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Amir thanks Kuwaitis for contributing to Gulf Cup glory

— Details Page 5 —



His Highness the Amir in a group photo after receiving the Minister of Information, Chairman of the Supreme Organizing Committee of the Gulf Cup, President of the Kuwait Football Association, members of the Supreme Committee and heads of the organizing committees of the tournament.

Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah
Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

Mohammed Shia al-Sudani: A stabilizing factor

AFTER the recent "earthquake" in Syria, many aftershocks are awaiting the region, particularly in the countries of the so-called "Axis of Resistance." Iraq, in particular, is the most vulnerable due to its internal challenges and Iran's dominance over most sectarian militias and its indirect connections with groups like Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and other terrorist organizations. This makes Iraq a critical point of strategic interest that cannot be overlooked.

Therefore, there is a strong reliance on Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, who, over the past two years, has focused on dealing with the internal issues and improving Iraq's relations with neighboring countries, particularly the Gulf states.

His efforts have been crucial in alleviating concerns over Iranian interference in Iraq's internal affairs, primarily through Tehran's control of militias. This interference has posed a threat to regional stability, particularly with Iran's military presence in Syria, which has exacerbated sensitive disputes among Syria's various societal components.

While there are notable differences between the two neighboring countries - Iraq and Syria, it is important to note that Syria's strategic location makes it a central point in the region. However, Iraq, as Syria's eastern neighbor, serves as an important gateway to the Gulf and West Asia. Despite this strategic position, Iraq must overcome the many burdens imposed by two decades of Iranian hegemony.

Historically known as Mesopotamia, Iraq has long been endowed with natural advantages. Its fertile plains enabled self-sufficiency in food production, and its vast oil wealth provided huge potential.

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Kuwait explores higher fees for expats, visitors

Tax on multinational entities may yield \$800 mln yearly



Celebrating the spirit of Christmas, the Egyptian Coptic Church gathers in joy and reverence at St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church for a heartfelt mass. — See Page 4

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: In a bid to bolster non-oil revenues and mitigate the impact of fluctuating global oil prices on the state budget, Kuwait has introduced a tax on multinational entities expected to generate approximately 250 million Kuwaiti dinars annually (around \$800 million), reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Noura Al-Fassam shared this projection during a televised interview with Sky News Arabia, highlighting the government's broader economic reform agenda.

Continued on Page 5

No HMPV spike in Kuwait

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

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: To reassure citizens and residents, the Ministry of Health, through its Assistant Undersecretary for Preventive Health Affairs, Dr. Al-Mundhir Al-Hasawi, confirmed that human metapneumovirus (HMPV) infections in Kuwait remain within typical seasonal levels.

In a press statement, Dr. Al-Hasawi clarified, "No noticeable increase in the number of infections has been recorded," and assured that the ministry has sufficient laboratory reagents for virus detection.

He noted that influenza types A and B are the primary causes of respiratory symptoms in adults this season, while respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) continues to be the leading cause of respiratory illness in children under five.

The Ministry of Health is actively monitoring the global health situation

and collaborating with international medical organizations. It is also utilizing the Emflu platform, operational in 12 health centers across Kuwait, to track respiratory diseases.

Dr. Al-Hasawi emphasized that there is no specific vaccine for HMPV and urged the public to adhere to general preventive measures to reduce the risk of infection.

Separately, Dr. Ghanem Al-Hujailan, an internal and epidemiological diseases consultant at Adan Hospital, downplayed concerns over HMPV's recent spread in China, noting that it is an old virus with risks far lower than COVID-19 or seasonal influenza.

On his X account, Dr. Al-Hujailan explained that HMPV symptoms resemble those of influenza, such as congestion, fever, and coughing. In rare cases, it may lead to pneumonia in children under five, particularly those with weakened immune systems.

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KFF cautions against unstable weather

The Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) urged Tuesday the public to be cautious due to unstable weather conditions affecting the country.

In a press release, the KFF called upon people to contact 112 hotline in case of any emergency. (KUNA)



Photo by Samer Shiqr

Motorists navigate Kuwait's roads as unpredictable weather takes hold.

Foreign wives of Kuwaitis retain access to social aid

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7, (KUNA): Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs Dr. Khaled Al-Ajmi said on Tuesday that foreign wives of Kuwaiti citizens whose citizenship has been revoked in accordance with Article 8 of the Kuwaiti Citizenship Law will continue to receive social aid payments.

In a statement to KUNA, Al-Ajmi affirmed that this decision aligns with the directives of the Cabinet to support this group and ensure a decent life for them while maintaining all the benefits provided to them.

He noted that the Ministry operates

within an integrated system aimed at achieving social justice and caring for the most vulnerable groups, stressing the Ministry's commitment to strictly implementing laws and regulations.

Al-Ajmi added that the continued support reflects the state's commitment to promoting social solidarity principles.

He further emphasized the Ministry's dedication to meeting the needs of all eligible groups, urging beneficiaries to contact the Ministry for inquiries or to submit requests related to social aid, ensuring the continuity of services and the achievement of public welfare.

Bloc consumer prices rise

Kuwait tops GCC inflation rates at 2.8% in Sept 2024

MUSCAT, Jan 7, (KUNA): The GCC Statistical Center announced that consumer price data showed an increase in the average inflation rate in GCC countries by the end of September 2024 by 1.5 percent, compared to the same month in 2023.

A Center report said that the increase was mainly due to the prices of the housing category, which recorded an increase of 5.7 percent, followed by the culture and entertainment category with 2.6 percent.

The commodities and services category comes next with 1.8 percent, then the restaurants and hotels category with 1.5 percent, and the food and beverage category and the education category with one percent each.

The report noted that prices decreased in the transportation category by three percent, the furniture and household equipment category by 2.3 percent, the tobacco category by 1.2 percent, the communications category by 0.9 percent, and the clothing and footwear category by 0.8 percent.

Meanwhile the prices of the health category remained stable at their previous levels.

The report indicated that Kuwait had the highest inflation rate among the GCC countries during last September, compared to the same month in 2023, reaching 2.8 percent, followed by Saudi Arabia with 1.7 percent, Qatar with 0.8 percent, and Bahrain and Oman with 0.4 percent each.

The report pointed out that the general Gulf inflation rate was lower than the European Union inflation rate of 2.1 percent, and was lower than many of the GCC's main trading partners in total commodity imports.

It indicated that Brazil recorded the highest inflation rate last September, compared to the same month in 2023 at 4.4 percent, followed by India with 4.2 percent, the United Kingdom with 2.6 percent, Japan with 2.5 percent, the United States with 2.4 percent, and Germany and South Korea with 1.6 percent each.

The Muscat-based Center is the official body accredited for data, information and statistics related to the GCC countries, in addition to enhancing the work of national statistical centers and planning agencies in member states.

News watch

TEHRAN: Iranian President Dr. Masoud Pezeshkian received credentials of Kuwait's Ambassador to the country Dr. Meshal Al-Mansour on Tuesday.

Kuwait's Embassy in Tehran said that Ambassador Al-Mansour conveyed greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah to President Pezeshkian and best wishes of the friendly Iranian people of continued progress and prosperity.

Ambassador Al-Mansour highlighted Kuwait's commitment to strengthening and expanding its relations with the Islamic Republic across various fields, emphasizing the importance of continued consultation and cooperation to meet aspirations of both nations and their peoples. (KUNA)

DAMASCUS: Damascus International Airport resumed international operations on Tuesday with flights to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar as the interim administration in Syria continues to bolster ties with Gulf countries.

The first flight departed on Tuesday morning for Sharjah, UAE, while a separate aircraft arrived from Doha, the first civilian flight from Qatar in 13 years, airport officials said. (Xinhua)

7 126 perish as powerful quake strikes Western China near Mount Everest

8 KFH introduces new services on KFHonline



8 Zain strategic partner of the Ya Hala Shopping Festival

11 Zendaya sparks engagement rumors at Globes



KUNA photo
Amiri Diwan Minister signs the condolence book at the US Embassy following the passing of former US President Carter. — See Page 2

Prayer Timings

Fajr	05:19	Asr	14:46
Sunrise ..	06:43	Maghrib ..	17:05
Zohr	11:54	Isha	18:27

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Rather cold to mild and cloudy and partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times southeasterly wind changing to northwesterly wind, with speed of 12-45 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times.

Weather

By Night: Cold and cloudy to partly cloudy with light to moderate northwesterly wind to variable wind, with speed of 08-38 km/h with a chance for light fog forming over some areas.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	20	13
Kuwait Airport	19	14

Abdaly	19	12
Bubyan	18	15
Jahra	20	12
Failaka Island	19	15
Salmiyah	18	15
Ahmadi	16	06
Jal Aliyah	19	13
Nuwaisib	20	14

Amiri Diwan conveys condolences of Amir, Crown Prince, PM over death of James Carter

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7, (KUNA): Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah visited the US Embassy in Kuwait on Tuesday morning, where he conveyed condolences of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown

Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the government and people of Kuwait over passing of former US President James Earl Carter Jr.

Gulf Zain 26 spells financial, cultural triumph for Kuwait

Around \$197 million generated during tournament: report

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: A report by Express Consulting and Business Management Company revealed that the "Gulf Zain 26" Championship generated a total financial return of 61 million dinars (approximately \$197 million), reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The average spending by sports fans during the championship was estimated at 118 dinars per day, amounting to 4 million dinars daily.

The championship also strengthened the bonds among Gulf nations. CEO of Express Consulting, Naif Bastaki, highlighted the event's significance in fostering unity among the peoples of the GCC.

He emphasized the need for continuous development to achieve even greater success in future editions, noting that the tournament served as a model for collaboration and excellence, leaving a lasting legacy for Kuwait and the Gulf region.

The report emphasized the integral role of sports in modern institutional business, both in the private and public sectors, highlighting their connection to customer passion and market sentiments. It noted that sports serve as a bridge to

connect communities, target market segments and influence customers on an emotional level.

The championship attracted around 400,000 spectators, with an average attendance of 26,000 per match.

These gatherings created significant impressions on Gulf audiences, showcasing the cultural richness of Kuwait and the organizational capabilities of its institutions.

The tournament's 15 matches left a lasting impression of Kuwait's potential to manage large-scale events, contributing to a positive shift in perceptions and mental imagery about the country.

While the total number of match attendees was 400,000, the number of visitors to Kuwait during the championship reached 69,000 individuals.

Many of these visitors attended multiple matches and 44.9 percent arrived via Kuwait's airports, while the rest came through land borders.

These visitors shared their experiences of Kuwait with their families and friends, estimated to be 10 close connections each, resulting in approximately 2.1 million people being directly informed about the championship's success.

This represents 3.4 percent of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) population forming a favorable impression of Kuwait's organizational capabilities.

With an average of 50 followers per person on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat and others, the championship's reach expanded to 17.1 percent of GCC citizens.

The tournament was broadcast on 10 sports channels across participating countries, with an estimated viewership of 16 million.

This extensive coverage enhanced the tournament's visibility, reaching 26.1 percent of GCC citizens. In addition to live broadcasts, the championship featured 25 dedicated sports programs, further supporting its broad appeal.

Marketing and advertising were pivotal in promoting the championship. Campaigns included street advertisements, print media, sports analysis programs, social media promotions, sports songs and various promotional offers.

The organizing committee's efforts to spread activities across key locations in Kuwait, such as airports, streets, restaurants, hotels and popular destinations like Murooj Square, Al Shaheed Park, The Avenues Mall and Souq Sharq, created a comprehensive cultural and social engagement.

These activities attracted 4.2 million beneficiaries during the championship's 15-day duration.

The report attributed the championship's success to the passion and hospitality of the Kuwaiti people, whose smiles, altruism and welcoming nature left a lasting impression on visitors.

The collaboration between state institutions and the private sector played a critical role in overcoming challenges and achieving strategic goals. Accelerated infrastructure development, such as the opening of Jaber Stadium in record time, further demonstrated Kuwait's readiness to host international events.



Naif Bastaki

Other Voices

The Apostolic Nunciature ... house of kindness, goodwill

By Nasser Al-Hajeri

The Apostolic Nunciature in Kuwait, under the leadership of Archbishop Eugene Nugent, is a beacon of faith, generosity, and goodwill in the Gulf region. As the official representative of the Holy See to Kuwait, the Nunciature embodies the values of compassion and inclusivity, fostering understanding and goodwill among diverse communities.

Archbishop Eugene Nugent, who assumed his role as Apostolic Nuncio to Kuwait in 2021, has brought a profound sense of warmth and dedication to his mission. Known for his approachable demeanor and tireless efforts, Archbishop Nugent has been instrumental in strengthening the bond between the Catholic Church and Kuwait's multicultural society. His leadership reflects the Vatican's mission to promote peace and solidarity across borders, guided by the teachings of His Holiness Pope Francis, who emphasizes the importance of compassion, dialogue, and inclusivity.

The Apostolic Nunciature in Kuwait has become a sanctuary of generosity and kindness, offering spiritual guidance and support to those in need. It plays a vital role in building bridges between people from different walks of life.

Supporting Archbishop Nugent is Fr. Fernando Frías, the Deputy Head



The Holy See flag

of Mission, who contributes to the smooth functioning of its activities. Alongside him, the entire staff of the Nunciature who work tirelessly to uphold its mission. Their collective dedication, kindness, and support have made the Nunciature a welcoming home in Kuwait.

Archbishop Nugent and the dedicated team at the Nunciature embody the spirit of service and compassion, inspiring hope and unity. Their efforts continue to strengthen relationships, foster understanding and connection, and nurture a spirit of goodwill in Kuwait. Through their work, the Apostolic Nunciature remains a cherished mission, enriching Kuwait's vibrant community and leaving a lasting impact on all who encounter its warmth and hospitality.

Procedure carried out with transparency: Al-Melhem

MoHE approves candidate list for supervisory positions

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: The acting undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) Lamia Al-Melhem has approved the list of candidates qualified to fill supervisory positions, including directors, supervisors, and department heads, following the completion of the work of the ministry's Personnel Affairs Committee.

In a statement issued by the ministry yesterday, Al-Melhem

affirmed that the selection process for these supervisory positions was carried out with full accuracy and transparency.

She explained that the Personnel Affairs Committee had made great efforts to ensure the selection of qualified candidates with the necessary experience and qualifications to meet the ministry's requirements and achieve its goals.

The ministry also coordinated with the Civil Service Commission (CSC), and the names were presented to the Employment

Affairs Department to ensure all required controls and conditions were met. This approach aims to uphold the integrity of the recruitment process and ensure equal opportunities for all applicants.

The decisions regarding these positions were made in accordance with the requirements of the applicable systems and regulations. They reflect the ministry's commitment to upholding the highest standards of integrity and transparency in appointments, in line with the directives of the Minister

of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Nader Al-Jalal.

Al-Melhem highlighted that the process of filling supervisory positions at the Ministry of Higher Education is ongoing.

She indicated that an announcement will be made in the coming days regarding the need to fill the remaining supervisory positions, based on urgent priorities, adding that this is part of the ministry's ongoing efforts to ensure work stability and promote its development.



KUNA photo

Minister of Education Sayyed Jalal Al-Tabtabaie during an inspection tour for the twelfth grade exams.

72% fall in 'deprivation' cases

MoE says marked improvement in conduct of 'Grade 12' exams

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: The Ministry of Education has announced considerable improvement in the conduct of 12th grade exams for the 2023/2024 academic year, attributing this improvement to intensive efforts, awareness campaigns and effective procedures implemented by the ministry, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The daily quoting ministry sources said only 32 cases of what the ministry called 'deprivation' were recorded on the first day, compared to previous semesters.

The ministry reported a 72 percent decrease in deprivation cases in the science section for mathematics, with only 25 cases, down from 90 last year.

In the literary section, the French language subject saw an 89 percent decrease, with just 7 cases of deprivation compared to 66 last year.

These improvements reflect the Min-

istry's commitment to enforcing regulations and educating students on the importance of maintaining integrity in the educational process.

The success of the procedures and campaigns has led to fewer violations and better control of the examination committees.

Dalal Al-Hajraf, acting general technical supervisor for mathematics, noted that the test was appropriately designed for students' abilities, with no recorded inquiries.

Meanwhile, Wafaa Al-Ali, the technical supervisor for French in the Hawalli Educational District, confirmed that the exam questions were clear and direct.

The exams in the scientific, literary, and religious education departments continued smoothly, with the Ministry ensuring a suitable atmosphere for students.

KJA members urged to settle dues, get cards

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: The Board of Directors of the Kuwait Journalists Association (KJA) has urged members to settle their financial obligations and obtain new membership cards for the year 2025, reports Al-Jarida daily.

In a statement issued by the KJA, the board reminded members that, with the end of the fiscal year 2024 and the start of the new fiscal year 2025, it is time to pay subscription fees.

It encouraged members to pay their dues promptly and collect their new membership cards for 2025.

Members are asked to visit the association's secretariat during official working hours, which is from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. Payments can be made in cash or through the KNet service.

According to Article 3 of the association's financial regulations, subscription payments for 2025 are due from January 1, 2025, with the final deadline being March 31, 2025.

The association's temporary headquarters is located at Shuwaikh Industrial, Al-Sahafa Main Street, Al-Balagh Newspaper Building, Plot No. 75, Second Floor.



KFF photo

Major General Talal Al-Roumi addressing KFF officers during the gathering.

KFF to tour buildings, facilities, wants safety rules compliance

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: Major General Talal Mohammad Al-Roumi, Chief of the General Fire Force, held a meeting with the heads and employees of the notifications department in the prevention sector, Tuesday morning.

During the meeting, Major General Al-Roumi emphasized the importance of intensifying inspection campaigns to identify and address buildings and facilities that fail to comply with safety and

fire prevention regulations. He underlined the need for strict enforcement of these requirements, highlighting that any violations that jeopardize public safety must not be overlooked.

His Excellency further directed that administrative action, including the closure of non-compliant buildings, should be taken against violators to safeguard community security and prevent potential accidents or fires.

Bidding for power stations concludes

Some vital educational zones powers withdrawn

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari/
Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: According to informed sources, several important powers were recently withdrawn from educational zones without prior notice or the issuance of an official circular. These powers include those related to security and safety, which were previously granted to directors, as well as the automatic linking of tardiness approvals to the system.

The sources indicated that this decision comes at a particularly sensitive time, as the current period marks the annual evaluation stage for employees.

They questioned how thousands of employees can be properly evaluated without accurate and comprehensive data, particularly if employee tardiness is not automatically recorded and linked to the system.

The sources stressed that the delay in integrating the fingerprint system with the necessary information systems, along with the withdrawal

of these powers from educational zones, reflects a lack of coordination and planning.

They lamented that this disruption complicates administrative tasks and increases the burdens on directors and supervisors, who were previously relying on these powers to organize work and monitor performance within the educational zones.

The sources explained that withdrawing certain powers and failing to automatically link the registration of tardiness to attendance and departure systems could delay rewards for excellent performance. This may require the issuance of a special bulletin, even if it includes amendments to existing terms or conditions.

In a related matter, the sources expressed surprise at the delay in issuing the job promotion bulletin for the 2024/2025 period and the continued absence of work teams in the educational zones.

They said the implementation of promotion decisions in the integrated systems is supposed to begin on

January 1 and continue until March 31, ahead of the new fiscal year.

The sources called on the ministry to reorganize these powers and ensure a stable and effective work environment within the educational zones.

They also stressed the importance of issuing official circulars that explain the reasons for these changes and their potential impact on the smooth functioning of work in the educational zones.

Bidding concludes: According to informed sources from the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, the bidding period for the Zour North Power Plant and Water Desalination Project, phases II and III, ended last week.

They explained that the project involves the financing, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of the Zour North Power Plant and Water Desalination Project, phases II and III. The project will have a minimum capacity of 2,700 megawatts for power generation and

a net capacity of at least 120 million imperial gallons per day for desalinated water.

The plant will operate using a combination of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and high-pressure natural gas, with gas oil serving as a backup fuel.

The project site is located in the North Zour area, adjacent to the western borders of the Zour North Power Plant Phase I, which is currently operational. It is also situated to the north of the existing Al-Zour South Plant, approximately 100 kilometers south of Kuwait City along the coast of the Arabian Gulf.

It is one of the important projects the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy is relying on to build a strategic reserve of electricity and water. This will help meet the growing demand driven by urban expansion and the steady annual increase in population. The project is part of a plan that includes seven projects that aim to provide 13,500 megawatts of capacity by 2030.



Where the rule of law prevails, and justice is accessible to all

"SHEIKH Fahad Al-Yousef, Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior, has emerged as a beacon of hope in the nation's fight against corruption and the protection of the homeland," columnist **Fakhri Hashim Al Sayed Rajab** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"His steadfast commitment to integrity and justice has positioned him as a vital figure in Kuwait's efforts to address challenges and build a sustainable future."

"Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef has boldly tackled corruption, addressing longstanding issues that have tarnished Kuwait's reputation and economy."

"His resolute actions have uncovered numerous violations threatening societal stability, demonstrating his unwavering dedication to the nation's welfare. His fight against corruption is not merely a personal mission but a call for collective action to foster transparency and uphold justice in Kuwait."

"As Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahad plays a crucial role in ensuring the safety and security of Kuwait. His strategic initiatives have strengthened the nation's crime prevention measures and enhanced public trust in security agencies."

"His vigilant oversight reflects his deep sense of responsibility to protect citizens and maintaining peace, making him a key pillar of national stability."

"Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef embodies the qualities of a leader who prioritizes the nation's interests above all else. His efforts in combating corruption, safeguarding security and promoting justice signal a brighter future for Kuwait. His patriotism and dedication serve as a powerful reminder of the values essential for national progress."

"Through his leadership, Kuwait is taking significant strides toward a vision of governance where the rule of law prevails and justice is accessible to all. Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef's legacy is one of courage, determination and hope -- a source of inspiration for generations to come."



Al-Sayed Rajab

lution through accountability and decisive action. This anecdote highlights the frustration many feel about the inefficiency in addressing basic issues, especially in a nation endowed with vast wealth.

"Despite these challenges, we must remember: 'Do not despair of the mercy of God.'" While the path to achieving transparency and resolving inefficiencies may seem arduous, prayer and perseverance remain essential tools for fostering social awareness and driving change.

"As we strive toward a brighter future, it is vital to balance material evaluations with moral considerations. Quality of life, citizen satisfaction, and alignment with global standards are metrics that cannot be confined to a price tag. Equally important is the activation of transparency to cultivate trust and enhance social awareness."

"Ultimately, progress lies in collective efforts, faith, and a commitment to transformative action. As always, God is the one we seek for help and guidance in overcoming challenges and realizing our aspirations."

"In Kuwait, an unfortunate trend has emerged where individuals, unqualified to issue fatwas (religious rulings), have taken it upon themselves to provide religious opinions that lead others astray. This growing phenomenon is concerning, particularly as it undermines the integrity of Islamic scholars and the proper guidance Muslims rely on," columnist, former MP and General Manager of Scope Satellite TV, **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) clearly warned against this in his teachings: 'Whoever gives a fatwa without knowledge, the sin is on the one who issued the fatwa'. This Hadith, narrated by Abu Dawoud and Al-Hakim on the authority of Abu Hurairah, emphasizes the severe responsibility that comes with issuing a fatwa. A fatwa is not to be issued by anyone without deep knowledge and understanding of the Islamic law."

"Sheikh Ibn Baz (may God have mercy on him) also stated: 'Issuing a fatwa without knowledge is a great evil, and it is one of the things that God has forbidden to His servants, and He has made its status higher than polytheism.' This makes it clear that unqualified fatwa issuance is a grave sin, not just an error in judgment."

"Yet, the increasing number of individuals issuing fatwas without the necessary expertise continues to rise, and often, it is driven by a desire for fame -- a dangerous and misguided ambition."

"This race to issue fatwas by those with little knowledge has led to an alarming situation where the official voice of the fatwa committee, which should represent authoritative and responsible Islamic guidance, has been drowned out by the noise of these unauthorized rulings."

"As a result, the responsible authorities in Kuwait appear to have lost their influence over religious guidance, and many individuals are left confused about who is truly qualified to issue fatwas."

"Sadly, this phenomenon extends even to mosque imams, who are appointed to lead prayers, not to issue fatwas. Some imams, fearing that admitting their lack of knowledge would be seen as a shortcoming, wrongly take it upon themselves to issue fatwas, despite lacking the necessary qualifications or insight."

"Their goal seems to be nothing more than the recognition that comes from issuing fatwas, whether correct or not. This not only misguides the community but also fosters a culture where knowledge is disregarded and public opinion is prioritized over accurate Islamic scholarship."

"This issue becomes even more pronounced against the backdrop of Kuwait's recent success in hosting the 'Gulf Cup' tournament -- a triumph that brought pride and joy to the nation. The success of the tournament demonstrated the Kuwaiti people's ability to unite and contribute to a common cause, overcoming challenges and revitalizing the spirit of the country after a long period of closure. The Amir of Kuwait, may God protect him, rightly deserves praise for his leadership, which allowed this success to unfold."

"However, amidst this national achievement, a faction with ties to the 'Muslim Brotherhood' has sought to undermine the progress by launching a campaign of fatwas aimed at asserting their control over religious discourse."

"This group, whose activities have been banned in Saudi Arabia for being a terrorist organization, continues to promote partisan agendas under the guise of religious piety. The Saudi Council of Senior Scholars has classified the Brotherhood as a group that does not represent the true path of Islam. According to the statement, their objectives are not religious but are driven by partisan politics that seek to destabilize nations, stir sedition, and disrupt societal peace."

"The question arises: Do these individuals who have been expelled from Saudi Arabia find sanctuary in Kuwait, only to continue their divisive activities under the guise of religious rulings?"

"This situation is not just concerning for Kuwait but for the broader Islamic community. It is vital that Kuwait reasserts control over the fatwa process, ensuring that religious guidance is based on knowledge and not driven by personal agendas or a thirst for fame."

"Kuwait must safeguard the integrity of its religious rulings by empowering qualified scholars and ensuring that the true voice of Islam prevails over the noise of unqualified fatwas. The need for responsible and knowledgeable religious guidance has never been more urgent. Muslims must fear God, seek knowledge, and rely on experts to guide them, as the consequences of misguided fatwas are too great to ignore."

"That said, many share valid concerns about the lack of concrete data regarding these achievements. Where are the numbers? What are the associated costs? When will these projects commence, and when will they be completed? What benefits will they yield? Without these metrics, skepticism thrives, and confidence wanes."

"One farmer humorously commented on a long-standing issue of groundwater leakage damaging farms -- a problem that persists despite its seemingly simple reso-

lution through accountability and decisive action. This anecdote highlights the frustration many feel about the inefficiency in addressing basic issues, especially in a nation endowed with vast wealth."

"Despite these challenges, we must remember: 'Do not despair of the mercy of God.'" While the path to achieving transparency and resolving inefficiencies may seem arduous, prayer and perseverance remain essential tools for fostering social awareness and driving change."

"As we strive toward a brighter future, it is vital to balance material evaluations with moral considerations. Quality of life, citizen satisfaction, and alignment with global standards are metrics that cannot be confined to a price tag. Equally important is the activation of transparency to cultivate trust and enhance social awareness."

"Ultimately, progress lies in collective efforts, faith, and a commitment to transformative action. As always, God is the one we seek for help and guidance in overcoming challenges and realizing our aspirations."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes



KUNA photo

Undersecretary of the National Guard, Lieutenant General Engineer Hashim Al-Rifaei, upon receiving the military attaché of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the country, Staff Brig. Mustafa Hassan.

KNG's Al-Rifaei meets Egyptian military attache

Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti National Guard (KNG), Lieu. Gen. Hashim Al-Rifaei received Tuesday Egypt's Military Attache to Kuwait, Staff Brig. Mustafa Hassan.

The meeting focused on ways to enhance cooperation between the National Guard and Egyptian military authorities, as well as addressing key issues of mutual interest.

In a statement, the National Guard said that Al-Rifaei conveyed greetings of the National Guard's leadership, emphasizing deep-rooted ties between Kuwait and Egypt. (KUNA)

Kuwait judiciary, counterparts in joint bid to curb cash crimes

Ways explored to boost judicial ties

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: The President of the Supreme Judicial Council and President of the Court of Cassation, Counselor Dr. Adel Boresli, held discussions with notable judicial figures, including the Vice President of the Supreme Court of Indonesia, Professor Sonar To, Jordanian Court of Cassation Judge Nahar Al-Ghazou and High Criminal Court

Judge Ali Al-Jaloudi, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

These meetings, held separately, focused on judicial and legal matters of mutual interest.

The Ministry of Justice stated that the talks occurred on the sidelines of a regional workshop organized by the Kuwait Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies.

The workshop, titled 'New Developments in Combating Money Laundering in National and Comparative Law,' will continue over two days, bringing together experts and officials to address

critical issues in financial crime prevention.

The discussions also highlighted the strong fraternal ties between Kuwait and the participating countries, exploring ways to deepen cooperation in judicial matters. The meetings aimed to strengthen and enrich collaborative efforts in the judiciary.

The talks were attended by prominent Kuwaiti judicial leaders, including the Vice President of the Court of Cassation, Counselor Saleh Al-Raqdan, the President of the Court of Appeal, Counselor Muhammad Al-Rifai and the President of the Court of First Instance, Counselor Abdul Latif Al-Thunayan.



KFF photo

One hurt in tank blast.

Fire in Shuwaikh Free Zone

Worker hurt in Amghara junkyard tank explosion

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: A tanker exploded on Sunday afternoon during maintenance work involving welding equipment in Amghara scrapyard, resulting in burns and injuries to a worker.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), when the Control Room of KFF received information about the tanker explosion, firefighters from Tahzir Fire Station rushed to the location and quickly dealt with the explosion and managed the situation. The worker who sustained burns and injuries was handed over to paramedics who referred him to the nearest hospital for treatment.

Investigations are ongoing to determine the cause of the tanker explosion.

Meanwhile, Monday evening, fire brigades from the Shuwaikh Industrial Center controlled a container fire that broke out in the free zone, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The teams acted swiftly to extinguish the blaze, ensuring that no significant injuries were reported during the incident.

Authorities are continuing their investigations to determine the cause of the fire.

Jail term overturned

Court acquits 3 Tunisians accused in terrorism plot

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

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: The Criminal Court has acquitted three Tunisian nationals who were accused of joining ISIS and planning terrorist operations in Kuwait.

During the trial, the court confronted the defendants with the charges, which they firmly denied. While their lawyer initially sought their release, the court rejected the request and continued their detention until the case was resolved.

At today's hearing, the three defendants reiterated their denial of all allegations, emphasizing that they were employed by a delivery company and had no ties to ISIS or terrorist activities.

'Liquor peddler' acquitted: The Misdemeanor Court of Cassation has overturned the imprisonment of one of the most prominent importers of alcoholic beverages, known by the nickname "Assas Al-Ghals." Despite his earlier confession, the court acquitted him, deeming his confession invalid and inconsistent with the facts and reality of the case.

The defendant's lawyer, An'am Haidar, successfully argued before the court that her client was not present at the crime scene and was not caught red-handed engaging in any transaction. This lack of direct involvement, she stated, undermined any connection between her client and the charges of possessing alcohol with intent to trade.

The Public Prosecution had accused the defendant of possessing alcohol for the purposes of trade and promotion, as specified in the case report. However, discrepancies in the investigation and the absence of tangible evidence at the scene ultimately led to the court's decision to acquit the defendant.

Two officers injured in film-style long distance chase of drunkard

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: An intoxicated armed man was arrested after a hot pursuit that lasted from Salwa to Al-Julai'a and culminated in his capture by security personnel in Abu Al-Hasaniya. During the pursuit, he collided with two patrol cars, damaging one of them, and injured two Hawally rescue officers. The suspect was carrying a firearm, which was seized, and a liquor bottle. He has been referred to the Public Prosecution on multiple charges, including possession of a firearm, resisting arrest, attempting to flee, driving under the influence, and damaging state property, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to the initial investigations, the man was not in control of

his actions because he was highly intoxicated, possibly due to narcotics, which are being examined by forensic authorities.

When the Operations Room of the Ministry of Interior received information about a person driving an American vehicle at high speed and in an erratic manner in Salwa, security personnel rushed to the location and attempted to arrest him, but he fled, which resulted in a chase that went through Julai'a and eventually he was cornered in Abu Al-Hasaniya, after all escape routes were blocked, and his car was damaged.

A security source said the two injured rescue officers were treated and discharged from the hospital.



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Egyptian Coptic Church in Kuwait celebrates Christmas

Spirit of joy and reverence mark special occasion

By Bassam Al-Qassas
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: The Egyptian Coptic Church in Kuwait celebrated Christmas in a spirit of joy and reverence at the St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church.

The cathedral was filled with the sounds of Christmas hymns, which created a festive atmosphere. It was beautifully decorated with vibrant bouquets of flowers, which featured the names of Their Highnesses and prominent community members who sent their warmest greetings and expressed sentiments of love and fraternity.

During the celebration, the Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Osama Shaltout delivered a speech in which he conveyed the heartfelt appreciation of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to the priests and congregation of the Coptic Church.

The ambassador read the President's message, which stated, "I am pleased to send you my most sincere appreciation and best wishes on the occasion of Christmas. I also take this auspicious opportunity to express my hopes for continued success and prosperity. I pray the Lord Almighty will make this a joyful and blessed holiday and will bestow further progress and prosperity upon our beloved Egypt."

Ambassador Shaltout affirmed the ongoing support of the Egyptian leadership for its citizens abroad, and highlighted efforts to strengthen the fraternal ties between Egypt and the friendly State of Kuwait. He also praised the spirit of fraternity and tolerance that is evident during such occasions.

Meanwhile, Patron of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Kuwait Archbishop Anba Bishoy Bigol, in a heartfelt speech during the Christmas Mass, expressed his deep gratitude for President el-Sisi's message.

He extended his greetings to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, and His Highness the Crown Prince, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled.

Archbishop Bigol described the Kuwaiti leadership as a model of wisdom and insightful vision, and commended their efforts in promoting the values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

He said, "Kuwait, under the leadership of His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince, is entering a new era of development and growth. These achievements are a testament to the wisdom of the leadership and its forward-thinking vision, which aims to preserve the social fabric and promote human values."

In his sermon, Archbishop Bigol spoke about the concept of inner peace, and urged everyone to strive for peaceful coexistence despite the challenges around them.

He said, "Peace is an inner treasure that we must preserve. Do not let anxiety or pessimism take root in our hearts. Challenges and difficulties can serve as valuable lessons for teaching us patience and faith. Holding onto hope is the key



Top and above: Photos during the Christmas celebration of the Egyptian Coptic Church in Kuwait.

Photos by Samer Shiqer

to overcoming crises."

Archbishop Bigol thanked the security personnel who worked tirelessly to ensure the smooth and safe conduct of the celebrations. He praised their active presence, which reflects the state's commitment to protecting religious freedom and ensuring the security of all citizens and residents.

In conclusion, he wished that this joyous occasion would bring peace and prosperity to everyone.

Archbishop Bigol also extended his heartfelt thanks to all who participated in the celebration and congratulated the

church on this occasion, which embodies the spirit of love and fraternity that prevails in Kuwaiti society.

Meanwhile, Bishop Aldo Berardi, the Apostolic Vicar of Northern Arabia for the Catholic Church in Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia, said all churches in the region celebrated Christmas throughout the past two weeks.

He expressed his joy in hosting representatives from the Egyptian Embassy and other Egyptian entities to join in the Christmas celebration.

In his speech during the Holy Mass for Christmas at the

Holy Family Cathedral, Bishop Berardi said, "Christmas is a time for unity among all Christians. Through the birth of Jesus Christ, we were filled with peace - a peace we have long awaited, with hopes for the fulfillment of His promises.

We pray for peace and justice in the Middle East, and for the reunification of families who are separated. We ask for special blessings for Egypt, its diverse communities, political bodies, and leadership. We pray that the people of Egypt remain united in harmony and peace, and become a shining example of love for the world to follow."

Other Voices

Arabian horses ... and the aftermath

By Ahmed alsarraf

In ancient times, Arabs employed specific tactics when choosing horses for war. Male horses were preferred during prolonged battles for their endurance and patience, while female horses were avoided due to concerns about them being in heat, which might distract them by responding to male calls.

Conversely, during raids, female horses were chosen for their quieter nature, as they do not neigh, providing an element of surprise. Additionally, females could urinate while running, whereas males would not, making them more efficient during fast-paced attacks. These strategies formed part of their 'warcraft'.

To maintain the purity of their horse breeds, some Arabs would go to extremes, such as sewing a mare's vagina to prevent mating with other horses during campaigns.

While this practice seems harsh by modern standards, it underscored the Arabs' pride in their horses, seen as a reflection of their own dignity and honor.

This intense pride extended beyond horses; their jealousy over personal and communal honor was deeply ingrained. Enemies often exploited this by spreading rumors before invasions, claiming they in-



Ahmed alsarraf

tended to dishonor Arab women, prompting the saying, "The land, but not the honor." It emphasized the importance of preserving dignity and self-respect, even at the cost of temporary loss of land.

However, the long-term consequences of losing land often resulted in the erosion of honor itself.

In modern contexts, the dynamics of war have shifted dramatically. Israel, in its conflicts with Hamas and other groups, historically sought to limit civilian harm during military operations.

However, this approach changed significantly after the October 7 attacks. Investigations, such as one by The New York Times, revealed that Israel relaxed its rules of engagement, allowing for strikes that risked greater civilian casualties.

This included targeting Hamas members in residential areas, even when surrounded by their families and neighbors. On rare occasions, strikes were authorized that put over 100 civilians at risk to eliminate high-value targets.

A similar approach was observed during Israel's brief conflict with Hezbollah, where entire buildings were destroyed to target individual leaders.

While warnings were sometimes given to evacuate, the intensity of these actions marked a shift in military strategy, reflecting the complexities and moral challenges of modern warfare.

□ □ □

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Ministry reviewing 41 serious files

MoE closes complaints applications

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: The Ministry of Education said it will not receive applications related to the Complaints and Grievances Committee, which was formed pursuant to a ministerial decision by the Minister of Education, Jalal Al-Tabtabaei, after the end of the two-week period which was specified for receiving applications, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The daily added the committee has received 41 files which shed light on serious financial and administrative irregularities, which are now under careful review in line with the established legal frameworks.

The Ministry explained that the committee includes representatives from four different entities and is committed to ensuring justice and transparency in handling the complaints.

In addition to reviewing the grievances, the relevant sectors are also addressing other files related to employees' financial and administrative dues and legal complaints, in line with directives issued by Al-Tabtabaei for strict adher-

ence to legal systems.

The Ministry expressed appreciation for the efforts of its employees in facilitating the review of grievances and reaffirmed its commitment to implementing systems that ensure fairness and integrity across all sectors.

Minister Al-Tabtabaei has called for continuous cooperation to create a fair and transparent work environment that serves both citizens and the public interest.

The Grievances and Complaints Committee will continue its work for a three-month period, during which it will submit monthly reports and a final report at the end of its tenure. The committee has the option to request an extension if needed.



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His Highness the Amir extends appreciation to Kuwaiti people for their role in success of Gulf Cup

Reception marks recognition of collective efforts, setting stage for future sports excellence

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah extended his sincere appreciation and gratitude to the Kuwaiti people for their hospitality and good deeds towards the Gulf Cup fans that have contributed to the success of the event.

This came in a speech by His Highness the Amir during his reception to the Supreme Organizing Committee for the Gulf Cup Tuesday in the presence of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

In the speech, His Highness the Amir thanked Minister of Information and Culture, Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Chairman of the Supreme Organizing Committee for the Gulf Cup, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, President of the Kuwait Football Association, Vice Chairman of the Supreme Committee Sheikh Ahmad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, and the committee members for their efforts.

His Highness the Amir also extended appreciation to His Highness the Prime Minister and all the concerned ministers, officials and volunteers tireless efforts, which culminated in the success of this sporting event that reflected the readiness of the State of Kuwait to organize such tournaments.

His Highness the Amir congratulated Bahrain on win-



His Highness the Amir of Kuwait in a group photo following the reception of the Minister of Information, Chairman of the Supreme Organizing Committee for the Gulf Cup, President of the Kuwait Football Association, committee members, and heads of the committees responsible for organizing the tournament. Amiri Diwan photo

ning the cup, extending appreciation to all of the participating teams wishing the success in upcoming events.

Further, His Highness the Amir affirmed full support for the continuation of the development renaissance witnessed by the State of Kuwait in various fields, especially sports, and the ambition of hosting the Asian Football

Cup in the near future.

In turn, Minister of Information Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi and on behalf of the supreme committee members thanked His Highness the Amir for this reception and the kind sentiments.

"Your generous sponsorship of this sporting event was

not just a support for sports, but rather a noble message that reflects your constant keenness to consolidate the values of brotherhood and fraternity among the peoples of the Arabian Gulf and to embody Kuwait's pioneering role as a center of love and peace in the region," said Minister Al-Mutairi.

The meeting was attended by senior state officials.

Over 260 engineers present 67 projects

Kuwait University hosts 47th Engineering Design Exhibition

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: The Engineering Training and Graduates Center at the College of Engineering and Petroleum in Kuwait University has announced the organization of the 47th Engineering Design Exhibition, which will take place on Tuesday, Jan 7 and Wednesday, Jan 8 from 11:00 am to 10:00 pm, under the patronage of Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Nader Al-Jalal, with support from the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), at the northern campus of the College of Engineering and Petroleum in Sabah Al-Salem University City, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The acting Dean of the College of Engineering and Petroleum Dr. Khaled Al-Hazaa stated that the exhibition showcases students' abilities to compete with the

best ideas. It represents the culmination of their work over five academic years.

In a press statement, Dr. Al-Hazaa affirmed that the exhibition is the largest engineering gathering, supported by KFAS for many years.

In addition, Director of the Engineering Training and Graduates Center Dr. Issam Al-Raqaba announced the participation of 263 male and female engineers presenting 67 projects from various scientific departments in the College of Engineering and Petroleum.

He expressed his gratitude to KFAS for its continued involvement since the first exhibition and highlighted its primary role in providing financial support to young talents, and helping to nurture their creativity and enhance their engineering design capabilities.

Over 21,000 students enrolled in various stages

Demand for adult education and literacy programs continue to soar across Kuwait

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: Adult education and literacy programs are crucial initiatives by the Ministry of Education to improve the educational levels of citizens and expatriates, as the first center for adult education was opened in 1957 and the program continues to thrive today.

The recent ministry report revealed a high demand for these

programs; with a total of 21,929 students in various stages in six educational districts — 12,571 males and 9,358 females. Out of these; 1,216 students are enrolled in literacy programs, with ages ranging from 15 to 60. Among the students; 16,888 are citizens and 5,041 are expatriates, including 594 in literacy programs.

The districts ranked by total student numbers are as follows: Ahmadi (5,756); Jahra (5,250); Farwaniya (4,925); Mubarak Al-

Kabeer (2,806); Capital (1,943) and Hawally (1,249).

In literacy programs, Ahmadi leads with 383 students; followed by Farwaniya with 357, Jahra with 272, Mubarak Al-Kabeer with 112, Capital with 50 and Hawally with 42.

For the intermediate stage, Ahmadi again tops the list with 901 students, followed by Jahra with 862, Farwaniya with 718, Mubarak Al-Kabeer with 406, Capital with 273 and Hawally

with 233.

In the secondary stage; Ahmadi leads with 4,102 students; followed by Jahra with 3,546; Farwaniya with 3,695; Mubarak Al-Kabeer with 2,288; Capital with 1,356 and Hawally with 974.

In evening religious education, Jahra ranks first with 570 students, followed by Ahmadi with 370, Capital with 264 and Farwaniya with 155; while Hawally and Mubarak Al-Kabeer have no registration in this program.

Municipality extends deadline for cultural center project proposals to March 31, 2025

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: According to informed sources, the Projects Sector of Kuwait Municipality has extended the deadline for companies that received the conditions booklet for the cultural and educational entertainment center project within the

Abdullah Al-Ahmad Street project for an additional three months to submit their offers to implement the project.

They explained that the extension will end on March 31, 2025. Three companies are qualified for the project, and the extension was granted based on their request for more time to review the conditions booklet and

implementation standards to prepare their proposals accordingly.

The municipality has adopted three design alternatives for the project and developed the best one while ensuring it meets the standards of the Green Buildings Certificate (GSAS), with four stars in design and construction, and a gold rating for operations.

Continued from Page 1

Mohammed Shia

Unfortunately, this potential has not been fully realized in recent decades, as the country has struggled to harness its resources in a way that could have transformed it into a leading industrial and agricultural power in the region.

Since 1958, Iraq has been plagued by repressive, totalitarian rule. In the two decades following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, the country experienced huge unrest, much of it instigated by Tehran in pursuit of its strategic goal of "exporting its revolution".

However, after the major changes in the region and the great efforts of Iraqi Prime Minister Dr. Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, it has become imperative for the Gulf states to re-direct their focus to Iraq. It is now important to take serious steps to help liberate Iraq from Iranian influence by prioritizing investments in the country. Such investments would not only serve as a catalyst for attracting millions of Iraqis but also encourage greater regional cooperation and openness with neighboring countries.

The Gulf states must assist the Iraqi government in dismantling the militias that represent a minefield for the country's stability. These militias, which have long controlled Iraq's wealth, have contributed to the nation's drift toward failure, as they have exploited these resources to further the interests of the mullahs' regime in Tehran.

It is important to realize that the greatest threat to the region stems from a misguided theory that was set in motion in 1980, when the Iranian regime launched a war against Mesopotamia (Iraq) with the goal of "exporting its revolution". This strategy capitalized on sowing sectarian strife, particularly around sacred sites associated with one of the sects. As a result, the Iranian regime engaged in sectarian crimes that exacerbated tensions within Iraqi society, later using these divisions as a foundation to build and empower its militias.

As the saying goes, "one hand does not clap," meaning that the Iraqi Prime Minister cannot face the storm alone, no matter how diplomatic or shrewd he may be, unless he has the support of Arab economic power behind him. This support is necessary and can be found in the Gulf states, which must play their part. In fact, this is not only a necessity for Iraq's development but also for the Gulf states themselves.

The GCC countries need economic influence to expand their international investment zones. By opening up to Iraq, the Gulf states could help create a regional market akin to the European Common Market, potentially even more powerful due to the strategic advantages the region offers.

The stability of Iraq is directly linked to the stability of the entire region. With a capable prime minister like Mohammed Shia al-Sudani at the helm, the future holds promise, provided there is a genuine Gulf commitment to breaking free from the cycle of anxiety that has dominated the region since 1979.

Kuwait explores

Al-Fassam emphasized that Kuwait is pursuing financial reforms aimed at enhancing government efficiency, fostering private sector growth, attracting investments, creating job opportunities, diversifying income sources, and ensuring tax equity.

However, introducing taxes on Kuwaiti citizens or local businesses is considered unlikely "at present." Instead, the government is exploring alternative measures, including higher fees for expatriates and visitors, such as residency and service charges, to strengthen the state budget and support fiscal reforms.

This tax initiative signals Kuwait's strategic shift toward diversifying revenue streams and reducing dependence on oil, while navigating the challenges of implementing equitable and sustainable economic policies.

Early estimates suggest that about 300 multinational groups operating in Kuwait will fall under the new tax regime.

The tax, formalized under Decree No. 157 of 2024 issued on December 30, imposes a supplementary local minimum tax of no less than 15 percent on multinational corporations operating across multiple countries or jurisdictions. This measure is part of Kuwait's efforts to align with global tax standards and improve fiscal sustainability.

While Kuwait currently imposes income tax on foreign companies, extending this policy to local companies remains a contentious issue.

Economic sources suggest that the temporary absence of the National Assembly presents an opportunity to pass long-delayed economic reforms, previously blocked due to political and electoral considerations.

No HMPV

The virus has a short incubation period and typically resolves within a week, posing minimal public health risks.

Dr. Al-Hujailan also noted that HMPV transmission, primarily through respiratory secretions, is less contagious than COVID-19. He highlighted that rising HMPV cases in China are unsurprising, as the country's influenza infection rates are four times higher than Kuwait's.

While there is no approved treatment for HMPV, Dr. Al-Hujailan noted that international health organizations have been working on vaccines since 2019.

Regarding influenza, he elaborated on its three types:

■ **Type A:** The most dangerous and widespread, and the target of vaccines.

■ **Type B:** Less severe and with lower transmission rates.

■ **Type C:** The least severe and least common of the three.

Both experts reassured the public that Kuwait remains vigilant and well-prepared to manage seasonal respiratory illnesses.

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French President calls for strong Europe

Macron affirms Trump a 'solid ally,' urges Ukraine realism on territory

PARIS, Jan 7, (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron said his country was a "solid ally" of President-elect Donald Trump as he outlined his vision for global diplomacy in 2025, while warning that France could lose the incoming U.S. leader's respect by being "weak and defeatist."

"Donald Trump knows that he has a solid ally in France, an ally he does not underestimate, one who believes in Europe and carries a lucid ambition for the transatlantic relationship," Macron said in a New Year's speech at the Elysee Palace, emphasizing France's commitment to fostering cooperation while urging European nations to fortify their unity and resilience.

Last month, Trump visited Paris for the grand reopening of Notre Dame Cathedral, an event that underscored the enduring ties between France and the United States.

"If we decide to be weak and defeatist, there is little chance we will be respected by the United States under President Trump," Macron warned.

The speech, delivered against a backdrop of geopolitical turmoil, laid out France's foreign policy priorities, spanning the Ukraine war, European defense, and the Middle East.

Even as Macron expressed openness to Trump, he delivered pointed criticism of tech mogul Elon Musk, a known Trump ally, for promoting what he described as a "new reactionary international" movement through his social media platform, X.

Without naming Musk directly, Macron referenced his alleged support for Germany's far-right AfD party and his increasing interference in European elections.



French President Emmanuel Macron delivers his speech to French ambassadors posted around the world, Monday, Jan. 6, 2025 at the Elysee Palace in Paris. (AP)

"Who could have imagined, 10 years ago, that the owner of one of the world's largest social networks would intervene directly in elections, including in Germany?" Macron said. He warned of the risks posed by unchecked power in the hands of tech billionaires and the destabilizing impact they could have on democratic institutions.

Macron framed Musk's influence as a challenge to Europe's democratic values, reinforcing the need for European unity and resilience against external disruptions.

Addressing the grinding war in Ukraine, Macron stressed the need for "realistic discussions on territorial questions," adding, "such negotiations can only be conducted by Ukrainians themselves."

He called on the United States to "help change the nature of the situation and convince Russia to come to

the negotiating table," while underscoring Europe's pivotal role. "The Europeans will have to construct security guarantees for Ukraine, which will be primarily their responsibility," he said.

Macron countered Trump's campaign pledge for an express settlement, warning, "There is no quick and easy solution in Ukraine." He also highlighted the stakes for the United States, stating, "The new American president himself knows the United States has no chance of winning anything if Ukraine loses."

The French president further cautioned against compromise due to fatigue. "The credibility of the West will be shattered if we compromise because of fatigue," he asserted, adding that a capitulation of Ukraine would be catastrophic not just for Europe, but for U.S. credibility as well.

PM defends record amid baseless accusations

Starmer slams 'lies and misinformation' from Musk undermining UK democracy

LONDON, Jan 7, (AP) — British Prime Minister Keir Starmer condemned "lies and misinformation" that he said are undermining U.K. democracy, in response to a barrage of attacks on his government from Elon Musk.

The billionaire Tesla CEO has taken an intense and erratic interest in British politics since the center-left Labour Party was elected in July. Musk has used his social network, X, to call for a new election and demand Starmer be imprisoned. On Monday he posted an online poll for his 210 million followers on the proposition: "America should liberate the people of Britain from their tyrannical government."

Asked about Musk's comments during a question session at a hospital near London, Starmer criticized "those that are spreading lies and misinformation as far and as wide as possible," particularly opposition Conservative politicians in Britain who have echoed some of Musk's claims.

Musk often posts on X about the U.K., retweeting criticism of Starmer and the hashtag TwoTierKeir -- shorthand for an unsubstantiated claim that Britain has "two-tier policing" with far-right protesters treated more harshly than pro-Palestinian or Black Lives Matter demonstrators. During summer anti-immigrant violence across the U.K. he tweeted that "civil war is inevitable."

Recently Musk has focused on child sexual abuse, particularly a series of cases that rocked northern England towns in which groups of men, largely from Pakistani backgrounds, were tried for grooming and abusing dozens of girls. The cases have been used by far-right activists to link child abuse to immi-



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer gives a speech on reducing NHS wait times as he visits a healthcare provider in Surrey, England, Monday, Jan. 6, 2025. (AP)

gration, and to accuse politicians of covering up the "grooming gangs" out of a fear of appearing racist.

Musk has posted a demand for a new public inquiry into the cases. A huge, seven-year inquiry was held under the previous Conservative government, though many of the 20 recommendations it made in 2022 - including compensation for abuse victims - have yet to be implemented. Starmer's government said it would act on them as quickly as possible.

Musk also has accused Starmer of failing to bring perpetrators to justice when he was England's director of public prosecutions between 2008 and 2013.

Starmer defended his record as chief prosecutor, saying he had reopened closed cases and "changed the whole prosecution approach" to child sexual exploitation.

He also condemned language used by Musk about Jess Phillips,

a government minister responsible for combating violence against women and girls. Musk called Phillips a "rape genocide apologist" and said she deserved to be in prison.

"When the poison of the far-right leads to serious threats to Jess Phillips and others, then in my book, a line has been crossed," Starmer said. "I enjoy the cut and thrust of politics, the robust debate that we must have, but that's got to be based on facts and truth, not on lies."

Musk has also called for the release of Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, a far-right activist who goes by the name Tommy Robinson and is serving a prison sentence for contempt of court.

Starmer said people "cheerleading Tommy Robinson ... are trying to get some vicarious thrill from street violence that people like Tommy Robinson promote."

Canada's Liberals look for new prime minister as Trump threatens tariffs and election looms

Trudeau announces resignation after nearly a decade as PM

TORONTO, Jan 7, (AP) — Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced his resignation after facing an increasing loss of support both within his party and in the country.

Now Trudeau's Liberal Party must find a new leader while dealing with U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's threats to impose steep tariffs on Canadian goods and with Canada's election just months away.

Trudeau said Monday he plans to stay on as prime minister until a new party leader is chosen.

He could not recover after Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, long one of his most powerful and loyal ministers, resigned from the Cabinet last month.

Trudeau, the 53-year-old scion of Pierre Trudeau, one of Canada's most famous prime ministers, became deeply unpopular with voters over a range of issues, including the soaring cost of food and housing as well as surging immigration.

A new Canadian leader is unlikely to be named before Trump is inaugurated on Jan. 20.

The political upheaval comes at a difficult moment for Canada. Trump keeps calling Canada the 51st state and has threatened to impose 25% tariffs on all Canadian goods if the government does not stem what Trump calls a flow of migrants and drugs into the U.S. - even though far fewer of them cross the border from Canada than from Mexico, which Trump has also threatened with tariffs.

Trump also remains preoccupied with the U.S. trade deficit with Canada, erroneously calling it a subsidy. Canada's ambassador to Washington, Kirsten Hillman, has said the U.S. had a \$75 billion trade deficit with Canada last year. But she noted that a third of what Canada sells to the U.S. are energy exports and that there is a deficit when oil prices are high.

If Trump applies tariffs, a trade war looms. Canada has vowed to retaliate.

The Liberals need to elect a new leader before Parliament resumes March 24 because all three opposition parties say they will bring down the Liberal government in a



Canada Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks with media outside Rideau Cottage, Monday, Jan. 6, 2025 in Ottawa. (AP)

no-confidence vote at the first opportunity, which would trigger an election. The new leader might not be prime minister for long.

A spring election would very likely favor the opposing Conservative Party.

It's not often that central bank governors get compared to rock stars. But Mark Carney, the former head of the Bank of Canada, was considered just that in 2012 when

he was named the first foreigner to serve as governor of the Bank of England since it was founded in 1694. The appointment of a Canadian won bipartisan praise in Britain after Canada recovered faster than many other countries from the 2008 financial crisis. He gained a reputation along the way as a tough regulator.

Few people in the world have Carney's qualifications. He is a highly educated economist with Wall Street expe-

rience who is widely credited with helping Canada dodge the worst of the 2008 global economic crisis and helping the U.K. manage Brexit. Carney has long been interested in entering politics and becoming prime minister but lacks political experience.

Freeland is also a front-runner. Trudeau told Freeland last month he no longer wanted her to serve as finance minister but that she could remain deputy prime minister and the point person for U.S.-Canada relations. An official close to Freeland said Freeland couldn't continue serving as a minister knowing she no longer enjoyed Trudeau's confidence. The official spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak publicly on the matter. The person added it's far too early to make declarations but said Freeland would talk to her colleagues this week and discuss next steps.

After she resigned, Trump called Freeland "totally toxic" and "not at all conducive to making deals." Freeland is many things that would seem to irritate Trump: a liberal Canadian former journalist. She is a globalist who sits on the board of the World Economic Forum. Freeland, who is of Ukrainian heritage, also has been a staunch supporter of Ukraine in its war against Russia.

Another possible candidate is the new finance minister, Dominic LeBlanc. The former public safety minister, and a close friend of Trudeau, LeBlanc recently joined the prime minister at a dinner with Trump at Mar-a-Lago. LeBlanc was Trudeau's babysitter when Trudeau was a child.

Recent polls suggest the Liberals' chances of winning the next election look slim. In the latest poll by Nanos, the Liberals trail the opposition Conservatives 47% to 21%.

"Trudeau's announcement might help the Liberals in the polls in the short run and, once a new leader is selected, things could improve further at least for a little while but that would not be so hard because, right now, they're so low in the polls," said Daniel Béland, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal.

America

Biden to honor Native tribes: President Joe Biden is establishing two new national monuments in California that will honor Native American tribes, the White House confirmed Tuesday, as Biden seeks to conserve at least 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030 through his "America the Beautiful" initiative.

Proclamations set to be signed Tuesday will create the Chuckwalla National Monument in Southern California near Joshua Tree National Park and the Sattifla National Monument in Northern California. The declarations bar drilling and mining and other development on the 624,000-acre (2,400-square-kilometer) Chuckwalla site and roughly 225,000 acres (800 square kilometers) near the Oregon border in Northern California.

The new monuments will protect clean water for communities, honor areas of cultural significance to tribal nations and Indigenous peoples, and enhance access to nature, the White House said.

Biden, who has two weeks left in office, is set to visit Los Angeles and the Eastern Coachella Valley on Tuesday after meeting Monday with the families of the victims in the New Year's attack in New Orleans. (AP)

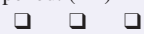


Subway suspect set to be arraigned: The man accused of burning a sleeping woman to death inside a New York City subway train is set to be arraigned Tuesday on murder and arson charges.

Sebastian Zapeta, 33, will appear in Brooklyn court in connection with the killing of Debrina Kawam, 57.

Prosecutors say Zapeta lit the New Jersey native on fire on a stopped F train at Brooklyn's Coney Island station on Dec. 22. Zapeta then fanned the flames with a shirt before sitting on platform bench and watching as Kawam burned, they allege.

Prosecutors say Zapeta confirmed to police he was the man in surveillance photos and videos of the fire but said he drinks a lot of alcohol and did not recall what happened. (AP)



Fireworks explosion raises toll to 4: A 3-year-old boy who died Monday was the fourth person to succumb to injuries from a massive explosion of fireworks on New Year's Eve at a Honolulu home, and a doctor said six others faced long recoveries in Arizona, where they were sent to be treated for severe burns. The blast also killed three women and injured more than 20 people, many of whom have burns over most of their bodies.

The Honolulu medical examiner identified the toddler as Cassius Ramos-Benigno. The cause and manner of death were listed as pending.

After the disaster, Hawaii's leaders intensified their oft-repeated calls to crack down on the state's vast illegal fireworks trade with stepped-up enforcement and greater penalties. (AP)



In this April 17, 2019 photo, reviewed by U.S. military officials, the control tower is seen through the razor wire inside the Camp VI detention facility in Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba. (AP)

US transfers 11 Guantanamo detainees to Yemen after more than two decades

WASHINGTON, Jan 7, (AP) — The Pentagon said Monday it had transferred 11 Yemeni men to Oman this week after holding them for more than two decades without charge at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The transfer was the latest and biggest push by the Biden administration in its final weeks to clear Guantanamo of the last remaining detainees there who were never charged with a crime.

The latest release brings the total number of men detained at Guantanamo to 15. That's the fewest since 2002, when President George W. Bush's administration turned Guantanamo into a detention site for the mostly Muslim men taken into custody around the world in what the U.S.

called its "war on terror." The U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and military and covert operations elsewhere followed the Sept. 11, 2001, al-Qaida attacks.

The men in the latest transfer included Shaqawi al-Hajj, who had undergone repeated hunger strikes and hospitalizations at Guantanamo to protest his 21 years in prison, preceded by two years of detention and torture in CIA custody, according to the U.S.-based Center for Constitutional Rights.

Rights groups and some lawmakers have pushed successive U.S. administrations to close Guantanamo or, failing that, release all those detainees never charged with a crime. Guantanamo held about 800 detainees at its peak.

Europe

Dozens rescued from floods in UK: Dozens of people were rescued Monday from flooded homes and stranded cars as a soggy and cold spell continued to disrupt life across parts of the U.K. and more wintry weather was expected.

Hundreds of schools were closed for the first day of classes of 2025, trains were halted and commuters experienced headaches as sections of highways and major roads were closed from high water and snow that made driving hazardous.

Much of the U.K. has been hit by strong winds and periods of precipitation that struck before New Year's Day and snuffed out several fireworks displays and other celebrations. Several communities have faced significant flooding since the start of the year.

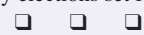
Warnings that flooding was expected were issued in nearly 200 places in England by late Monday afternoon. Several train lines were shut down or experiencing delays due to floodwaters or trees that had fallen on tracks. (AP)



Norwegian PM concern over Musk: Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store has expressed concern over the potential influence of billionaire Elon Musk on democratic processes, criticizing his involvement in the internal affairs of other nations.

In an interview with the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) on Monday, Store said, "I find it concerning that a man with enormous access to social media and significant financial resources intervenes so directly in the internal affairs of other countries. That is not how things should be between democracies and allies."

Store made the comments during the political program Politisk kvarter in response to a question about concerns Musk might interfere in Norwegian parliamentary elections set for September. (Xinhua)



French police arrest 3 Algerians: Police in France have arrested three Algerian men described by authorities as social media influencers accused of posting videos inciting violence, against a backdrop of soured relations between Paris and its former colony in North Africa.

French Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau announced the latest arrest Sunday evening - the third in as many days. A French media report that the minister attached to his post on X said the influencer posted a video to his 138,000 followers on TikTok that French authorities deemed anti-Semitic.

The arrest in Montpellier, southern France, and two others in the Alpine city of Grenoble and the western port city of Brest come amid renewed turbulence in the often complicated relationship between France and Algeria, which shook off French rule in 1962 after a brutal war. (AP)

126 perish as powerful quake strikes Western China near Mount Everest



Rescuers treat the injured in Changsuo Township of Dingri County in Xigaze, southwest China's Xizang Autonomous Region, Jan. 7, 2025. (Xinhua)



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, rescue workers search for survivors in the aftermath of an earthquake in Changsuo Township of Dingri in Xigaze, southwestern China's Tibet Autonomous Region on Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025. (Xinhua via AP)



Nepalese people who rushed out of their homes after experiencing an earthquake stand amidst construction material in Kathmandu, Nepal, Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025. (AP)

BEIJING, Jan 7, (AP) — A strong earthquake shook a high-altitude region of western China and areas of Nepal on Tuesday, damaging hundreds of houses, littering streets with rubble and killing at least 126 people in Tibet. Many others were trapped as dozens of aftershocks shook the remote region.

Rescue workers climbed mounds of broken bricks, some using ladders in heavily damaged villages, as they searched for survivors. Videos posted by China's Ministry of Emergency Management showed two people being carried on stretchers by workers treading over the debris from collapsed homes. At least 188 people were injured in Tibet on the Chinese side of the border, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

More than 1,000 homes were damaged in the barren and sparsely populated region, state broadcaster CCTV reported. In video posted by the broadcaster, building debris littered streets and crushed cars.

People in northeastern Nepal strongly felt the earthquake, but there were no initial reports of injuries or damage, according to the country's National Emergency Operation Center. The area around Mount Everest, about 75 kilometers (50 miles) southwest of the epicenter, was empty in the depth of winter when even some residents move away to escape the cold.

The quake woke up residents in Nepal's capital of Kathmandu - about 230 kilometers (140 miles) from the epicenter - and sent them running into the streets.

Damage

The U.S. Geological Survey said the earthquake measured magnitude 7.1 and was relatively shallow at a depth of about 10 kilometers (6 miles). China's Earthquake Networks Center recorded the magnitude as 6.8. Shallow earthquakes often cause more damage.

The epicenter was in Tibet's Tingri county, where the India and Eurasia plates grind against each other and can cause earthquakes strong enough to change the heights of some of the world's tallest peaks in the Himalayan mountains.

Tibet is part of China, but many Tibetans' loyalties lie with the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader who claims to have lived in exile in India since a failed anti-Chinese uprising in 1959. Western governments and human rights organizations have repeatedly accused the Chinese government of abuses in Tibet, where it has cracked down on dissent while investing heavily in economic development. There have been 10 earthquakes of at least magnitude 6 in the area where Tuesday's quake hit over the past century, the USGS said.

About 150 aftershocks were recorded in the nine hours after the earthquake, and the Mount Everest scenic area on the Chinese side was closed.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping called for all-out efforts to rescue people, minimize casualties and resettle those whose homes were damaged. More than 3,000 rescuers were deployed, CCTV said.

Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing was dispatched to the area to guide the work, and the government announced the allocation of 100 million yuan (\$13.6 million) for disaster relief.

About 6,900 people live in three townships and 27 villages within 20 kilometers (12.5 miles) of the epicenter on the Chinese side, state media said. The average altitude in the area is about 4,200 meters (13,800 feet), the Chinese earthquake center said in a social media post. On the southwest edge of Kathmandu, a video showed water spilling out into the street from a pond in a courtyard with a small temple.

"It is a big earthquake," a woman can be heard saying. "People are all shaking."

Military equipment, tech transfer on cards

Indonesia, Japan to restart naval development

JAKARTA, Jan 7, (AP) — Indonesia's government said it agreed with Japan on Tuesday to resume talks on the joint development of naval vessels that have stalled in recent years.

Visiting Japanese Defense Minister Gen. Nakatani discussed ways to deepen a defense partnership with his Indonesian counterpart, Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin, in a meeting Tuesday and agreed to continue negotiations on joint development of naval ships and other military equipment and on technology transfer, Defense Ministry spokesperson Brig. Gen. Frega Wenas said.

"In principle, both defense ministers welcomed cooperation on promoting military equipment," Wenas said. "Of course, it needs to be explored further where the joint development would occur and whether it would involve ships or other defense equipment."

Japan is unable to export finished frigates or submarines under its current guidelines on transfer of defense equipment and technology, and it is believed that joint development is the most feasible way to make transfers.

Japanese media said Nakatani, who arrived in Jakarta on Sunday for an Indonesia-Japan defense ministerial meeting, would present a proposal for joint development of destroyers that stalled in recent years.

Frigates

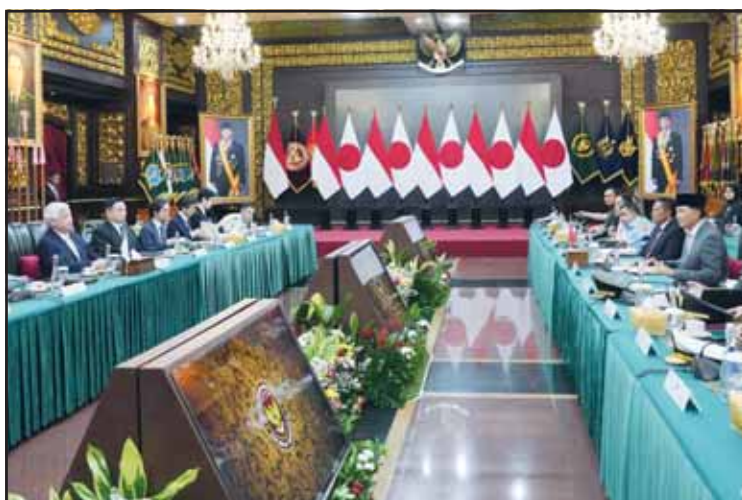
The Japanese government is envisioning frigates based on its Monogami class design, in which President Prabowo Subianto earlier showed interest when he was defense minister. The ships can be operated by a crew of about 90, half the number of conventional destroyers.

However, negotiations stalled under former President Joko Widodo as the Indonesian government invested huge amounts in the relocation of its capital, Japan's Kyodo News agency reported.

Tokyo has also proposed joint development of Monogami class frigates with Australia and Germany, and Canberra is expected to make a final decision on the partnership in the second half of this year. Nakatani declined to comment to the media after his meeting with Sjamsoeddin. He said in a statement ahead of the talks that he hoped to deepen defense engagement with Southeast Asia's largest economy.

"Southeast Asian countries are in a strategically important region and occupy key points on our sea lanes," Nakatani said. "I would like to take this visit as an opportunity to further develop our cooperative relationship with Indonesia."

Japan's Defense Ministry said in a statement Tuesday that the two ministers agreed to establish consultations on mutual maritime security, including defense equipment and technology cooperation. Defense is considered to be one of Subianto's priorities. He wants to strengthen the military by buying submarines, frigates and fighter jets and plans to increase defense cooperation with other countries.



Japan's Defense Minister Gen. Nakatani, left, attends a bilateral meeting with his Indonesian counterpart Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin, right, in Jakarta, Indonesia, Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025. (AP)

Africa

Ghana's Mahama set for 3rd presidency: John Mahama will be sworn in on Tuesday as Ghana's president for the third time, as the country faces its worst economic crisis in a generation.

Mahama, the opposition leader who started his political career as the communications minister, won the presidential election late last year after pledging to tackle the economic crisis, corruption and unemployment.

Mahama, 65, who was previously Ghana's president between July 2012 and January 2017, will replace current President Nana Akufo-Addo. Mahama was first sworn in as president when President John Evans Atta Mills died in July 2012. He served the rest of that term and then won an election in 2012.

Mahama promised to "reset" the country on various fronts during a campaign that prioritized the economy and largely appealed to young Ghanaians who saw the vote as a way out of the country's economic crisis.

The election in December for both president and members of parliament was held against the backdrop of the country's worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation and was seen as a litmus test for democracy in a region shaken by extremist violence and coups. West Africa's regional bloc of ECOWAS said the election was generally peaceful, a continuing trend in Ghana. (AP)

Macron comment sparks Chad concern: Chad's Foreign Minister Abderraman Koullamallah on Monday expressed "deep concern" over French president Emmanuel Macron's contemptuous comment about Africa.

The French president said African leaders had "forgotten to say thank you" to France for helping to combat extremist insurgencies in the Sahel.

"None of them would have a sovereign state if the French army had not deployed in this region," Macron said. Chad's top diplomat said in a statement that such remarks reflected "a contemptuous attitude" toward Africa and Africans. "French leaders must learn to respect the African people and recognize the value of their sacrifices," Koullamallah said.

He said France did not build the Chadian army and that France had never contributed to its structural development. The Chadian people aspire to full sovereignty and true independence. French troops are in the process of pulling out of Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire and Chad, having already withdrawn from Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. (Xinhua)

Guinea's junta faces protests: Parts of Guinea's capital were on lockdown as civil society and opposition groups protested the ruling junta's missed deadline to launch a return to democracy, with the U.S. calling for clear timelines to hold long-delayed elections.

Guinea is one of several West African countries where the military has taken power and delayed a return to civilian rule. Col. Mamadi Doumbouya, the junta leader in power since 2021, agreed in 2022 to launch a democratic transition after a Dec. 31, 2024, deadline.

However, the expiration of that deadline came with more promises. In his New Year's message, Doumbouya said without committing to a date that a decree for a constitutional referendum will be signed to launch the democratic process. Activists and opposition groups condemned the announcement as a ploy to prolong the military rule. (AP)

Venezuela opposition leader who claims to have defeated Maduro meets US president

CARACAS, Jan 7, (AP) — The Venezuelan opposition leader who claims to have defeated President Nicolás Maduro in last year's presidential election met Monday with U.S. President Joe Biden just days ahead of Maduro's contested inauguration to a third term.

Biden's White House meeting with Edmundo González, who represented Venezuela's main opposition coalition in the July presidential election, took place as the retired diplomat tries to rally support for his effort to get Maduro out of office by Friday, when by law, the South American country's next presidential term begins.

Biden and González agreed that González's "campaign victory should be honored through a peaceful transfer back to democratic rule," according to a White House readout of the meeting. Both men also expressed serious concerns regarding "Maduro and his representatives' unacceptable and indiscriminate use of repression against peaceful protesters, democracy activists, and civil society."

González began a tour of the Americas on Saturday with stops in Argentina and Uruguay. His campaign called on Venezuelans living in the Washington area to gather with him Monday outside the offices of the Organization of American States.

Freezing

Carolina di Martino Popovich waved and cheered in freezing temperatures outside the OAS, accompanied by her daughters Isabella, 1, and Camila, 6, and her mother Petra Gambor. Di Martino Popovich and Gambor are longtime immigrants from Venezuela.

"We drove 10 hours in the snowstorm from Boston, and we made it," di Martino Popovich said. "That is how much he means to us. We couldn't vote in Venezuela, but we are here to recognize him as our president."

Meanwhile, Maduro already has received an invitation from the National Assembly to be sworn in for a third six-year term Friday, more than five months after the National Electoral Council, stacked with ruling-party loyalists, declared him winner of the July 28 election.

More than 2,000 people, including minors, were arrested during nationwide post-election demonstrations. Opposition leaders, lawyers, activists and journalists were among those detained.

Unlike previous presidential elections, electoral authorities did not provide detailed vote counts. However, the opposition collected tally sheets from more than 80% of the nation's electronic voting machines, posted them online and said they showed González had won the election with twice as many votes as Maduro.

The U.S.-based Carter Center, which Maduro's government invited to observe the presidential election, has said the tally sheets published by the opposition are legitimate.

The U.S. and most European gov-

ernments have rejected the election's official results and consider González the legitimate winner.

"We had a long, fruitful and cordial conversation with President Biden and his team," González told reporters. "We, of course, thanked the United States government for the support it has given us in this fight for democratic recovery in Venezuela. That is a commitment that we take with us and that we will continue to follow until the last day of the president's government."

When asked on Monday about González's plans, Venezuela's Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello insulted the politician, attacked his credibility and threatened him with arrest. He also insisted that Maduro would be sworn in on Jan. 20.

"Coward," Cabello said, referring to the retired diplomat, whom he accused, without offering any proof, of being a CIA agent. "He has neither courage nor disposition... Mr. González Urrutia knows that as soon as he steps in Venezuela, he will be arrested."

González, who represented the Uni-

tary Platform coalition, left Venezuela for exile in Spain in September after a judge issued a warrant for his arrest in connection with an investigation into the publishing of the election's tally sheets. Last week, the government announced a \$100,000 reward for information on González's whereabouts.

González on Monday also met with Rep. Mike Waltz, U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's designate to be his national security adviser once he's sworn in on Jan. 20.

In recent weeks, González has vowed to travel to Venezuela to be sworn in for the presidential term, but he has not explained how he plans to return or wrest power from Maduro, whose party controls all institutions and the military.

On Sunday, González addressed Venezuela's armed forces in a social media video, reminding them that according to the constitution, he "must assume the role of commander in chief" on Friday and that they are "called to be a guarantee of sovereignty and respect for the popular will."



Edmundo Gonzalez, who represented Venezuela's main opposition coalition in the July presidential election, waves as he arrives to address a gathering of supporters outside of the Organization of American States, Monday, Jan. 6, 2025, in Washington. (AP)



Supporters of Venezuelan opposition leader Edmundo Gonzalez react as he speaks to the group outside of the Organization of American States, Monday, Jan. 6, 2025, in Washington. (AP)

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts		
SAUDI	- Tadawul	+8.60	12,113.29	PHILIPPINES	- PSEI	-79.79	6,545.38
DUBAI	- DFMGI	+23.23	5,213.93	PAKISTAN	- KSE 100	-425.68	116,074.06
JAPAN	- Nikkei 225	+776.25	40,083.30				

Business

Kuwait's largest shopping festival set to launch on January 21 and continue for 70 days

Zain strategic partner of the Ya Hala Shopping Festival

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: As part of its continued commitment to strategic partnerships with the public sector to support Kuwait's largest tourism initiatives, Zain has announced its role as a strategic partner for the Ya Hala Shopping Festival. The festival, the largest in the country's history, will run for 70 days from January 21 to March 31, offering exciting raffles and valuable prizes worth \$8 million.

The partnership was unveiled at a ceremony organized by the Permanent Committee for Celebrating National Holidays and Occasions at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center. The event was attended by the Committee Chair, H.E. Abdulrahman Bedah Al-Mutairi, Minister of Information, Culture, and State Minister for Youth Affairs; Zain Kuwait's CEO Nawaf Al-Gharabally; Dr. Nasser Muheisen, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information; Ziyad Al-Najem, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry; Faisal Al-Shaiji, Chairman of the Kuwait Shopping Festival; Fadhel Al-Dousari, the festival's CEO; and other senior leaders from both the public and private sectors.

Following the resounding success of Khaleeji Zain 26, which enriched Kuwait's tourism and economic scenes with the participation of neighboring Gulf countries, Zain's partnership with the Ya Hala Shopping Festival underscores its commitment to enhancing the private sector's role in supporting



Minister Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi recognizes Nawaf Al-Gharabally for Zain's partnership.

public-sector initiatives to drive national development projects. Zain takes pride in being one of

the foremost organizations to annually support national celebrations and festivals since 1998. This commit-

ment contributes to promoting domestic tourism, diversifying Kuwait's economy, and solidifying the country's

reputation as a leading destination for tourism, entertainment, and culture.

True to its tradition, Zain will par-

ticipate in the festival with a unique touch, offering a range of exceptional activities and events that reflect its brand values, Zain: A Wonderful World. These initiatives aim to spread joy and celebration among all members of the community throughout the festival period.

The festival boasts prizes worth \$8 million, including \$1 million in cash awards and 120 luxury cars distributed over ten raffles across ten weeks. Each raffle will feature 12 luxury cars and \$100,000 in cash, shared among 100 winners.

Over the course of 70 days, from January 21 to March 31, the Ya Hala Shopping Festival will offer promotional campaigns, discounts, and giveaways from participating entities. These include shopping malls, retail stores, cooperative societies, supermarkets, major companies, e-commerce platforms, and businesses across various sectors.

During the festival, shoppers will receive one raffle coupon for every 10 KWD spent at participating entities, qualifying them for the weekly raffles. Additionally, the festival will feature entertainment events and activities inside and outside shopping malls, including drone shows, fireworks displays, hospitality for Gulf visitors, and much more.

Boursa gains KD 400 million in market value in early '25

General index rises 13.9 points

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: The Boursa Kuwait continued its positive momentum during the first two trading sessions of 2025, marking a significant increase in market value, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The market gained over 400 million dinars, raising its total capital value to 43.976 billion dinars, up from 43.576 billion dinars in the final sessions of 2024.

This increase in market value was driven by investor optimism, largely fueled by strong expectations regarding company results for 2024.

On the second day of trading, the market saw an 81 million dinar rise in value and the general index climbed by 13.9 points, or 0.19 percent, reaching 7,430 points.

Trading volumes also saw significant activity, with 278 million shares changing hands through 15,652 transactions, amounting to a total value of 63.6 million dinars (approximately \$195.8 million).

Breaking it down by market segments, the main market index increased by 32.3 points (0.4 percent) to reach 7,024 points, with 151 million shares traded through 8,235 transactions valued at 19.8 million dinars (about \$60.9 million).

Gained

Meanwhile, the Premier Market Index gained 9.5 points (0.12 percent), reaching 7,896 points, with 127 million shares traded in 7,417 transactions, valued at 43.7 million dinars (about \$134 million). The (Main 50) index also rose by 70.4 points (1 percent) to 6,987 points, trading 111.9 million shares in 5,664 transactions, valued at 14.3 million dinars (approximately \$44 million).

Sector performance was mixed, with seven sectors showing gains, led by the insurance sector (up 1.58 percent). However, six sectors saw declines, with healthcare leading the drop (down 3.59 percent).

Among individual stocks, 57 saw price increases, with "Asas" gaining the most (up 6.20 percent). On the other hand, 54 stocks experienced declines, with "Al-Kout" leading the drop

(down 14.29 percent). A total of 18 stocks remained unchanged.

The session was marked by high activity in the "Business City" stock, which led in volume with 29.84 million shares traded, while "Baytak" led in liquidity with a value of 8.64 million dinars.

The top-performing companies included "Asas," "Al-Masakin," "Osool," and "KMEF-IC," while the companies with the biggest declines were "Al-Kout," "Imtiyazat," "Maidan," and "M Al-Aamal."

In corporate news, Boubyan Petrochemical Company signed a renewable banking facilities contract with a non-local bank worth 25 million dinars.

The facilities are intended to finance the company's general requirements, with the financial impact being determined by how much of the facilities contract is utilized.

Boubyan Petrochemical also reported a remarkable 209 percent year-on-year increase in profits for the second quarter ending October 2024, reaching 9.07 million dinars, up from 2.94 million dinars in the same period the previous year.

Workshop focuses on preventing burnout

KIBS hosts workshop on resilient leadership with Dr. M. Alsuwaidan

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: The Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies (KIBS) is constantly seeking the latest ideas that interest different sectors in Kuwait. Because of this reason, it is offering bankers and other organizations the chance to attend an interactive workshop titled Invest in Resilient Leaders: From Burnout to Balance held by Dr. Mohammad Alsuwaidan. The workshop will be held on Wednesday, February 5, 2025, at The Four Seasons from 9 AM until 12 PM.

Ms. Rana A. Al Nibari, Director General of KIBS, shared an overview of the workshop that focuses on enabling participants to detect signs of burnout in themselves and their teams, and equip them with strategies to manage stress and prevent burnout effectively. The workshop also addressed how to strengthen leadership practices to foster a culture of well-being and resilience.

Split into sessions, the workshop will focus on understanding burnout in leadership roles and identifying personal and team burnout signals and managing stress while leading effectively. The workshop also highlights leadership strategies for building resilient teams by mitigating burnout at the organizational level or how to prevent burnout in teams. The interactive experience will showcase how to build personal resilience and techniques on how to protect against and recover from burnout as it trains participants on how to create action plans to foster resilience in their teams and themselves.

Dr. Mohammad Alsuwaidan is an

Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto in Canada and a Consultant Psychiatrist, CEO, and Clinical Director at MindWell, a leading private mental health care center in Kuwait.

He completed his psychiatry residency, mood and anxiety disorders fellowship, and medical education fellowship at the University of Toronto. He also trained in mood disorders at Stanford University and Tufts University. He holds a Master of Public Health (MPH) from John Hopkins University and is a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, a Diplomate of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology and certified in public health by the National Board of Public Health Examiners in the United States.

And beyond his clinical, research, and academic activities, Dr. Alsuwaidan is a dedicated public advocate for mental health and is widely followed by global audiences on social media, podcasts, and television programs.

The Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies (KIBS) has been a key player in Kuwait's banking and financial sector for over five decades, leveraging its expertise to facilitate knowledge transfer and innovation. Its offerings have evolved to encompass a wide range of programs and services such as professional certification, executive development, training and development in various fields, assessments and tests, English language training, e-learning and publications on business and finance research.

Over 150 digital services available on application

KFH introduces new services on KFHonline

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has expanded its digital offerings by introducing new banking services on its KFHonline app. This move underscores KFH's dedication to providing customers with a seamless and secure banking experience while reinforcing its position at the forefront of digital banking innovation.

WAMD Service

Executive Manager Digital and Alternative Channels at KFH, Meshal Al-Obaid said that KFH provides a suite of digital services, including WAMD, an instant money transfer solution. Customers can utilize WAMD to request funds from a group of individuals using their phone numbers. The service facilitates real-time delivery of requests. Furthermore, customers can conveniently track the payment status of each user within the WAMD service's transaction history.

WAMD enables customers to instantly send and request money to other customers at KFH or any local bank using their mobile number. This service is free and accessible around the clock.

Al-Obaid mentioned that this service, launched in collaboration with KNET and accessible on KFHonline, underscores KFH's digital leadership. It exemplifies the bank's dedication to providing innovative digital financial solutions, including robust payment systems. This aligns with KFH's focus on enhancing its technology and delivering seamless digital experiences to customers.



Meshal Al-Obaid

Request money from a group

Al-Obaid noted that customers can now request money from a group by either sharing a payment link and entering recipients' phone numbers or by creating a group. Furthermore, they can track everyone's payment status through transactions history for KFH PAY transactions.

Financing online

He stated that applying for online financing requests is now simpler with KFHonline. KFH customers can access the service under "Finance Services" > "Finance Request" within the app.

Banking cards

Al-Obaid continued saying: "To enhance the customer experience, KFH simplified the process of adding beneficiaries with quick and easy steps. Transfers are now also easier and faster. KFH also introduced a range of bank card services, including the ability to temporarily deactivate and activate cards, and view card details and the PIN number."

Al-Obaid emphasized that KFH is committed to maintaining its leadership in digital banking by offering a diverse range of innovative services and solutions. This aims to enhance customer experience, keep pace with evolving technologies, and provide customers with seamless, fast, and secure banking experiences that fulfill all their financial needs conveniently and effortlessly, eliminating the need for branch visits.

More than 150 services on KFHonline

Through the KFH Online app and website, KFH offers over 150 services, while XTM and KFH GO smart branches provide approximately 50 additional services. Consequently, KFH customers have access to nearly 200 e-services.

KFH offers a range of services, including e-payment and settlement solutions, opening bank accounts online, instant printing of all types of bank cards, gold buying and selling, and the ability to conduct numerous transactions without visiting a branch.

US-China tensions grow

China's yuan devaluation sparks concerns over currency disputes

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: China's recent decision to allow its currency, the yuan, to weaken against the dollar has sparked concerns about the potential for growing tensions over exchange rate policies throughout 2025, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This move broke a level the country had managed to defend for weeks, raising fears that international currency disputes could escalate.

US President-elect Donald Trump and his administration have long criticized China and other trading partners for allegedly using currency devaluation as a strategy to boost exports unfairly.

In a June interview with Bloomberg Businessweek, Trump argued that keeping the currencies of countries like China and Japan low puts undue pressure on American companies, making it more difficult for them to compete globally.

With the Chinese yuan now weaker than it was in June, Beijing's decision to let it slide further is likely to attract a strong backlash from Trump and his new administration.

Trump has previously expressed interest in using tariffs to address perceived currency manipulation, suggesting that his administration would take a hard stance on exchange rates.

While China's currency decline may be due to factors such as low interest rates tied to slower domestic demand, Trump's historical disregard for such explanations raises concerns about the risk of escalating tensions.

The real danger, experts warn, is that the yuan's weakening could reignite a

protectionist international economic agenda, reminiscent of the "beggar-thy-neighbor" policies of the 1930s.

During that time, countries, including the United States, devalued their currencies and raised tariffs, triggering a cycle that significantly reduced global trade. A study by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that such currency wars led to an 18 percent decrease in global trade.

Chris Michener and Kirsten Wandschneider, scholars who have studied this period, argue that the currency devaluations of the 1930s marked a shift in policymaking, as countries prioritized their domestic economies at the expense of the international economic order.

After World War II, the United States shifted to a more cooperative approach, promoting global economic coordination through institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, the current climate, with Trump's "America First" stance, mirrors the protectionist rhetoric and policies of the 1930s.

While Trump's promised tariff hikes may be smaller than initially suggested during his campaign, experts speculate that an agreement could eventually be reached between Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping to freeze tariffs at levels both sides find tolerable.

Nonetheless, the risk remains that miscalculations on either side could lead to a dangerous escalation of protectionist measures, reminiscent of the trade wars that undermined global stability nearly a century ago.

Global oil prices dip as Brent and WTI decline

Kuwaiti oil rises to \$76.58 pb, up by 5 cents

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7, (KUNA): The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by five cents to USD 76.58 per barrel (pb) on Monday, compared with USD

76.53 pb the previous day, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Tuesday.

At the global level, the Brent crude went

down by 21 cents to USD 76.30 pb, and the West Texas Intermediate also went down by 40 cents to USD 73.56 pb.

Nikkei 225 jumped 2.2%

Asian shares mostly rise after Wall St rally led by Nvidia

TOKYO, Jan 7, (AP): Asian shares mostly rose Tuesday, deriving optimism from rising technology stocks on Wall Street, led by Nvidia.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 jumped 2.2% to 40,164.53. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 edged up 0.3% to 8,285.10. South Korea's Kospi added 0.4% to 2,497.75.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng index slid 1.9% to 19,316.53 as shares in technology and games company Tencent plunged 7.8% after it was hit by U.S. sanctions.

The Shanghai Composite edged 0.1% higher to 3,209.94.

Nippon Steel, whose attempt to take over U.S. Steel is being blocked by the Biden administration, slid 1.5% in Tokyo trading, shortly after its chief executive vowed to keep pushing the deal.

U.S. Steel climbed 8.1% overnight after it and Japan's Nippon Steel filed a federal lawsuit challenging President Joe Biden's decision to block a proposed nearly \$15 billion deal for Nippon to buy its Pittsburgh-based rival.

The suit, filed in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, alleges it was a political decision. Japanese leaders have also said there is scant evidence the merger poses a security concern for the U.S.

Investors are also watching for possible policy changes under incoming President Donald Trump, whose term is beginning soon, said Stephen Innes, managing partner at SPI Asset Management.

"The convergence of these financial indicators points to a heightened alert among traders, who carefully calibrate their strategies for potential shifts in policy and economic directives that the new administration may bring," he said.

U.S. indexes recovered more of a holiday-season slide that bridged the new year. The S&P 500 added 0.6% to 5,795.38 for a second straight gain following five straight losses, its longest losing streak since April. The Dow Jones Industrial Average lost an early gain to slip 0.1% to 42,706.56, and the Nasdaq composite gained 1.2% to 19,864.98.

Slightly more stocks fell in the S&P 500 than rose amid the mixed trading. Tech companies were the clear leaders, including those swept up in the frenzy around artificial-intelligence technology.

Nvidia climbed 3.4% to top its record set in November ahead of a speech by CEO Jensen Huang at the annual CES convention in Las Vegas after trading ended for the day.

Nvidia and other AI stocks have kept climbing de-

spite concern that their stock prices have already shot too high, too fast. Despite worries about a potential bubble, the industry continues to talk up its potential.

Uber Technologies drove 2.7% higher after the ride-hailing app said it would accelerate \$1.5 billion in purchases of its own stock, part of a previously announced \$7 billion buyback program.

The New York Stock Exchange and Nasdaq will close their stock and options markets on Thursday in observance of a National Day of Mourning for former President Jimmy Carter.

But in a potentially market-moving event later in the week, the Federal Reserve will release minutes from its last policy meeting, where it cut its main interest rate for a third straight time.

The monthly jobs report, along with an update on how U.S. consumers are feeling, are set for Friday. So far, the economy has remained remarkably resilient. The Fed began cutting interest rates in September after inflation pulled nearly all the way down to its 2% target.

Getting the last percentage point of improvement from inflation may prove more difficult. Worries are also rising that tariffs and other policies coming from President-elect Donald Trump could push inflation higher.



A currency trader works near a screen showing the Korea Composite Stock Price Index (KOSPI), left, and the foreign exchange rate between U.S. dollar and South Korean won at the foreign exchange dealing room of the KEB Hana Bank headquarters in Seoul, South Korea, Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025. (AP)

Tokyo, Washington's key ally in Asia

US rejection of Nippon Steel's bid for US Steel rankles Japan

BANGKOK, Jan 7, (AP): U.S. President Joe Biden's decision to reject a bid by Nippon Steel to acquire U.S. Steel on national security grounds isn't the first time friction over trade and investment has irked Washington's closest ally in Asia.

There have been plenty of scraps over trade in the past few decades, and Secretary of State Anthony Blinken sought to smooth ruffled feathers in a visit to Tokyo on Tuesday.

Nippon Steel Chief Executive Eiji Hashimoto said the top Japanese steelmaker was standing firm on its proposed \$15 billion friendly acquisition. Nippon Steel and U.S. Steel filed a federal lawsuit challenging the Biden administration's decision. But the assertion that the proposed deal could threaten U.S. national security has stung.

Many in Japan see the decision as a betrayal by Washington after decades of U.S. pressure to lift barriers to investment and trade. The timing doesn't help, with Japanese businesses already bracing for potentially damaging tariff hikes once President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru

Ishiba was blunt in warning that spoiling the deal might hurt Japanese investment in the U.S.

Here are some key issues at stake:

While in Tokyo in a farewell tour before Biden leaves office, Blinken told reporters he believes that during the past four years the alliance with Japan has "grown stronger than it's ever been before." Japan and the U.S. are mutually the largest investors in each other's economies, he noted, "strengthening the foundation for many years to come." Japan's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the U.S. Steel decision came up during Blinken's meeting with Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya. But it said only that the two sides had "reaffirmed the importance of Japan-U.S. economic relations, including investment in the U.S. by Japanese companies."

Before Blinken's visit, Ishiba, who has struggled to build support and momentum since he took office in October, was emphatic.

"As for why national security was cited as an issue, it must be clearly explained. Otherwise, future discussions on the matter will come to naught," he said Monday.



A staff enters doorway next to Nippon Steel logo at the company's Kashima Plant in Kashima, Japan on Friday, Dec. 6, 2024. (AP)

Eyeing opportunities, US companies remain committed to China market

BEIJING, Jan. 7 (Xinhua): U.S. carmaker Tesla's Shanghai energy storage Megafactory began trial production recently, with mass production expected to start in the first quarter of 2025.

Trial production was launched just seven months after construction began, setting a new record for "Tesla speed" in China. The company's Shanghai Gigafactory -- Tesla's first plant in the country's eastern financial hub -- was built and inaugurated within a year in 2019.

China offers a complete industrial chain, vast market potential, and a production and business environment crucial for enterprise growth, according to Tesla vice president Tao Lin.

Tesla's second factory in Shanghai underscores its commitment to investing in the world's second-largest economy, its confidence in China's manufacturing capabilities, and the strengthened economic ties between the two countries in the new-energy sector, experts said.

Like Tesla, many U.S. multinationals remain committed to the Chinese market as few can afford to ignore the immense opportunities here. Many are ramping up investment to consolidate their presence, defying the rhetoric of "decoupling" and "de-risking" from China ratcheted up by some American politicians.

Such is the case with U.S. tech giant

Apple. The company, which sees China as an important market and a key supply chain partner, is committed to long-term development in China and will continue to increase investment in areas such as the supply chain and research and development, said Apple CEO Tim Cook during a meeting with Chinese commerce minister in October.

When asked about his Chinese supply chain partners during a visit to the second China International Supply Chain Expo in Beijing in November, Cook said: "I value them very highly. We could not do what we do without them."

China remains an indispensable part of Apple's global supply chains. Out of Apple's 200 major suppliers worldwide, over 80 percent have set up factories in China.

In addition, China is an important market for Apple. In the fourth quarter of its fiscal year 2024, Apple's Greater China net sales topped 15 billion U.S. dollars, making it the third-largest market globally after the Americas and Europe.

China's robust, innovation-driven economy, complete industrial chain, huge consumer market, continuous opening-up and business-friendly environment have made it a popular investment destination for a huge number of American companies.

China has been a land of opportu-

WASHINGTON, Jan 7, (AP): President Joe Biden is moving to ban new offshore oil and gas drilling in most U.S. coastal waters, a last-minute effort to block possible action by the incoming Trump administration to expand offshore drilling.

Biden, whose term expires in two weeks, said he is using authority under the federal Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to protect offshore areas along the East and West coasts, the eastern Gulf of Mexico and portions of Alaska's Northern Bering Sea from future oil and natural gas leasing.

"My decision reflects what coastal communities, businesses and beachgoers have known for a long time: that drilling off these coasts could cause irreversible damage to places we hold dear and is unnecessary to meet our nation's energy needs," Biden said in a statement Monday.

"As the climate crisis continues to threaten communities across the country and we are transitioning to a clean energy economy, now is the time to protect these coasts for our children and grandchildren," he said.

Biden's orders would not affect large swaths of the Gulf of Mexico, where most U.S. offshore drilling occurs, but it would protect coastlines along California, Florida and other states from future drilling.

Biden's actions, which protect more than 625 million acres of federal waters, could be difficult for President-elect Donald Trump to unwind, since they would likely require an act of Congress to repeal. The 72-year-old law that Biden

Trump vows to undo it



Cargo vessels are seen anchored offshore, sharing space with oil platforms, before heading into the Los Angeles-Long Beach port on Oct. 5, 2021. (AP)

cited allows the president to withdraw portions of the outer continental shelf from mineral leasing, including leasing to drill for oil and gas, if the areas are deemed too sensitive to drill.

Trump himself has a complicated history on offshore drilling. He signed a memorandum in 2020 directing the Interior secretary to prohibit drilling in the waters off both Florida coasts, and off the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina until 2032.

Earlier in his term, Trump had initially moved to vastly expand offshore drilling, before retreating amid widespread opposition in Florida and other coastal states.

Trump on Monday declared that, after he's inaugurated on Jan. 20,

Biden's drilling ban will "be changed on day one."

"I will unban it immediately!" Trump told conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt. "I have the right to unban it."

He said the U.S. has "oil and gas at a level that nobody else has and we're gonna take advantage of it. It's really our greatest economic asset."

Trump has vowed to establish what he calls American "energy dominance" around the world as he seeks to boost U.S. oil and gas drilling and move away from Biden's focus on climate change.

Environmental advocates hailed Biden's action, saying new oil and gas drilling must be sharply curtailed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that

contribute to global warming. 2024 was the hottest in recorded history.

"This is an epic ocean victory!" said Joseph Gordon, campaign director for the environmental group Oceana.

Gordon thanked Biden "for listening to the voices from coastal communities" that oppose drilling and "contributing to the bipartisan tradition of protecting our coasts."

Biden's actions build on the legacy of Democratic and Republican presidents to protect coastal water from offshore drilling, Gordon said, adding that U.S. coastlines are home to tens of millions of Americans and support billions of dollars of economic activity that depend on a clean environment, abundant wildlife and thriving fisheries.

Moderate recovery vs mounting risks: what to expect from Europe's economy in 2025

BERLIN, Jan. 7, (Xinhua): Germans welcomed 2025 with renewed hope despite economic challenges, as the country looks toward recovery in the months ahead. The festive spirit over the past week marked a shift in mood, reflecting aspirations for brighter prospects for Europe's largest economy.

After five consecutive quarters of stagnation, the euro area economy saw modest growth in 2024, marked by slow but steady progress. Yet, much like the fleeting brilliance of New Year's Eve fireworks, uncertainty lingers over 2025. Geopolitical tensions, rising protectionism, and mounting pressure from U.S. policies present significant risks, threatening to disrupt Europe's fragile recovery.

The eurozone's GDP is projected to grow by 0.8 percent in 2024, driven by easing inflation and a recovery in consumption and investment, according to the latest forecast by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Growth is expected to accelerate to 1.3 percent in 2025 and 1.5 percent in 2026, while the European Central Bank (ECB) remains more cautious, predicting growth at 1.1 percent and 1.4 percent respectively.

Inflation continued to ease throughout the past year, largely due to the sharp drop in energy prices. After falling to 1.7 percent in September, inflation rebounded to above 2 percent since October. Annual inflation is forecast at 2.4 percent for 2024 -- more than halving from the previous

year -- before gradually slowing to 2.1 percent in 2025. Core inflation, which excludes food and energy, is expected to approach the ECB's 2-percent target by late 2025 as wage growth moderates and services inflation softens.

While lower inflation and stronger labor markets have boosted disposable incomes, the ECB has warned that weak consumer confidence and economic uncertainty may lead to higher household savings, potentially dampening short-term growth.

Thiess Petersen, senior advisor at the Bertelsmann Stiftung, said "2025 would be another year of considerable economic risks for Europe," noting that sluggish growth in Germany continues to weigh down the broader bloc.

Structural challenges, particularly underinvestment, remain a key obstacle for Germany. In December, major think tanks lowered their forecasts, with the Ifo Institute projecting a 0.1-percent contraction for 2024. This could mark Germany's first consecutive annual recessions in over two decades.

Germany's debt brake, or Schuldenbremse, which caps annual deficits at 0.35 percent of GDP, is facing growing scrutiny. ING Research estimates that the country needs additional public investment equivalent to 1.5 percent of GDP annually over the next decade to offset years of underfunding. Without such measures, stagnation could persist through 2025, further straining Europe's economic recovery.

Despite modest growth in 2024, Europe's economic outlook remains fraught with risks, ranging from geopolitical tensions and persistent energy vulnerabilities to escalating trade disputes and political unrest.

A December report from the German Economic Institute revealed that 31 out of 49 business associations reported deteriorating conditions over the past year, with high energy costs cited as a primary concern.

The expiration of the EU's gas transit deal with Russia via Ukraine on Jan. 1 has further heightened uncertainty. Brussels-based think-tank Bruegel estimates the bloc now faces an annual shortfall of 140 terawatt hours. While liquefied natural gas imports may help bridge the gap, the costlier and less reliable alternative risks placing additional strain on consumers and industries across the EU.

Adding to the challenges, Europe's export-driven economy faces potential disruptions from the United States, where President-elect Donald Trump has pledged to impose tariffs on all imports. A Financial Times survey of 72 economists identified global trade tensions and regional political paralysis as the biggest threats to the eurozone in 2025.

"A looming trade war with tariffs of 10 percent to 20 percent on European goods could push the eurozone economy from sluggish growth into recession," warned Carsten Brzeski, global head of macro at ING Research.

Meta adds three board members including UFC boss Dana White, key figure in Trump's orbit

NEW YORK, Jan 7, (AP): Meta has appointed three new members to its board of directors, including Dana White, the president and CEO of Ultimate Fighting Championship and a key figure in the orbit of incoming President Donald Trump.

The social media company, which owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, is also adding auto tycoon John Elkann and tech

investor Charlie Songhurst, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said in a Facebook post late Monday.

White's ties with Trump date back to 2001, when White hosted a UFC at the Republican's former casino-hotel in Atlantic City, New Jersey, the Trump Taj Mahal. Trump has also appeared with White at UFC matches over the years, especially in his 2024 campaign as part of efforts to ap-



In this Nov. 2, 2018, file photo, UFC president Dana White speaks at a news conference in New York. (AP)

peal to younger male voters.

White, in turn, has had speaking roles at the 2016, 2020 and 2024 Republican conventions and appeared on stage at Trump's election victory party in November, even speaking briefly to the crowd.

White has built UFC "into one of the most valuable, fastest growing, and most popular sports enterprises in the world," Zucker-

berg said. "I've admired him as an entrepreneur and his ability to build such a beloved brand."

Zuckerberg is also active in mixed martial arts. Zuckerberg and fellow billionaire Elon Musk seemingly agreed to fight in a "cage match" in 2023, but it never happened.

Elkann, another person joining Meta's board, is the CEO of Exor, a Netherlands-based investment

company, and chairman of its two auto companies, Stellantis and Ferrari.

Zuckerberg said Elkann has "deep experience running large global businesses and he brings an international perspective to our board."

Songhurst previously worked at Microsoft and joined began advising Meta last year on artificial intelligence.

Within its constant efforts to enhance customer banking experience

NBK extends exclusive partnership with Xcite until 2026 and offers customers 5 percent online instant discount

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: Seeking to continuously improve customer banking experience through exceptional offers, benefits and rewards, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has announced extending its exclusive partnership with Xcite by Alghanim Electronics, subsidiary of Alghanim Industries for additional two years until 2026. This partnership provides NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Cardholders with exclusive offers that meet their expectations.

Started in 2024, the partnership will continue to give cardholders 10% NBK KWT Points when using their NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Card to shop at Xcite instore, online or through the app, as well as 2% instant discount on selected products.

In celebration of the renewal of this strategic partnership, NBK is delighted to offer a 5% online instant discount to all NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Cardholders for purchases made at Xcite from January 9 to January 11, 2025. This exclusive offer is our way of thanking our customers for their loyalty and enhancing their shopping experience with even greater value.

NBK and Xcite are committed to provide various offers and promotions all year round and on special occasions such as National Days, Mother's Day, as summer, back to school deals and many more.

On this occasion, Mr. Anwar Al-Ballam, Senior Products Manager, Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said, "We are delighted to extend our partnership with a leading electronics brand like



Anwar Al-Ballam

Xcite. Through this partnership, we aim to provide our customers with exclusive offers and exceptional rewards throughout the year and on special occasions, so that we always remain closer to our customers."

"NBK maintains solid relationships with leading institutions across different sectors, which we leverage to improve customer banking experience by delivering top-notch offers, discounts and benefits for unmatched banking experience" he added.

"We depend on the extensive experience gained over long decades to understand customers' needs, evaluate their goals, and even exceed their

Al-Ballam:

- We aim to provide our customers with exceptional offers and rewards all year round and on special occasions
- The partnership reflects NBK's dedication to elevating customer banking experience and delivering unmatched services

Ibrahim:

- Our fruitful collaboration with NBK strengthens our position as a leader in the electronics sector
- The partnership allows customers to benefit from the offers and discounts on the latest electronic devices



NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Card

expectations. Therefore, service excellence and top-notch customer experience are embedded in NBK's culture," he continued.

"This partnership reflects NBK's dedication to elevating customer banking experience by providing valuable and competitive banking services tailored to meet their different needs and categories. This comes within our constant endeavors to keep pace with their changing needs and evolving expectations," he explained.

On his part, Hussam Ibrahim, Senior Vice President at Xcite, mentioned, "Renewing our partnership with NBK is not just an extension of an agree-

ment, but strengthening a strategic alliance that has transformed customer experience. Over the past year, we have successfully delivered innovative solutions and exclusive offers to KWT Visa Infinite Credit Cardholders, enriching their lifestyle and meeting their expectations. We are committed to maintaining our leadership and innovation, striving to exceed expectations and provide advanced technological services that reflect our shared vision. This renewed partnership is a bold step towards strengthening our position as industry leaders and reaffirming our dedication to always delivering the

best to our valued customers."

"This fruitful collaboration with NBK will strengthen Xcite's leading position in the electronics sector, while allowing cardholders to benefit from special offers and discounts on the latest electronic devices, as well as exclusive technological benefits that suit their dynamic lifestyle," he noted.

A Card Like No Other

NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Card is the most popular credit card in Kuwait, as it offers customers a unique lifestyle with exceptional rewards, benefits and offers tailored to meet

their needs and expectations, and cash-back up to KD 1,000 in NBK KWT Points every month.

The card combines an exclusive package of exceptional rewards with a design inspiring national pride, making it a card like no other, and gives customers the flexibility to choose the way they want to earn rewards based on their lifestyle; either the "Spends Tier" or "Merchant Category" option.

When choosing the "Merchant Category", customers can earn NBK KWT Points on all payments made using NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Card at the selected categories, with 10% on dining and telecom, 5% on fitness and beauty and 3% on clothing, grocery and education.

Meanwhile, when choosing the "Spends Tier" earning option, based on their monthly spends, with up to 5% on international POS, up to 4% on digital payments, and up to 3% on all other spends.

The earned NBK KWT Points can be redeemed through NBK Online or Mobile Banking whether as cashback directly to the card, travel booking at more than 800 airlines and 150,000 hotels, e-vouchers from over 190 merchants, or points exchange with most preferred airlines.

NBK Visa Credit Cards offer the best payment method for the convenience and benefits they provide to customers, especially when using them in shopping including NBK Rewards Program as well as Purchase Protection and Extended Warranty.

Leading account with highest returns

KIB announces winners of Al Dirwaza account's draw

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced the winners of the weekly draw held under the Al Dirwaza account's 2024 campaign, which is distinguished by the highest number of winners throughout the year. The first weekly draw, based on customers' December deposits, recently took place in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as well as representatives from the Bank. The KD 1,000 prize was awarded to Sayed Hossein Sayed Hashem Mosavi, Ruqayah Saqer Rashed Alarmali, Abduljaleel Bavu Valappil, Fahad Faisal Bader Alqanaee, Yousef Mohammad Ali Alqabandi, whilst the KD 500 prize was awarded to Abdullah Saleh Metni Alkhalidi, Ebrahim Ajel Ali Hamad, Mary Gholum Shah Redha, Elham Shaker Mohamed Zordok, Khaled Abdullah Hassan Madhloum, Mohamed Sari Ahmed Zarifa, Hasan Abdulrasoul Essa Alhaddad.

It serves to note that Al Dirwaza account is a savings account for individual customers, based on the Wakala investment principle, launched by KIB as one of its banking products for individuals. The account is currently the best of its kind in the sector, with annual expected profits of up to 2% disbursed on a monthly basis, where the customer gets an expected profit of 2% for the first 3 months from the account opening date and up to 1% expected rate onward. The expected profits are automatically deposited into the customer's account within the first day of the beginning of each month.

Al Dirwaza account holders are eligible to enter the weekly, monthly and annual draws on the condition of maintaining at least KD 100 in their account. For the weekly and monthly draws, each KD 1 that has completed a full month's cycle in the account will count for one chance, and chances are calculated based on the lowest monthly balance preceding the draw. As for the mega draw, chances are calculated for each KD 1 that completes a two-month cycle in the account - based on the lowest two monthly balances prior to the draw.

Al Dirwaza account is also in com-

pliance with the provisions of Islamic Sharia and approved by the KIB's Sharia Supervisory Board. Furthermore, the account comes with a wide range of benefits, including the ease of opening the account, which does not require a salary transfer, and the customer's ability to open it remotely without visiting a branch through KIB Online on the Bank's website or KIB Mobile application on smartphones.

Additionally, Al Dirwaza account automatically grants customers instant issuance of an ATM card, with a KD 2,000 ATM daily withdrawal limit, as well as the ability to issue credit cards against the cash collateral in the account. To open the account and participate in its draws, a minimum of KD 100 is required and can only be withdrawn upon account closure.

About KIB

Kuwait International Bank (KIB) is a bank that operates according to the Islamic Shari'ah, based in the State of Kuwait. Incorporated in 1973, and originally known as Kuwait Real Estate Bank, KIB made the transition to its current Islamic operating model in 2007. In 2018, KIB embarked on a new phase of its journey full of innovation and development. As part of its new strategic direction, the Bank focuses on offering a next-level customer experience under the slogan: "Bank for Life".

Through a network of branches spread across the State of Kuwait, KIB offers a broad range of banking products and services, as well as innovative digital banking solutions in line with international best standards. As part of its duty towards the community, the Bank also encompasses a leading social responsibility program that aims at positively impacting all members of the community through a wide range of impactful initiatives and activities.

Today, KIB has taken concrete steps in implementing its new strategic objectives. The Bank has cemented its role as a key player in the local banking industry and has continued to maintain its strong financial performance; enabling it to be globally recognized for its strong credit rating and financial position.



KIB's Al Dirwaza account

Exclusive jewelry event reflects ABK's customer-centric approach

ABK invites elite clients to discover new collections of Palmiero jewelry

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) has invited its affluent and private banking customers to attend an exclusive evening at the Italian jewelry house Palmiero, organized by Behbehani Prestige, the exclusive agent for the brand in the state of Kuwait.

The evening offered an opportunity to explore the latest Palmiero jewelry, with the brand aiming to introduce this segment of jewelry enthusiasts to its diverse designs that suit their lifestyle.

Johair Marafi, General Manager of Retail Banking at ABK, stated, "This event reflects our commitment to providing our distinguished customers with an exceptional and exclusive experience that meets their various needs, introducing them to the luxury products of the brand in the Kuwaiti market as part of our ongoing efforts to elevate the exceptional banking experience we offer them at all levels."

She explained that ABK continuously interacts with its customers in its role as a responsible banking institution that provides comprehensive banking solutions to meet all their needs, enhancing their satisfaction with their choice of the bank as their preferred banking partner.

Concluding her statement, Marafi invited everyone to follow ABK's



Ms. Johair Marafi, General Manager of Retail Banking at ABK

official website and pages on social media platforms to learn more about all the offers, campaigns and latest products launched throughout the year. Since its establishment in 1967, ABK has progressed to become one of the leading Kuwaiti banks in the region that offers a wide array of personal, corporate, and private banking products and services. ABK also provides a broad range of local, regional, and global investment solutions and services through its subsidiary, ABK Capital.



Photo of the event.

This is in addition to ABK's three branches located in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) in the United Arab Emirates, servicing both Kuwaiti and Emirati individual and corporate clients.

ABK is a strong supporter of Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association's 'Let's Be Aware' awareness campaign. Through its various initiatives, the Bank aims to promote financial inclusion by educating Kuwaiti soci-

ety about customer rights, responsibilities, and the different types of banking and special needs services.

Additionally, ABK consistently provides strategic information on how to avoid banking and financial fraud, loan application requirements, digital services, and more.

For more information about ABK, please follow the Bank's Instagram account @abk_kuwait, visit eahl.com, contact Ahlan Ahli 1 899 899 or visit one of the Bank's branches across Kuwait.

Empowering students through real-world shopping experience

Lulu supports life skills for differently abled learners

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: Lulu Hypermarket, in collaboration with the Conductive Education School Kuwait for Special Needs, successfully conducted a Shopping Skills Training Program on 6th January 2025 at LuLu Hypermarket Alrai Outlet, designed to empower differently abled students by equipping them with essential life skills.

The program provided students hands-on exposure to a real-world shopping environment, fostering independence, confidence, and practical learning. Under the guidance of experienced instructors and Lulu Happiness volunteers, the participants learned to navigate the hypermarket, purchase items, manage a shopping list, and understand the basics of financial transactions.

The Conductive School, renowned for its focus on holistic development for special students, emphasized the significance of such programs.

The Shopping Skill Training Program exemplifies the potential of community partnerships in making a positive difference. This initiative is a testament to the belief that inclusivity and practical education can transform lives.



Photos during the campaign.

Golden Globes ratings hold steady with 10M viewers

Zendaya sparks engagement rumors at Globes

NEW YORK, Jan 7, (AP): Zendaya is generating engagement speculation after wearing a massive diamond on her left ring finger during the Golden Globes.

Representatives for Zendaya and her longtime partner, Tom Holland, did not return requests for comment from The Associated Press on Monday, a day after the 28-year-old Emmy Award-winner attended the telecast at the Beverly Hilton.

People magazine said the pair is engaged, citing "a family source." Another source told the magazine that Holland shared the news with friends around New Year's Eve. TMZ was the first to report the engagement, citing "sources close to the couple."

Zendaya, the breakout star from "Euphoria" and "Challengers" who showed up on the red carpet in a Louis Vuitton gown, has long been linked to Holland since they played love interests in 2017's "Spider-Man: Homecoming." Holland wasn't at Sunday's Globes.

A reporter for the Los Angeles Times seemed to confirm something was up when she held up her engagement ring and pointed to it, and Zendaya responded by showing her own left-hand bling.

The reporter then asked if the actor was engaged and "she kept showing her ring, smiled coyly and shrugged her shoulders mysteriously."

Another clue was that Bulgari — for which the "Dune" star is an ambassador — provided Zendaya's carpet jewelry — a necklace, right-hand ring and earrings — but a press release didn't mention the ring on her left ring finger.

Meanwhile, an average of 10.1 million viewers tuned into the 82nd Golden Globes across CBS and Paramount+, Dick Clark Productions said Monday, roughly matching the audience for last year's broadcast.

CBS reported ratings figures from VideoAmp rather than the industry standard audience measurement service, Nielsen. Paramount Global, which owns CBS, is in a contract dispute with Nielsen.

At a time when most traditional linear telecasts are in decline, holding steady from last year's Globes' audience was sure to count as a success for the Nikki Glaser-hosted broadcast. Last year's show, the Globes' first on CBS, drew an audience of 9.4 million, though that was according to Nielsen.

Before the pandemic, though, the Globes typically drew closer to 20 million viewers. In 2020, 18.4 million watched the Globes.

But the Globes were teetering on the brink of termination as recently as two years ago. After The Los Angeles Times reported that the HFPA had no Black members, Hollywood boycotted the organization and the 2022 Globes were booted off the air. NBC aired the 2023 edition and then dropped the awards show.

The 2024 Globes had their issues, too, with many calling the Jo Koy-hosted ceremony a train-wreck. But the ratings rebounded and CBS signed up for five more years. Following the scandals, the awards were acquired by Eldridge Industries and Dick Clark Productions, which Penske Media owns, and turned into a for-profit venture.

Sunday's ceremony, which ran concurrently with NBC's broadcast of the Minnesota Viking-Detroit Lions game, drew much better reviews for Glaser. The top prizes of the night went to the Netflix musical "Emilia Perez" and the A24 postwar epic "The Brutalist." On the TV side, FX's "Shogun" and Max's "Hacks" went home winners.



Zendaya arrives at the 82nd Golden Globes on Sunday, Jan. 5, 2025, at the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, Calif. (AP)

People

Constitutional violations

Shakur murder suspect requests case dismissal

LAS VEGAS, Jan 7, (AP): An ex-gang leader is seeking to have all the charges against him dismissed in the 1990s killing of rap music icon Tupac Shakur.

Attorney Carl Arnold filed the motion on Monday in the District Court of Nevada to dismiss

charges against Duane Davis in the 1996 shooting of Shakur. The motion alleges "egregious" constitutional violations because of a 27-year delay in prosecution. The motion also asserts a lack of corroborating evidence and failure to honor immunity agreements granted to Davis by federal and local authorities.

"The prosecution has failed to justify a decades-long delay that has irreversibly prejudiced my client," Arnold said in a news release. "Moreover, the failure to honor immunity agreements undermines the criminal justice system's integrity and seriously questions this prosecution."

Clark County District Attorney Steve Wolfson didn't immediately respond to an email seeking comment on the filing. He has said evidence against Davis is strong and it will be up to a jury to decide the credibility of Davis' accounts of the shooting including those in a 2019 memoir.

Davis is originally from

Compton, California. He was arrested in the case in September 2023 near Las Vegas. He has pleaded not guilty to first-degree murder and has sought to be released since shortly after his arrest.

Davis is accused of orchestrating and enabling the shooting that killed Shakur and wounded rap music mogul Marion "Suge" Knight after a brawl at a Las Vegas Strip casino involving Shakur and Davis' nephew, Orlando "Baby Lane" Anderson.

Authorities have said that the gunfire stemmed from competition between East Coast members of a Bloods gang sect and West Coast groups of a Crips sect, including Davis, for dominance in a genre known as the time as "gangsta rap."

In interviews and a 2019 tell-all memoir that described his life as a leader of a Crips gang sect in Compton, Davis said he obtained a .40-caliber handgun and handed it to Anderson in the back seat of a car from which he and authorities say shots were fired at Shakur and Knight in another car at an intersection near the Las Vegas Strip. Davis didn't identify Anderson as the shooter.

Shakur died a week later in a nearby hospital. He was 25. Knight survived and is serving a 28-year prison sentence in connection with the killing of a Compton man in 2015.

Anderson denied involvement in Shakur's death and died in 1998 at age 23 in a shooting in Compton. The other two men in the car are also dead.



Shakur



Actor Ben Affleck, (left), and actor-singer Jennifer Lopez attend the premiere of 'The Last Duel' on Oct. 9, 2021, in New York. (AP)

Legal closure sought

J.Lo and Ben Affleck ask judge to finalize divorce

LOS ANGELES, Jan 7, (AP): Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck have settled their divorce and are asking a judge to finalize their breakup.

Lopez filed documents Monday in Los Angeles Superior Court that show the former couple settled their divorce through mediation in September, about a month after she filed for divorce.

While most of the financial details of their split were not publicly filed, neither star will pay the other spousal support. Lopez will drop Affleck from her legal name once the divorce is finalized.

The superstar couple married in July 2022. Lopez filed for divorce in August 2024, although the couple said in court filings that they separated in April 2023.

After meeting, falling in love and getting engaged in the early

2000s - and starring together in 2003's infamous "Gigli" and 2004's "Jersey Girl" - the couple parted ways, blaming in part the pressure of the public eye.

But to the delight of many and perhaps the skepticism of others, they reunited two decades later and married.

Records filed Monday show the pair resolved the financial aspects of their divorce through mediation and without long-drawn-out proceedings in court.

The couple have no children together. Affleck divorced Jennifer Garner, with whom he has three children, in 2018. Lopez has been married four times and has twins with singer Marc Anthony.

The settlement documents were first reported by celebrity website TMZ.

Awards



Selena Gomez, left, and Benny Blanco arrive at the 82nd Golden Globes on Sunday, Jan. 5, 2025, at the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, Calif. (AP)



Gal Gadot arrives at the 82nd Golden Globes on Sunday, Jan. 5, 2025, at the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, Calif. (AP)

The off-screen moments

Inside the Golden Globes

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif., Jan 7, (AP): The Golden Globes are a social affair with occasional breaks for awards. It's a game of seconds inside the packed ballroom as A-listers attempt to get in as many hugs and hellos as possible before the cameras start broadcasting to the world again.

It's a tricky room to navigate, packed to the brim with banquet tables. Some choose to stay put, like Steve Martin, a fortress in a well-guarded, hard to get to seat against a wall. Others, like Andrew Scott and "Challengers" filmmaker Luca Guadagnino couldn't seem stay in their seats — there's just too many fun people to chat with.

As the first major awards show of the year, a wide-open field of contenders, and a fairly new group of voters, there was a bit of nervous anticipation in the air as everyone wondered how the night would play out.

Former Spider-Man Andrew Garfield got caught in a logjam of celebrities blocking the stairs to the main floor. He made a "get going" gesture to Zendaya, whose new ring on her left hand had onlookers buzzing. But the train of her burnt orange Louis Vuitton ballgown was proving to be its own blockade. Garfield ran to the rescue, after giving Colman Domingo a quick kiss on the cheek and grabbed the back of the train to help Zendaya navigate the stairs, and Daniel Craig and Kate Winslet exchanged hellos.

Somehow Angelina Jolie and daughter Zahara made their way through the flurry, mostly unbothered. Elsewhere,

Miley Cyrus sidled up to the "Baby Reindeer" people, before finding her proper seat near Pamela Anderson and Gia Coppola.

Just off to the side of the ballroom, in a separate room away from the sight of the broadcast cameras, attendees could gather for extra Nobu bites, cocktails and desserts. Keith Urban was enjoying the food at the sushi bar, sampling Nobu's yellowtail and jalapeño bites and going back for seconds. He was soon joined by Ewan McGregor and his wife Mary Elizabeth Winstead.

Categories

Nearly Kirsten Dunst and husband Jesse Plemons beelined to Ayo Edebiri where Dunst gushed about Edebiri's grey Loewe suit. She made her way to the long bar line telling Plemons to stay put with Edebiri.

With no television screens broadcasting the live show it was easy to miss cues about commercials and categories. That's how Margaret Qualley accidentally missed the moment of her co-star Demi Moore's win, and moving speech.

For viewers at home commercial breaks can take an eternity, but in the room there's never enough time — to make it to the bathroom, to get a drink from the bar (the tables had only champagne, wine and water), or to chat. But efforts are made to work the room, and race back to where you need to be before the countdown clock hits zero.

After his sushi snack, Urban found his way back to Nicole Kidman and the "Wicked" group, spending quite a bit

of time talking animatedly to Ariana Grande. They were interrupted to pose for a photo but soon picked up where they left off. Nearby, Cara Delevingne made her way to say hello to Cynthia Erivo, while Kidman was greeted by Naomi Watts.

On a different level, Daniel Craig stopped to congratulate "Baby Reindeer" winner Jessica Gunning. "That was amazing," Craig said. Gunning could barely pause to process the moment with the former James Bond before someone else was asking for a selfie.

Zoe Saldana and Ali Wong also exchanged congratulations to one another, before Saldana spotted Netflix power publicist Lisa Tabak, letting out a yelp and running to hug her.

Should one not make it back to one's seat on the main floor before the commercial break ends, pleasant security guards put up a rope and hold guests back — no matter how famous. At any given moment during the show, you could find quite a few famous faces waiting to get back to their seats. But Emma Stone, in her pixie haircut, managed to sneak by, gracefully bolting to her table as the best animated film nominees were read.

Guadagnino was not so lucky and spent the next few categories in the holding pen, letting out an excited sound when "Flow" won. During the next category, best director, he clapped enthusiastically when Payal Kapadia's name was read. The "All We Imagine As Light" director did not win the award — Brady Corbet did for "The Brutalist."

Variety

LOS ANGELES: Writer-director Jeff Baena, whose darkly comedic independent films included "The Little Hours" and who was married to his frequent creative collaborator Aubrey Plaza, has died. He was 47.

Baena was found dead Friday morning at a Los Angeles home, according to the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner's Office. His death was ruled a suicide.

Baena co-wrote David O. Russell's 2004 film "I Heart Huckabees" and wrote and directed five of his own films, four of which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival.

He had been dating Plaza for three years before she starred in his 2014 directorial debut, the zombie comedy "Life After Beth." His next film, 2016's "Joshy," featured Thomas Middleditch as a man who gets together with friends months after his fiancée commits suicide.

The son of an attorney and teacher, Baena grew up in Miami and attended film school at New York University. He told podcaster Marc Maron in a 2017 interview that his interest in cinema was sparked after watching Stanley Kubrick's "A Clockwork Orange" and Federico Fellini's "8 1/2" as a child.

"I was always drawn to left-of-center things," he told Jim Alexander two years ago in an interview for the Reel Talker YouTube channel.

Baena said in the same interview that it was "amazing" to work with Plaza, who appeared in four of his five films. The 40-year-old actor and producer rose to fame playing April Ludgate on the television series "Parks and Recreation" and was nominated for an Emmy for her role on "The White Lotus." The couple married in 2021.

"The opportunities to create together, to do something creative where we're both fulfilled, it's like, how rare is that? She's down and she's so talented, so I'm really lucky," Baena said.

A representative for Plaza said that in addition to Plaza, Baena is survived by his mother, Barbara Stern, stepfather Roger Stern, father Scott Baena, stepmother Michele Baena, brother Brad Baena and stepsiblings Bianca Gabay and Jed Fluxman. This story includes discussion of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988. (AP)



Baena

MEXICO CITY: As a teenage punk 35 years ago, José Luis Escobar Hoyos wanted to show his mother that his lifestyle wasn't just about dressing in chains and spikes and listening to loud, accelerated music.

So he started a project called Kings Punks, where he collected and distributed toys for children living on the street on Three Kings day, also known as Epiphany, when children in Mexico typically receive gifts from the three wise men.

"The bases of punk are mutual support and solidarity," the 50-year-old said Sunday night as the gift drive was in full swing.

Over the years many volunteers have joined his effort. Sporting black t-shirts from their favorite bands, black boots and glimmering piercings, the punks handed out scooters, dinosaurs and other gifts to children in the streets of Mexico City's capital early Monday.

"Dealing with children and the way you get attached and can be supportive to them - that is priceless," said Escobar, who is known locally as El Picos. "As we tell people: We don't want diplomas, recognition or anything. We are punks, and that's why we do it."

In more recent years, Escobar has expanded beyond just the places he knows Mexican families are living in the streets to also include some of Mexico City's migrant encampments.

Lucha libre wrestler Peter Punk - black tights and green and white mask - joined as well, participating in brief wrestling bouts on the pavement at each stop. Volunteers also string up a candy-filled piñata for children to bash.

One of the volunteers is shoemaker Marcos Grande. This year, he brought seven pairs of his boots to give away.

"The satisfaction of the children, bringing them a gift, a joy because many children do not have it, that is what is satisfying, taking it to where sometimes it does not reach, where they do not have the three kings but now here are friends, the group, the punks," he said. (AP)

Ratner's documentary to stream on Amazon Prime Video

Film on Melania Trump promises 'a truly unique story'

LOS ANGELES, Jan 7, (AP): Incoming first lady Melania Trump will be the subject of a new documentary directed by Brett Ratner and distributed by Amazon Prime Video. The streaming arm of the tech giant got exclusive licensing rights for a streaming and theatrical release later this year, the company said Sunday.

Filming is already underway on the documentary. The company said in a statement that the film will give viewers an "unprecedented behind-the-scenes look" at Melania Trump and also promised a "truly unique story."

The former and now future first lady also released a self-titled memoir late last year. Her husband takes office on Jan. 20.

The film is the latest connection between Amazon founder Jeff



Former first lady Melania Trump speaks at a campaign rally, Oct. 27, 2024, in New York. (AP)

Bezos and Donald Trump. The company in December announced plans to donate \$1 million to the President-elect's inauguration

fund, and said that it would also stream Trump's inauguration on its Prime Video service, a separate in-kind donation worth another \$1 million.

The two men had been at odds in the past. During his first term, Trump criticized Amazon and railed against the political coverage at The Washington Post, which Bezos owns. But he's struck a more conciliatory tone recently as Amazon and other tech companies seek to improve their relationship with the incoming president.

In December, Bezos expressed some excitement about potential regulatory cutbacks in the coming years and said he was "optimistic" about Trump's second term.

Bezos in October did not allow the Post to endorse a presidential

candidate, a move that led to tens of thousands of people canceling their subscriptions and to protests from journalists with a deep history at the newspaper. This weekend, a cartoonist quit her job after an editor rejected her sketch of the newspaper's owner and other media executives bowing before the president-elect.

The film also marks the first project that Ratner has directed since he was accused of sexual misconduct by multiple women, including actor Olivia Munn, in the early days of the #MeToo reckoning in November 2017. Ratner, whose lawyer denied the allegations, directed the "Rush Hour" film series, "Red Dragon" and "X-Men: The Last Stand."

Fernando Sulichin, an Argentine filmmaker, is executive producing

the film, which began shooting in December.

Melania Trump, Donald Trump's third wife, has been an enigmatic figure since her husband announced he was running in the 2016 election. She had sought to maintain her privacy even as she served as first lady, focusing on raising their son, Barron, and promoting her "Be Best" initiative to support the "social, emotional, and physical health of children."

While she appeared at her husband's campaign launch event for 2024 and attended the closing night of the Republican National Convention this summer, she has otherwise stayed off the campaign trail, though the demands of again being first lady may dictate a higher public profile after Inauguration Day.

Music



Bad Bunny performs at the Latin Billboard Awards in Coral Gables, Fla., on Oct. 5, 2023. (AP)

Folk and pop blend for modern anthem

Bad Bunny drops love letter to Puerto Rico

NEW YORK, Jan 7, (AP): Just in time for Three Kings Day, Bad Bunny has released his sixth studio album, an opus on his beloved Puerto Rico.

On "Debí Tirar Más Fotos," which translates to "I should have taken more photos," Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio pulls from the island's rich musical history and hybridizes it.

The journey to "Debí Tirar Más Fotos" began with the release of "El Club" in early December, a song that effortlessly combines house rhythms, electronic production - courtesy MAG, La Paciencia and Saax - and nylon-stringed plena guitars. It was an interesting tease: Here, Benito marries pop modernity with a classical, Puerto Rican folk style. Not unlike Mexican corridos, with narrative lyrics that spread messages to its people, plena has been known as "El Periódico Cantado" or "the singing newspaper" in English.

Then came "Pitorro de Coco," named after the Puerto Rican coconut-flavored spirit, a downtrodden holiday song built on a jíbara rhythm that interpolates a song from Chufito el de Bayamón's "Música Jíbara Para Las Navidades."

Both, it would turn out, were ideal introductions

to a new era for the artist. "Debí Tirar Más Fotos" is rooted in música jíbara and other Puerto Rican folkloric musical styles but works to evolve them. That's found in the salsas "Baile Inolvidable" and "La Mudanza," or the opening track "NuevaYol," a love letter to New York that weaves dembow into a sample of El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico's "Un Verano en Nueva York." It shouts out both Willie Colón and Toñita, the matriarch one of the city's last-standing Puerto Rican social clubs.

The shared language of Puerto Rico's traditions transformed into Bad Bunny's present exists in his collaborations, too. He features talent from his homeland like the band Chuwi, Dei V, Omar Courtz, Pleneros de la Cresta, and the next-generation superstar RaiNao, one woman at the forefront of the changing face of urbano.

Those listeners eager to hear more politically motivated songs a la "El Apagón" won't be disappointed, either. There's "Turista" and the affecting "Lo Que Pasó a Hawaii," where Bad Bunny sings "No quiero que pase contigo lo que pasó a Hawaii," ("I don't want what happened in Hawaii to happen to you,") a rallying cry for Puerto Rico's

cultural autonomy.

"Debí Tirar Más Fotos" follows 2023's "Nadie Sabe Lo Que Va a Pasar Mañana" ("Nobody Knows What Will Happen Tomorrow") and successfully detours from it. That record produced the ubiquitous, luxury-obsessed "Monaco" but failed to capture the summertime spirit of 2022 "Un Verano Sin Ti" - still Spotify's most-streamed album of all time. Instead, it saw Benito returning to the Latin trap of his debut, "X 100PRE." Perhaps the album was in an attempt to rekindle connection to his day one fans, though they've never left. At the time, with its lack of reggaeton and obsession with the trials and tribulations of fame, critics worried one of the world's biggest artists had abandoned his island for the glittery promises of Hollywood.

"Debí Tirar Más Fotos" should immediately alleviate any concerns. It is an album for his loyalists and new listeners alike, but most importantly, it is one of Bad Bunny's best because it does what he has always done best: "Debí Tirar Más Fotos" celebrates the music at the heart of Puerto Rico and brings it to the world.

Lodge was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1998 for services to literature. (AP)

NEW YORK: Disney has agreed to combine its Hulu + Live TV streaming service with sports-focused FuboTV, a deal that will also end pending litigation over the formation of Venu Sports, the companies said on Monday.

Under the agreement, Disney will own roughly 70 percent of Fubo, whose management team will operate the new venture. Hulu + Live TV and Fubo would continue to be offered as separate streaming services with more than 6.2 million subscribers combined in North America.

In February 2024, Fubo sued to block the launch of Venu, a joint streaming venture between Disney's ESPN, Warner Bros. Discovery and Fox Corp., alleging the companies wouldn't let Fubo carry a small bundle of sports-focused channels that they were looking to include in the new service. Fox and News Corp. share common ownership. (Xinhua)

ish novelist and critic who gently satirized academia, religion and even his own loss of hearing in such highly praised narratives as the Booker Prize finalists "Small World" and "Nice Work," has died. He was 89.

Lodge's death was announced by Vintage Books UK, which said in a statement that he died Wednesday with his family by his side. Lodge's wife, Mary, died in January 2022. He is survived by three children, Stephen, Christopher and Julia.

"His contribution to literary culture was immense, both in his criticism and through his masterful and iconic novels which have already become classics," publisher Liz Foley said in a statement. "He was also a very kind, modest and funny person and I feel incredibly lucky to have worked with him and had the pleasure of enjoying his wit and company."



Lodge

Variety

NEW ORLEANS: Women dressed as angels, hands clasped in prayer, passed through New Orleans Monday evening to celebrate the first parade of Carnival season, just blocks from where 14 people were killed five days ago by a rampaging driver.

Hundreds filled the streets for the annual Joan of Arc parade through New Orleans' historic French Quarter. Organizers said they want the event to convey the city's spirited grit as it grapples with the violent New Year's Day attack but still persists with beloved traditions.

"We are celebrating life," said Antoinette de Alteris, a captain of the Krewe de Jeanne d'Arc. "We are choosing hope and we are choosing joy."

Before the parade, President Joe Biden paid tribute to victims at the nearby St. Louis Cathedral. (AP)

LONDON: David Lodge, a witty and prolific Brit-

Underrated albums

Discover the 'hidden' musical gems of 2024

NEW YORK, Jan 7, (AP): At the end of every year, when critics rush to compile their best of the year lists, great art inevitably gets overlooked. A top 10 list doesn't leave a lot of room for discovery and, in music, that sometimes means the most innovative records lose out to make room for other titles. In this list, The Associated Press attempts to rectify that.

Here are some of the top under-the-radar albums of the year, in no particular order, as chosen by AP Music Writer Maria Sherman.

"Still," Erika de Casier

In a just world, Portuguese-born Danish singer Erika de Casier would be one of the biggest names in pop, for her retro-futuristic R&B deeply informed by the Y2K greats of the not-so-distant past. It's hard not to hear Aaliyah or Jennifer Lopez or Janet Jackson in her breathy vocal storytelling, but her songs are not simply nostalgic. They shapeshift in the inclusion of '90s UK garage production ("Ex-Girlfriend") with Charli XCX collaborator Shygirl) or her creative collaborations, like on "ice" with Florida rap duo They Hate Change.

"Psykos," Yung Lean and Bladee

One-fourth of the rap collective Drain Gang - that's Bladee (pronounced "Blade") - and emo rap prodigy Yung Lean teamed up for the surprise release "Psykos" earlier this year, a genre-allergic, rock-infused hip-hop collection of depressive pop. It's a fatalistic record for a lost, moony generation, and it may take a few listens for these Swedes to connect. But once their music does, it sounds like a surrealist document on the current moment.

"Dunya," Mustafa

Sudanese Canadian singer Mustafa's "Dunya" (which translates from Arabic to "the world") hits like ancient folkloric tradition and sounds like poetry. (It's Mustafa The Poet, after all, though he's also scored writing credits for the likes of The Weeknd, Shawn Mendes, Camila Cabello and the Jonas Brothers.) He's said the album works to "preserve and celebrate the ordinary life in the hood," what is delicately and purposefully articulated across vignettes of love, loss and his native Toronto. "Leaving Toronto," specifically, is a tearjerker - a touching tribute to his city and his late brother, who was shot and killed last year.

"Night Reign," Arooj Aftab

Pakistani American astral folk-jazz artist Arooj Aftab is celebrated in certain circles and lacks visibility in others: She's a Grammy winner who has been nominated the past three years in a row and is up for two more in 2025. She's performed at the White House. Earlier this month, she delivered an evocative set on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," a welcomed disruption from the kinds of artists who normally grace American late-night television. But she's far from a household name, more likely to be your favorite artist's favorite artist. Whatever the case, her fourth album is a testament to her greatness. "Night Reign" combines cultures and genres for a gorgeous matrimony.

"Eels," Being Dead

Those who declare there are no rock 'n' roll bands anymore aren't listening

closely enough. Enter Austin weirdos Being Dead, whose sophomore album "Eels" is an asymmetrical collection of egg punk, Devo-worship, a recording of a bus driver who has had enough, psychedelic harmonies and various other oddball sensibilities that make them the best college radio rock band in recent history. And if that isn't enough to convince a nonbeliever, the proof is in the pudding - or in this case, the producer: Grammy winner John Congleton (St. Vincent, Tegan and Sara) took the reins on the 16-track collection. And his co-sign means something.

"Across the Tracks," Boldy James & Conductor Williams

Detroit rapper Boldy James often works by finding a single - and singular - producer with whom he works closely for an album of distinction. This year, he's found a partner in Kansas City producer Conductor Williams for "Across the Tracks," a dreamy, loop-heavy record of rap excellence. It's right there from the jump. Intro "Terms and Conditions" is stuffed with vintage, soulful sensibilities and undeniable bars. "Was taught to always be the message I bring / Pulled the sword from the stone," he delivers in his cool monotone. "Could never compete / They know the flow is rather unique (blocks) / I kept the receipts."

"Sentir Que No Sabes," Mabe Fratti

In a time where celebrity musicians strive to appear like they avoid categorization, Guatemala-born, Mexico City-based cellist Mabe Fratti lives it. Her album, "Sentir Que No Sabes" ("Feel Like You Don't Know"), thrives in the uncertainty of its title. Her inventive compositions contort her chosen instrument, as well as horns and drums and pianos, into something resembling free-form jazz. Or is it post-punk pop? Experimental electro-folk? These are never quite dissonant compositions, but they are unusual, askew. Language loses out here, and it's a wonderful thing.

"Absolute Elsewhere," Blood In-Cantation

It is a failure of imagination that "best of" music lists often fail to account for metal and its subgenres, despite consistently being one of the most popular musical forms the world over. But sometimes a metal album is too grand to ignore. That is the case with American death metal band Blood In-Cantation, whose fourth studio album "Absolute Elsewhere" stunned even the genre's most transitory listeners for its prog rock spirit, synth detouring, playful kraut teases, hardened blast beats and throat-ripping vocals. It's cinematic.

"Great Doubt," Astrid Sonne

There's something in the water in Denmark. In 2024, some of the most exciting singer-songwriters hailed from the Scandinavian country: ML Buch and Clarissa Connelly, as well as de Casier. But it's the folk and classical songs of Astrid Sonne's "Great Doubt" that truly struck a chord with us. It answers the question: What would a classically trained composer making experimental, haunted pop music with detuned pianos and woodwinds and flutes and brass actually sound like? Great, it turns out.



This image released by 4AD shows 'Still' by Erika de Casier. (AP)

HEALTH

Experts investigate bird flu mutation

Health officials report first US death from bird flu

NEW YORK, Jan. 7, (AP) - The first US bird flu death has been reported - a person in Louisiana who had been hospitalized with severe respiratory symptoms.

State health officials announced the death on Monday, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed it was the nation's first due to bird flu.

Health officials have said the person was older than 65, had underlying medical problems and had been in contact with sick and dead birds in a backyard flock. They also said a genetic analysis had suggested the bird flu virus had mutated inside the patient, which could have led to the more severe illness.

Few other details about the person have been disclosed.

Since March, 66 confirmed bird flu infections have been reported in the US, but previous illnesses have been mild and most have been detected among farmworkers exposed to sick poultry or dairy cows.

A bird flu death was not unexpected, virus ex-

perts said. There have been more than 950 confirmed bird flu infections globally since 2003, and more than 460 of those people died, according to the World Health Organization.

The bird flu virus "is a serious threat and it has historically been a deadly virus," said Jennifer Nuzzo, director of the Pandemic Center at the Brown University School of Public Health. "This is just a tragic reminder of that."

Nuzzo noted a Canadian teen became severely ill after being infected recently. Researchers are still trying to gauge the dangers of the current version of the virus and determine what causes it to hit some people harder than others, she said.

"Just because we have seen mild cases does not mean future cases will continue to be mild," she added.

In a statement, CDC officials described the Louisiana death as tragic but also said "there are no concerning virologic changes actively spreading in wild birds, poultry or cows that would raise the risk

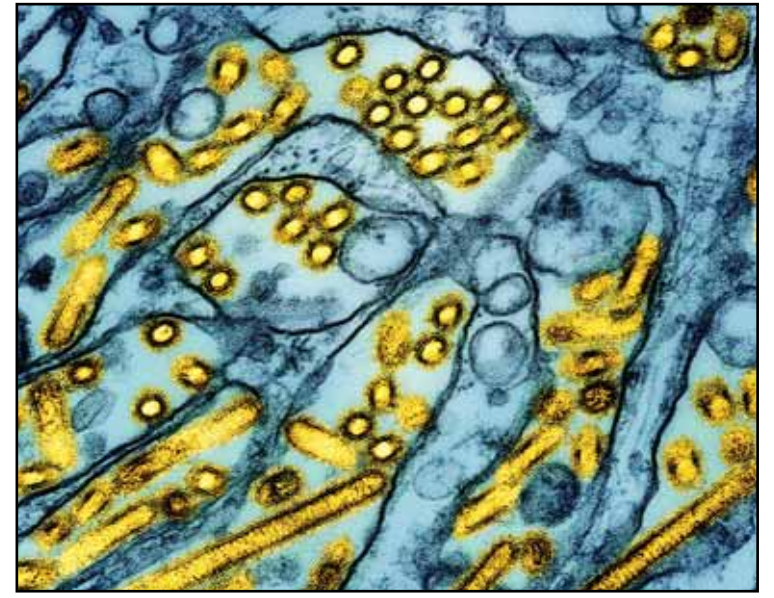
to human health."

In two of the recent US cases - an adult in Missouri and a child in California - health officials have not determined how they caught the virus. The origin of the Louisiana person's infection was not considered a mystery. But it was the first human case in the U.S. linked to exposure to backyard birds, according to the CDC.

Louisiana officials say they are not aware of any other cases in their state, and U.S. officials have said they do not have any evidence that the virus is spreading from person to person.

The H5N1 bird flu has been spreading widely among wild birds, poultry, cows and other animals. Its growing presence in the environment increases the chances that people will be exposed, and potentially catch it, officials have said.

Officials continue to urge people who have contact with sick or dead birds to take precautions, including wearing respiratory and eye protection and gloves when handling poultry.



This colorized electron microscope image released by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases on March 26, 2024, shows avian influenza A H5N1 virus particles (yellow), grown in Madin-Darby Canine Kidney (MDCK) epithelial cells (blue). (AP)



A health worker uses a pulse oximeter to check the oxygen saturation level of another after administering COVID-19 vaccine at a hospital in Gauhati, India, Jan. 21, 2021. (AP)

FDA seeks to fix disparity

Oximeters may misread 'oxygen levels' in some

WASHINGTON, Jan. 7, (AP) - Makers of medical devices that quickly measure oxygen levels in the blood would have to gather extra data to show that their products work for patients of color, under a new federal proposal released Monday.

The Food and Drug Administration's recommendations apply to pulse oximeters, which are clip-on devices used in hospitals and medical clinics to ensure patients are getting enough oxygen. The FDA said it wants companies to conduct larger studies and include more patients from different racial groups.

By snapping a device onto a finger

and then sending two wavelengths of light into the skin, the oximeter measures how much of the light is absorbed and estimates how much oxygen is flowing through the blood.

Oximeters were a critical part of emergency care for patients with COVID-19 during the pandemic. But several studies have suggested that darker skin pigmentation can sometimes throw off the accuracy of readings. In 2021, the FDA warned doctors about potential inaccuracies with oximeters after a study found the devices tended to overestimate Black patients' oxygen levels, which could lead to delays in getting treatment and increased risks of death.

Indonesia confirms HMPV cases

India strengthens HMPV surveillance as cases rise

NEW DELHI, Jan. 7, (Xinhua) - Following the detection of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) cases in India, the federal health ministry Tuesday asked states to review Influenza-Like Illness (ILI) and severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) surveillance.

The federal health secretary Monday reviewed the situation of respiratory illnesses in the country and the status of public health measures for their management.

According to the health ministry, the data from the Integrated Disease Surveillance Program (IDSP) does not indicate any unusual rise in ILISARI cases anywhere in the country, which

is also corroborated by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) sentinel surveillance data.

HMPV is one of the many respiratory viruses that can cause infections in people of all ages, particularly during the winter and early spring months. The virus infection is usually a mild and self-limiting condition and most cases recover on their own.

Meanwhile, Indonesian Minister of Health Budi Gunadi Sadikin announced on Tuesday that the country has detected infections of the respiratory virus HMPV, but assured the public that the disease is not dangerous.

Changes in diet, food production blamed

Doctors worry that iodine deficiency, dietary problem from past, resurging

NEW YORK, Jan. 7, (AP) - The 13-year-old boy came to the clinic with a rapidly ballooning neck. Doctors were puzzled.

Testing ruled out their first suspicion. But further tests pinpointed what they - and the boy - had been missing: iodine.

A century ago, iodine deficiency affected kids across large swaths of the country. It essentially disappeared after some food makers started adding it to table salt, bread and some other foods, in one of the great public health success stories of the 20th century.

But today, people are getting less iodine because of changes in diet and food manufacturing.

Although most people are still getting enough, researchers have increasingly been reporting low levels of iodine in pregnant women and other people, raising concerns about an impact on their newborns. And there is also a very small, but growing, number of reports of iodine deficiency in kids.

"This needs to be on people's radar," said Dr. Monica Serrano-Gonzalez, a Brown University doctor who treated the boy in 2021 in Providence, Rhode Island.

Iodine is a trace element found in seawater and in some soils - mostly in coastal areas. A French chemist accidentally discovered it in 1811 when an experiment with seaweed ash created a purple puff of vapor. The name iodine comes from a Greek word meaning violet-colored.

Later that century, scientists began to understand that people need certain amounts of iodine to regulate their metabolism and stay healthy, and that it's crucial in the development of brain function in children.

One sign of insufficient iodine is a swelling of the neck, known as a goiter. The thyroid gland in the neck uses iodine to produce hormones that regulate the heart rate and other body functions. When there's not enough iodine, the thyroid gland enlarges as it goes into overdrive to make up for the lack of iodine.

At the beginning of the 20th century, goiter was very common in children in certain inland parts of the United States, especially in a "goiter belt" that stretched from Appalachia and the Great Lakes to the northwest United States. Some of the kids were unusually short, deaf, intellectually stunted and had other symptoms of a syndrome once known as "cretinism."



Iodized salt is displayed for a photograph in Philadelphia on Monday, Jan. 6, 2025. (AP)

Public health experts realized they couldn't solve the problem by feeding everyone seaweed and seafood, but they learned that iodine can essentially be sprayed on table salt. Iodized salt first became available in 1924. By the 1950s, more than 70% of U.S. households used iodized table salt. Bread and some other foods also were fortified with iodine, and iodine deficiency became rare.

But diets changed. Processed foods now make up a large part of the American diet, and though they contain a lot of salt, it's not iodized. Leading bread brands no longer add iodine. In the case of the 13-year-old boy, he has mild autism and was a fussy eater, mostly only eating specific brands of bread and peanut butter.

TCM treatments stir curiosity

China offers free clinical services in Malta

VALLETTA, Jan. 7, (Xinhua) - The 20th Chinese medical team for Malta from the Mediterranean Regional Centre for Traditional Chinese Medicine (MRCTCM) Sunday provided free clinical services to residents in Santa Lucija, southern Malta, and donated medical supplies.

During the event, the medical team offered traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) treatments, sparking significant interests among local residents. For many, it was their first encounter with TCM, and they approached it with curiosity and admiration.

Mariella Ruggier, 72, described the experience as extraordinary. "It feels quite different to be able to see a TCM doctor right at my doorstep," she said. Ruggier, who has knee arthritis, expressed amazement at TCM's history spanning thousands of years. "That's really remarkable," she added, noting her intention to try acupuncture in the future.

Pierre Zammit, 65, a TCM enthusiast, shared his experience with acupuncture treatment. He explained that he regularly seeks acupuncture therapy to treat insomnia. "I found it incredibly effective for insomnia," he said, adding, "Several

of my friends have also tried acupuncture on my recommendation, and they all gave positive feedback."

Domenico Farrugia, 67, gave a glowing review of his Tui-na treatment, a form of TCM therapeutic massage. "It really works. It is amazing," he said, giving the thumbs up after experiencing significant relief from his neck pain.

In addition to providing treatments, members of the Chinese medical team measured blood pressure and blood sugar levels for residents, while also demonstrating the proper use of donated plasters.

The event aimed to introduce TCM culture to more local people by offering health consultations and free medical services. Yang Libai, leader of the Chinese medical team, said, highlighting that these efforts also serve to strengthen the friendship between China and Malta.

The MRCTCM was established by the Chinese and Maltese governments in 1994. To date, 20 Chinese medical teams comprising over 100 doctors, have provided TCM treatments to approximately 250,000 Maltese patients.

Novel job

New vaccine to fight infections

COLUMBUS, Ohio, Jan. 7, (Agencies) - Clarametx Biosciences Inc. ("Clarametx"), a biotechnology company developing immune-enabling biologic technologies to combat serious infections associated with biofilms, has announced that CARB-X (Combating Antibiotic Resistant Bacteria Biopharmaceutical Accelerator), a global non-profit partnership dedicated to accelerating antibacterial research and development, has awarded the company funding to advance its novel anti-biofilm vaccine candidate, CMTX-301, through lead optimization to prepare for preclinical (IND-enabling) and Phase 1 evaluation. Pre-clinical and Phase 1 clinical evaluation work plans may be considered for future awards with successful completion of milestones.

Clarametx is developing a novel non-antibiotic and pathogen-agnostic therapeutic and vaccine platform to address persistent bacterial infections and combat the global threat of antibiotic resistance. This approach targets and removes universal structural elements within the bacterial biofilm, rapidly dismantling the structure and rendering bacteria vulnerable to immune response or antibiotic intervention. This collaboration funds development of CMTX-301, which is designed specifically to prevent biofilm formation and maturation, enabling the body's natural immune response to more effectively clear emerging infections, ultimately reducing their incidence and severity.

Training: The 34th Chinese medical aid team to Tanzania's Zanzibar has recently provided specialized training to more than 30 local doctors at Kivunge District Hospital in the Unguja North region.

Invited by Zanzibar's Ministry of Health, the team, consisting of experts from Huai'an No. 1 People's Hospital in east China's Jiangsu Province, offered lectures and hands-on teaching on Sunday, breathing new life into the local healthcare system.

As a key element of the China-Africa hospital cooperation mechanism, the training covered a range of topics, including laparoscopic surgery, imaging diagnosis of small intestinal obstruction, transperineal prostate puncture, and gallstone disease.

Chinese imaging expert Zhang Jiandong elaborated on the diagnosis of small intestinal obstruction, enhancing local doctors' ability to diagnose acute abdominal conditions.

Urology doctor Niu Xiaobing introduced the new technique of transperineal prostate puncture, aimed at improving the diagnosis and treatment of prostate cancer in local hospitals.

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SPORTS

Beal shines off the bench, Suns snap four-game skid



Philadelphia 76ers' Kelly Oubre Jr., center, goes up for a shot between Phoenix Suns' Jusuf Nurkic, right, and Bradley Beal during the second half of an NBA basketball game, in Philadelphia. (AP)

Pistons rally for win over Blazers

DETROIT, Jan 7, (AP): Cade Cunningham had 32 points and nine assists as the Detroit Pistons reached .500 for the first time after New Year's Day since 2019 with a 118-115 win over the Portland Trail Blazers on Monday night.

Tim Hardaway Jr. added 26 points for Detroit and Jalen Duren had 14 points and 12 rebounds. The Pistons (18-18), who were 3-33 after 36 games a season ago, have won seven of eight.

Anfernee Simons had 36 points and nine assists for Portland, while Shaedon Sharpe had 20 points, eight assists and eight rebounds. The Trail Blazers led by 22 points in the first half.

Suns 109, 76ers 99

In Philadelphia, Bradley Beal came off the bench for the first time in nine years and scored 25 points as Phoenix ended a four-game skid with a win over Philadelphia.

Beal was shifted to a reserve role before the game and scored 20 points in the second half as the Suns overcame an early 12-point deficit and won for the second time in nine games.

Kevin Durant scored 23 points and Ryan Dunn 15 for the Suns.

Tyrese Maxey had 31 points and 10 assists for the Sixers, who were missing Joel Embiid, who was sidelined with a left foot sprain. Kelly Oubre added 26 points as Philadelphia lost for the third time in four games.

Pacers 113, Nets 99

In New York, Tyrese Haliburton scored 23 points, Benedict Mathurin added 20 and Indiana beat Brooklyn.

Pascal Siakam contributed 19 points and Obi Toppin scored 11 for the Pacers, who have won three straight and nine of 12.

Day'Ron Sharpe had 16 points and 13 rebounds, Tyrese Martin added 15 points and Noah Clowney scored 14 for the Nets, who have lost 10 of 13.

Indiana led by 24 points in the third quarter before the Nets went on a 12-0 run over the last 4:30 of the period to trim the deficit to 78-70.

Brooklyn fell behind by 14 early in the fourth quarter and got within 10 before the Pacers responded with a 14-2 spurt, capped by a dunk and

a 3-pointer from Toppin that increased the lead to 105-83 with 4:33 left.

Magic 103, Knicks 94

In New York, Cole Anthony scored 24 points, Wendell Carter Jr. had a season-high 19 off the bench and Orlando shut down a New York team missing Karl-Anthony Towns for a victory.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope added 15 points for the Magic, who are missing their top four scorers because of injuries but didn't need too much offense the way they defended. They limited the Knicks to 4-for-22 shooting from 3-point range and didn't allow a make in the second half until Cam Payne's basket with 8.2 seconds remaining.

Jalen Brunson and Mikal Bridges each scored 24 points for the Knicks, who were held to their lowest point total of the season in their season-high third straight loss. Towns, averaging 25.3 points and an NBA-leading 14 rebounds, sat with right knee pain.

Bucks 128, Raptors 104

In Toronto, Giannis Antetokounmpo had 11 points, 13 assists and 12 rebounds for his fourth triple-double of the season, Damian Lillard scored 25 points and Milwaukee beat struggling Toronto.

Bobby Portis scored 20 points, Gary Trent Jr. had 17 against his former team and Brook Lopez added 16 for Milwaukee.

The Bucks outscored the Raptors 63-24 in bench points and handed Toronto its 13th loss in 14 games.

Lillard scored 15 points in the third, making all five of his field

goal attempts.

Milwaukee came in having lost two straight and four of five, all to teams with losing records. But the Bucks had no trouble handling the Raptors. The Bucks' biggest lead was 33 points, 113-80, after a Lopez 3-pointer in the fourth quarter.

Bulls 114, Spurs 110

In Chicago, Coby White made a go-ahead layup with 47 seconds left, and Chicago topped Victor Wembanyama and San Antonio.

Zach LaVine had 35 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists for Chicago, which trailed by 19 before rallying in the fourth quarter. Nikola Vucevic had 24 points and 11 boards, and White finished with 23 points.

After White's layup gave the Bulls their first lead at 111-110, Devin Vassell threw away the ball for San Antonio. White then drove into the lane and dunked over a late-arriving Wembanyama, delighting the crowd of 18,886 at the United Center.

Wembanyama had 23 points, 14 rebounds and eight blocks for San Antonio, which carried a 95-82 lead into the final period. Chris Paul added 18 points and nine assists in the opener of a four-game trip.

Grizzlies 119, Mavericks 104

In Memphis, Jaren Jackson Jr. had 35 points, 13 rebounds and five assists to lead Memphis to a victory over Dallas.

Scotty Pippen Jr. finished with 18 points, while Jaylen Wells added 17 points and 11 rebounds as Memphis won for the 10th time in the last 11



Sacramento Kings guard Keon Ellis, left, drives to the basket past Miami Heat guard Jaime Jaquez Jr. (11) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Sacramento, Calif. (AP)

crew chief.

"Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would enter a NASCAR race and certainly not the Daytona 500 with a team like Trackhouse Racing," Castroneves said. "This is an opportunity that nobody in their right mind could ever turn down. I am so thankful to Wendy's for allowing me to wear their uniform and drive their car."

Project 91 debuted in 2022 when former Formula 1 champion Kimi Raikkonen made his Cup Series debut at Watkins Glen. Project 91 then ran three times in 2023, once with Raikkonen at Circuit of the Americas and twice with three-time

Australian V8 Supercars champion Shane van Gisbergen.

Van Gisbergen won in his NASCAR debut on the street course in Chicago and that led to last season's move to full-time stock car competition. The New Zealander will be a full-time Cup Series driver this year.

Castroneves, meanwhile, is at the end of his driving career. One of only four drivers to win the Indy 500 four times, the Brazilian moved into an ownership role with Meyer Shank Racing last season and only ran three races.

His 2021 win at Indianapolis was with Meyer Shank, where he landed after his long career with Team Pen-

home games.

P.J. Washington led the Mavericks with 17 points and 10 rebounds. Naji Marshall finished with 16 points, while Klay Thompson and Jaden Hardy added 15 points each. Dallas has lost five straight.

The Mavericks already were without leading scorer Luka Doncic with a left calf strain, and earlier Monday, Dallas announced that backcourt mate Kyrie Irving will miss time with a bulging disk in his back. That meant both teams were without their starting backcourts as injuries kept Ja Morant and Desmond Bane out for the Grizzlies.

Timberwolves 108, Clippers 106

In Minneapolis, Anthony Edwards scored 28 of his 37 points in the second half and Minnesota overcame a 19-point first-half deficit to beat Los Angeles.

Edwards, who had a career-high 53 points in Saturday's loss at Detroit, finished 14 of 29 from the field, including a pair of late 3-pointers for his eighth game this season of 30-plus points.

Naz Reid scored 18 off the bench and Donte DiVincenzo added 15 for Minnesota, which ended a three-game slide. Rudy Gobert had eight points and a game-high 18 rebounds.

Norman Powell led Los Angeles with 25 points, James Harden added 22 and Ivica Zubac had 17 points and 16 rebounds. The Clippers have lost three of four.

Kings 123, Heat 118, 20T

In Sacramento, DeMar DeRozan scored nine of Sacramento's 11 points in the second overtime, and the Kings beat Miami Heat to extend their winning streak to a season-high five games under interim coach Doug Christie.

DeRozan finished with 30 points on 12-of-26 shooting. Domantas Sabonis had 21 points, 18 rebounds and 11 assists as the Kings (18-19) won their second straight without injured point guard De'Aaron Fox.

Malik Monk scored 23 points, Keon Ellis had 17 and Keegan Murray added 14 points and 12 rebounds.

Jaime Jaquez Jr. had a triple-double with 16 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists for Miami. Tyler Herro scored 26 but was called for a costly 8-second violation toward the end of the fourth quarter.

Terry Rozier added 18 points, and Hayward Highsmith had 14.

'Draw to access ticket sales'

Djokovic reflects on deportation trauma ahead of Australian Open

MELBOURNE, Jan 7, (AP): Novak Djokovic said he still feels "a bit of trauma" when he travels to Australia, stemming from his deportation in 2022 because he was not vaccinated against COVID-19.

"The last couple of times that I landed in Australia, to go through passport control and immigration, I had a bit of trauma from three years ago," Djokovic said in an interview with Melbourne's Herald Sun newspaper published Monday, ahead of the Australian Open. "And some traces still stay there when I'm passing passport control, just checking out if someone from immigration zone is approaching."

Djokovic, who has won 10 of his 24 Grand Slam championships at Melbourne Park, continued: "The person checking my passport - are they going to take me, detain me again or let me go? I must admit I have that feeling."

Back in 2022, Djokovic sought, and initially obtained, an exemption that would allow him into the Australian Open - and the country - even though there were strict rules requiring shots to protect against the coronavirus. But after his flight landed, he was detained at the airport, his visa was canceled and he was sent to an immigration hotel.

A judge later reinstated the visa and ordered Djokovic's release, ruling he wasn't given enough time to speak to his lawyers. Australia's immigration minister then took away the visa again, based on "public interest." Djokovic's appeal of that ruling was denied by a three-judge panel, and he was deported. He faced a possible three-year ban from the country as someone whose visa was revoked, but Australia had a change of government, its pandemic border rules changed and a new immigration minister granted Djokovic a visa in 2023 - when he went on to claim the trophy.

"I don't hold any resentment, to be honest," Djokovic told the Herald Sun about the saga. "I don't hold a grudge."

The Australian Open begins Sunday (Saturday EST), and Djokovic will be pursuing his 11th trophy in Melbourne to add to his men's record and an unprecedented 25th major singles title overall.

A year ago, Djokovic lost in the semifinals to eventual champion Jan-nik Sinner.

"I just hope to, before I retire, get at least one more title there," said the



Serbia's Novak Djokovic reacts after losing his match against USA's Reilly Opelka at the Brisbane International, in Brisbane, Australia. (AP)

37-year-old Djokovic, whose only triumph at a tournament in 2024 was his singles gold medal for Serbia at the Paris Olympics in August.

Djokovic opened 2025 at the Brisbane International last week, losing in the quarterfinals to Reilly Opelka.

At the Australian Open, Djokovic will be playing in his first event alongside new coach Andy Murray, his former on-court rival and a three-time major champion who retired as a player after the Summer Games. Murray and Djokovic have said they will partner up through the year's initial Grand Slam tournament.

French Open organizers are introducing a draw system to access ticket sales for the clay-court Grand Slam tournament.

The French tennis federation said Tuesday it faces an "ever-increasing demand" and that the trial of a random draw for the general public should help reduce waiting times and ensure a fairer access to seats.

"Finally, this new sales system will make it possible to combat fraud and the purchase of tickets by bots," organizers said.

Registration for the draw will run from Jan. 27 to Feb. 9. Being selected in the draw will guarantee access to ticket sales, but not necessarily the right to receive tickets for a specific day or court, organizers said.

The French federation has also limited the maximum number of tickets one can buy for the main courts to four per person.

The French Open takes place from May 25-June 8 at Roland Garros stadium in Paris.

Guangzhou unable to meet requirements

China's most successful club folds under weight of debts

BEIJING, Jan 7, (AP): Guangzhou FC, the most successful soccer club in Chinese history, disbanded on Monday due to crippling debts.

The club, formerly known as Guangzhou Evergrande, has been unable to meet the Chinese Football Association's financial entry requirements needed to compete in the 2025 domestic season.

"Due to heavy financial burdens resulted from previous seasons, the club could not pay off all the debt by the deadline," Guangzhou said in a statement. "We express our sincere apology to all the supporters from across the community and we appreciate the understanding and forgiveness of all the fans very much."

After being taken over by property developer Evergrande in 2010, the club started the spending spree in China that made headlines around the world.

Helped by players such as Brazilian international Paulinho and elite coaches such as Marcello Lippi of

Italy and Brazil's Luiz Felipe Scolari, Guangzhou won eight Chinese Super League titles from 2011 to 2019. The team triumphed also won the Asian Champions League in 2013 and 2015.

Other clubs followed with world-famous stars such as Carlos Tevez, Nicolas Anelka, Oscar, Didier Drogba and others heading to China.

In 2021 however, Evergrande reported debts of over \$300 billion and, as key players left the club due to financial issues, it was relegated to China's second tier in 2022.

On the same day, Chinese Super League club Cangzhou Mighty Lions also announced its disbandment, as did third tier club Hunan Billows.

"Only by setting sights on the long term, keeping the financial operation in a healthy status and investing in youth with patience should clubs build a robust future," the Chinese Football Association said in a statement, adding that 49 teams had been deemed financially ready to compete in the top three tiers of the league system in 2025.



In this file photo, Chinese soccer fans from the Guangzhou F.C. cheer during a match for the Super League of Chinese Football Association in Guangzhou in south China's Guangdong province. (AP)

Castroneves set to make NASCAR debut at Daytona 500 with Trackhouse Racing

CHARLOTTE, N.C., Jan 7, (AP): Four-time Indianapolis 500 winner Hélio Castroneves will attempt to make his NASCAR debut in next month's Daytona 500 with Trackhouse Racing.

Castroneves, one of the most popular drivers in IndyCar history, has been trying for two years to get a Daytona 500 seat and finally landed one Monday as part of Trackhouse's "Project 91" designed to give renowned racers from outside of NASCAR a shot in a stock car.

He will attempt to qualify for the "Great American Race" in the No. 91 Chevrolet with sponsorship from Wendy's. Darian Grubb will be his

crew chief.

"Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would enter a NASCAR race and certainly not the Daytona 500 with a team like Trackhouse Racing," Castroneves said. "This is an opportunity that nobody in their right mind could ever turn down. I am so thankful to Wendy's for allowing me to wear their uniform and drive their car."

Australian V8 Supercars champion Shane van Gisbergen.

Van Gisbergen won in his NASCAR debut on the street course in Chicago and that led to last season's move to full-time stock car competition. The New Zealander will be a full-time Cup Series driver this year.

Castroneves, meanwhile, is at the end of his driving career. One of only four drivers to win the Indy 500 four times, the Brazilian moved into an ownership role with Meyer Shank Racing last season and only ran three races.

His 2021 win at Indianapolis was with Meyer Shank, where he landed after his long career with Team Pen-

ske came to a close. Castroneves had been inquiring for the last few years about a chance to run the Daytona 500.

Castroneves is a three-time winner of the Rolex 24 endurance sports car race held on the road course inside Daytona International Speedway. NASCAR's biggest race is held on the 2 1/2-mile oval.

"Hélio is one of the greatest drivers of all time and exactly the type of driver we want to bring to NASCAR," Trackhouse owner Justin Marks said. "I think race fans around the world will be excited to see Hélio in NASCAR's most prestigious race. It also exposes our sport to a global

audience and allows them to see just how great of a series we have in NASCAR."

Castroneves won 31 races in IndyCar and finished second in the championship four times. He's part of the exclusive group of four-time Indy 500 winners with A.J. Foyt, Rick Mears and Al Unser Sr.

Castroneves will need to qualify for the Feb. 16 race with either a fast time in time trials or race his way in via a qualifying race. There are only four open spots in the 40-car field, as 36 are earmarked for teams that hold NASCAR charters. Trackhouse has three chartered Cup cars, but the Project 91 Chevrolet is not one of

them. The Trackhouse drivers with guaranteed spots in the Daytona 500 are van Gisbergen, Ross Chastain and Daniel Suarez.

If Castroneves won the Daytona 500, he would join Foyt and Mario Andretti as the only drivers to win both the Daytona 500 and Indianapolis 500.

"I know how much of a challenge this is going to be, but I also know the type of people and team Trackhouse Racing will bring to the effort," Castroneves said. "I can't wait to get to the Trackhouse race shop in North Carolina to meet everyone and prepare for Daytona. There is so much I must learn and I'm ready to get started."

Al-Qadsiya faces key absences ahead of crucial Zain Premier League match

Al-Arabi president confirms Majed's commitment, clarifies transfer situations

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: Al-Arabi Club President, Abdulaziz Ashour, announced that the club will continue to retain the services of rising star Youssef Majed, confirming that the talented player has signed a five-season contract with the "Green" club.

Majed's performance has been exceptional this season, with notable contributions to Al-Arabi's success, as well as impressive displays for the youth, Olympic, and senior teams.

Ashour expressed that Majed is

one of the most promising talents in Kuwaiti football, reaffirming that the club is fully committed to keeping him. However, he added, "Should Majed receive a distinguished offer from abroad, Al-Arabi will not obstruct his path to professionalism."

In a post-match statement following Al-Arabi's win against Al-Nasr in the Zain Premier League, Ashour also addressed the return of Abdulrahman Al-Dhafiri, revealing that the club has closed the door on a possible return for the player after Kazma recently terminated his contract.

Ashour clarified, "Al-Arabi al-



Al-Arabi Club president Abdulaziz Ashour

ways prioritizes the best interests of both the player and the club. While we were open to Al-Dhafiri's potential move to Saudi Arabia, the deal didn't materialize, and we were taken by surprise by his sudden departure from the club."

Regarding strengthening the squad, Ashour highlighted the presence of five professional players within the team, expressing confidence in their contributions and praising the excellent technical work of head coach Nasser Al-Shatti.

Al-Qadsiya will be without two key players, Khalid Ibrahim and

goalkeeper Khalid Al-Rashidi, for tomorrow's crucial league clash against Kuwait Club in the tenth round. Both players sustained injuries while representing Kuwait in the "Khaleeji Zain 26". Ibrahim is dealing with a tear in his posterior muscle, while Al-Rashidi is recovering from a back injury.

In other news, midfielder Salman Al-Bous is reportedly considering leaving Al-Qadsiya, having expressed his desire to depart before the end of his contract in June due to dissatisfaction with his position on the reserve bench.

Al-Qadsiya recently parted ways with Brazilian defender Igor Rossi

and continues to grapple with a "financial crisis" that threatens to destabilize the team's progress.

Despite these challenges, Al-Qadsiya remains focused on winning, understanding that only victories can revive their hopes of contending for the league title, which has eluded the club for several years. However, the team's internal struggles and instability raise concerns, especially after their recent 3-0 defeat to Al-Salmiya in a friendly match, in which many key professionals were unavailable.

Forest moves closer to European dream

Gibbs-White and Wood shine in win over Wolves

WOLVERHAMPTON, England, Jan 7, (AP): Nottingham Forest beat Wolverhampton Wanderers 3-0 away from home and moved within six points of Premier League leader Liverpool on Monday.

First-half goals from Morgan Gibbs-White and Chris Wood and an injury-time third from Taiwo Awoniyi sent Forest to a sixth straight league win. Nuno Espirito Santo's men are tied on points with Arsenal, which is above them on goal difference.

The game took place on the 50th anniversary of Brian Clough's appointment at the City Ground and the old maestro would have been thrilled to see his team get off to the perfect start with a goal after six minutes.

Former Wolves midfielder Gibbs-White combined on the counterattack with Anthony Elanga before stroking the ball into the bottom corner from 14 meters.

Both sides looked to play football and Wolves came into the game. However, Norwegian striker Jorgen Strand Larsen rued missing a couple of clear chances and he was punished two minutes before halftime when Wood doubled the visitor's lead.

The big New Zealander put away Callum Hudson-Odoi's cut back to grab his 12th goal of the season and his eighth in 13 league appearances against Wolves.

Forest dominated the second half and Wood's late replacement Awoniyi made it 3-0 in stoppage time.

The result set up a mouth-watering fixture between first and third next week, when Forest hosts Liverpool on Jan. 14.



Wolverhampton Wanderers' Tommy Doyle, left, fouls Nottingham Forest's Anthony Elanga during the Premier League match at Molineux Stadium, Wolverhampton, England. (AP)

It also brought Forest's European dreams a tiny bit closer. Wood said the squad's focus was keeping up the rich form that would make that happen for the first time since the 1990s.

"It is about consistency and doing what we have been doing extremely well already this season," Wood said. "We're not giving up halfway through the season, we need to keep doing

what we've been doing in the first 19 matches. The defeat was the first for recently appointed Wolves coach Vitor Pereira and left it fourth from bottom. It was "one of those games where

you feel like the result could've been the other way," Wolves defender Matt Doherty said. "Teams are ruthless. You can't make mistakes and we made a couple of them and we got punished."

Fahaheel, Khaitan face off in league

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: The Zain Premier League resumes today with a single match as Fahaheel faces Khaitan at Al-Bab Stadium in Ahmadi Governorate at 5:35 pm, marking the start of the tournament's second half. The league has been on hiatus since November 6 due to the Kuwait national team's participation in the Asian qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup and Kuwait's hosting of the "Khaleeji Zain 26", which concluded last Saturday.

The round continues tomorrow with two matches: Al-Tadamon will face Al-Yarmouk at Nasser Al-Osaimi Stadium.

Fahaheel, under Syrian coach Firas Al-Khatib, aims to extend its dominance over Khaitan after a 4-1 victory in the first half of the season. A win today would temporarily elevate Fahaheel to third place and secure its position away from the relegation zone. The team recently completed a training camp in Sharjah, UAE, but will miss key players Ahmed Al-Riyahi, Mohammed Naeem, and Abdullah Mawi due to injuries.

Meanwhile, Khaitan is eager to secure its second win of the competition and keep alive its hopes of qualifying for the "top-six" league stage.

Sanders dominates the motorbikes

Baciuška wins Dakar Rally's longest stage

BISHA, Saudi Arabia, Jan 7, (AP): Lithuanian driver Rokas Baciuška proved he's a contender in the Dakar Rally when he won the longest stage in the Saudi Arabia desert.

Baciuška was 22 minutes off the lead starting the second half of the two-day, 967-kilometer second stage. But on the day's 341-kilometer drive back to Bisha, he finished within seven minutes of provisional winner Yazeed Al Rajhi, and hours later was promoted to stage winner.

Baciuška was given back time lost for faulty refueling, giving him the win by nearly three minutes over Al Rajhi. Juan Cruz Yacopini of Argentina was also promoted after the race to third, giving the Overdrive Racing team's Toyotas 1-2-3 on the stage.

Al Rajhi and Nasser Al-Attiyah's Dacia duelled over the entire stage, and were as close as 20 seconds apart. But at the finish they were penalised two and four minutes respectively for exceeding speed limits.

Baciuška's credentials aren't in dispute. He made the podium in his first three Dakars in the buggy classes, and turned them into world rally-raid titles the last three years.

This year he's stepped up to the major car category, reunited with his first Dakar co-driver, Oriol Mena, after his usual partner Oriol Vidal withdrew with a back injury. They got off to a horrible start on stage



Driver Rokas Baciuška and co-driver Oriol Mena of Lithuania compete during the third stage of the Dakar Rally between Bisha and Al-Henakiyah, Saudi Arabia. (AP)

one when mechanical problems cost them 2 hours, 20 minutes.

But by Sunday night, despite another late mishap, Baciuška was only 22 minutes off the pace.

Another big improver was Sebastien Loeb, who rebounded from engine fan problems on Sunday by slashing 15 minutes on Monday to finish only 16 minutes back in seventh.

Defending champion Carlos Sainz, who landed on his roof on

Sunday, lost more time on Monday and finished more than 1 1/2 hours behind.

Overall, the leader was South Africa's Henk Lategan after finishing fourth on the stage; Al Rajhi was nearly five minutes behind, and Al-Attiyah third more than 11 minutes back.

"The dust was a problem for most of the stage," Lategan said. "The navigation was also super, super tricky. Brett (Cummings, co-driver)

did really well. It's actually a big surprise to be first because we haven't been really focusing on it. But I'm happy with that. We've been playing a more strategic game over these two days."

Toby Price and navigator Sam Sunderland, both two-time motorbike champions trying four wheels for the first time, were fourth.

In the motorbike class, Daniel Sanders became the first rider to win three consecutive stages since Joan Barreda in 2017.

Sanders was seventh to start the day but the Australian caught the pathfinders after about 150 kilometers and controlled the rest of the race.

After 11 hours of racing over two days, Sanders won the stage by more than seven minutes from American Skyler Howes. Spain's Tosha Schareina, who opened the way, was only another four seconds back.

Overall, Sanders was more than 12 minutes up on Howes and Botswana's Ross Branch.

Defending champion Ricky Brabec fell 15 minutes back in fifth.

"The body feels good and I don't feel tired at all," Sanders said. "I just saved a lot of energy ready for next week. It was good to get the stage win, but it was on me to decide whether I wanted today or not."

Pakistan fined and docked 5 pts

England urged to boycott game against Afghanistan

LONDON, Jan 7, (AP): England should refuse to play the Champions Trophy cricket match against Afghanistan next month according to a letter signed by more than 160 U.K. politicians.

The politicians want the England and Wales Cricket Board to take a stand against the Taliban regime and boycott the men's one-day international against Afghanistan in Lahore, Pakistan, on Feb. 26.

Female participation in sport has effectively been outlawed since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, a move that puts the Afghanistan Cricket Board in contravention of International Cricket Council rules.

Because Afghanistan's men are still allowed to compete by the ICC, a strongly worded letter has emerged from the U.K. parliament pleading for the ECB to make its own moral objection.

Penning by Labour MP Tonia Antoniazzi and signed by a cross-party group from the House of Commons and House of Lords including Nigel Farage and Jeremy Corbyn.

Gould issued a swift response, reaffirming ECB principles while suggesting it favoured a uniform approach from all member nations rather than acting alone.

"The ECB strongly condemns the treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime," he said.

"The ICC constitution mandates that all member nations are committed to the growth and development of women's cricket. In line with this commitment, the ECB has maintained its position of not scheduling any bilateral cricket

matches against Afghanistan.

"A coordinated, ICC-wide approach would be significantly more impactful than unilateral actions by individual members.

"We understand the concerns raised by those who believe that a boycott of men's cricket could inadvertently support the Taliban's efforts to suppress freedoms and isolate Afghan society. It's crucial to recognise the importance of cricket as a source of hope and positivity for many Afghans, including those displaced from the country."

At the 2003 Cricket World Cup, England forfeited a game against Zimbabwe in protest at Robert Mugabe's regime.

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The ICC has fined Pakistan players 25 percent of their match fee and also docked the team five World Test Championship points for maintaining a slow over-rate against South Africa in the second test at Newlands.

South Africa, which will take on Australia in the WTC final at Lord's in June, swept Pakistan 2-0 in the series with a 10-wicket win inside four days in the second test.

The ICC said in a statement that match referee **Richie Richardson** of the West Indies imposed the sanction after "Pakistan was ruled to be five overs short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration."

According to the ICC code of conduct, players are fined five percent of their match fee for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time. The teams are also penalized one WTC point for each over short.

The ICC also said that Pakistan captain **Shan Masood** accepted the proposed sanction, so there was no need for a formal hearing.

Pakistan is at No. 8 in the points table just above last-placed West Indies.

Tottenham triggers option to extend Son contract

LONDON, Jan 7, (AP): Tottenham has triggered an option to extend Son Heung-min's contract until 2026, the Premier League club said Tuesday.

Son's deal, which he signed in 2021, was due to expire at the end of the season.

Spurs said the South Korea international had become a "global star" and a "modern-day great" in his time at the club.

Son joined Tottenham from Bayer Leverkusen in 2015 and has made 431 appearances. The 32-year-old Spurs captain is the club's fourth highest scorer of all time with 169 goals and is No. 18 on the Premier League's list of leading marksmen with 125 goals.

He won the Premier League's golden boot in

2021-22.

Son has made 131 appearances for South Korea.

The announcement of his extension came ahead of Tottenham's English League Cup semifinal first leg against Liverpool on Wednesday.

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Slavia Prague signed Czech Republic forward **Vasil Kušej** from domestic rival **Mlada Boleslav** on Tuesday.

Slavia said Kušej signed a contract until December 2028. Financial details were not given.

Kušej has three goals and eight assists in the Czech league this season.

Last season, his six goals and nine assists

helped Mlada Boleslav qualify for a European competition for the first time in 17 years. Including qualifying, the 24-year-old forward scored four goals and added three assists in the third-tier Conference League this season.

Kušej has played two games for the Czech national team.

He still won't be eligible for Slavia's final two games in the second-tier Europa League in January but could be available for the knockout rounds, if Slavia qualifies.

The announcement came two days after Slavia sold goalkeeper **Antonín Kinský** to **Tottenham**. The deal estimated to be worth up to 17 million euros (\$17.7 million) is the biggest sum paid for a Czech goalkeeper.



Milwaukee Bucks guard Ryan Rollins (13) drives between Toronto Raptors guard Jamal Sheard (23) and Bruce Brown, right, during second-half NBA basketball game action in Toronto. (AP) - See Page 14

Sports

Blues play second friendly against Cuban team

Morale high as Kuwait begins final countdown to Handball World Cup

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: Kuwait will play its second friendly match in Croatia tomorrow against the Cuban team. This comes after its first friendly game against the Green Mountain team. These matches are part of the team's final preparations for the 29th World Handball Championship, which will take place from January 14 to February 2 in Croatia, Denmark, and Norway.

Kuwait, drawn into Group C, will face Austria on January 14, Qatar on January 16, and France on January 18. All group-stage matches for Kuwait will be held in Croatia.

The national team delegation arrived in Croatia last Saturday, led by Federation Secretary-General Qaed Al-Adwani. The delegation includes the National Teams Director Faisal Saywan, First Team Director Abdulaziz Al-Zaabi, and technical staff headed by Algerian coach Saeed Hijazi, along with 18 players: Abdullah Al-Khamis, Abdulaziz Al-Shammari, Haider Dashti, Mohammed Amer, Fawaz Mubarak, Abdulaziz Salmeen, Fawaz Al-Shammari, Mohammed Al-Hindal, Ali Naseer, Saif Al-Adwani, Mishaal Al-Harbi, Saleh Al-Mousawi, Mohammed Al-Sanea, Abdulrahman Al-Shammari, Mohammed Ghadanfar, Hassan Safar, Abdulaziz

Al-Dhafiri, Mohammed Bouyabes. Kuwait has been preparing for the championship through training camps in Croatia and Tunisia last month, during which the team played several friendly matches. The technical staff has focused on improving physical fitness and implementing defensive and offensive strategies.

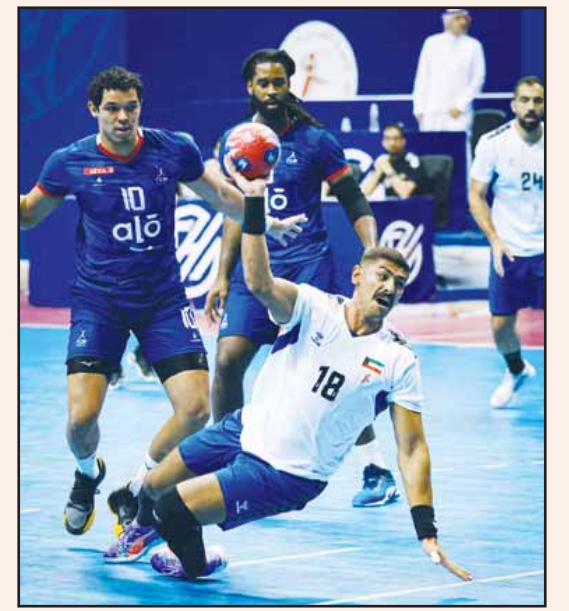
Team Director Abdulaziz Al-Zaabi praised the players' high spirits and commitment since arriving in Croatia, where they are training in the Novgrad region.

"I've witnessed the players' enthusiasm and dedication during morning and evening training sessions. Their focus on representing Kuwaiti hand-

ball with pride is evident, especially as this marks Kuwait's ninth participation in the World Championship," Al-Zaabi stated.

Despite being in a challenging group, Al-Zaabi expressed confidence in the team's ability to achieve positive results. He emphasized the players' determination to give their best and fight until the final whistle.

The delegation management has also worked diligently to address any challenges, ensuring an optimal training environment. Al-Zaabi commended the players' professionalism and discipline, highlighting their commitment to representing Kuwait in the best possible manner.



A Kuwaiti player makes a goal attempt during the team's first friendly match in Croatia.

Milan wins Italian Super Cup with stunning comeback against Inter



AC Milan's team celebrates after winning the Italian Super Cup final soccer match between AC Milan and Inter Milan at Al Awwal Park Stadium in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. (AP)

Conceicao celebrates first trophy

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia, Jan 7, (AP): It took exactly one week on the job for Sergio Conceicao to earn his first trophy as AC Milan's coach - with two comeback wins no less.

Milan came back from two goals down to beat city rival Inter Milan 3-2 and win the Italian Super Cup.

Rafael Leao came off the bench and played a part in all three of Milan's goals from Theo Hernandez, Christian Pulisic and Tammy Abraham.

Conceicao was hired to replace the fired Paulo Fonseca last Monday and also led the Rossoneri to a comeback win over Juventus in the semifinals.

So what changed with Conceicao?

"We played with confidence, courage and hunger," Abraham said. "We're a strong team."

Added Pulisic, "He told us we need to have more hunger and that that's more important than tactics."

After the semifinals, Conceicao was asked if he embraced his players. "I'm not so nice and I'm not someone who hugs," he said. "I'm not here to make friends. I'm here to win."

But after the final, Conceicao was seen dancing with his players and smoking a cigar in the changing room.

It was Milan's first trophy since winning Serie A in 2022; and eighth Super Cup title but first since 2016.

Lautaro Martinez and Mehdi Taremi put Inter ahead with goals on either side of halftime.

Leao then earned a foul that resulted in a free kick which Hernandez curled in around Inter's wall.

Then Pulisic finished off a counterattack by shooting through Augusto's legs on a play that began with Leao.

For the third goal, Leao provided a through ball for Pulisic, who crossed to Abraham, who tapped into an empty net in stoppage time. The final was moments away from going to a penalty shootout, since there was not going to be any extra time according to the competition

rules.

"It's also our fault that Fonseca was fired," said Hernandez, who like Leao often clashed with Fonseca. "We didn't have much time to

work together (with Conceicao) but it's gone well in that short span."

It was the fifth time in the last seven years that the competition was played in Saudi Arabia, and the

second year of an expanded four-team format.

A throw-in led to Inter's opener as Taremi fed the ball inside the area to Lautaro, who cut back before shooting through Hernandez's legs on Inter's only real chance of the half.

Taremi, who was playing in place of the injured Marcus Thuram, finished off a counterattack right after the break.

Milan plays its first Serie A match under Conceicao against Cagliari on Saturday. The Rossoneri are in eighth place with only seven wins in 17 matches but will return to league action with much more confidence.

Inter lost for only the third time this season across all competitions, and for the second time to Milan, which won the Serie A derby 2-1 in September. The Nerazzurri's other loss was to Bayer Leverkusen in the Champions League.

"Inter stopped playing when it was 2-0," Lautaro said. "You pay for that in games like these. We knew that Milan's best weapon is their counterattacks."



Inter Milan's Hakan Calhanoglu, front, challenges AC Milan's Alvaro Morata, center, during the Italian Super Cup final soccer match between AC Milan and Inter Milan at Al Awwal Park Stadium in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. (AP)

Minera beaten 5-0

Real cruises into last-16 of Copa

MADRID, Jan 7, (Xinhua): Real Madrid sailed into the last 16 of the Copa del Rey with a 5-0 victory away to fourth-tier side Deportiva Minera.

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti made several changes to his lineup for the match, but his team had little trouble facing a rival that managed just one shot on target all game, compared to Madrid's 21.

Federico Valverde opened the scoring in the fifth minute, capitalizing on a poor defensive clearance to fire home. Eduardo Camavinga doubled the lead in the 13th minute, heading in after Fran Garcia eluded two defenders to deliver a precise cross, and Arda Gulcer added a third in the 28th with a long-range effort that took a deflection to deceive home goalkeeper Fran Martinez.

Leading 3-0 at halftime, Real Madrid maintained pressure on the Minera goal. Luka Modric added the fourth 10 minutes after the break, finishing off a pass from Brahim Diaz, and Gulcer completed his brace in the closing stages with the fifth goal of the night.

Real Madrid now travels to Saudi Arabia to face Mallorca in the Spanish Super Cup semifinal on Thursday.

Athletic Bilbao and FC Barcelona play the first semifinal of the Spanish Supercup in Jeddah on Wednesday, ahead of the second semi between Real Madrid and Mallorca on Thursday.

The match takes place under the shadow of Barca's failure to register Spain international Dani Olmo and forward Pau Victor for the second half of the season, after the club failed to meet financial fair-play regulations.

The pair have traveled with the rest of the squad to the Saudi Arabian city in the hope the club will be granted a last-minute reprieve and be allowed to register them, even though the rules clearly state a player can't be registered twice in the same season with the same club.

Barca coach Hansi Flick also has a doubt over the fitness of 17-year-old Lamine Yamal, who has been suffering from an ankle problem that saw him miss Barca's 4-0 win over fourth-tier Barbastro in the Copa del Rey last Saturday.

If Yamal isn't able to play, Pablo Torre or Ferran Lopez will accompany Robert Lewandowski in the Barca attack.

Athletic Bilbao qualifies for the Supercup as winner of last season's Copa del Rey, but had to work hard in the defense of its title as it was taken to a penalty shootout by UD Logrones.

Coach Ernesto Valverde will make plenty of changes to the side that made hard work of qualification on a dry and bumpy pitch in Logrono, with Nico and Inaki Williams both starting, and the team will be hoping to use their speed against Barca's high-pressure.

Nico was a transfer target for Barca last summer, and looking at Olmo's situation at the club, he must be thankful that he wasn't tempted to abandon Athletic, while Inaki was Athletic's hero last season as it knocked Barca out of the Copa del Rey, flying overnight to Bilbao after Ghana's exit from the Africa Cup of Nations to score the winning goal as his side won 4-2 in the quarterfinals.



Ancelotti