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Opinion

■ Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

The country that became fixated on failure

FOR decades, the absence of sound governance crippled a nation and drove it towards failure. While countries with far fewer resources have managed to prosper, this nation, despite its immense wealth, has failed on nearly every level.

The crisis was a direct result of the absence of professional economic governance capable of harnessing the country's potential to improve living standards. Instead, the implementation of reckless and ideologically driven policies led to widespread failure, marked by systemic corruption and the appointment of unqualified individuals to positions of authority.

As conditions deteriorated, millions of people began leaving the country in search of better opportunities. The number of migrants, including a significant share who left illegally, is estimated at around seven million, which is a striking figure compared to Venezuela's total population of approximately 28 million.

Today, Venezuela holds the world's largest oil reserves, estimated at 303 billion barrels. Besides oil, the country is rich in other natural resources, including gold, diamonds, iron, bauxite, nickel, phosphates, and lithium.

It is important to note that, in addition to oil, Venezuela also possesses substantial untapped mineral resources, as well as agricultural and tourism sectors that were once significant sources of income.

For three decades, from the 1950s through the 1980s, Venezuelans experienced a high standard of living, largely sustained by unrestricted consumer spending.

However, the state's heavy dependence on oil as its sole source of revenue, combined with its failure to develop diversified industries or alternative economic strategies, resulted in the widespread subsidization of nearly everything.

This intense "curse of dependence on a single source

of income" proved disastrous when oil prices collapsed in the 1980s. The majority of the population were left unable to meet basic daily needs, despite the country's vast untapped natural wealth.

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: A comprehensive statistical study of cases heard in the Family Courts of the Court of First Instance from 2017 to 2024 revealed a significant increase in the number of family cases brought before the judiciary.

This rise was accompanied by high completion rates, reflecting the efficiency of judicial performance and the absence of case backlogs, despite the exceptional challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report showed that the Family Courts received a total of 278,116 cases during the study period. A total of 359,845 cases were heard, and 309,072 cases were adjudicated, resulting in an overall completion rate of 85.9 percent.

The report explained that 2024 recorded the highest number of received cases, accounting for 13.9 percent of the total, followed by 2019 at 13.7 percent. In contrast, 2020 recorded the lowest number of received cases at 8.8 percent, due to

disruptions in judicial work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With regard to pending cases, 2019 ranked highest at 13.6 percent, while 2020 ranked lowest at 9.2 percent for the same reasons.

Family Court cases made up the largest share of incoming cases at 45.2 percent, followed by family petition orders at 23.8 percent, with Jaafari family cases and grievances accounting for similar proportions.

Some types of cases recorded very low numbers, most notably endowment petition orders, with only six cases over the eight-year period, along with urgent cases for non-Muslims and grievances from non-Muslims.

Also, the total number of resolved cases reached 309,072. The years 2019 and 2024 recorded the highest number of resolved cases, each accounting for 13.7 percent, while 2020 had the lowest at just 8.5 percent.

Family court cases made up the largest share of resolved cases at 50.3 percent, followed by Family Court orders at 19.4 percent.

The report confirmed that the case resolution rate compared to pending cases reached 85.9 percent during the study period.

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Amiri Diwan photos

Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs and Head of the Crown Prince Diwan receive the Ambassador of Djibouti to Kuwait (left) and the Ambassador of Senegal to Kuwait (right).

Amiri Diwan Minister, Crown Prince Diwan Head receive Senegal, Djibouti ambassadors

Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah and Head of the Crown Prince Diwan Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Monday at Bayan Palace the Ambassador of Senegal to Kuwait, Hassan Sogou.

During the meeting, they touched on the relations linking the two countries and peoples and discussed ways to further develop cooperation

across various fields.

The meeting also reaffirmed the shared desire to expand cooperation and strengthen the foundations of the longstanding friendship between the two sides.

The talks also touched on the upcoming official visit of President Bassirou Diomaye Faye of the Republic of Senegal to Kuwait later this month.

In a separate meeting, Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah and Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received the Ambassador of Djibouti to Kuwait, Issa Khairy Robleh.

The meeting discussed the distinguished relations between the two countries and peoples, and discussed ways to enhance and develop existing frameworks of cooperation in various fields. (KUNA)



Acting Undersecretaries of the Ministries of Education and Justice during the signing of the cooperation protocol in the presence of the Ministers of Education and Justice.

Education, Justice tie-up to boost legal awareness

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5, (KUNA): Kuwait's Ministries of Education and Justice signed on Monday a cooperation protocol to strengthen educational and legal aspects, in line with the state's approach to enhancing institutional integration among government entities, and supporting partnerships that contribute to public service development.

Minister of Education Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaei said in a press statement that the protocol embodies the state's vision of unifying efforts on issues of common interest, supporting educational frameworks, promoting legal awareness, and reinforcing compliance with laws and regulations.

Minister of Justice Counselor Nasser Al-Sumait affirmed that the agreement reflects a firm belief in institutional cooperation to serve Kuwaiti society and praised the constructive collaboration with the Ministry of Education.

The protocol was signed by Acting Undersecretary of Education Engineer Mohammad Al-Khaldi and Acting Undersecretary of Justice Awatif Al-Sanad, in the presence of the two ministers and senior officials.

Public trust violated in Kuwait fraud case

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: The Public Prosecution presented its case before the Criminal Court, presided over by Judge Nasser Al-Bader, in Case No. 947/2025 (Capital Governorate), registered as No. 144/2025 (Money Laundering), concerning manipulation of withdrawals overseen by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The case follows the completion of investigations, after which the defendants were referred to criminal trial.

Omar Al-Otaibi, a member of the investigation team and Deputy Prosecutor for the Capital Governorate and the Anti-Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants Prosecution Office, presented the case to the court.

He outlined the serious findings and conclusive evidence uncovered during the investigations, revealing an organized criminal scheme designed to undermine the integrity of the withdrawal system, turning it from a mechanism based on equal opportunity into a tool for fraud, deception, and illicit personal gain.

Continued on Page 5

Six concerts planned for Kuwait February events

By Mohammed Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: The Ministry of Information is preparing to directly contract a specialized artistic production company to acquire the rights to broadcast, record, and transmit several concerts as part of the "February Kuwait" events.

According to informed sources, the contract, currently under review, is valued at KD 290,000. The step aims to keep pace with the artistic momentum of the national celebrations and provide distinguished content to the public via Kuwait TV.

The proposed contract covers six concerts performed by selected artists and singers, which will be broadcast exclusively on Kuwait TV, alongside a private satellite channel that holds exclusive transmission rights. This is intended to maximize audience reach and engagement for the events.

Continued on Page 5

Day by Day

THE Ministry of Health's decision to increase health insurance fees for residents means that companies will pay the higher fees to the government. These companies will, in turn, raise the costs of their projects. Ultimately, the state will bear the financial burden.

The problem with the Cabinet is its tendency to rush into decisions without adequately studying their negative consequences.

... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

Sovereign immunity under scrutiny

US legal battle over Maduro begins

NEW YORK, Jan 5, (AP): Deposed Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro is set to make his first appearance Monday in an American courtroom on the narco-terrorism charges the Trump administration used to justify capturing him and bringing him to New York.

Maduro and his wife are expected to appear at noon before a judge for a brief, but required, legal proceeding that will likely kick off a prolonged legal fight over whether

he can be put on trial in the U.S.

The couple were transported under armed guard early Monday from the Brooklyn jail where they've been detained to a Manhattan courthouse.

The trip was swift. A motorcade carrying Maduro left jail around 7:15 a.m. and made its way to a nearby athletic field, where Maduro slowly made his way to a waiting helicopter.

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Deposed Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores are led from a helicopter during the journey from prison to Manhattan court. (Source: IMA-GO/ZUMA Press Wire)

Newswatch

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwaiti Minister of Oil Tareq Al-Roumi has affirmed that Kuwait remains committed to supporting joint efforts aimed at promoting the recovery of the global economy and achieving balance in the oil market.

This came in a statement issued by the Ministry of Oil following Al-Roumi's participation in a virtual meeting of the eight countries involved in the agreement on the gradual exit from voluntary oil production cuts under the OPEC+ framework.

He emphasized that working within the OPEC plus alliance constitutes a fundamental pillar for reinforcing the stability of energy markets.

Al-Roumi said the meeting falls within the framework of ongoing coordination among participating countries to closely monitor developments in the oil market on a monthly basis, which enhances market stability and supply security.

He praised the decision of the eight countries to continue maintaining production rates for the months of February and March 2026, noting that Kuwait's production rate since December is 2.580 million barrels per day. He added that it was agreed that the next meeting would be held on Sunday, February 1, 2026. (KUNA)

2 11 companies cannot take part in 'tenders'

8 Kamco Invest manages 14 debt transactions worth \$7 bln in 2025



9 A year of breakthrough: Zain Kuwait leads 2025 in digital innovation and community impact that built 'Better Lives and Lasting Connections'

16 Over 122 channels to air PSG vs Marseille French Super Cup in Kuwait

LOCAL

diwaniya

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

O time of wonders ... all possible in a strange era

"TRULY we live in a strange era, one in which the truthful are branded liars, while the liars are trusted. A time when the ignorant and trivial dominate the public sphere, amassing tens of thousands of followers on social media, while learned and pious scholars are largely ignored," columnist **Hamed Salem Al-Marri** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"It is an age in which people hesitate to help others, fearing that their good will might fall afoul of laws criminalizing aid to wrongdoers. They are afraid to lend a phone to a stranger who urgently needs to make a call after running out of credit, worried that the person might be a drug dealer, a terrorist, or someone under surveillance, and that their act of help could be misinterpreted as complicity. It is also a time when people fear speaking to anyone sitting near them in public, unsure if the person might be a criminal under watch and if even a casual conversation could lead to accusations of collaboration.

"A time when people fear stopping for a broken-down car on the road, especially in the middle of the night, worried that it might be a fugitive criminal intending to rob them or steal their vehicle. A time when even a recklessly speeding car inspires fear, as the driver could be under the influence of drugs. A time when someone hesitates to sit in a gathering of acquaintances whose companions they do not know, fearing that some attendees might be drug users, and that they could be arrested, accused of associating with them, and face up to three years in prison under the new drug law.

"A time when the media is dominated by the 'bankrupt Brotherhood,' who recruit young people to serve their political interests, sometimes under the banner of Sharia, sometimes in the name of freedom, and sometimes invoking democracy, and by liberals who advocate permissiveness and moral decay in the name of personal freedom.

"Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) spoke the truth, 'There will come years of deception in which the liar will be believed, and the truthful disbelieved; the treacherous trusted, and the trustworthy betrayed; and the insignificant will speak.' It was asked, 'Who is the insignificant?' He replied, 'The worthless man who speaks about public affairs.'

"Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman said, 'People used to ask the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) about good, but I asked him about evil, fearing it would overtake me. I said, 'O Messenger of Allah, we were in ignorance and evil, then Allah brought us this good. Will there be evil after this good?' He said, 'Yes.' I asked, 'And will there be good after that evil?' He said, 'Yes, but it will be tainted.' I asked, 'What is its taint?' He said, 'People who guide others with something other than my guidance. You will recognize them... And he denied it. I asked, 'Is there evil after that good?' He said, 'Yes, there will be callers to the gates of Hell. Whoever answers their call will be thrown into it.' I asked, 'O Messenger of God, describe them to us.' He said, 'They are from our own people and speak our language'. I asked, 'What do you command me to do if I live to see that time?' He said, 'Adhere to the community of Muslims and their leader'. I asked, 'What if there is no community or leader?' He said, 'Then keep away from that. All factions, even if you must cling to the root of a tree until death overtakes you while in that state'."

"This statement is a direct warning against the 'bankrupt Muslim Brotherhood' and those who orbit around them, exploiting religion to advance their partisan interests."

Also:

"Floating 23 state-owned construction projects through public-private partnerships is a good and positive step. This move enhances private sector participation in stimulating the economy," **Sheikh Eng. Fahad Dawood Al-Sabah** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"However, it is essential that the terms and conditions are clear, particularly with regard to the participation of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). At present, the economy relies heavily on SMEs, as they serve as the primary link between large companies and consumers, as well as between the public and private sectors. SMEs play a vital role in creating job opportunities for recent graduates and in reducing the burden on the already bloated public sector."

"Partnerships among SMEs, large companies, and the public sector support economic development by financing infrastructure, transferring knowledge, creating jobs, improving efficiency, and stimulating innovation. Small companies benefit from access to markets and financing, while large companies benefit from specialized expertise. The public sector, in turn, benefits from private sector resources that help deliver better services and achieve development goals."

"Large companies participating in these projects will primarily require a national workforce, in addition to subcontractors for marketing and project management. This role is best fulfilled by SMEs, which offer a young workforce and innovative marketing ideas. All the proposed projects are consumer-oriented and provide fast services that can only be delivered through a skilled workforce. SMEs also benefit from partnerships with large companies and

the public sector by gaining technical and managerial expertise through joint ventures.

"In today's rapidly changing world, driven by technological advancements, global challenges, and interconnected markets, partnerships are no longer merely a growth strategy but a fundamental pillar of the economy. Collaboration across all sectors has become essential, as it enables companies, governments, and startups to generate broad benefits that serve the nation as a whole. Such partnerships empower individuals to unlock new opportunities, reduce costs, and maximize sustainable economic impact."

□ □ □

"With the start of the year 2026, more than a pause is needed. What is urgently needed are a careful review, an objective analysis, and serious reflection on the political arena," columnist **Khaled Ahmad Al-Tarrah** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Kuwait was not a political funeral procession, but a nation with its own story to tell, its own history to record, and its own objections to decisions, policies, confrontations, and shortcomings. In Kuwait's political funeral, figuratively speaking, former ministers and members of parliament walked not as mourners, but as part of the procession that led to the current outcome. A political inventory requires examining more than one stance and more than one deviation, both ministerial and parliamentary.

"The parliamentary years from 2013 to 2020 were marked by bleak scenes, the most notable being the legislative branch's encroachment on the powers of the executive branch, which ultimately led to the dissolution of the 2020 National Assembly under a decisive decision and wise guidance from the political leadership. This raises questions about the boundaries between parliamentary and ministerial rights and responsibilities. Political action is shaped in practice, and the political arena is built upon the legacy of previous governments and parliaments. Yet paradoxically, we are left with a single arena, devoid of review and correction.

"In this arena, we have not seen any joint political effort between ministers and members of parliament to preserve the state, the constitution, and democracy from pitfalls, deviations, and the arbitrary use of constitutional tools. As a result, Kuwait has found itself in a political dead end. The breakdown in cooperation between the executive and legislative branches was evident in the 2020 parliament and the 2022 parliamentary year, which witnessed the constitutional invalidation of the National Assembly.

"This was followed by the rise of strident voices from certain MPs, both inside and outside parliament, particularly during the 2023 and 2024 elections, which was closely linked to the accumulation of parliamentary and ministerial deviations between 2013 and 2020. In contrast, not a single government, nor any ministers in positions of responsibility, took the initiative to correct the course or lay the political foundations for the relationship between the two branches of government. The scene resembled a political funeral procession. Not a single minister, during debates on grilling motions, revealed the truth or exposed the sources of political pressure and blackmail exercised by some MPs.

"Most ministers did not dare to admit defeat or offer concessions as a political virtue, except for those who resigned during, before, or after a grilling. Even then, these resignations were driven by self-preservation or personal interest, rather than the public good. In reality, the defeat was a defeat for governments that willingly relinquished their constitutional responsibilities to certain members of parliament and yielded to political demagoguery.

"The focus of a grilled minister was often on personal interests, future electoral prospects, or securing regional and international government positions. Meanwhile, the MPs leading the grilling were primarily concerned with winning voters' approval by claiming a fake victory over a weak government that avoided genuine constitutional confrontation. Tribalism, sectarianism, factionalism, and regionalism were inflamed, their effects spreading across Kuwait and undermining its national achievements.

"There has been a complete absence of any serious initiative from either Parliament or the Government to extinguish this political conflagration. Both the parliamentary and governmental arenas have devolved into marketplaces of bargaining and political scrap trading. The scene often appeared as a veiled act of revenge against the national gains established by the 1962 Constitution. Enough time has passed since the suspension of certain constitutional articles and the dissolution of the 2024 Parliament to review ministerial and parliamentary mistakes, acknowledge successes and failures, and assess them objectively and responsibly."

"Perhaps the new year, 2026, will bring optimism, renewal, national reconciliation, and a prudent approach to addressing the shortcomings of the recent past, allowing democracy to be revived."

Compiled by Simi K. Kutty



KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: Director General of the Police Aviation Department Air Commodore Salem Al-Shehab, First Lieutenant Dana Al-Shaleen and securitymen at the air base.

Police force to get 1st woman pilot

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5, (KUNA): The Ministry of Interior announced on Sunday selecting First Lieutenant Dana Al-Shaleen to study aviation sciences in Greece, marking her as the first female police pilot in Kuwait's history.

Director General of the Police Aviation Department Air Commodore Salem Al-Shehab said in a statement issued by the Ministry of Interior that this scholarship is a historic first for Kuwait's security and military institutions.

He pointed out that First Lieutenant Al-Shaleen would

undergo intensive academic and practical flight training in Greece to qualify as a pilot officer.

"This step clearly embodies the State's vision of empowering women and enhancing their participation in various security sectors as well as keeping pace with the latest developments in the security field," he stated. He added that the initiative also comes within the framework of the Ministry's non-stop efforts led by the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheik Fahad Yousef Al-Sabah for modernizing the force.

Police force must stick to work timing

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: The Ministry of Interior has issued a circular to all members of the police force on the need for adherence to the attendance and departure system, reports Al-Anba daily.

The Administrative Circular No. 248/2025, which was issued by Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Major General Abdulwahab Al-Wahib, emphasizes that members of the police force must register their attendance and departure using electronic fingerprint devices. All personnel are required to record their attendance and departure at the officially designated times approved by their respective departments. Failure to comply with the electronic fingerprint system will result in disciplinary action.

The circular specifies that disciplinary measures will be applied based on the principle of graduated penalties, and in accordance with Ministerial Resolution No. 898/1998 on the executive regulations for disciplinary penalties for members of the police force and its amendments.

Major General Al-Wahib directed assistant undersecretaries, heads of sectors, directors general, and department directors to ensure full awareness of the circular and to implement it accurately in order to contribute to strengthening job discipline and institutional commitment.

Booze peddlers acquitted

Cassation court overrules Appeals verdict

By Jaber Al-Hamoud
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: The Court of Cassation overturned the verdict of the Court of Appeals that sentenced two defendants in a liquor trafficking case to prison, and upheld the lower court's acquittal ruling.



Al-Qattan

The Court of Cassation concluded that the arrest and search procedures carried out during a sting operation conducted by the Drug Control General Department (DCGD) were invalid.

In its reasoning, the highest court affirmed the validity of the argument raised by the defendants' lawyer, Attorney Abdul Mohsen Al-Qattan, regarding the invalidity of the arrest and search warrant due to its issuance and expiration before the procedure was executed. The court considered this argument to be sound as per the Code of Criminal Procedure. It explained that Article 44 of the law stipulates that a written warrant is required for a search, which was not the case here. It emphasized that mere suspicion or observing the accused in an "abnormal state" does not constitute a state of flagrant delicto that permits arrest and search without a warrant.

The case details revealed that the Public

Prosecution accused the defendants of possessing alcoholic beverages with the intent to trade and distribute them. They were apprehended in Hawally through a sting operation carried out using an informant who was provided with marked money to purchase alcohol. The operation resulted in the discovery of 27 bottles of Chivas and 36 bottles of Black Label, in addition to KD395. The arresting officer indicated that the defendants admitted the seized items belonged to them and were intended for sale. However, the defense argued during the proceedings that the search warrant was not valid at the time of the operation, thus, invalidating the arrest, the search, and the resulting evidence. The Court of Cassation accepted this argument, hence, acquitting the defendants and reaffirming that invalid procedures cannot be used as basis for a conviction.

Major leap recorded in e-judicial notifications: MoJ

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait says the ministry has recorded a record increase and a significant leap in the rate of electronic notifications since the issuance of the ministerial decree in April 2025 for adopting modern technological methods for judicial notifications, reports Al-Anba daily.

In an official statement, Minister Al-Sumait explained that more than 403,000 electronic notifications have been completed, compared to just 57,000 traditional notifications, reflecting a transformation rate of 85 percent. This shift helps expedite litigation procedures, reduce delays in notifications, increase the efficiency of judicial communications, and deliver notices directly to the parties involved through approved digital channels.

He emphasized that this development is part of the ministry's plan for complete digital transformation, aimed at improving service quality and facilitating faster and more reliable access to judicial procedures for litigants.

Syrian mugged in Hawally

Woman, partner held in stabbing, robbery

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: The Hawally Investigation Department of the General Department of Criminal Investigations has successfully closed a case involving attempted robbery and stabbing, classified as a felony, after arresting a woman and her accomplice for the crime, reports Al-Anba daily.

The incident occurred on Saturday around 8:00 pm when a Syrian expat born in 1997 reported that he had been targeted by two individuals in an attempted robbery.

According to the victim, the woman stole a silver bag containing KD 860.

When he attempted to intervene, her accomplice stabbed him in the left shoulder before both suspects fled the scene.

Following the report, detectives immediately launched an investigation.

They visited the crime scene and reviewed CCTV footage.

With the assistance of confidential sources, they were able to identify the suspects and determine their location in Hawally.

The suspects were subsequently apprehended and transferred to the Criminal Investigation Department at the Hawally Police Station.

During questioning, the first suspect admitted that a verbal argument had escalated into him stabbing the victim.

The second suspect confessed to the attempted theft, stating that she seized the opportunity to take the bag from the victim.

A physical altercation had taken place between the victim and the first suspect as the victim tried to prevent their escape.

It was established that the first suspect's actions were intended to separate the victim from the second suspect after the bag was stolen.

The case has now been referred to the Public Prosecution for further legal action.

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Health ministry unveils unified employee self-service platform

E-performance appraisals run Jan 4–31

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: The Ministry of Health has launched a unified digital platform for employee self-services (ESS) and inaugurated its first electronic ser-

vice, which is the electronic performance appraisal. This new service aims to enhance administrative efficiency and improve the quality of services provided to employees.

In an official statement, the ministry explained that the ESS platform is a smart application that offers a comprehensive suite of human resources and other administrative services through a single electronic portal. It is designed to streamline procedures, expedite transactions, and enhance the overall user experience.

The electronic performance appraisal service will be used to evaluate performance for the 2025 fiscal year. Evaluations will be conducted through the application from January

4 to 31, 2026, within a framework of governance and transparency to ensure fairness, accuracy, and support decision-making based on objective and reliable data.

The smart platform will expand in the next phase to provide integrated administrative services, including leave requests, official assignments, transfer requests, and attendance monitoring.

meet local health, living, and educational needs.

Activities included a medical camp, field visits to orphans and the elderly, distribution of food baskets, shopping trips for orphans, visits to schools, and helping repair some classrooms to improve the learning environment and support basic living standards for vulnerable individuals.

Kuwaiti volunteers conducts 10-day mission in Indonesia

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5, (KUNA): The Kuwaiti volunteer team Sahabt Amal carried out a series of humanitarian programs in Indonesia to support the most deprived, as part of Kuwait's charitable sector efforts to encourage volunteering abroad.

The 10-day mission was organized by Kuwaiti doctors from the team, with volunteers from other Gulf countries, reflecting joint humanitarian cooperation to



Kuwaiti volunteer team Sahabt Amal carried out a series of humanitarian programs in Indonesia.



KUNA photos

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Applications open until Feb 5

Japanese government launches scholarship for Kuwaiti teachers

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: The Embassy of Japan in the State of Kuwait is pleased to announce that the Government of Japan is offering a scholarship for Kuwaiti teachers who wish to conduct research on school education at designated Japanese Universities.

The Japanese Government Scholarship, established in 1954, aims to foster mutual understanding between the people of Japan and those of other nations, while contributing internationally to the advancement of intellectual exchange.

All Kuwaiti nationals who meet the qualifications below are eligible to apply:

1. Applicants must be born on or after April 2, 1991.

2. Applicants must be graduates of universities or teacher training schools, and have worked as teachers at elementary, middle, high schools or teacher training schools in Kuwait for at least five years as of October 1, 2026. In-service faculty members in higher education institutions are not eligible.

3. Applicants should be physically fit to participate in the program.

4. Applicants must be interested

in Japan and willing to deepen their understanding of Japan after arriving there. Applicants must also have the ability to do research in Japan and adapt to living there.

5. Applicants must return to Kuwait by the end of the final month of the scholarship period and resume their work as teachers in their educational institutions.

All necessary information and application forms are available through the link:

<https://www.studyinjapan.go.jp/en/smap-stopj-applications-teacher.html>

Applications must be submitted in person at the Embassy of Japan after scheduling an appointment. And after receiving the applications, the Embassy will conduct the document screening, written examinations in English and Japanese, and personal interviews in order to select the scholarship awardee.

The deadline for submitting applications is Thursday, February 5, 2026 at 03:00 P.M.

For inquiries, please contact cultural section:

■ Email address: culturalsection@kw.mofa.go.jp

■ Telephone: +965 - 2530 9426 | 9458

CSC urges govt agencies to lift freeze on vacant financial posts

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: The Civil Service Commission (CSC) has called on relevant government agencies to lift the freeze on vacant financial positions to meet the staffing needs in various government entities and facilitate appointments, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In an official statement, Assistant Undersecretary of CSC Salah Al-Saqabi said this step is part of

CSC's ongoing efforts to utilize vacancies created by employees' end-of-service in various government agencies.

Al-Saqabi stressed the importance of cooperation among government agencies to ensure the activation of appointments to vacant positions, in line with the country's administrative development goals and the public interest.

Review of applications begins March 5

Education ministry opens appeals for 2024/25 performance bonuses

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: The Ministry of Education announced that it will begin receiving appeals regarding the excellent performance bonus for employees in institutes, schools, and kindergartens for the 2024/2025 academic year from Sunday, January 4 to March 4 via the ministry's official website, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The ministry clarified that the review and processing of appeals will begin on March 5, in preparation for disbursing the bonus to eligible applicants in accordance with approved procedures and

regulations.

It confirmed the completion of the first phase of disbursing the outstanding performance bonus and the launch of the second phase, which allows employees to check their eligibility and submit appeals regarding non-receipt of the bonus for the 2024/2025 academic year.

Appeals and inquiries will be accepted through the Ministry of Education's official website for a period of 60 days, including Fridays and official holidays, as stipulated in the relevant ministerial decree.

24 tenders assessed for compliance

SAB reviews key airport projects

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: The State Audit Bureau (SAB) is currently reviewing 24 tenders and projects for implementation at Kuwait International Airport, with a total estimated value of KD8 million.

Reliable sources revealed this review is part of the approved oversight procedures, indicating SAB is still in the review phase, following the submission of applications by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). They said the financial and technical aspects of the tenders and projects are being scrutinized in preparation for issuing a final opinion on them in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

Sources added the tenders under review include the following:

- Baggage handling services at Terminal One (T1)
- Restaurants and commercial spaces at the airport
- Design, manufacture, supply, installation and operation of specialized technological systems, including an integrated ground-based sensor station system, an overhead airborne system and a hydrogen generator system – a move to introduce modern and advanced technologies into the airport's operations.

■ A number of commercial and service activities at T1 like travel agencies, telecommunications services, cafés, shops selling eyeglasses, clothing and electronics, car rentals, pastry shops, and other activities aimed at improving services provided to travelers and airport users.

Sources confirmed that SAB reviews all tenders and projects according to the approved oversight frameworks, focusing on their compliance with applicable laws and their impact on developing airport facilities and improving service quality. They stressed that observations will be subject to the established procedures to ensure proper implementation and in the interest of the public.

News in Brief

Grade-12 exam stats: The Ministry of Education announced the attendance, absence, and disqualification statistics for the first semester final exams for grade-12 students on the first day of examinations, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In the science section, 29,292 students attended the mathematics exam, while 605 were absent and 21 were disqualified.

In the arts section, 10,761 students attended the French language exam, with 607 absent and 10 disqualified.

■ ■ ■

7 illegal food trucks impounded: Farwaniya Municipality carried out a comprehensive campaign throughout the governorate, resulting in the removal and impoundment of seven illegal food trucks in coordination with the Ministry of Interior, reports Al-Rai daily.

Mohammed Al-Jubai'ah, Director of the Public Hygiene and Road Occupancy Department at the Farwaniya Municipality, confirmed that field campaigns will continue to monitor violators and take legal action against them.

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Ramadan starts Feb 18: Astronomer Adel Al-Saoudoun announced that the upcoming month of Ramadan will be 30 days long, with relatively cool weather expected during the holy month, reports Al-Jarida daily.

He revealed that the first day of Ramadan will fall on February 18, making March 20 the first day of Eid al-Fitr.

LOCAL

Boards urged to support local farmers and ensure smooth operations under new directives

MoSA issues standardized form for Cooperative inspections

By Fares Ghaleb

AI-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff
KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Financial, Administrative and Cooperative Affairs at the Ministry of Social Affairs Dr. Sayed Issa confirmed the preparation of a standardized form for inspectors

in cooperatives and its distribution to relevant authorities. In a press statement, Issa revealed that the ministry has started contacting the chairpersons of the boards of directors of cooperatives to allocate spaces for the Kuwaiti farmers, as stipulated in Ministerial Resolution No. 347/2025, published in the official gazette, 'Kuwait Al-Youn'.

He stated that each cooperative society has also been instructed to assign a specialized employee from the Purchasing Department to serve as a liaison for coordination and follow up and to expedite the resolution of inquiries or obstacles that may arise during the implementation phase.

He said the vegetable teams are con-

tinuing their efforts, in coordination with cooperative societies and administrative and financial inspectors, to ensure the proper implementation of the resolution. He added this is being done under the guidance of Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huailah in order to support local produce and strengthen

the cooperative system.

He called on the boards of directors of cooperative societies to shoulder their responsibilities and adhere to the principles of cooperative management, particularly regarding attendance, followup, and avoiding disruption of cooperative operations. He stressed that negligence or dereliction of duty within

the boards of directors is unacceptable, warning that non-compliant boards will be summoned and that necessary measures will be taken against those proven to be obstructive or refusing to perform their duties, including dismissal and the appointment of replacements to ensure the continuity of operations and good management of cooperatives.



Receiving patients at the treatment camp.

Around 250 specialized operations planned

Kuwait's Fund Society carries out life-saving surgery camp in Sudan



A glimpse into the medical operations of the Kuwaiti Patients Fund camp.

Khartoum, Jan 5, (KUNA): Kuwait's Patients Helping Fund Society has launched a surgical camp in Sudan's Khartoum and Kassala states, aiming to perform around 250 specialized operations.

Sudan's Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) praised the initiative, highlighting the Fund's vital role in supporting life-saving health services in cooperation with the Sudanese Doctors Association in Qatar (SUDAQ). Executive Director of the Patients Helping Fund Society Abdulkmajid Fadlallah reaffirmed the Fund's commitment to developing healthcare services through partnerships, commending Sudanese doctors abroad for their contributions.

Hospital officials described the camp as a successful model of Arab health cooperation. At Om-

durman Teaching Hospital, the initiative includes 200 procedures over one week, while Kassala

Teaching Hospital emphasized its role in capacity building and service localization.

Continued from Page 1

The country

It also has vast, underutilized agricultural lands that once earned it the title of the "breadbasket of Latin America" before its severe economic decline.

The country's current economic catastrophe, where nearly 91 percent of the population lives below the poverty line and external debt has reached about 200 percent of GDP, or roughly USD 170 billion, is the result of several factors. They include excessive reliance on oil as a single source of income, rampant corruption, administrative nepotism, political and economic mismanagement, and the coercive imposition of communist governance.

The absence of forward-looking economic management, one that plans for the future, diversifies income sources, and reduces dependence on oil, ultimately doomed the country. This failure stands as a stark warning to others.

The case of Nauru, which relied solely on phosphates until their depletion led to poverty and dependence on foreign aid, highlights the dangers of relying on a single resource.

Countries seeking a secure future must learn from these lessons and avoid the trap of economic singularity, including excessive dependence on oil.

Ultimately, nations that fail to invest their savings and sovereign wealth funds also tend to fail in effectively promoting their industrial and economic opportunities.

Kuwait courts

The highest case resolution rate was recorded in 2024 at 89.2 percent, while the lowest was in 2020 at 79.7 percent.

The resolution rate compared to new cases filed in the same year stood at 82.4 percent, reflecting the smooth functioning of the judicial system and the absence of backlog, as resolution rates exceeded 70 percent in all years.

At the court level, the Capital Governorate Court recorded the highest completion rate at 90 percent in 2024, followed by the Farwaniya Governorate Court at 90.5 percent, and the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate Court at 90.4 percent.

Conversely, most courts saw their lowest completion rates in 2020, due to the impact of the pandemic and the suspension of court sessions.

The report highlighted a clear disparity in annual change rates. In 2021, cases filed, pending, and adjudicated saw the highest increase compared to 2020, while 2020 experienced the largest decline compared to 2019, due to the exceptional global circumstances.

Public trust

The Public Prosecution strongly argued that the instant constitutes one of the most serious and dangerous crimes, leaving a lasting wound on the state and society. It was committed under the guise of public office, undermining the trust on which the state and its institutions are built.

The prosecution emphasized that this was not an isolated error or individual act, but a coordinated crime where malicious intent and criminal roles converged. Public office was exploited, eroding public trust and violating legal principles.

Investigations revealed a systematic deviation in managing the withdrawals, with procedures manipulated to compromise impartiality. This resulted in falsified outcomes and illicit gains, clearly violating integrity, the rights of participants, and the principle of equal opportunity.

The prosecution further revealed that the first defendant, identified as A.M.H., responsible for ensuring the integrity of the prize draws, appeared in the circulated video conducting a fraudulent draw after pre-arranging the results in favor of one of the defendants.

He deliberately concealed her participation slip within his clothing in full view of attendees, cameras, and the media. This undeniable act served as conclusive evidence of the criminal scheme and helped expose the entire plot.

The prosecution emphasized that the case is not merely a criminal offense but a clear violation of professional integrity and a betrayal of public trust.

It affirmed its ongoing commitment to its constitutional duty to protect society, uphold the integrity of the criminal process, and reinforce the values of professional honesty.

The prosecution pledged to confront all forms of corruption firmly, without leniency, in full accordance with the law.

It requested the maximum penalties for the defendants, emphasizing that corruption, regardless of its duration or the size of its gains, will ultimately be held accountable before a vigilant and impartial judiciary.

The court also heard the defense team's arguments, in which they de-

manded the acquittal of their clients and requested their release on any guarantee the court deems appropriate pending the final verdict.

Six concerts

The sources revealed that the Ministry of Information has submitted a request to the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) to approve the direct contracting method, which is still under review.

They noted that direct contracting was chosen due to the nature of the artistic works and the associated broadcasting rights, which require speedy execution and coordination and are linked to specific dates within the celebrations program.

On another note, CAPT approved the request of the Ministry of Information to issue a public tender for organizing a celebration marking 64 years since Kuwait's first television broadcast, in accordance with Article 17 of Public Tenders Law No. 49/2016.

The sources stated that CAPT's Board of Directors authorized the relevant entity to carry out the necessary procedures through a public tender, following the approved legal frameworks, to ensure the highest artistic and organizational standards for the upcoming celebration.

They emphasized that this step is part of the Ministry of Information's efforts to commemorate national occasions and prominent milestones in Kuwaiti media history through high-quality events and programs that showcase the legacy of Kuwaiti television, its cultural and media role, and enhance Kuwait's artistic and media presence during February.

US legal

The chopper flew across New York harbor and landed at a Manhattan heliport, where Maduro, limping, was loaded into an armored vehicle.

A few minutes later, the law enforcement caravan was inside a garage at the courthouse complex, just around the corner from the one where Donald Trump was convicted in 2024 of falsifying business records. Across the street from the courthouse, the police separated a small but growing group of protesters from about a dozen pro-intervention demonstrators, including one man who pulled a Venezuelan flag away from those protesting the U.S.

KPC maps 2026 growth goals for energy sector

Plan emphasizes acquisitions, expansion efforts

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) has set six primary and four secondary objectives for the development and sustainability of Kuwait's oil sector in 2026.

According to informed sources, the first objective is to increase acquisitions by its foreign subsidiaries, citing as an example the projects agreed with partner Shell for the final investment in developing the West Mena oil field in the Egyptian Mediterranean Sea, which was scheduled for 2025.

The second objective focuses on exploring domestic hydrocarbon resources using advanced methods and the latest technologies to expand the geographical scope of oil production, with the goal of reaching four million barrels per day.

The third objective is to complete

the first phase of offshore exploration during 2026, covering six oil fields, half of which has already been completed.

The fourth objective aims to maximize the refining capacity of overseas refineries to achieve full production efficiency. This follows the company's success, in collaboration with other companies, in boosting the output of the Nghi Son Refinery by 120 percent and in upgrading the Milazzo sour crude oil processing unit in Italy to enhance its capacity to refine multiple types of crude oil.

The fifth objective focuses on expanding petrochemical production both domestically and internationally, targeting an annual output of 14.5 million tons of various petrochemicals by 2040.

The sixth objective aims to maximize gas production. This year, KPC will launch promising projects through Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) to expand gas production capacity by optimally utilizing advanced technologies to reduce import dependency.

An official document highlighted KOC's relentless efforts to increase production capacity and meet grow-

ing local market demand.

The company has achieved significant milestones in natural gas production through the use of advanced technologies, infrastructure development, and the discovery of new fields, creating opportunities for future expansion and strengthening its leading role in the energy sector.

The document explained that KOC achieved its highest-ever non-associated gas production in the 2024/2025 fiscal year, reaching 683 million standard cubic feet (MMscf).

By the end of the fiscal year, non-associated gas production had reached approximately 637 MMscf, surpassing the annual target of around 630 MMscf. The company continues its efforts to achieve its strategic objectives in this area.

KOC successfully connected two high-pressure gas export pipelines in western Kuwait that supply the desulfurization plant, providing additional diversion options through the existing 30-inch export pipeline. This ensures operational flexibility and enables the export of 40 million standard cubic feet of gas per day.

KJA calls on members to pay 2026 annual dues

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: The Kuwait Journalists Association has urged its members to pay their annual subscription fees for the year 2026, reports Al-Jarida daily.

In a press statement, the association explained that with the end of the 2025 fiscal year and the start of the upcoming new fiscal year, the board of directors reminds members to settle their financial obligations

promptly, collect their 2026 membership cards, and visit the association's office during official working hours from 9:00am to 4:00pm.

Dues can be paid in cash or via KNET.

According to Article 3 of the association's financial regulations, dues are payable from January 1, 2026, to March 31, 2026.

47 posts open across 18 cooperatives

GUST opens prep courses for co-op supervisory applicants

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: After the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) completed the review of job applications and verified applicants' eligibility for supervisory positions in cooperative societies through the "Fakhruna" platform, the recruitment process advanced to the preparation and qualification phase, paving the way for the approved tests to select qualified national candidates.

In this context, Gulf University of Science and Technology (GUST) announced on its website the launch of optional preparatory training courses for the second batch of citizens applying for vacant supervisory positions in cooperative societies, ahead of the written exam, the date of which will be announced later.

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According to the university, the courses will begin on Sunday, January 11, and run for four weeks. Each course will include five training days, totaling 15 hours, plus a three-hour review day, with content tailored to the

specific supervisory positions being targeted.

Informed sources explained that a coordination meeting is scheduled for Wednesday between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Gulf University, with the ministry participating this time as an observer in the examination process.

The meeting will discuss exam dates, preparation and organizational procedures, monitoring mechanisms, and the process for announcing results.

Data indicated that 1,072 applicants met the employment requirements out of 1,305 who applied for supervisory positions through PAM's "Fakhruna" platform during the previous period.

The eligible applicants are competing for 47 vacant supervisory positions, including general managers, their deputies for financial and administrative affairs, commercial affairs, and department heads, in 18 cooperative societies.

The initiative aims to strengthen cooperative work with qualified national leaders based on clear professional standards.

Al-Mutlaa water station hits full capacity after pipeline upgrade

By Mohammed Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: The Al-Mutlaa Water Station began operating at full capacity on Monday, following the completion of a new, higher-capacity main water pipeline.

According to informed sources from the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, the upgrade aims to meet the growing demand for fresh water and strengthen the stability of supplies for residents in the area.

The new pipeline was designed to ensure a continuous and safe flow of water, and tackle operational bottlenecks. This enhancement improves the efficiency of the distribution system and raises the level of service for Al-Mutlaa residents, especially amid ongoing urban expansion and rising population density.

The sources highlighted that bringing the station to full operation is a

major milestone in the ministry's plan to develop water infrastructure in new residential areas and ensure readiness to meet current and future demand, particularly during peak summer periods.

They noted that the Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, the Minister of Finance, and the acting Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Dr. Subaih Al-Mukhaizeem had instructed the project be completed quickly, emphasizing the urgency in activating the station to guarantee residents a stable and uninterrupted water supply.

The sources affirmed that similar projects are ongoing to modernize water networks and enhance operational efficiency, as part of a comprehensive strategy to strengthen water security and improve the quality of essential services provided to citizens in residential areas.

- See Also Page 7

INTERNATIONAL

Fire survivors return home to new nightmare

Toxic ash still haunts homes a year after LA wildfires

ALTADENA, Calif., Jan 5, (AP): "DANGER: Lead Work Area" reads a sign on a front door of an Altadena home. "May damage fertility or the unborn child. Causes damage to the central nervous system."

Block after block there are reminders that contaminants still linger.

House cleaners, hazardous waste workers and homeowners alike come and go wearing masks, respirators, gloves and hazmat suits as they wipe, vacuum and power-wash homes that weren't burnt to ash.

It's been a year of heartbreak and worry since the most destructive wildfires in the Los Angeles area's history scorched neighborhoods and displaced tens of thousands of people. Two wind-whipped blazes that ignited on Jan. 7, 2025, killed at least 31 people and destroyed nearly 17,000 structures, including homes, schools, businesses and places of worship. Rebuilding will take years.

The disaster has brought another wave of trauma for people afraid of what still lurks inside their homes.

Indoor air quality after wildfires remains understudied, and scientists still don't know the long-term health impacts of exposure to massive urban fires like last year's in Los Angeles. But some chemicals released are known to be linked to heart disease and lung issues, and exposure to minerals like magnetite has been associated with Alzheimer's disease.

Ash in the area is a toxic soup of incinerated cars, electronics, paints, furniture and every other kind of personal belonging. It can contain pesticides, asbestos, plastics, lead or other heavy metals.

Many with homes still standing are now living with the hazards left by the fires.

Nina and Billy Malone considered their home of 20 years a safe haven before smoke, ash and soot seeped inside, leaving behind harmful levels of lead even after professional cleaning. Recent testing found the toxin is still on the wooden floors of their living room and bedroom.

They were forced to move back home in August anyway, after insurance cut off their rental assistance.

Since then, Nina wakes up almost daily with a sore throat and headaches. Billy had to get an inhaler for his worsening wheezing and congestion. And their bedroom, Nina said, smells "like an ashtray has been sitting around for a long time." She worries most about exposure to unregulated contaminants that insurance companies aren't required to test.

"I don't feel comfortable in the space," said Nina, whose neighbors' homes burned down across the street.

They're not alone.

According to a report released in November by the Eaton Fire Residents United, a volunteer group formed by residents, six out of 10 homes damaged from smoke from the Eaton Fire still have dangerous levels of cancer-causing asbestos, brain-damaging lead or both. That's based on self-submitted data from 50 homeowners who have cleaned their



An aerial view shows cleared lots and rebuilding in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles, Friday, Dec. 5, 2025, months after the Palisades Fire. Inset: Ellard Bailey kisses the forehead of his wife Charlotte after Los Angeles County approved their rebuilding plans, months after the Eaton Fire, as they visit their neighbor Ted Koerner whose home was rebuilt in Altadena, Calif., Thursday, Dec. 11, 2025. (AP)

homes, with 78% hiring professional cleaners.

Of the 50 homes, 63% have lead levels above the Environmental Protection Agency's standard, according to the report. The average lead levels were almost 60 times higher than the EPA's rule.

Even after fires were extinguished, volatile organic compounds from smoke, some known to cause cancer, lingered inside of people's homes, according to a recent study. To mitigate these risks, residents returning home should ventilate and filter indoor air by opening windows or running high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) purifiers with charcoal filters.

Zoe Gonzalez Izquierdo said she can't get her insurance company to pay for an adequate cleanup of her family's Altadena home, which tested positive for dangerous levels of lead and other toxic compounds.

"They can't just send a company that's not certified to

just wipe things down so that we can go back to a still contaminated home," Gonzalez said, who has children ages 2 and 4.

Experts believe the lead, which can linger in dust on floors and windowsills, comes from burned lead paint. The University of Southern California reported that more than 70% of homes within the Eaton Fire were built before 1979, when lead paint was common.

"For individuals that are pregnant, for young children, it's particularly important that we do everything we can to eliminate exposure to lead," said pediatrician Dr. Lisa Patel, executive director for the Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health and a member of the climate group Science Moms.

The same goes for asbestos, she added, because there is no safe level of exposure.

People who lived in the Pacific Palisades, which was also

scorched, face similar challenges.

Residents are at the mercy of their insurance companies, who decide on what they cover and how much. It's a grueling, constant battle for many. The state's insurer of last resort, known as the California Fair Access to Insurance Requirements Plan, has been scrutinized for years over its handling of fire damage claims.

Homeowners want state agencies to enforce a requirement that insurance companies return a property to pre-fire condition.

Julie Lawson won't take any risks. Her family paid about \$7,000 out of pocket to test the soil in their Altadena home, even though their insurance company had already agreed to pay to replace the grass in their front yard. They planned to test for contaminants again once they finished remediating the inside, the process of making a home contaminant-free after a fire. If insurance won't cover it, they'll pay for it themselves.

Even if their home is livable again, they still face other losses - including equity and the community they once had.

"We have to live in the scar," she said. "We're all still really struggling."

They will be living in a construction zone for years. "This isn't over for us."

Annie Barbour with the nonprofit United Policyholders has been helping people navigate the challenges, which include insurance companies resisting to pay for contamination testing and industrial hygienists disagreeing on what to test for.

She sees the mental health toll it's having on people - and as a survivor herself of the 2017 Tubbs Fire in Northern California, she understands it.

Many were at first joyful to see their houses still standing.

"But they've been in their own special kind of hell ever since," Barbour said.

Now residents like the Malones are inspecting their belongings, one by one, fearing they may have absorbed toxins.

Boxes, bags and bins stuffed with clothes, chinaware and everything in between fill the couple's car, basement, garage and home.

They have been painstakingly going through their things, assessing what they think can be adequately cleaned. In the process, Nina is cleaning cabinets, drawers, floors and still finding soot and ash. She wears gloves and a respirator, or sometimes just an N-95 mask.

Their insurance won't pay to retest their home, Billy said, so they're considering paying the \$10,000 themselves. And if results show there's still contamination, their insurance company told them they will only pay to clean up toxins that are federally regulated, like lead and asbestos.

"I don't know how you fight that," said Nina, who is considering therapy to cope with her anxiety. "How do you find that argument to compel an insurance company to pay for something to make yourself safe?"

'Russian claim aimed at undermining talks'

Ukraine didn't target Putin residence: Trump



US President Donald Trump speaks with reporters while in flight on Air Force One, Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, as returning to Joint Base Andrews, Md. (AP)

pened." Trump told reporters as he traveled back to Washington on Sunday after spending two weeks at his home in Florida. "We don't believe that happened, now that we've been able to check."

Trump addressed the U.S. determination after European officials argued that the Russian claim was nothing more than an effort by Moscow to undermine the peace effort.

But Trump, at least initially, had appeared to take the Russian allegations at face value. He told reporters last Monday that Putin had also raised the matter during a phone he had with the Russian leader earlier

that day. And Trump said he was "very angry" about the accusation.

By Wednesday, Trump appeared to be downplaying the Russian claim. He posted a link to a New York Post editorial on his social media platform that raised doubt about the Russian allegation. The editorial lambasted Putin for choosing "lies, hatred, and death" at a moment that Trump has claimed is "closer than ever before" to moving the two sides to a deal to end the war.

The U.S. president has struggled to fulfill a pledge to quickly end the war in Ukraine and has shown irritation with both Zelenskyy and Putin as he tried to mediate an end to a conflict he boasted on the campaign trail that he could end in one day.

Both Trump and Zelenskyy said last week they made progress in their talks at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort.

But Putin has shown little interest in ending the war until all of Russia's objectives are met, including winning control of all Ukrainian territory in the key industrial Donbas region and imposing severe restrictions on the size of Ukraine's post-war military and the type of weaponry it can possess.

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INTERNATIONAL

China supports UN Security Council to hold emergency meeting over US operation against Venezuela

Venezuelan interim leader invites Trump to 'collaborate,' seeks 'respectful relations'

BEIJING, Jan 5, (Agencies): China supports the United Nations Security Council to hold an emergency meeting on the U.S. military action against Venezuela, and backs the Security Council in fulfilling its due role in accordance with its own responsibilities, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian told a news briefing here on Monday.

Lin noted that China is ready to work with the international community to firmly uphold the UN Charter, defend the bottom line of international morality, and safeguard international fairness and justice.

The UN Security Council will hold an emergency meeting on Monday on the U.S. operation against Venezuela, the council presidency told Xinhua on Saturday.

As uncertainty simmers in Venezuela, interim President Delcy Rodríguez has taken the place of her ally President Nicolás Maduro, captured by the United States in a nighttime military operation, and offered "to collaborate" with the Trump administration in what could be a seismic shift in relations between the adversary governments.

Rodríguez served as Maduro's vice president since 2018, overseeing much of Venezuela's oil-dependent economy and its feared intelligence service, and was next in the presidential line of succession.

She's part of a band of senior officials in Maduro's administration that now appears to control Venezuela, even as U.S. President Donald Trump and other officials say they will pressure the government to fall in line with its vision for the oil-rich nation.

On Saturday, Venezuela's high court ordered her to assume the role of interim president, and the leader was

backed by Venezuela's military.

Rodríguez, a 56-year-old lawyer and politician has had a lengthy career representing the revolution started by the late Hugo Chávez on the world stage. It's been unclear if the leader would warm up to the Trump administration or follow the same adversarial line as her predecessor.

Her rise to become interim leader of the South American country came as a surprise on Saturday morning, when Trump announced that Secretary of State Marco Rubio had been in communication with Rodríguez and that the Venezuelan leader was "gracious" and would work with the American government. Rubio said Rodríguez was someone the administration could work with, unlike Maduro.

But in a televised address, Rodríguez gave no indication that she would cooperate with Trump, referring to his government as "extremists" and maintaining that Maduro was Venezuela's rightful leader.

"What is being done to Venezuela is an atrocity that violates international law," Rodríguez said, surrounded by high-ranking civilian officials and military leaders.

Trump warned on Sunday, if Rodríguez didn't fall in line, "she is going to pay a very big price, probably bigger than Maduro." He added that he wanted her to provide "total access," from oil facilities to basic infrastructure like roads, so they can be rebuilt.

Trump's comments also followed Rubio having asserted in TV interviews on Sunday that he didn't see Rodríguez and her government as "legitimate" because he said the country never held free and fair elections.

On Sunday, in statements posted to her Instagram, she took a major



President of the new Constituent Assembly Delcy Rodriguez, in red, leads the newly sworn-in members as they pose for an official photo, in Caracas, Venezuela, Aug. 4, 2017. (AP)

shift in tone in a conciliatory message where she said she hoped to build "respectful relations" with Trump.

"We invite the US government to collaborate with us on an agenda of cooperation oriented towards shared development within the framework of international law to strengthen lasting community coexistence," she wrote.

A lawyer educated in Britain and France, the interim president and her brother, Jorge Rodríguez, head of the Maduro-controlled National Assem-

bly, have sterling leftist credentials born from tragedy. Their father was a socialist leader who was arrested for his involvement in the kidnapping of American business owner William Niehous in 1976, and later died in police custody.

Unlike many in Maduro's inner circle, the Rodríguez siblings have avoided criminal indictment in the U.S., though the interim president did face U.S. sanctions during Trump's first term for her role in undermining

Venezuelan democracy.

Rodríguez held a number of lower-level positions under Chávez's government, but gained prominence working under Maduro to the point of being seen as his successor. She served the economic minister, foreign affairs minister, petroleum minister and others help stabilize Venezuela's endemic crisis-stricken economy after years of rampant inflation and turmoil.

Rodríguez developed strong ties

with Republicans in the oil industry and on Wall Street who balked at the notion of U.S.-led regime change. The interim president also presided over an assembly promoted by Maduro in response to street protests in 2017 meant to neutralize the opposition-majority legislature.

She enjoys a close relationship with the military, which has long acted as the arbiter of political disputes in Venezuela, said Ronal Rodríguez, a spokesperson for the Venezuela Observatory of Rosario University in Bogota, Colombia.

"She has a very particular relationship with power," he said. "She has developed very strong ties with elements of the armed forces and has managed to establish lines of dialogue with them, largely on a transactional basis."

It's unclear how long Rodríguez will hold power, or how closely she will work with the Trump administration.

Geoff Ramsey, a senior nonresident fellow at the Atlantic Council, a Washington research institute, said Rodríguez's initially firm tone with the Trump administration may have been an attempt to "save face." Others have noted that Maduro's capture required some level of collaboration within the Venezuelan government.

"She can't exactly expect to score points with her revolutionary peers if she presents herself as a patsy for U.S. interests," Ramsey said.

Venezuela's constitution requires an election within 30 days whenever the president becomes "permanently unavailable" to serve. Reasons listed include death, resignation, removal from office or "abandonment" of duties as declared by the National Assembly.



Chinese President Xi Jinping, center left, and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung, center right, inspect a guard of honor during a welcoming ceremony in Beijing, China, Monday, Jan. 5, 2026. (AP)

Xi, Lee witness signing of 15 cooperation agreements

China, South Korea boost ties at summit

BEIJING, Jan 5, (Xinhua): China and the Republic of Korea (ROK) share close economic ties with industrial and supply chains deeply interwoven, and the bilateral cooperation is mutually beneficial, Chinese President Xi Jinping said on Monday.

The two countries should further align their development strategies, strengthen policy coordination, expand the pie of common interests, and achieve more cooperation results in emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, green industries, and the silver economy, Xi said when holding talks with visiting ROK President Lee Jae Myung in Beijing.

China and the Republic of Korea (ROK) should join hands to safeguard the fruits of the victory in World War II and protect peace and stability in Northeast Asia, Chinese President Xi Jinping said on Monday.

More than 80 years ago, the two

peoples made tremendous national sacrifices and won the victory against Japanese militarism, Xi said when holding talks with ROK President Lee Jae Myung in Beijing.

China and the ROK shoulder important responsibilities in maintaining regional peace and promoting global development, and share a wide range of common interests, Xi said, noting that the two countries should firmly stand on the right side of history and make the right strategic choices.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and President of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Lee Jae Myung witnessed the signing of 15 cooperation documents in fields including scientific and technological innovation, ecological environment, transportation, and economic and trade cooperation after their talks on Monday.

Earlier, Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng on Monday emphasized that

China and the Republic of Korea (ROK) should strengthen economic ties and forge new prospects for win-win cooperation.

He, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks while jointly attending a China-ROK business forum in Beijing with ROK President Lee Jae Myung.

He said that under the strategic guidance of the important consensus reached between the two heads of state, China and the ROK should actively promote the improvement and upgrading of economic and trade cooperation, continually opening up new prospects for win-win cooperation.

China will unswervingly expand high-level opening-up and welcomes enterprises from all countries, including those from the ROK, to invest and do business in China and share in the opportunities of its development, noted He.

"Through today's launching drill, we can confirm that a very important technology task for national defense has been carried out," Kim said, according to KCNA. "We must continuously upgrade the military means, especially offensive weapon systems."

The possession of a functioning hypersonic weapon would give North Korea an ability to penetrate the U.S. and South Korea's missile defense shields. In past years, North Korea has performed a series of tests to acquire it, but many foreign experts question whether the tested missiles have achieved their desired speed and maneuverability during flights.

In recent weeks, North Korea test-fired what it called long-range strategic cruise missiles and new anti-air missiles and released photos showing apparent progress in the construction of its first nuclear-powered submarine.

Observers say North Korea aims to demonstrate or review its achievements on the weapons development sector ahead of the ruling Workers'

Kim pushes nuclear deterrence

North Korea shows off hypersonic missiles

SEOUL, Jan 5, (AP): North Korea said Monday that leader Kim Jong Un observed test-flights of hypersonic missiles and underscored the need to bolster the country's nuclear war deterrent, as the country dials up weapons displays ahead of its major political conference.

North Korea reported on the drill a day after its neighbors said they detected multiple ballistic missile launches and accused the North of carrying out provocations. The tests came just hours before South Korean President Lee Jae Myung departed for China for a summit with President Xi Jinping.

The official Korean Central News Agency said Sunday's drill involving a hypersonic weapon system was meant to examine its readiness, enhance missile troops' firepower operational skills and evaluate operational capabilities of the country's war deterrent.

"Through today's launching drill, we can confirm that a very important technology task for national defense has been carried out," Kim said, according to KCNA. "We must continuously upgrade the military means, especially offensive weapon systems."

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Observers say North Korea aims to demonstrate or review its achievements on the weapons development sector ahead of the ruling Workers'

Party congress, the first of its kind in five years. Keen attention is on whether Kim would use the congress to set a new approach on relations with the U.S. and resume long-dormant talks.

North Korea's nuclear program is expected to be discussed when Lee and Kim meet for a summit later Monday. Lee's office earlier said he would call for China, North Korea's major ally and economic pipeline take "a constructive role" in efforts to promote peace on the Korean Peninsula.

The latest launches followed Saturday's audacious U.S. military operation that ousted Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro from power and brought him to the U.S. to face narco-terrorism conspiracy charges. North Korea slammed the operation, saying it again shows "the rogue and brutal nature of the U.S."

Many experts say the U.S. operation likely leave Kim pushing to further expand his nuclear weapons capabilities

that he thinks guarantees the survival of his government and state sovereignty in the face of U.S.-led hostilities.

During Sunday's launch drill, Kim defended his push for a stronger nuclear program. "Why it is necessary is exemplified by the recent geopolitical crisis and complicated international events," he said.

South Korea's Defense Ministry noted the launches violated U.N. Security Council resolutions that ban any ballistic activities by North Korea. It urged North Korea to cease provocative actions immediately and respond to South Korea's push to restart talks and restore peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Japanese Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said that at least two missile launches by North Korea have been confirmed. "They are a serious problem threatening the peace and security of our nation, the region and the world," Koizumi told reporters.

Asia

Marcos signs \$115bn budget: Philippine President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr. on Monday signed into law a 6.793-trillion-peso (about 115 billion U.S. dollars) national budget for 2026.

At the signing ceremony at the presidential palace, Marcos said the 2026 General Appropriations Act is aligned with the government's medium- and long-term development plans and is aimed at improving the lives of Filipinos.

In the budget, education received the largest share, with more than 1.34 trillion pesos allocated for additional teaching and non-teaching plantilla positions, teacher promotion and reclassification, and nationwide classroom construction. (Xinhua)

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Manila arrests retired Air Force gen: Philippine police on Monday arrested retired Air Force Major General Romeo Poquiz on charges of sedition in connection with his alleged role in a destabilization plot against the government.

Operatives of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group arrested Poquiz at Manila's international airport upon his arrival from a family holiday in Bangkok, Thailand, by virtue of an arrest warrant issued by a court for rebellion and inciting to sedition.

Authorities said the complaint stemmed from a protest rally organized by Poquiz's group in Manila in November last year, during which he allegedly urged members of the armed forces to rise against the current government.

Following his arrest, Poquiz was brought to the Philippine National Police national headquarters, where he underwent booking and documentation procedures before being presented to the court. (Xinhua)

Death toll from floods in Indonesia rises to 9

JAKARTA, Jan 5, (Agencies): The death toll from flash floods and landslides in the eastern Indonesian province of North Sulawesi early Monday has risen to nine, the National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) said.

The disaster struck Sitaro Islands Regency at around 2:30 a.m. local time following prolonged heavy rainfall.

BNPB said five people remain missing, while 17 others were injured. A total of 102 residents were displaced and sheltered at a nearby church building.

The agency also said that rocks and mud swept through residential areas, inundating streets and damaging houses. Floodwaters had receded by Monday afternoon, but electricity and telecommunications networks remained disrupted in the affected areas.

Five houses were reportedly washed away, while assessments of other material losses are still underway.

Also:

JAKARTA: Indonesian rescuers recovered a second body Sunday in the ongoing search for a Spanish soccer coach and two of his children who went missing after a tour boat sank during their Christmas holiday.



In this photo released by the Indonesian National Search and Rescue Agency (BASARNAS) on Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, rescuers recover a body believed to be one of the victims of a tourist boat that sank on Dec. 26, in the waters near Padar Island in Komodo National Park, Indonesia. (AP)

Chinese president congratulates Doumbouya

Guinea's junta leader confirmed president-elect

CONAKRY, Jan 5, (Agencies): The Supreme Court in Guinea on Sunday upheld the election victory of Gen. Mamadi Doumbouya, cementing the junta leader's transition to a democratically elected president four years after staging a coup in the West African nation.

Doumbouya won the country's first election since the 2021 coup after polling 86.7% of the votes, according to the General Directorate of Elections. His victory, which had been predicted by analysts, was confirmed by the Supreme Court in the capital Conakry.

"Today, there are neither winners nor losers. There is only one Guinea, united and indivisible," Doumbouya said in a broadcast late Sunday, calling on citizens to "build a new Guinea, a Guinea of peace, justice, shared prosperity, and fully assumed political and economic sovereignty."

Yero Baldé, the runner-up who won 6.59% of the vote, had filed a petition accusing the electoral body of manipulating the results in Doumbouya's favor. But authorities said he withdrew the petition a day before the Supreme Court verdict.

The Dec. 28 election was held under a new constitution that revoked a ban on military leaders running for office and extended the presidential mandate from five years to seven years.

Critics say Doumbouya has clamped down on political opponents and dissent since the 2021 coup, leaving him with no major opposition among the



This photo taken on Nov. 11, 2025 shows Mamady Doumbouya attending an official launch ceremony of the Simandou iron ore and infrastructure project held at the port of Morebaya, Forecariah Prefecture, Guinea. (Xinhua)

Guilavogui added. Despite the country's rich mineral resources including the world's biggest exporter of bauxite, which is used to make aluminum, more than half of its 15 million people are experiencing record levels of poverty and food insecurity, according to the World Food Program.

The junta's most important initiative has been a mega-mining project at Simandou, the world's largest iron ore deposit. The 75% Chinese-owned project began production in December after decades of delays.

Meanwhile, Chinese President Xi Jinping on Sunday sent a congratulatory message to Mamady Doumbouya on his election as president of Guinea.

In his message, Xi noted that Guinea is the first sub-Saharan African country to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.

The two sides, he said, have long upheld mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit, supported each other on issues involving their respective core interests and major concerns, and carried out fruitful cooperation for common development.

Xi also said that he attaches great importance to the development of China-Guinea relations and stands ready to work with Doumbouya to further develop the two countries' comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership, so as to make greater contributions to improving the well-being of both peoples and promoting solidarity in the Global South.

In Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar

Kamco Invest manages 14 debt transactions worth \$7 bln in 2025

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: Kamco Invest, a regional non-banking financial powerhouse with one of the largest AUMs in the region, successfully lead and managed 14 debt capital market transactions in 2025 totaling USD7.0bn. The transactions consisted of thirteen sukuk and bond issuances worth USD6.7bn for financial institutions and corporates in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Qatar in addition to one liquidity management transaction for USD304mn for a Kuwaiti company.

The Debt Capital Markets team successfully acted as Joint Lead Manager on six bond issuances totaling USD2.9bn and seven sukuk issuances totaling USD3.8bn. The majority of these transactions were for Kuwaiti banks, in USD and KWD, amounting to USD3.3bn, followed by the UAE with three transactions worth USD1.5bn, Saudi Arabia with two transactions totaling USD1.4bn, and Qatar with one transaction worth USD500mn.

In Kuwait, the team participated in seven issuances totaling USD3.3bn comprised two KWD-denominated issuances and five USD-denominated issuances for leading Kuwaiti banks, underscoring the team's strong presence and influence in the local debt capital markets.

Since launching its debt capital markets platform, Kamco Invest has played a key role in managing over USD27.2bn through conventional and Islamic debt issuances across all GCC countries. Our participation in key GCC corporate bond and sukuk issuances underscores our position as a trusted debt advisor in the region. We help clients navigate the complexities of debt capital instruments, providing tailored solutions across bonds and sukuk to meet their diverse financing needs.

The GCC debt capital markets had reached record high levels during 2024, and issuers maintained that



Abdullah AlSharekh

AlSharekh: We are proud to have acted alongside leading international institutions as joint lead managers on local and regional USD-denominated issuances



Omar A. Zaineddine

Zaineddine: We have created a DCM platform that empowers clients and investors to reach their goals, foster enduring partnerships, and navigate market dynamics

record in 2025 with equal issuances of USD207bn. In terms of type of issuers, corporate issuances reached a new record high level of USD128.6bn during 2025 vs. USD108.2bn in 2024. Government issuances, on the other hand, declined from USD98.6bn in 2024 to reach USD77.9bn in 2025. The share of bonds in the total amount increased to USD125.2bn in 2025 vs. USD106.2bn in 2024 while sukuk issuances declined to USD81.4bn in 2025 as compared to USD100.6bn in 2024.

At the country level, Saudi Arabia continued its lead in the region, although total issuances declined from USD100.3bn in 2024 to USD82.0bn in 2025. Issuances

in the UAE remained elevated around last year's levels at USD64.9bn in 2025 while Qatar showed a decline of 21.7% with total issuances reaching USD22.1bn. Kuwait saw the biggest increase in issuances in the GCC after the government passed the debt law, reaching USD20.5bn in 2025 vs. USD2.6bn in 2024.

Abdullah M. AlSharekh, Managing Director of Markets and Investment Banking, said, "We remain committed to strengthening our track record, achieving unprecedented levels in completed transaction values. Our emphasis on long-term client relationships, innovative financing structures, and increased participation in regional issuances has reinforced Kamco Invest's

standing as a leading force in the region's debt capital markets."

Kamco Invest's ability to adapt to the evolving regulatory and economic environment in the GCC has allowed it to provide innovative solutions that cater to a diverse range of issuers across different sectors. Through aligning its offerings with regional development and investor demand, the Company has consistently delivered on promises to its clients and contributed to the growth across debt capital markets.

Executive Director of Debt Capital Markets, Omar Zaineddine, said, "Focused on the evolving needs of local and regional issuers, our Debt Capital Markets team actively supports the growth of the region's capital markets. Through extensive experience and a robust track record, we have created a DCM platform that empowers clients and investors to reach their goals, foster enduring partnerships, and navigate market dynamics. As the market evolves, we look forward to pursuing new debt opportunities and contributing to the development of Kuwait's and the wider region's financial ecosystem."

AlSharekh concluded, "We are proud to have acted alongside leading international institutions as joint lead managers on local and regional USD-denominated issuances. We thank our clients for their trust in us and, by leveraging our expertise and strong relationships, we remain committed to navigating the dynamic market landscape and supporting the region's economic growth."

It is worth noting that Kamco Invest was named Kuwait's Best Investment Bank – DCM at the Euromoney Awards for Excellence 2025, recognizing the Company's strong performance and extensive track record in managing debt capital market transactions on behalf of local and regional clients.

Under 'Diraya' campaign

KFH promotes financial safety and transparency



addition to the long and short-term investment plans.

Meanwhile, KFH warns customers against engaging in high-risk investments that are promoted by unregulated entities and are not subject to oversight by any supervisory authority fueled by the growing presence of shell companies and other online scammers that promote quick profits. KFH advises customers and investors to refrain from responding to advertisements, text messages and emails received from unknown sources. Additionally, the Bank also urges investors to seek advice from qualified experts before making any investment decisions.

Coastal & warehouse deals plunge

Kuwait real estate market grows 21.8% in December

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: The real estate market witnessed remarkable growth in December, increasing by 21.8 percent, with transactions totaling KD510.4 million through 597 deals, compared to KD419 million for 573 deals in November, in view of the increased demand for residential, investment and commercial properties.

According to official data released by the Real Estate Registration and Documentation Departments at the Ministry of Justice in December, private real estate accounted for 70.8 percent of the total number of transactions during the month, ranking first with 423 deals valued at KD249.4 million, compared to 425 deals valued at KD172.1 million in November.

Investment properties came in second at 22.4 percent of the total number of transactions with 134 deals valued at KD156.4 million -- three percent increase in volume and 25.4 percent increase in value compared to 130 deals valued at KD124.7 million in the previous month.

Commercial real estate also recorded a strong performance in December, registering 34 transactions worth KD98.7 million, compared to 13 transactions worth KD93 million in the previous month. This is a growth of 141.5 percent in the number of transactions and six percent in transaction value.

The disparity between the quan-

tative and qualitative growth rates reflects the completion of smaller-scale transactions during this period.

In contrast, the data showed a remarkable decline in the number and value of industrial properties during the month, with only one transaction valued at KD1.3 million, compared to three transactions worth KD6.2 million in the previous month. This indicates a decrease of 66 percent in the number of transactions and 79 percent in value, reflecting the sector's lack of attractiveness for investment during this period.

The warehouse and coastal strip sectors recorded one transaction each, valued at KD1.4 million for warehouse and KD 650,000 for coastal strip. This is a sharp decrease in value compared to the KD20 million value of coastal properties in November.

Meanwhile, the retail sector recorded three transactions in December, totaling KD1.4 million.

It is worth noting that the real estate market witnessed remarkable growth in 2025, with transactions exceeding KD 4.5 million, marking the second real estate peak in the country after the 2024 peak, which recorded transactions amounting to KD4.8 million.

This is a clear indication of the market's recovery and the country's entry into a stage of real estate economic maturity, the features of which will become clear in 2026, especially with the legislative renaissance and anticipated laws.

On an annual basis, prices increased by 28.31

percent for food and non-alcoholic beverages, 28.44 percent for transportation, and 49.45 percent for housing.

These categories were also the largest contributors to the annual inflation rate. Food and non-alcoholic beverages contributed 7.07 percentage points, housing accounted for 7.52 percentage points, and transportation added 4.36 percentage points to the overall increase.

On a monthly basis, consumer prices rose by

0.89 percent in December, slightly higher than the 0.87 percent increase recorded in November last year, according to TurkStat.

Turkiye has been wrestling with high inflation since a 2018 currency crisis, and elevated price pressures have eroded the purchasing power of households and businesses.

The country's central bank has been gradually cutting its benchmark one-week repo rate since mid-2025.

Under 'Diraya' campaign

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A year of breakthrough: Zain Kuwait leads 2025 in digital innovation and community impact that built 'Better Lives and Lasting Connections'

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: In 2025, Zain Kuwait continued to bring its '4WARD-Progress with Purpose' corporate strategy (Better Lives, Lasting Connections) to life through initiatives that touched people's everyday experiences, guided by innovation and rooted in genuine closeness to the community. Building on its role as a trusted national partner, the company ensured that its community programs and digital solutions remained a natural extension of its commitment to creating sustainable value and supporting Kuwait's national development priorities.

Across the year, Zain pursued a fully integrated strategic approach that balanced leadership in digital services with a strong human and social role. This enabled the company to remain close to every segment of the community through partnerships and initiatives that advanced empowerment, deepened a culture of giving, supported innovation, and contributed to community wellbeing and long-term sustainability.

In this report, Zain highlights the most notable milestones of 2025 that translated this commitment into tangible impact on the ground.

Technology leadership and operational excellence

Zain continued to strengthen its leadership across telecommunication through major investments in digital infrastructure. Most notably, the company launched 5G Advanced to meet rising demand for data, enable smart city and IoT applications, and lay the groundwork for next-generation technologies.

On a national level, Zain played a role in Kuwait's historic Guinness World Records achievement for the world's longest-distance transcontinental robotic surgery between Kuwait and Brazil. The record was enabled by a high-capacity international connection that supported the procedure with precision and reliability, opening broader horizons for the growth of digital healthcare.

Reinforcing its shift toward smarter networks, Zain introduced an AI digital assistant for radio site engineers, the region's first application of its kind in operations and maintenance. Powered by AI and natural language interaction, it supports fault analysis and recommends immediate solutions.

Zain also advanced its operational transformation through a major BSS digital upgrade project, designed to enhance efficiency, accelerate service growth, and elevate customer experience through more flexible and intelligent product development and management capabilities.

The company also expanded the scope of network innovation by partnering with Rakuten Symphony to deploy Kuwait's first cloud-native OpenRAN trial, improving network flexibility, efficiency, and scalability, and accelerating service delivery within a more open and reliable operating environment.

Global and regional accolades

2025 marked a strong year of recognition that reinforced Zain's leadership in Kuwait across operations, digital excellence, and customer service. The company received five global Ookla Speedtest awards, reaffirming its position as Kuwait's fastest network and best overall experience across multiple categories including performance, speed, video streaming experience, gaming experience, and 5G technology.

Regionally, Zain won Best Telecom Company in Kuwait and Best Digital Transformation Company from International Finance for the sixth time, reflecting its sustained excellence in innovation and digital experience development. Zain also received three Telecom Review awards recognizing its achievements in 5G Advanced, network experience, and digital transformation solutions through business support systems.

Zain further maintained its leadership in the Service Hero customer satisfaction index for the 13th time, securing first place in both the telecom operators and internet service providers categories based on consumer votes. On the creativity front, Zain added four wins at the Kuwait Creativity Award, honoring artistic and media work that combined powerful messaging, high-quality execution, and community impact.

A key partner in advancing sports

Zain strengthened its position as a leading supporter of Kuwaiti and Gulf sports through major milestones, most notably the success of its official partnership with Khaleej Zain 26, hosted in Kuwait with exceptional momentum. Through a series of activations, fan zones, and interactive experiences, Zain contributed to showcasing the tournament at the highest standards, as affirmed by the participating Gulf delegations.

Locally, Zain continued its long-standing support for Kuwaiti football through Dawri Zain, HH the Amir Cup, and other competitions as part of its extended strategic partnership with the Kuwait Football Association. The company recognized top-performing players and delivered the league's largest incentive awards to date, totaling more than KWD 60,000 during the season. This support elevated competition, renewed excitement among fans, and reflected Zain's commitment to developing local sports.

In support of the national team and its fans, Zain also operated flights to Doha in collaboration with the Kuwait Football Association and Kuwait Airways to back the team during the Arab Cup. The initiative underscored the value of fans in shaping achievements and sharing the joy of qualification.

Beyond football, Zain expanded its support for diverse sports by renewing its strategic partnership with the Rafa Nadal Academy for the third time, helping develop a new generation of Kuwaiti athletes to world-class tennis standards. In padel, Zain sponsored Zain Edition tournaments in Kuwait and the BPC TOUR



Zain in 2025: Better Lives, Lasting Connections

- Company launched 5G Advanced and enabled a Kuwait-first medical technology milestone recognized by Guinness World Records
- Five global Ookla Speedtest awards, seven regional wins, and four creativity awards
- Major sports partnerships and fan experiences across Khaleej Zain 26 and Dawri Zain
- Zain Great Idea accelerator expanded regionally, driving innovation and building entrepreneurial capabilities

in Marbella, strengthening Kuwait's sporting presence and speaking directly to youth passion, alongside supporting various equestrian events and championships.

Youth empowerment and community partnerships

Zain continued investing in youth empowerment and digital skills development through high-impact education partnerships, most notably its strategic collaboration with CODED Academy across specialized programs that enhanced students' readiness for the digital job market. The year also marked the completion of the second edition of Academy X, which trained more than 500 female students.

Zain also concluded the fourth season of Kuwait Codes, graduating more than 1,000 students in 2025, reflecting a growing national pathway that builds a capable base to lead digital innovation.

To bridge education with real-world experience, Zain's Summer Program in its sixth season continued to offer a distinctive training model that blended mentorship with hands-on application across multiple tracks, including placements within Zain branches and with program partners such as Kuwait News and Kuwait Times. The program also introduced an operational and technical track with its new partner V-Thru, alongside skills development workshops in partnership with INJAZ Kuwait.

Zain also celebrated 10 years of supporting the KON social entrepreneurship program, as part of its long-standing partnership with LOYAC spanning more than 21 years, reinforcing its commitment to early pathways for innovation and social responsibility among students. The company further concluded the fourth edition of KON-tine through an intensive training journey that helps transform ideas into scalable business models with real impact.

Building on a 20-year partnership with INJAZ, Zain supported the Company Program competition with the participation of 200 students, while continuing to expand its sustainability and entrepreneurship focus through the Sustainability Heroes initiative, which aims to equip 150 university students to turn environmental and social challenges into scalable entrepreneurial opportunities.

Zain Alshuhoor Ramadan campaign

During the Holy Month of Ramadan, Zain renewed its community presence through its annual Ramadan campaign Zain Alshuhoor, one of Kuwait's largest and most wide-reaching community initiatives. The campaign ran daily through Eid Al-Fitr, delivering a range of volunteer, charitable, humanitarian, and faith-based programs that reflected the values of generosity and unity.



The company places youth empowerment and skills development at the top of its priorities.

Campaign activities included community, humanitarian, and cultural initiatives, with Zain Alshuhooritars providing more than 40,000 meals to fasting individuals across multiple locations throughout the month. This was complemented by food basket distributions delivered through official partners to support families in need.

The campaign extended to programs that celebrate identity, values, and joy through Zain's Girgean and its various activities, reaching children and people with disabilities across care homes, hospitals, and specialized centers. Zain also organized a Quran recitation competition that attracted around 500 participants.

These initiatives concluded with the exceptional musical Zain Who Knows No Fear At The Arena Kuwait during Eid Al-Fitr, which offered large-scale visual and musical experience on the world's largest circular children's stage, delivering entertainment with educational meaning that speaks to families and supports local content.

Driving innovation and backing entrepreneurship

Zain further cemented its role as a key engine for innovation and entrepreneurship in Kuwait and the region through its flagship tech startup accelerator Zain Great Idea (ZGI), which received international recognition in Paris with the Corporate Rising Star award by the International Chamber of Commerce and Mind the Bridge. The award reflected the program's legacy of more than 15 years in accelerating technology startups.

The program's regional expansion in 2025 marked a major milestone, opening participation for the first time to entrepreneurs from six markets, supported by Zain Ventures and ZainTECH to enable stronger pathways for mentorship, funding, and scale. This built on the program's cumulative impact, having empowered more than 7,000 entrepreneurs, organized more than 110 bootcamps, and attracted investments exceeding USD 135 million over the past five years.

Reinforcing its commitment to future skills and preparing a generation to lead digital transformation, Zain continued strengthening educational and tech partnerships under the Innovation Nation (IN) umbrella. The company supported the Kuwait National Robotics Competition (KNRC) for the second consecutive year, with participation exceeding 800 students, and several teams qualifying for the VEX World Robotics Championship in the US.

Zain also partnered with the TechEdge program in collaboration with the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), and the National University of Singapore (NUS), helping develop Kuwaiti talent in fields such as AI, data science, cybersecurity, and cloud computing.

Zain also concluded the third season of the Innovation Nation (IN) Summer Camp, empowering around 2,600 children through interactive experiences in robotics, AI, 3D printing, electronics, and renewable energy.

On the inclusion and women empowerment front, Zain continued developing its Women in Tech initiative as a core pillar of the Group's sustainability, diversity, inclusion, and equity strategy. The initiative attracted more than 550 participants in 2025 through training, mentorship, and practical application tracks, with direct outcomes including career transitions into tech roles, employment opportunities, and international cybersecurity certifications, alongside inclusive participation that welcomed female students with special needs.

Advancing sustainability

Zain continued advancing sustainability through practical solutions that combined technology with national partnerships, translating awareness into measurable environmental impact. This included deploying the smart beach-cleaning robot BeBot for the second consecutive year, an innovative renewable-energy-powered solution that rakes sand and captures buried waste.

Zain also became the first telecom operator in Kuwait to adopt DHL GoGreen Plus, reducing emissions from air freight through the use of sustainable aviation fuel. This supports Zain's pathway toward reducing environmental impact and its commitment to net zero by 2050.

Zain also strengthened circular economy ecosystems through its partnership with the ECO incubator under the initiative Together for Schools Free of E-Waste, in collaboration with government and national entities. The initiative promoted responsible environmental behaviors in schools and turns old devices from an environmental burden into recoverable and recyclable resources within a broad collaborative model.

As part of long-term institutional partnerships that support quality of life and biodiversity, Zain implemented an environmental mission in cooperation with the Kuwait Dive Team on Umm Al-Maradim Island. The mission included installing eco-friendly marine moorings, monitoring coral reefs, and cleaning beaches, within a strategic partnership spanning more than 28 years, during which Zain has supported the team with resources enabling hundreds of environmental missions.

Zain also joined the Kuwait Green Building Council (KGBC) to enhance energy and water efficiency and waste management across its facilities, supporting sustainability agendas in the workplace and the wider community. The year concluded with the signing of an MoU with the Environment Public Authority (EPA) to expand collaboration in awareness, community engagement, data exchange, technical expertise, and national initiatives related to pollution prevention and sustainability.

SUMMIT TELECOM Review LEADERS' SUMMIT 19TH EDITION

TELECOM REVIEW Excellence Awards 2025

TECH INTELLIGENCE BEYOND MOBILITY

Best 5G Advanced Leading Network in Kuwait



Zain Kuwait CEO Nawaf Al-Gharabally receives one of Zain's regional awards.



Zain Alshuhoor: The largest Ramadan campaign of its kind in Kuwait.



The company places youth empowerment and skills development at the top of its priorities.



Minister of Health Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadi and Bader Al-Kharafi watch the remote robotic surgery.



Zain's Corporate Affairs and Relations team made great efforts to ensure the success of the company's initiatives throughout the year.



Khaleeji Zain 26: An exceptional edition of the tournament closest to the people of the Gulf.



Zain continued to protect Kuwait's environment and reinforce a culture of sustainability.



Zain Great Idea participants in California during the Silicon Valley trip.

Nvidia, AMD, and Lenovo CEOs highlight AI vision at CES

What to expect from CES 2026, the annual show of all things tech

LAS VEGAS, Jan 5, (AP): With the start of the New Year squarely behind us, it's once again time for the annual CES trade show to shine a spotlight on the latest tech that companies plan to offer in 2026.

The multiday event, organized by the Consumer Technology Association, kicks off this week in Las Vegas, where advances across industries like robotics, healthcare, vehicles, wearables, gaming and more are set to be on display.

Artificial intelligence will be anchored in nearly everything, again, as the tech industry explores offerings consumers will want to buy. AI industry heavyweight Jensen Huang will be taking the stage to showcase Nvidia's latest productivity solutions, and AMD CEO Lisa Su will keynote to "share her vision for delivering future AI solutions." Expect AI to come up in other keynotes, like from Lenovo's CEO, Yuanqing Yang.

The AI industry is tackling issues in healthcare, with a particular emphasis on changing individual health habits to treat conditions - such as Beyond Medicine's prescription app focused on a particular jaw disorder - or addressing data shortages in subjects such as breast milk production.

Expect more unveils around domestic robots too. Korean tech giant LG already has announced it will show off a helper bot named "CLOiD," to handle a range of household tasks. Hyundai also is announcing a major push on robotics and manufacturing advancements. Extended reality, basically a virtual training ground for robots and other physical AI, is also in the buzz around CES.

In 2025, more than 141,000 attendees from over 150 countries, regions, and territories attended CES. Organizers expect around the same numbers for this year's show, with more than 3,500 exhibitors across the floor space this week.

The AP spoke with CTA Executive Chair and CEO Gary Shapiro about what to expect for CES 2026. The conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

Well, we have a lot at this year's show.

Obviously, using AI in a way that makes sense for people. We're seeing a lot in robotics. More robots and humanoid-looking robots than we've ever had before.

We also see longevity in health, there's a lot of focus on that. All sorts of



People arrive at the CES Unveiled tech show Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, in Las Vegas. (AP)

wearable devices for almost every part of the body. Technology is answering healthcare's gaps very quickly and that's great for everyone.

Mobility is big with not only self-driving vehicles but also with boats and drones and all sorts of other ways of getting around. That's very important.

And of course, content creation is always very big.

You are seeing humanoid robots right now. It sometimes works, sometimes doesn't.

But yes, there are more and more humanoid robots. And when we talk about CES five, 10, 15, 20 years now, we're going to see an even larger range of humanoid robots.

Obviously, last year we saw a great interest in them. The number one product of the show was a little robotic dog that seems so life-like and fun, and loved for people that need that type of affection.

But of course, the humanoid robots are just one aspect of that industry. There's a lot of specialization in robot creation, depending on what you want the robot to do. And robots can do many things that humans can't.

AI is the future of creativity.

Certainly AI itself may be arguably creative, but the human mind is so unique that you definitely get new ideas that way. So I think the future is more of a hybrid approach, where content creators are working with AI to craft variations on a theme or to better monetize what they have to a broader audience.

We're seeing all sorts of different devices that are implementing AI. But we have a special focus at this show, for the first time, on the disability community. Verizon set this whole stage up where we have all different ways of taking this technology and having it help people with disabilities and older people.

Well, there's definitely no bubble when it comes to what AI can do. And what AI can do is perform miracles and solve fundamental human problems in food production and clean air and clean water. Obviously in healthcare, it's gonna be overwhelming.

But this was like the internet itself. There was a lot of talk about a bubble, and there actually was a bubble. The difference is that in late 1990s there were basically no revenue models. Companies were raising a lot of money with no plans for revenue.

These AI companies have significant revenues today, and companies are investing in it.

What I'm more concerned about, honestly, is not Wall Street and a bubble. Others can be concerned about that. I'm concerned about getting enough energy to process all that AI. And at this show, for the first time, we have a Korean company showing the first ever small-scale nuclear-powered energy creation device. We expect more and more of these people rushing to fill this gap because we need the energy, we need it clean and we need a kind of all-of-the-above solution.

Chinese firms flock to Vietnam amid tariffs

Vietnam's Bac Ninh transforms into manufacturing powerhouse

BAC NINH, Jan 5, (AP): The transformation of Vietnam's Bac Ninh is evident in the signs above its shops and the spicy Chinese and Korean dishes on its tables.

Once known for its rice fields and the love duets of its centuries-old Quan Ho folk songs, the city just north of Hanoi has become one of Vietnam's busiest factory zones, reflecting a surge of investment, hastened by President Donald Trump's tariff hikes, that are reshaping the region.

The economy has profited from friction between Washington and Beijing as factories shifted out of China, joining earlier waves of foreign investment by the Japanese and South Koreans that have made Vietnam a global manufacturing hub. But rising labor costs, worker shortages and inadequate infrastructure are exposing the limits to its rapid rise.

With rivals like Indonesia and the Philippines competing hard for new projects, Vietnam is trying to climb into higher-value manufacturing and expand export markets to maintain that momentum. That effort is evident in Bac Ninh.

Traditionally a center for artisans, Bac Ninh's first boom began around 2008 when Samsung built its first phone factory there, turning Vietnam into its largest offshore manufacturing base.

Now, Chinese companies are pouring in as they diversify their factory locations to skirt U.S. tariffs and other trade restrictions. After Hanoi and Beijing normalized ties in the 1990s, inflows of Chinese investment began to pick up as Chinese firms in places like Bac Ninh tapped Vietnam's electronics supply chain, labor force and support local governments, often aided by Chinese-speaking intermediaries who smooth paperwork and logistics.

But Vietnam is too small to replace China, whose economy is 40 times larger, as the world's factory floor. To try to keep up, its leaders are building new infrastructure, including a highway to the Chinese border that has cut travel time by more than an hour. A railway will connect Hanoi to Haiphong - Vietnam's largest seaport - and then the border town of Lao Cai.

On Dec. 19, Bac Ninh broke ground on the expansion of an industrial zone for high-tech manufacturing, including electronics, pharmaceuticals and clean energy. It's part of a synchronized nationwide push in which Vietnam launched 234 major projects worth more than \$129 billion just weeks before a pivotal National Party Congress in January, when leaders will decide the country's political leadership and economic direction.

Marketplace

In Bac Ninh's downtown, a convenience store bears the name Tmall, after Alibaba's flagship online marketplace. Signs in Chinese advertise services for investors. Chinese-Vietnamese language schools have opened to help locals and Chinese to learn each other's languages.

But as Chinese companies compete for the best labor and other resources, costs are rising for the "China plus one" strategy of moving factories out of China to other locations, for example, Apple's shift into India.

"It is becoming difficult to recruit workers," said Peng, who works at a telecoms equipment company that moved from China's southern technology hub of Shenzhen. He gave only one name because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

Labor costs have jumped 10%-15% since 2024, he said. "And we expect them to keep rising."

Vietnam still need technology, equipment and expertise from China, which had created "the best manufacturing ecosystem," said Jacob Rothman, co-founder and CEO of China-based Velong Enterprises, which makes grill tools and kitchen gadgets and has shifted some production to Southeast Asian countries including Cambodia and Vietnam.

Supply chains and manufacturers in China have benefited from decades of

government support, large-scale investment and its huge population, Rothman said. "You can't recreate that overnight."

Brian Bourke, global chief commercial officer at U.S.-based SEKO Logistics, said while factories making footwear, furniture and technology are still relocating to Vietnam, it lags China in infrastructure and logistics capabilities.

Some of those limits are surfacing in boomtowns like Bac Ninh, where firms are trying to lure workers with higher wages and bonuses, a box of instant noodles on their first day and bus fares if they commute from another city, according to state media.

Few countries have benefitted more from Trump's trade war than Vietnam, whose biggest export market is still the U.S. In 2024, Vietnam ran a \$123.5 billion surplus with the U.S., the third largest behind China and Mexico. That irked Trump, who threatened a 46% import tax on Vietnamese goods before settling on 20%.

Tariffs

The two countries are still working toward a deal to keep most tariffs at 20%. Vietnam has offered broad preferential access for U.S. products, the White House said in October. So far, it has largely absorbed the tariffs, running a trade surplus of \$121.6 billion in January-November 2025.

The agreement in October by Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping to a year-long trade truce and lower average tariffs on Chinese exports to the U.S. to about 47% helped ease some concerns. But persisting uncertainty over tariffs and other trade restrictions means companies aren't just trying to shift factories out of China but to spread them across several countries, said Frederic Neumann, chief Asia economist at HSBC.

Even with lower U.S. tariffs on China, the calculus still favors moving to Southeast Asia where manufacturing inefficiencies add only about 10% in cost. But while large corporations can shift production easily, smaller firms may struggle to fit a new factory with expensive equipment.

"(The) race to move outside of China is still happening, and it's accelerating," Rothman said.

Vietnam is still attracting ample foreign investment. Cumulative foreign investment topped \$28.5 billion as of September, up 15% from last year. But scrutiny of Vietnam's role as a hub for tariff-dodging transshipments has some manufacturers hedging their bets.

One of SEKO Logistics' customers has shifted some of its furniture making to India, not wanting to "put all their eggs in Vietnam," Bourke said.

Countries like Indonesia and the Philippines, which missed the early gains Vietnam captured, are promoting themselves as alternative manufacturing bases. In the Philippines, a new law allows foreign investors to lease private land for up to 99 years to attract long-term commercial and industrial investment.

Vietnam has a goal of becoming rich by 2045. It aims to become Asia's next "tiger economy," following export powerhouses like South Korea and Taiwan by shifting from low-cost assembly work to manufacture higher-value products like electronics and clean energy equipment.

It's offering incentives like tax breaks on imported machinery and discounted rents to help factory suppliers upgrade and modernize. About a third still use non-automated equipment and only about 10% use robots on their production lines.

The country also is trying to reduce its dependence on the U.S. market by expanding exports to the Middle East, Latin America, Africa and India. Overseas trade offices have been asked to share market intelligence and promote products made in Vietnam.

Vietnam knows that rising costs and tougher competition will test how far it - and places like Bac Ninh - can climb. Announcing hundreds of projects in December, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh framed the stakes: Vietnam must "reach far into the ocean, delve deep underground and soar high into space."

Tesla slips as Chinese EV brands surge in Portugal

Chinese EVs gain momentum in Portugal, led by BYD

LISBON, Jan 5, (Xinhua): Chinese electric vehicle manufacturers are gaining increasing traction in Portugal, with BYD emerging as one of the fastest-growing brands as the country's automotive market undergoes a profound shift toward electrification.

According to figures released recently by the Portuguese Automobile Association (ACAP), BYD led Portugal's electric vehicle market in November with 645 units registered, representing a year-on-year increase of 119.4 percent. The result placed the Chinese automaker ahead of all competitors for the month and highlighted its growing presence in a market that is becoming more competitive and diversified.

From January to November, BYD recorded a total of 4,477 registrations of its electric vehicles, an increase of 90.5 percent compared with the same period last year, reflecting strong demand for its expanding range of fully electric and plug-in hybrid models.

Tesla, by contrast, registered 425 units in November, marking a sharp year-on-year decline of 46.9 percent, as intensified competition, pricing volatility and the rapid entry of Chinese brands reshaped consumer choices.

Industry observers note that the rise of Chinese electric vehicles is closely linked to the strategies of Portugal's major automotive distributors. Grupo Salvador Caetano, one of the country's

largest dealership groups and a key representative of several Chinese EV brands, sees the trend as structural rather than cyclical.

A senior executive at the group said Chinese manufacturers no longer compete solely on price but increasingly on technology, design and value. He added that consistent vehicle availability, competitive ownership costs and rapid model updates have made brands such as BYD particularly appealing to Portuguese consumers.

Consumer sentiment appears to be shifting accordingly. Joao Vieira, a Lisbon-based owner of a BYD Dolphin, said he chose the vehicle after comparing it with several European and American models. While price was an important factor, he pointed to the car's equipment level, warranty and driving range as decisive elements. "It felt like the most balanced option for everyday use," he said.

Ana Fernandes, who drives a BYD Seal in Setubal, southern Lisbon metropolitan area, highlighted the driving experience and technology. She described the car as smooth, quiet and intuitive, adding that it represented a clear upgrade from her previous petrol vehicle.

Beyond BYD, other emerging brands are also strengthening their presence in Portugal's electric vehicle market. Leapmotor registered 55 units in November and 210 in the year to date. Xpeng recorded 46 units in November and 785 in

registrations from January to November, reflecting annual growth of more than 1,500 percent. Polestar registered 40 units in November, bringing its year-to-date total to 484, up 85.4 percent.

Bernardo Mendia, secretary general of the Portugal-China Chamber of Commerce, said that the strong performance of Chinese EV brands like BYD demonstrates not only their technological competitiveness but also their growing role in shaping sustainable mobility in Portugal, bringing more choice, innovation, and affordability to the market, which benefits both consumers and the broader transition to electric transportation.

ACAP data further show that fully electric vehicles accounted for 22.9 percent of all new car registrations in the first 11 months of the year, approaching the share of petrol vehicles at 25 percent and far surpassing diesel models at 5.7 percent. The figures underscore the pace of Portugal's transition toward electric mobility.

Although Tesla remains ahead in cumulative registrations in Portugal for the year, analysts say the narrowing gap with fast-growing Chinese brands signals a deeper market transformation. Consumers are increasingly comparing vehicles from different origins on equal terms, and Chinese electric vehicles are moving from being perceived as alternatives to becoming central players in shaping Portugal's evolving automotive landscape.

'From pollution control to innovation'

China's Yangtze economic belt more than doubles GDP as green growth takes hold over past decade

BEIJING, Jan 5, (Xinhua): China's Yangtze River Economic Belt, a pivotal economic powerhouse, has seen its regional GDP more than double in the course of the past decade, while steering toward a new path that prioritizes ecological protection and green growth.

Speaking at a press conference on Monday, Wang Changlin, deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission, highlighted some telling indicators of this economic belt's high-quality development.

The economic belt currently contributes 47.3 percent of the national economic output, up from 42.2 percent ten years ago, and has significantly boosted the share of sections with good water quality from 67 percent to 96.5 percent. The Yangtze River trunk line has remained the world's busiest inland waterway, as its annual cargo throughput has surged by 71 percent to 4.2 billion tonnes over the past decade.

Stretching more than 6,300 kilometers before emptying into the East China Sea, the Yangtze River is China's longest waterway.

China launched the Yangtze River Economic Belt initiative in early 2016, aiming to transform the region into a golden economic belt featuring more beautiful ecology, smoother transport networks, a more coordinated economy, a better-integrated market and a greater quantity of scientific mechanisms.

Ten years on, the economic belt, comprising 11 provincial-level regions, has emerged stronger with an improved natural environment and new growth impetus from innovation-driven industries.

Decade of ecological advancement

Jiang Huohua, an official with the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, has hailed the sharp

rise in the proportion of good water quality over the past decade as "hard-won," noting that the water quality of the river's main stream has remained at Grade II in the country's five-tier water quality system for six consecutive years.

Efforts have been made in pollution control, ecological restoration, systematic management and risk prevention, Jiang noted. Over 90 percent of black, malodorous water bodies in county-level cities have been cleared, while the total phosphorus level in the Yangtze River Basin has dropped by more than 40 percent from ten years ago.

"Populations of flagship species, such as the finless porpoise, have increased, and the 'mother river' is teeming with new vitality," Jiang told the press.

To restore biodiversity along the river, China implemented a full fishing ban in 332 conservation areas of the Yangtze River basin in January 2020, which was expanded in 2021 to a 10-year fishing moratorium along the river's main streams and major tributaries.

"Sustained conservation and restoration initiatives have led to a steady recovery in aquatic biodiversity," said Jiang Kaiyong, an official with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

Between 2021 and 2024, a total of 344 indigenous fish species were monitored in the Yangtze River Basin, an increase of 36 species compared to the period before the fishing ban, Jiang revealed.

Strengthened joint enforcement has successfully driven down fishing-related crimes over the past five years, he added, while pledging that the agricultural ministry will work with other authorities to support the high-quality development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt through high-level protection of aquatic biodiversity.

Innovation-driven growth

Over the past decade, the Yangtze River Economic Belt has emerged as one of China's most dynamic innovation hubs, as technological advances increasingly translate into both industrial strength and global competitiveness.

It has produced a number of internationally competitive technology companies, including AI startup DeepSeek and stellar robotics maker Unitree Robotics, alongside the rise of world-class industrial clusters in sectors such as automobile manufacturing and electronic information.

Wang Changlin said the government has established three major science and technology innovation centers and eight national laboratories across regions along the Yangtze River, which have supported breakthroughs in core technologies spanning AI, quantum information, integrated circuits and life sciences.

Manufacturing depth has also strengthened. The economic belt has built complete industrial chains in electronic information, automobiles, pharmaceuticals and chemicals. A total of 41 national-level advanced manufacturing clusters and 30 clusters focused on strategic emerging industries have taken shape.</p

Features

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Awards



Jessie Buckley accepts the award for best actress for 'Hamnet'. (AP)



Left: Audrey Nuna, from left, Rei Ami, Ejae, Mark Sonnenblick, Chris Appelhans, Maggie Kang, Michelle Wong, Arden Cho, May Hong and Ji-young Yoo pose with the award for best animated feature for 'KPop Demon Hunters,' in the press room during the 31st Annual Critics Choice Awards, at The Barker Hanger in Santa Monica, Calif. Right: R. Scott Gemmill, from left, Shawn Hatosy, Damian Marcano, Katherine LaNasa, winner of the award for best supporting actress in a drama series for 'The Pitt,' Noah Wyle, winner of the award for best actor in a drama series for 'The Pitt,' Patrick Bell, and Amanda Marsalis pose with the award for best drama series for 'The Pitt' in the press room during. (AP)



Tramell Tillman accepts the award for best supporting actor in a drama series for 'Severance'. (AP)



Timothée Chalamet accepts the award for best actor for 'Marty Supreme'. (AP)



Left: Hannah Walters, from left, Stephen Graham, winner of the award for best actor in a limited series or movie made for television for 'Adolescence,' Erin Doherty, winner of the award for best supporting actress in a limited series or movie made for television for 'Adolescence,' Ashley Walters, Emily Feller, Christine Tremarco, Nina Wolarsky, Owen Cooper, winner of the award for best supporting actor in a limited series or movie made for television for 'Adolescence,' pose with the award for best limited series or movie made for television for 'Adolescence' in the press room during the 31st Annual Critics Choice Awards at The Barker Hanger in Santa Monica, Calif. Right: Seth Rogen, from left, Ike Barinholtz, Peter Huyck, Evan Goldberg, James Weaver, and Alex Gregory accept the award for best comedy series for 'The Studio'. (AP)



Katherine LaNasa accepts the award for best supporting actress in a drama series for 'The Pitt' during the 31st Annual Critics Choice Awards. (AP)



Noah Wyle accepts the award for best actor in a drama series for 'The Pitt' during the 31st Annual Critics Choice Awards. (AP)



Jimmy Kimmel, winner of the award for best talk show for 'Jimmy Kimmel Live!', poses in the press room during the 31st Annual Critics Choice Awards. (AP)



Benicio del Toro, from left, Leonardo DiCaprio, Cassandra Kulukundis, Teyana Taylor, Chase Infini, and Paul Thomas Anderson accept the award for best picture for 'One Battle After Another' during the 31st Annual Critics Choice Awards at The Barker Hanger in Santa Monica, Calif. (AP)

Obituary

Deep sorrow at the sudden, sad news'

South Korean movie star Ahn dies at 74

SEOUL, South Korea, Jan 5, (AP): Ahn Sung-ki, one of South Korea's biggest stars whose prolific 60-year career and positive, gentle public image earned him the nickname "The Nation's Actor," died Monday. He was 74.

The death of Ahn, who had suffered blood cancer for years, was announced by his agency, the Artist Company, and the Seoul-based Soonchunhyang University Hospital.

"We feel deep sorrow at the sudden, sad news, pray for the eternal rest of the deceased and offer our heartfelt condolences to his bereaved family members," the Artist Company said in a statement.

Born to a filmmaker in the southeastern city of Daegu in 1952, Ahn made his debut as a child actor in the movie "The Twilight Train" in 1957. He subsequently appeared in about 70 movies as a child actor before he left the film industry to live an ordinary life.

In 1970, Ahn entered Seoul's Hankuk University of Foreign Studies as a Vietnamese major. Ahn said he graduated with top honors but failed to land jobs at big companies, who likely saw his Vietnamese major largely useless after a communist victory in the Vietnam War in 1975.

Ahn returned to the film industry in 1977 believing he could still excel in acting. In 1980, he rose to fame for his lead role in Lee Jang-ho's "Good, Windy Days," a hit coming-of-age movie about the struggle of working-class men from rural areas during the country's rapid rise. Ahn won the best new actor award in the prestigious Grand Bell Awards, the Korean version of the Academy Awards.

He later starred in a series of highly successful and critically acclaimed movies, sweeping best actor awards and becoming arguably the country's most popular actor in much of the 1980-90s.

Some of his memorable roles included a Buddhist monk in 1981's "Mandara," a beggar in 1984's "Whale Hunting," a Vietnam War veteran-turned-novelist in 1992's "White Badge," a corrupt police officer in 1993's "Two Cops," a murderer in 1999's "No Where To Hide," a special forces trainer in 2003's "Silmido" and a devoted celebrity manager in 2006's "Radio Star."

Ahn had collected dozens of trophies in major movie awards in South Korea, including winning the Grand Bell Awards for best actor five times, an achievement no other South Korean actors have matched yet.

Ahn built up an image as a humble, trustworthy and family-oriented celebrity who avoided major scandals and maintained a quiet, stable personal life. Past public surveys chose Ahn as South Korea's most beloved actor and deserving of the nickname "The Nation's Actor."

Ahn said he earlier felt confined with his "The Nation's Actor" labeling but eventually thought that led him down the right path. In recent years, local media has given other stars similar honorable nicknames, but Ahn was apparently the first South Korean actor who was dubbed as "The Nation's Actor."

"I felt I should do something that could match that title. But I think that has eventually guided me on a good direction," Ahn said in an interview with Yonhap news agency in 2023.

In media interviews, Ahn couldn't choose what his favorite movie was, but said that his role as a dedicated, hardworking manger for a washed-up rock singer played by Park Jung-hoon resembled himself in real life the most.

Ahn was also known for his reluctance to do love scenes. He said he was too shy to act romantic scenes and sometimes asked directors to skip steamy scenes if they were only meant to add spice to movies.

"I don't do well on acting like looking at someone who I don't love with loving eyes and kissing really romantically. I feel shy and can't express such emotions well," Ahn said in an interview with the Shindonga magazine in 2007. "Simply, I'm clumsy on that. So I couldn't star in such movies a lot. But ultimately, that was a right choice for me."

Ahn is survived by his wife and their two sons. A mourning station at a Seoul hospital was to run until Friday.



In this file photo, South Korean actor Ahn Sung-ki attends an event as part of the 11th Pusan International Film Festival in Busan, South Korea. (AP)

Film



Richard Baneham, left, and Joe Letteri, winners of the award for best visual effects for 'Avatar: Fire and Ash,' pose in the press room during the 31st Annual Critics Choice Awards on Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, at The Barker Hanger in Santa Monica, Calif. (AP)

Hollywood starts 2026 on high note with Cameron's sci-fi epic No. 1

'Avatar: Fire and Ash' blazes past \$1 billion

NEW YORK, Jan 5, (AP): Hollywood kicked off 2026 with "Avatar: Fire and Ash" atop the box office for the third straight week and with hopes for a blockbuster-filled year after a disappointing 2025.

In three weeks of release, "Fire and Ash" has cleared \$1 billion worldwide. The third chapter in James Cameron's Pandora epic collected \$40 million over its third weekend in North American theaters, according to studio estimates Sunday.

"Fire and Ash" is doing its biggest business overseas; it's grossed \$777.1 million internationally thus far. The Walt Disney Co. on Sunday trumped the \$1 billion milestone as "celebrating another monumental achievement for James Cameron's groundbreaking franchise."

But over the holidays, it wasn't just about the weekend ticket sales. The whole week was a lucrative one for Hollywood, with most schools still out. What drove ticket sales, beyond "Avatar"?" Sydney Sweeney, Timothée Chalamet and "Zootopia 2."

The most sustained success over the holiday season in theaters belonged to a movie that opened all the way back in November. Yet Dis-

ney's "Zootopia 2" has had remarkable staying power. It landed in second place with \$19 million, dipping a mere 4% from the previous weekend.

The animated sequel has amassed \$1.59 billion in six weeks. That makes "Zootopia 2" Disney's second highest grossing animated movie ever, trailing only 2019's photorealistic "The Lion King" (\$1.66 billion).

"The Housemaid," the twisty thriller starring Sweeney and Amanda Seyfried, also emerged as a holiday-season hit for Lionsgate. It collected \$14.9 million over the weekend, giving it \$75.7 million domestically over three weeks. It dipped only 3% from last weekend. Internationally, "The Housemaid," which cost a modest \$35 million to make, has added \$57.3 million.

Just as Sweeney's star power is propelling "The Housemaid," so is Chalamet's with "Marty Supreme." The A24 release also held well in its third weekend, grossing an estimated \$12.6 million. After two weeks of wide release, Josh Safdie's frenetic table tennis tale has grossed \$56 million in North America, passing the director's previous film, "Uncut Gems" (\$50 million).

lion worldwide).

Just about everything playing in theaters saw small drops from the previous weekend. Sony's action comedy "Anaconda," starring Jack Black and Paul Rudd, dipped 31% to collect \$10 million in second weekend. Focus Features' "Song Sung Blue" dropped only 17% in its second weekend with \$5.9 million. The Hugh Jackman-Kate Hudson Neil Diamond cover band movie has earned \$25 million domestically.

With "Avatar: Fire and Ash" and a wide variety of smaller hits, Hollywood started 2026 strongly. Overall sales were up 26.5% from the same weekend in 2025, according to data firm Comscore.

The movie industry is coming off a poor 2025, where domestic moviegoing continued to slide. U.S. and Canada ticket sales in 2025 amounted to \$8.9 billion, a 2% increase from the year earlier, according to Comscore, but about 20% below pre-pandemic levels. That slight improvement was notably less than anticipated and was also boosted by higher ticket prices. Actual tickets sold declined from more than 800 million in 2024 to around 780 million in 2025.

China sees record number of enterprises in ice and snow tourism

Harbin's Ice and Snow Festival turns city into a glowing winter wonderland



Left: Competitors put the final touches on their piece for the ice sculpture competition at the annual Ice and Snow Festival held in Harbin in China's Heilongjiang province. Right: Competitors put the final touches on their piece for the ice sculpture competition at the annual Ice and Snow Festival held in Harbin in China's Heilongjiang province. (AP)



A visitor walks near ice structures at the annual Ice and Snow Festival held in Harbin in China's Heilongjiang province. (AP)



A visitor passes by ice sculpture at the annual Ice and Snow Festival held in Harbin in China's Heilongjiang province. (AP)



Visitors stand near a giant ice sculpture of a train at the annual Ice and Snow Festival held in Harbin in China's Heilongjiang province. (AP)



A security guard is dwarfed by a huge ice structure at the annual Ice and Snow Festival in Harbin in northeastern China's Heilongjiang province. (AP)

HARBIN, China, Jan 5, (Agencies): Each January, an unusual and beautiful phenomenon occurs in the frigid northeastern Chinese city of Harbin.

Some would argue that the place, the capital of Heilongjiang Province, already has enough ice. But sculptors converge on the town not far from China's border with Russia to bring out more of it, and to compete for the best ice sculpture of the year.

The effect is dreamlike. Sculptures are lit from within, and a section of the city becomes a magical expanse that feels like a holiday TV special. Families journey from distant locations to see the sculptures - and bundle up while doing so.

In these photos by Associated Press photographer Ng Han Guan, taken Saturday, an ice sculptor prepares his work for competition at the Ice and Snow Festival, and people approach the icy steps of an obelisk sculpture glowing in yellow and purple.

The festival lasts until mid-February. And yes: If they want to, visitors can go swimming amidst the ice, too.

China's ice and snow tourism is entering "a new stage of sustained prosperity," with a record-high 14,075 related enterprises operating in the sector at the end of 2025, according to a report released on

Monday by the China Tourism Academy (CTA).

The report, released at the Ice and Snow Tourism Development Forum 2026 in northeast China's Harbin City, attributed the scale to a surge in innovative tourism products, including ice sculpting, ice and snow photography, and themed travel experiences across China. Iconic destinations like Harbin Ice-Snow World and the Changbai Mountain ski resort have played a key role in driving the growth.

CTA researcher Han Yuanjun highlighted that such innovations have sustained the strong demand for ice and snow tourism. A recent CTA survey found that 74.8 percent of respondents planned to take part in related leisure activities during the 2025-2026 winter season, and 50.5 percent intended to travel long distances to engage in winter tourism.

He noted that consumer spending is shifting from typical "hard expenses" like transportation and accommodation to more "soft expenses" such as entertainment, cultural experiences and technology, reflecting a shift in both the quality and structure of winter tourism in China.

The report also notes the growing demand for indoor ice and snow

entertainment, with south China investing 30 billion yuan in the sector in 2025, accounting for 30 percent of the total. Related indoor complexes have become a key investment area, fueling year-round tourism demand.

Liu Huaxiang, another researcher at the CTA and an associate professor at Hangzhou Normal University, emphasized that China has developed a comprehensive industrial chain driven by ice and snow tourism, covering areas such as culture, sports and equipment manufacturing.

Domestic products such as skis, snowboards and snow wax cars are expanding their global presence through cross-border e-commerce, opening new avenues for international collaboration and industrial growth, she said.

China is positioning the ice and snow economy as a key driver of development and consumption, and its scale is expected to reach 1.2 trillion yuan by 2027 and 1.5 trillion yuan by 2030.

The country stressed efforts to "expand the supply of high-quality goods and services" at the recent Central Economic Work Conference, and experts are anticipating a more vibrant tourism market this winter.

Bluefin tuna sells for record \$3.2 million at year-opening auction at Tokyo fish market



Kiyoshi Kimura, president of Kiyomura Co., poses with the bluefin tuna that won the highest bid at the annual New Year auction in Tokyo. (AP)

TOKYO, Jan 5, (AP): A massive 243-kilogram (535-pound) bluefin tuna sold for a record 510 million yen (\$3.2 million) at the first auction of 2026 at Tokyo's Toyosu fish market.

The top bidder for the prized tuna at the predawn auction on Monday was Kiyomura Corp., whose owner Kiyoshi Kimura runs the popular Sushi Zanmai chain. Kimura, who has won the annual auction many times in the past, broke the previous record of 334 million yen (\$2.1 million) he set in 2019.

Kimura later told reporters he was hoping to pay a bit less for it, but "the price shot up before you knew it."

The auction started when the bell rang, and the floor was filled with torpedo-shaped fish with their tails cut off so bidders could examine meat details such as color, texture and fattiness while walking around the rows of tuna.

'The Pitt' leads this week's streaming releases

NEW YORK, Jan 5, (AP): Returns to "The Pitt," the Grid and music of Kid Laroi are some of the new television, films and music headed to a device near you.

The first week of January brings a pair of sophomore efforts: Laroi's album "Before I Forget" and the second season of the Emmy-winning hospital drama "The Pitt." This week's streaming offerings, as selected by The Associated Press' entertainment journalists, also include the return of "The Night Manager" after nearly a decade.

Audiences can reenter the Grid when "Tron: Ares" hits Disney+ on Wednesday. The franchise's third film stars Jared Leto, Greta Lee and Jodie Turner-Smith and features a return of Jeff Bridges. The 1982 original starred Bridges as a hacker who's transported into a dangerous digital world and kicked off the cult franchise with then-state-of-the-art computer graphics and special effects. AP critic Mark Kennedy praised Leto and Lee's performances and said despite being a movie that "bites off too much," it was worth a watch. A bonus for music fans? The film's Nine Inch Nails soundtrack with some throwbacks to the original film's score.

■ AP film team

Grammy-nominated artist the Kid Laroi - a direct inheritor of Justin Bieber's glossy R&B-informed pop -- will release his sophomore album, "Before I Forget," on Friday. Judging by the previously released singles, listeners can expect slow-burn breakup reflections ("A Perfect World") and

high-hat heavy tracks with lovelorn lyrics ("A Cold Play"). It's frictionless listening to start the new year.

■ AP Music Writer Maria Sherman

In what counts as a quick turnaround these days in the world of prestige TV, "The Pitt" returns for its second season, and second day in the life of a frenetic Pittsburgh emergency room run by Noah Wyle's beleaguered and beloved Dr. Robby. The first episode of Season 2 premieres Thursday on HBO Max at 9 p.m. Eastern. Expectations will be a lot higher this time. In the 10 months since Season 1 ended, "The Pitt" won the best drama Emmy along with four others, including best actor for Wyle and supporting actress for Katherine LaNasa, who will be returning despite her character vowed to quit after taking a punch. Ten months have also passed in the world of the show, which will again follow a single ER shift, this time on a July Fourth weekend.

After a much, much longer absence, "The Night Manager" will return for a second season. It's been nearly a decade since Tom Hiddleston's hotel worker-turned-spy stalked a dirty arms dealer on the show based on a novel by John le Carré. It was meant to be a limited series for the BBC and AMC, but its creators are now bringing it back with a new and original story. This time, it's airing on Prime Video in the U.S., beginning with a three-episode drop on Sunday.

■ AP Entertainment Writer Andrew Dalton

How museums can help rebuild trust in a divided America

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

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By Devon Akmon

Michigan State University

Across the United States, political polarization has deepened to historic levels. In a report published in May 2025, the Pew Research Center found that Americans are more divided and less trusting of one another than at any point in recent decades. Yet museums remain among the few places where curiosity still draws people across political and cultural lines.

Ninety-two percent of adults view museums as nonpartisan sources of education, according to a report from Wilkening Consulting. People also trust museums for presenting fact-based, authentic and research-driven information.

Ninety-six percent of Americans say they would support lawmakers who fund museums, and 97% see museums as vital educational assets to their communities.

These findings place museums among the most trusted institutions in American life, ranking just behind friends and family.

That rare level of confidence gives museums both an opportunity and a responsibility.

As debates over science, history and art intensify, they are being called upon to do something more fundamental: to model how people might think and listen together.

As director of the Michigan State University Museum in East Lansing, and core faculty in the Arts, Cultural Management and Museum Studies program at MSU, I see every day how these spaces can foster understanding.

At the MSU Museum, an upcoming exhibition titled "Blurred Realities" will ask a question that feels urgent far beyond its gallery walls: How do we decide what is true?

Opening in January 2026, "Blurred Realities" examines how information, bias and technology shape people's understanding of the world. Rather than advancing a single authoritative narrative, the exhibition creates space for inquiry, encouraging visitors to reflect on how beliefs are formed, how digital systems influence perception, and how imagination reshapes memory and identity.

In doing so, the exhibition invites thoughtful engagement with the stories, data and algorithms that shape contemporary life, and considers what it means to navigate truth in an increasingly complex information environment.

Central to this effort are the museum's "CoLaborators," a team of

college students trained to facilitate small, idea-driven conversations that encourage curiosity and exchange between museum visitors. They engage guests in open conversations that respond to their interests in the moment. This approach differs from the traditional docent model, which often centers on the transmission of information. Instead, the students' work transforms the gallery into a living forum where questions matter more than conclusions.

In my experience, this is just one of many ways that museums are engaging the communities they serve to explore timely and relevant topics that shape contemporary life.

Museums have long been places to explore the natural world, cultural artifacts and scientific discovery.

History museums have hosted community storytelling projects. An excellent example is the "Your Story, Our Story" project led by the Tennenbaum Museum in New York.

Science museums, including the Natural History Museum of Utah, have led public discussions on climate change.

Art and history museums have opened their galleries and programming spaces to conversations about identity and belonging. The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History held an exhibition centered on Detroiters exonerated of crimes and themes of justice, identity and renewal.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services describes museums and libraries as community catalysts that support social well-being through cultural engagement, shared identity and social connection.

In a time when public debate often happens online, in anger and lacking nuance, museums offer something different: a physical place where curiosity can thrive and where people can pause, reflect and listen.

The more than 35,000 museums across the United States represent a remarkably broad and diverse field, rooted in communities of every size and serving people where they live and learn. Their core work has traditionally focused on collecting, researching, preserving and interpreting objects of historical, cultural and scientific significance.

As social divisions grow, they are becoming important forms of social infrastructure where people can encounter different perspectives. In many cases, their roles are also expanding as museums help the public engage with the pressing questions of our time.

The Association of Science and Technology Centers notes that rising mistrust in institutions, the spread of

misinformation and the weakening of shared public spaces are creating new challenges for organizations that engage the public. In recent years, these trends are prompting museums to think about their role in supporting connection and understanding. Across the country, institutions that once focused mainly on preservation and education are reframing their purpose to include convening civic dialogue and helping visitors navigate complex issues together.

As museums step more visibly into the civic sphere, they also face new pressures. Efforts to engage with difficult topics can draw criticism from across the political spectrum.

Some question why museums address issues like race, climate or misinformation at all, while others expect them to go further. The result can be a delicate balance between maintaining trust and remaining relevant.

Staff and volunteers are expected to create inclusive environments while navigating limited resources, public scrutiny and, sometimes, personal attacks. Smaller institutions may lack the capacity to sustain long-term partnerships or withstand political pushback.

I believe avoiding these conversations carries its own risks. It can reinforce perceptions that museums are detached from the realities of the communities they serve. The key question we ask ourselves at the MSU Museum is not whether to engage with societal issues, but how to do so with care, humility and authenticity. That involves listening as much as leading and viewing dialogue itself as part of our educational mission.

At a moment when trust in public institutions is fragile, museums hold a rare and valuable position. They are places where people still expect to learn something new and to encounter ideas different from their own. When museums invite visitors to think together about complex issues, whether through exhibitions, conversations or community partnerships, they help nurture the habits of curiosity and empathy that democracy depend on.

These interactions may not resolve polarization, but they can model a more constructive way of engaging with difference.

Within a museum's walls, people can explore difficult ideas without the noise of argument or the demand to take sides. In doing so, museums continue their essential work, not only preserving the past but helping us imagine a shared future built on understanding, curiosity and trust.

"Blurred Realities" is on view at the Michigan State University Museum in East Lansing, Michigan, from Jan. 15 to July 18, 2026. (AP)

60-channel closed-loop neurostimulation device shows promise in preclinical study

Nia Therapeutics publishes validation of advanced brain implant

ALLSTON, Mass., Jan 5, (BUSINESS WIRE): Nia Therapeutics announced publication of the first in vivo validation of its Smart Neurostimulation System (SNS), a wireless, implantable brain-computer interface designed for closed-loop treatment of memory disorders.

The SNS records neural activity from 60 channels across four brain regions—an order-of-magnitude increase over commercially available devices. The NeuroPace RNS system, FDA-cleared for epilepsy, records from up to six channels; Medtronic's Percept adaptive DBS system records from up to four.

This expanded sensing capacity reflects the distributed nature of memory, which arises from coordinated dynamics across widespread neural networks rather than from a single focal site.

"Most brain implants were developed for conditions in which a localized abnormal signal drives symptoms," said Michael J. Kahana, PhD, co-founder and CEO of Nia Therapeutics and a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. "Decades of research show that memory

depends on coordinated activity across distributed networks. The SNS was engineered to detect these patterns and respond with personalized stimulation."

In a chronic study of three sheep, the SNS demonstrated stable performance across core functions:

These results demonstrate that the SNS can chronically record distributed neural activity, decode behaviorally relevant brain states, and deliver stimulation with predictable effects—key prerequisites for future closed-loop neurostimulation therapies.

The SNS builds on federally funded research supported by DARPA and NIH. In prior human studies using externalized research systems, Kahana and colleagues recorded intracranial brain activity from hundreds of epilepsy patients performing memory tasks and showed that machine-learning models could predict, moment by moment, whether newly learned information would be remembered.

In sham-controlled clinical experiments, brief bursts of electrical stimulation delivered during classifier-identified poor-encoding states improved delayed recall



Nia Therapeutics develops implantable brain-computer interfaces for memory disorders. (Business Wire)

by approximately 20%; stimulation delivered at random times produced no benefit. Those studies established the

therapeutic principle underlying Nia's approach but relied on devices unsuitable for chronic use.

"This publication shows that the core capabilities required for memory-guided stimulation—high-density sensing, real-time decoding, and programmable neuro-modulation—can be delivered in a fully implantable, wireless system," said Daniel S. Rizzuto, PhD, co-founder and President of Nia Therapeutics.

Memory impairment is among the most common and disabling consequences of traumatic brain injury and age-related cognitive decline. Although recent disease-modifying drugs for early Alzheimer's can slow progression, they do not restore lost function. Nia's approach aims to complement such treatments by directly improving memory through targeted neuro-modulation.

Nia Therapeutics is preparing for first-in-human studies, with regulatory submissions planned for 2026. The initial study will focus on patients with memory loss resulting from moderate-to-severe traumatic brain injury.



A teacher guides children of a nursery class to interact with a robot at a kindergarten in Laoling city, East China's Shandong province, Nov 4, 2025. (Xinhua)

3,600 yuan annual subsidy per child under 3

China launches 2026 applications for nationwide childcare subsidies

BEIJING, Jan 5, (Xinhua): China on Monday started a new round of applications for its 2026 nationwide childcare subsidy program, offering eligible families a tax-free lump sum of 3,600 yuan (about 513 U.S. dollars) per year for each child under the age of three.

Eligible parents can apply through multiple online platforms, including Alipay and WeChat, as well as via offline channels, according to relevant authorities.

The program, launched in July 2025, has so far benefited more than 24 million people nationwide, with the distribution rate of childcare subsidies for 2025 reaching around 80 percent, data from the National Health Commission showed.

To support this program, the central government had planned to allocate 90 billion yuan from the central budget in 2025, the Ministry of Finance noted.

The latest move comes as China continues to build a more supportive policy environment for childbearing and child-rearing in response to long-term demographic changes. With roughly 30 million children

under the age of three, the country's birth rate and its total number of newborns had declined for seven consecutive years before posting a modest rebound in 2024. Meanwhile, China's population aged 60 and above had reached 310 million by the end of 2024.

In recent years, China has expanded economic support for families with children across multiple areas. In addition to direct subsidies, childcare for children under the age of three and children's education have been included in additional individual income tax deductions, with the deduction standard raised from 1,000 yuan to 2,000 yuan per child per month.

More policy measures to ease the financial burden of childbirth and child-rearing are in the pipeline. Last year, China announced a plan to ensure nationwide insurance coverage for basic childbirth costs by 2026.

Fertility policy was also highlighted at last year's Central Economic Work Conference, which called for efforts to maintain the birth rate at a stable level.

Deal aims to boost HIV, malaria and maternal care

US, Ivory Coast ink \$480m health pact

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast, Jan 5, (AP): The United States and Ivory Coast signed a health deal Tuesday requiring the U.S. to commit \$480 million to the West African nation's health sector as part of "America First" global health funding pacts that mirror the Trump administration's foreign policy.

The signing in Ivory Coast's capital of Abidjan covers areas such as HIV, malaria, maternal and child health, and global health security. It is the latest agreement the U.S. has entered with more than a dozen African countries, most of them hit by U.S. aid cuts, including Ivory Coast.

U.S. aid cuts have crippled health systems across the developing world, including in Africa, where many countries relied on the funding for crucial programs, including those responding to outbreaks of disease.

The new health pact is based on the principle of shared responsibility with Ivory Coast committing to provide up to 163 billion CFA francs (\$292 million) by 2030, representing 60% of the overall commitment, according to Ivorian Prime Minister Robert Beugré Mambe.

U.S. Ambassador to Ivory Coast Jessica Davis Ba said the U.S. government is moving "beyond the traditional aid approach toward a model focused on trade, innovation, and shared prosperity."

"Today, our bilateral cooperation is entering a new phase. We are implementing the America First global health strategy," the ambassador said.

The Trump administration says the new "America First" global health funding agreements are meant to increase self-sufficiency and eliminate what it says are ideology and waste from international assistance. The deals replace a patchwork



U.S. Ambassador to the Ivory Coast Jessica Davis Ba, left, and Adam Coulibaly, minister of finance and budget, sign a health agreement in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, on Dec. 30, 2025. (AP)

of previous health agreements under the now-dismantled United States Agency for International Development.

In Ivory Coast, USAID had invested \$115 million to support sectors such as health, education and aid for refugees mostly fleeing violence in

neighboring Sahel states.

Analysts say the new approach to global health aligns with U.S. President Donald Trump's pattern of dealing with other nations transactionally, using direct talks with foreign governments to promote his agenda abroad.

Rwanda adds universal hepatitis B birth dose to national immunization program

KIGALI, Jan 5, (Xinhua): Rwanda has introduced a universal hepatitis B birth dose into the national immunization program as part of efforts to eliminate the viral disease as a public health threat within the next four years.

In a statement released on Friday, the Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC) said this will ensure that all newborns receive the vaccine within 24 hours of birth to prevent mother-to-child transmission of the hepatitis B virus and its lifelong complications.

"The birth dose vaccine is the most effective and cost-effective intervention to prevent mother-to-child transmission. Introduction of the universal birth dose further strengthens Rwanda's commitment to eliminating viral

hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030," the statement said.

To implement the initiative, the RBC said the government has trained health workers, reinforced cold chain systems to ensure vaccine safety, and equipped health facilities nationwide to provide the vaccine within 24 hours of birth, including for babies born outside health facilities.

Hepatitis B is a highly infectious viral disease that can be transmitted from mother to child during childbirth. According to the World Health Organization, about 254 million people worldwide are living with chronic hepatitis B, while in Rwanda, official data show a low hepatitis B prevalence of about 0.26 percent.

Microlensing breakthrough opens door for future space-ground studies

Scientists identify Saturn-mass free-floating planet

BEIJING, Jan 5, (Xinhua): Chinese scientists have successfully achieved the first direct mass measurement of a free-floating object, confirming that it is a planet with a mass comparable to that of Saturn.

This key research finding, led by the Department of Astronomy research team at the School of Physics, Peking University, was published in Science on Friday.

Free-floating objects are mysterious celestial bodies that do not orbit any star and drift alone through interstellar space. When a free-floating object passes in front of a background star, its gravity bends the starlight like a lens, causing the star to brighten temporarily—a phenomenon known as a microlensing event, according to Dong Subo, head of the research team.

Over the past decade, scientists have detected approximately ten free-floating objects through observations with ground-based telescopes. However, their mass has yet to be accurately measured.

In 2024, the research team reported a microlensing event observed from both ground- and space-based telescopes. By combining observations from Earth and a distant spacecraft with a time difference, the mass-distance degeneracy can be broken, enabling the research team to extract the object's distance information and then determine its mass and distance separately, the research shows.

"This is analogous to observing the same scene with 'eyes' that are extremely far apart," Dong said.



An illustration of a free-floating object. (Xinhua)

This achievement highlights the advantages and significance of space-ground coordinated ob-

servations and provides important reference for upcoming projects such as NASA's Roman Space Tel-

scope," a reviewer for the journal Science commented.

The China Space Station Tele-

scope, independently developed by China and planned for launch, will also support such observations.

China sets new brain standard

BEIJING, Jan 5, (Xinhua): A study by a Chinese research team has established normative references for brain structure throughout the entire lifespan of Chinese individuals, thereby enhancing diagnostic standards for neurological disorders among patients.

Professor Liu Ya'ou, leader of the research team from the Department of Radiology at Beijing Tiantan Hospital, explained that neurological disease diagnosis in China has long faced two major challenges.

Firstly, the current normative brain references are primarily derived from Western populations. However, the distinctive genetic background and environmental conditions of the Chinese population give rise to significant differences in brain structure. These variations can lead to discrepancies in both diagnosis and therapy.

Secondly, there is an urgent need for data to better distinguish between physiological aging and pathological changes in patients, which would help prevent delays in early diagnosis and intervention during critical periods.

To address these issues, the researchers from Beijing Tiantan Hospital and Beijing Normal University collaborated, integrating magnetic resonance imaging data from 24,061 healthy individuals and 3,932 patients with neurological disorders across China. The team established normative reference ranges for 228 core structural indicators specific to the Chinese population.

The findings were recently published in the international journal *Nature Neuroscience*.

"By calculating individual brain deviation scores from these normative references, we can quickly quantify deviations in brain structure to help identify specific diseases, significantly improving diagnostic accuracy compared to traditional assessments," said Liu.

For example, Alzheimer's disease shows widespread deviation scores across multiple brain structure indicators. Parkinson's disease primarily shows deviations in deep gray matter, while multiple sclerosis mainly involves deviations in white matter and thalamus volume.

Booker's dagger ends Thunder streak

Lakers rally past Grizzlies

PHOENIX, Jan 5, (AP): Devin Booker hit the go-ahead 3-pointer with 0.7 seconds remaining, Jordan Goodwin scored 26 points with a career-high eight 3-pointers and the Phoenix Suns beat the Oklahoma City Thunder 108-105.

Booker took the late inbounds pass and drilled the long 3-pointer over Alex Caruso, shaking a season-long slump from long range. Ajay Mitchell missed a corner 3 at the buzzer that would have tied it.

Oklahoma City's four-game winning streak was snapped and the team fell to 30-6, which is still the best record in the NBA.

Lakers 120, Grizzlies 114

In Los Angeles, Luka Doncic scored 36 points with nine rebounds and eight assists, LeBron James added 26 points with 10 assists and the Los Angeles Lakers rallied for a 120-114 victory over the Memphis Grizzlies.

Jake LaRavia also scored 26 points against his former team and Deandre Ayton had 15 points as the Lakers earned their second home victory over the Grizzlies in three days. The consecutive victories came after Los Angeles lost four of its previous five contests.

Jaylen Wels scored 23 points for Memphis and rookie Cedric Coward scored 16 points with nine rebounds, all in the first half, but did not play after halftime because of an ankle injury.

Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 14 points and Jock Landale had 13 points with 10 rebounds for the Grizzlies, who lost their fourth consecutive game.

Bucks 115, Kings 98

In Sacramento, Giannis Antetokounmpo had 37 points and 11 rebounds as the Milwaukee Bucks sailed to a 115-98 victory over the Sacramento Kings.

Antetokounmpo made 13 of 17 shots from the field and 11 of 13 at the free-throw line in 31 minutes as the Bucks won for the fifth time in their last seven games. Kevin Porter Jr. added 25 points and 10 assists,



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James (23) drives the ball against Memphis Grizzlies forward Santi Aldama (7) during the second half of an NBA basketball game Sunday in Los Angeles. (AP)

while Myles Turner scored 15 points.

Russell Westbrook had 21 points and Zach LaVine had 20 for the Kings, who have lost five games in a row.

Heat 125, Pelicans 106

In Miami, Norman Powell made a career high nine 3-pointers in a 34-point performance as the Miami Heat beat New Orleans 125-106, extending the Pelicans' losing skid to seven.

Powell shot 11 of 15 from the field and 9 of 12 from behind the arc. Nikola Jovic finished with 19 points and Kel'el Ware had 16 points and 12 rebounds for the Heat, who

rebounded from a 10-point home loss to Minnesota on Saturday that snapped a four-game winning streak. Miami's Pelle Larsson had 16 points and six assists.

Timberwolves 141, Wizards 115

In Washington, Anthony Edwards scored 35 points, Julius Randle added 22, and the Minnesota Timberwolves completed a season sweep of the Washington Wizards with a 141-115 rout on Sunday night.

Rudy Gobert had 18 points and 14 rebounds for his 15th double-double of the season for Minnesota, which outscored Washington 76-48 in the paint. The Timberwolves went 3-1

on their road trip and won on consecutive days for the third time this season.

CJ McCollum had 20 points to lead Washington, which at 9-25 has the second-worst record in the Eastern Conference. The Wizards had won four of five.

Minnesota had its third 140-plus-point game of the season, while the Wizards allowed 140-plus for the fourth time.

Nets 127, Nuggets 115

In New York, Michael Porter Jr. had 27 points, 11 rebounds and five assists in his first game against his former team, and the Brooklyn Nets

beat the Denver Nuggets 127-115 on Sunday to snap a three-game losing streak.

The Nuggets got Aaron Gordon and Christian Braun back from lengthy injury absences and a huge game from Jamal Murray, but fell to 1-2 since Nikola Jokic was lost for perhaps a month with a hyperextended left knee.

Murray finished with 27 points, a career-high 16 assists and six rebounds. Gordon had 20 points off the bench after missing 19 games with a strained right hamstring, while Braun started and scored four points after he sat out 23 games with a

sprained left ankle.

Noah Clowney added 22 points for the Nets, while Cam Thomas and Day'Ron Sharpe each had 17. Sharpe started at center with Nic Claxton out for personal reasons.

Magic 135, Pacers 127

In Orlando, Fla., Desmond Bane scored 31 points, Paolo Banchero added 28 points and 12 rebounds and the Orlando Magic handed the Indiana Pacers their 12th straight loss, 135-127 on Sunday.

Anthony Black had 27 points and 10 assists for the Magic, who beat the Pacers for the second time in five days.

Pascal Siakam led Indiana with 34 points. Aaron Nesmith had 25 points and eight assists and Andrew Nembard added 20 points and 11 assists for the Pacers, who shot 55.2% after coming into the game with the NBA's poorest field-goal percentage (43.8%).

Orlando shot 56% overall and made 15 of 32 3-pointers (46.9%).

Seven months after playing in the NBA Finals, the injury-depleted Pacers tied a 43-year-old franchise record with their 12th straight loss. Two of their last three losses were against the Magic, including a 112-110 decision on Dec. 31 at Indianapolis.

Pistons 114, Cavaliers 110

In Cleveland, Cade Cunningham scored 27 points, Daniss Jenkins added 25-21 in the second quarter alone - and the Detroit Pistons held on down the stretch for a rare road win at Cleveland, beating the Cavaliers 114-110 on Sunday.

Despite playing without two starters, the Eastern Conference-leading Pistons snapped a nine-game losing streak at Rocket Arena and beat the Cavaliers for just the second time in 15 games.

Donovan Mitchell scored 30-23 after halftime - to pace Cleveland, which trailed by 13 with less than five minutes to go before cutting Detroit's lead to 108-106 on Darius Garland's basket with 1:16 left.

However, Pistons forward Ausar Thompson scored on a tip-in with 17.2 seconds remaining, and Jenkins made four free throws in the final 5.7 seconds to put the Cavs away.



Gonzaga forward Graham Ike (15) shoots while pressured by Loyola Marymount forward Jalen Shelley (1) during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game, Sunday in Spokane, Wash. (AP)

San Francisco tops Portland

Gonzaga keeps win streak alive with big LMU victory

SPOKANE, Wash., Jan 5, (AP): Graham Ike scored 16 points as No. 7 Gonzaga overcame early shooting trouble to beat Loyola Marymount 82-47 on Sunday night for its ninth consecutive victory.

Mario Saint-Supery added 13 points and Jalen Warley 12 points for Gonzaga (16-1, 4-0 West Coast Conference), which was coming off an 80-72 overtime win over Seattle on Friday night, and had a slow start against the Lions.

Rodney Brown scored 11 points to lead Loyola Marymount (10-7, 1-3), which defeated Gonzaga in Spokane during the 2022-23 season. The Lions shot just 30% in the game, compared to 54% for Gonzaga.

Gonzaga's only loss this year was to No. 2 Michigan in Las Vegas.

San Francisco 73, Portland 68

In San Francisco, Venjamin Absio had 16 points and nine rebounds, David Fuchs added 15 points and 10 rebounds, and San Francisco beat Portland 73-68 on Sunday.

Ryan Beasley had 14 points and shot 5 of 14 from the field, including 1 for 4 from 3-point range, and went 3 for 5 from the free-throw line for the Dons (11-6, 3-1 West Coast Conference).

Washington State 81, Oregon State 67

In Pullman, Wash., Aaron Glass' 16 points helped Washington State defeat Oregon State 81-67 on Sunday.

Glass went 7 of 15 from the field (1 for 7 from 3-point range) for the Cougars (8-9, 3-1 West Coast Conference). ND Okafor scored 13 points, shooting 6 of 8 from the field. Jerone Morton shot 5 for 8, including 3 for 5 from beyond the arc to finish with 13 points.

KRANJSKA GORA, Slovenia, Jan 5, (AP): Alpine skiing in its Olympic form dates back more than a century and the sport made its debut at the 1936 Games in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. Events have been modified over the years, but the individual competitions familiar to most fans like downhill and slalom remain. Here is what to know for the Winter Olympics in Italy next month.

There are five different events in Alpine skiing at these Olympics for both the men and women. The individual events are: downhill, super-G, giant slalom and slalom. Then there is the team combined event, which will be making its Olympic debut.

In downhill and super-G, otherwise known as the "speed events," each competitor gets only one run. Giant slalom and slalom are contested over two runs, with the top 30 finishers from the opening leg starting in reverse order for the second leg. The team combined features two-person teams with one racer competing in a downhill run and the other in a slalom run, with their combined times producing the results.

Americans Mikaela Shiffrin and Lindsey Vonn are the two of the most accomplished skiers of all time. Shiffrin excels in slalom and giant slalom while the 41-year-old Vonn excels in downhill and super-G. It's possible that they could pair with each other in team combined. The American squad also includes downhill world champion Breezy Johnson and defending super-G silver medalist Ryan Cochran-Siegle.

The host Italians have a strong squad with Sofia Goggia and Federica Brignone - if she returns in time from injury - and Dominik Paris. Swiss standout Marco Odermati is the top men's racer.

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French standout Jean-Claude Killy swept gold in all three men's events on home snow at the 1968 Grenoble Games.

Goggia & Brignone lead Italy's ski hopes

Shiffrin eyes historic winter Olympics win



United States' Mikaela Shiffrin competes in an alpine ski, women's World Cup slalom, in Courchevel, France. (AP)

Men's events at these Olympics will be held in Bormio and women's events in Cortina d'Ampezzo. The schedule features the men's downhill on Feb. 7, the women's downhill Feb. 8; the men's giant slalom is Feb. 14, the women Feb. 15; and the men's slalom is Feb. 16, with the women's slalom on Feb. 18 the final Alpine event.

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Shiffrin became the youngest slalom gold medalist as an 18-year-old at the 2014 Sochi Games.

Austria's Hermann Maier bounced back from a horrific crash in downhill at the 1998 Nagano Games to win gold in super-G and giant slalom.

Alberto Tomba is the most decorated Italian skier in Olympic history with five medals: three golds and two silvers, won at Calgary in 1988, Albertville in 1992 and Lillehammer in 1994. While he's from the Bolo-

gna area, Tomba spent many winters training in Cortina before he became a star.

Deborah Compagnoni, who was born in Bormio and raised just up the road in Santa Caterina di Valfurva, won skiing golds at three straight Olympics: 1992, 1994 and 1998.

Combined is the oldest skiing event at the Olympics, having featured when the sport made its debut in 1936 Garmisch-Partenkirchen. But the event's format has changed multiple times over the years.

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Cadillac signs Guanyu as backup to Bottas & Pérez

SILVERSTONE, England, Jan 5, (AP): New Formula 1 team Cadillac made another experienced hire Monday with the choice of former Sauber driver Zhou Guanyu as its reserve.

The only driver from China in F1 history, Shanghai-born Zhou hasn't raced since 2024 but spent last season as reserve with Ferrari, which is supplying engines and gearboxes for Cadillac's debut season. That means he brings "relevant and recent experience" to Cadillac, the team said.

Zhou will be the backup to Cadillac's even more experienced pairing of Valterri Bottas and Sergio Pérez, who have a combined 16 wins and 527 starts between them.

"We wanted a candidate who had recent F1 driving experience, is prepared to work hard as part of a team and understands the challenges of developing a car throughout the season," team principal Graeme

Lowdon said in a statement.

"Zhou fits the bill perfectly. He will be a great asset to us as we go racing in 2026 and we look forward to him being an integral part of our team."

Zhou's arrival also gives the Cadillac brand visibility in China, where he is a celebrity with a major commercial profile.

Zhou was Bottas' teammate over three seasons with Sauber, including under the Alfa Romeo name, from 2022 through 2024 and had a best race finish of eighth. His Ferrari duties last year included a test of 2026-specification tires in September when Lewis Hamilton was absent for personal reasons.

Cadillac is also backing U.S. driver Colton Herta, formerly of IndyCar, through a season in Formula 1 in 2026 alongside test driver duties for the F1 team. That will help Herta get the points he needs for an FIA

super license to make him eligible to drive in F1 in the future.

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Burgan defeats Al-Nasr

Kuwait Club extends league lead after crushing Yarmouk

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: Kuwait continued to lead the preliminary round of the volleyball league, with a convincing 3-0 win over Yarmouk. The match, held at the Volleyball Federation Hall in the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex, ended with set scores of 25-11, 25-22, and 25-22. With this victory, Kuwait Club extended its lead at the top of the standings with 17 points, while Yarmouk remains in eighth place with three points.

In another match from Round 6, Burgan defeated Al-Nasr 3-1, winning the sets 25-22, 23-25, 25-17, 25-22. This is Burgan's second victory in six league matches, following losses in their first four games. They had also beaten Al-Shabab in the previous round. Burgan's total now stands at seven points, while Al-Nasr has yet to earn a point.

Both Kuwait Club and Burgan are



Al Nasr player smashes the ball in play.

set to participate in the West Asia Club Championship, hosted by Kuwait SC next month. Some league matches were

scheduled early to allow both teams to prepare for the international tournament.

Kuwait Club looks to stay top against Al-Ula

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff
KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: Kuwait Club will take on Saudi Arabia's Al-Ula tonight at 8:00 p.m. at Prince Mohammed bin Abdulaziz Hall in Medina, in Round 5 of Group B of the West Asian Basketball League (Gulf Zone).

The "White" team seeks to remain at the top of the group with seven points, despite the challenge posed by Al-Ula, who has six points and a star-studded lineup. In the first leg, Kuwait Club, the Arab champion, narrowly defeated Al-Ula 113-108, in a match that confirmed both sides as strong contenders for the title.

Kuwait Club enters the match fully prepared under Serbian coach Dušan Stojkov, relying on a balanced squad of local and foreign talents, including brothers Hamad and Mohammed Adnan, Alexander Al-Ghais, Imran Jawhar, Turki Hamoud, Sahoo Al-Sahoo, Ali Al-Haddoud, and captain Fahad Al-Dhafiri, alongside foreign players Charlie Moore, fellow Serbian Jamal Jones, and Frenchman



Kuwait Club player drives to the hoop.

Geoffrey Lauvergne.

Al-Ula, guided by Greek coach Stratis Kokolikidz, knows a victory could decide the group's top spot and secure a strong chance for the semifinals. Key players for Al-Ula include Australian Thon Meeker,

Lebanese Wael Arakji, American Jonathan Gibson, as well as Mohammed Al-Swailem, Mohammed Al-Hosawi, Abdulaziz Al-Alawi, Ahmed Al-Mukhtar, Mohammed Al-Saqr, Mohammed Saleh, and Ahmed Al-Jizani.

Championship begins January 8

'Atayab Al-Marshoud' championship announces over KD 50,000 in prizes

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: Saud Al-Marshoud, a member of the Supreme Organizing Committee for the "Atayab Al-Marshoud" International Show Jumping Championship, announced that the total prizes for the top winners have been increased to over KD 50,000 for the three-star category.

The committee has also expanded sponsorship and welcomed participation from riders representing Kuwait, other Arab countries, the Gulf region, and international nations.

Al-Marshoud confirmed that all preparations are complete for the 12th edition of the championship, which will begin on January 8 at the Kuwait Equestrian Center, with just four days remaining until the opening ceremony.

Leading the list of past champions is Ali Al-Kharafi of the Kuwait Equestrian Club, who has won the title four times: 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2024. Two-time champion Rakan Al-Hasawi follows, while Abdulrahman Al-Fuzae, Abdullah Al-Wadhi, Nora Al-Qaoud, and Anaz Al-Anaz have each claimed the title once.

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A Moroccan fan reacts during the Africa Cup of Nations round of 16 soccer match between Morocco and Tanzania in Rabat, Morocco. (AP)

Sports

Entertainment program adds flair to event

Over 122 channels to air PSG vs Marseille French Super Cup in Kuwait

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 5: Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef, president of the Kuwait Football Association, announced that more than 122 television channels will broadcast the French Super Cup match between Paris Saint-Germain and Marseille, scheduled for 9 p.m. next Thursday at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

Sheikh Al-Yousef made the remarks during a press conference hosted by Kuwait Airways to outline preparations by the Supreme Organizing Committee for the event and to ensure it is presented in a manner befitting Kuwait's sporting reputation, in cooperation with sponsoring partners.

The conference was attended by Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef; Kuwait Airways Chairman Captain Abdulmohsen Al-Faqaan; Waleed Al-Khashti, Chief Corporate Affairs & Relations Officer at Zain Kuwait; CEO of Kuwait Flour Mills &

Bakeries Mutlaq Al-Zayed; Deputy Group CEO of the Combined Group Dr. Mohammed Al-Awad; Vice President of the "Visit Kuwait" platform Dr. Fatima Sayed Hashem; and IKEA CEO for Kuwait, Jordan and Morocco Marino Maganto.

Sheikh Al-Yousef revealed that the match will be preceded by a 12-minute musical operetta in Arabic and French, starting at 8 p.m., featuring international star Khaled and singer Bader Al-Shuaibi, along with laser shows and several surprises for fans. He added that 90 percent of match tickets have already been sold.

Kuwait Airways Chairman Abdulmohsen Al-Faqaan praised the efforts of Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef, describing the event as a "distinguished start to 2026." He said Kuwait Airways is proud to be part of the global sporting occasion and has prepared a range of surprises and valuable prizes for fans, including business-class airline tickets and commemorative gifts.

For his part, Mutlaq Al-Zayed said

hosting the French Super Cup represents the ideal opening to the New Year, expressing hope that 2026 will be filled with major sporting events that boost local tourism. He noted that Kuwait Flour Mills & Bakeries has a long history of active participation in sports events and will continue to contribute positively to the success of major international competitions, stressing that global reach can only be achieved through engagement in prominent world events.

Waleed Al-Khashti thanked Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef for his role in bringing the event to Kuwait, saying the Super Cup sends a strong message that the country is capable of hosting major events according to the highest international standards. He described the tournament as a comprehensive sporting, economic and tourism experience, adding that Zain's participation reflects successful cooperation between the public and private sectors and presents Kuwait's positive image to the world.



Officials pose for a group photo after the press conference.

Díaz keeps Morocco on track as Cameroon outlasts South Africa



Tanzania's Selamani Mwalimu, center, fights for the ball with Morocco's Nayef Aguerd, left and Bilal El Khanouss during the Africa Cup of Nations round of 16 soccer match between Morocco and Tanzania in Rabat, Morocco. (AP)

Atlas Lions to face Indomitable Lions in quarterfinals



South Africa's Siyabonga Ngezana and Cameroon's Arthur Avom challenge for the ball during the Africa Cup of Nations round of 16 soccer match between South Africa and Cameroon in Rabat, Morocco. (AP)

RABAT, Morocco, Jan 5, (AP): Brahim Díaz kept Morocco's Africa Cup of Nations title hopes on track while five-time winner Cameroon beat South Africa 2-1 for a showdown with the host nation in the quarterfinals.

Díaz sent Morocco through with a 1-0 win over Tanzania before Cameroon held on to beat South Africa for the first time since 1992 thanks to goals from Junior Tchamadeu and Christian Kofane. They meet in the next round on Friday.

"The Morocco game is far away for us," Cameroon coach David Pa-gou said. "We suffered today, even if we won."

South Africa was left to rue a host of missed chances early on when Cameroon's defenders looked as though they were playing together for the first time.

The Bafana Bafana had two extra days to prepare for their last 16 game, while Cameroon's last group game was Wednesday.

An injury to Cameroon's Darlin Yongwa allowed both teams to readjust before play resumed.

Cameroon improved, supported by most fans in the cozy 18,000-capacity Stade Al Barid.

There was a huge roar when TV cameras picked up Samuel Eto'o, the former Cameroon forward who's now president of the country's soccer federation, while boos rang out whenever South Africa coach Hugo Broos was shown on the big screen, apparently for his comments about the lack of an "AFCON vibe" in Morocco.

Tchamadeu got the opener when he side-footed the ball inside the far post in the 34th after he was left free when South African defenders failed to clear Cameroon's first corner.

The Indomitable Lions emerged with more bite after the break, with Aboubakar Nagida crossing for Kofane to head the second goal in the 47th.

"I don't think Cameroon were really dangerous in the first half and we wanted to continue like this in the second half. But after the second goal it was very difficult,"

Broos said. "Cameroon stayed very well as a block."

Cameroon goalkeeper Dévis Epassy saved from Samukelo Kabini, who'd missed one of the early chances, then dived to keep out Teboho Mokoena's free kick.

Evidence Makgopa's 88th-minute strike was too late for the Bafana Bafana.

Díaz, who has quickly emerged as Morocco's star player, broke the deadlock against Tanzania in the 64th minute. He beat Hussein Masaalanga at his near post when the Taifa Stars' goalkeeper probably expected a cross.

It was Díaz's fourth goal in four games and it set off celebrations of relief around Rabat's near 70,000-capacity Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium, where the home team will play all its games as long as it keeps winning through to the final on Jan. 18.

The Atlas Lions had dominated possession but were largely frustrated by Tanzania's disciplined and committed defense.

Morocco captain Achraf Hakimi made his first start of the tournament after recovering from an ankle injury and played the whole game.

Senegal and Mali booked their places in the quarterfinals on Saturday.

Kuwait overcomes Algeria, prepares to face Slovenia

By Khaled Al-Enezi

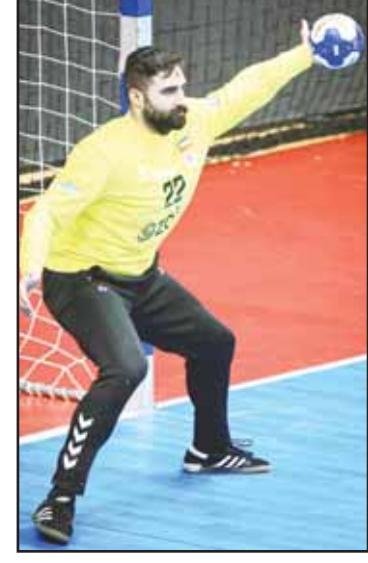
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

ZAGREB, Jan 5: Kuwait will play its second friendly match today during its current training camp in Croatia, taking on Slovenia. The team opened the series with a 32-25 victory over Algeria two days ago, leading 17-15 at halftime.

Following the Slovenia match, Kuwait will face Kosovo on January 9 and Georgia on January 10, before the delegation returns home on January 11.

The European training camp is part of Kuwait's preparation for the 22nd Asian Men's Handball Championship, which also serves as the 2027 World Cup qualifiers in Germany. The tournament will be held at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex Hall in Kuwait from January 15 to 29. Kuwait has been drawn into Group C alongside the UAE, Hong Kong, and India. The other groups are: Group A: Oman, Qatar, South Korea; Group B: Bahrain, Jordan, China, Iraq; Group D: Japan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Australia.

Kuwait began its Asian Championship preparations at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, Saudi



Hassan Safar, goalkeeper of Kuwait makes a save.

Arabia, last November, followed by a domestic training camp. The team then held a Cairo camp, where it played two friendly matches against Egypt, before traveling to Slovenia and Croatia for the current European training session.

Fletcher to take charge against Burnley

Man Utd coach Amorim out one day after provocative comments

MANCHESTER, England, Jan 5, (AP): Ruben Amorim is out as coach of Manchester United after just 14 months in the job.

The Premier League club announced on Monday that Amorim's reign was over - with the decision coming a day after he made provocative comments about his position following a 1-1 draw with Leeds.

"With Manchester United sitting sixth in the Premier League, the club's leadership has reluctantly made the decision that it is the right time to make a change," United said in a statement. "This will give the team the best opportunity of the highest possible Premier League finish."

United said youth coach Darren Fletcher would take charge of its match against Burnley on Wednesday.

Amorim oversaw a slew of unwanted records at the 20-time English champion including its lowest finish in the Premier League era last season. The United job has proved one of the most difficult in world soccer since club legend Alex Ferguson retired in 2013, with Amorim the sixth permanent manager or coach to be dismissed in that time.

Amorim apologized to fans at the end of last season for what he described as a "disastrous" campaign when United finished 15th in the standings, recorded its highest number of losses in a Premier League season and lowest points total.

Last week there were reports that figures at the club had questioned his tactics and on Sunday the Portuguese sought to clarify his position.

"I came here to be the manager of Manchester United, not to be the coach of Manchester United," he said. "And that is clear."

"I'm not going to quit. I will do my job until another guy is coming here to replace me."

Amorim was considered one of the brightest coaches in Europe when United hired him from Sporting Lisbon in November 2024 at a cost of 11 million euros (\$12 million). He had led the Portuguese giant to two league titles in four years and was seen as the ideal candidate to lead United back to the summit of English soccer after more than a decade since it was last crowned Premier League champion.

But results plummeted in his first season and defeat to Tottenham in the Europa League final ended hopes of qualifying for the lucrative Champions League.

Still he was given more than \$300 million to reshape his squad with signings like Matheus Cunha and Bryan Mbeumo. But the struggles have continued this term, with United winning only two of its first six games in the league and suffering a humiliating loss to fourth-tier Grimsby in the League Cup.

Results have improved, but just three wins from the last 11 games have seen United fail to close the gap on the top three in the standings.

Amorim faced constant questions about his tactics - opting for a system with wingbacks that did not seem to suit his players. He was also questioned over his reluctance to play one of United's most talented home-grown talents in Kobbie Mainoo, who was largely overlooked despite previously being a key player for England.

He became known for his candid approach to interviews - not least last January when he admitted his team might be the worst in the club's history.

United dominated England's top flight since the inception of the Premier League in 1992 - winning 13 titles. But it has not been crowned champion since Ferguson's retirement. Top names have been hired since then, including Champions League-winning coaches Louis van Gaal and Jose Mourinho, but they have only brought limited success.