. He said the healthy development of Beijing-Seoul relations depends on mutual respect. Lee also praised Xi as a “truly reliable neighbor.”

Last week, China staged large-scale military drills around the island for two days to warn against separatist and “external interference” forces. At that time, the Chinese Foreign Ministry accused Taiwan’s ruling party of trying to seek independence through requesting U.S. support.

The U.S. planned large-scale arms sales to Taiwan angered Beijing in December, leading to China sanctioning 20 U.S. defense-related companies.

Lee said Seoul’s cooperation with the U.S., its military ally, does not mean South Korea-China relations should move toward confrontation, CCTV

reported. He acknowledged that past misunderstandings between his country and China had hindered bilateral relations.

“This visit to China aims to minimize or eliminate these past misunderstandings or contradictions, to elevate and develop South Korea-China relations to a new stage,” CCTV quoted him as saying.

South Korea and the U.S. have urged China, North Korea’s traditional ally and economic pipeline, to use its influence on its socialist neighbor to convince it to return to talks or abandon its nuclear program.

But China has long been suspected of avoiding fully implementing U.N. sanctions on North Korea and sending clandestine aid shipments to help the North stay afloat and continue to serve as a bulwark against U.S. influence on the Korean Peninsula.

On Sunday, North Korea launched multiple ballistic missiles toward the sea, South Korea’s military said, the latest weapons demonstration by the North ahead of its upcoming ruling party congress.

Lee’s visit is meant to strengthen bilateral ties and discuss ways to restore peace on the Korean Peninsula, South Korean officials said.

During Monday’s summit, Lee and Xi are to hold “in-depth talks on substantive ways” to address security and economic issues facing the two countries, South Korea’s national security adviser Wi Sung-lac told a briefing Friday. On Tuesday, Lee is to meet Zhao Leji, chairman of the National People’s Congress, and Premier Li Qiang, Wi said.

During Lee’s trip, South Korea will also request that China play “a constructive role” in efforts to promote peace on the Korean Peninsula, Wi said. In their November talks, Lee already asked Xi to make greater efforts to persuade North Korea to return to talks.

South Korea would push for substantial achievements that could directly benefit ordinary citizens in both countries too, Wi said.

## Africa

**Gunmen kill 30:** At least 30 villagers have been killed while several others were abducted by gunmen who raided a village in northern Nigeria’s Niger state, police said Sunday, the latest in a cycle of deadly violence in the conflict-hit region.

The gunmen stormed the Kasuwan-Daji village in Niger state’s Borgu local government area on Saturday evening and opened fire on residents. They also razed down the local market and several houses, Niger state police spokesman Wasiu Abiodun said in a statement.

At least two residents put the death toll at 37 and said it could be much higher as some people remained missing as of Sunday. Residents also said security forces are yet to arrive in the area, contradicting the police’ claim that they have deployed officers to search for those kidnapped. (AP)

**Strike worries UN:** The United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), known as MONUSCO, voiced deep concern on Saturday over reports of a drone strike in the country’s conflict-hit eastern region.

In a statement posted on social media platform X, MONUSCO strongly condemned attacks, including those carried out by drones,

that target or affect civilians and civilian infrastructure, urging an independent verification of the reported incident in Masisi-center, located in North Kivu Province, where fighting has been raging between the DRC government forces and the March 23 Movement (M23) rebel group.

The UN mission called on all parties to strictly respect the ceasefire and international humanitarian law, and to prioritize the implementation of existing peace agreements reached under various diplomatic mediation efforts.

According to a statement released late Friday by the international medical charity Medecins Sans Frontières, 42 people, including women and children, were admitted to the Masisi General Referral Hospital after an airstrike hit a residential area. The patients suffered shrapnel wounds and other trauma, and two of them died shortly after arriving at the hospital.

Masisi is among the areas hardest hit by the conflict in the eastern DRC. The reported drone strike came amid intensified fighting last week between the M23, the DRC

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military, and their respective allies. (Xinhua)

**Opp’n appeals results:** An opposition party in Guinea, the Democratic Front of Guinea, announced on Friday that it has officially filed an appeal with the country’s Supreme Court over the provisional results of the presidential election held on Dec. 28, 2025.

In a statement released the same day, the party said it had mandated a team of lawyers to file legal documents with the Supreme Court, contesting the election results.

According to the provisional results announced by Guinea’s General Directorate of Elections on Dec. 30, independent candidate and Guinea’s transitional president Mamady Doumbouya won the election with 86.72 percent of the vote, while Abdoulaye Yero Balde, leader of the Democratic Front of Guinea, came second with 6.59 percent.

The statement said the party resorted to judicial channels to defend what it believes to be the will of the people, stressing that it will strictly uphold democratic principles within the legal and institutional framework. It also reaffirmed the party’s commitment to the rule of law, republican legality and the lawful exercise of rights.

The Supreme Court is expected to examine the appeal within the legally prescribed time limit. (Xinhua)



A rescue team works at the scene of a collapsed building in Nairobi, Kenya, Friday, Jan. 2, 2026. (AP)



Enhancing customer education and data protection

ABK demonstrates extensive support for ‘Let’s Be Aware’ campaign throughout 2025

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Aspiring to continue its efforts in the new year, Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) played a strong role in supporting the ‘Let’s Be Aware’ awareness campaign throughout 2025 in co-operation with the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA).

On this occasion, the Bank received recognition from CBK and KBA and was selected among the leading banks supporting the campaign, reflecting its significant efforts in promoting the campaign, spreading banking and financial awareness, and achieving financial inclusion across all segments of society.

The Bank also made a major contribution to educating customers about their rights and obligations when dealing with banks, including types of banking services, products, and solutions, loan requirements, card types, services for people with special needs, digital services, and key investment and savings methods, among others.

ABK participated in numerous television and radio interviews to discuss ways to combat banking and financial fraud, how to protect customers, and to encourage them not to share their personal or banking information with any party. The Bank also emphasized the importance of being cautious when entering OTP codes during payment transactions, avoiding the use of ATMs located in unsafe areas while traveling, paying in the local currency of the country visited, and other important tips.

The Bank also published ‘Let’s Be Aware’ campaign advertisements across cinema theatres, television, and radio stations, playing a major role in highlighting many campaign-related topics and contributing to its continued success in achieving its intended objectives.

Campaign advertisements were also displayed on screens across ABK branches throughout Kuwait, as well as on its website and mobile application. In addition, the Bank sent SMS messages and notifications to customers to further enhance their level of banking awareness.

At the same time, the Bank organized a sign language workshop to enhance employees’ ability to serve customers with special needs and provide them with the best possible services, reaffirming its role as a leading banking institution committed to delivering the highest levels of service and con-



Podcast episode promoting the goals of the ‘Let’s Be Aware’ campaign.



The Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait honors Deputy Group CEO Abdullah Al-Sumait for ABK’s exceptional contribution to the ‘Let’s Be Aware’ campaign.



Spreading banking awareness at the HH the Crown Prince Cup football final.



Spreading financial awareness via radio segments.



Connecting with youth at padel tournaments to encourage financial awareness.

tinuously keeping pace with developments in the banking industry.

The Bank also sponsored a variety of events, including the Porsche Club Kuwait Festival, HH the Amir Cup football final, HH the Crown Prince Cup football final, the Child Protection Conference organized by the Kuwait Bar Association, the Dr. Jawad Behbehani award, the Amiri Hospital Health Day, and others. During these events, the Bank’s was keen to promote the ‘Let’s Be Aware’ campaign to reach different segments of society and respond to participants’ inquiries about the campaign’s importance and its major role in protecting customers and meeting their needs and requirements.

Meanwhile, the Bank continuously worked on updating its technical systems to ensure the highest levels of security to protect customers and maintain the confidentiality of their personal data, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and increasing their confidence in conducting banking and financial transactions using the

Bank’s diverse and advanced products and solutions.

The Bank also enhanced the features of its services offered through digital channels as part of the ‘Let’s Be Aware’ campaign, which encourages customers to use digital services. It further developed its mobile application and website and introduced additional solutions to facilitate customer transactions quickly and conveniently at all times.

In addition, the Bank organized a series of competitions in shopping malls to engage with customers, introduce them to the campaign, and provide the necessary advice on how to benefit from banking services and prevent fraudsters from stealing their data and information. The Bank emphasized the importance of being cautious when entering personal information during payments via applications and websites, relying only on trusted platforms for banking transactions, and avoiding suspicious calls. It also stressed that the Bank will never request customers’ private



Employees participating in a sign language workshop.

information through phone calls or SMS messages.

Furthermore, the Bank published awareness videos and various infographics in cooperation with CBK and KBA across its digital platforms as part of the ‘Let’s Be Aware’ campaign.

These received strong engagement from followers, thanks to the distinctive content that highlighted the campaign’s various topics in a simple manner.

ABK endeavors to continue to publish relevant campaign content throughout 2026 and come

up with innovate ways to educate and interact with customers. These efforts are in line with enhancing society’s banking and financial awareness as well as safeguard them, within its role as a responsible and leading banking entity in Kuwait.

Premier and main markets lead losses

Boursa Kuwait ends Sunday trading lower

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait closed trading on Sunday in negative territory, with the general index falling 57.90 points, or 0.65 percent, to end the session at 8,849.70 points. Total trading volume reached 150.7 million shares across 11,941 transactions, with a total value of 42.15 million Kuwaiti dinars (approximately 128.5 million US dollars).

The Main Market Index slipped 31.21 points, or 0.38 percent, to close at 8,271.18 points. Trading activity on this segment included 77.5 million shares

through 6,484 transactions worth 16.2 million dinars (around 49.4 million dollars).

Similarly, the Premier Market Index recorded a loss of 67.28 points, or 0.71 percent, settling at 6,431.03 points. The index saw 73.15 million shares change hands through 5,457 deals valued at 25.8 million dinars (roughly 78.6 million dollars).

The Main 50 Index also posted a decline of 43.97 points, or 0.51 percent, closing at 8,644.83 points, with 51.4 million shares traded in 4,030 transactions amounting to 11.8 million dinars (about 35.9 million dollars).

Kuwaiti gold prices mirror global correction

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4, (KUNA): The Kuwaiti gold market reflected last week’s global price movements, with 24-karat gold trading at around KD 42.8 per gram (approximately 139 dollars) and 22-karat gold at about KD 39.2 per gram (around 126.6 dollars).

According to a report by Kuwaiti company Dar Al-Sabaek issued on Sunday, silver prices stabilized near KD 832 per kilogram (about 2,707 dollars).

Globally, gold experienced a noticeable corrective wave after reaching a series of record highs, closing last week at 4,329 dollars per ounce and recording a weekly loss of nearly five percent. The decline was attributed to profit-taking operations and fluctuating risk appetite amid ongoing geopolitical and economic uncertainties.

Dar Al-Sabaek report explained that the 4,300-dollar-per-ounce level continues as an important psychological and technical support zone, with

clear buying demand emerging whenever prices approach this range. This suggests that the recent dip is part of a natural correction following a strong year for the precious metal.

Expectations of US interest rate cuts during 2026 continue to support gold prices, as investors anticipate the Federal Reserve may ease further if inflation slows and growth weakens. Gold also remains a safe haven amid escalating geopolitical risks and continued strong Central Bank purchases, bolstering its positive medium-term outlook for the precious metal.

The report highlighted that some investors repositioned portfolios after the significant gains of 2025, creating temporary pressure on prices toward the end of the year. Geopolitical developments, particularly US restrictions on Venezuelan oil trade and rising political tensions, have further increased demand for gold as a hedge against global market risks.

Strategic reviews by major banks and financial institutions point toward a bullish scenario for gold in the medium term, with expectations for elevated trading ranges in 2026, supported by portfolio diversification and rising inflows into gold-backed exchange-traded funds.

However, Dar Al-Sabaek warned that periodic corrections could occur if US economic data improves or if real yields and the dollar strengthen unexpectedly. Markets are now closely watching US inflation and economic activity indicators, as well as geopolitical developments, with any signs of economic slowdown or clearer signals of interest rate cuts likely to restore upward momentum for gold.

The report concluded that the balance of risks still favors holding gold as a key hedging instrument, given the delicate interplay between interest rate expectations, dollar volatility, and ongoing sources of global concern.

Winter enhances charcoal trade after years of decline

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: With the return of winter, colder temperatures, and the camping season, and after years of stagnation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent events, the charcoal market has made a strong comeback this year, with sales rising by more than 75 percent, reports Al-Anba daily.

Lighting a campfire is regarded as one of the most important sources of warmth, especially in camps and desert gatherings.

In an effort to highlight demand levels and pricing, a tour of the charcoal market in Shuwaikh was carried out.

According to Ali Mohammed, a vendor, Kuwait is a country of seasons and many goods are seasonal in nature. He has worked in the charcoal market for 28 years and had never witnessed a recession like the one experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and the years that followed, largely due to stricter camping permit regulations. Previous years saw relatively mild winters, while this year demand for charcoal has increased significantly because of the sudden drop in temperatures.

He revealed that African charcoal is the most popular type due to its reasonable price, quick ignition, and high quality.

Vendor Jawad Hussein said, “We work year-round, relying on restaurant and café owners, but demand rises in winter due to the cold and camping. The charcoal market is affected by all internal and external events. Prices have remained stable for the past 10 years, changing only slightly despite rising costs and storage fees. Charcoal is preferred over wood because it lights quickly and produces less smoke.”

Fayez Al-Shammari, who owns a family camp and a youth camp in northern Kuwait, said he visits the charcoal market weekly to buy charcoal and wood. He affirmed that winter and camping are incomplete without a campfire and that they prefer charcoal for heating, even at a higher cost.

Manea Al-Mutairi revealed that he buys ten bags of charcoal, each weighing 10 kilograms, every ten days for heating, coffee, and tea. He noted that although heating

methods have evolved, camping in the desert is incomplete without a fire, adding that charcoal prices have risen slightly due to a decrease in the number of shops, which used to number more than 20.

Young Salman Talal Al-Saadi said, “I came with my family to buy camping supplies, especially charcoal. We need it at our campsite and use African charcoal for heating, grilling, and making tea and coffee. I see camping trips as an opportunity for family and friends to gather.”

Abdullah Al-Tamimi stated that the annual cost of buying charcoal for his campsite ranges from KD 150 to KD 200. Charcoal prices have not changed in four years and have even decreased. He added, “How wonderful it is to gather with family around a charcoal fire, enjoying tea and coffee. May God protect our country.”

Vendor Abdulwahab Mohamed also noted that winter is a season of joy in Kuwait, and for them, it brings double the happiness. He explained that in summer, their sales are mostly limited to cafes and a few restaurants, but in winter, the situation changes. Charcoal sales range from 150 to 250 sacks per day, and they look forward to the arrival of the cold season, even if it comes late.

He said, “The most popular type of charcoal is African, followed by Vietnamese and Thai, as they produce little smoke and burn easily. Next are Paraguayan and Indonesian charcoal. A 15-kilogram sack costs KD 6. Customers also prefer ‘Naqwa’ charcoal, which we collect ourselves and sell for half a dinar more than regular charcoal.”

Seller Rajab Muhammad said he has been working in the charcoal market for 20 years. He described the work as tiring, with low profits that depend on the winter season, as the colder and rainier the weather, the higher the demand.

He noted that charcoal prices have remained unchanged for many years, and customers are familiar with them, adding that residents typically buy small amounts for camping trips, while citizens purchase larger quantities to store.

Promotion system under review

KPC calls for delay in promotion exemption talks

By Najeh Bilal  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) urged the Petroleum and Petrochemical Workers Union to postpone its request to exempt the remaining positions at KPC and its subsidiaries from the unified promotion system for all grades in the oil sector.

According to informed sources, this request follows KPC’s recent decision to exempt employees in the operations departments from the system.

In a letter sent to the union, KPC referred to the union’s correspondence dated November 20, 2015, which requested a comprehensive review of the system and a postponement of any decision until the current budget cycle is completed.

KPC explained that the unified promotion system was scheduled to be implemented in the next fiscal year. Since the system came into effect on June 1, 2015, a number of employees have already been promoted and have legally acquired new job grades. Suspending the system at this stage would result in the cancellation of those grades, requiring the corporation

to develop appropriate solutions to ensure that affected employees are not harmed.

KPC affirmed its commitment to carefully studying all inquiries and proposals submitted by the union through specialized committees and working groups.

This includes the recent decision to exempt operations department employees in subsidiary companies, for which KPC expressed its appreciation of the union’s efforts.

In follow-up to its previous correspondence dated July 8, 2025, concerning the exemption of operations employees, the Petroleum and Petrochemical Workers Union requested an urgent meeting.

The union aimed to prevent disparities among employees and ensure the system achieves its intended objectives by extending the exemption to other administrative and technical categories. It is worth noting that the Chief Executive Officer of KPC, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Saud Al-Sabah, approved the exemption of operations departments from the Kuwait National Petroleum Company’s promotion system in early December.



# AI and sovereign issuances power global debt market to record highs

By KAMCO Invest

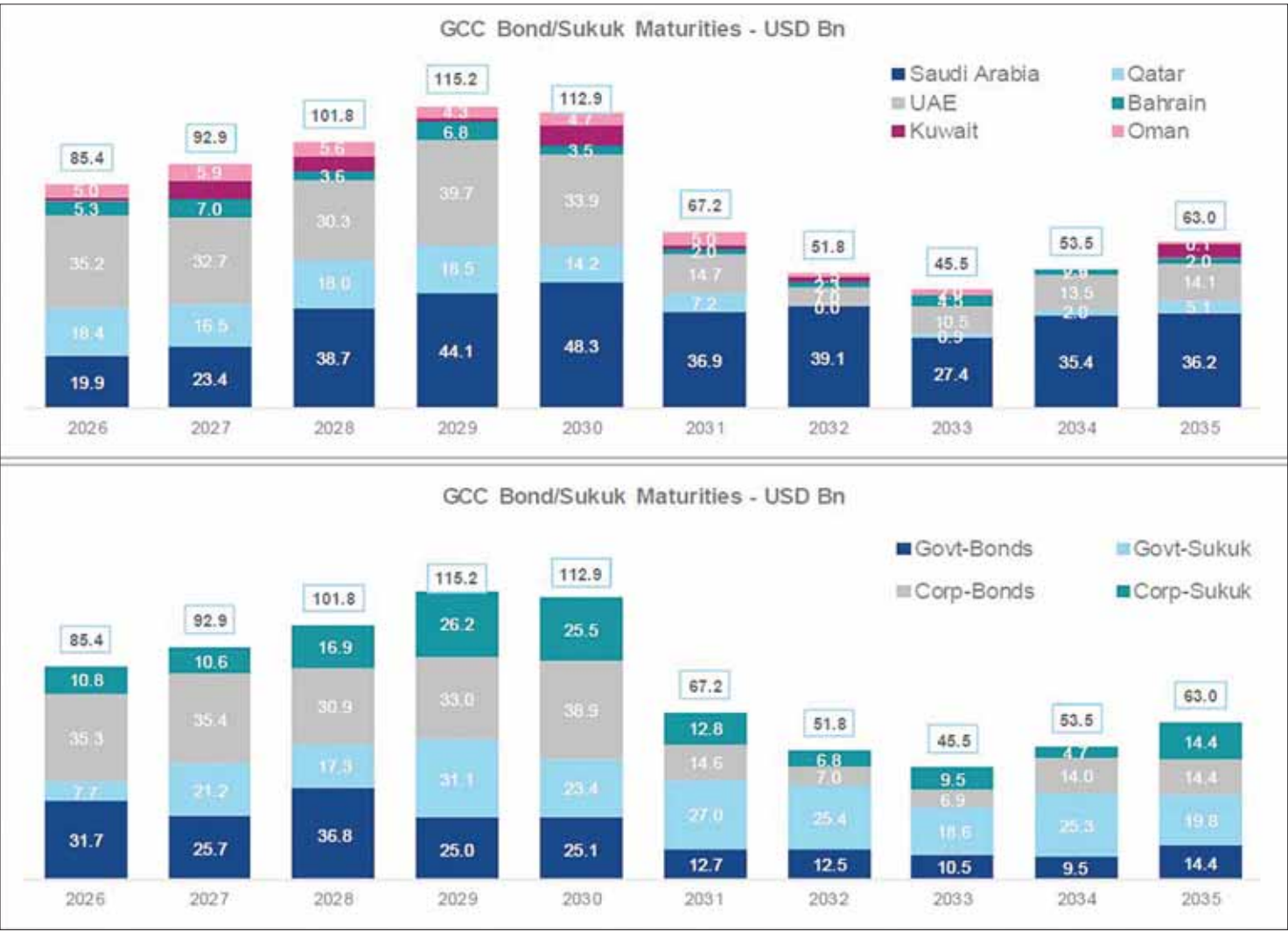
An easing of financing conditions coupled with softer USD led to a wave of fixed income issuances this year driven largely by emerging market governments. The increase in Eurobond issuances by emerging market sovereigns comes despite increasing talks of dedollarization. In terms of sectors, there has been a steep increase in non-financials corporates raising debt this year. Bonds issuances related to AI-linked companies in the US hit a record high this year aggregating to over USD 200 Bn, as per IIF. A similar trend was seen across clean-tech firms that are mainly concentrated in China. A separate report from Dealogic also showed record debt issuances by global technology companies as the intense competition to build artificial intelligence capacity forces even cash-rich firms to borrow heavily to fund that investment. Total issuances by tech companies reached USD 428.3 Bn through the first week of December-2025 with US firms accounting for the lion's share of these issuances raising USD 341.8 Bn followed by European and Asian tech companies with total issuances of USD 49.1 Bn and USD 33.0 Bn, respectively.

In terms of quarterly data, global debt market issuances remained elevated during Q3-2025, over the USD 3.0 Trillion per quarter mark, resulting in record issuances during the year. As per data from LSEG, issuances during 9M-2025 increased by 12% y-o-y to reach USD 9.5 Trillion marking the strongest issuances during the nine month period since at least 1980. Issuances of investment grade debt increased by 8% during the year to reach USD 4.5 Trillion as Q3-2025 issuances faltered 11% q-o-q to reach USD 1.4 Trillion. On the other hand, high yield issuances increased by 20% y-o-y during 9M-2025 to reach USD 385 Bn and increased by 22% q-o-q during Q3-2025.

Corporates issuers in emerging markets were leading with 19% y-o-y increase in issuances during 9M-2025 with issuances totaling USD 349.4 Bn. Corporate debt issuers from India, Saudi Arabia, Brazil and Malaysia accounted for 50% of total emerging markets activity. Issuances of green bonds remained subdued registering a growth of 1% from last year to reach USD 393.4 Bn during 9M-2025 with volumes registering a growth of 2% vs. last year. Issuances of green bonds during Q3-2025 declined by 22% q-o-q. In terms of currency, local currency bonds from Asian issuers registered a y-o-y growth of 22% during 9M-2025 to reach USD 3.6 Trillion. China led the way in terms of issuances, registering a growth of 23% while Japanese issuances declined by 8%.

### Inflation and interest rate changes

The latest data on inflation shows a cooling trend with US CPI coming in lower than expected at 2.7% for November-2025, beating all records despite talks of impact of tariffs while inflation in the UK declined for the second consecutive month to reach 3.2% in November-2025 from 3.6% in the previous month mainly led by slower food price rises. Inflation in the Eurozone came in close to the medium-term target of 2.0% reaching 2.1% in November-2025, stable from the October-2025 inflation rate. Core inflation for the region was also stable at 2.4% during November-2025. Inflation in emerging market had the biggest impact at the global level with significant fall in certain countries that have seen



double-digit inflation numbers. According to Bloomberg, the global composite inflation excluding China is expected to ease to 5.5% during Q4-2025 from as high as 16.6% in Q2-2024. Inflation in China was below zero for the bulk part of this year and recovered to 0.7% during November-2025, a 21-month high level, driven by rising food costs (especially vegetables), while factory-gate (PPI) deflation deepened to -2.2%, signaling persistent weak demand despite government efforts, with core inflation holding steady at 1.2%.

In terms of rate cuts, global central banks showed significant divergence in their policy paths. While the US and UK continued to cut rates to support weakening growth, the Eurozone and Canada paused their easing cycles, and Japan moved in the opposite direction by raising rates. The US Fed implemented its third rate cut for the following weeks of speculations on the possibility of the cut. The 25 bps cut would reduce the target range for the federal funds rate to between 3.50% and 3.75%. The decision was termed as a “close call” according to Fed chair, intended as an insurance cut to guard against a softening labor market even while navigating persistent inflation pressures. Also, the rate cut decision generated the most internal dissent since 2019, with the final vote tallying 9 to 3. Furthermore, the absence of reliable data following the historic 43-day government shutdown resulted in further speculation and market volatility. The Fed also signaled a cautious forward path, with the dot plot projections suggesting only one additional rate cut in 2026. Officials indicated the current rate was in “neutral” territory that neither significantly stimulates nor restricts the economy. The Bank of England also cut its benchmark rate by 25 bps to 3.75%, its lowest level in three years. The decision was a narrow 5 to 4 vote, reflecting deep divisions within the committee that highlighted the sharp fall in inflation in November-2025 and a stagnant economy with zero growth expected in Q4-2025.

Meanwhile, the ECB kept its main refinancing rate steady at 2.15% and the deposit facility rate at 2.0%. This marked the fourth consecutive meeting without a rate change, following a series of eight cuts between mid-2024 and mid-2025. The ECB described the current policy as being in a “good place,” noting that inflation is stabilizing near the 2% target. On the other hand, the Bank of Japan raised its policy rate by 25 bps to 0.75% in December-2025, signaling the country's exit from the era of ultra-loose monetary policy as core inflation remains steady at 2%. In the GCC, the trend in the interest rates was almost in line with that by the US Fed as most GCC central banks lowered rates in line with the Fed decision whereas Kuwait, which has its currency pegged to a basket of currencies, implemented a total of 50 bps cut vs. 75 bps cuts by other central banks in the region.

### GCC Bond/Sukuk Maturities

GCC governments are expected to see elevated levels of maturities over the next five years, especially for bond issuances during the years after the pandemic. According to data from Bloomberg, GCC sovereign maturities stands at USD 244.8 Bn over the next five years (2026-2030), whereas corporate maturities are much higher at USD 263.3 Bn. Both bond and sukuk maturities are expected to remain elevated starting from 2026 until 2030 and then gradually taper for the rest of the tenor. The higher maturities during the next five years reflects deficit financing issuances from GCC governments as well as investment and refinancing related issuances from the corporates. A majority of these maturities are denominated in USD at 64.7% followed by local currency issuances in SAR and QAR at 10.6% and 6.3%, respectively. In addition, due to the credit rating profile of the GCC governments, a majority of these maturities are in the high investment grade or A rated instruments with maturities of USD 208.7 Bn while maturities of investment grade instruments

stood at 239.1 Bn. In terms of type of instruments, conventional bonds dominate with USD 317.6 Bn in maturities over the next five years, whereas sukuk maturities are expected to be at USD 190.5 Bn. In terms of conventional bond maturities, corporate maturities stood at USD 173.4 Bn, surpassing government bond maturities at USD 144.2 Bn. In the sukuk market, government sukuk maturities stood at USD 100.6 Bn vs. corporate sukuk maturities at USD 89.9 Bn.

At the country level, Saudi Arabia continues to see the biggest fixed income maturities during 2026-2030. The Kingdom is expected to see maturities of USD 174.5 Bn until 2030 closely followed by UAE with maturities of USD 171.8 Bn. However, bulk of the maturities in Saudi Arabia are for bonds/sukuk issued by the government at USD 106.4 Bn while in the case of UAE, the lion's share of maturities are for instruments issued by corporates at USD 136.2 Bn. Qatar was next with maturities of USD 85.6 Bn while maturities in Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman stood around USD 25 Bn each over the next five years. In terms of sector maturities, Banks and other Financial Services sector have USD 210.4 Bn in maturities in the next five years, accounting for around 79.9% of the total corporate maturities and 41.4% of the total maturities in the GCC until 2030. The Energy sector was next with maturities of USD 21.8 Bn or 8.3% of GCC corporate maturities until 2030 followed by Utilities and Industrials at USD 13.6 Bn and USD 5.4 Bn, respectively. Banks in UAE have the biggest maturities over the next five years at USD 80.9 Bn followed by Qatari banks with maturities of USD 28.2 Bn.

Banks in UAE and Qatar accounted for 41.5% of total corporate maturities in the GCC and 21.5% of total bonds/sukuk maturities over the next five years in the GCC. Other Financial Services and Real Estate sectors were next with maturities of UD 33.9 Bn and USD 16.6 Bn until 2030. Meanwhile, Real Estate maturities are concentrated mainly in the UAE and Saudi

Arabia at USD 11.2 Bn and USD 4.3 Bn, respectively, until 2030.

### Issuances in 2025 in line with the record issuances in 2024

Aggregate issuances of bonds and sukuk in the GCC stood at USD 206.6 Bn until the third week of December-2025 as compared to USD 206.8 Bn in 2024, highlighting another year of active bonds/sukuk primary market in the GCC. However, in terms of issuers, there was a sharp decline in government issuances during the year as compared to last year while corporate issuances reached a new record high level. Government issuances reached USD 77.9 Bn in 2025 vs. USD 98.6 Bn in 2024 while corporate issuances stood at USD 128.6 Bn this year vs. USD 108.2 Bn during 2024.

In terms of type of issuances, sukuk issuances witnessed a sharp decline during 2025 whereas bond issuances showed a healthy growth. Aggregate GCC bond issuances stood at USD 125.2 Bn in 2025, the highest on record, vs. USD 106.2 Bn during 2024 whereas sukuk issuances declined by 19.1% to reach USD 81.4 Bn this year as compared to issuances of USD 100.6 Bn during 2024.

At the country level, the trend in fixed income issuances remained mixed with Saudi Arabia and Qatar showing a decline in total issuances during 2025 while the rest of the GCC aggregates showed growth. Nevertheless, despite a decline of 18.3%, Saudi Arabia remained the biggest issuer of fixed income instruments in the GCC and one of the biggest globally with total issuances of USD 82.0 Bn in 2025 vs. USD 100.3 Bn in 2024. Issuances from Qatar also showed a sharp decline of 21.7% reaching USD 22.1 Bn in 2025 vs. USD 28.3 Bn in 2024. Aggregate issuances from the UAE showed a marginal growth during the year reaching USD 64.9 Bn in 2025 as compared to USD 63.4 Bn in 2024, registering a gain of 2.5%. Kuwait showed the biggest growth in issuances during the year as the country tapped the fixed market

after the approval of the debt law. Total issuances from Kuwait stood at USD 20.5 Bn in 2025 vs. USD 2.6 Bn in 2024 with bulk of the issuances were from the government.

The structure of maturities saw perpetual instruments seeing a significant growth in 2025 reaching a new record high during the year with total issuances of USD 17.9 Bn vs. USD 10.7 Bn in 2024. Saudi Arabia remained the biggest issuer of perpetual instruments during the year at USD 10.6 Bn followed by UAE and Kuwait with issuances of USD 3.3 Bn and USD 1.9 Bn, respectively. In terms of type of perpetual instruments, perpetual sukuk far exceeded bonds during the year reaching USD 12.0 Bn during the year vs. perpetual bonds of USD 5.9 Bn. The increase in perpetual sukuk issuances were seen mainly in Saudi Arabia as banks in the Kingdom bolstered their capital with AT1 perpetual instruments.

The issuance of green instruments in the GCC showed significant growth during 2025 as compared to the previous year although it remained below record levels seen in 2023. Total issuances of green instruments reached USD 12.5 Bn during 2025 as compared to USD 4.6 Bn in 2024 and USD 17.3 Bn in 2023. UAE was leading in the GCC with green instrument issuances worth USD 5.6 Bn this year as compared to USD 3.8 Bn in 2024. Issuances in Saudi Arabia stood at USD 5.1 Bn this year vs. zero issuances in 2024.

### Outlook

Expectations for rates cuts in 2026 remain volatile with the Fed dot plot suggesting a single rate cut in 2026 whereas the consensus estimates and the options market showing at least two cuts next year. Market expectations were boosted by the release of lower than expected inflation numbers for November-2025 while labor market continues to remain a concern for the US Fed. Moreover, the impact of tariffs remain unclear despite the US government finalizing tariff rates with a number of its trading partner. That said, inflation is expected to see a decline globally in 2026 based on Bloomberg forecast of an average inflation of 2.8% in 2026 and end of year levels coming in at around 2.3%.

For the GCC, we have forecasted rates based on US Fed rate cuts. As a result, most central banks in the GCC are expected to slash rates in line with the US Fed due to the pegged currencies. As such, we've forecasted a 50 bps cut by all central banks in the GCC. We see minimal pressure on currency pegs in the GCC and monetary policies are expected to remain largely stable and supportive of the sizable projects market in the region.

In terms of issuances, we expect higher issuances from the governments facing deficits, especially from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The rest of the region, especially UAE and Qatar are expected to see elevated levels of corporate issuances during the year. The decline in interest rate further boost our forecast for issuances from the region in 2026 especially at the start of the year when issuers focus on locking in lower rates. Maturity refinancing is expected result in approximately USD 85.4 Bn in issuances during the year while government deficit financing led by lower average oil prices would also contribute to the overall trend during the rest of the year. Based on IMF forecasts, deficit financing would result in issuances of close to USD 60 Bn during 2026.

## Fed divided on 2026 rate-cut outlook

# Year-end markets: Soft liquidity as markets await 2026 policy signals

By National Bank of Kuwait

Global markets closed out the final week of 2025 on a cautious but relatively constructive note, as thin year-end liquidity amplified moves across asset classes. U.S. data reinforced the narrative of a cooling but resilient economy, with initial jobless claims falling to their lowest level since January, underscoring continued labor market strength even as expectations for rate cuts in 2026 remain intact. Equity markets were broadly stable, supported by softer bond yields and fading inflation pressures, though gains were capped by uncertainty around the timing and depth of future Federal Reserve easing signaled in the latest FOMC minutes. The U.S. dollar drifted lower, trading near multi-month lows as investors priced in policy divergence and a more accommodative Fed path relative to other major central banks. Gold consolidated just below record highs, with profit-taking offset by persistent geopolitical risks and declining real yields, keeping the metal on track for one of its strongest annual performances in decades. In FX markets, range-bound trading dominated, with majors constrained by year-end positioning, while broader macro signals continue to point toward a gradual transition from restrictive policy to growth support in early 2026.

### North America

Fed Signals Openness to 2026 Cuts, But Division Persists

Minutes from Federal Open Market Committee's December meeting showed that most policy makers expect rate cuts to be appropriate this year, provided inflation continues to ease. However, the committee remains divided on risks, with some members more concerned about inflation becoming entrenched and others favoring deeper cuts to address signs of a softening labor market. The Fed cut rates by 25bps to 3.5%–3.75%, marking the third cut of the year and aligning with market expecta-

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.1764	1.1712	1.1788	1.1719	1.1600	1.1820	1.1769
GBP	1.3477	1.3399	1.3530	1.3456	1.3375	1.3560	1.3456
JPY	156.41	155.74	157.00	156.81	155.55	158.90	155.62
CHF	0.7879	0.7870	0.7942	0.7921	0.7800	0.7990	0.7848

tions, though the decision included two dissents for no change and one call for a larger 50bps cut. The Summary of Economic Projections also reflected greater optimism on growth, citing a smaller-than-expected initial drag from tariffs.

Lower Rates Revive U.S. Housing Momentum

U.S. pending home sales surged unexpectedly in November, jumping 3.3% month-on-month to their highest level in nearly three years, well above the 1.0% rise economists had forecast. The index also rose 2.6% from a year earlier, marking its strongest performance since February 2023. The National Association of Realtors said improving affordability, helped by lower mortgage rates, wage growth outpacing home prices, and increased housing inventory, has boosted buyer momentum across all regions. Mortgage rates have eased since the Fed resumed rate cuts in September, with the 30-year fixed rate at around 6.18%, though further declines remain uncertain as policy makers signal a possible pause.

The Greenback was last seen trading at 98.424.

### Europe

Euro Area Manufacturing Slump Deepens as Germany

Drags

Euro area manufacturing activity deteriorated further in December, with the HCOB Manufacturing PMI falling to 48.8, below both the preliminary estimate and November's 49.6, marking the fastest pace of contraction since March. The decline was driven primarily by weaker output and new orders, with Germany recording the sharpest deterioration and its weakest performance since February. Italy and Spain also remained in contractionary territory, while France stood out, posting its strongest expansion since mid-2022. Employment conditions continued to worsen across the bloc, extending a two-and-a-half-year streak of factory job losses.

The EUR/USD currency pair was last seen trading at 1.1719

### United Kingdom

UK Factories Return to Expansion, Employment Still Lags

UK manufacturing activity expanded for a second consecutive month, with the PMI rising to 50.6, slightly below the preliminary reading but above market expectations. Output increased for a third straight month, sup-

ported by broad-based gains across consumer, intermediate, and investment goods sectors, while new orders expanded for the first time in 15 months. This marks a notable shift after a prolonged period of contraction throughout most of last year. However, employment continued to decline for a fourteenth consecutive month, reflecting ongoing concerns around elevated labor costs and higher employer insurance contributions. Uncertainty linked to the Autumn Budget eased, helping soften the pace of job losses. On the inflation front, both input and output prices rose, driven by higher wages and surging wholesale metal prices, complicating the outlook for near-term margin recovery.

The GBP/USD currency pair was last seen trading at 1.3456

### Asia-Pacific

China Manufacturing Edges Back into Expansion, Sentiment Weakens

China's RatingDog General Manufacturing PMI edged back into expansion at 50.1 in December, up from 49.9 in November and above expectations, signaling a modest improvement in factory activity. The uptick was driven by stronger domestic demand, while export orders continued to decline, highlighting ongoing external weakness. Purchasing activity remained flat as firms relied on existing inventories, and employment fell for a second straight month amid cost pressures. On prices, input costs rose to a three-month high due to higher raw material prices, while output prices continued to fall as companies sought to support sales. Overall, business sentiment weakened, reflecting persistent concerns about the growth outlook.

The USD/CNY currency pair was last seen trading at 6.9931

### Kuwait

Kuwaiti Dinar  
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30540.



Inflation stays elevated

US economy grows in '25 despite weak job growth

WASHINGTON, Jan 4, (AP): The economy in 2025 was filled with contradictions, as growth was healthy while hiring slowed, inflation stayed elevated and unemployment rose.

Last year's odd outcomes raise a host of questions for the upcoming year: Will a growing economy eventually boost the sluggish job market? Or are last year's weak job gains a sign of a stumbling economy that could get worse?

There is another uncomfortable possibility: The economy could keep growing without much hiring, as technology - particularly artificial intelligence - enables more companies to step up their production of goods and services without adding more workers, leading to a "jobless expansion."

Adding to the complications, the six-week government shutdown last fall disrupted the collection and publication of economic data, leaving policy-makers at the Federal Reserve with a cloudier view of the economy that will only slowly clear up this year.

"2026 begins at a time when it is hard to say how 2025 ended," Stephen Stanley, chief economist at Santander, an investment bank, said in a note to clients.

Sharp inequality has also meant that wealthier U.S. households account for a rising share of spending, so that even healthy growth figures mask underlying weaknesses among lower-income families - what many economists refer to as the "K-shaped" economy.

Still, Stanley, like many economists, is somewhat optimistic: He expects that hiring will pick up on the back of stronger growth fueled by large tax refunds early this year, a result of President Donald Trump's tax cut legislation. Companies may also step up hiring because they face much less uncertainty this year from tariffs.

This year "could turn out to be a better year," said Federal Reserve governor Christopher Waller last month. "Now whether that pulls the labor market along with it, I certainly hope it does."

Here are five charts that illustrate the economy in 2025, and where it may be headed.

Surveys suggest Americans have a gloomy outlook on the economy, but that hasn't kept many of them from spending at a healthy clip. Solid consumer spending - likely fueled mostly by higher-income Americans - boosted growth to a 4.3% annual pace in the July-September quarter, a much better than expected showing and the biggest increase in two years.

The healthy gain followed two quarters where Trump's tariffs distorted the economy. A surge in imports in the first three months of the year caused the economy to shrink as businesses sought to bring in products from overseas ahead of the duties.

Growth likely continued in the final three months of the year, but the government shutdown almost certainly weighed on output, reducing growth by one percentage point, economists forecast.

Even as the economy picked

up, hiring did not - in fact job gains weakened after Trump's announcement of sweeping tariffs in early April, which he dubbed "Liberation Day."

The economy even shed jobs in June, August, and October. The unemployment rate, meanwhile, rose from 4% in January to 4.6% in November, highest in four years. December's figures will be released Jan. 9.

There were several reasons hiring likely slowed: The uncertainty around tariffs, which Trump imposed, then in some cases lowered or removed, or delayed, led many companies to put hiring on hold. Still, layoffs remain low, in what has been a "low-hire, low-fire" job market.

At the same time, the ongoing adoption of artificial intelligence may have led many firms to hold off on adding workers, as they sort out what the new technology can do for them.

"AI, AI, AI, AI -- that is all I have heard since this summer," Waller said last month, referring to comments he has heard from business executives explaining why they are reluctant to add jobs.

Still, there are signs of improvement: Employers cut 105,000 jobs in October, but that was mostly because of a large drop in federal government jobs stemming from the Trump administration's purge of government workers, which didn't formally take effect until that month.

Excluding government, businesses added an average of 75,000 jobs a month in the three months ended in November, a significant increase from just 13,000 in the three months ending in August.

However, most of the hiring this year has been heavily concentrated in just a few sectors - health care, restaurants and hotels, and government (outside of October). Most large private industries have shed jobs.

Even though inflation fell sharply in 2023 and 2024 from a four-decade high, there was little improvement last year. Annual inflation, according to the Federal Reserve's preferred measure, actually ticked higher to 2.8% in September - the latest data available - from 2.7% in December 2024.

Elevated costs became a potent political issue in races as diverse as governors' contests in Virginia and New Jersey and New York City's mayoral race. All were won by Democrats as Trump found himself grappling with issues of "affordability," which he referred to as a "hoax."

Inflation cooled in November, according to the more widely-followed consumer price index, though economists said the figures were distorted by the government shutdown. Prices were mostly collected in the second half of November, after the shutdown ended, when holiday discounts were more likely to be in effect.

Some economists worry inflation will worsen in early 2026, as companies implement annual price changes and pass through more tariff costs. But most expect inflation will continue to slowly cool in 2026 and move closer to the Fed's 2% target.

Trump's Venezuela oil plan seen as slow to move prices

Oil shift could pressure Russia over time

WASHINGTON, Jan 4, (AP): President Donald Trump's plan to take control of Venezuela's oil industry and ask American companies to revitalize it after capturing President Nicolás Maduro in a raid isn't likely to have a significant immediate impact on oil prices.

Venezuela's oil industry is in disrepair after years of neglect and international sanctions, so it could take years and major investments before production can increase dramatically. But some analysts are optimistic that Venezuela could double or triple its current output of about 1.1 million barrels of oil a day to return to historic levels fairly quickly.

"While many are reporting Venezuela's oil infrastructure was unharmed by U.S. military actions, it has been decaying for many many years and will take time to rebuild," said Patrick De Haan, who is the lead petroleum analyst at gasoline price tracker GasBuddy.

American oil companies will want a stable regime in the country before they are willing to invest heavily, and the political picture remained uncertain Saturday with Trump saying that the United States is in charge, while the current Venezuelan vice president argued, before Venezuela's high court ordered her to assume the role of interim president, that Maduro should be restored to power.

"But if it seems like the U.S. is successful in running the country for the next 24 hours, I would say there would be a lot of optimism that U.S. energy companies could come in and revitalize the Venezuelan oil industry fairly quickly," said Phil Flynn, a senior market analyst at the Price Futures Group.

And if Venezuela can grow into an oil production powerhouse, Flynn said "that could cement lower prices for the longer term" and put more pressure on Russia.

Oil isn't traded over the weekend, so there wasn't an immediate impact on prices. But a major shift in

prices isn't expected when the market does reopen. Venezuela is a member of OPEC so its production is already accounted for there. And there is currently a surplus of oil on the global market.

Venezuela is known to have the world's largest proven crude oil reserves of approximately 303 billion barrels, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. That accounts for roughly 17% of all global oil reserves.

So international oil companies have reason to be interested in Venezuela. Leading companies, including Exxon Mobil and Chevron, didn't immediately respond to requests for comment Saturday. ConocoPhillips spokesperson Dennis Nuss said by email that the company "is monitoring developments in Venezuela and their potential implications for global energy supply and stability. It would be premature to speculate on any future business activities or investments."

Chevron is the only one with significant operations in Venezuela, where it produces about 250,000 barrels a day. Chevron, which first invested in Venezuela in the 1920s, does business in the country through joint ventures with the state-owned company Petróleos de Venezuela S.A., commonly known as PDVSA.

But even with those massive reserves, Venezuela has been producing less than 1% of the world's crude oil supply. Corruption, mismanagement and U.S. economic sanctions saw production steadily decline from the 3.5 million barrels per day pumped in 1999 to today's levels.

The problem isn't finding the oil. It's a question of the political environment and whether companies can count on the government to live up to their contracts. Back in 2007, then President Hugo Chávez nationalized much of the oil production and forced major players like ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips out.

"The issue is not just that the infrastructure is in bad shape, but it's mostly about how do you get foreign companies to start pouring money in before they have a clear perspective on the political stability, the contract situation and the like," said Francisco Monaldi, who is the director of the Latin American energy program at Rice University.

But the infrastructure does need significant in-

vestment.

"The estimate is that in order for Venezuela to increase from one million barrels per day - that is what it produces today - to four million barrels, it will take about a decade and about a hundred billion dollars of investment," Monaldi said.

Venezuela produces the kind of heavy crude oil that's needed for diesel fuel, asphalt and other fuels for heavy equipment. Diesel is in short supply around the world because of the sanctions on oil from Venezuela and Russia and because America's lighter crude oil can't easily replace it.

Years ago, American refineries on the Gulf Coast were optimized to handle that kind of heavy crude at a time when U.S. oil production was falling and Venezuelan and Mexican crude was plentiful. So refineries would love to have more access to Venezuela's crude because it would help them operate more efficiently, and it tends to be a little cheaper.

Boosting Venezuelan production could also make it easier to put pressure on Russia because Europe and the rest of the world could get more of the diesel and heavy oil they need from Venezuela and stop buying from Russia.

"There's been a big benefit for Russia to see Venezuela's oil industry collapse. And the reason is because they were a competitor on the global stage for that oil market," Flynn said.

But Matthew Waxman, a Columbia University law professor who was a national security official in the George W. Bush administration, said seizing control of Venezuela's resources opens up additional legal issues.

"For example, a big issue will be who really owns Venezuela's oil?" Waxman wrote in an email. "An occupying military power can't enrich itself by taking another state's resources, but the Trump administration will probably claim that the Venezuelan government never rightfully held them."

But Waxman, who served in the State and Defense departments and on the National Security Council under Bush, noted that "we've seen the administration talk very dismissively about international law when it comes to Venezuela."

Innovation, openness drive China's economic maturity

China charts course for quality growth in 2026

BEIJING, Jan 4, (Xinhua): China's economic outlook is often framed abroad as a question of how much growth Beijing can stimulate -- and how quickly. Yet recent policy signals tell a different story -- one of strategic transformation, resilience and sustained fiscal progress.

That was clear from the annual Central Economic Work Conference in Beijing, which laid out the country's economic priorities for 2026 and offered a road-map for the next stage of development in the world's second largest economy.

As the conference ran through the list of key tasks for the year ahead, the scale of the ambition became ever clearer -- stabilizing employment, boosting consumption and investment, advancing technological innovation, deepening reforms, expanding opening-up, promoting green development, and safeguarding social stability and livelihoods. It is a to-do list few governments would even contemplate, let alone publicly commit to delivering.

Rather than relying solely on the speed and scale of growth, Chinese policymakers are increasingly prioritizing quality, sustainability and resilience, reflecting confidence in the country's ability to deliver steady, long-term economic expansion while navigating a complex domestic and international environment.

I closely follow these developments from a distance. From where I am in Northern Ireland -- a region which should be fully exploiting the dual-market access of its unique geographical environs, namely being both inside and outside the EU -- it seems clear that for China, innovation is no longer a slogan or abstract concept. It is the engine of the nation's economic strategy and the driver of its growth.

As an old Irish saying goes, "Ní neart go cur le chéile" -- there is no strength without unity -- a principle reflected in China's emphasis on coordinated growth across sectors and regions.

I saw it myself earlier this year on a visit to the northwestern Chinese city of Xi'an, where the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been brought to life, not in grandiose displays, but in the quiet ingenuity of its infrastructure and innovation hubs. Walking through the sprawling logistics and industrial zones, one was struck by the seamless integration of advanced technologies -- from smart warehousing systems and automated supply chains to digital trade platforms connecting Xi'an to markets across Eurasia.

Here, a stone's throw from the historical treasures and tales of the terracotta

warriors, a new global vision is on the march -- one which is built on practical, high-tech solutions on the ground, marrying efficiency with forward-looking design.

The BRI is not just a geopolitical strategy; it is a living laboratory of innovation, quietly reshaping trade, logistics and industrial collaboration at a scale that often goes unnoticed but is profoundly impactful. This emerging "smart industrial ecosystem" is positioning China to move further up global value chains and compete more effectively in high-tech markets, as the economy transitions toward a more sustainable growth model.

For investors and international businesses, the implication is clear: China is moving toward structurally stronger growth, underpinned by innovation that is already reshaping industries and boosting productivity.

When I walked through Beijing's commercial heart, these reforms were tangible: broader access for foreign firms, and increasing collaboration with local companies. Openness is being approached strategically, enabling the country to remain integrated in global supply chains while accelerating domestic innovation.

Green growth is another area where China is turning policy into economic opportunity. Decarbonization, renewable energy and sustainable urban development are no longer regulatory goals; they are launchpads for new industries, jobs and exports.

During my stay in China, I witnessed the fruits of large-scale investments in clean energy, electric transportation and green infrastructure. In Beijing, for example, visitors expecting to be met with blankets of smog and meager shafts of the horizon are instead pleasantly surprised to breathe clean air and see the full expanse of blue sky.

China faces challenges, from its much-discussed demographic shifts to external tariffs. But for international businesses and investors, the message is encouraging: China is not simply trying to recover growth but is reorienting its economy toward higher-quality, sustainable expansion.

Seen up close, China is clearly entering a new era of economic maturity. Growth is not slowing; it is becoming smarter, more resilient and more sustainable. The combination of innovation, openness and green development offers a blueprint for long-term prosperity, positioning the Asian giant as a key engine of both domestic and global economic opportunity.

Young Africans find hope in farming as urban life becomes too expensive

TAMBACOUNDA, Jan 4, (AP): On a blazing afternoon in Senegal, 33-year-old farmer Filly Mangassa heaved peanut plants onto a horse-drawn cart, sending clouds of dust swirling.

Ten years ago, he left his village for the capital, Dakar, dreaming of becoming a professor. But the high cost of living and lack of jobs put that dream out of reach.

"Particularly after COVID, companies weren't hiring and prices were rising," said Mangassa, who has a masters degree in criminology. "I thought: My father and my grandfather were farmers, so why not use that experience and go back to my hometown and try to make a living in agriculture."

Across much of Africa, farming has long been seen as low-status work, pushing young people to cities in search of office jobs.

"For my father and some people in my family, they sort of saw me returning to the countryside as a step back," Mangassa said.

But that perception is changing. Rising food prices, investments in irrigation and access to new technologies are making agriculture more profitable. Governments and nonprofits now fund programs that teach advanced farming skills and support farmers with equipment, fertilizers, pesticides and seeds.

"When my father saw that I had a clear, thorough business plan, he encouraged me and helped me with the administrative process to acquire land," Mangassa said.

He is part of a trend of young Africans leaving cities to try their luck at farming. Mangassa says he makes a profit of around 2 million CFA (\$3,500 a year), far above Senegal's average yearly income of about \$2,500.

Africa is the world's fastest-urbanizing region, with cities growing at an average rate of 3.5% per year. As city populations increase, so does the cost of living.

Median rents and grocery prices in places like Dakar or Kenya's capital of Nairobi are approaching those of major European cities, despite median salaries being significantly lower, according to the World Bank.

Meanwhile, between 10 and 12 million young Africans enter the job market each year while only about 3 million formal jobs are created, according to the African Development Bank.

"A lot of my friends who graduated at the same time as me now work as motorcycle taxi drivers and barely make a living," Mangassa said.

Mangassa now owns a 32-acre farm where he grows peanuts, corn, vegetables and fruit. He received some funding to buy land from a World Food Program initiative helping young Africans start careers in agriculture.

Launched in 2023 and set to run through early 2027, it has supported



Filly Mangassa, left, and Mamadou Camara, who are part of a growing trend of young Africans moving to rural areas for better work opportunities, throw peanut plants on a pile on a farm in Tambacounda, Senegal, Wednesday, Nov. 5, 2025. (AP)

around 380,000 people in launching agricultural businesses.

It works with local governments to allow young farmers to acquire land - often a challenge because of complex ownership systems and young people's difficulty in obtaining loans because they are seen as high risk.

In Senegal, the program has supported over 61,000 people, with more than 80% launching farms, according to WFP. It also operates in Ghana, Nigeria, Mozambique, Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya and Tanzania.

"Our surveys show three main barriers for young people entering agriculture: limited access to land, financing and inputs; a lack of practical skills; and tough market conditions - knowing when to sell, how to add value and how to market their products," said WFP's country director for Senegal, Pierre Lucas.

Senegal, like many African countries, is plagued by food insecurity that has been exacerbated by donors' funding cuts and worsening climate conditions.

The region also is recovering from the colonial era, said Ibrahima Hathie, an agricultural economist at the Senegal-based Prospective Agricultural and Rural Initiative think tank.

"In Senegal for example, farmers were pressured to grow groundnuts to be sold in France instead of food crops," Hathie said.

Scarce arable land and soil degradation further constrain food production.

But now, many young farmers are shifting to high-value crops and have better technology, so production is increasing, Hathie said, predicting that as more locally produced food enters markets, staple prices could fall.

Senegal is a main departure point for migrants attempting to reach Europe via the deadly Atlantic route. Authorities see agriculture as one way to create jobs to keep young people at home, launching campaigns in rural areas most affected by migration.

"I'm convinced that the only sector that can create the hundreds of thousands of jobs young people in Africa need is agriculture and livestock," Senegal's agriculture minister, Mabouba Diagne, told reporters in October.

Adama Sane, 24, once dreamed of reaching Europe but didn't have money to pay smugglers. He had moved to Dakar in 2020 but struggled to make ends meet as a construction worker. Then he heard about the WFP initiative.

"In a sense, discovering agriculture saved my life," Sane said. "If I had stayed in my construction job, I would have tried crossing the ocean sooner or later."

He now raises poultry and cultivates peppers on his five-acre farm in his village.

"I am still far from where I want to be with my business, but at least I am saving a lot of money compared to the city, and life is less stressful," Sane said. "A lot of young people think that being a farmer is a 'small job,' but there is starting to be a public awakening that agriculture can be the key to development in Senegal."

Three other potential migrants are now working for Mangassa.

Mamadou Camara, 22, Issa Traoré, 22, and Madassa Kebe, 23, had been living in Mali's capital, Bamako, struggling to find work. Their families had helped them raise money for the Atlantic journey to Europe via Guinea-Bissau, but they said a smuggler there disappeared with it.

They decided to return home through Senegal, where they met Mangassa.

"I empathized with them because I know what it's like to work hard and still not make ends meet while your family depends on you," Mangassa said. "I wanted to show them that there are opportunities for young people here."



Film



Rose Byrne poses with the breakthrough performance award for 'If I Had Legs I'd Kick You' in the press room during the 37th Palm Springs International Film Festival Film Awards at Palm Springs Convention Center in Palm Springs, Calif. (AP)



Jane Fonda, from left, Jessie Buckley, Chloe Zhao, and Paul Mescal pose with the vanguard award for 'Frankenstein' in the press room during the 37th Palm Springs International Film Festival Film Awards at Palm Springs Convention Center in Palm Springs, Calif. (AP)



Joachim Trier, far right, and Stellan Skarsgård, from left, Inga Lillsj  , Elle Fanning, and Renate Reinsve pose with the international star award for 'Sentimental Value' in the press room during the 37th Palm Springs International Film Festival Film Awards at Palm Springs Convention Center in Palm Springs, Calif. (AP)



Timoth  e Chalamet, with the spotlight actor of the year award for 'Marty Supreme,' poses in the press room during the 37th Palm Springs International Film Festival Film Awards at Palm Springs Convention Center in Palm Springs, Calif. (AP)

Palm Springs Film Festival opens awards season

Stars use awards to champion original filmmaking

PALM SPRINGS, Calif., Jan. 4, (AP): Leonardo DiCaprio emphasized the importance of creating cinema over content at the Palm Springs Film Festival.

"Movies are still meant to be experienced, together, in a theatre. Right now, that belief matters more than ever. Original films are harder to make and harder to protect. But movies still matter, not content, but cinema. Stories made by people meant to be shared in a dark room in a communal experience," he said.

The "One Battle After Another" actor accepted the award via a pre-recorded video. Variety reported that he was unable to attend the film festival due to the ongoing political conflict with Venezuela, which led to the cancellation of multiple flights out of the Caribbean, where the actor was spotted vacationing over the holiday season. His co-stars, Chase Infiniti and Teyana Taylor, accepted

the award on his behalf.

The 37th annual International Film Awards at the festival in Palm Springs, California, kicks off Hollywood's whirlwind award season, honoring some of the film industry's most anticipated award contenders.

The glamorous night was full of long, heartfelt speeches, each emphasizing the importance of unity amongst artists and the importance of keeping original storytelling and movie theaters alive.

While accepting the Icon Award, Actor Michael B. Jordan told his colleagues to continue to tell original stories that build unity.

"The films were honoring tonight inspire each other to do more, to be better, to see each other more clearly and make the world a brighter place. And maybe when the lights come up in the theater, we could step back into the sun together," said the actor.

Cyrus accepted the Outstanding

Artistic Achievement Award for her song "Dream As One" in "Avatar: Fire and Ash." The recording artist hopes artists will pivot to becoming more community-focused instead of seeing each other as competitors.

"Numbers can make it feel like a sport, but performance runs so much deeper than a scoreboard, because each artist can bare their soul in a completely unique way and every contribution leaves its own mark on history," she said.

Jane Fonda briefly led the audience in a breathing exercise before presenting "Hamnet's" Chloe Zhao, Paul Mescal and Jessie Buckley with the Vanguard Award. Fonda credited the call to the action to director Chloe Zhao, who would routinely lead similar exercises before festival screenings of "Hamnet."

Guillermo del Toro stood alongside his "Frankenstein" cast to receive the Visionary Award.

The director revealed he recently lost his older brother and reflected on the relevance of Mary Shelley's classic novel as the world continues to grapple with emerging technology and division. For del Toro, it's relevance means two things: "We never learn, and sometimes the only way to talk about humanity is through monsters."

Timoth  e Chalamet received the Spotlight Award, and focused his speech on his "Marty Supreme" character's pursuit of greatness and making his dreams come true.

Mahershala Ali presented Ethan Hawke with the Career Achievement Award, reminiscing on how Hawke's performance in "Reality Bites" was one of many films that inspired his early acting days.

Hawke's acceptance speech gave credit to the friends and collaborators that left a mark on who he is today and remembered the influence the

late River Phoenix had on his life.

"I stand here in front of you a sum accumulation of all of the individuals who helped shape me," said the actor.

Hawke made his way to the stage a second time for a "First Reformed" reunion with former co-star Amanda Seyfried to present her with the Desert Palm Achievement Award, Actress.

Seyfried was quick to point out the unexpected full-circle moment while receiving the same award as DiCaprio.

"I want to thank Leo for inspiring me to be an actor. So, it's weird. It's amazing to get this award. It's the same title of the award, so it's like sharing it with him? Sort of? Maybe," said the actor.

The night continued with laughter from actor and comedian Adam Sandler after Laura Dern presented him with the Chairman's Award. Sandler accepted his award with

none other than a short stand-up routine about what his life would have looked like if he had chosen a quieter life instead of working in entertainment.

"I'd probably still have a deal with Netflix. But I'd be paying them a monthly fee so I can watch 'Stranger Things' last season," said the comedian.

The cast of "Sentimental Value" accepted the International Star Award as an ensemble. Rose Byrne took home the Breakthrough Performance Award, Actress, for her work on "If I Had Legs I'd Kick You," poking fun at the idea of receiving a breakthrough award in her 40s. The show concluded with Kate Hudson accepting the Icon Award, Actress for her work in "Song Sung Blue."

Award season continues with the 31st annual Critics' Choice Awards and next Sunday with the 83rd annual Golden Globes.



Colman Domingo, left, and Michael B. Jordan, with the icon award for his performance in 'Sinners,' pose in the press room during the 37th Palm Springs International Film Festival Film Awards at Palm Springs Convention Center in Palm Springs, Calif. (AP)



Adam Sandler accepts the chairmans award for 'Jay Kelly' during the 37th Palm Springs International Film Festival Film Awards at Palm Springs Convention Center in Palm Springs, Calif. (AP)



Josh Safdie, left, and Timoth  e Chalamet, with the spotlight actor of the year award for 'Marty Supreme,' pose in the press room during the 37th Palm Springs International Film Festival Film Awards at Palm Springs Convention Center in Palm Springs, Calif. (AP)

Many still grappling with grief and sorrow

After fire, Altadena garden becomes symbol of healing

ALTADENA, Calif., Jan. 4, (AP): Missi Dowd-Figueroa brought life back to the fire-ravaged plot where her home once stood -- one sunflower at a time.

The registered nurse and mother of three lost her 1898 farm-style house in the Eaton Fire, one of two deadly wildfires that tore through the Los Angeles area last January, obliterating entire neighborhoods and displacing tens of thousands of people.

A year later, have been able to rebuild so far, and the rest face no shortage of challenges.

"The Altadena I know and love is gone," Dowd-Figueroa said, referring to the suburb devastated by the fire. "Everything burned down - my dentist, my pharmacy - all of it's gone. But there's still something about Altadena that feels like Altadena now, even though there are no homes."

She's among those who decided to stay. Her process of healing started with tiny seeds that gave her hope and eventually turned her barren property into a flourishing garden.

Dowd-Figueroa and her family had lived in the four-bedroom, three-bath house for 10 years. It was the longest she'd ever lived in one place, and the

sense of loss left her stricken by waves of sadness.

For months, she would drive to the empty lot and cry. Her grief and shock deepened when she realized that, in addition to her late grandmother's artwork that was in her home, her father's ashes were gone forever.

"I spent several days digging through the ashes just looking for his little urn, and I never found it," said Dowd-Figueroa, 44.

Gone, too, were every family photo except those saved on her iPad.

"That was like a second grief, too. I was like, 'Well, great.' Now, if my dad knew, he'd be so disappointed because he was such a family lineage type of person," she said. "I have nothing from my father. You know, I'll never touch anything that he touched ever again."

Then one day, after cleanup crews had removed the last of the debris from the 2,000-square-foot lot, she brought along some flower seeds. They were mostly sunflowers, but also included zinnias and cosmos, among others, and planted them in the soil.

"I was already going there every day crying, so

I was like, 'Why am I just sitting here?' I might as well do something that keeps me busy, and I enjoy, because the house I'm in now, I can't have a garden," she said.

Sunflowers can take up cadmium and other heavy metals that can be left behind in the soil, though experts debate their effectiveness after a wildfire. Dowd-Figueroa hoped they would help remove toxins on her property once she ripped them out by the roots and tossed them after they died, being careful not to leave behind seeds.

For several months, while Dowd-Figueroa and her husband took steps toward eventually building a new home, the garden flourished, blanketing a large swath of the lot with a colorful display of approximately 500 flowers - bright orange and red ones, as well as yellow ones with giant heads.

"It was really healing just to come back and tend the space where I lived for the longest time in my life," she said.

Butterflies began to appear, along with a variety of insects and small animals.

"I felt like I was helping nature come back a little bit," she said.



Left: This undated photo, provided by Missi Dowd-Figueroa, shows Figueroa watering sunflowers growing on her fire-ravaged property in the aftermath of the Eaton Fire in Altadena, Calif. Centre & right: This undated photo, provided by Missi Dowd-Figueroa, shows sunflowers growing on her fire-ravaged property in the aftermath of the Eaton Fire in Altadena, Calif. (AP)

Variety

**PHNOM PENH:** Cambodia's renowned Angkor Archaeological Park recorded a total of 80,144 Chinese tourists in 2025, a slight decrease of 3 percent from 2024, said an official report on Sunday.

China was the fourth largest source of international tourist arrivals to the UNESCO-listed world heritage site after the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, said the state-owned Angkor Enterprise's report.

The ancient park attracted a total of 955,131 foreign visitors from 197 countries and regions in 2025, a year-on-year drop of 6.7 percent, the report said, adding that the park made a gross revenue of 44.7 million U.S. dollars last year, also down 6.5 percent.

Thourn Sinan, chairman of the Pacific Asia Travel Association Cambodia chapter, said persistent online scams and recent border conflict with Thailand have adversely affected Cambodia's tourism industry.

"2025 was a difficult year for Cambodia's tourism sector," he told Xinhua. "It will remain a challenge for the tourism sector in 2026 if we do not root out online scams." Thong Mengdaiv, deputy director at the China-ASEAN Studies Center of the Cambodia University of Technology and Science in Phnom Penh, said Cambodia's pilot visa-free policy for Chinese citizens from June 15 to Oct. 15 is likely to generate a significant rise in arrivals from China.

"Supported by strong air connectivity and effective promotion, I believe that the number of Chinese tourists to the Angkor park will be on the rise this year," he told Xinhua.

Located in northwest Siem Reap province, the Angkor Archaeological Park, the most popular tourist destination in the Southeast Asian country, is home to 91 ancient temples built from the ninth to the 13th centuries. (Xinhua)

**MIAMI:** For their latest project, the Florida Panthers signed Wayne Gretzky, Martina Navratilova, Michael Bubl  , Dustin Johnson and the Miami Heat.

And they were armed with paintbrushes, not hockey sticks.

The Panthers - a few hours before their Winter Classic outdoor game at the Miami Marlins' ballpark against the New York Rangers - unveiled a couple dozen panther sculptures, all painted in a unique way and now being auctioned off with hopes of raising \$1 million for cancer research.

Gretzky commissioned a sculpture that displays some of his stats, Johnson arranged one depicting a scene from Augusta National, Bubl  's is adorned in rhinestone braille, the NBA's Heat commissioned a pair of sculptures with some of the team's themes, artist Romero Britto painted one as well and Navratilova didn't technically paint hers - she dipped tennis balls into paint and then served them into the panther, creating a polka-dotted splash of various colors.

"To be able to have the privilege to reach out and make those contacts and have those folks say, 'Of course,' what a gift that was," Panthers general manager and hockey operations president Bill Zito said. "It's just so neat." About \$700,000 has been raised already, Zito said. The idea for the fundraiser - "Panthers on the Prowl," they call it - is loosely built around Chicago's "Cows on Parade" art project. Zito and his wife Julie co-chair the Panthers' project; she is a breast cancer survivor, and Zito has lost a number of relatives to the disease.

"It was my wife Julie's idea," Zito said. "And we lived in Chicago during 'Cows on Parade,' and then Romero Britto said we should auction them. I can't take credit for any of it." Many of the panthers were on display at LoanDepot Park on Friday, where about 35,000 fans attending the Winter Classic would see them. (AP)



# Egypt sees record 19 million tourists in 2025, up 21 pct



This photo shows tourists visiting the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt. (Xinhua)



This photo shows a visitor taking photos of exhibits at the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza, Egypt. (Xinhua)



This photo shows people taking photos of an exhibit at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, Egypt. (Xinhua)

CAIRO, Jan 4, (Xinhua): Egypt received a record of nearly 19 million tourists in 2025, up 21 percent from the previous year, Tourism and Antiquities Minister Sherif Fathy said.

Fathy attributed the increase to security and stability, a clear development strategy, and efforts to diversify tourism products and improve service quality.

ity.

Cairo, Hurghada, Sharm El-Sheikh, and Marsa Alam were the country's busiest airports, reflecting the geographical spread of Egypt's attractions, he said, adding that tourist flights arrived from 193 cities worldwide.

Charter flight traffic rose 32 percent in 2025, with New Alamein City

emerging as a fast-growing destination after a 450 percent surge in charter flights.

Tourism is a key source of foreign currency for Egypt, alongside remittances, Suez Canal revenues and exports. The sector has continued to recover after generating 15.3 billion U.S. dollars in 2024 from 15.7 million visitors.



This photo taken on Dec. 29, 2025 shows the Art Deco town hall in the Gratte-Ciel district of Villeurbanne, France. (Xinhua)

## Building on a legacy

### France's Villeurbanne redefines its Art Deco heart

LYON, Jan 4, (Xinhua): A hundred years after its birth in Paris, Art Deco is no longer just a chapter in architecture books. Villeurbanne, a city bordering Lyon, is reshaping its historic Art Deco district.

On a construction site across from the city's twin towers, cranes rise above closed-off sidewalks, marking the Gratte-Ciel Downtown Project, which will double Villeurbanne's downtown area without expanding the city limits. About 900 homes, new public services and green space will be added across roughly eight hectares.

The redevelopment comes as France marks the centenary of Art Deco, an architectural style that continues to shape urban landscapes across the country.

Art Deco emerged in the 1920s and gained international prominence after the 1925 Paris exposition. The movement favored straight lines, geometric patterns and monumental forms, made possible by materials such as reinforced concrete, metal and glass, which were increasingly used in construction at the time.

The style soon spread beyond France. In the United States, it helped define New York's skyline through buildings such as the Empire State Building.

"Art Deco provides a shared geometrical vocabulary," said Emmanuel Breon, an art historian who has curated several major Art Deco exhibitions in France. "Squares, circles, octagons, porthole windows, ocean-liner curves - architects around the world could work with the same forms while adapting them to local contexts." In Paris, the exhibition 1925-2025: One Hundred Years of Art Deco, held at the Museum of Decorative Arts through April 2026, traces the origins, influence and lasting presence of the style, renewing

public attention to this architectural heritage.

Beyond museums and landmark buildings, Art Deco also shaped everyday housing. One of the most complete examples can be found in Villeurbanne.

The Gratte-Ciel district was built in the early 1930s, where the apartments were equipped with then-modern amenities, and living conditions improved gradually between the 1950s and 1970s as buildings were upgraded.

For brasserie owner Jean-Pierre Siola, Art Deco isn't a subject for art exhibitions. It's something he lives in. By the time Siola moved into the apartment above his brasserie in 1990, everything had been renovated. "I didn't have to do anything," he said.

Although the Gratte-Ciel Downtown Project won't be completed until 2030, change is already visible. The new T6 tram line, running north-south, connecting the historic and future downtown areas, is scheduled to start service in February.

"The new buildings will be in harmony with the historic ones," said Ouachani Dorsaf, who assists residents at the project information center. According to project documents, the redevelopment will mix social housing, private apartments and student residences, with shops planned on ground floors. Siola passes the construction site from time to time to see his niece. "The project will bring many people to the neighborhood. We'll see," he said.

For Perrine Soncini, a physiotherapist who works in the neighborhood, the changes are tangible. Cycling daily along the new tram route, she said improved lighting, fewer cars and more green space could make daily life easier, especially for the area's aging population.



A blind staff member of the National Press Braille proofreads printed Braille books in Kabul, Afghanistan. (Xinhua)

## 'Vision loss isn't a barrier to a normal life'

### Afghan blind man writes books in Braille to lighten world for visually impaired

KABUL, Jan 4, (Xinhua): Despite being blind, Reshad Hassan is busy writing books in Braille. He dismisses the idea that vision loss is a disability that can prevent a determined person from living a normal life in society.

"My job here in the National Press Braille (a publishing house) is writing books in Braille. I copy a book word by word and point to point to Braille without pictures," Hassan told Xinhua in his office recently.

Wearing eyeglasses to hide his blindness and having a master's degree in crisis management, Hassan currently works as a permanent staff member of the National Press Braille in Afghanistan.

"I am very happy with my work here and earning a reasonable income to support my family," said the bread earner of a four-member family.

The books written in Braille by Hassan, after proofreading and correction by another blind man named Jawad, will go for publication, Hassan said.

"Learning Braille is vital for anyone with a loss of vision. Learning Braille facilitates visually impaired persons to find a job, earn income, and run their daily life properly," Hassan said, as the United Nations marks World Braille Day on Jan. 4 to promote Braille as a means of education for people with vision loss.

Ali Zia Amini is a student of administration and management at an institute that provides higher education for

visually impaired people.

"Learning in Braille school has changed my life positively, and that is why my life is on track," said Amini, who was born blind 23 years ago.

"My proposal to the government, aid agencies, as well as neighboring countries is to provide necessary equipment to the Braille schools to help the visually impaired people in Kabul and provinces to update their knowledge," Amini spoke softly.

"My dream is to write books and articles in Braille for people with vision loss so that they can learn something and use them in their daily life," he said.

So far, more than 4,000 textbooks have been published by the National Press Braille for students in Braille schools since the industry was established in the post-war country four years ago.

Said Safir Mansoori, a public relations officer of the Technical & Vocational Education & Training Authority (TVET-A), said more than 4,000 students, including boys and girls suffering from blindness and deafness, are studying in TVET-A educational centers.

He added that the TVET-A currently has 26 educational centers for special students. It will add five more centers in the new educational year (March 23, 2026) and aims to open educational centers in all 34 provinces of the country in the future.

## Tourism

## 'The whole process was very smooth'

### Easier entry, simplified tax refunds draw foreign tourists to shop in China

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A century after Art Deco first reshaped cities, Villeurbanne offers a clear example of how this modern heritage remains part of everyday urban life in France.



A staff member introduces duty-free policies to customers at a duty-free shopping mall in Haikou, south China's Hainan Province.(Xinhua)



Customers select products at a duty-free shopping mall in Haikou, south China's Hainan Province. (Xinhua)



3D imaging uncovers mechanisms behind solar cell performance

Chinese researchers reveal charge transport in perovskite films

HANGZHOU, Jan 4, (Xinhua): A group of Chinese researchers has developed a three-dimensional (3D) electrical imaging method that directly reveals how defect passivation treatment improves the quality of perovskite films and related solar cell performance.

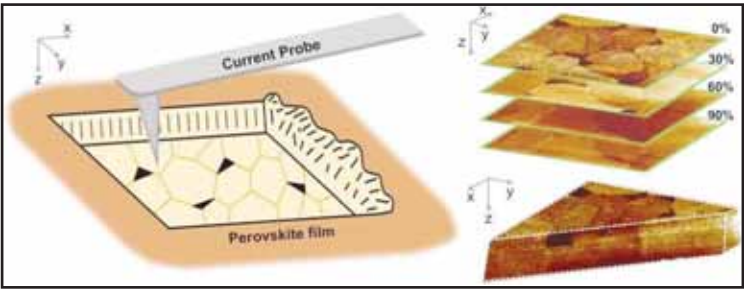
The study was recently published in the journal *Newton*.

Perovskite solar cells have attracted widespread attention as a low-cost and high-efficiency alternative to conventional silicon photovoltaics. However, defects buried inside perovskite films can impede charge transport, leading to energy loss and reduced operational stability.

Passivation treatments aim to mitigate these defects, but verifying their internal efficacy remains elusive, as most characterization techniques probe only the surface or provide averaged macroscopic information.

To address this challenge, the researchers at the Ningbo Institute of Materials Technology and Engineering (NIMTE) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) employed tomographic conductive atomic force microscopy to visualize current distribution across perovskite films.

The technique works by sequentially removing ultrathin layers of the



Three-dimensional mapping of electrical behavior in perovskite films. (Xinhua)

film while measuring local electrical conductivity at different depths. By stacking these measurements, a 3D map of charge transport within the film is reconstructed with nanoscale resolution.

Using this approach, the researchers characterized the internal electrical

behaviors of perovskite films treated with different passivation strategies.

Untreated films exhibited extensive low-conductivity regions that hindered charge transport, whereas bulk passivation significantly reduced these regions, particularly along grain boundaries.

Surface passivation mainly enhanced conductivity near the top interface, which is critical for device integration. Films treated with both bulk and surface passivation demonstrated the most uniform and continuous conductive pathways, with remaining low-conductivity regions confined mainly to the surface.

“These microscopic electrical features closely correlate with the resulting solar cell performance, establishing a direct link between 3D charge transport within the film and overall device efficiency,” explained Professor Xiao Chuanxiao, a corresponding author of the study. By delivering a direct, 3D view of how electrons move through perovskite films, this work offers a powerful tool for evaluating and optimizing passivation strategies. It paves the way for the rational design of higher-quality perovskite materials, enabling more efficient and stable perovskite solar cells.



A view of a mouse brain under a microscope. (Xinhua)

Real-time observation in vivo

New imaging technique charts embryonic mouse brain growth

BEIJING, Jan 4, (Xinhua): Chinese researchers have developed an in vivo embryonic mouse intrauterine imaging technique, which has elucidated the dynamic process of brain development in embryonic mice in vivo, the *Science and Technology Daily* has reported.

The study, conducted by a research team from Tsinghua University, was recently published in the journal *Cell*. Experts say this technology holds significant potential for deciphering the mechanisms of developmental disorders.

“The in vivo imaging technique is based on two-photon microscopy and utilizes an auxiliary support device to immobilize the embryonic mouse, enabling long-term, wide-field and deep-tissue live observation,” said Mi Da, the corresponding author of the paper.

Mi noted that this technology successfully overcomes the limitations of traditional embryonic in vivo imaging in terms of stability, duration, field of view and operability, allowing researchers

to observe various indicators such as embryonic cerebral blood flow and brain tissue cell activity.

Building on this, the research team labeled excitatory and inhibitory neurons in the cerebral cortex of embryonic mice and, combined with intrauterine imaging, comprehensively analyzed the individual and collective migration patterns of different neuron types.

The study provides new in vivo evidence of abnormal neuronal migration in mouse models of neurodevelopmental disorders, while also uncovering the dynamic behavioral characteristics of embryonic immune cells in response to environmental stress.

Shi Songhai, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said that the technological framework and analytical methods established in this study will serve as crucial tools for future research on brain development and developmental brain disorders, offering profound methodological significance and broad application prospects.

From hotpot to herbal brews

Healthy living trending in China

BEIJING, Jan 4, (Xinhua): Having lived 10 years in the southwestern Chinese city of Chongqing, Huang Mengya noticed that her eating habits, along with those of many colleagues, had shifted -- from Chongqing’s famous spicy, oil-heavy hotpot to lighter, cleaner-tasting meals.

“Light meals are low in calories and full of nutrients. I’m not just eating this way to stay in shape -- it’s for my health,” she said.

In Beijing, 38-year-old Tang Xiaohua visits a health bar once a week for moxibustion, a mild traditional Chinese medical therapy. She said after a six-month course of treatment, her shoulder and neck pain had vanished, she no longer felt tired easily, and she slept more soundly than ever.

“Moxibustion helps improve blood flow, dispel cold and boost immunity, making it especially suitable for those in unhealthy condition,” said Liu Dong, the health bar’s owner. He has noted a rise in the number of customers visiting for massages and spa treatment in recent years.

Whether through diet, body conditioning or exercise, Chinese people are paying growing attention to their everyday health and wellness.

A Future of Wellness survey by consultancy McKinsey in 2025 found that 94 percent of Chinese consumers view wellness as a “top” or “important” priority, compared to 79 percent in Britain and 84 percent in the United States.

“As China’s economy expands and living standards improve, demand for health and wellness is rising steadily,” said Li Lu, director of the social governance division of the Academy of Macroeconomic Research’s social development research institute.

Li noted that as the per capita disposable income of Chinese citizens increases, spending on health-related products and services has been climbing quickly, with significant room for further growth.

This shift in consumption preference is evident in the food sector. Data from business information platform Tianyancha shows that China currently has more than 14,000 light-food-related enterprises, nearly 60 percent of which were established within the last five years.



Light meals are provided at a canteen of Huzhou University in Huzhou City, east China’s Zhejiang Province, March 25, 2025. (Xinhua)

Across city streets, sugary bubble teas once cradled in young people’s hands are giving way to steaming cups of herbal brews.

Beyond food and drink, spending on fitness is gaining momentum as well. Health-minded consumers have propelled sportswear to China’s second-most-popular clothing category, behind only casual wear, according to a 2025 report from iiMedia Research.

Wellness tourism has also taken off in recent years, with Hainan and Yunnan emerging as popular destinations. Across these southern provinces, resorts are combining natural resources like hot springs, forests and traditional Chinese medicine with modern health care, offering trips where travelers can unwind while boosting their health.

Chinese people aren’t just more health-conscious these days, they’re weaving wellness into everyday life.

The trend has been fueled in no small part by national strategies.

In 2016, the State Council issued the Outline of the Healthy China 2030

Plan, which was the first medium and long-term strategic plan for the health sector to be proposed at the national level since the founding of the People’s Republic of China. The Healthy China Initiative emphasizes prevention first, shifting the focus from treating diseases to promoting the health of the people.

But that shift does not mean China’s health care system has run out of momentum. On the contrary, China remains one of the world’s fastest movers in terms of medical progress, with key health indicators ranking among the top across middle and high-income countries. In 2024, the average life expectancy of the Chinese people rose to 79 -- five years more than the global average -- and the country is aiming to push that figure to 80 by 2030.

A prevention-first approach is a philosophy that focuses not only on treating disease but also on promoting well-being in a more holistic way, improving quality of life and reducing the incidence of diseases, said Han Yong-

peng, head of the Beijing Hospital of Integrated Traditional Chinese and Western Medicine.

The country will adopt the prevention-first approach and promote healthy lifestyles during the next five years, said Lei Haichao, director of the National Health Commission.

This vision has already been reinforced through a series of policies and initiatives. In 2024, the Chinese government launched a three-year weight management campaign with the aim of encouraging healthier lifestyles and preventing chronic diseases. Last year, a plan of action was introduced to promote health-related consumption, outlining several measures in areas such as healthy eating, sports consumption, and services for the country’s aging population.

To harness this momentum, communities have seen a surge in sports facilities and events. Primary and secondary schools are now required to ensure students get at least two hours of physical activity every day.

The Conversation

From chatbots to doers

The rise of AI agents in 2025 and the tests awaiting in 2026

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

By Thomas Serban von Davier  
Carnegie Mellon University

In artificial intelligence, 2025 marked a decisive shift. Systems once confined to research labs and prototypes began to appear as everyday tools. At the center of this transition was the rise of AI agents - AI systems that can use other software tools and act on their own.

While researchers have studied AI for more than 60 years, and the term “agent” has long been part of the field’s vocabulary, 2025 was the year the concept became concrete for developers and consumers alike.

AI agents moved from theory to infrastructure, reshaping how people interact with large language models, the systems that power chatbots like ChatGPT.

In 2025, the definition of AI agent shifted from the academic framing of systems that perceive, reason and act to AI company Anthropic’s description of large language models that are capable of using software tools and taking autonomous action. While large language models have long excelled at text-based responses, the recent change is their expanding capacity to act, using tools, calling APIs, coordinating with other systems and completing tasks independently.

This shift did not happen overnight. A key inflection point came in late 2024, when Anthropic released the Model Context Protocol. The protocol allowed developers to connect large language models to external tools in a standardized way, effectively giving models the ability to act beyond generating text. With that, the stage was set for 2025 to become the year of AI agents.

The momentum accelerated quickly. In January, the release of Chinese model DeepSeek-R1 as an open-weight model disrupted assumptions about who could build high-performing large language models, briefly rattling markets and intensifying global competition. An open-weight model is an AI model whose training, reflected in values called weights, is publicly available. Throughout 2025, major U.S. labs such as OpenAI, Anthropic, Google and xAI released larger, high-performance models, while Chinese tech companies including Alibaba, Tencent, and DeepSeek expanded the open-model ecosystem to the point where the Chinese models have been downloaded more than American models.

Another turning point came in April, when Google introduced its Agent2Agent protocol. While Anthropic’s Model Context Protocol focused on how agents use tools, Agent2Agent addressed how agents communicate with each other. Crucially, the two protocols were designed



AI agents have emerged from the lab, bringing promise and peril. (AP)

to work together. Later in the year, both Anthropic and Google donated their protocols to the open-source software nonprofit Linux Foundation, cementing them as open standards rather than proprietary experiments.

These developments quickly found their way into consumer products. By mid-2025, “agentic browsers” began to appear. Tools such as Perplexity’s Comet, Browser Company’s Dia, OpenAI’s GPT Atlas, Copilot in Microsoft’s Edge, ASI X Inc.’s Fellou, MainFunc.ai’s Genspark, Opera’s Opera Neon and others reframed the browser as an active participant rather than a passive interface. For example, rather than helping you search for vacation details, it plays a part in booking the vacation.

At the same time, workflow builders like n8n and Google’s Antigravity lowered the technical barrier for creating custom agent systems beyond what has already happened with coding agents like Cursor and GitHub Copilot.

As agents became more capable, their risks became harder to ignore. In November, Anthropic disclosed how its Claude Code agent had been misused to automate parts of a cyberattack. The incident illustrated a broader concern: By automating repetitive, technical work, AI agents can also lower the barrier for malicious activity.

This tension defined much of 2025. AI agents expanded what individuals and organizations could do, but they also amplified existing vulnerabilities. Systems that were once isolated text generators became intercon-

nected, tool-using actors operating with little human oversight.

Looking ahead, several open questions are likely to shape the next phase of AI agents.

One is benchmarks. Traditional benchmarks, which are like a structured exam with a series of questions and standardized scoring, work well for single models, but agents are composite systems made up of models, tools, memory and decision logic. Researchers increasingly want to evaluate not just outcomes, but processes. This would be like asking students to show their work, not just provide an answer.

Progress here will be critical for improving reliability and trust, and ensuring that an AI agent will perform the task at hand. One method is establishing clear definitions around AI agents and AI workflows. Organizations will need to map out exactly where AI will integrate into workflows or introduce new ones.

Another development to watch is governance. In late 2025, the Linux Foundation announced the creation of the Agentic AI Foundation, signaling an effort to establish shared standards and best practices. If successful, it could play a role like the World Wide Web Consortium in shaping an open, interoperable agent ecosystem.

There is also a growing debate over model size. While large, general-purpose models dominate headlines, smaller and more specialized models are often better suited to specific tasks. As agents become configurable consumer and business tools, whether through browsers or workflow management software, the power to choose the right model increasingly shifts to users rather than labs or corporations.

Despite the optimism, significant socio-technical challenges remain. Expanding data center infrastructure strains energy grids and affects local communities. In workplaces, agents raise concerns about automation, job displacement and surveillance.

From a security perspective, connecting models to tools and stacking agents together multiplies risks that are already unresolved in standalone large language models. Specifically, AI practitioners are addressing the dangers of indirect prompt injections, where prompts are hidden in open web spaces that are readable by AI agents and result in harmful or unintended actions.

Regulation is another unresolved issue. Compared with Europe and China, the United States has relatively limited oversight of algorithmic systems. As AI agents become embedded across digital life, questions about access, accountability and limits remain largely unanswered.

Meeting these challenges will require more than technical breakthroughs. It demands rigorous engineering practices, careful design and clear documentation of how systems work and fail. Only by treating AI agents as socio-technical systems rather than mere software components, I believe, can we build an AI ecosystem that is both innovative and safe. (AP)



# Wolves surge late to snap Heat streak

Celtics dominate Clippers

MIAMI, Jan 4, (AP): Anthony Edwards scored 33 points, Naz Reid had 20 of his 29 in the second half and the Minnesota Timberwolves pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat Miami and snap the Heat's four-game winning streak.

Julius Randle finished with 23 points and 10 rebounds for Minnesota, which outscored Miami 19-4 in the opening 4 1/2 minutes of the final quarter to turn a four-point lead into a 109-90 edge. Rudy Gobert added 13 points and 12 rebounds for the Timberwolves.

Norman Powell scored 21 for the Heat, who are 3-5 in their last eight home games. Davion Mitchell and Nikola Jovic added 14 for Miami, while Bam Adebayo and Andrew Wiggins each had 12.

**Warriors 123, Jazz 114**

In San Francisco, Stephen Curry scored 31 points with six 3-pointers and Golden State welcomed back their regulars Saturday to beat Utah.

Curry scored 20 points in the third quarter making six of his seven shots, knocking down a go-ahead 3 with 7:01 left in the period and another the next time down.

Lauri Markkanen shot 9 for 12 in the first half for 21 of his 35 points. Keyonte George had 22 points and nine assists for a Jazz team missing Jusuf Nurkic for a second straight game because of a sprained toe on his left foot. Utah has lost three straight and seven of nine.

**Celtics 146, Clippers 115**

In Inglewood, Calif., Jaylen Brown matched his career high with 50 points and Boston completed a successful West Coast swing with a victory over Los Angeles Clippers.

Brown had 19 points in the third quarter. Derrick White added 29 points and Anfernee Simons had 15 as the Celtics went 4-1 on the trip and 3-1 against Western Conference teams. Boston is 7-1 since Dec. 19.

Brown was 18 of 26 from the floor, while White went 10 of 20. Boston shot 55.2% overall and 47.1% from 3-point range. Brown and White combined to go 11 of 22 from long range.

Kawhi Leonard and John Collins each scored 22 points as the Clippers saw their season-best, six-game winning streak end. Collins made his first eight shots in the game and went 9 of 10 from the floor.

**76ers 130, Knicks 119**

In New York, Tyrese Maxey scored 36 points, Joel Embiid and VJ Edgecombe each had 26 and Philadelphia beat the New York for their third straight victory.

Paul George added 15 points and Quentin Grimes had 10 for the 76ers, who won at Madison Square Garden for the second time this season. Embiid also grabbed 10 rebounds.

Jalen Brunson scored 31 points for the Knicks, who have lost three straight for the second time this season. Karl-Anthony Towns, who returned after missing one game due to illness, added 23 points and 14 rebounds.

Deuce McBride scored 20 points, OG Anunoby had 19 and Mikal Bridges added 12 for New York.

**Mavericks 110, Rockets 104**

In Dallas, Anthony Davis had 26 points and 12 rebounds and Max Christie scored 24 points, hitting 4 of 6 3-pointers, as Dallas beat Houston.

The Mavericks snapped a four-game losing streak, which tied their longest of the season. They have won six of their last seven home games, two of those against the Rockets (122-109 on Dec. 6).

Dallas saw a 17-point lead early in the fourth quarter shrink to 106-101 with 1:07 to play before Christie, fourth in the NBA shooting 45.9% from downtown, drove in for a dunk.

Kevin Durant scored 34 points, playing the entire second half with four fouls, to lead the Rockets, who had a four-game winning streak snapped. Amen Thompson



Minnesota Timberwolves guard Bones Hyland (8) drives past Miami Heat guard Dru Smith (12) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Miami. (AP)

had 20 points and 12 rebounds while Tari Eason had 19 points and 10 rebounds.

**Trail Blazers 115, Spurs 110**

In San Antonio, Deni Avdija had 29 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists, Donovan Clingan added a career-high 24 points along with 12 rebounds and Portland beat San Antonio.

Toumani Camara had 20 points and eight rebounds as Portland led for all but 18 seconds in picking up its second straight victory.

Luke Kornet had 20 points and Julian Champagnie added 20 points and 10 rebounds for San Antonio. The Spurs had won two straight.

**Raptors 134, Hawks 117**

In Toronto, RJ Barrett scored a season-high 29 points, Brandon Ingram also had 29 and Toronto beat Atlanta in the first of back-to-back meetings between the teams.

Scottie Barnes scored 20 points and Immanuel Quickley had 15 for the Raptors, who have won five straight meetings with the Hawks and three of four games overall. Sandro Mamukelashvili had 13 points, 12 rebounds and a career-high eight assists.

Barrett scored eight points as Toronto, up one through three quarters, opened the fourth with a 16-0 run to take a 123-106 lead with 7:18 remaining. The Raptors are 17-1 this season when taking a lead to the fourth.

Atlanta missed six straight field-goal attempts to begin the final period before Nickeil Alexander-Walker connected for a 3 with 6:49 left.

Alexander-Walker finished with 31 points, Jalen Johnson added 30 and Dyson Daniels had 20 points and 12 assists for the Hawks.

**Hornets 112, Bulls 99**

In Chicago, Miles Bridges had 26 points and 14 rebounds, helping Charlotte beat Chicago.

Brandon Miller scored 22 points for Charlotte, and Kon Knueppel finished with 18. LaMelo Ball added 17 points and seven assists.

The Hornets had lost three straight and five of seven. They improved to 5-2 on the second day of back-to-back games.

Nikola Vucevic had 28 points, eight assists and seven rebounds for Chicago, which had won two in a row and seven of nine overall. Matas Buzelis scored 17 points.



England's Luke Littler lifts the trophy after winning the World Darts Championships final match against Gian van Veen of the Netherlands at Alexandra Palace in London. (AP)

## ‘The Nuke’ joins world-title elite

# Littler wins back-to-back world darts titles at 18

LONDON, Jan 4, (AP): Luke Littler is a back-to-back world darts champion at the age of 18.

The English phenom beat Gian van Veen of the Netherlands 7-1 in the final at Alexandra Palace to secure a record winner's prize of 1 million pounds (\$1.35 million) and underline his status as a generational talent in the sport.

It was Littler's third straight appearance in the final of darts' showpiece tournament. He lost to Luke Humphries in 2024 - as a precocious 16-year-old who quickly became a household name across Britain - and defeated Michael van Gerwen last year.

Twelve months later and now the world's top-ranked player, Littler -

nicknamed "The Nuke" - has become the 16th player to win multiple men's world titles.

Following his second title, Littler paid a tribute to Anthony Joshua's friends following their fatal car crash this week, before borrowing one of the heavyweight boxing champion's famous catchphrases.

"Obviously everyone knows what happened with Anthony Joshua and his guys and his team," Littler said.

"Rest in peace to his friends. But just like AJ said, the first time was so nice, I had to do it twice."

Such is Littler's talent that many are already wondering whether he can challenge the 16 world titles collected by Phil Taylor, darts' greatest ever player.

## US posts career-best finishes

# Germany sweeps bobsled World Cup medals

WINTERBERG, Germany, Jan 4, (AP): Germany's dominance of the World Cup two-man bobsled season continued Saturday, with the host nation sweeping the medals again.

Johannes Lochner was first, Adam Ammour was second and Francesco Friedrich was third. It was the fifth two-man race of the season and the fifth German sweep.

The only variable is the order; Lochner has now won four of those races, Friedrich won the other and Ammour got silver for the first time on Saturday after four bronzes to start the season.

American Kris Horn drove to a fourth-place finish, the best two-man result of his World Cup career as a pilot. And Frank Del Duca of the U.S. was fifth; he's been sixth or better in all five two-man events on the World Cup schedule to this point.

"It's great to start the second half of the season with good results," USA Bobsled coach Chris Fogt said. "It shows how hard our athletes continued to work and train over the holidays."

Earlier Saturday in Winterberg, Laura Nolte of Germany got her second women's monobob World Cup win of the season and her fifth medal in five tries.

Nolte prevailed, with Cynthia Apiah of Canada - matching her best career monobob showing - finishing second and Lisa Buckwitz of Germany placing third.

The U.S. women had a strong day, with Kaillie Humphries Armbruster leading the way with a fifth-place finish. Elana Meyers Taylor tied with Melissa Lotholz of Canada for sixth and reigning world champion Kaysha Love placed eighth.

All three U.S. sleds finished within 0.08 seconds of one another.

Summer Britcher and Emily



In this file photo, Second placed Johannes Lochner of Germany celebrates after the men's two-man bobsleigh World Cup race in Igls, near Innsbruck, Austria. (AP)

Fischnaller of the U.S. are in contending positions heading into Sunday's second run of this weekend's World Cup women's singles race at Sigulda, Latvia.

Julia Taubitz of Germany is the leader after one run, followed by Lisa Schulte of Austria and then Britcher in third - those three sleds separated by a mere 0.005 seconds. Fischnaller is fourth at the halfway point, 0.027 seconds off the lead.

In the men's race, which also will conclude Sunday, Felix Loch of Germany is the leader, with Austrian teammates Nico Gleirscher and Jonas Mueller holding the second and third spots. Jonny Gustafson was the top American on Saturday, placing 16th in his first run.

The U.S. had two sleds in the top six of a women's doubles luge race. Selina Egle and Lara Kipp won, with Dajana Eitberger and Magdalena Matschina of Germany in second,

then Andrea Voetter and Marion Oberhofer of Italy in third.

Marta Robezniece and Kitija Bogdanova of Latvia were fourth, followed by the U.S. sleds; Chevonne Forgan and Sophia Kirkby were fifth, followed by Maya Chan and Sophia Gordon in sixth.

In the men's doubles race, Edwards Sevics-Mikelsevics and Lukass Krasts of Latvia defended home ice and got their first World Cup victory. Tobias Wendl and Tobias Arlt of Germany were second, and Martins Bots and Roberts Plume of Latvia were third.

Marcus Mueller and Ansel Haugsjaa were ninth for the U.S., one spot ahead of Zach DiGregorio and Sean Hollander.

Bobsled: Two-woman and four-man World Cup races in Winterberg on Sunday. Skeleton: Men's World Cup race at St. Moritz, Switzerland, on Wednesday.

## Best of the Rest

**Fury eyes comeback:** Tyson Fury is returning to the ring after announcing on Sunday that he will step out of retirement.

The former heavyweight world champion confirmed his comeback in a post on social media, which sets up the prospect of a long-awaited showdown with Anthony Joshua.

"2026 is that year. Return of the mac," Fury posted on Instagram. "Been away for a while but I'm back now, 37 years old and still punching. Nothing better to do than punch men in the face and get paid for it."

Fury retired last year after losing for a second time to Oleksandr Usyk in December 2024. Before his two bouts with Usyk he was unbeaten in 35 fights, winning 34 and drawing one. (AP)

□ □ □

**Joshua posts 1st public update:** Former world heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua issued his first public update on Sunday following the car crash that killed two of his friends in Nigeria.

Joshua posted a picture on his Instagram account of him sitting on a couch with his mother and three other women, one of whom is holding a photo on her lap. Joshua wrote "My Brothers Keeper" on the caption along with two hearts. (AP)

□ □ □

**Diane Crump dies at 77:** Diane Crump, who in 1969 became the first woman to ride professionally in a horse race and a year later became the first female jockey in the Kentucky Derby, has died. She was 77.

Crump was diagnosed in October with an aggressive form of brain cancer and died Thursday night in hospice care in Winchester, Virginia, her daughter, Della Payne, told The Associated Press. (AP)

NOTICE FOR PUBLICATION

In compliance with the publication requirement and pursuant to the OCRG

Memorandum Circular No. 2013-1. Guidelines in the Implementation of the Administrative Order No. 1 Series of 2012 (IRR on R.A. 10172), a notice is hereby served to the public that

Generose Melchor Panaligan has filed with this Office a petition for correction in the date of birth from 05 May 2018 to 17 May 2018.

In the birth certificate of

Adona Rose Melchor Panaligan, who was born on 05 May 2018 at State of Kuwait and whose parents are

Adonis Muelo Panaligan and Generose Melchor Panaligan.

Any person adversely affected by said petition may file his written opposition with this Office not later than fourteen (14) days from the date of this notice.

# Stolz overcomes fall, set for Milan Cortina Olympics

MILWAUKEE, Jan 4, (AP): Star speedskater Jordan Stolz shockingly stumbled to the ice right after the start of the men's 1,000 meters at the U.S. Olympic trials for long track speedskating on Saturday but still finished with the third-fastest time and will

head to the Milan Cortina Winter Games.

Stolz caught the toe of one of his skates on the slick surface, lost his footing and tripped after fewer than five strides at the Pettit National Ice Center, about 40 miles south of his home-

town of Kewaskum. It was the sort of thing that simply doesn't happen to the best in the world at what he does - someone expected to earn multiple medals and to be one of the faces of the Feb. 6-22 Olympics.

He quickly rose and con-

tinued to race, faring well enough to turn in the third-fastest time of 33 entrants.

"I just tried to get it all out, right? Go as hard as I could and see what would happen, where I would end up," Stolz said.

He pointed to a recent

cold that prevented him from his normal preparation.

"Just didn't have the right feeling," the 21-year-old said. "Sitting around a lot. Been a little cramped up, dehydrated, so that was more so the issue today."

He's not just considered a

medal contender for at least three events, including the 1,000, in Milan - he might just be the favorite for gold.

In addition to owning the 1,000 world record, Stolz is a two-time world champion at each of the 500, 1,000 and 1,500.

Because of past results, Stolz was pre-qualified for those three Olympic races and only needed to take part Saturday to officially lock in a roster spot. Despite the misstep, he did end up with a time good enough to be among the trio of automatic qualifiers in the 1,000, joining Conor McDermott-Mostowy and Cooper McLeod.

McDermott-Mostowy clocked 1 minute, 7.606 seconds, with McLeod 0.24 behind and Stolz 0.36 off the pace.

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Al-Kholood routs Al-Fayha

Al-Ittihad edges Al-Taawoun to extend streak



Al-Ittihad player skillfully handles the ball in play.

RIYADH, Jan 4: Al-Ittihad claimed a hard-fought 1-0 victory over Al-Taawoun in the 13th round of the 2025-2026 Roshn Saudi League. The match was decided by Mohannad Al-Shanqeeti, who scored the winning goal in the 50th minute, giving the “Tigers” their fourth consecutive win.

With the victory, Al-Ittihad climbs to fifth place in the league standings with 23 points, while Al-Taawoun remains in third place on 28 points. Elsewhere in the round, Al-Kholood thrashed Al-Fayha 5-0, and Al-Fateh secured a 2-0 win over Al-Shabab.

The match also featured controversy, as VAR disallowed a

late goal by Abdel Fattah Adam for Al-Taawoun in the 89th minute, confirming the 1-0 result for Al-Ittihad. Former international referee Saad Al-Kathiri weighed in, calling the decision incorrect. He told Al-Jazirah:

“There was no foul by the Al-Taawoun player. The ball was closer to him, and it was the Al-Ittihad player who moved toward him. Play should have continued.” Despite the setback, Al-Ittihad’s win maintains their winning momentum, while Al-Taawoun’s 28 points keep them in contention, just one point behind Al-Hilal and three behind league leaders Al-Nassr.

Al-Arabi faces Al-Shabab

Al-Sulaibikhat aims to extend strong start against Al-Qadsia in the league

By Khaled Al-Enezi  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Al-Qadsia will take on Al-Sulaibikhat at 5:30 pm today in the sixth round of the General Volleyball League, held at the Federation Hall in the Sheikh Al-Abdullah Sports Complex. Later, at 7:30 pm, Al-Shabab faces Al-Arabi in another key match.

Currently, Kuwait Club leads the standings with 14 points, followed by Al-Arabi in second with 13 points, Al-Sulaibikhat third with 11 points, and Al-Qadsia fourth with 10 points. Kazma holds fifth with 8 points, Al-Shabab is sixth with 6 points, Burgan seventh with 4 points, Al-Yarmouk eighth with 3 points, Al-Nasr ninth, and Al-Sahel sit at the bottom without points.

While the Al-Arabi vs. Al-Shabab match favors the “Greens,” the highlight of the day is expected to be the Al-Sulaibikhat vs. Al-Qadsia clash. With only one point separating the third-placed Al-Sulaibikhat from fourth-placed Al-Qadsia, the encounter promises intensity and excitement.



A Qadsia player spikes the ball while the opponent tries to defend.

Al-Sulaibikhat has had its strongest league start in years, winning all four of its matches against Al-Nasr, Al-Yarmouk, Al-Arabi, and Kazma, establishing itself as serious title contender this season. A victory today would mean it has defeated all top teams except Ku-

wait Club, whom it will face on the 8th of this month.

Al-Qadsia, meanwhile, has won three of its four matches, losing only to Kuwait Club. A win today could see it level with Al-Arabi in second place if the latter falters in its Ahmadi match.

Rast ends Shiffrin slalom streak ahead of Olympics

Holdener takes third place

KRANJSKA GORA, Slovenia, Jan 4, (AP): The duel between Mikaela Shiffrin and her Swiss rival Camille Rast is shaping up nicely with 45 days to go until the women’s slalom race at the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics.

Rast ended Shiffrin’s six-race winning streak in World Cup slaloms Sunday, beating the American star by 0.14 seconds after clocking the fastest time in both runs at an event in Slovenia.

Rast, who is the slalom world champion, also led Shiffrin last week in Austria after the first leg but the American made up more than half a second on a deteriorating course to narrowly take the win.

On Sunday, though, Rast held on to her first-run lead for her fourth career win, and third in slalom, before being hugged by Shiffrin in the finish area.

“Her skiing is so strong, and it’s been building, building, building,” Shiffrin said about Rast. “The last races she had some mistakes that cost time. And today, how I saw her ski the first run, ah, I had to go 120% in order to have a shot. So, it was a big, big, amazing day for her.”

Shiffrin was still satisfied with her own skiing and celebrated by pumping her fist after finishing her final run, when Rast was yet to start.

“I had a really specific goal for my skiing for the second (run), a little bit technical thing, and I felt like I really accomplished that,” Shiffrin said.

“This was the hardest I could push. I pushed so hard, it was like a small mistake here and a small mistake there and I don’t think that cost time. That was just how hard I was trying. I could feel these turns that I wanted to feel.”

Sunday’s victory came one day after Rast earned her maiden giant slalom win on the same hill and



Switzerland's Camille Rast speeds down the course during an alpine ski, women's World Cup slalom, in Kranjska Gora, Slovenia. (AP)

dedicated that victory to the victims of the fire at a bar in Crans-Montana near her hometown of Vétroz.

“I gave everything I had this weekend. Double on the same weekend is quite amazing. I’m so happy,” Rast said, adding that “a lot of energy” was key to her triumph.

“It was a little bit a battle, but I had a lot of fun. And the slope, wow, was amazing. The preparation was top.”

The duo was far ahead of the rest of the field, with Rast’s teammate Wendy Holdener trailing by a massive 1.83 seconds in third for her first podium result in nearly a year.

Shiffrin’s teammate Paula Molizan in fourth was the only other racer finishing less than two seconds off the pace.

Shiffrin, who took slalom gold at the 2014 Olympics and holds four world titles in the discipline, won the final race of last season before taking the first five slaloms in the



United States' Mikaela Shiffrin celebrates her second place during the podium ceremony for an alpine ski, women's World Cup slalom, in Kranjska Gora, Slovenia. (AP)

current campaign and raise her career tally to 69 wins in slalom and 106 overall, both World Cup records.

Defending slalom World Cup winner Zrinka Ljubic of Croatia didn’t finish for the fourth time in six races this season.

Juventus draws with Lecce

Atalanta beats Roma in Gasperini’s return

MILAN, Jan 4, (AP): Gian Piero Gasperini’s return to Bergamo ended in defeat as his Roma lost at Atalanta 1-0 in Serie A on Saturday.

Giorgio Scalvini claimed the only goal in the 12th minute and Atalanta rose to eighth place.

Roma could have moved level with second-placed Inter Milan with a win but instead was left level on points with Juventus, which moved into fourth despite being held to a surprise 1-1 draw by relegation-threatened Lecce.

Como was three points further back after a Lucas Da Cunha penalty gave it a 1-0 win over Udinese.

There was a minute’s silence before kickoff in every game in Serie A this weekend for the victims of the fire at a Crans-Montana bar.

It was Gasperini’s first match against Atalanta since leaving in the summer after nine high-scoring seasons in charge, during which he transformed the Bergamo team into

a top contender in Italy and Europe.

Atalanta has struggled since his departure and is already on its second coach after Gasperini.

However, it was the home side which took the lead in the 12th minute when Scalvini managed to bundle in a corner. Gianluca Scamacca thought he doubled Atalanta’s lead in the 28th but it was ruled out after a lengthy video review because the home forward was judged to be offside at the start of the movement.

Juventus dominated and had numerous chances but it was Lecce which took a surprise lead in first-half stoppage time.

There seemed little danger when Juventus defender Andrea Cambiaso rolled a ball towards teammate Pierre Kalulu but it was underpowered and Lameck Banda rushed in to intercept before cutting past two opponents and firing into the near corner.

Juventus leveled almost imme-



Juventus' Lloyd Kelly, left, and Lecce's Jamil Siebert in action during the Serie A soccer match between Juventus and Lecce in Turin, Italy. (AP)

diately after the break as Weston McKennie touched on a cross and rushed into the area, right in front of goal, to control the return pass from

Kenan Yildiz and fire home.

It was McKennie’s first goal in Serie A this season although the United States international has scored two in the Champions League.

Juventus had a chance to take the lead when it was awarded a penalty after Lecce midfielder Mohamed Kaba blocked Jonathan David’s effort with his arm. David stepped up but the Canada forward’s penalty was central and weak and was saved by Falcone.

David almost atoned for his error late on but his fierce strike was brilliantly saved by Falcone. Yildiz also hit the post deep in stoppage time as Juventus laid siege to the goal.

Lecce inched five points above the relegation zone.

Genoa drew with Pisa 1-1 in a relegation tussle that will please neither side. Pisa midfielder Mehdi Leris equalized in chaotic circumstances at the end of the first half to cancel out Lorenzo Colombo’s screamer.

Iyer back for India ODIs

BCB seeks ICC approval to move T20 WC matches outside India

DHAKA, Bangladesh, Jan 4, (AP): Bangladesh has refused to travel to India for next month’s T20 World Cup and asked the ICC to move its games “outside India” due to strained political relations between the two countries.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board said in a statement on Sunday that it has decided not to send its cricket team to India “following a thorough assessment of the prevailing situation and the growing concerns regarding the safety and security of the Bangladesh contingent in India.”

The BCB said it also considered advice from its government before reaching out to the ICC “as the event authority to consider relocating all of Bangladesh’s matches to a venue outside India.”

The T20 World Cup will be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka from Feb. 7-March 8 and Bangladesh is due to play three group games in Kolkata and one in Mumbai.

Pakistan is already scheduled to play all its group games and beyond if it advances in the tournament, in Sri Lanka due political tensions with India that brought both countries to the brink of war last year.

On Saturday, Indian Premier League franchise Kolkata Knight Riders released Bangladesh fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman on the instructions of the Board of Control for Cricket in India. Mustafizur was the only Bangladesh player, who was picked for \$1 million, in the recent IPL auction.

Bangladesh announced its 15-member squad for the tournament on Sunday with Litton Das as skipper and Mustafizur leading the pace attack.

Shreyas Iyer was provisionally named in India’s squad on Saturday for the home one-day international series against New Zealand starting Jan. 11.

India will host the Black Caps in a white-ball engagement - three ODIs and five T20s - in the build-up to the 2026 T20 World Cup.

Iyer returns to the international fold after sustaining a spleen injury during an ODI against Australia in Sydney last October.

His selection is subject to fitness clearance from BCCI’s medical team and he will return as India’s vice-captain for the three-



Shreyas Iyer

match series.

Skipper Shubman Gill also returns, after he missed the ODI series against South Africa in December. He had a neck spasm in the test series earlier, and subsequently played in the T20s against the Proteas.

Ruturaj Gaikwad and Tilak Verma missed out. Gaikwad had scored a maiden ODI hundred against South Africa in Visakhapatnam.

Rishabh Pant is retained as second keeper-batter behind Lokesh Rahul, who had stood in as captain against the Proteas.

Star batters Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma had both participated in the domestic List A tournament - Vijay Hazare Trophy - and return to the international stage for the ODIs.

All-rounder Hardik Pandya is fit, but not sufficiently enough to bowl 10 overs in an ODI. Thus, he has been rested further ahead of the 2026 T20 World Cup (in India and Sri Lanka) starting Feb. 7. Nitish Kumar Reddy is included in the squad.

Pacer Mohammed Siraj returns to lead the bowling lineup with Jasprit Bumrah rested again. Siraj had missed the South Africa series because of workload management.

The three ODIs will be played in Vadodara (Jan. 11), Rajkot (Jan. 14) and Indore (Jan. 18), with the five-match T20 series starting Jan. 21.

Squad: Shubman Gill (captain), Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, KL Rahul, Shreyas Iyer, Washington Sundar, Ravindra Jadeja, Mohammed Siraj, Harshit Rana, Prasad Krishna, Kuldeep Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Arshdeep Singh, Yashasvi Jaiswal.

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NEWS





Mali players celebrate after the penalty shootout at the Africa Cup of Nations best of 16 soccer match between Mali and Tunisia in Casablanca, Morocco. (AP)

# Sports

## Al-Kharafi & Al-Anaz shine at Show Jumping Championship



Al-Kharafi, Al-Hunaidi, and Al-Fazeeh take their place on the podium.

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Kuwaiti riders delivered standout performances at the conclusion of the fourth edition of the Ghaseel Show Jumping Championship, held at the Kuwait Equestrian Center with the participation of riders from Kuwait as well as several Arab and European countries.

The opening day saw Anaz Al-Anaz capture first place in the Grand Prix event at a height of 140cm, while Mohammad Al-Mulaifi topped the Medium Prize class at 130cm. Mohammad Ghaloom claimed victory in the Small Prize category at 115cm.

On the second day, Ali Al-Kharafi continued the strong Kuwaiti showing by winning the Grand Prix at 140cm. Aws Al-Tanak secured first place in the Medium Prize class at 130cm, while Mohammad Al-Rifai triumphed in the Small Prize event at 120cm.

The final day featured victory for British rider Chad Fellows, who won the Grand Prix at 145cm. Madi Al-Khamis claimed the Medium Prize title at 135cm, while rising star Al-Joud Al-Sabah took top honors in the Small Prize class at 120cm.

Rider Saleh Al-Musallam said the championship reflects Ghaseel's commitment to community engagement.

"Over the past 10 years, Ghaseel has become the most widely used car-wash service platform in Kuwait. We have focused on supporting the community, particularly small businesses, through partnerships that help them expand their reach. From this same belief that support makes a difference, the fourth edition of the international show jumping championship was held with a strong public turnout," he said.

## Wolves claims win of season at 20th attempt

# Cunha earns Man United a point at Leeds

MANCHESTER, England, Jan 4, (AP): Matheus Cunha rescued a point for Manchester United in a 1-1 draw at Leeds in the Premier League.

The Brazil forward equalized for United after U.S. international Brenden Aaronson put Leeds in front in the second half at Elland Road.

Aaronson opened the scoring in the 62nd minute, but Cunha leveled three minutes later. Cunha was close to firing a winner late in the match with a curling shot from outside the box that struck the outside of the post.

United has lost just two of its last 14 games in the league, but six draws during that run have seen Ruben Amorim's team struggle to keep pace with the top three in the standings.

Leeds is unbeaten in seven games and went ahead when Aaronson raced past United defender Ayden Heaven and shot low into the far corner.

Cunha scored his third goal in his last five games when latching onto a pass from substitute Joshua Zirkzee and sliding a shot past Leeds goalkeeper Lucas Perri.

Declan Rice proved why he's a leading candidate to be the Premier League's player of the season by inspiring Arsenal to a come-from-behind victory at Bournemouth.

The England midfielder scored two second-half goals - with almost identical low, side-footed finishes - in a 3-2 win on the south coast.

Rice was a doubt for the match because of a knee injury that forced



Manchester United's Patrick Dorgu, left, and Leeds United's Gabriel Gudmundsson battle for the ball during the English Premier League soccer match between Leeds United and Manchester United in Leeds, England. (AP)

him out of the 4-1 win over Aston Villa on Tuesday. He was fit enough to return and was the difference between the teams.

"We are going to need everyone chipping in at different points so happy to help the team," said Rice, who scored twice in a Premier League game for the first time.

Arsenal fell behind in the 10th minute when Evanilson stroked into an unguarded net after intercepting a woeful pass out from the back by Gabriel Magalhaes.

The Brazil center back made amends by lashing in the equalizer six minutes later, following a mazy

run by Noni Madueke, for a second goal in as many starts since returning from six weeks out injured.

After Rice's double, a long-range strike by Bournemouth substitute Eli Junior Kroupi in the 76th minute made for a tense finale but Arsenal held on to record a fifth straight win, keeping Villa and Manchester City at arm's length in the title race.

It has taken 20 games but Wolverhampton Wanderers finally have their first win in the Premier League.

A 3-0 victory over West Ham at Molineux brought some respite for Wolves after its historically bad

start to a top-flight season.

No team has taken this long to record its first win of a Premier League campaign since the competition's inception in 1992.

The record for the longest winless start to a top-division campaign is held by Bolton Wanderers, who won for the first time in the 1902-03 season on their 22nd attempt.

Wolves, which has won twice in the English League Cup this season - including against West Ham - last tasted success in the Premier League on April 26. That was a month before the end of last season.

Jhon Arias, Hwang Hee-chan and Mateus Mané scored first-half goals for Wolves, which moved onto six points - still 12 from safety with 18 games remaining - but was only six points behind next-to-last Burnley, which lost at Brighton 2-0 on Saturday.

West Ham stayed in third-to-last place, four points from safety.

Wolves manager Rob Edwards said he was torn between feeling "a bit of relief and really pleased."

"We should enjoy it," he said, "but it's only one win. That's all it is."

Wolves was only six points behind next-to-last Burnley, which lost at Brighton 2-0, and eight off third-to-last West Ham.

West Ham manager Nuno Espirito Santo said his team's performance was "embarrassing" and the worst in his coaching career.

"I don't recall one day that I felt so bad in a football pitch," Nuno said.

# Senegal through to AFCON quarterfinals

## Mali eliminates Tunisia

RABAT, Morocco, Jan 4, (AP): Sadio Mané led Senegal to the quarterfinals of the Africa Cup of Nations after a 3-1 win over Sudan in Tangier.

The 2019 and 2022 African footballer of the year chased and harried, and set up goals and chances for teammates, leading by example in the absence of suspended captain Kalidou Koulibaly.

Mané set up midfielder Pape Gueye's first goal of two and substitute Ibrahim Mbaye's goal to send the Lions of Teranga, the 2021 champions, through to a quarterfinal against Mali, which held on with 10 men on a cold, wet night in Casablanca to beat Tunisia 3-2 in a penalty shootout.

"We needed to dig deep," said Senegal coach Pape Thiaw, whose team faced an early setback when Amir Abdallah stunned the favorites with Sudan's opener in the sixth minute.

It was the first and last goal scored by a Sudanese player in the tournament. The Falcons of Jediane defeated Equatorial Guinea in the group stage thanks to an own goal.

The Sudanese, who played all of their qualifying matches away from home as the country contends with a brutal war and humanitarian crisis, were bold against Senegal.

"I am sure the Sudanese people know that we came to this competition and proudly represented them," Sudan coach James Kwesi Appiah

said.

Senegal was a challenge too far, though.

Mané set up Gueye to score in the 29th. Gueye also got the second before the break, set up by Jackson. The 19-year-old Mbaye made his entrance as a substitute in the 74th and Mané set up the youngster to wrap it up on a break three minutes later.

El Bilal Touré fired Mali into the quarterfinals with the winning penalty in a 3-2 shootout win over Tunisia after they finished 1-1 with extra time.

Mali goalkeeper Djigui Diarra saved two penalties to make up for misses from Yves Bissouma and Dorgeles Nene, as the Eagles set up a showdown with Senegal in Tangier on Jan. 9.

Tunisia was left to rue the miss from Ali Abdi and saves Diarra made to deny Elias Achouri and Mohamed Ben Romdhane. They failed to beat Mali despite having an extra player from the 26th minute, when Woyo Coulibaly was red-carded for a dangerous tackle on Hannibal Mejbri.

It was one of many bad tackles. Referee Abongile Tom had already issued four yellow cards before the red.

Coulibaly was the second Mali player sent off in two games after Amadou Haidara against Comoros.

Even after the sending off, neither Mali nor Tunisia managed a shot on target in the first half.

Fans needed to wait till the 88th before Elias Saad crossed for Firas



Sudan's Mohamed Ahmed Saeed Ahmed, left, and Senegal's Sadio Mane fight for the ball during the Africa Cup of Nations best of 16 soccer match between Senegal and Sudan in Tangier, Morocco. (AP)

Chaouat to head what most assumed was Tunisia's winner.

But Tunisia defender Yassine

Meriah conceded a penalty in stoppage time, and Lassine Sinayoko duly equalized from the spot to send

the game to extra time. It was Mali's first shot on target.

Sinayoko also scored in the shoot-

out to draw the team level again after Mali captain Yves Bissouma started by blazing his penalty over.

# Barcelona goalie García shrugs off hostile homecoming at Espanyol for derby win

BARCELONA, Spain, Jan 4, (AP): Goalkeeper Joan García shrugged off the jeers and vitriol in his return to Espanyol and Barcelona teammate Fermín López set up two late goals for a 2-0 victory in a heated Catalan derby.

Fermin assisted fellow substitutes Dani Olmo and Robert Lewandowski in the 86th and 90th minutes to tilt the match in favor of the La Liga leaders.

But the credit for the win went to García, who made superb saves to frustrate an Espanyol attack that dominated all but the final period.

The final score hid a superb effort by fifth-placed Espanyol. Pere Milla and Roberto Fernández drew save after save from García, who was playing his first game at Espanyol since he left the "parakeets" last summer for its top rival. His highlight came in the 39th when García used a reflex one-hand save to paw a point-blank header by Milla over his crossbar.

Espanyol went as far as installing a thin mesh barrier behind the goals at RCDE Stadium to impede any object from being thrown toward the goalie from the stands. That did not dissuade the section of the club's most fervent young supporters from holding up signs with the image of a rat in Barcelona's burgundy-and-blue colors while shouting at García, a former fan favorite.

"Espanyol played a fantastic game. We didn't deserve it (the win)," Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said. "I have to say thank you to Joan García. He played an unbelievable match. He is one of the best goalkeepers in the world and we had the players off the bench who showed the quality this team has."

Flick also credited Espanyol coach Manolo González for having given García the "confidence" to grow last season, when he caught the eye of many top clubs



Barcelona's goalkeeper Joan Garcia, top, clears the ball during the Spanish La Liga soccer match between RCD Espanyol and Barcelona in Barcelona, Spain. (AP)

in Europe.

"(García) plays for us now and he has played unbelievable all season. He played fantastic and the clean sheet today was his responsibility."

Olmo broke through for Barcelona when he used one smooth touch to lob a pass by Fermin over Espanyol goalie Marko Dimitrovic. Fermin then followed that by dribbling past his marker inside the right side of the box before laying off for Lewandowski to finish off Espanyol.

Before that late burst by Barcelona, the action had mostly been in García's box where he made three stops to turn back Roberto in the second half.

The loss broke a run of five straight victories by Espanyol, its best winning run since the 1998-99 season.

"Today was a day to win and we let it get away from us," Espanyol's González said. Next up for Barcelona is a trip to Saudi Arabia for the Spanish Super Cup along with Madrid, Atletico Madrid and Athletic Bilbao from Jan. 7-11.

Villarreal beat Elche 3-1 to end a run of three straight losses across the league, Champions League and Copa del Rey. The victory on the road ensured Villarreal maintained third place in the table 11 points behind Barcelona.

It was the first home loss for Elche since it returned to the top flight this season in surprisingly strong style.

Borja Iglesias scored twice as Celta Vigo routed Valencia 4-1 at home, leaving the visitor on the brink of the relegation zone after just one win in 13 rounds.

"The numbers speak for themselves," beleaguered Valencia coach Carlos Corberán said.