

A Worldwide Welcome to 2026



SINGAPORE After the clock struck midnight, people watched fireworks in celebration of New Year's Day from the landmark Marina Bay Sands hotel.



BEIJING A crowd of revelers with smartphones recorded the falling balloons and confetti during a New Year countdown event held at a Chinese shopping mall.



BALI, INDONESIA Taman Kaja community members performed a dance depicting scenes from the Hindu epic Ramayana at the Pura Dalem Taman Kaja temple.



AMSTERDAM Celebrations in the city included fireworks and a light show for children on the Museumplein, a large public square bordered by museums.

Group Behind Organ Matches Raked In Cash

This article is by **Danielle Ivory, Grace Ashford and Robert Gebeloff.**

The worst moment of Gareth Hil's life, he once said, came when he discovered he couldn't donate a kidney to his sick 10-year-old daughter. By the time the girl found a match a couple of months later, Mr. Hil, an entrepreneur, had drawn up plans to transform the world of living organ donation.

His organization, the National Kidney Registry, started in 2007 with a simple idea: Donors who are incompatible with sick loved ones give their kidneys to a nationwide pool. The sick patients tap into that pool of strangers to find matches more quickly.

Since its founding, N.K.R. has enabled nearly 12,000 such swaps, called paired donations, far more than any other public or private program. The organization's focus on technology and efficiency has jolted a sluggish system, many health experts said.

But at the same time, N.K.R. has created a multimillion-dollar business with considerable power over the flow of thousands of organs, according to interviews with more than 100 people in transplant medicine and a review of business records. Many doctors told The Times the stakes of these lifesaving exchanges were too high to be managed by a private company with little government oversight.

As N.K.R. has grown, it has charged hospitals steep fees for access to its registry of donors. Some of that cost is passed on to taxpayers through Medicare.

The organization was a non-profit for more than a decade, but during that period paid at least \$39 million for technology and other services to a company owned by Mr. Hil, charity filings show. In 2023, N.K.R.'s commercial operations were sold to a new for-profit company owned by Mr.

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For Enforcers Of al-Assad, 5-Star Hotels

This article is by **Erika Solomon, Christiaan Triebert, Haley Willis, Neil Collier, Danny Makki and Ahmad Mhidi.**

The apartments at the Four Seasons in Moscow offer living rooms with crystal chandeliers, views of the Kremlin and access to a concierge ready to book anything from Bolshoi Ballet premieres to private jets.

The residences, topping out at \$13,000 a week, are billed as "perfect for family gatherings, cocktail parties and business events."

Or perhaps, in the case of some of the world's most-wanted war criminals, for a five-star beginning to life in exile.

Over decades, President Bashar al-Assad of Syria and his allies tortured and caused the disappearances of hundreds of thousands of people. With Russian air power, they waged a 13-year war to suppress a popular uprising.

But in December 2024, a whirlwind rebel offensive sent Mr. al-Assad and his innermost circle fleeing to Russia, where they regrouped at one of Moscow's swankiest addresses. The Russian authorities wanted them all in one place for security surveillance, according to witnesses and acquaintances of those present.

Maher al-Assad, 58, Bashar's brother and the head of Syria's long-feared shock troops, the Fourth Armored Division, was spotted by one former official at the hotel gym muttering about "the disgrace." Others pondered their future over the breakfast spreads, three members of the regime's hotel entourage recalled.

A New York Times investigation has located many of the top-ranking government and military figures linked to the deadliest chapters of Syria's recent history — including scientists who developed chemical weapons and spy chiefs accused of torture — and

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He May Escape Torture Claim by Being Deported

By **FRANCES ROBLES**

The handsome actor, who appeared on a telenovela with salt and pepper locks under a baseball cap marked "POLICE," seemed familiar to Venezuelan exiles who watched the show.

It wasn't long before he was recognized as the lieutenant colonel who ran a notoriously repressive military unit in Barquisimeto, Venezuela.

Rafael Quero Silva, a former officer in Venezuela's National

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Actor in U.S. Telenovela Was Maduro Officer

Guard, was once accused by dozens of people and several human rights organizations of ordering violent military raids and the torture of detainees who were arrested after massive crackdowns on antigovernment protests in 2013 and 2014.

At some point after the protests

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ended, Mr. Quero Silva left the national guard.

Then, in 2018, Venezuelans living in the United States discovered that he had a new life in the Miami suburbs as a television extra on the Spanish-language soap opera "My Perfect Family."

On Tuesday, five people who say they were tortured, shot or beaten by soldiers under Mr. Quero Silva's command filed a claim in U.S. court under the Torture Victim Protection Act. The 1991 law al-

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ULET IFANSASTI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Floods Came Quickly, Recovery Less So

Protests have erupted in Indonesia over relief efforts. Flattened palm oil trees, above. Page A7.

Conservative Social Influencers Give Trump's Team an Amplifier

By **KEN BENSINGER and ERNESTO LONDOÑO**

A 43-minute video posted online in the past week, purporting to expose extensive fraud at Somali-run child care centers in Minnesota, has been viewed by millions of people. It has also set off a series of events that show the symbiotic relationship between the Trump administration and self-described citizen journalists.

It was posted to X and YouTube the day after Christmas by Nick Shirley, a 23-year-old who has made a name for himself in the last two years by producing viral

content that aligns with MAGA policies. In the video, Mr. Shirley is accompanied by a man identified only as David, who claims to have uncovered fraud worse than "anywhere else ever in history."

Specifically, the man says he has identified dozens of child care and autism centers receiving mil-

lions of dollars in state funding without caring for any children.

The New York Times could not verify the claims made in the video. Mainstream news sites have reported on cases of social services fraud in Minnesota for years, including a 2,200-word article in

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Key to the City? It's From N.J.

Since 2023, New York's ceremonial golden keys have come from across the Hudson River.

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A Shift on Guard Deployment

President Trump said he would abandon efforts to deploy the National Guard in three major cities.

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The Problem-Driver Problem

Uber monitors passenger feedback for risky driver behavior, but many drivers with serious flags for sexual misconduct are still on the road.

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How Scallops Became a Pawn

Beijing is using a ban on the mollusk to punish Japan over its apparent willingness to defend Taiwan.

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Putin Says Little About War

The Russian leader's New Year's address to a nation tiring of fighting only briefly mentioned Ukraine.

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SPORTS B7-10

Ducks in a Bigger Pond

Oregon spent decades building a title-worthy program. Now it must fend off a new group of gate-crashers.

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'Celtic University' in Session

Boston's coach is taking a measured approach to basketball education, and his young team is growing up.

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Nothing Is Their Specialty

The latest social media fad has young people sharing videos of themselves doing as little as humanly possible, sometimes for hours on end.

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Moving Closer to God

"The Testament of Ann Lee," a new movie starring Amanda Seyfried, tells the story of the Shakers religious sect and its feminist leader.

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Michelle Cottle

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A Kennedy Who Faced Cancer

Tatiana Schlossberg, an environmental journalist and daughter of Caroline Kennedy, wrote of her harrowing struggle with leukemia. She was 35.

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