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MULTIPLE TRIP PERMITS ACCELERATE WORKER'S PROCESSING TIME

Kuwait simplifies employee exit permits

PAM pre-approval service speeds up transactions

By Fares Ghaleb
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) has upgraded its exit permit service by introducing a multiple-trip option aimed at simplifying procedures for both employers and employees.

In an official statement issued on Thursday, PAM explained that the new feature allows users to obtain exit permits that are valid for a specified period, replacing the previous single-trip limitation, thereby significantly streamlining and accelerating the process.

Kuwait braces for frosty weekend, chance of rain

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: (KUNA) The Meteorological Department has forecast that the country will experience slightly cool weather during the day and cold to very cold conditions at night, with a chance of frost over agricultural and desert areas during the weekend. There is also a possibility of scattered rain during the day and fog forming on Sunday night.

The acting Director of the department, Dhirar Al-Ali, told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Thursday that the country is affected by an extension of a European high-pressure system from the northwest, accompanied by a very cold air mass. This is expected to cause a noticeable drop in maximum and minimum temperatures, along with light to moderate northwesterly winds that will occasionally strengthen this evening over coastal areas.

The winds will raise sea waves, with slightly cool weather during the day and cold to very cold conditions at night, along with a chance of frost over agricultural and desert areas. On Sunday, the winds are expected to shift to the southeast, with scattered rain possible during the day and fog forming at night.

On Friday, the weather during the day will be cold to slightly cool, with light to moderate northwesterly winds of 12 to 38 km/h. Maximum temperatures are expected to range between 13 and 15 degrees Celsius, and the sea will be light to moderately wavy, from two to five feet.

Friday night will be cold to very cold, with light to moderate northwesterly winds of 12 to 35 km/h and a chance of frost forming over agricultural and desert areas. Minimum temperatures are expected between 2 and 4 degrees Celsius, and the sea will be light to moderately wavy, from two to four feet.

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The service can be accessed through the official platforms, either via the As'hal Companies/Manpower portal or the Sahel Business/Individuals application. Both employers and employees can also print the exit permit form whenever needed.

The upgrade offers several advantages, such as saving time and effort, speeding up transaction processing, and supporting the digital transformation of government services.

In parallel, PAM introduced a "Pre-Approval of Exit Permit" service, which allows employers, via an authorized signatory, to grant automatic prior approval for exit permits, thus removing the need to approve each request individually.

The pre-approval service offers full flexibility, and enables employers to apply it to a single employee, a selected group, or all employees under a specific license or file, with the option to exclude certain individuals through an exception system.

With this system, exit permits are issued automatically once an employee submits an application, thus significantly reducing processing time. Employers also retain full control, with the ability to revoke or cancel pre-approval at any time.

Kuwait PM hosts Cardinal Parolin, holds official talks



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdulla Al-Sabah with Secretary of State of the Vatican Cardinal Pietro Parolin.

Decision sparks land price surge in outlying areas

Experts weigh in on relocation of schools

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: The decision issued by the Minister of State for Housing Affairs and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Abdul Latif Al-Mishari to approve the Municipal Council's resolution to close private schools in residential areas has reignited a long-standing and sensitive debate within urban planning and economic circles.

Supporters view the move as a necessary step to restore calm in residential neighborhoods, while critics caution that it could have significant repercussions if adequate alternative locations are not provided.

Economic expert Qais Al-Ghanim noted that the decision to close private schools in residential areas is not new, as the government has been discussing it for years.

He explained that the implementation of the decision now falls within a broader regulatory framework. The decision is important and necessary overall. It takes into consideration the interests of all parties and provides school owners with sufficient time to adjust their operations.

Al-Ghanim emphasized that the success of the decision and the achievement of its objectives require strong government intervention to ensure effective implementation on the ground.

He highlighted the importance of making government-owned land available and reaching agreements with school owners to use under usufruct arrangements for specified periods, which would allow schools to be built in suitable areas away from residential neighborhoods.

Al-Ghanim stressed that the government could also lease this land through Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) contracts for school construction, describing this approach as the ideal

solution.

He noted that the decision offers significant benefits, including reducing traffic congestion and preserving the quality of life and comfort of residents in private residential areas.

Al-Ghanim warned of the potential exploitation of the decision by some parties through inflated land prices in remote areas.

He revealed that a school owner had filed a complaint, stating that the price of a 3,000-square-meter plot in an outlying area had surged to approximately KD 12 million after the decision was announced, reflecting a significant increase driven by the schools' urgent need to relocate.

Meanwhile, real estate expert Abdul Aziz Al-Dugaishim praised the Cabinet's decision to close private sector schools in residential areas, highlighting that such schools have caused severe traffic congestion and considerable inconvenience for residents over the years.

He explained that the unregulated expansion of schools within residential neighborhoods, along with congestion from school buses and parents' vehicles, has distorted the urban landscape and reduced one of the important elements of residential appeal. The actual need within residential neighborhoods is limited to small nurseries that serve local families. Such facilities do not cause the traffic congestion associated with large, densely populated schools.

Al-Dugaishim stressed the importance of allocating land in vacant areas for the construction of new schools, with proper road networks and ample parking to accommodate the movement of parents and staff, in order to balance educational needs with the quality of residential life.

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Al-Ghanim



Behbehani



Al-Sultan

KASCO set to partner with Kuwaiti farmers

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: The acting CEO of Kuwait Aviation Services Company (KASCO), Abdulrahman Al-Kandari, affirmed the company's full readiness to cooperate with Kuwaiti farmers to supply local products according to the company's needs, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement issued after a meeting with the Kuwait Farmers Union, Al-Kandari explained that cooperation with the union will begin as soon as possible, with a supply mechanism being established and health requirements for the products strictly observed, in line with the instructions of the company's Board Chairman Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Shabib, and board members.

This step is part of the company's commitment to relying on local produce and supporting the union, in line with the directives of the higher leadership to encourage Kuwaiti suppliers and promote national products.

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Muthanna Complex makeover underway

By Mohammed Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: The Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects (KAPP) has received approval from the State Audit Bureau to proceed with the tender for the modernization, development, major maintenance, management, and operation of the Muthanna Complex in Kuwait City.

This move comes in confirmation of the article published by the daily recently under the headline "KD 77.6 million for upgrading and rehabilitating the Muthanna Complex." In coordination with the Ministry of Finance, KAPP has now issued an invitation for interested companies and consortia to submit bids for the project.

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2 Could Pahlavi return to power?

Zain selects six Kuwaiti graduates to drive the next era of digital innovation as Generation Z enters its second decade

Continued on Page 5

Major Kuwait raid yields arrests and drug seizures

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: The Ministry of Interior's Criminal Security Sector, represented by the Drug Control General Department (DCGD), carried out a major anti-narcotics campaign in several areas of the country, resulting in the arrest of 23 suspects of various nationalities in 14 separate cases.

According to security sources, those arrested were found in possession of varying quantities of

narcotics and psychotropic substances, and they will be referred for legal action in accordance with the penalties stipulated under the new drug law.

The campaign is part of the Ministry of Interior's ongoing efforts to combat drug-related crimes. It was carried out under the direct field supervision and guidance of Director of DCGD Brigadier General Mohammed Qabazard, and his deputy Brigadier General Sheikh Hamad Al-Sabah.

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US citizens in Kuwait urged to stay alert

US halts immigrant visas, not tourists

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: The U.S. Embassy in Kuwait announced that it is closely monitoring ongoing regional tensions and is committed to providing timely updates as the situation develops.

The embassy explained that no changes have been made to the embassy operations or staffing levels. However, as a precaution, staff have been advised to exercise increased vigilance. Also, movement into the facilities at Camp Arifjan, Camp Buehring, Ali Al-Salem Air Base, and Camp Patriot has been temporarily halted, with access currently limited to essential personnel only.

The embassy urged U.S. citizens in Kuwait to maintain

a high level of personal security awareness, stay informed through local and international media, comply with instructions from local authorities, and make decisions based on their individual circumstances in light of the evolving security environment.

It also encouraged its citizens to enroll in the US Department of State's STEP program to receive security notifications and ensure effective communication in emergencies, reaffirming its readiness to provide assistance as needed.

Meanwhile, US Embassy spokesperson in Kuwait Stuart Turner affirmed that the US Department of State will temporarily suspend the issuance of immigrant visas for citizens of some countries, including Kuwait.

He clarified that the suspension does not apply to non-immigrant visas, including tourist visas and other categories.

French Business Council relaunched in Kuwait



French Ambassador to Kuwait Olivier Gauvin addresses attendees during the relaunch of the French Business Council in Kuwait.

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: The French Ambassador to Kuwait Olivier Gauvin highlighted the numerous promising areas of cooperation between France and Kuwait, covering vital sectors such as energy, health, infrastructure, sustainable cities, transportation, pharmaceuticals, logistics, and artificial intelligence, in addition to high value-added services and the financial sector.

The Ambassador said this during the relaunch of the French Business Council in Kuwait, describing the event as a significant milestone in the economic relations between the two countries.

He attributed the relaunch to the diligent efforts of the council's new

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Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:20 Asr 14:52
 Sunrise .. 06:44 Maghrib .. 17:11
 Zohr 11:57 Isha 18:33

Local

PM: Continue follow up, supervision to push forward development projects



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Sabah urged a Ministerial Committee to speed up implementation of development projects.

Kuwait Amir condoles Saudi King on passing of Princess

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Moshel Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent Thursday a cable of condolences to Custodian of the two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia on passing away of Princess Hind bint Saud bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

His Highness the Crown Prince prayed to Allah Almighty to bestow the deceased with his blessing and called for solace for the Royal family.

Crown Prince

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also sent a cable of condolences to Custodian of the two Holy Mosques

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Prime Minister

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'Charity begins at home, serve country & citizens'

MoSA, IICO, Naama sign agreement

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15, (KUNA): Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah stressed the importance of localizing charitable work within Kuwait, in line with the directives of the political leadership.

This came in remarks to KUNA by Dr. Al-Huwailah while attending and sponsoring the signing of two agreements between the Ministry of Social Affairs, represented by Undersecretary Dr. Khaled Al-Ajmi, and both the International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) and Naama Charity of the Social Reform Society. She explained that the first agreement aims



Dr Al-Huwailah

to rehabilitate and maintain social care homes to ensure their operational readiness, while the second agreement with Naama Charity focuses on developing and modernizing the physiotherapy department at Farah Specialized Center.

Dr. Al-Huwailah said the agreements fall within the Ministry's vision to enhance the sustainability of charitable work under its comprehensive strategic plan.

She called on charitable organizations to direct their efforts toward development initiatives that serve the nation and citizens, and support social and economic stability.

For his part, Undersecretary Dr. Khaled Al-Ajmi affirmed the Ministry's keenness to localize charitable work and strengthen its pathways to achieve sustainable societal impact.

He noted that the beginning of the year represents an ideal launch for a new phase of organized charitable work based on a clear vision.

Dr. Al-Ajmi said the Ministry will place increased focus in the coming period on localizing charitable work as a national priority.

Meanwhile, Engineer Jamal Al-Nouri, Chair-

man of the Board of the International Islamic Charity Organization, expressed pride in signing the agreement, describing it as a practical model of responsible partnerships that place people at the heart of priorities.

Al-Nouri said the partnership stems from a shared vision between the Ministry, IICO, and Naama Charity to develop services, enhance social program efficiency, and achieve tangible humanitarian impact that benefits society.

In turn, Saad Al-Otaibi, CEO of Naama Charity, said the organization continues to fulfill its societal role by localizing charitable work, building effective partnerships with government and civil institutions, and implementing high-quality programs that support the most vulnerable groups.

He stressed that the two agreements aim to develop work mechanisms, enhance service quality, and ensure a dignified environment for beneficiaries, affirming that this cooperation embodies a national approach focused on investing in people and achieving social stability.

Call for joint Gulf act to refine 'education'

'Global scenario presses need to diversify economic sectors'

RIYADH, Jan 15, (KUNA): Kuwait's Minister of Education, Jalal Al-Tabatabaei stressed on Thursday importance of strengthening joint Gulf educational cooperation and consolidating regional and international partnerships to keep pace with rapid transformations in education sector.

In a statement, the Ministry of Education said the remarks were made during Al-Tabatabaei's participation in a high-level dialogue session held on the sidelines of a celebration marking 50 years since the establishment of the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States.

Al-Tabatabaei said the meeting comes at a significant time, marking half a century since the establishment of the bureau, which has played a key role in unifying educational visions and promoting education as a cornerstone for human development and future-building in GCC countries.

He noted that the session aligns with Kuwait Vision 2035, which places investment in human capital at the heart of sustainable development, and highlighted the Ministry's Education development plan (2025-27) as a comprehensive roadmap moving from planning to implementation.

NEW DELHI, Jan 15, (KUNA): Kuwait participated in the National Conference on Strategic Trade Controls (NCSTC) 2026 in the Indian capital New Delhi on Thursday, which comes of great importance as it occurs amidst massive economic and trade transformations across the world.

In a statement to KUNA, Kuwait's Ambassador to India Moshel Al-Shemali said that the current global situation requires focusing on creating an improved and transparent business environment and finding the best ways to diversify economic sectors and sources of income.

Al-Shemali added that the high-level attendees reflect the importance that participating countries from different continents of the world attach to the desire to exchange ideas and information on local and international trade controls, combating price manipulation and commercial fraud, combatting money laundering and securing global supply chains.

The conference is a platform to discuss challenges affecting future policies being considered by countries towards trade control strategies.

NCSTC is organized by the Indian Directorate General of Foreign Trade in cooperation with the Ministry of External Affairs and several other government agencies at the Bharat Mandapam Convention Center in New Delhi.

The conference focuses on key sectors including security and defense, space, chemicals, biotechnology, electronics, information technology, commercial applications, emerging technologies and compliance, with a particular focus on academia and scientific research.

12 nabbed in food factory

Other Voices

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15, (KUNA): Kuwait's Ministry of Interior arrested 12 suspects of Arab and Asian nationalities involved in the illegal manufacture and preparation of children's food products in an unsanitary environment.

In a press statement on Thursday, the Ministry said the Criminal Security Sector had monitored suspicious activity involving several individuals operating a factory and warehouse for food production inside a residential home in the Jleeb Al-Shuyukh area without meeting the legal requirements.

Following legal procedures, authorities raided the location and found that the facility lacked basic hygiene standards, did not have any industrial or commercial licensing, and posed a direct threat to public health and consumer safety.

The suspects admitted to producing and manufacturing food products inside the home, while investigations revealed that the items were stored and distributed to cooperative associations across several areas.

into the political system. This groundwork provided credibility and operational readiness.

Reza Pahlavi lacks such foundations. After nearly five decades outside Iran, he has not built a coherent domestic political base or an organizational framework capable of translating symbolic appeal into effective political power. His presence relies heavily on media visibility and international engagements rather than on a structured political project inside Iran. Several high-profile interviews have revealed inconsistencies in messaging and limited capacity to address complex issues with professional rigor, raising doubts about his capabilities and preparedness as a political leader.

According to multiple research assessments, his strongest support remains concentrated within segments of the Iranian diaspora rather than inside Iran itself.

Yet political history rarely operates on permanent exclusions. Societies do not always vote based on ideal choices, but often on what appears feasible under pressure. When systems stagnate and alternatives erode, symbolic figures can unexpectedly regain relevance. It is therefore not impossible that a Pahlavi could one day return to power. But absent credible domestic organization, political depth, and institutional readiness, such a scenario remains speculative rather than strategically grounded.

By Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri



Al-Anjeri

History occasionally allows political names associated with closed chapters to re-emerge when alternatives narrow and public frustration deepens. Ferdinand Marcos ruled the Philippines through centralized authority and widespread corruption before being ousted in 1986. More than three decades later, his son returned to power through elections, as a political wager driven by stagnation and limited choices.

South Korea offers a similar precedent. Park Chung-hee seized power in a military coup in 1961 and governed until his assassination in 1979. His rule delivered rapid economic growth alongside authoritarian control and restricted freedoms. Despite this legacy, his daughter, Park Geun-hye, won the presidency in 2012 after years of institutional political engagement.

Iran's case, however, differs fundamentally. In both the Philippine and South Korean examples, the political comeback was preceded by sustained domestic political work, organizational structures, and gradual integration

Big crowd at PAHW housing 'lottery' for Kuwaiti women

By Mohammad Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: Head of the Women's Housing Committee at the Public Authority for Housing Welfare, Sheikha Bibi Al-Yousef, announced PAHW's largest-ever lottery for Kuwaiti women applying for rented housing in Sulaihiya and Taima.

The lottery, which covered applications registered up to December 31, 2008, allocated approximately 349 houses.

In a press statement, Sheikha Bibi emphasized that rented housing serves as a temporary solution until the new homes, which are expected to be completed in 2028, are distributed.

On the sidelines of the lottery held on

Photo by Rizk Taufiq

E-filing major leap: Al-Ajeel

'Qayd' to boost quality of data

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15, (KUNA): The implementation of the national project for e-filing of financial statements, ('Qayd'), is a significant shift in the mechanism of submitting and analyzing the financial statements, Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel said on Wednesday.

The project also seeks to boost oversight efficiency and the quality of financial data at the national economy level, Al-Ajeel added in a press statement on the announcement of this step.



Al-Ajeel

The step depends on applying the global XBRL standard, thus enabling a shift from handling traditional documents to structured digital financial data that can be instantly analyzed, it noted.

It contributes to accelerating review and

approval procedures, unifying disclosure standards, and easing procedural burdens on companies.

He noted that the optional implementation phase of the project began as of January 1, and it includes free-zone companies, single-person companies, simple limited partnership companies, and joint-stock companies.

It represents an expansion of a successful national experience in e-disclosure and aims to unify the mechanism for filing financial statements through a single digital platform, thus improving business environment, boosting transparency, and raising compliance efficiency.

Implementing the project will be done in line with transitional phases that ensure the readiness of firms and audit firms, with mandatory implementation of the system set to begin in 2027, the minister said.

He expected that the project would help lessen time required to approve financial statements, improve data quality, and establish a national financial database that boosts economic analysis and decision-making.

Could Pahlavi return to power?

By Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri

History occasionally allows political names associated with closed chapters to re-emerge when alternatives narrow and public frustration deepens. Ferdinand Marcos ruled the Philippines through centralized authority and widespread corruption before being ousted in 1986. More than three decades later, his son returned to power through elections, as a political wager driven by stagnation and limited choices.

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Weather			
with speeds of 08-32 km/h with a chance for frost forming over agricultural and desert areas.	Abdaly	19	06
By Day: Rather cold with light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speeds of 12-35 km/h.	Bubyan	18	04
By Night: Cold to very cold with light to moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind,	Jahra	19	11
	Failaka Island	18	08
	Salimiyah	18	14
	Ahmadi	17	08
	Jal Aliyah	18	07

LOCAL

diwaniya

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

The decline of media and social standards

"IN recent years, the rise of certain figures on social media platforms is no longer an innocent or fleeting phenomenon. Rather, it has become a dangerous sign of a deep imbalance in the system of values and standards within society," Kuwaiti writer Hussein Al-Rawi wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.



"We see individuals with little intellectual, moral, or cognitive merit presented to the public as 'influential,' 'inspiring,' or 'opinion leaders.'"

"How did we reach this point? The problem is not related to the freedom of expression or appearance, which are fundamental human rights. The issue lies in the deliberate conflation of freedom with vulgarity and media presence with cultural or intellectual merit."

"When fame is built on physical display and cheap sensationalism, and its holder is given a media platform to guide society or offer advice, we are witnessing the inflation of nothingness and the transformation of emptiness into symbolic power."

"Social media has fundamentally changed the nature of stardom. In the past, status was earned through knowledge, achievement, or profound human experience."

"Today, fame has become a commodity subject to market forces, where anything that attracts attention is rewarded, regardless of how superficial or empty it may be."

"This is how the economy of triviality has emerged, where influence is measured by views and sensationalism rather than the depth of ideas or the value of content."

"The media, which is meant to serve as a critical authority and a tool for raising awareness, bears a significant share of the responsibility. When programs and podcasts feature these personalities simply because they are 'trending,' they legitimize mediocrity and dress it in a veneer of false respect."

"Instead of questioning guests about their knowledge, projects, or genuine contributions, they are celebrated as phenomena, as if mere social media presence is a significant achievement. Even more concerning is the cumulative effect on collective consciousness, particularly among young people."

"Distorted models of success are being promoted, suggesting that influence is earned through physical appearance rather than intellect, through ostentation rather than effort, and through shock value rather than meaningful content."

"As a result, genuine thinkers are marginalized, intellectuals are excluded, and profound human values are sidelined in favor of fleeting, easily consumed content."

"The public cannot be absolved of responsibility, for an audience that applauds triviality while neglecting knowledge fuels this decline, whether intentionally or unintentionally."

"Triviality cannot exist in isolation, as it needs an audience to sustain it. What we are witnessing today is not merely a crisis of individual morality, but a crisis of collective consciousness."

"A society that allows triviality to become a role model endangers its cultural future, weakens its intellectual resilience, and leaves future generations vulnerable to emptiness and loss."

"In conclusion, restoring balance does not begin with prohibition or repression, but with reaffirming the value of reason and creating platforms that respect awareness and support serious, meaningful content."

Also:

"We have lately begun hearing about decisions that directly affect certain commercial activities," columnist Eng. Adel Al-Jarallah Al-Kharafi wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"For instance, some shops, including restaurants and companies, reportedly closed due to recently issued decisions that impacted them. While the full accuracy of these reports is unclear, as the saying goes, 'there's no smoke without fire.'"

"Whether these reports are rumors or fact, clarification is essential. These decisions may have valid justifications, but no explanations have been provided."

"Also, inaccurate news about certain companies circulated recently, which affected their stock values to some extent and prompted responses from their owners. Such incidents inevitably impact market activity. Therefore, decisions that affect businesses must be carefully studied, and their repercussions fully analyzed before being issued, as their effects on people can be long-lasting and difficult to reverse, even if the decisions are later corrected."

"Some decisions have been issued and subsequently revoked. During the period between issuance and cancellation, negative consequences were felt by investors and beneficiaries, impacting productivity and economic stability."

"In many countries, a process known as theoretical measurement or testing is used, where a decision is examined on a specific segment of the population or by surveying experts. If the results are positive, the decision is implemented; if negative, it is discarded, and the executive authority considers alternative options."

"When decisions are issued without proper study, they can undermine investment confidence and affect the

overall situation, making it difficult to address their consequences, even if corrective action is taken later."

"Logically, any decision should be preceded by a thorough situation analysis to identify root causes, involve expert consultation, and ensure that corrective alternatives are available. A clear implementation plan, rigorous monitoring, and continuous evaluation of results should accompany the decision to ensure its effectiveness."

"Based on this, let us reflect on the COVID-19 pandemic and how the world, particularly the Arab region, responded to the measures implemented to prevent the virus's spread. The global economy was already in a highly sensitive state due to ongoing conflicts and mounting financial pressures."

"The pandemic brought significant political and economic changes, prompting governments to develop decisive plans to address its emerging effects. Many of these effects lasted for years, and some are still being felt today. Some countries, however, chose not to follow the World Health Organization's advice and avoided major negative consequences. Despite experiencing minor losses, they achieved substantial economic benefits."

"This example serves as a lesson for everyone - Any decision must be carefully studied to ensure that its potential harms do not outweigh the expected benefits."

□ □ □

"In recent years, the world has changed at an unprecedented pace, driven by technological advancements and accelerating digital transformation. Artificial intelligence (AI) has begun to make its presence felt in multiple fields," Nour Al-Azmi, Bachelor of Law, Kuwait University, wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"Today, this newcomer stands at the gates of justice, knocking on the doors of the courts and posing a bold question - Can AI serve as a judge?"

"The law faces an unfamiliar challenge. The judiciary, by its very nature, relies on human intellect, experience, and judgment to weigh facts and assess circumstances. AI, however, offers something entirely different - precision, speed, and computational neutrality."

"In Kuwait, with the advancement of technology and the digital transformation of government institutions, it has become essential to consider how to regulate the use of AI in judicial procedures. Kuwaiti law, despite being robust, has not yet directly addressed this type of challenge, leaving the door open for new legislation to govern the interaction between humans and machines within the justice system."

"AI is now capable of analyzing surveillance camera footage, comparing voices and fingerprints, and detecting manipulation of images and documents."

"However the crucial question is - Are these tools truly fair?"

"Algorithms are shaped by the data they are fed; if the data is biased, the results will be biased as well. This is where the role of the Kuwaiti legislator becomes essential, in order to establish strict controls that ensure true justice remains in human hands, not in the hands of a program devoid of emotion or conscience."

"Between human justice and digital justice, a human judge possesses what AI lacks - the ability to understand human circumstances, assess motives, and interpret justice in its broadest sense. AI, in turn, possesses what a judge lacks - the speed to access thousands of precedents in seconds and analyze hundreds of pages in minutes."

"From this perspective, Kuwait has a golden opportunity - a balanced integration of human expertise and machine intelligence, where AI serves as aid to the judge, not a replacement."

"Legislation must uphold justice and ensure that the introduction of AI into the judicial system does not become a threat. Essential steps include:

- Enacting a law to regulate the use of AI in evidence and investigations

- Establishing a judicial-technical committee to review any algorithm used in the courts

- Guaranteeing the defendant's right to appeal the results produced by smart devices

"Kuwait, with its strong legal and judicial standing, has the potential to lead in this field if it takes the initiative to enact legislation that balances technological advancement with justice."

"In an era where human intellect alone is no longer sufficient to unravel the complexities of crime, AI has emerged as a tireless digital investigator, capable of comparing data, tracking phones, and reconstructing events with accuracy surpassing that of humans. AI can work continuously without fatigue and personal bias. However, it is still a machine, and is unable to feel, understand pain, consider circumstances, or account for human excuses. Unregulated use poses a serious threat to the integrity of judicial procedures."

"Therefore, the final word in justice must remain with the human judge. AI is a powerful tool that accelerates the discovery of truth and assists the judge in piecing together the threads of a crime. No matter how advanced it becomes, it can never replace a human judge."

— Compiled by Simi K. Kutty



Kuwait National Guard (KNG) took part in the annual meeting to review the work of North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) regional center and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI).

KNG participates in NATO regional ctr, ICI meeting

BRUSSELS, Jan 15, (KUNA): Kuwait National Guard (KNG) took part in the annual meeting to review the work of North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) regional center and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), held in Brussels with representatives from member and partner countries.

In a press release on Thursday, KNG said Kuwait was represented at the meeting by Colonel Ismail Khalil, head of the training section.

Meanwhile, the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) took

part in the annual meeting of the NATO regional center and Istanbul cooperation initiative held on Wednesday in Brussels to discuss the center's future plan and action for 2026-2027.

Communication officers represented the KFF in the meeting which reviewed programs and focused on boosting coordination and cooperation among bodies, in a manner that aligns with accredited international standards.

The KFF's statement during the meeting affirmed the necessity of focusing on specialized

preparing in AI applications and managing risks due to the key role of these techniques in predicting incidents, analyzing data and backing decision-making.

The techniques also help develop smart systems that contribute to enhancing operational efficiency and improving response times to various incidents and emergencies. KFF's Colonel Mohammad Abdulkhaleq Abdulmajeed and Captain Salem Abdulkhaleq Abdulmajeed participated in the meeting.

Woman acquitted of running brothel, inciting debauchery

Appeals court slashes 5-year jail

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: The Court of Appeals overturned a lower court's ruling, which sentenced a woman in her forties to five-year imprisonment with hard labor for her alleged role in establishing and managing a brothel. The court instead acquitted her of the charges.

According to the Public Prosecution, the case involved a series of alleged crimes committed in October 2024 within the juris-

diction of the Public Morality Protection and Human Trafficking Department.

The case file explained that the defendant was accused of misusing communication technologies and creating websites that violated public morals. The alleged crimes included facilitating prostitution through two Snapchat accounts, sending indecent photographs and videos, and inciting debauchery and immorality.

The defendant was initially convicted by the lower court and sentenced to five years of hard labor, fined KD 3,000, and ordered to be deported upon completion of her prison term. The court also ordered the confiscation of her mobile phones and the permanent deletion of all photos and videos stored on them.

During the appeal process, the defendant was represented by Lawyer Inaam Haidar, who sub-

mitted a comprehensive defense memorandum.

Lawyer Haidar argued that the appealed judgment was flawed and should be overturned, citing violations of the law, errors in its application and interpretation, weak reasoning, insufficient justification, and infringement of the defendant's right to a defense.

She said the public prosecutor's warrant was invalid because it was based on unreliable investigations, adding that the arrest and search procedures were also deemed invalid, as they exceeded the scope of the warrant.

A central point of the defense was the absence of the essential elements required to establish the crime of participating in the establishment and management of a place of debauchery and prostitution, asserting that no valid legal evidence supported this charge.

Drugs found on Indian male, female from Benin

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: Customs officers at Kuwait International Airport have intercepted narcotics from two passengers in separate operations at Terminals 1 and 4, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In the first case, an Indian passenger arriving from Delhi was apprehended at Terminal 4 with around 226 grams of hashish in their possession.

In the second case, a female passenger from Benin, employed as a domestic worker, was apprehended at Terminal 1 carrying approximately

1.074 kilograms of marijuana. Officers also found small bags used for sorting and distributing the drugs, as well as rolling papers.

The General Administration of Customs explained that legal procedures have been initiated for both cases. Official seizure reports are being prepared, and the confiscated substances have been referred to the Drug Control General Department to complete the procedures in accordance with the law.

Meanwhile, an intoxicated man exhibiting er-

Teenager perishes in Wafra Road accident

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: An 18-year-old citizen tragically lost his life on Wednesday in a traffic accident on Wafra Road.

According to a statement from the Kuwait Fire Force, firefighters from Mina Abdullah station responded to the scene after receiving information that a vehicle had collided with a semi-trailer truck.

The body of the deceased was transferred to the Forensic Medicine Department, the site was handed over to the relevant authorities for investigation, and a case was registered.

Meanwhile, four individuals sustained injuries when a vehicle overturned on Sabah Al-Ahmad Road. Al-Kout station firefighters dealt with the situation, and eventually handed over the site to the concerned authorities.

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Tailor shop on fire: Fire broke out on Wednesday in a tailor shop in Egaila area. No casualties were reported but material losses had incurred, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Firefighters from Manqaf and Bairaq fire stations rushed to the location and fully extinguished the blaze before it spread further.

Investigations were launched to determine the cause of the fire.

Road 30 partial closure near Eqaila for 20 days

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: The General Traffic Department (GTD) announced the closure of the middle lane, right lane, and emergency lane on King Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman Al-Saud Road (Fahaheel Road) for traffic heading from the city toward Fahaheel, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The closure will begin on Wednesday, January 14, and will continue for 20 days.

The department clarified that the partial closure covers the area from the exit of the Eqaila-Fintas intersection to the entrance of the Al-Riqqa and Mahboula bridges to allow for maintenance work.

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KFAS partners with ICTP to launch SciFabLab in Kuwait

New facility to boost hands-on STEM learning



Kuwaiti specialists and guests observe hands-on training at the SciFabLab in Trieste, Italy.



Kuwaiti specialists and ICTP experts pose for a group photo during SciFabLab training.

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15, (KUNA): Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) announced on Wednesday cooperation with the International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) to establish an advanced Scientific Fabrication Laboratory (SciFabLab) at The Scientific Center, one of KFAS' affiliates, as a leading platform for interactive knowledge dissemination and hands-on scientific learning.

In a press statement, KFAS said the project aims to support innovation and science and technology education by creating an integrated creative environment for future generations. It seeks to expand the concept of "learning by doing" and enhance the scientific and technical skills of young people.

KFAS noted that its cooperation with ICTP dates back to 1981 and has traditionally focused on supporting researchers and academics. The partnership is now expanding to include community-oriented initiatives, coinciding with The Scientific Center's comprehensive expansion plan implemented in 2025 to attract youth and stimulate interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

The statement said that, in preparation for the laboratory's launch scheduled for spring 2026, a team of eight specialists from The Scientific Center completed intensive training at ICTP's SciFabLab in Trieste, Italy. The training program covered digital laboratory operations, the design of interactive scientific activities and the use of modern fabrication technologies, including 3D printing, laser cutting and robotics programming.

KFAS added that the cooperation also involved defining the technical specifications and equipment requirements to be provided by ICTP to ensure the laboratory meets international standards. Plans include organizing a major science event in Kuwait inspired by the global Maker Faire festival to promote local innovation.

KFAS stressed that the project aligns with its strategy to build a scientifically capable Kuwaiti generation prepared for future challenges and to strengthen a knowledge-based economy, reflecting its continued commitment to nurturing talent and encouraging scientific curiosity that leads to innovation.



Photo by Rezk Tawfiq
Cardinal Pietro Parolin presides over the solemn Mass at Holy Family Co-Cathedral, Kuwait city.

Mass gathers diplomats, clergy across Gulf

Vatican Secretary of State leads historic Mass in Kuwait

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Holy See's Secretary of State under Pope Leo XIV, presided over a solemn Mass at the Holy Family Co-Cathedral in Kuwait City Thursday night.

The celebration gathered a distinguished congregation of Arab and foreign ambassadors, diplomats accredited to Kuwait, and around 70 priests who traveled from various Gulf states to accompany the Cardinal.

The liturgy marked a momentous occasion—the elevation of the Church of Our Lady of Arabia in Ahmadi to the veneration of the Mother of the Savior. This decree, Cardinal Parolin noted, reflects the enduring Marian devotion among the Christian community in Kuwait. He also conveyed Pope Leo XIV's warm greetings and spiritual closeness to the faithful.

Cardinal Parolin highlighted that the celebration coincided with the 65th anniversary of the consecration of the Cathedral of the Holy Family, a historic center of encounter and dialogue among people of different cultures and religions.

Expressing joy at his first visit to Kuwait, the Cardinal described the significance of celebrating

the Eucharist in a church "between the sea and the desert," symbolizing spiritual refuge for generations of believers from diverse nations who came to Kuwait in pursuit of work and found faith and peace through Christ.

Reflecting on the cathedral's patronage, he said the Holy Family of Nazareth represents a model of Christian life rooted in communion, faith, hope, and love—values that form the foundation of family and community life.

He drew attention to the spiritual symbolism of Kuwait's geography, describing the desert as a place of silence, repentance, and encounter with God, and the sea as a symbol of providence, unity, and new beginnings echoing the Gospel image of Christ calling His disciples from the shore.

Cardinal Parolin reminded the faithful that the Church is not defined by walls or structures, but by the living people of God, each person a temple of the Holy Spirit. He urged the community to be "living stones" in building the one holy and universal Church, united in cultural and liturgical diversity under Christ.

In conclusion, he called for renewed dedication to making the Church in Kuwait a beacon of faith, peace, and dialogue a witness of unity and coexistence under the protection of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Family, in service to humanity.

Seven submissions under review

CAPT opens bids for new KDIPA HQ

By Mohammed Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: The Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) held a meeting on Monday to open bids for the construction, completion, furnishing, and operation of the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) headquarters in Shargh.

Seven bids were accepted, while two were rejected. The submissions will be referred to KDIPA for review, after which a technical recommendation will be prepared to guide CAPT's Board of Directors in awarding the contract.

Meanwhile, a government report highlighted the inclusion of two projects involving KDIPA in the national development plan. They are the Economic Zones Project and the expansion and development of free trade zones. These projects contribute to achieving the "Strengthening a Dynamic Private Sector" program, one of the nine programs in the development plan.

The program seeks to transform Kuwait into an attractive investment hub led by the private sector by offering an easy business environment, fair competition, and streamlined government procedures.

It focuses on enhancing innovation and advanced technology in multiple sectors, increasing the private sector's contribution to

GDP, creating a balanced and fair business environment, and establishing world-class specialized knowledge clusters.

According to the report, the Economic Zones Project aims to enhance Kuwait's investment environment and expand value-added investment opportunities for both local and foreign investors. It emphasizes coordination with relevant government entities in line with the Third National Structural Plan 2005-2030 to support the country's development goals.

This will be achieved through the development, planning, and implementation of economic zones allocated by Kuwait Municipality to KDIPA for the execution of its economic projects.

The objectives of these economic zones include transferring modern technology and technical expertise to Kuwait, creating job opportunities, providing capacity-building programs, transforming Kuwait into a commercial hub, and establishing zones in Abdali, Wafra, and Naayem.

In a related context, the report highlighted the second expansion project for the establishment and development of free zones. This includes 50 logistics warehouses and storage areas, four restaurant complexes for workers, five commercial banks, 50 light factories, two investment complexes available for sublease, two medical centers, 500 investment companies (with tenders issued for the components), and three hotels.

MoE prepares for PIRLS 2026

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: As part of its preparations for the international study assessing reading skills among fourth-grade students, the Ministry of Education held an informational meeting on Tuesday for principals of schools that are participating in the PIRLS 2026 study at the ministry's auditorium, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Minister of Education Jalal Al-Tabtabaei attended part of the event, along with Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Affairs Hamad Al-Hamad, Assistant Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial, and Technical Affairs Mohammed Al-Khalidi, and Director of the Student Measurement and Evaluation Department Dr. Sultan Al-Mishali.

The meeting focused on preparation and implementation measures to ensure schools are ready and achieve the best results.

In an official statement, the ministry explained that the study will include 5,532 fourth-grade students from participating schools, which reflects the ministry's commitment to improving learning outcomes and enhancing reading comprehension skills.

The meeting reviewed the study's objectives and implementation procedures, the role of school administrations in creating a conducive learning environment, and the technical and organizational readiness required to administer the electronic test in the selected schools.



KUNA photo
Al-Babtain Health Center includes 3 clinics and other health facilities.

Kuwaiti-funded health center opens in Yemen

ADEN, Jan 15, (KUNA): Governor of Yemen's Shabwa Governorate, Awadh Al-Awlaqi, inaugurated on Wednesday the Abdulkarim Saud Al-Babtain Kuwaiti Health Center, which is set to benefit around 20,000 citizens in the city of Ataq, the governorate's capital.

The project was implemented under the supervision of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri Charity Society of Kuwait as part of the "Kuwait Is by Your Side" campaign, now in its 11th consecutive year.

In a press statement during the inauguration, Al-Awlaqi expressed his deep appreciation and gratitude to Kuwait for its continued and unwavering support for the Yemeni people.

He said the project reflects the integration of efforts between local authorities and donor organizations to enhance service stability and improve healthcare services for residents of Shabwa.

For his part, Director General of Ataq District Abdullah Al-Khalifi said the center represents a qualitative addition to healthcare services provided to residents of the Jouf Al-Aadh area and neighboring regions.

He noted that the facility will serve more than 20,000 people, thanking Kuwait, the donors, and project supervisors for the quality and speed of implementation.

JANUARY



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LOCAL

High-efficiency engineering services

MEW gets conditional approval for KD 87.3m Subiya plant deal

By Mohammed Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: Ministry of Electricity and Water has received conditional approval from the State Audit Bureau (SAB) on January 12 to award a contract for high-efficiency engineering services and maintenance of open-cycle gas turbines (Phase II) at the Subiya power and water desalination plant, valued at KD 87.28 million. This is in confirmation of an article published by the daily in this regard on November 18.

According to informed sources, the ministry had previously secured approval from the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) to award the contract to the lowest bidder that met all technical specifications and requirements.

CAPT reviewed a letter from the Ministry of Finance detailing the fi-

nancial allocation for the tender, which was submitted along with the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy's request to finalize the contract.

The tender focuses on implementing precise and efficient engineering works and carrying out necessary maintenance to extend the lifespan of the units and ensure safe operation of the Subiya plant, particularly during the peak summer season.

It is worth noting that the Subiya plant is one of Kuwait's most prominent electricity and water production facilities and is part of a network of nine plants, including the Shagaya renewable energy plant. The installed capacity of the Subiya power station is approximately 7,046 megawatts from gas and steam units, accounting for more than 34 percent of the ministry's total production capacity of 20,250 megawatts.

Other Voices

No punishment, no fear!

By Ahmad alsarraf

The Ministry of Social Affairs, for perhaps the tenth time, issued a statement stressing the importance of charitable organizations adhering to the regulations and conditions for advertising licensed projects, both inside and outside the country.

This reiterates the ministry's commitment to promoting transparency and good governance, upholding the integrity of charitable work, protecting donors, and ensuring full compliance with rules when advertising any charitable project, particularly those involving deductions from donation amounts.



alsarraf

Yet, despite these repeated warnings, some charitable organizations continue to disregard the ministry's directives. They repeatedly announce fundraising campaigns for projects, both inside and outside Kuwait, without a license and often fail to disclose the percentage of funds allocated for administrative expenses.

They insist on using misleading advertising phrases and methods, and overlook the requirement that advertising details match the licensing information, including project name, duration, objectives, and other specifications. Clearly, the administrations of these charitable organizations have motivations that encourage them to take such risks.

The main reasons for this are:
1. These organizations may believe that the ministry is ineffective or that it will not exercise its authority.

2. They know that the harshest action likely to be taken is the suspension of the advertisement or project, rather than revoking the license. The phrase "taking the necessary measures against the violator" is vague and subject to the discretion of those enforcing it.

3. These charities are aware that if one project is halted, there are dozens of others that can continue in its place.

4. If a particular charity's license is revoked, others can take over its work. It is well known where the influence of some charities extends, and these entities have established multiple similar organizations in anticipation of potential closures.

5. The most significant reason is that the amounts raised in any campaign, licensed or unlicensed, are so large that they justify committing violations, even if the penalty could include license revocation. This explains why these charities repeatedly disregard the Ministry of Social Affairs' decisions, instructions, and warnings.

I have a 42-page document listing the names of charitable projects licensed by the Ministry of Social Affairs. It details dozens of charities that were previously allowed to collect funds through various channels, take their substantial share, and transfer the remainder abroad, often to entities about which little is known, including the ultimate fate of these massive donations.

This situation persisted for years, during which some of these charities, with records available to the Ministry of Social Affairs, were able to transfer billions abroad without any objection or oversight. Eventually, decisive action was taken to end this chaos, resulting in hundreds of beneficiaries losing tens of millions that had been flowing into their pockets every month.

Firmly dealing with these violations and treating them as crimes is essential to protect Kuwait from slipping back into its previous deplorable state.

The United States government recently designated the Muslim Brotherhood in Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan as terrorist organizations, thereby freezing all assets belonging to the groups and their officials.

Kuwaiti authorities should take note and exercise caution, as these branches are in urgent need of funding that could potentially be sent from Kuwait.

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs photo
Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chairs the Borders Committee meeting.

Deputy FM chairs borders meeting

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15, (KUNA): Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chaired a meeting of the Borders Committee held on Thursday at the headquar-

ters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During the meeting, participants reviewed and discussed all items listed on the committee's agenda, according to an official statement.

Extension indefinite

Undersecretary exit deadlines extended

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: The Cabinet has approved extending the deadline for implementing its decision on ending the assignments of department directors holding the position of Assistant Undersecretary, as well as terminating the decrees of assistant undersecretaries whose appointments remain valid but who have not yet been placed in the new organizational structures of their respective entities. The extension will remain in effect until further notice, reports Al-Anba daily.

A circular issued by the General Secretariat of the Cabinet stated that the Civil Service Council, during its 27th meeting of 2025 held on December 25, 2025, reviewed the Cabinet's decision on terminating the assignments and decrees of assistant undersecretaries.

Citing the need for government entities to have additional time to organize their internal affairs, the Civil Service Council recommended extending the implementation deadline to March 31, 2026. However, the Cabinet ultimately approved an open-ended extension until further notice.

MoH advances robotic surgery, earns orthopedic accreditation

Jaber Hospital named 'Center of Excellence'

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: Dr. Abdullah Al-Fares, Assistant Undersecretary for Allied Medical Services at the Ministry of Health, announced that the number of robotic surgeries conducted in the country has exceeded 200.

He highlighted the launch of local training programs for doctors in this advanced surgical technique.

Meanwhile, Dr. Al-Fares affirmed that the Orthopedic Surgery Department at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital has been recognized and accredited as a Center of Excellence for Orthopedic Surgery, following a rigorous and impartial evaluation by a specialized US-based entity.

In his opening speech at the Fourth Annual Orthopedic Surgery Conference, Dr. Al-Fares emphasized the Ministry of Health's commitment to supporting continuing medical education in various specialties. He explained that this support is provided by hosting leading international experts and surgeons, helping develop professional skills and raising the overall standard of medical performance.

The ministry continues its diligent efforts to enhance healthcare services by investing in the ongoing education and training of doctors in all specialties, with the aim of achieving a qual-



Participants and organizers of the 4th Kuwait Orthopedic Conference pose for a group photo, highlighting the Ministry of Health's commitment to advancing orthopedic care, surgical training, and professional development in Kuwait.

tative improvement in the care provided to citizens and residents.

The outcomes of these programs are expected to positively impact the quality of healthcare services.

The conference includes more than fifty scientific lectures, along with surgical training workshops that play a major role in strengthening practical skills and transferring hands-on experience to participants. Among these workshops is a session being held for the first time in Kuwait, focusing on anatomical training

using human specimens, conducted in collaboration with the Faculty of Medicine at Kuwait University.

Furthermore, the conference chair, Dr. Awad Al-Mutairi, stated that the event was organized based on a firm belief in the importance of continuing education for the development of healthcare services, given its clear impact on the quality of medical care, particularly in specialties that enhance the quality of life at all stages.

He highlighted that the three-day

conference includes more than 50 scientific lectures, five surgical training workshops, and a scientific poster competition, adding that over 25 scientific papers have been submitted by both local and international researchers.

Dr. Al-Mutairi stressed that participants will receive accredited medical training hours exceeding 20 hours, along with opportunities to engage with international and local medical companies participating in the accompanying medical exhibition.

PAMA launches annual Umrah trip for minors

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: The Public Authority for Minors' Affairs (PAMA) announced on Tuesday that it will organize its annual Umrah trip to Makkah for those under its care, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The acting Director General of PAMA Alia Al-Saqr stated during an orientation meeting with 48 minors that the trip will begin next Saturday and will include

visits to both Makkah and Madinah.

Al-Saqr congratulated the participants and urged them to follow the instructions and guidance of the supervisors to ensure their safety.

It is worth highlighting that the Umrah pilgrimage is one of the annual activities organized by PAMA for participants aged 13 to 21 selected by lottery.

Continued from Page 1

KASCO set

He noted that the collaboration with the Farmers Union will help achieve food sustainability and enhance the quality of services provided, adding that relying on local products reflects the company's confidence in the quality of Kuwaiti produce and its ability to meet national companies' requirements according to the highest approved standards.

Al-Kandari noted that KASCO will provide technical support and maintain continuous coordination with farmers to ensure smooth and uninterrupted supply operations.

Meanwhile, Head of the interim committee managing the Kuwait Farmers Union, Ahmed Al-Adwani, stated that the union will work to provide all required products at the best prices on a daily basis.

He said the union will also guide its members and farm owners to supply the products needed by KASCO in all required quantities.

French Business

leadership, commending the president and team for reviving the organization after the hiatus caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Affirming that the upcoming phase will be marked by innovative projects and new ideas, Ambassador Gauvin said the relaunch comes at a time of unprecedented momentum in bilateral relations, with French-Kuwaiti ties currently flourishing at both the political and economic levels.

The re-establishment of the council represents a major element of the current positive momentum in bilateral relations. Its main objectives include boosting mutual investments, expanding trade, economic, and financial ties,

and building long-term partnerships between public and private sector parties in both countries.

Serving as a platform and bridge for companies and business leaders, the council will facilitate communication and the development of business networks, thus creating real business opportunities and translating them into tangible projects.

Muthanna Complex

Previously, KAPP had previously submitted the tender to the State Audit Bureau on December 25 for prior oversight, review, and auditing before awarding the contract to the winning bidder.

KAPP held a public session to open bids for the project tender, which had successfully passed the technical evaluation.

This initiative is part of KAPP's strategy, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, to re-tender projects under the management and development system in accordance with the provisions of Article 116 of 2014 and its executive regulations.

Kuwait braces

On Saturday, the daytime weather will be cold to slightly cool, partly to mostly cloudy, with northwesterly to variable winds at light to moderate speeds of 8 to 30 km/h, and a chance of frost over agricultural and desert areas. Maximum temperatures are expected between 15 and 17 degrees Celsius, and the sea will be light to moderately wavy, from one to four feet.

Saturday night will be cold to very cold, with light variable winds of 6 to 20 km/h and a chance of frost over agricultural and desert areas. Some high

clouds will appear, with minimum temperatures expected between 4 and 6 degrees Celsius, and the sea will be light, from one to two feet.

Kuwait PM

The original chapel was constructed in 1948, while the current church building was completed in 1957, with continued support from local donors.

The statement reaffirmed Kuwait's firm principles of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence among religions, values that have been deeply rooted in the country since its founding and later enshrined in the Constitution.

It also highlighted that the occasion provides an opportunity to recall the historic visit of the late Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, to the Holy See on May 6, 2010, which marked a significant milestone in bilateral relations.

The statement added that the visit was part of a series of high-level exchanges, preceded by a visit in 2009 by His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the former Prime Minister, and followed in 2015 by a visit from His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the late former Prime Minister.

It said the official celebration announced the Minor Basilica status will be held in Ahmad on Friday, January 16, 2026, at 10:00 am local time, and will be presided over by Cardinal Parolin.

The statement emphasized that the visit also aims to strengthen ties of friendship and cooperation between Kuwait and the Vatican, which have maintained diplomatic relations since 1968, when Kuwait became the first Gulf Cooperation Council country to establish diplomatic ties with the Vatican.

It concluded by noting that the visit reflects Kuwait's long-standing traditions of religious coexistence, which

continue to distinguish the country within the Gulf region.

Major Kuwait

In a related development, the Ministry of Interior issued a press release in which it revealed the substances and items seized during the campaign.

The confiscated narcotics included approximately 160 grams of cocaine, 2.5 kilograms of hashish, 1.25 kilograms of marijuana, 1 kilogram of synthetic cannabinoids, 200 grams of heroin, and 500 grams of methamphetamine, along with 15,000 assorted psychotropic pills. In addition to the drugs, authorities also seized 14 bottles of alcoholic beverages, 15 precision scales used for weighing narcotics, two firearms, and a quantity of unlicensed ammunition.

The ministry emphasized that the seizures were the result of extensive field operations and in-depth investigations, which reflected the vigilance and dedication of security personnel.

It said the efforts are aimed at tracking down and arresting those involved in drug-related offenses in full compliance with legal procedures.

The ministry reaffirmed its firm commitment to continuing security campaigns with determination and zero tolerance toward drugs.

It stressed that the strictest legal measures will be taken against anyone found to be involved, in order to uphold public safety and security.

Experts weigh

Furthermore, real estate developer Khaled Behbehani said the decision to close private schools in residential areas was first issued eight or nine years ago and was partially implemented in some neighborhoods, including Jabri-

ya, but was not fully enforced in all schools at that time.

Behbehani explained that he has long supported and advocated for the implementation of this decision. The issue is not just about the closure of schools within residential areas, but also the lack of suitable alternatives to accommodate private schools outside these neighborhoods. Relocating most private schools to investment zones has significantly increased traffic density and caused severe congestion in those areas, placing double the pressure on existing infrastructure. The long-term solution lies in establishing new investment cities dedicated to educational and service activities, which would help reduce congestion in both residential and investment areas and promote a better urban balance.

Regarding the decision to link the civil ID card to the residential address, Behbehani stressed that this decision is also old, but its current implementation is more flexible and aligns with the development of the e-government system.

He considered the decision a positive regulatory step, affirmed his support for it, and expressed his hope that everyone will adhere to it, which will contribute to better organization of housing and services.

In addition, real estate expert Basma Al-Sultan affirmed that the decision represents a regulatory step aimed at improving the quality of life and reducing disruption for residents.

She emphasized the importance of considering the economic and social factors related to housing and investment in these areas.

Al-Sultan pointed out that the decision may directly affect the attractiveness of some residential areas for families who prefer schools close to their homes, which could lead to a reassessment of housing demand in those locations in the coming period.

From an investment perspective,

she highlighted that relocating to other areas after the schools close could increase the value of those areas, especially if they offer comprehensive infrastructure, including education, transportation, and family amenities, thereby enhancing their investment potential.

Al-Sultan stressed the importance of providing accessible educational alternatives within close proximity to residential areas to reduce pressure on families.

She emphasized the need to develop a comprehensive services plan in the areas targeted for relocation, including educational, commercial, and mobile service facilities.

Al-Sultan highlighted the importance of coordination between government agencies and real estate developers to revitalize the value of areas affected by the decision through incentives or community projects.

She indicated that regulatory legislation requires a balanced vision that combines residents' comfort, protection of investors' assets, and the creation of more sustainable and higher-quality residential environment.

Suggested solutions for closing schools in residential areas:

1. Allocate separate areas away from private residences to establish new schools.

Beijing, Ottawa signal reset as PM Carney visits

China ready to work for steady, sound ties with Canada: FM

BEIJING, Jan 15, (Agencies): China is willing to strengthen communication, enhance trust, eliminate interference, and deepen cooperation with Canada to bring bilateral relations forward on a steady and sound track in solid strides under the new circumstances, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said here on Thursday.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks when meeting with Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand in Beijing.

Referring to Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney's visit to China, the first by a Canadian prime minister in eight years, Wang said the trip marks a milestone in bilateral ties and signals a turning point in the relationship.

The leaders of the two countries will hold meetings and talks, which are expected to open up new prospects for bilateral relations, Wang added.

The world today is undergoing profound and complex changes, and the impact of China-Canada relations transcends the bilateral scope, Wang noted.

He said that China and Canada have different social systems, stemming from different historical and cultural heritage, and based on the choices of their respective people.

He urged both sides to view each other in a rational and amicable manner with an inclusive mindset, handle issues on the basis of mutual respect, focus on the agenda of cooperation,



Left: Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney, center, walks through a hotel lobby in Beijing, China Thursday, Jan. 15, 2026. Right: Canada's Foreign Minister Anita Anand, left, meets with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China Thursday, Jan. 15, 2026. (AP)



partnership - one that builds on the best of our past, and responds to the challenges of today," Carney posted on X after his arrival in Beijing on Wednesday night.

Canada, following the U.S. lead, announced tariffs of 100% on EVs from China and 25% on steel and aluminum in 2024 under Carney's predecessor, former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

China responded by imposing duties of 100% on Canadian canola oil and meal and 25% on pork and seafood. It added a 75.8% tariff on canola seeds last August. Collectively, the import taxes effectively closed the Chinese market to Canadian canola exports, an industry group said.

China is hoping that Trump's tariffs and other pressure tactics on Canada and other allies drive them to pursue a foreign policy that is more independent from America's. The government in Beijing has often accused the U.S. of rallying allies to gang up on China, particularly under former President Joe Biden, Trump's predecessor.

Canadian authorities incensed China in late 2018 when they detained Meng Wanzhou, the chief financial officer of Huawei Technologies Co., at the request of the United States, which wanted her extradited to face charges. China responded by detaining two Canadians on spying charges, casting a pall over relations for more than two years.

and send positive messages so as to foster optimism, inject greater confidence into the development of bilateral relations, and jointly build a new type of strategic partnership between China and Canada.

Anand said the new Canadian government attaches great importance to relations with China. She also added that Prime Minister Mark Carney looks forward to engaging in in-depth exchanges with Chinese leaders during the visit to set the course for the development of bilateral relations, resume dialogue in various fields,

pursue more mutually beneficial outcomes, enhance coordination and cooperation in multilateral affairs, and further advance the strategic partnership between the two countries.

On the first trip by a Canadian leader to China in eight years, both sides are signaling the start of an era of better relations.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, meeting his Canadian counterpart on Thursday, described Prime Minister Mark Carney's visit this week as a turning point that is expected to open up new prospects for the relationship, Carney, who became prime minister 10 months ago, is attempting to repair relations with China following several years of acrimony over issues ranging from Canada's 2018 arrest of a senior Chinese tech executive to Canadian tariffs on China-made elec-

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Carney was holding talks later Thursday with Premier Li Qiang and meeting top leader Xi Jinping on Friday.

His mission has been made more pressing by the higher tariffs imposed on exports to the United States by President Donald Trump. More than 75% percent of Canada's exports go to the U.S., and Carney has set a goal of reducing that reliance by doubling Canada's non-U.S. exports over the next decade.

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Business

Kuwait oil price surges to \$61.20 pb

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15, (KUNA): The price of Kuwaiti crude oil rose up 61 cents to USD 61.20 per barrel (pb) on Wednesday, compared to USD 60.59 pb the previous day, said Kuwait Petroleum

Corporation (KPC) on Thursday.

In global markets, Brent crude futures went down 92 cents to USD 64.55 pb, and U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude futures went down 96 cents to USD 60.19 pb.

Zain selects six Kuwaiti graduates to drive the next era of digital innovation as Generation Z enters its second decade

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: Zain Group, a leading provider of innovative ICT and digital lifestyle communications in eight markets across the Middle East and Africa, has selected six talented Kuwaiti nationals to participate in the 11th cycle of what has developed to become one of the region's most successful internal graduate training programs in the region - Generation Z (Gen Z).

The intensive year-long undertaking is designed to align and prepare the that focuses on continuity, acceleration, collaboration and digital innovation.

This year's graduate program will offer participants exposure to AI tools, Big Data, and analytics platforms to extract insights.

They will also be encouraged to develop creative and systems thinking capabilities, enabling broader, more strategic approaches to problem solving as well as leadership and social influence skills.

Strengthening of resilience and adaptability through mental toughness challenges will also form part of the curriculum, as will the exploration of purpose and motivation, helping graduates align personal strengths and values with meaningful organizational contribution.

Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO commented, "Entering the 11th year of Gen Z highlights Zain's commitment to fostering talent locally and establishing a genuine pipeline of Kuwaiti leaders for the future. Given the pace of technological change of the corporate landscape because of the development and uptake of artificial intelligence, and quantum computing to come, this next decade will demand even higher levels of resilience, agility, and AI skills from the workforce."

Al-Kharafi added, "This program continues to provide technical and soft skills for the participants, permitting them to navigate the corporate world



Bader Al-Kharafi with the talented Kuwaiti nationals selected for the 11th cohort.

- **Bader Al-Kharafi:** "Given the pace of technological change, this next decade will demand even higher levels of resilience, agility, and AI skills from the workforce"
- The evolution of Gen Z reflects Zain's transformation from a Telco to a TechCo
- Over the past decade, Gen Z has so far developed over 50 graduates

with confidence and impact. I congratulate this year's class and encourage them to make the very most of the exposure and training provided during the year."

The acceptance rate for Gen Z is on-par with those for top-ranked international university places, and the initiative is aimed at identifying and nurturing

young Kuwaiti talent who demonstrate leadership potential, equipping them with the skills, mindset, and hands-on experience to thrive in the corporate world.

The highly competitive selection process for the six places in the 2026 program was fierce, with 687 applicants to the program, of which 31

were invited to individual interviews. The last six were selected following a gruelling week-long job assessment engagement that featured multiple rounds of interviews that included an individual '4WARD-Progress with Purpose' strategy task, team assignments, science-based psychometrics and presenting to the Vice Chairman and Group CEO.

The six high-caliber Kuwaiti nationals selected for 2026 Gen Z cohort are: Abdulmohsen Al-Zenki; Ahmed Al-Onaiz; Asail Al-Heis; Ayah Al-Fadhl; Jana Al-Abduljader; and Miteb Al-Oqab.

The Generation Z 2026 graduate program remit falls under the "Build the Youth of the Future" pillar of Zain Group's Corporate Sustainability strategy and the Inclusion, Diversity & Equity strategic pillar of "Zain Youth" (ZY), which foster the growth of youth employees.

The ZY pillar also includes the ZY Counsel who take on CEO assigned projects, the ZY Mavericks which form an internal pool of youth experts to facilitate peer-learning and enable employee mobility, and ZY Learn which ensures youth follow a lifelong learning path, all of which foster the growth of youth employees into talent unlike any other.

The decade-long evolution of Gen Z reflects the company's transformation from a Telco to a TechCo. Over the past decade, Gen Z has so far developed over 50 graduates with a multitude of traits and skills that has enhanced their individual and professional characters, as well as contributing to Zain's and the region's economic and social prosperity.

Top achievers within the program are routinely offered and sponsored by Zain to undertake their MBA at the UK's London Business School, and previous Gen Zalumni have gone to consolidate impressive corporate careers within Zain and elsewhere.

Full-service availability across e-branches

KFH ensures round-the-clock e-services during the holiday



Kuwait Finance House holiday services.

France, Germany, Turkey and Spain) without additional fees.

To use this service customers can call from the following toll-free numbers: USA and Canada (18008188608), UK (08000148898), France (0805086620), Germany (08001817080), Spain (900905440), and Turkey (908507712154). Local tariff charges may be applied in Turkey by local Turkish telecoms companies when calling this number.

This service is free exclusively for mobiles and tablets users in the mentioned countries only and doesn't include the (Roaming Service).

Social media channels

KFH's social media team remains dedicated to addressing customer inquiries and assisting them at all hours through the official social media accounts (@KFHGroup).

Money transfer and account opening

KFH successfully launched WAMD digital service, allowing customers to send and receive money instantly and for free using their mobile numbers, 24/7. Additionally, customers can request money through WAMD service by sharing or scanning a QR code from the KFHOnline app. This app also allows customers to transfer funds from their local Knet bank accounts directly to their credit and prepaid cards.

KFH also successfully launched the D-POS device for account opening, the first-of-its-kind in the market, allowing customers to open accounts at KFH immediately and anywhere.

Customers can now open accounts in major currencies through KFHOnline; previously, account opening was only available at branches. Additionally, KFH has integrated Western Union (WU) services into its app, enabling customers to make international transfers directly through the application. The Bank also offers instant transfers within the GCC countries through the AFAQ network on the mobile app.

Corporate services

KFH launched the first mobile application for corporate banking encompassing major services for business development, in addition to launching facial recognition technology based on biometric identity and other distinguished electronic services available through the corporate banking webpage.

KFH successfully introduced corporate cards, offering three different products that cater to the various local and global corporate needs. Key features include cash and cheque deposits, as well as cash withdrawals. The cards also provide access to Point of Sale (POS) terminals and online payment gateways, both in Kuwait and internationally.

In addition, KFH has introduced corporate credit cards, which are among the bank's distinguished offerings for business owners. These cards are linked directly to the company's account, allowing business owners to issue cards to employees for seamless expense management. They can be used to cover day-to-day business expenses, one-time travel costs, and more. The corporate credit card helps businesses better manage their cash flow while offering enhanced control over employee expenditures.

Call Center

The Call Center continues to provide services around the clock, receiving customer calls, addressing their inquiries, and responding to them through a qualified and technically advanced staff. KFH also provides the automated telephone service, 1803333, which operates with the same efficiency and speed to facilitate transfers between accounts, answer inquiries about financial transactions, among other services.

Customers outside Kuwait can contact KFH's call center from seven countries (USA, Canada, UK,

Under CBK's 'Let's Be Aware' initiative

NBK warns customers against using public Wi-Fi for banking



- NBK stressed the importance of turning off automatic joining refraining from saving data on the phone.

ing personal data to avoid any hacking attempts of sensitive and personal information.

NBK's efforts to educate its customers are a fundamental pillar of its strategy, as it consistently emphasizes the need for customers to adhere to general instructions and guidelines to avoid digital fraud, as well as the importance of regularly changing bank card PINs and not sharing them with fraudsters.

Moreover, NBK highlighted the necessity of using anti-virus and anti-hacking programs, as well as securing the internet connection and verifying the ads generated from these public networks. NBK also stressed the importance of turning off Wi-Fi and automatic joining and refraining from saving

data on the phone.

It is worth mentioning that NBK is a key supporter and partner in all CBK's

initiatives and campaigns aiming to raise financial awareness and spread banking culture among all segments of society.

As a leading financial institution in Kuwait and across the region, NBK frequently organizes various activities that contribute to raising awareness about all topics related to the banking sector. It also organizes various activities and training courses on fraud prevention and financial crimes.

As one of the largest financial institutions in the region, NBK is committed to its social responsibility towards the communities in which it operates, and it is always proactive in providing all forms of support for important and strategic campaigns, such as the "Let's Be Aware" campaign, which serves the national economy and society.

First airline to connect direct from Kuwait

Jazeera shifts Amman flights to City Airport starting Feb 1



Jazeera Airways A320neo

end experience with reduced ground travel time and costs. We are also proud to be the first airline from Kuwait to operate scheduled commercial flights at Amman City Airport – a pioneering step that reinforces our leadership in enhancing regional connectivity."

Operating from Amman City Airport brings several advantages for travelers, particularly those seeking speed, convenience, and ease of access to the city. The smaller, more efficient terminal layout offers a quicker airport experience and is located just 10 km from central Amman, significantly reducing travel time. Shorter travel time also helps lower ground transport costs, getting travelers to their homes, hotels, or meetings faster.

For any assistance, passengers may contact Jazeera Airways customer service at 177 in Kuwait or +965 22054944 internationally.

Jazeera currently flies to more than 70 destinations and serves more than 5 million passengers with a fleet of 23 aircraft while managing its own terminal – T5 at Kuwait International Airport. In its next phase of network growth, the airline will serve more than 100 destinations and over 10 million passengers in the next four years. Jazeera will also expand its fleet with a firm order book of 26 Airbus aircraft, comprising 18 A320neo and 8 A321.

BUSINESS

GCC projects market witnesses broad-based slowdown in 2025

By KAMCO Invest

The total value of contracts awarded across the Gulf Cooperation Council declined by 32% y-o-y in 2025, reaching USD 213.4 Bn, compared to USD 314.0 Bn in 2024. This contraction was driven largely by a substantial downturn in contract awards within Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the two largest projects markets in the region. In contrast, only Kuwait and Qatar recorded growth in project awards during the year, while the four remaining member states experienced declines.

Subsidized oil prices throughout 2025, averaging USD 63.1/bbl down from USD 74.5/bbl in 2024 impacted overall project development, despite the rescinding of OPEC+ production cuts. This sharp decline follows two consecutive years of record capital expenditure, during which the region channeled significant investment into large-scale hydrocarbon initiatives and a portfolio of giga projects valued in excess of USD 1 Tn. The contraction during the final quarter was broad-based across the region. All of the six GCC nations witnessed declines, with five recording double-digit y-o-y decreases in total awarded contract value during Q4-2025. Examining quarterly performance, total GCC project awards amounted to USD 41.8 Bn in Q4-2025, marking the lowest quarterly figure in thirteen years. Contract awards in Saudi Arabia contracted 68% y-o-y during this period, falling to USD 15.0 Bn from USD 46.9 Bn in Q4-2024. Conversely, aggregate project awards in Kuwait remained largely unchanged, posting a marginal y-o-y decline of 0.9% to reach USD 3.1 Bn, compared to USD 3.2 Bn in the prior-year quarter. Meanwhile, the United Arab Emirates saw contract awards decrease by 44.5% y-o-y in Q4-2025, reaching USD 17.4 Bn, down from USD 31.3 Bn.

Looking forward, GCC project activity is anticipated to regain momentum in 2026, supported by stabilizing cyclical oil price movements and sustained expansion within the non-oil economic sector, although the pace of recovery may be tempered if crude prices remain subdued. The outlook for the coming year remains positive for GCC projects, buoyed by anticipated regional economic expansion. According to World Bank projections, the GCC economy is forecast to grow by 4.5% in 2026, accelerating from an estimated 3.2% in 2025, driven primarily by the expected rollback of OPEC+ production restraints and robust non-oil sector growth as per the MEED Economic Activity Index, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar emerge as the project markets to monitor in 2026, with both economies receiving favorable forecasts for real GDP growth and project market expansion.

Saudi Arabia

The total value of contracts awarded in Saudi Arabia during 2025 reached the lowest level recorded over the preceding three years, amounting to USD 84.3 Bn. This figure represents a substantial decline when compared to the USD 164.1 Bn awarded in 2024. Contract awards declined across all eight sectors within the Kingdom's projects market during the year. This broad-based downturn was led by the Chemical sector, which recorded no new contract awards throughout 2025. Consequently, Saudi Arabia's contribution to the total GCC project awards fell to 39.5% in 2025, a significant decrease from its 52.3% share in 2024. The overall decline in the Kingdom's project awards was principally driven by pronounced reductions in the Power, Construction, and Gas sectors, with no sector registering any growth in award value during the year.

In terms of sector-specific performance, the Kingdom's Power sector retained its position as the largest sector by awarded project value, continuing to lead ahead of the Construction sector. However, the total value of projects awarded within the Saudi Power sector more than halved during 2025, falling to USD 25.1 Bn against the USD 53.3 Bn recorded in 2024. Similarly, the total value of contract awards within the Kingdom's Gas sector also halved during the year, reaching USD 7.3 Bn as compared to USD 18.8 Bn in 2024. Furthermore, project awards within the Kingdom's Construction sector experienced a 44.4% y-o-y decline during 2025, decreasing to USD 12.2 Bn from USD 40.0 Bn in the previous year.

The steep fall in giga project awards throughout 2025 constituted another major factor behind the overall decline in the total value of project awards in the Kingdom for the year. According to data from MEED Projects, the total value of giga project awards in Saudi Arabia for the first nine months of 2025 reached only USD 8.5 Bn. This stands in stark contrast to the total giga project awards for the full calendar year of 2024, which amounted to USD 29.3 Bn. The largest individ-



ual giga project awarded in Saudi Arabia during the first nine months of 2025 was the USD 1.5 Bn Diriyah Company - Diriyah Project: Diriyah 2: Boulevard Southwest: Arena Block Commercial Buildings. This was followed by the USD 1.4 Bn Diriyah Company - Diriyah Project: Diriyah 2: Boulevard Southwest: Royal Diriyah Opera House and the USD 800 Mn Qiddiya Project: City Center: Performance Arts Centre.

Other major and notable contracts awarded in the Kingdom during the year, with particular emphasis on those finalized in Q4-2025, include a USD 347 Mn agreement between the Saudi Electricity Company and Soudah Development. This agreement is for the development of electrical infrastructure to support the Kingdom's Soudah Peaks project, which itself is a component of a larger USD 7.7 Bn master development plan encompassing the construction of hotels, resorts, and residential units. The scope of this electrical infrastructure project includes the creation of a central 380/132kV transmission substation with a capacity of 500MVA, in addition to two 13.8/132kV substations.

UAE

Total value of projects awarded in the UAE declined by 14.5% y-o-y (nearly USD 15 Bn) to reach USD 88.2 Bn in 2025 as compared to USD 103.2 Bn in 2024. The fall in the value of contracts awards was underpinned by the broad-based decline in y-o-y project awards for five out of the eight sectors during 2025 led by the Construction sector which recorded 15.4% y-o-y (USD 8.2 Bn) fall in contracts awarded to reach USD 44.9 Bn against USD 53.1 Bn in 2024. The Emirates' projects market once again overtook Saudi Arabia as the biggest projects market in the GCC during 2025 managing to increase its share of total GCC projects, from 32.9% in 2024 to 41.3% in 2025. Despite the dip in the overall aggregate of yearly project awards, there have been several robust growth in the value clean energy projects awarded in the UAE during the year. So far, the UAE represented nearly 31% of the total value of clean energy projects awarded in the GCC during the last decade of which some of the top projects currently under execution in the Emirate include the EWEC/Masdar - Abu Dhabi Solar PV IPP 5200 MW and BESS project.

In terms of sectors, the Construction Sector once again comprised the biggest pie for new project awards in the UAE representing 50.7% of total projects in the UAE during 2025, reaching USD 44.9 Bn as compared to USD 53.1 Bn awarded in 2024. However, the Emirate's Power sector recorded 97.8% y-o-y increase of value projects awards during 2025, recording the largest absolute growth in value of contract awards during the year, reaching USD 11.1 Bn against USD 5.6 Bn in 2024. Contract awards in the Chemical sector jumped over three times y-o-y during 2025 to reach USD 4.4 Bn up from USD 1.0 Bn in 2024.

Other notable projects awarded in the UAE during 2025 especially in Q4-2025 include the USD 272 Mn Maysan residential package deal awarded to Trojan. The project, which spans an area of approximately 600,000 square meters, covers the development of the Mayar and Thoraya residential districts within the development. Another major contract awarded in the UAE during the year was the USD 2.0 Bn project to build chemicals cluster in the complex of specialty chemical plants in the Taziz Industrial Chemicals Zone at Ruwais Industrial City. The chemical facility is expected to produce 1.9 million tonnes of marketable polyvinyl chloride (PVC), ethylene dichloride (EDC), vinyl chloride monomer (VCM) and caustic soda per year.

Kuwait

Total yearly projects awarded in Kuwait during 2025 reached the highest level in nine years, rising to USD 10.2 Bn against USD 8.8 Bn in 2024. Kuwait witnessed a 16.2% y-o-y gain in the value of contracts awarded during 2025, representing the

biggest y-o-y percentage growth in aggregate contracts awarded among the GCC countries for the year. Projects aligned with the economic diversification agenda of the Kuwait government, under the Kuwait Vision 2035 strategy, underpinned the overall growth of contracts in the country during the year. In addition to these diversification efforts, Kuwait also advanced initiatives to modernize its key foundational sectors, including the Energy sector (Oil & Gas) as well as the Power and Transport sectors.

Kuwait's Power Sector received over 53% (USD 5.4 Bn) of the total value of projects awarded in the country during the year. This was followed by the Oil Sector, which witnessed over 4-fold jump in contract awards, reaching USD 1.2 Bn in 2025 compared to USD 285 Mn in 2024. Conversely, the total value of projects awarded in the Transport Sector declined by 21.7% y-o-y to reach USD 1.1 Bn, down from USD 1.4 Bn in 2024. The majority of the growth in Kuwait's projects market occurred during the second half of 2025, with nearly 70% of the total project value awarded in H2-2025. According to MEED, Kuwait executed its highest value of awards for oil and gas projects in eight years, with most of these deals being finalized towards the end of 2025. In total, 19 contracts with a combined valuation of USD 1.9 Bn were awarded in Kuwait's energy sectors during the year. Currently, according to MEED Projects, there are over USD 115.0 Bn worth of contracts in the pipeline for Kuwait. Of these, 37.9% are in the Study stage, followed by 21.2% in the Design Stage, while 19.6% are in the Bid Evaluation stage. In terms of upcoming contracts, the Power Sector (26.9%) and the Construction Sector (22.5%) represent the lion's share of projects in the pipeline. Regarding currently ongoing major projects in the country, the Sabah Al Ahmad City construction project, with a budget of USD 19.3 Bn, is the largest project developed by Kuwait's Public Authority for Housing and Welfare. This project, which is over 52% completed, involves the construction of 11,000 housing units, 45 schools, and 70 mosques, among other facilities. Meanwhile, in terms of the largest upcoming projects, the USD 5 Bn project for the development of the Kuwait National Railroad tops the list. This initiative includes the construction of a 111 KM single-track rail network. It is followed by the USD 4.6 Bn Subiya Urban Development (Al-Sabriya Project), which entails, among other components, the construction of 52,625 residential units.

Qatar

The total value of contracts awarded in Qatar registered a moderate y-o-y increase of 4.0%, attaining USD 23.1 Bn in 2025 against USD 22.2 Bn in 2024, as per data from MEED Projects. This expansion in contract awards was principally driven by a substantial surge in the value of projects within Qatar's Gas Sector, which recorded a twofold increase to reach USD 12.3 Bn in 2025, up from USD 6.0 Bn in 2024. The Gas Sector constituted 53.2% of the total contracts awarded in the country during the year. One of the significant gas contracts awarded in Qatar during 2025, particularly in the fourth quarter, was the USD 4 Bn EPCI (engineering, procurement, construction and installation) contract for the second phase of the North Field Production Sustainability (NFPS) project by QatarEnergy LNG. This contract was awarded to a consortium of contractors comprising Saipem (the Italian contractor) and China Offshore Oil Engineering.

Conversely, Qatar's Oil Sector, conventionally the largest in terms of project value, experienced a 6.4% y-o-y decline, receding to USD 6.0 Bn in 2025 from USD 6.5 Bn in 2024. Meanwhile, the Power Sector encountered a substantial contraction, with the total value of contracts awarded decreasing by 11.8% y-o-y to USD 2.6 Bn compared to USD 2.9 Bn in 2024. The Power Sector received the third-highest value of contract awards in Qatar during 2025.

Among the notable projects awarded in Qatar during 2025, especially in the fourth quarter, were the USD 305 million (Mn) contracts by Qatar's Public Works Authority (Ashghal) for the construction of roads and infrastructure networks in the Izghawa and Al-Themaid areas northwest of Doha. The project scope encompasses the construction of carriageways, footpaths, parking areas, kerb lines, traffic signs and road markings, pedestrian guard rails, fencing, traffic signals, street lighting, landscaping, and irrigation systems.

Oman

The total value of contracts awarded in Oman in 2025 witnessed a 51.0% y-o-y decline to reach USD 6.2 Bn, the lowest point in three years, as compared to USD 12.7 Bn in 2024. In terms of sectoral performance, despite recording a 53.3% y-o-y fall, Oman's Transport Sector received the largest value of projects awarded in the Sultanate during 2025, which aggregated USD 1.7 Bn as compared to USD 3.6 Bn in 2024. The Sultanate's Gas Sector followed with USD 1.2 Bn in the total value of projects awarded in 2025 as compared to USD 2.2 Bn in 2024. Meanwhile, Oman's Water Sector received a total value of USD 1.0 Bn in projects during 2025 as compared to the previous year.

One of the most notable projects awarded in the Sultanate during the year was the USD 683 million (Mn) gas contract that Petroleum Development Oman awarded to Kuwait-based Specto to develop an integrated natural gas facility. According to reports, the natural gas facility is expected to produce natural gas from the Budour and Tayseer fields in Oman and will be developed over the next two and a half years.

Bahrain

The total value of contracts awarded in Bahrain in 2025 witnessed a 54.9% y-o-y decline to reach USD 1.4 Bn, the lowest point in over two decades, as compared to USD 3.1 Bn in 2024. In terms of sectoral performance, the Kingdom's Power Sector topped the list with USD 500 Mn worth of projects awarded in 2025, up from USD 330 Mn in 2024. The Kingdom's Transport Sector followed as the second-largest sector in terms of the value of contracts awarded in 2025, despite suffering a 24.3% y-o-y fall to reach USD 284 Mn as compared to USD 375 Mn. According to MEED Projects, there were no recorded notable projects awarded in the Kingdom in the Chemical, Oil, and Gas sectors during the year, which played a vital role in the overall decline of total contracts in the country during the year. Some of the notable contracts awarded in the Kingdom during the year included the USD 77 Mn project to expand the Budaiya Highway. The project, which involves the construction of 6.5 kilometres of dual carriageway with three lanes in each direction on Budaiya Highway, was awarded during Q3-2025 by Bahrain's Ministry of Works.

GCC Projects Market Outlook

The outlook for the GCC project market in 2026 is expected to remain strong, following a year of overall decline in awarded contract value. A number of positive factors are anticipated to support renewed project activity across the region in the coming year. These include the projected stabilization and recovery of oil prices, as higher crude revenues directly increase the capital expenditure capacity of the hydrocarbon-exporting GCC governments. Furthermore, the continued acceleration of economic diversification initiatives under various national visions is expected to contribute to an overall upturn in project awards.

Robust investment in non-oil sectors such as Power, Construction, and Industry is forecast to continue, helping to counteract volatility in energy markets and drive sustained project flow. Across the GCC, there is an estimated USD 1.9 Tn worth of contracts in the pre-execution pipeline, with Saudi Arabia accounting for the majority at approximately 50%. A number of these projects is anticipated to be awarded within the next 6-12 months, indicating that 2026 contract award values could match or potentially exceed those of 2025, according to analysis by MEED Projects.

The largest share of these pipeline projects, roughly 36.9%, is currently in the design stage, while about 9.2% are in the bid evaluation phase. On a country-specific basis, Saudi Arabia leads with an estimated USD 949.9 Bn of projects in pre-execution, followed by the UAE (USD 491.2 Bn), Oman (USD 211.8 Bn), and Kuwait (USD 115.1 Bn). This substantial backlog of planned projects positions the region for a potential rebound in contract awards during 2026, supported by favorable economic conditions and strategic government spending.

Saudi Arabia emerged as the region's largest issuer by volume in 2025

MENA sustainable finance market hits \$35.1 billion led by financials and energy: Bloomberg Intelligence

DUBAI, Jan 15: A new report by Bloomberg Intelligence highlights the continued structural evolution of the Middle East and North Africa's (MENA) sustainable finance market, with issuance expanding sevenfold since 2020 despite easing to \$35.1 billion in 2025 (18% below its 2023 peak) amid global market headwinds.

The report finds that the market has transitioned from being predominantly sovereign-led to a more diversified ecosystem anchored by financial institutions and energy-related issuers. Financials accounted for almost 50% of MENA issuance in 2025, up from 32% in 2020, reflecting stronger regulatory signalling and higher underwriting and lending activity as banks decarbonised balance sheets and adopted taxonomies.

Saudi Arabia emerged as the region's largest sustainable finance issuer by volume in 2025, reaching \$19.7 billion, overtaking the UAE, further supported by publication of the country's 2024 Green Financing Framework.

Green-labelled instruments represented the largest share of MENA issuance, increasing by 60% to \$25.8 billion in 2025. Capital was primarily directed toward renewable energy, low-carbon infrastructure and water-efficiency projects aimed at strengthening climate adapta-

- Bloomberg Intelligence report shows MENA sustainable finance issuance has risen sevenfold since 2020
- Saudi Arabia emerged as the region's largest issuer by volume in 2025, supported by its 2024 Green Financing Framework
- Financial institutions are driving a bank-led expansion of sustainable finance, with UAE lenders anchoring scale, profitability and product innovation

tion and resilience, with growing potential as the region expands its data-center capacity.

UAE banks including First Abu Dhabi Bank and Emirates NBD played a prominent role in the bank-led expansion of sustainable finance through underwriting and lending, reflecting strong balance sheet deployment across green bonds, sustainability-linked instruments and lending. The UAE Banking Federation's AED 1 trillion sustainable finance target by 2030 continues to underpin long-term growth. Banks are well positioned to capture a \$2 trillion opportunity

across renewables, water and low-carbon infrastructure.

Grace Osborne, ESG Analyst at Bloomberg Intelligence, said: "MENA's sustainable finance market has matured rapidly over the past five years, driven by government initiatives, supportive regulations and increased investor demand. While issuance eased in 2025 in line with global trends, the shift toward bank-led and green-labelled financing reflects a more durable market structure well positioned for further growth. Saudi Arabia's emergence as the largest issuer highlights how national frameworks and regulatory clarity can accelerate capital mobilization at scale."

The report notes that regulatory progress across the region is strengthening foundations for future growth, although the absence of a harmonised regional taxonomy continues to limit the classification of transition activities. As markets move toward International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) aligned disclosures, forward-looking climate risk assessment and transition planning are expected to become key differentiators for issuers seeking sustainable capital. Moreover, rising investment in AI-driven data centres in the region are likely to sharpen the focus on energy efficiency, water security and climate-resilient infrastructure.

US moves to secure rare earth supply amid China dominance

Bipartisan bill proposes \$2.5 billion agency to boost US critical minerals

WASHINGTON, Jan 15, (AP): A bipartisan group of lawmakers have proposed creating a new agency with \$2.5 billion to spur production of rare earths and the other critical minerals, while the Trump administration has already taken aggressive actions to break China's grip on the market for these materials that are crucial to high-tech products, including cellphones, electric vehicles, jet fighters and missiles.

It's too early to tell how the bill, if passed, could align with the White House's policy, but whatever the approach, the U.S. is in a crunch to drastically reduce its reliance on China, after Beijing used its dominance of the critical minerals market to gain leverage in the trade war with Washington. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to a one-year truce in October, by which Beijing would continue to export critical minerals while the U.S. would ease its export controls of U.S. technology on China.

The Pentagon has shelled out nearly \$5 billion over the past year to help ensure its access to the materials after the trade war laid bare just how beholden the U.S. is to China, which processes more than 90% of the world's critical minerals. To break Beijing's chokehold, the U.S. government is taking equity stakes in a handful of critical mineral companies and in some cases guaranteeing the price of some commodities using an approach that seems more likely to come out of China's playbook instead of a Republican administration.

The bill that Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., and Sen. Todd Young, R-Ind., introduced Thursday would favor a more market-based approach by setting up the independent body charged with building a stockpile of critical minerals and related products, stabilizing prices, and encouraging domestic and allied production to help ensure stable supply not only for the military but also the broader economy and manufacturers.

Shaheen called the legislation "a historic investment" to make the U.S. economy more resilient against China's dominance that she said has left the U.S. vulnerable to economic coercion. Young said creating the new reserve is "a much-needed, aggressive step to protect our national and economic security."

When Trump imposed widespread tariffs last spring, Beijing fought back not only with tit-for-tat tariffs but severe restrictions on the export of critical minerals, forcing Washington to back down and eventually agree to the truce when the leaders met in South Korea.

On Monday, in his speech at SpaceX, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth revealed that the Pentagon has in the past five months alone "de-



Workers use machinery to dig at a rare earth mine in Ganxian county in central China's Jiangxi province on Dec. 30, 2010. (AP)

ployed over \$4.5 billion in capital commitments" to close six critical minerals deals that will "help free the United States from market manipulation."

One of the deals involves a \$150 million of preferred equity by the Pentagon in Atlantic Alumina Co. to save the country's last alumina refinery and build its first large-scale gallium production facility in Louisiana.

Last year, the Pentagon announced it would buy \$400 million of preferred stock in MP Materials, which owns the country's only operational rare earths mine at Mountain Pass, California, and entered into a \$1.4-billion joint partnership with ReElement Technologies Corp. to build up a domestic supply chain for rare earth magnets.

The drastic move by the U.S. government to take equity stakes has prompted some analysts to observe that Washington is pivoting to some form of state capitalism to compete with Beijing.

"Despite the dangers of political interference, the strategic logic is compelling," wrote Elly Rostom, a senior fellow at the Washington-based research institute Center for European Policy Analysis. She suggested that

the new model could be "a prudent way for the U.S. to ensure strategic autonomy and industrial sovereignty."

But companies across the industry are welcoming the intervention from Trump's administration.

"He is playing three-dimensional chess on critical minerals like no previous president has done. It's about time too, given the military and strategic vulnerability we face by having to import so many of these fundamental building blocks of technology and national defense," NioCorp's Chief Communications Officer Jim Sims said. That company is trying to finish raising the money it needs to build a mine in southeast Nebraska.

In addition to trying to boost domestic production, the Trump administration has sought to secure some of these crucial elements through allies. In October, Trump signed an \$8.5 billion agreement with Australia to invest in mining there, and the president is now aggressively trying to take over Greenland in the hope of being able to one day extract rare earths from there.

On Monday, finance ministers from the G7 nations huddled in Washington over their vulnerability in the critical mineral supply chains.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, who has led several rounds of trade negotiations with Beijing, urged attendees to increase their supply chain resiliency and thanked them for their willingness to work together "toward decisive action and lasting solutions," according to a Treasury statement.

The bill introduced on Thursday by Shaheen and Young would encourage production with both domestic and allied producers.

Congress in the past several years has pushed for legislation to protect the U.S. military and civilian industry from Beijing's chokehold. The issue became a pressing concern every time China turned to its proven tactics of either restricting the supply or turned to dumping extra critical minerals on the market to depress prices and drive any potential competitors out of business.

The Biden administration sought to increase demand for critical minerals domestically by pushing for more electric vehicle and windmill production. But the Trump administration largely eliminated the incentives for those products and instead chose to focus on increasing critical minerals production directly.

Most of those past efforts were on a much more limited scale than what the government has done in the past year, and they were largely abandoned after China relented and eased access to critical minerals.

EU, Mercosur set to sign historic free trade deal

Farmers protest as EU, Mercosur near trade agreement

CAÑUELAS, Jan 15, (AP): Talks on a landmark free trade deal between the European Union and four South American countries started so long ago that the euro wasn't even in circulation, China hadn't yet joined the World Trade Organization and Venezuela was still America's top oil provider.

But against a starkly different geopolitical background and tough odds - including backlash from powerful protectionist lobbies - the EU and the South American alliance known as Mercosur are expected to formally sign their quarter-century-in-the-making trade pact this Saturday at a ceremony in Paraguay.

This is the first major trade agreement for Mercosur, which includes the region's two biggest economies, Brazil and Argentina, along with Paraguay and Uruguay. Bolivia, the newest member, was not involved in negotiations but can join the agreement in the coming years.

The trans-Atlantic trade deal - lifting tariffs on products ranging from Argentine steaks and Brazilian copper to German cars and Italian wine - still has to be ratified by the European Parliament.

The significance of creating one of the world's largest free-trade zones - home to more than 700 million people and accounting for a quarter of global gross domestic product - while President Donald Trump yanks the United States out of the international economy is not lost on the signatories.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen hailed the deal last week as a powerful endorsement of multilateralism "in the face of an increasingly hostile and transactional world." Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, 80, called it a rare "victory for dialogue, negotiation and the bet on cooperation."

That victory comes at the expense of the U.S. and China, experts say, as Trump aggressively asserts American authority in the resource-rich region and Beijing uses its massive trade and loans to build influence.

"It's a signal that South American economies

are seeking to hedge away from this great power competition between the U.S. and China," said Lee Schlenker, a research associate with the Global South program at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, a Washington think tank.

"It shows that South America can continue to flex its muscles in the international sphere, to diversify its trade partners and exert a certain level of autonomy it's often denied."

The accord grants South American nations, renowned for their fertile land and skilled farmers, increased access at a preferential tax rate to Europe's vast market for agricultural goods.

Here in Argentina, exporters reckon they'll save tens of millions of dollars a year thanks to the deal's immediate elimination of a 20% tariff on the EU's long-standing quota scheme for high-quality meat imports.

It's a breakthrough for Argentina, a nation dominated for decades by left-leaning populist governments that kept the economy closed to the outside world and prioritized the domestic market to the extent of imposing taxes on farm exports to keep food prices down.

"We're in the midst of a paradigm shift here," said Carlos Colombo, the president of Cañuelas Cattle Market in Buenos Aires province where over 12,000 cattle are sold daily, many destined for Europe and China. "Argentina has reopened itself to the world."

Argentine President Javier Milei may be Trump's strongest ideological ally in Latin America - sharing his disdain for the United Nations and the Paris climate accord - but no one can call the radical libertarian a protectionist.

At first he derided the notoriously slow-moving Mercosur as irrelevant and threatened to ditch it. But he changed his tune since realizing the bloc's potential to sweep away tariffs and slash customs red tape.

"He sees this agreement as a way to revitalize and re-signify Mercosur," said Marcelo Elizondo, an Argentine economic analyst specializing in international trade.

The free-trade fever has also infected Brazil's long-closed economy. Apex, a Brazilian government investment agency, estimates that EU-bound agricultural exports like instant coffee, poultry and orange juice will rake in \$7 billion in coming years.

Squeezed by environmental regulations and fearing a flood of cheap food products from

across the Atlantic, farmers have blocked highways and descended on the streets of European capitals in an explosion of outrage against the agreement.

The EU has scrambled to soothe their concerns over decades of negotiations, adding environmental and animal welfare safeguards to the accord and imposing strict quotas for South American exports of meat and sugar to ensure homegrown produce stays competitive.

Even so, the angry farmers ultimately persuaded France, Poland and a few other states to oppose the deal in last week's internal EU vote, depriving the accord's supporters of what they hoped would be a show of unity. Italy and other agricultural powerhouses only came around after the EU offered farmers generous subsidies to the tune of \$52 billion.

"It's a sizable bribe," said Jacob Funk Kirkegaard, nonresident senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics. "EU leaders decided that the deal is so important at this moment, it's worth it."

Some have dubbed the deal "cows for cars," reflecting the perception that Europe's auto industry will also win big.

Clobbered by growing competition with China and sky-high U.S. tariffs, vaunted German auto giants like Volkswagen and BMW are glad for the boost, as are producers in Europe's pharmaceutical, construction and machinery sectors gaining access to hundreds of millions more consumers.

Experts say that the elimination of 35% tariffs on auto parts and cars gives European industrial exporters a rare chance to claw back their South American market share from cheaper Chinese rivals.

"Failing to sign the EU-Mercosur free trade agreement risked pushing Latin American economies closer to Beijing's orbit," said Agathe Demarais, a senior policy fellow with the European Council on Foreign Relations.

But many are still holding their breath, having watched negotiations lumber along for years only to trip up at the last minute.

"There are still several steps that have to be taken ... and Europe continues to be very careful," Colombo said, straining to be heard over the hollers of cowboys prodding hundreds of bellowing cattle into trucks.

"Let's not forget, this is historic. We've never reached an agreement like this before."

Judge weighs fate of New York's Empire Wind project

WASHINGTON, Jan 15, (AP): A federal judge is considering whether to set aside a Trump administration order pausing construction on a major offshore wind farm for New York, which the developer says could mean the death of a project that's 60% complete.

The Empire Wind project is designed to power more than 500,000 homes. Norwegian company Equinor said the project was in jeopardy due to the limited availability of specialized vessels, as well as heavy financial losses. It's one of five big offshore wind projects on the East Coast that the administration froze days before Christmas, citing national security concerns. Developers and states have sued seeking to block the order.

The case was heard Wednesday by District Judge Carl J. Nichols, an appointee of President Donald Trump. Nichols plans to issue his decision Thursday.

The government filed their national security reasoning in secret for Nichols to review. The administration hasn't publicly revealed specifics about those concerns, and at least one expert says the offshore projects were permitted following years of careful review that included the Department of Defense.

During the hearing, Nichols said the government's main security concern seemed to be over operation of the wind turbines, not construction - a contention the government would later disagree with.

He also sharply questioned the government for not responding to key points in Empire Wind's court filings, like the accusation the Trump administration didn't follow the right procedures and acted arbitrarily.

"Your brief doesn't even include the word arbitrary," the judge said. When the government said they were still contesting Empire Wind's arguments on those points, Nichols responded, "This is not the way we do things."

Equinor's hearing is the second of three for these legal challenges this week; on Monday, a judge ruled that a project serving Rhode Island and Connecticut could resume.

Trump has targeted offshore wind from his first days back in the White House, most recently calling wind farms "losers" that lose money, destroy the landscape and kill birds.

The administration's stance against offshore wind and renewable energy more broadly runs counter to dozens of other countries, and experts say the world needs a major buildout of renewable electricity to address climate change.

The global offshore wind market is growing, with China leading the world in new installations. Nearly all of the new electricity added to the grid in 2024 was renewable.

The British government said Wednesday it secured a record 8.4 gigawatts of offshore wind in Europe's largest offshore wind auction, enough clean electricity to power more than 12 million homes.

It said that as Britain races to cut bills and meet growing energy demand, the price for offshore wind agreed to in the auction is 40% cheaper than the cost of building and operating a new gas power plant.

Molly Morris, Equinor's senior vice president overseeing Empire Wind, said federal officials haven't given any explanation of the national security concerns or how to mitigate them.

A specialized heavy lift vessel, Heerema's Sleipnir, must begin lifting the topside to the project's offshore substation off the transport ship and onto its foundation because the Sleipnir is scheduled to depart by Feb. 1 for other commitments, Morris said. The topside weighs more than 3,000 tons and there are few specialized offshore wind installation ships in the world. Equinor's limited liability company has spent about \$4 billion to develop and construct the project.

"We have been clear and consistent that we are ready to address any additional security concerns that were not already addressed through our lengthy engagement with various defense agencies," Morris said.

Monday's hearing was in the same federal court, with Danish energy company Orsted prevailing. A judge ruled that work on its project, called Revolution Wind, can resume while the administration considers ways to mitigate its national security concerns. Revolution Wind is nearly complete.

After that hearing, White House spokesperson Taylor Rogers said the pause is meant to protect the national security of the American people, and "we look forward to ultimate victory on the issue."

The Trump administration paused leases for the Vineyard Wind project under construction in Massachusetts, Revolution Wind, Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind, and two projects in New York: Sunrise Wind and Empire Wind. New York's attorney general sued the Trump administration on Friday over Empire Wind and Sunrise Wind. The administration previously halted work on both Empire Wind and Revolution Wind.

Higher tariffs and strong euro drag on German exports

German economy grows 0.2% in 2025 amid export headwinds

FRANKFURT, Jan 15, (AP): Germany's troubled economy returned to modest growth last year after two years of falling output, official figures showed, as hopes rise that government spending on bridges, rail lines and defense may help end years of stagnation.

The expansion in gross domestic product of 0.2% for 2025 was fueled by stronger consumer and government spending while exports sagged under the weight of more restrictive U.S. trade policy under President Donald Trump, the German Federal Statistical Office said on Thursday.

That follows shrinkage of 0.5% in 2024 and 0.9% in 2023.

"Germany's export business faced strong headwinds owing to higher U.S. tariffs, the appreciation of the euro and increased competition from China," statistical office head Ruth Brand said in a statement accompanying the statistical release.

Expectations have risen for Germany to finally see stronger growth this year as the government under Chancellor Friedrich Merz implements plans to increase spending on infrastructure to make up for years of un-

derinvestment. Meanwhile defense spending is rising due to a perceived higher level of threat from Russia after its invasion of Ukraine.

Germany has endured a period of extended stagnation following the COVID-19 pandemic. Higher energy costs following the war in Ukraine and increasing competition from China in key German specialties such as autos and industrial machinery have held back an economy that is heavily focused on exports. Then came Trump's imposition of higher tariffs, or import taxes, on goods from the European Union. The slow growth has also exposed long-term structural issues such as excessive bureaucracy and lack of skilled labor. A stronger euro has also made exports less competitive on price.

A group of leading economists has predicted 0.9% growth for this year but said that forecast could be at risk if the increase in government spending is unleashed more slowly than expected.

The German economy grew 0.2% in the last three months of 2025, according to available preliminary data.

Asked about concerns over an AI bubble -- as critics point to ballooning invest-

ments which might not pay off -- TSMC chairman and CEO C. C. Wei said he is confident that the growing demand from customers is real.

"I'm also very nervous about it, you bet," said Wei. "AI is real. Not only real,

it's starting to grow into our daily life."

With a market capitalization -- total outstanding shares times share price -- of about \$1.4 trillion, TSMC is Asia's most valuable company.

Alphabet, Google's parent, passed the \$4 trillion market capitalization mark this month, the fourth Big Tech company to hit that mark after Nvidia, Apple and Microsoft, although concerns over massive spending on AI could turn into a bubble had led to occasional sell-offs.

HONG KONG, Jan 15, (AP): Taiwan-based TSMC, the world's largest computer chip maker, plans to increase its capital spending by as much as nearly 40% this year after it reported a 35% jump in its net profit for the latest quarter thanks to the boom in artificial intelligence, the company said Thursday.

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp., a major supplier to companies including Nvidia and Apple, reported a net profit of \$60 billion new Taiwan dollars (\$16 billion) for the October-December quarter, a 35% surge from a year earlier, better than analysts' estimates.

TSMC said Thursday that its revenue in the last quarter increased 21% from a year earlier to more than 1.046 trillion new Taiwan dollars (\$33 billion).

TSMC said it plans to boost its capital expenditure budget to \$52 billion-\$56 billion for 2026, up from about \$40 billion last year. The company's Taiwan-listed shares have climbed more than 6% since the beginning of the year, reflecting its strong position in the AI-driven market.

Other tech giants including Microsoft, Meta and Alphabet are spending big on investments in AI infrastructure. "We expect our business to be supported by continuous strong demand for our leading edge process technologies," Wendell Huang, TSMC's chief financial officer, said in a conference call. He said spending would be "significantly higher" in the next three years.

Features

ARAB TIMES

FRIDAY-SATURDAY, JANUARY 16-17, 2024



Kim Gordon appears at the premiere of 'The Chronology of Water' in Los Angeles on Jan. 8, 2026. (AP)

Variety

CAMBRIDGE, Mass.: Actor Michael Keaton has been named 2026 Man of the Year by Harvard University's Hasty Pudding Theatricals.

The theater group, which dates to 1844 and claims to be the world's third-oldest still operating, announced

Wednesday that Keaton will receive his Pudding Pot award at a celebratory roast Feb. 6. Afterward, Keaton will attend a performance of Hasty Pudding's 177th production, "Salooney Tunes."

Hasty Pudding Theatricals gives the awards to people who have made lasting and impressive contributions to the world of entertainment.

The Academy Award-nominated and Emmy-winning actor is known for his roles in "Batman," "Birdman," "Beetlejuice," and "Spotlight." More recently Keaton has starred in and directed the short film "Sweetwater" and starred in and executive produced the eight-part Hulu miniseries "Dopesick." (AP)



Keaton

ROME: Italian influencer Chiara Ferragni, once the unrivaled social media star, was cleared of aggravated fraud charges on Wednesday in the so-called Pandoro-gate trial, centered on allegedly misleading charitable deals.

Milan prosecutors accused Ferragni - who faced a potential jail term in the trial -- of misleading consumers in 2022 and 2023 by promoting sales of a limited-edition pandoro cake produced by Italian confectionery company Balocco. The inflated prices were supposed to directly support children's medical treatment.

A similar case involved Ferragni-branded Easter eggs in support of "I Bambini delle Fate," an association that helps children with autism.

Ferragni, facing the brunt of public and legal scrutiny, issued an apology immediately after the controversies emerged, pledging to donate 1 million euros to the Regina Margherita children's hospital in Turin that was involved in the Pandoro initiative. She also paid the "Bambini delle Fate" association 1.2 million euros (\$1.3 million). (AP)

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BARCELONA, Spain: Spanish prosecutors are studying allegations that Grammy-winning singer Julio Iglesias sexually assaulted two former employees at his residences in the Dominican Republic and the Bahamas.

The Spanish prosecutors' office told The Associated Press on Wednesday that the allegations were related to media reports from earlier this week that alleged Iglesias had sexually and physically assaulted two women who worked in his Caribbean residences between January and October 2021.

Iglesias has yet to speak publicly regarding the allegations. Russell L. King, a Miami-based entertainment lawyer who lists Iglesias as a client on his website, didn't immediately respond to a request for comment by the AP.

The Spanish prosecutors' office that handles cases for Spain's National Court said that it had received formal allegations against Iglesias by an unnamed party on Jan. 5. Iglesias could potentially be taken in front of the Madrid-based court, which can try alleged crimes by Spanish citizens while they are abroad, according to the court's press office. (AP)

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.: Emmy Award-winning actor Timothy Busfield was ordered held without bond at his first court appearance Wednesday, a day after turning himself in to face charges of child sex abuse stemming from allegations that he inappropriately touched a minor on the set of a TV series he was directing in New Mexico.

Busfield appeared remotely via a video link from jail, where he was booked Tuesday. Whether he remains in jail will be the subject of a detention hearing that will be scheduled within five business days.

Albuquerque police issued a warrant for his arrest last week on two counts of criminal sexual contact of a minor and one count of child abuse. A criminal complaint alleges the acts occurred on the set of the series "The Cleaning Lady," which was filmed in the city.

Busfield, who is married to actor Melissa Gilbert and is known for appearances in "The West Wing," "Field of Dreams" and "Thirtysomething," has vowed to fight the charges. In a video shared before turning himself in, Busfield called the allegations lies. (AP)

'Pachinko' author to release 'American Hagwon' in September

Min Jin Lee's new book explores Korean education obsession

NEW YORK, Jan 15, (AP): Min Jin Lee's first novel since her million-selling "Pachinko" is a long book that grew out of a basic question: What do Koreans care most about?

"We're obsessed with education, and it became my obsession over why Koreans care so much," says Lee, whose "American Hagwon," scheduled for Sept. 29, will likely be one of the year's most anticipated books. Hagwons are for-profit tutoring centers - sometimes likened to "cram schools" - where Koreans of all ages receive instruction for everything from English to guitar to cooking. Any language school or organization that gives private lesson music classes" can be considered a Hagwon, Lee says.

The author, 57, calls herself an "accidental historian," a novelist who uses broad narratives to unearth the past,

Kim Gordon returns with defiant new album 'Play Me'

NEW YORK, Jan 15, (AP): Ten years ago, Kim Gordon - a revolutionary force in the alternative rock band Sonic Youth, the '80s New York no wave scene and the space between art and noise - debuted solo music. At the time, she was already decades into a celebrated, mixed-medium creative career.

The midtempo "Murdered Out" was her first single, where clangorous, overdubbed guitars met the unmistakable rasp of her deadpan intonations. It was a surprise from an experimentalist well-versed in the unexpected: The song took inspiration from Los Angeles can culture, and its main collaborator was the producer Justin Raisen, then best known for his pop work with Sky Ferreira and Charli XCX. Their partnership has continued in the decade since, and on March 13, Gordon will drop her third solo album, "Play Me," announced Wednesday alongside the release of a hazy, translucent single, "Not Today."

"It was a happy accident," she says of her continued work with Raisen. "In the beginning, I was somewhat skeptical of working with a producer and collaborator, really. But it's turned out to be incredibly freeing."

"Play Me" follows Gordon's critically lauded, beat-heavy 2024 album "The Collective," a noisy body of work that featured oddball trap blasts. It earned her two Grammy nominations - a career first - for alternative music album and alternative music performance. Those were for the song "Bye Bye," with its eerie, dissonant beat originally written for rapper Playboi Carti. For "Play Me," Gordon reimagine the track

for the closer, "Bye Bye 25!" She says it was the result of her thinking about the rap world, where revisiting and remixing is commonplace.

"I came up with the idea of using these words that Trump had sort of 'banned' in his mind," she says of the new song's lyrics. (An example: "Injustice / Opportunity / Dietary guidelines / Housing for the future.") President Donald Trump's administration associates the terms with diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, which it has vowed to root out across the government.) For Gordon, because it became "more conceptual ... the remake doesn't seem as anxiety-provoking as the original."

Connective

There is a connective spirit between "The Collective" and "Play Me" - a shared confrontation, propulsive production and songs that possess a keen ability to process and reflect the world around Gordon. "It does feel kind of like an evolution," she says of this album next to her last. "It's sort of a more focused record, and immediate." The songs are shorter and attentive.

Or, to put it more simply: "I like beats and that inspires me more than melodies," she says. "Beats and space."

That palette drives "Play Me," a foundation in which staccato lyricism transforms and offers astute criticism. Consider the title track, which challenges passive listening and the devaluation of music in the age of streaming. She names Spotify playlist titles, imagined genres defined by mood

rather than music. "Rich popular girl / Villain mode" she speaks-sings, "Jazz and background / Chillin' after work."

"It's just representative of, you know, this era we're in, this culture of convenience," she says. "Music always represented a certain amount of freedom to me, and it feels like that's kind of been blanketed over."

Sonically, it is a message delivered atop a '70s groove, placing it in conversation with an era unshackled from these digital technologies. The title, too, is playing off the sort of passive nature of listening to music," she says, "But also it could be seen as defiant. Like, I dare you to play me."

There's also the blown-out "Subcon," which examines the world's growing billionaire class and their fascination with space colonization in period of economic insecurity. In the song, Gordon's lyrical abstractions highlight the absurdity, taking aim at technocrats.

"I find reality inspirational, no matter how bad it is," she says. Where some artists might veer away from the news, Gordon tackles truth. "I'm not sure what music is supposed to be. So, I'm just doing my version of it."

In the end, she hopes listeners are "somewhat thrilled by" the album. "This is the music that I've wanted to hear," kind of feeling. Does that sound egotistical? I don't know," she laughs. If it is, it is earned.

1. "Play Me"; 2. "Girl with a Look"; 3. "No Hands"; 4. "Black Out"; 5. "Dirty Tech"; 6. "Not Today"; 7. "Busy Bee"; 8. "Square Jaw"; 9. "Subcon"; 10. "Post Empire"; 11. "Nail Bitter" and 12. "Bye Bye 25!"

Film



This image released by Sony Pictures Classics shows Jodie Foster in a scene from 'A Private Life.' (AP)

Zlotowski's 'A Private Life' defies rules

Foster anchors twisty, stylish French thriller

LOS ANGELES, Jan 15, (AP): Jodie Foster plays a self-assured psychoanalyst whose composure unravels after a patient unexpectedly dies in the genre-bending French film "A Private Life."

Rebecca Zlotowski's latest, in theaters Friday, is part noir, part comedy of remarriage, and part Freudian fever dream about past lives.

This is a film that does not abide by rules or play into any easy expectations about what it should be, resulting in big swings, tonal shifts and even a lurking Holocaust through-line. Also, oddly enough considering such grave themes and subjects, it's all done with a relatively light touch set, in part, by the cheeky needle drop at its opening: the Talking Heads song "Psycho Killer."

Some parts work better than others, but you can't help but admire the go-for-broke originality and unabashed femininity of it all. And anchoring it all is Foster, using the full force of her star power and impeccable French to make "A Private Life," unwieldy and complex as it is, go down as easy as a glass of gamay.

Foster's character, Dr. Lilian Steiner, is an American expat living and working in France. She's an accomplished, sophisticated woman who believes she has a grasp on people and the world around her, recording and cataloging all her private sessions with clients on meticulously organized CDs. This act in and of itself is a little odd - her son wonders why she doesn't just use a more modern method, for instance. But it also kind of gets to the heart of why, perhaps, despite her evident

intelligence, there's a cold disconnect between analyst and subject. Is she even listening to them?

Lilian starts to wonder this herself after she receives a call that her client Paula (Virginie Efira) has died by suicide. Paula was not someone she believed was capable of this. Instead of looking inward, she goes back to the tapes to begin an amateur investigation to find some other explanation: It must be murder, she concludes. Suspects include Paula's daughter Valérie (Luana Bajrami) and husband Simon (Mathieu Amalric).

Sidekick

She also enlists a sidekick in her sleuthing, her ex-husband Gabriel (a delightful Daniel Auteuil) who is more than happy to go along for the ride, to listen to her conspiracy theories over several bottles of wine, to be a decoy distraction so that she can snoop through Simon's house, and, ultimately, to just be there for her, no matter how unhinged she's becoming. You can just see the love and admiration in his attentiveness. He's not off put by the crazy; it's just part of what makes her, well, her. Their rekindled relationship, so effortlessly lived in, so mature, so fun, is by far the highlight of "A Private Life."

It's a shame that their romance is basically a side show to the more convoluted rest, which involves a hypnotist and a revelation of a past life in which Lilian and Paula were members of the same WWII-era orchestra and lovers torn apart by jealous exes and

Nazis. One of those Nazis is Lilian's son (Vincent LaCoste), which she awkwardly, drunkenly tells him at his birthday dinner to try to explain why they've never been that close. She's also completely disinterested in her grandchild, which might be one "let's unpack that" too many in this film. In other words, there's a lot going on in "A Private Life," which Zlotowski co-wrote with Anne Berest.

One thing there's not enough of is Efira. She gets some moments in flashback, but most of them teeter on the "dead wife montage" cliche. It's not that Zlotowski wasn't aware of what she had in Efira (case in point, their poignant, tender work together in "Other People's Children"), but perhaps she was counting on our familiarity to fill in the gaps.

"A Private Life" is ultimately Foster's show anyway and she seems to relish the tricky assignment. The tone around her might be on the lighter side, but for Lilian, the stakes are grave with the very essence of her self-worth and life's work on the line. It's a fascinating portrait of a woman essentially forced to rethink and revise all of the rules she'd lived by, the facts that she made sense of the world with and submit herself to the idea that some things might just be unknowable - even for a know-it-all psychoanalyst.

"A Private Life," a Sony Pictures Classics release in theaters Friday, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for "language, graphic nudity, brief violence, some sexual content." Running time: 105 minutes. Three stars out of four.



Min Jin Lee attends the GQ Global Creativity Awards in New York on April 6, 2023. (AP)

Trump urges Smithsonian to focus on positive US history

Smithsonian responds to White House, hands over more exhibit info

WASHINGTON, Jan 15, (AP): The Smithsonian Institution gave the White House new documents on its planned exhibits Tuesday in response to a demand to share precise details of what its museums and other programs are doing for America's 250th birthday.

For months, President Donald Trump has been pressing the Smithsonian to back off "divisive narratives" and tell an upbeat story on the country's history and culture, with the threat of holding back federal money if it doesn't. The institution is a cornerstone of American culture, operating 21 museums and a zoo that are among the most popular tourist destinations in Washington.

By Tuesday, the Smithsonian was supposed to provide lists of all displays, objects, wall text and other material dedicated to this year's anniversary and other purposes. Smithsonian Secretary Lonnie Bunch III told staff, in an email obtained by The New York Times and The Washington Post, that "we transmitted more information in response to that request."

The White House did not respond to a request for comment, leaving it unclear whether it was satisfied with the material it received. Bunch indicated there was more to come, saying the institution will continue to engage in providing

"relevant and appropriate materials."

The Trump administration's intent is to ensure Americans get an positive accounting of the country's history, not one weighted by complexities or shameful episodes of the past.

The ultimatum was laid out in a Dec. 18 letter to Bunch from the White House budget director, Russell Vought, and the domestic policy director, Vince Haley.

"We wish to be assured that none of the leadership of the Smithsonian museums is confused about the fact that the United States has been among the greatest forces for good in the history of the world," the letter said.

Americans "will have no patience for any museum that is indifferent about America's founding or otherwise uncomfortable conveying a positive view of American history, one which is justifiably proud of our country's accomplishments and record."

The Smithsonian is not a federal entity but receives a majority of its money from Congress.

The White House initially asked for all relevant materials in September but said documents turned over by the Smithsonian fell far short of what it requested.

In his March executive order, Trump claimed there had been a "concerted and widespread" effort over the past de-



A visitor stops to look at a photograph of President Donald Trump and a short plaque next to it on display at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery's "American Presidents" exhibit on Sunday, Jan. 11, in Washington. (AP)

cade to rewrite American history by replacing "objective facts" with a "distorted narrative driven by ideology rather

than truth."

As part of that, Vice President JD Vance was placed on the Smithsonian's Board of Regents to oversee efforts to "remove improper ideology" from all areas of the institution.

The Smithsonian and the White House did not respond to requests for comment Tuesday afternoon.

The prospect of polishing the historical record to satisfy a president is concerning to many who study the past.

"History is about evidence," said Matthew Delmont, a history professor at Dartmouth College. "It's about welcoming complexity and nuance. It's not about crafting a single story that needs to make everyone feel happy."

Jim McSweeney, a retired archivist from the National Archives, said: "Here's our history. Here's our shared experience. We have to learn from it and never go back and try to whitewash or change anything based upon your political leanings."

In the months leading up to Trump's order in August for an official review of all Smithsonian exhibits, Trump fired the head archivist of the National Archives and said he was firing the National Portrait Gallery's director, Kim Sajet, who maintained the backing of the Smithsonian's governing board, but ultimately resigned.

Stage



Children and adults with disabilities showcase their talent in a special performance of the play 'Short Rope.'



Minister of Social Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila with officials from the Public Authority for Disability Affairs and the Ministry of Information.

'Short Rope' brings spotlight on talented performers with disabilities

In a vibrant celebration of talent and inclusivity, the Public Authority for Disability Affairs hosted a special performance of the play "Short Rope" on Wednesday.

The event, attended by Minister of Social Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila, was held in collaboration with the Ministry of Information and the UN Representative's office, creating a colorful platform where art meets empowerment.

The stage came alive as a group of dedicated performers with disabilities brought the play's profound themes to life, captivating the audi-

ence with their energy, dedication, and passion.

The months of preparation and training were evident in every gesture, line, and scene, reflecting both their talent and their commitment to showcasing the abilities of people with disabilities as integral members of society.

The Public Authority announced that the official performances of "Short Rope" will take place on January 16 and 17, open to the public via registration on the Authority's official platforms, inviting everyone to witness the inspiring artistry of these exceptional performers. (KUNA)

Non-European tourists to pay more

What to know as Louvre's ticket price goes up by 45%

PARIS, Jan 15, (AP): Long lines beneath I.M. Pei's glass pyramid in Paris have become as much a part of the experience as the "Mona Lisa" itself.

Now the Louvre is putting a higher price on that pilgrimage, raising admission prices on Wednesday for most non-European visitors by nearly half as it tries to shore up finances after repeated strikes, chronic overcrowding - and a brazen French Crown Jewels heist that shook the institution.

The museum said the 45% price hike to 32 euros (\$37) from 22 euros is part of a national "differentiated pricing" policy announced early last year that's coming into force across major cultural sites, including the Versailles Palace, the Paris Opera and the Sainte-Chapelle.

But French worker unions have denounced the Louvre ticketing change, saying it undermines the universal mission of the world's most visited museum - home to the "Venus de Milo" and the "Winged Victory of Samothrace."

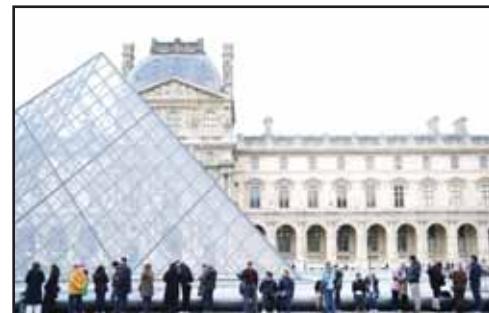
Some visitors echoed those concerns outside the Louvre on Wednesday.

"Culture should be open to everyone - yes - at the same price," said Laurent Vallet, visiting Paris from Burgundy.

Despite the hike, workers walked out again Monday in the latest strike over pay and working conditions, thrusting the museum's internal strain back into public view.

The change affects visitors from most non-EU countries, including the United States, which typically accounts for the majority of the Louvre's foreign tourists.

Under the new structure, visitors who are neither citizens nor residents of the EU - or Iceland, Liech-



People wait for the Louvre museum to open as employees at the museum vote to extend a strike that has disrupted operations at the world's most visited museum, Thursday, Dec. 18, 2025 in Paris. (AP)

stein and Norway - will pay the higher rate.

The new price applies to individual visitors outside Europe; guided groups will pay 28 euros, with tours capped at 20 people "to maintain the quality of the visit," the museum said.

Still, some tourists questioned the logic of charging visitors more. "In general, for tourists things should be a little bit cheaper than local people because we have to travel to come all the way here," said Darla Daniel Quiroz, visiting from Vancouver.

Others said they would pay anyway. "It's one of the main attractions here in Paris ... We're still going to go," said Allison Moore, a Canadian tourist from Newfoundland visiting with her mother. "Hopefully it'll be all worth it in the end."

The CGT Culture union has denounced the policy, arguing it turns access to culture into a "commercial product" and creates unequal access to national heritage.

Some categories remain eligible for free admission, though, including visitors under the age of 18.

The last price hike was in January 2024, when the standard entry fee rose from 17 euros to 22 euros.

The Louvre says it is not alone. Versailles and other flagship tourist attractions are adopting similar two-tier pricing this month.

At Versailles, the "Passport" ticket will cost 35 euros in high season for visitors from outside the European Union, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, compared to 32 euros for visitors who are citizens or residents of those countries. At Sainte-Chapelle, the ticket rises to 22 euros for visitors from outside those countries, versus 16 euros for those within them, according to heritage officials.

The Louvre said the new tariff will help finance investment under its "Louvre - New Renaissance" modernization project and could bring in as much as 20 million euros more per year.

French museums had already been considering higher fees for visitors from outside Europe before the Oct. 19 theft of French Crown Jewels from the Louvre, valued by investigators at about 88 million euros.

However, the robbery that was carried out in daylight, in minutes - was a speed and audacity that intensified scrutiny of how France protects its most prized cultural treasures.

It also fueled debate over how major landmarks should pay for upgrades and whether visitors should carry a bigger share of the cost.

A true national treasure'

Lebanon nominates Lebanese TV archive for UNESCO recognition

BEIRUT, Jan 15, (KUNA): Lebanese President Michel Aoun on Wednesday described the archive of Lebanon Television as a "true national treasure" documenting decades of Lebanon's history, events, culture, and creative achievements.

Speaking at a ceremony marking the nomination of Lebanon's TV archive for the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, Aoun said the nomination "restores Lebanon to its natural place on the global stage in the media and documentation fields."

He added that "Lebanon's TV is an integral part of our national identity," urging its staff to present Lebanon, Arab, and international audiences with "the real image of Lebanon: strong institutions, free, professional and responsible media."

Meanwhile, Lebanese Minister of Information Paul Merheb highlighted the ministry's commitment to protecting the archive, digitizing it, and making optimal use of its contents. He stressed that Lebanon TV's significance is evident as a "unifying na-

tional platform" that has returned to the media scene through positive competition based on professionalism, objectivity, and journalistic ethics, rather than sensationalism or misleading news.

The Lebanon TV's archive encompasses Lebanon's political and cultural life since 1958. It has been digitized with the support of UNESCO's Beirut office and the Alef Foundation and is set to be made accessible to the public according to international archival lending standards.

Technology

Apple store sensation

'Are You Dead?' app helps young Chinese living solo

BEIJING, Jan 15, (AP): In China, the names of things are often either ornately poetic or jarringly direct. A new, wildly popular app among young Chinese people is definitely the latter.

It's called, simply, "Are You Dead?"

In a vast country whose young people are increasingly on the move, the new, one-button app - which has taken the country by digital storm this month - is essentially exactly what it says it is. People who live alone in far-off cities and may be at risk - or just perceived as such by friends or relatives - can push an oversized green circle on their phone screens and send proof of life over the network to a friend or loved one. The cost: 8 yuan (about \$1.10).

It's simple and straightforward - essentially a 21st-century Chinese digital version of those American pendants with an alert button on them for senior citizens that gave birth to the famed TV commercial: "I've fallen, and I can't get up!"

Developed by three young people in their 20s, "Are You Dead?" became the most downloaded paid app on the Apple App Store in China last week, according to local media reports. It is also becoming a top download in places as diverse as Singapore and the Netherlands, Britain and India and the United States - in line with the developers' attitude that loneliness and safety aren't just Chinese issues.

"Every country has young people who move to big cities to chase their dreams," Ian Lü, 29, one of the app's developers, said Thursday.

Lü, who worked and lived alone in the southern city of Shenzhen for five years, experienced such loneliness himself. He said the need for a frictionless check-in is especially strong among introverts. "It's unrealistic," he said, "to message people every day just to tell them you're still alive."

Against the backdrop of modern and increasingly frenetic Chinese life, the market for the app is understandable.

Traditionally, Chinese families have tended to live together or at least in close proximity across generations - something embedded deep in the nation's culture until recent years. That has changed in the last few decades with urbanization and rapid economic growth that have sent many Chinese to join what is effectively a diaspora within their own nation - and taken hundreds of millions far from parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Information

Today, the country has more than 100 million households with only one person, according to an annual report from the National Bureau of Statistics of China in 2024.

Consider Chen Xingyu, 32, who has lived on her own for years in Kunming, the capital of southern China's Yunnan province. "It is new and funny. The name 'Are You Dead?' is very interesting," Chen said.

Chen, a "lying flat" practitioner who has rejected the grueling, fast-paced career of many in her age group, would try the app but worries about data security. "Assuming many who want to try are women users, if information of such detail about users gets leaked, that'd be terrible," she said.

Yuan Sangsang, a Shanghai designer, has been living on her own for a decade and describes herself as a "single cow and horse." She's not hoping the app will save her life - only help her relatives in the event that she does, in fact, expire alone.

"I just don't want to die with no dignity, like the body gets rotten and smelly before it is found," said Yuan, 38. "That would be unfair for the ones who have to deal with it."

While such an app might at first seem best suited to elderly people - regardless of their smartphone literacy - all reports indicate that "Are You Dead?" is being snapped up by younger people as the wry equivalent of a social media check-in.

"Some netizens say that the 'Are you dead?' greeting feels like a carefree joke between close friends - both heartfelt and gives a sense of unguarded ease," the business website Yicai, the Chinese Business Network, said in a commentary. "It likely explains why so many young people unanimously like this app."

The commentary, by writer He Tao, went further in analyzing the cultural landscape. He wrote that the app's immediate success "serves as a darkly humorous social metaphor, reminding us to pay attention to the living conditions and inner world of contemporary young people. Those who downloaded it clearly need more than just a functional security measure; they crave a signal of being seen and understood."

Death is a taboo subject in Chinese culture, and the word itself is shunned to the point where many buildings in China have no fourth floor because the word for "four" and the word for "death" sound the same - "si." Lü acknowledged that the app's name sparked public pressure.

"Death is an issue every one of us has to face," he said. "Only when you truly understand death do you start thinking about how long you can exist in this world, and how you want to realize the value of your life."

A few days ago, though, the developers said on their official account on China's Weibo social platform that they'd pivot to a new name. Their choice: the more cryptic "Demumu," which they said they hoped could "serve more solo dwellers globally."

Then, a twist: Late Wednesday, the app team posted on its Weibo account that workshopping the name Demumu didn't turn out "as well as expected." The app team is offering a reward for whoever offers a new name that will be picked this weekend. Lü said more than 10,000 people have weighed in.



The app 'Are You Dead?' is seen on a smartphone in Beijing, China, Thursday, Jan. 15. (AP)

Kuwait to host stem cell and gene therapy conference

Conference to discuss and share advances in pediatric stem cell treatments

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: Kuwait will host the 5th Stem Cell Transplantation, Cell Therapy, and Gene Therapy Conference on January 19-20 at the Four Seasons Hotel.

The announcement was made by Dr. Sundus Al-Shuraifa, Head of the Kuwait Pediatric Association and Director of the Department of Hematology, Pediatric Oncology, and Stem Cell Transplantation.

The conference, which will be held under the patronage of Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi, will bring together a distinguished panel of international and regional experts to discuss advancements in these rapidly evolving medical fields.

Dr. Al-Shuraifa explained that the conference is an initiative of the Kuwait Pediatric Association aimed at advancing specialized medical fields, improving care for children with complex diseases, and supporting the Ministry of Health's commitment to cutting-edge scientific

programs.

It will serve as a leading scientific platform to discuss the latest breakthroughs in the field, including innovative treatments such as CAR-T therapy.

A primary focus will be on clinical applications, practical challenges, and strategies to align healthcare development with international standards.

The conference is expected to attract wide participation, including speakers from leading global centers and hospitals in Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States,

along with experts from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. This extensive engagement aims to facilitate the exchange of expertise and transfer of advanced medical knowledge to the region.

The conference will also include specialized applied workshops covering a range of topics such as therapeutic apheresis, best practices in stem cell collection (MNC), the use of point-of-care ultrasound (POCUS) in clinical care, pain management, pediatric palliative care, and advanced medical training and simulation programs.



Roscosmos cosmonaut Oleg Platonov, left, NASA astronauts Mike Fincke, Zena Cardman, and JAXA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency) astronaut Kimiya Yui are seen inside the SpaceX Dragon Endeavour spacecraft onboard the SpaceX recovery ship SHANNON shortly after having landed in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Long Beach, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 15. (AP)

New crew liftoff targeted for mid-February

Ailing astronaut returns to Earth early in first medical evacuation by NASA

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla., Jan 15, (AP): An ailing astronaut returned to Earth with three others on Thursday, ending their space station mission more than a month early in NASA's first medical evacuation.

SpaceX guided the capsule to a middle-of-the-night splashdown in the Pacific near San Diego, less than 11 hours after the astronauts exited the International Space Station.

"It's so good to be home," said NASA astronaut Zena Cardman, the capsule commander.

It was an unexpected finish to a mission that began in August and left the orbiting lab with only one American and two Russians on board. NASA and SpaceX said they would try to move up the launch of a fresh crew of four; liftoff is currently targeted for mid-February.

Cardman and NASA's Mike Fincke were joined on the return by Japan's Kimiya Yui and Russia's Oleg Platonov. Officials have refused to identify the astronaut who developed the health problem last week or explain what happened, citing medical privacy.

While the astronaut was stable in orbit, NASA wanted them back on Earth as soon as possible to receive proper care and diagnostic testing. The entry and splashdown required no special changes or accommodations, officials

said, and the recovery ship had its usual allotment of medical experts on board.

The astronauts will receive more in-depth medical checks at a local hospital before flying to their home base in Houston, NASA said. Platonov's return to Moscow was unclear.

The astronauts emerged from the capsule, one by one, after it was aboard the recovery ship. They were helped onto reclining cots and then whisked away for standard medical checks, waving to the cameras.

Jared Isaacman, NASA's new administrator, monitored the action from Mission Control in Houston.

NASA stressed repeatedly over the past week that this was not an emergency. The astronaut fell sick or was injured on Jan. 7, prompting NASA to call off the next day's spacewalk by Cardman and Fincke, and ultimately resulting in the early return. It was the first time NASA cut short a spaceflight for medical reasons. The Russians had done so decades ago.

The space station has gotten by with three astronauts before, sometimes even with just two. NASA said it will be unable to perform a spacewalk, even for an emergency, until the arrival of the next crew, which has two Americans, one French and one Russian astronaut.

Trump signs new school nutrition law

Whole milk returns to US school cafeterias

WASHINGTON, Jan 15, (AP): Whole milk is heading back to school cafeterias across the country after President Donald Trump signed a bill Wednesday overturning Obama-era limits on higher-fat milk options.

Nondairy drinks such as fortified soy milk may also be on the menu in the coming months following adoption of the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act, which cleared Congress in the fall.

The action allows schools participating in the National School Lunch Program to serve whole and 2% fat milk along with the skim and low-fat products required since 2012.

"Whether you're a Democrat or a Republican, whole milk is a great thing," Trump said at a White House signing ceremony that featured lawmakers, dairy farmers and their children.

The law also permits schools to serve nondairy milk that meets the nutritional standards of milk and requires schools to offer a nondairy milk alternative if kids provide a note from their parents, not just from doctors, saying they have a dietary restriction.

The signing comes days after the release of the 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which emphasize consumption of full-fat dairy products as part of a healthy diet. Previous editions advised that consumers older than 2 should consume low-fat or fat-free dairy.

Earlier this week, the Agriculture Department sent a social media post showing Trump with a glass of milk



A student drinks milk in the cafeteria area of an elementary school in Los Angeles on Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2015. (AP)

and a "milk mustache" that declared: "Drink Whole Milk."

The change could take effect as soon as this fall, though school nutrition and dairy industry officials said it may take longer for some schools to gauge demand for full-fat dairy and adjust supply chains.

Long sought by the dairy industry, the return of whole and 2% milk to school meals reverses provisions of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act championed by former first lady Michelle Obama. Enacted more than a dozen years ago, the law aimed to slow obesity and boost health by cutting kids' consumption of saturated fat and calo-

ries in higher-fat milk.

Nutrition experts, lawmakers and the dairy industry have argued that whole milk is a delicious, nutritious food that has been unfairly vilified, and that some studies suggest that kids who drink it are less likely to develop obesity than those who drink lower-fat options. Critics have also said that many children don't like the taste of lower-fat milk and don't drink it, leading to missed nutrition and food waste.

The new rules will change meals served to about 30 million students enrolled in the National School Lunch Program.

'Excessive gaming, not gaming itself, is the problem'

Gaming over 10 hours a week harms diet, sleep

SYDNEY, Jan 15, (Xinhua): Playing video games for more than 10 hours a week may significantly affect young people's diet, sleep and body weight, a new study shows.

The research, led by Australia's Curtin University and published in Nutrition, surveyed 317 students from five universities across the country, with a median age of 20, said a Curtin University statement on Thursday.

Participants were classified as low (0-5 hours per week), moderate (5-10 hours) and high (10+ hours) gamers.

Researchers found while low and

moderate gamers reported similar health outcomes, results worsened dramatically among those who gamed more than 10 hours weekly.

The findings suggested excessive gaming appeared to be the key issue, rather than gaming itself, said Professor Mario Sierro from the Curtin School of Population Health.

"What stood out was students gaming up to 10 hours a week all looked very similar in terms of diet, sleep and body weight," Sierro said, adding that beyond that 10-hour threshold, clear differences emerged.

Students gaming more than 10 hours a week had poorer diet quality and higher obesity rates, with a median body mass index of 26.3 compared to 22.2 and 22.8 for low and moderate gamers respectively, the study showed.

All groups reported generally poor sleep quality, but increased gaming hours were also linked to sleep disruption, the researchers said.

The study suggests adopting healthy routines, such as limiting late-night gaming and choosing healthier snacks, may help reduce health risks.

'GLP-1 Friendly' food labels lack FDA oversight

Food firms target weight-loss drugs users with 'GLP-1 Friendly' labels



Meals with 'GLP-1 Friendly' labels sit on the shelf of a Kroger grocery store Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2026, in Ann Arbor, Mich. (AP)

NEW YORK, Jan 15, (AP): Meals and snacks with "GLP-1 Friendly" labels on the packaging are becoming more common in US supermarkets as a growing number of Americans try obesity drugs like Wegovy and Zepbound to lose weight.

But the labels aren't regulated by the US Food and Drug Administration, unlike the popular medications themselves. Dieticians say people taking GLP-1 drugs need to read ingredient lists and talk to experts about what nutrients they need - and don't need.

"A drug does not educate you on how to eat properly," said Suzy Badaracco, a registered dietitian and president of the food trends forecasting firm Culinary Tides. "You're not magically going to be educated - without a doctor's help - to eat healthy."

The nutritional needs of GLP-1 users aren't that different from those of the general population, said Shannon Christen, a dietitian and diabetes educator with UCHHealth University of Colorado Hospital.

The difference is that GLP-1 users eat less because the drugs suppress their appetites, so the foods they do eat need to be packed with nutrients, Christen said. They can expect to eat around 50% less than they ate before they started taking the medications, she said.

"Every bite needs to be nutritious," Christen said.

Protein helps GLP-1 users maintain muscle mass as they lose weight. Christen said she generally recommends that patients eat 20-30 grams of protein per meal, or 1.2 grams per kilogram of body weight daily.

Samantha Snashall, a registered dietitian at Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center, said GLP-1 users should also try to meet the U.S. Department of Agriculture's recommended daily amount of fiber, which is around 14 grams for every 1,000 calories consumed. Fiber is important for everyone, but it's particularly helpful for GLP-1 patients because constipation is a frequent side effect of the medications, she said.

Badaracco said it's easy for GLP-1 users to get dehydrated since the drugs may block the body's thirst signals. Fresh fruits and vegetables provide hydration, she said, and patients should also drink water throughout the day.

GLP-1 users should avoid meals and snacks that are deep fried, high in sugar or saturated fat and spicy or acidic, since those foods can worsen side effects and work against weight-loss efforts, Snashall said.

Drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy mimic the naturally occurring hormone GLP-1, which the body produces in the small intestine to control blood sugar levels, digestion and appetite. Around 12% of U.S. adults were taking GLP-1 medications as of November to lose weight or treat a chronic condition like diabetes, according to a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Big food companies expect the de-

mand for GLP-1 drugs only to grow as the injected medication becomes available in pill form, which happened with Wegovy last week. Meals marketed for GLP-1 users also are attracting non-users, including people who have come off the drugs but want to maintain weight loss.

Nestle targeted GLP-1 users when it launched its Vital Pursuit frozen meal brand in the fall of 2024. The company didn't use a "GLP-1 Friendly" label at first but added one to the packaging after customers reported that a label would help them identify products that met their dietary needs, according to Jennifer Barnes, vice president of brand marketing for Nestle's frozen meals.

Sales have been brisk and the company is adding new meals to the line-up, Barnes said. She said the products have broad appeal; 77% of Vital Pursuit sales are coming from households where no one is using GLP-1 drugs.

Conagra Brands added a "GLP-1 Friendly" label to 26 of its Healthy Choice frozen meals in early 2025. The Smoothie King chain has a "GLP-1 Support Menu," while several meal kit brands cater to patients, like Factor's "GLP-1 Balance."

Both Conagra and Nestle got approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service to use "GLP-1 Friendly" labels. The USDA said it granted approval because the labels are accompanied by statements about protein and fiber content and aren't misleading. But the USDA reiterated that there is no regulatory standard for the term "GLP-1 Friendly."

Other companies are targeting GLP-1 users but not mentioning the drugs on their labels or menus. In November, French yogurt maker Lactalis began selling Ratio Pro Fiber yogurt in the U.S. The company said the yogurt, which contains 20 grams of protein and 10 grams of fiber per serving, was formulated with GLP-1 users in mind. Restaurant chains Chipotle and Shake Shack also mentioned GLP-1 users last

'Breakthrough device'

AI in China spots cancers doctors may have missed

GENEVA, Jan 15, (Agencies): The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has confirmed that 2025 was one of the three warmest years on record, continuing the streak of extraordinary global temperatures.

In a statement issued in Geneva, WMO said that the past 11 years have been the 11 warmest on record, and ocean heating continues unabated.

The global average surface temperature was 1.44 C above the 1850-1900 average according to WMO's consolidated analysis of eight datasets.

WMO confirmed that the past three years, 2023-2025, are the three warmest years; the consolidated three-year average 2023-2025 temperature is 1.48 C above the pre-industrial era.

WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo said, "The year 2025 started and ended with a cooling La Niña, and yet it was still one of the warmest years on record globally because of the accumulation of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in our atmosphere."

She explained that high land and ocean temperatures helped fuel extreme weather heatwaves, heavy rainfall and intense tropical cyclones, underlining the vital need for early

warnings.

According to the statement, a separate study published in Advances in Atmospheric Sciences said that ocean temperatures were also among the highest on record in 2025, reflecting the long-term accumulation of heat within the climate system.

About 90 pct of excess heat from

global warming is stored in the ocean, making ocean heat a critical indicator of climate change.

"I almost dismissed the call as a scam," Fang said, a decision that could have proved fatal. Further tests confirmed the existence of a pancreatic neuroendocrine tumor, the same rare cancer that afflicted Steve Jobs. Because the anomaly had been detected early by the AI, surgeons were able to remove it successfully in a minimally invasive operation last April.

"Without that AI alert, I would have missed my chance," Fang said.

Fang's case is not an isolated

one. At the Affiliated People's Hos-

pital of Ningbo University, also in

Zhejiang, a 57-year-old retiree was similarly diagnosed by the same AI project during a scan for stomach discomfort.

Since the system went live there

in late 2024, it has reviewed over

180,000 abdominal and chest CTs,

uncovering more than 20 pancreatic

cancers – 14 of them early-stage

cases and many that had never

triggered any alert before going

through the AI system.

"For some of these patients, I

can say with certainty that AI saved them," said Zhu Kelei, vice president of the hospital.

The technology, named DAMO

PANDA, has been developed by

Alibaba's DAMO Academy to take

on one of medicine's most lethal ad-

versaries, namely pancreatic cancer.

In November 2023, a paper

in Nature Medicine showed that

DAMO PANDA had retrospec-

tively identified 31 missed lesions,

Inconsistent Marseille can ill afford to drop any points

Little Lens blossoming into serious rival for PSG in title race

PARIS, Jan 15, (AP): Lens has gone from surprise front runner to serious title contender in Ligue 1.

Despite having modest resources, coach Pierre Sage has done remarkably well to keep his side ahead of defending champion Paris Saint-Germain.

Cash-rich PSG clinched a record-extending 13th league title last season while Lens won its only title in 1998. But Lens pushed PSG close in 2022-23 and finished runner-up by one point.

Lens is one point ahead of PSG this season and eight clear of third-place Marseille going into this weekend's 18th round.

Sage's side will be confident of a club record-extending 10th straight win in all competitions when it hosts next-to-last Auxerre on Saturday.

Excellent teamwork and a strong defense are hallmarks of Lens which has five clean sheets in the past nine games.

PSG has a tricky home match against fourth-placed Lille on Friday at Parc des Princes, just days after being knocked out of the French Cup at home by capital

city rival Paris FC.

Inconsistent Marseille is at mid-table Angers on Saturday and can ill afford to drop any points with Lille level on points.

Erratic Monaco has tumbled to mid-table and needs to bounce back with a home win against Lorient on Friday.

Lyon fans will be hoping to see Brazil forward Endrick in action at home to Brest on Sunday.

Endrick is on loan from Real Madrid until the end of the season and scored on his club debut in the French Cup on Sunday.

After missing 14 games due to a shoulder injury, Marseille forward Amine Gouiri is finding form. He scored twice and provided one assist in a 9-0 French Cup win on Tuesday.

Nantes has earned a reputation for having a strong youth academy and Tyle Tati is the latest product. The 17-year-old central defender looked assured in a 2-0 win at Marseille and looks set to feature at home to Paris FC on Sunday.

Paris FC forward Jonathan Ikoné's neat finish knocked titleholder PSG - his former club - out of the French Cup. Ikoné has yet to score in the league.

Paul Pogba's move to Monaco is not working out as hoped and the former France midfield star remains sidelined by a calf injury.

The 2018 World Cup winner has also dealt with thigh and ankle problems since joining the club in the offseason, after more than two years out of the game in a career derailed by injuries, off-field problems and a doping ban.

Pogba hoped to relaunch his career in time to make France's squad for the World Cup but has so far played only 30 minutes in three substitute appearances.

Monaco's long injury list includes defender Mohammed Salisu (ACL), winger Ansu Fati (hamstring), goalkeeper Lukas Hradecky (knee) and winger Takumi Minamino (ACL).

Forwards Jérémie Boga and Terem Moffi are reportedly trying to terminate their contracts with Nice after being attacked by their own supporters following a game on Nov. 30.

'Best interests of the team'

Robertson fired as NZ coach, two years into his 4-year term

WELLINGTON, New Zealand, Jan 15, (AP): All Blacks head coach Scott Robertson has been removed two years into a four-year contract, after a damning internal report into the New Zealand rugby team's 2025 season and reported threats from senior players to quit if he was not removed.

Robertson's tenure as head coach was controversial even before it properly began and he presided over the team's worst results in the professional era, including a loss to South Africa last year which was the heaviest in the All Blacks' 120-year history.

World Cup-winning All Blacks captain David Kirk, who chairs the board of New Zealand Rugby, announced Robertson's "departure" in a statement Thursday.

"The mid-point in the Rugby World Cup cycle is the right time to look at the All Blacks' progress over the first two seasons," Kirk said. "The team are set to play a significant 2026 schedule and the (World Cup) tournament in 2027 remains the key goal.

"We've taken an extensive look at the team's progress on and off the field and have subsequently had discussions with Scott on the way forward. Both NZR and Scott agree it is in the best interests of the team that he depart his role as head coach."

In a statement, Robertson referred to his dismissal as an "early" contract end.

"Following the end of year review I have taken time to reflect on some of the feedback. My priority has always been the success of the All Blacks and, after discussions with New Zealand Rugby, I believe it is in the best interests of the team for me to step aside," Robertson said.

"I have therefore reached an agreement with New Zealand Rugby to end my contract early so a new coaching group has the time it needs to prepare and take the team into the next World Cup. I am incredibly proud of what this team has achieved and of the progress we have made."

But Robertson said he was "gutted" by the news of his dismissal.

"I care deeply about this team," he said. "Given the sensitivity of this situation I will not be making any further comment."

NRZ said a process has begun to select a new head coach. Jamie Joseph, the former Japan and New Zealand Maori coach, is thought to be the preferred candidate.

"On behalf of New Zealand Rugby I would like to thank Scott for his contribution to the All Blacks," Kirk said. "As always, he has continued to put the All Blacks first and we respect that he has done the hard but right thing in agreeing to depart."

Robertson had 20 wins from 27 matches in charge, a winning percentage well below those of predecessors Steve Hansen (87%), Graham Henry (85%) but above Ian Foster (70%).

Robertson's position became tenuous when it was reported Ardie Savea, who captained the All Blacks at times last year, had indicated he would not play for New Zealand while Robertson remained in charge.

Robertson was appointed head coach in March, 2023 while the current head coach Foster was already contracted to take the New Zealand team to the World Cup later that year.

That created an unprecedented situation in which the incumbent coach had to operate with his successor already in place. When Foster, unexpectedly, led New Zealand to the World Cup final in which it lost by a single point to South Africa, the decision to allow overlapping coaching tenures became farcical.

At the same time, it was clear Robertson was only appointed because he had threatened to leave New Zealand and coach overseas unless he was promised the All Blacks head coaching role. Departing chief executive Mark Robinson has been heavily criticized for bowing to that threat and for undermining Foster in a World Cup year.

Robertson had always seemed likely to become All Blacks head coach after leading the Christchurch-based Crusaders to seven consecutive Super Rugby titles.

Previously, Henry and Steve Hansen, who both led the All Blacks to World Cup victories, and Foster who was an assistant to Hansen had international coaching experience before being appointed. Robertson did not and that lack of experience showed throughout his tenure.

In 2024, his first season in charge, the All Blacks lost to Argentina in New Zealand for the first time and lost also to South Africa and France.

Last year, the All Blacks lost to Argentina in Argentina for the first time. Their 43-10 loss to South Africa in Wellington was the largest in their history. They also lost to England at Twickenham in November.

In this file photo, New Zealand's All Blacks coach Scott Robertson watches players warm up before a rugby championship match against Argentina's Los Pumas at Mario Alberto Kempes stadium in Cordoba, Argentina. (AP)

Best of the Rest

Eto'o banned over alleged misbehavior: African football's governing body CAF has imposed a 20,000 U.S. dollar fine and a four-game ban on Cameroon Football Federation (FECAFOOT) president Samuel Eto'o for allegedly misbehaving during his team's loss to Morocco in the Africa Cup of Nations quarterfinal.

FECAFOOT confirmed the sanction in a statement released, stressing that the ruling "lacks any explicit justification". (Xinhua)

FA charges Tottenham, Villa: The Football Association has charged Tottenham Hotspur and Aston Villa with misconduct following a melee after their FA Cup clash on Saturday.

Players from both sides were involved in a confrontation shortly after Tottenham's 2-1 win in the third-round duel.

The clubs are accused of having "failed to ensure their players and officials did not behave in an improper and/or provocative way after the final whistle." (Xinhua)

Lamouchi appointed head coach of Tunisia: The Tunisian Football Federation announced Wednesday that Sabri Lamouchi has been appointed head coach of Tunisia until 2028.

Lamouchi, 54, succeeds Sami Trabelsi, who was dismissed after Tunisia's round-of-16 exit at the ongoing 2025 Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco.

As a player, Lamouchi had spells with several European clubs, winning French league titles with Auxerre and Monaco, and lifting the Italian Cup with Parma. (Xinhua)

Leonard scores 33 as Clippers top Wizards for fourth straight victory



Sacramento Kings guard Russell Westbrook (18) drives to the basket past New York Knicks guard Jordan Clarkson (00) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Sacramento, Calif. (AP)

Flagg sprains ankle, Mavs lose to Nuggets



New Orleans Pelicans forward Trey Murphy III (25) goes to the basket against Brooklyn Nets center Nic Claxton (33) in the second half of an NBA basketball game in New Orleans. (AP)

of five from 3-point range, to take a 39-18 lead after the first quarter. The Pacers made just six of 18 shots.

Cavaliers 133, 76ers 107

In Philadelphia, Donovan Mitchell had 35 points and nine assists, Darius Garland scored 20 points before leaving with an injured foot and the Cleveland Cavaliers beat the Philadelphia 76ers.

Garland was ruled out for the game late in the third quarter when he hurt his right foot diving for a loose ball. Garland already had surgery in June on the injured left big toe that hampered him during Cleveland's exit from the playoffs.

The All-Star guard averaged 17.9 points after a slow start this season as he recovered from surgery. Garland continued his recent hot streak and shot 8 for 13 against the 76ers.

Pelicans 116, Nets 113

In New Orleans, Trey Murphy III scored 34 points, Saddiq Bey made a tying 3-pointer, converted an offensive rebound into a dunk and two free throws in the final 1:04, and the New Orleans Pelicans edged the Brooklyn Nets.

Zion Williamson had 25 points for New Orleans, which won for just the second time in 13 games. Yves Missi contributed 12 points and 12 rebounds, nine on the offensive end to help the Pelicans finish with 33 second-chance points.

Bulls 128, Jazz 126

In Chicago, Nikola Vucevic made a tiebreaking layup with 4 seconds remaining, and the Chicago Bulls overcame Brice Sensabaugh's career-high 43 points to beat the Utah Jazz.

Vucevic scored 35 points to lead the Bulls, who had five reserves finish in double figures. Isaac Okoro was the only other starter in double figures with 12 points for a Bulls team playing without Josh Giddey because of strained left hamstring.

made 12 of 13 free throws. That gave the 36-year-old 26,077 career points, moving him past Hall of Famer Kevin Garnett. Garnett had 26,071 points in 21 NBA seasons.

OG Anunoby had 15 points and Karl-Anthony Towns scored 13 for New York.

Raptors 115, Pacers 101

In Indianapolis, Brandon Ingram scored 30 points, including two key 3-pointers late, Scottie Barnes had 26 points and 13 assists, and the Toronto Raptors used a fast start to defeat the Indiana Pacers 115-101 on Wednesday night.

Grady Dick had 21 points and 11 rebounds off the bench for the Raptors, who have won all three meetings with the Pacers.

When Indiana surged late to close the gap to 103-99 with 4:17 remaining, Ingram responded with 3-pointers on back-to-back possessions.

The Raptors never trailed. They shot 7 of 16 with one 3-pointer and

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Sinner, Djokovic could meet in semifinals

Australian Open draw sets potential Gauff–Venus showdown

MELBOURNE, Australia, Jan 15, (AP): Coco Gauff and Venus Williams could meet in the second round of the Australian Open, another potential chapter in a tennis tale that started with a 15-year-old on her Grand Slam debut beating a seven-time major winner at Wimbledon.

Gauff thanked Williams for being such an inspiration for her career after that win at the All England Club in 2019, saying "I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for her."

She followed it up with a first-round win at the Australian Open in 2020.

Now she's the No. 3 seed and a two-time major winner. The 45-year-old Williams has a wild-card entry for the Australian Open, where she's playing for the first time in five years.

The tournament starts Sunday at Melbourne Park. When the draw

was conducted Thursday, Gauff was drawn to open against No. 91-ranked Kamilla Rakhimova and No. 576-ranked Williams - who made her Australian Open debut in 1998 and has twice reached the final - was drawn to face No. 68-ranked Olga Danilovic in the first round.

Williams is set to become the oldest woman to compete in an Australian Open main draw, surpassing the record previously held by Japan's Kimiko Date, who was 44 when she lost in the first round at Melbourne Park in 2015.

To have any chance of facing Gauff again, she needs to do something she hasn't done in 2026: record a win. In the last two weeks, Williams played tournaments in New Zealand and in Hobart, losing in the first round at both.

After a 6-4, 6-3 win over Williams



In this file photo, Ben Shelton of the U.S. plays a forehand return to Jannik Sinner of Italy during their semifinal match at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

on Tuesday, Tatjana Maria said it was a tough one because "everyone loves Venus. I love her, too."

Gauff and Williams are in the same half of the draw as top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka, who won back-to-back Australian Open titles before losing last year's final to Madison Keys.

Sabalenka, who opened her season with a title in Brisbane last week, has a potential third-round meeting against 2021 U.S. Open winner Emma Raducanu.

Defending champion Keys, who lost her quarterfinal match at the Adelaide International to rising Canadian star Victoria Mirok in three sets on Thursday, was drawn into the same quarter as No. 6 Jessica Pegula, and No. 4 Amanda Anisimova.

No. 2-ranked Iga Swiatek, seeking a career Grand Slam with her first title at Melbourne Park, is in the bot-

tom quarter on that side of the draw and has a potential fourth-round match against four-time major winner Naomi Osaka.

Jannik Sinner and Novak Djokovic landed in the same half of the draw, setting up a potential semifinal between the defending champion and the 24-time major winner.

Djokovic, who has won 10 Australian titles but hasn't gone past the semifinals at Melbourne Park since 2023, played an exhibition against Francesca Tiafoe on Rod Laver Arena hours after the draw was made. He withdrew last week from a warmup tournament in Adelaide to give himself more time to be ready for the Open.

Top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz is on the opposite side to Sinner and Djokovic, and has Tiafoe and local hope and sixth-seeded Alex De Minaur in his quarter of the draw.

Albacete eliminates Real



Real Madrid's Fran Garcia, right, vies for the ball with Albacete's Lorenzo Aguado during the Copa del Rey round of 16 soccer match between Albacete and Real Madrid, in Albacete, Spain. (AP)

Rayo defeated by Alavés

MADRID, Jan 15, (AP): Álvaro Arbeloa got off to a dismal start as the new coach of Real Madrid, seeing his team lose to second-division club Albacete 3-2 and drop out of the Copa del Rey in the round of 16.

Jefet Betancor scored the game-winning goal four minutes into stoppage time to send Albacete to the quarterfinals. Gonzalo García had also scored in added time for Madrid to even the match at 2-2.

Madrid struggled from the start in the debut of Arbeloa, the club's former B-team coach who on Monday was picked to replace Xabi Alonso following a tumultuous eight-month stint at the helm.

"At this club, even a draw is bad, a tragedy, imagining a defeat like this, especially against a lower-division opponent," Arbeloa said. "If anyone is responsible, it's me, as I'm the one who made the decisions regarding the lineup, how we wanted to play, and the substitutions. I can only thank the players for the welcome they gave me and help them recover physically and mentally."

Arbeloa used a few B-team players as expected, but he drew some criticism for resting many of his top stars, including Kylian Mbappé, Jude Bellingham, Thibaut Courtois and Rodrygo.

Vinícius Júnior started, but was mostly ineffective as Madrid had difficulty creating scoring opportunities.

Arbeloa said he had "no regrets" about his squad choice.

"I was convinced that the squad was the right one," Arbeloa said. "It was a great team, the starting lineup and the bench. I have a very talented squad and it's not easy for them to do everything I've asked of them in just one day with a new coach. I feel ultimately responsible."

Veteran defender Dani Carvajal, who entered the game in the second half, said Madrid fans deserved an apology after the team's performance.

"We are not going through our best moment," he said. "Everyone has to give a lot more."

Albacete sits in 17th-place in the 22-team second-division standings. It hadn't won in five consecutive games in all competitions.

The hosts had gotten on the board first with Javier Villar scoring with a header off a corner kick in the 42nd and Franco Mastantuono equalized from close range three minutes into first-half stoppage time. Betancor put Albacete back in front in the 82nd with a shot from inside the area after the Madrid defense failed to fully clear a cross into the box.

"It's the greatest thing in football and it happened today," Betancor said. "I'm so happy for

my team, everyone worked like crazy. I'm very, very happy."

Madrid was coming off a 3-2 loss to Barcelona in the final of the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia. It trails Barcelona by four points at the halfway point in the Spanish league, and sits in seventh place in the league phase of the Champions League. Madrid's next match is at home on Saturday against Levante in the Spanish league.

Like Alonso, the 42-year-old Arbeloa played several years for Madrid. He has been with the club for 20 years, having coached many of its youth squads.

As a player, Arbeloa helped Madrid win eight titles from 2009-16, including two European Cups and one Spanish league. He also helped Spain win the 2010 World Cup and the 2008 and 2012 European Championships.

In other meetings between first-division clubs, Rayo Vallecano lost 2-0 at Alavés and Real Betis beat Elche 2-1 at home.

Rayo played with 10 men from the 69th as Isi Palazón was sent off. Ezequiel Ávila scored twice, including an 80th-minute winner, as Betis rallied from behind against Elche.

On Tuesday, Atletico Madrid beat second-division club Deportivo La Coruña 1-0.

Barcelona visits Racing Santander - the second-tier leader - on Thursday.

The round of 16 is played in single elimination games.

Frankfurt takes on struggling Bremen

Record-chasing Bayern faces Leipzig test

BERLIN, Jan 15, (AP): Bayern Munich still has rivals for the Bundesliga title, in theory at least, and Leipzig is one of them.

After Bayern matched the record points total for the halfway stage of a Bundesliga, beating the record on goal difference, only a spectacular collapse over the next four months would put Bayern's 11-point lead under threat.

Ahead of Saturday's game, Leipzig is third and has plenty to play for in a competitive fight for the Champions League places.

Bayern delivered an opening statement of intent by sweeping aside Leipzig 6-0 in the first round. Leipzig was much improved since and showed strong set-piece awareness in beating Freiburg 2-0 on Wednesday.

It's been a tough start to 2026 for Bayer Leverkusen, which seemed to find consistently strong form at the end of last year. A 4-1 loss to Stuttgart last week was followed by a weather-related postponement, so facing Hoffenheim on Saturday will be a key test.

The big factor holding back seventh-place Eintracht Frankfurt is a defense which has conceded 36 goals in 17 games, the league's



Leipzig's Antonio Nusa and Freiburg's Niklas Beste in action during the Bundesliga soccer match between RB Leipzig and SC Freiburg in Leipzig, Germany. (AP)

third-worst record. Facing Werder Bremen's underperforming attack on Friday is a chance to improve that record.

Lennart Karl's breakout season for Bayern Munich has been must-see viewing in the Bundesliga and Champions League. The 17-year-old attacking midfielder scored

again in Wednesday's 3-1 win over Cologne. His success will cause a selection headache for coach Vincent Kompany when Jamal Musiala finally returns from injury.

Hoffenheim's surprise push for Champions League qualification owes a lot to the experienced Andrej Kramarić, who's marking 10 years at the club this month and celebrating

ed with a hat trick on Wednesday against Borussia Moenchengladbach.

Bayern is dealing with an injury list including midfielder Joshua Kimmich, who's spent the last month recovering from an ankle issue, and left back Alphonso Davies, back in training after illness. Defender Josip Stanisic is ruled out for the rest of January and forward Jamal Musiala's long-awaited comeback remains uncertain.

Leverkusen defender Edmond Tapsoba will miss up to three weeks after returning from the Africa Cup of Nations with a muscle injury.

Postponed games are piling up in the Bundesliga after snowstorms caused chaos in northern Germany last week, causing three matches to be rescheduled. Hamburger SV is working on its stadium's roof ahead of Saturday's game against Borussia Moenchengladbach to avoid another postponement.

Frankfurt's six signings stand out in a quiet transfer window so far for Bundesliga clubs, especially since Eboualib and fellow forward Ayoub Amaimouni-Echghouyab have each scored on their debuts. Young Nigerian winger Suleiman Sani has joined Leipzig from Slovakia club Trencin.

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New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell celebrates after scoring a century during the second One Day International cricket match between India and New Zealand in Rajkot, India. Mitchell scored 131 not out off 117 balls as New Zealand beat India by seven wickets in the second one-day international to draw level in the three-match series. (AP)

Sports

Morocco marches on as Senegal ends Egypt hopes



Senegal's Sadio Mane, and Egypt's Mohamed Hany, right, vie for the ball during the Africa Cup of Nations semifinal soccer match between Senegal and Egypt, in Tangier, Morocco. (AP)

Penalty drama halts Nigeria's run

RABAT, Morocco, Jan 15, (AP): Youssef El-Nesyri scored the winning penalty, and Yassine "Bono" Bouounou saved two as Morocco advanced to the Africa Cup of Nations final with a 4-2 win on penalties over Nigeria.

Nigeria goalkeeper Stanley Nwabali saved one but was bettered by Bono in the shootout after the teams drew 0-0 with extra time in front of 65,458 mostly Morocco supporters in Rabat's Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium.

"We played with 12 (players)," Morocco coach Walid Regragui said of the fans. There were some green-clad Nigerian fans present, struggling to make themselves heard.

The host nation set up a title match in the same stadium on Sunday with 2021 champion Senegal, which defeated Egypt 1-0 in the other semifinal earlier in Tangier. Morocco is bidding for its first title since its only success in 1976, and tickets for the decider are likely to command steep prices.

There were reports before Wednesday's game that tickets with a face value of 500-500 dirhams (\$32-42) for the semifinal were going for as much as 7,000 dirhams (\$760) or more on the illegal market.

It was easy to tell which team was in possession from the deafening chorus of fans' whistles any time a Nigerian player had the ball.

Calvin Bassey was the first to receive the home fans' piercing welcome when he took a walkout alone on the field before the match. He responded with a huge smile.

Morocco went close with the early chances with Semi Ajayi producing a brilliant block to stop Ismael Saibari. Brahim Díaz whipped a shot past the far post and then tried riling up the already riled crowd.

Bassey was booked for a tactical foul outside the penalty box, which would have ruled him out of the final with a suspension if the Super Eagles made it.



Morocco players celebrate after winning a penalty shootout during the Africa Cup of Nations semi-final match between Nigeria and Morocco in Rabat, Morocco. (AP)

Instead, he'll miss the unpopular third-place decider against Egypt in Casablanca on Saturday.

Ademola Lookman had Nigeria's only shot on target - too close to Bono in the Morocco goal after some fine team play. Ultimately, there was too little of that from the Super Eagles.

"It was a team that had scored 14 goals. They had two shots and only hit the target once. That tells you something," Regragui said.

His team had 16 shots, five on target, with Díaz, Ayoub El Kaabi, and Achraf Hakimi all enjoying good chances. Nigeria held on to get the game to the shootout, where Bono saved from Samuel Chukwueze and Bruno Onyemaechi to set up El-Nesyri for the winner.

Sadio Mané again got the better of his former teammate Mohamed Salah by

firing Senegal into the final of the Africa Cup of Nations with a 1-0 victory over Egypt.

Salah's wait for an Africa Cup title goes on - Egypt lost the 2021 final on penalties to Senegal, when then-Liverpool teammate Mané and his country claimed their first.

Mané and his Teranga Lions have a chance for their second when they contest the final against Morocco in Rabat on Sunday - the host nation defeated Nigeria on penalties in the second semifinal. Senegal will play its first game of the tournament away from Tangier when it contests the decider.

Mané, the two-time African Footballer of the Year, broke the deadlock Wednesday in the 78th minute when he left fly from just outside the penalty area inside the bottom left corner after Lamine Camara's initial effort was blocked.

One-sided derby

Qadsia sweeps past Al-Arabi

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff



Qadsia player out-jumps the Al-Arabi defense to score.

Kuwait claims silver in team category

Al-Dahiani wins gold at Asian Shooting Championship

DOHA, Jan 15, (KUNA): Kuwait's Mohammad Al-Dahiani claimed the gold medal in the men's singles skeet shooting finals at the Asian Championship in Qatar, which continues until January 21.

In the team category, Kuwait finished second, trailing gold medalists Qatar and ahead of bronze medalists Kazakhstan.

Expressing his joy over Al-Dahiani's triumph, Obaid Al-Osaimi, dual secretary general of the Kuwaiti and Arab Shooting Federations, praised the athlete's achievement and hoped it would inspire further successes.

Al-Dahiani dedicated his victory to Kuwait's leaders and the nation, highlighting the crucial role of support from home in his accomplishment and vowing to continue striving for excellence.

The championship features 196 shooters from 17 Asian nations, all competing for the top honors since the event kicked off on Monday in Qatar.

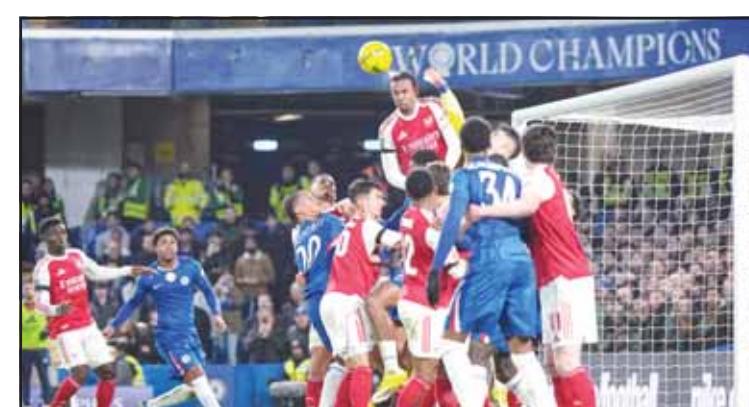


Al-Dahiani celebrates on the podium with other winners as officials look on.

KUNA photo

Gunners cash in on Sanchez mistakes

Arsenal closes in on Wembley after dramatic Chelsea win in League Cup semifinals 1st leg



Arsenal's Gabriel heads the ball clear during the English League Cup semi-final first leg soccer match between Chelsea and Arsenal in London. (AP)

League standings.

Liam Rosenior, taking charge of his first home match as Chelsea's new coach, refused to criticize Sanchez for his mistakes.

"I said to him before the game, and I made this really clear - when my players make mistakes, I'm accountable. That's on me," Rosenior said.

"I'll stay positive with him, as I will

with the group. My job is to help them, not to blame them."

In the other semifinal matchup, Manchester City won 2-0 at Newcastle in the first leg on Tuesday. Their second match is scheduled for February 4.

It means the most likely title match is City vs. Arsenal, the top two in the league. That would be a rematch of the 2018 final - the last one Arsenal reached in the League Cup - which City won 3-0.

Rosenior was hired last week on a 6-year deal and won the FA Cup over the weekend.

That was away, against a second-division opponent in Charlton Athletic, so this was Rosenior's first real test, and Arsenal could have left Stamford Bridge in a commanding position.

Instead, Garnacho's late goal gives hope to Chelsea, which was without Reece James, Cole Palmer, and Malo Gusto due to injuries and Moises Caicedo through suspension.

'Visit Kuwait' named sponsor of Asian Handball Championship

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15, (KUNA): The Ministry of Information and Kuwait Handball Association (KHA) signed an agreement, proclaiming "Visit Kuwait" the official platform for events and tourism, as the local sponsor of the 22nd Men's Asian Handball Championship.

The deal, inked by Undersecretary of the Ministry Dr. Naser Mheisen and KHA Vice President Shabeef Saad Al-Hajri, aims to facilitate fans' access to various services, including online ticket booking via the platform and all information about the championship.

The championship kicked off at Sheikh Saad Al Abdullah Sports Complex, until January 29. National teams from across the continent will be competing for qualification spots in the International Handball Federation (IHF) Men's Handball World Cup, due in Germany next year.

Over 500 million ticket requests submitted for 2026 World Cup

GENEVA, Jan 15, (Xinhua): FIFA announced Thursday that over 500 million 2026 World Cup ticket requests have been submitted since the random selection draw phase began on December 11, 2025.

Apart from co-hosts the United States, Mexico and Canada, most applications came from fans residing in Germany, England, Brazil, Spain, Portugal, Argentina and Colombia, and

the most coveted match in this sales phase was Colombia vs Portugal on June 27 in Miami, FIFA announced.

Other highly sought-after tickets include those for matches between Mexico and South Korea, Mexico and South Africa, and the final.

"Half a billion ticket requests in just over a month is more than demand - it's a global statement," said FIFA President Gianni Infantino.

A corner sailed over Sanchez in the seventh minute, allowing Ben White to head into an unguarded net, before the Spanish keeper let a low cross squirm through his grasp to gift Viktor Gyokes a tap-in in the 49th.

Substitute Alejandro Garnacho pulled a goal back, but Martin Zubimendi restored Arsenal's two-goal cushion by slotting home a finish in the 70th. Garnacho's second goal - in the 83rd - gave Chelsea a lifeline ahead of the second leg on Feb. 3 at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium.

Still, Mikel Arteta's team is the favorite to advance to the March 22 final at Wembley Stadium in what is shaping up to be a banner season for the Gunners, who lead the Premier League by six points and top the Champions

League standings.

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