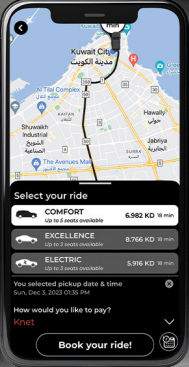



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Jordan score twice at the  
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# PM takes oath as Deputy Amir

## Cabinet also sworn in • MPs call on govt to urge rights body to probe Zionist genocide

### Amir meets Al-Quds Fund chief; will head to Saudi on state visit



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Chairman of Al-Quds Fund and Endowment Prince Turki Al-Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud at Seif Palace on Jan 29, 2024. HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal and an accompanying delegation will head to Saudi Arabia on Tuesday on a state visit that will be marked with a scheduled summit with Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah on Monday took the oath in the National Assembly to become the Deputy Amir during the absence of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah abroad.

HH the Prime Minister pledged to respect the constitution and state laws, safeguard freedoms, interests and funds of the people of Kuwait, as well as the homeland's independence and territorial sanctity, and be faithful to HH the Amir.

National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun said that the swearing-in of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad as Deputy Amir established a new precedent in the country's history.

The unprecedented move will remain valid until HH the Amir appoints a crown prince, according to an Amir decree.

Under the constitution, HH the Amir has one year to appoint a crown prince from Dec 20, 2023, when he took the constitutional oath to assume his duties as ruler of Kuwait. HH the Amir starts a state visit to Saudi Arabia on Tuesday.

Before that, HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad and 13 ministers took the oath to become members of parliament in accordance with the law. The ceremony was held during a special National Assembly session. Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah was appointed as acting prime minister during the absence of HH the Amir abroad.

Sheikh Fahad expressed gratitude towards the trust bestowed by the country's leadership, saying it was a huge responsibility to execute all ministerial duties with utmost diligence.

Meanwhile, 36 MPs on Sunday called on the government to ask the International Human Rights Commission to convene an emergency session to discuss Zionist human rights violations in the Gaza Strip, where more than 26,000 civilians have been killed in the past four months in barbaric Zionist attacks.

The lawmakers called in a statement on the foreign ministry to ask the IHRC to form an international committee to investigate crimes against humanity committed by the Zionist entity against Palestinian civilians. Kuwait became a member of the IHRC since the start of the year.



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah takes the oath as Deputy Amir during a special session of the National Assembly on Jan 29, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 2)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Friday sermon on national unity

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs announced on Monday sermons during this Friday's prayers will focus on promoting national unity and tolerance. Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf Faisal Al-Ghareeb directed officials to emphasize these themes in the sermons. — KUNA (See Page 3)

Iran hangs 4 on spying charges

PARIS: Iran on Monday hanged four members of its Kurdish minority on charges of spying for the Zionist entity. The four men were executed at dawn after they were convicted of collaborating with the Zionist entity on a plan to sabotage an Iranian defense site in the central province of Isfahan. — AFP (See Page 5)

Zionist strikes in Syria kill 7

BEIRUT: Zionist strikes in Syria on Monday killed seven people, a war monitor said. "Zionist strikes targeted a base belonging to Hezbollah and Iran's Revolutionary Guards, killing seven people" including pro-Iran fighters, said Rami Abdel Rahman, director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. — AFP (See Page 6)

Naval forces rescue two boats

NEW DELHI: Indian Ocean naval forces said Monday they had freed two fishing vessels hijacked separately by Somali pirates, with Indian sailors rescuing an Iranian boat and commandos from the Seychelles releasing a Sri Lankan trawler. The hijackings off Somalia have fueled concerns about a resurgence of Indian Ocean raids by opportunistic pirates. — AFP (See Page 7)

### Kuwait condemns attack on US troops; Biden under pressure

KUWAIT/WASHINGTON: Kuwait's ministry of foreign affairs condemned Monday the "terrorist attack" on a US military post near the Syria-Jordan borders that killed three American troops and injured many more. In a statement, the ministry also affirmed Kuwait's denunciation of all kinds of terrorism, calling for cooperation to maintain peace regionally and globally.

US President Joe Biden was facing mounting political pressure Monday to retaliate against Iran for the deadly drone strike on US troops, posing a major challenge for the Democrat in an election year. Striking Iran would dramatically escalate the risk of the wider war Biden says he's trying to avoid — not to mention the possibility of more US caskets coming home in the months before polls open.

But with Republicans urging the 81-year-old to "hit Iran", Biden can ill afford to portray weakness against Tehran as he struggles with low approval ratings ahead of a likely rematch with Donald Trump. "He's under tremendous pressure — the administration's in a kind of a lose-lose situation," Colin Clarke, research director at the Soufan Center in New York, told AFP. "I think he's going to get hammered by people saying he's weak and he's going get ham-

mered by people saying he's going too far. So it's damned if you do, damned if you don't."

The White House on Monday promised a "very consequential" answer to the attack on the base in Jordan on Sunday, as National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told CNN. "But we don't seek a war with Iran. We're not looking for a wider conflict in the Middle East," he added. Biden himself said "we shall respond" during a campaign event at a church in South Carolina, one of a series he's held in recent days as he seeks to kickstart his bid for a second term.

Iran has denied any link to the attack, which Biden blamed on Iran-backed militias. Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani rejected the accusations as "baseless", adding Sunday Tehran "is not involved in the decisions of the resistance groups". But the issue has become a political weapon for Republicans — and Trump in particular, as he seeks a return to the White House in November's election and vengeance for his 2020 loss to Biden.

Trump described the deaths as a "consequence of Joe Biden's weakness and surrender" — focusing on a deal the Biden administration made with Iran last year to free US captives in exchange for freeing \$6 billion in Iranian funds. The former president could also point to the fact that he had personally ordered the US strike that killed Iranian Revolutionary Guards general Qasem Soleimani four years ago. Other Republicans also gave notice they would use Iran as a test case of Biden's strength ahead of elections.

Continued on Page 6

### 65 % of family visa applications rejected on Day 1

KUWAIT: The interior ministry has started accepting and processing family visa applications for expatriates after opening the doors on Sunday, following a suspension of almost two years. Local media cited the interior ministry as saying that the visas are limited for wives and children and not for parents or siblings. Applications that included parents or siblings were rejected outright.

On the first day on Sunday, the ministry received some 1,800 applications, of which some 1,165 were rejected. The ministry has set new conditions for family visas, including raising the monthly salary requirement to KD 800 and that applicants must hold university degrees and must work in the same field of their study specialization.

About 14 categories were exempted from the salary precondition. These include judges, advisors, engineers, doctors, teachers, nursing and medical staff and others. The ministry stressed these categories are exempted only from the salary precondition and not from the university degree requirement. University degrees must be attested by the university, Kuwait embassy in the expats' home countries and the foreign ministry in Kuwait.

### Fierce battles rage in Gaza

GAZA: Deadly fighting and air strikes rocked besieged Gaza on Monday, a day after an attack that killed three US troops in Jordan heightened fears of a wider regional conflict. Zionist bombing of the Gaza Strip killed 140 people overnight, including 20 members of one family, said the health ministry in the Palestinian territory.

Zionist ground forces backed by tanks have focused combat operations on the coastal strip's main southern city of Khan Yunis, the hometown of Hamas' Gaza leader Yahya Sinwar. The Zionist entity's relentless military offensive has since killed at least 26,637

people in Gaza, most of them women and children, according to the territory's health ministry.

In the latest efforts to broker a new ceasefire, CIA chief William Burns met top Zionist, Egyptian and Qatari officials in Paris on Sunday, but no breakthrough was reported. Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the talks were "constructive" but pointed to "significant gaps which the parties will continue to discuss this week".

US President Joe Biden sent Burns to try to negotiate the release of remaining captives in exchange for a ceasefire, a security source has confirmed to AFP. The New York Times reported Saturday that the negotiators were discussing a deal under

Continued on Page 6



GAZA: This picture taken during a media tour organised by the Zionist military on Jan 27, 2024 shows a Zionist army tank in Gaza's southern city of Khan Yunis in front of a destroyed mosque. — AFP



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# New Cabinet vows to achieve the aspirations of the people

## Deputy Amir's swearing-in sets new historical precedent



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah



Deputy PM, Defense Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah



Deputy PM, Oil Minister Emad Al-Atiqi



Deputy PM, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sharida Al-Maousherji



Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi



Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi



Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah



Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Dr. Anwar Al-Mudhaf

**KUWAIT:** Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah expressed his gratitude on Monday for the trust bestowed by the country's leadership, saying it was a huge responsibility to execute all ministerial duties with the utmost diligence. Speaking to the press after taking the constitutional oath at parliament, Sheikh Fahad Al-Sabah, who is also acting minister of interior, said the responsibilities "placed upon us" were great, and the Cabinet has to work toward achieving the aspirations of the people.

He stressed that "no one is above the law," affirming that the government would be fighting corruption through accountability. The pivotal cooperation between legislative and executive authorities would ensure the best interest of the country and the people of Kuwait, he added. He added that the security and stability of the country were crucial factors, as it was significant to reform and improve the military establishments and the competence of the members.

Meanwhile, National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun said that the swearing-in of His High-

ness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah as Deputy Amir in the extraordinary session Monday established a new precedent in the country's history. During the session dedicated to swearing in the Deputy Amir, Al-Saadoun mentioned in a speech that he attempted to review all precedents but found no similar instances, clarifying that the Amiri Decree appointing His Highness the Prime Minister as Deputy Amir outlined two key points.

The first point, detailed in Article 1 of the decree, indicated that the appointment remained valid throughout the periods of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's absence from the country. Article two stipulated the continuation of this procedure until the Crown Prince was appointed, and therefore the Deputy Amir will be sworn in only once during His Highness the Amir's absence until a Crown Prince is appointed. Following Deputy Amir's constitutional oath, Al-Saadoun adjourned the session, and the next regular session was set for February 6 and 7. — KUNA



Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Salem Al-Hajraf



Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Adel Al-Adwani



Minister of Commerce and Industry Abdullah Al-Jouan



Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya



Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Faisal Al-Ghareeb



Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Dr Noura Al-Meshaan

## MoH showcases Kuwait healthy cities strategies

**KUWAIT:** Head of the Kuwait Healthy Cities Office at the Ministry of Health (MoH), Dr. Amal Al-Yahya, affirmed the continual progress in regards to the "Healthy Cities" initiative through applied strategies to keep pace with updated plans and the foundation of these cities. During Monday's workshop on the "review for healthy cities," Dr. Al-Yahya mentioned the signing of cooperation agreements for more companies, resource mobilization and attraction, and other initiatives.

Dr. Al-Yahya highlighted that the office has been working in recent years on formulating the national strategy for healthy cities to align with future national, regional, and global trends. The workshop, she added, aims to review features and purposes in creating a national strategy for healthy cities in

2023–2030, enabling current registered healthy cities and cities eager to join the initiative in implementing development plans in coordination with current applied approaches.

Additionally, Dr. Al-Yahya reviewed the methods for preparing the strategies and their components, the package of new initiatives, and how to achieve health development standards for healthy cities in alignment with the national strategy. Furthermore, Dr. Al-Yahya reaffirmed the importance of creating and implementing healthy cities within Kuwaiti areas to achieve the highest level of health and well-being amongst Kuwaiti society members.

Not only will healthy cities include medical facilities for accessibility purposes, but they will also enrich the environment, stimulate the economy, and boost national values within a community. On his part, the Director of the Planning and Development Department at the MoH, Dr. Maitham Husain, affirmed the significance of the four-day workshop in obtaining skills and in preparation for Kuwait's fourth development.

It was also important for the government's current legislative session action plan and the



Head of the Kuwait Healthy Cities Office at the Ministry of Health, Dr. Amal Al-Yahya

Minister of Health, Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi's, desire for the MoH to have a strategic vision in place. Moreover, Dr. Husain underscored Kuwait's commitment to achieving the third goal out of the 17 sustainable development goals related to health and its commitment to realizing Kuwait Vision 2035. He mentioned that there were 20 projects contributing to health enhancements in Kuwait



Director of the Planning and Development Department at MoH, Dr. Maitham Husain

Vision, involving a myriad of state sectors.

This included the MoH with around eight projects consisting of initiatives for combating chronic non-communicable diseases, the national project for cities, the establishment of Kuwait Medical City and the medical city in Sabah Al-Ahmad Area, assurances of the quality of healthcare services, and other health projects. — KUNA



## Local

# Amir's visit to Saudi Arabia, a new addition to solid ties

## Kuwait and Saudi to bolster relations

### 130 years of exceptional relations

**RIYADH:** Kuwaiti-Saudi relations have traversed pivotal and historical points over the course of 130 years, passing over stepping stones that solidified and deepened relations between leadership and people alike. The evocative words of late Saudi King Fahad bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, "Either Kuwait is restored, or Saudi Arabia is gone with it," still reverberate through the hearts and minds of Kuwaitis.

The exceptional nature of these share bonds is rooted all the way back in 1891, when the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah (Mubarak Al-Kabeer), hosted Imam Abdulrahman Al-Faisal Al-Saud and his son King Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman in Kuwait, standing by their side until they regained Riyadh in 1902. This took Kuwaiti-Saudi relations beyond the point of neighboring nations to a relationship of kinship and joint destiny in the face of challenges and mitigating circumstances.

The relationship between Sheikh Mubarak and Imam Abdulrahman was passed down the line of successive Kuwait Amirs and Saudi Kings and further solidified bonds. In 2018, during the reign of the late Kuwaiti Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, the Saudi-Kuwaiti Coordination Council was established with the joint vision of augmenting cooperation and ensuring the sustainability of ties, in line with Gulf Cooperation Council objectives.

The Council sets out to reinforce an integrated economic system, find innovative solutions for the utilization of resources, and build an efficient, cohesive educational system founded on the strengths of both nations. On June 5, 2021, the first council meeting was held as per the directions of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

The two nations are aspiring towards a more expanded trade exchange, with official data showing that in 2019 it reached SAR 39.8 billion (approximately \$10.61 billion), with Saudi exports to Kuwait at SAR 83.7 billion (approximately \$22.32 billion) and imports at SAR 56.1 billion (approximately \$14.96 billion). The countries' leadership has regularly reciprocated visits over the past few years for coordination on various issues of common concern, the latest of which was His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, then Crown Prince's, visit to Riyadh on November 11, 2023, heading a Kuwaiti delegation at the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit. — KUNA

## Envoy affirms strong Saudi-Kuwaiti ties

**RIYADH:** Kuwait's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, stressed on Monday the strength of fraternal relations between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and their leaderships. Speaking to KUNA on the occasion of the planned visit to the Kingdom by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the ambassador affirmed the two countries' support for peace and stability in the region and the world, noting also their common vision for the two peoples' prosperity.

He added that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber's upcoming visit to Saudi Arabia will be the first after assuming the top office, noting that the mission will reflect sisterly deep-rooted ties between the two countries. The envoy concluded that His Highness the Amir and the Saudi leaders, during the visit, will discuss political topics and ways to promote investment exchange by using all means to achieve stable and strong economies that fulfill the ambitions and aspirations of the two sisterly countries' peoples. — KUNA

## Awqaf devotes Friday sermon to national unity and tolerance

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Awqaf (Endowment) and Islamic Affairs announced on Monday that next Friday's prayers would be devoted to talking about national unity and tolerance. The Ministry's spokesman, Salman Al-Kandari, told KUNA that the Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Faisal Al-Ghareeb, directed officials to make a speech about the concept of national unity and tolerance.

Al-Kandari explained that this directive by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs comes in order to consolidate the concept of tolerance and acceptance of others. He added that the tolerance that Kuwaiti society has achieved is derived from following the teachings of the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), which leads to supporting national unity and achieving peace and security among society. — KUNA

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is scheduled to visit the brotherly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on a state visit Tuesday that will be marked with a scheduled summit meeting with the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. His Highness the Amir's visit is the latest step by the top leadership in bolstering further the close relations between the two brotherly Gulf countries, bonded by family affiliations, geographic proximity, joint history, and destiny.

The mission falls within the framework of regular coordination between the two neighboring countries' leaderships regarding regional and international issues. Leaders of the two Gulf States regularly reciprocate visits. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal's last visit to the Kingdom was on June 1, 2021, when he was Kuwait's Crown Prince. He went there again on October 25, 2021, to partake in the first Middle East Green Initiative (MGI) Summit, followed by another one on December 14, heading a delegation at the 42nd session of the Supreme Council of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

On July 16, 2022, His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad visited Saudi Arabia to address a speech at the Jeddah Security and Development Summit, followed by another mission on December 8, participating in the 43rd session of the GCC Supreme Council, the GCC-China Summit, and the Arab-China Summit, hosted by Riyadh. On May 19, 2003, His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad went to the Kingdom to head the State of Kuwait's delegation at the Arab Summit that convened in the Red Sea city of Jeddah.

He went there again on July 19 to take part in the 18th consultative meeting of the top GCC leaders and the Gulf Summit with Central Asia States. On October 20, 2023, His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad was in the Kingdom, leading the State of Kuwait's delegation at the Gulf-ASEAN summit in Riyadh, and he was there on November 11 to chair the Kuwaiti delegation at the Arab-Islamic Summit, organized in Riyadh. The late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited Saudi Arabia in January 2021, heading a delegation at a GCC meeting, against the backdrop of a visit to Kuwait by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, in December 2016.

Kuwaiti and Saudi officials have regularly reciprocated visits for coordination on various issues of common concern. In June 2022, the then foreign minister, Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, visited Riyadh. Later, in February 2023, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal Bin Farhan Al-Saud came to Kuwait, and the country's deputy prime minister and minister of defense, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Ahmad, traveled to the Kingdom last October. Moreover, the former prime minister, His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, visited the Kingdom in September 2022 on the first such mission abroad since taking office, signaling Kuwait's acknowledgement of Saudi Arabia's heavyweight.

The historic and brotherly relations between Kuwait and Riyadh stood out starkly when the Kingdom supported Kuwait in defending its legitimacy and independence during the blatant Iraqi aggression that began on August 2, 1990. The Kingdom hosted the Kuwaiti leaders, officials, and ordinary citizens, providing them with all forms of backing in addition to its effective participation in the international coalition that liberated the country in 1991.

On the basis that the security of the two countries is inseparable, brotherly relations have deepened with a host of cooperation agreements at the media, cultural, economic, aviation, commercial, and energy levels. The two countries, key oil producers, maintain close coordination regarding the policy of maintaining international oil markets. Moreover, the signed accords have ensured a steady two-way flow of commodities across the borders between the two neighboring Gulf countries.

On December 11, 2022, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to develop the offshore Al-Durra gas field with a projected daily output of one billion cubic feet of gas and 84,000 barrels of liquid gas a day. On September 26, 2023, the Saudi Cabinet



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah chats with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed Bin Salman in this file photo. — KUNA

approved the Kuwait-Saudi accord for establishing joint railways. In aerial transport, on May 14, 2023, Kuwait Airways signed a code-sharing deal with Saudia (formally known as Saudi Arabian Airlines).

At the parliamentary level, cooperation between Kuwait's National Assembly and the Saudi Shura Council has been growing through the joint friendship committee, reciprocal vis-

its, and coordination with international and external quarters. In May 2023, a Saudi delegation visited Kuwait for coordination against cross-border trafficking. And in tourism, a Saudi delegation came to Kuwait in September 2022 to promote tourist attractions in the Kingdom. During the 2023 hajj season, Kuwait staged 75 flights to transport the devotees to sacred sites in the Kingdom. — KUNA

## PM receives top dignitaries



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah receives the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Al-Quds Fund and Endowment, Prince Turki Al-Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, and his accompanying delegation on the occasion of his visit to the country. (Right) Also, His Highness the Prime Minister received Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, accompanied by the UK Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for the Cabinet Office, Member of Parliament, Oliver Dowden. During the meeting, both sides touched on bilateral ties between the two friendly countries and the latest regional and global developments. — KUNA

## Kuwait Airport records 15.6 million passengers

**KUWAIT:** The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said on Sunday that the total number of passengers that traveled through and from Kuwait International Airport in 2023 reached 15,616,800. In a statement to KUNA, DGCA's Acting Director-Gen-

eral Emad Al-Jalawi noted that Kuwait's International Airport witnessed a rise in passenger traffic by 26 percent and in flights by 23 percent. Whereas air shipping increased by three percent compared to the year prior.

He affirmed that in 2023, the number of arrivals reached 7,932,222 and the number of departures reached 7,684,578. He explained that the number of flights operated from and to Kuwait International Airport reached 128,584 flights, compared to 104,147 in 2022. Al-Jalawi revealed that in 2023, the cargo traffic amounted to a total of 210 million kg, where the volume of inbound cargo reached 170 million kg and the outbound cargo reached 40.3 million kg. — KUNA



Kuwait Ambassador to Iraq meets with Iraqi official. — KUNA

## Kuwait, Iraq officials discuss cooperation

**BAGHDAD:** Kuwait Ambassador to Iraq Tariq Al-Faraj discussed on Sunday, separately with the Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein and the President of the Iraqi Supreme Judicial Council, Faiq Zaidan, ways to enhance cooperation between the two brotherly countries. Al-Faraj told KUNA that he discussed with the Iraqi Foreign Minister bilateral relations, cooperation between the two countries, and aspects of cooperation and coordination in the political and economic fields between them, in addition to regional and international issues. The ambassador also pointed out that he discussed with the President of the Supreme Judicial Council ways to enhance cooperation in the judicial field and a number of bilateral issues. — KUNA



## Central Department of Statistics, Agriculture Authority sign MoU

**KUWAIT:** The Central Department of Statistics signed on Monday a memorandum of understanding with the Public Authority of Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources on the exchange of information and statistical data. The agreement was signed at the headquarters of the department by the director general, Wafa Al Yahya, and the director general of the agriculture authority, Nasser Taqi.

Al-Yahya told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the signing of the memorandum contributes to strengthening institutional cooperation, coordination, and data integration between the two sides and will provide more statistical data related to the agricultural sector and fisheries, which will help guide government policies and planning for economic development, which in turn leads to ensuring and improving food security.

She pointed out the administration's constant pursuit to approve a sustainable executive mechanism that ensures the responsiveness of government agencies in providing statistics in accordance with clear standards and guidelines regarding the quality of data and information, enhancing their exchange, increasing cooperation in developing methodologies, simplifying statistical procedures, and reducing financial expenditures conducted on field surveys.

She stressed the Department's commitment to enhance cooperation and coordination with all government agencies and the private sector in order to achieve its strategy (2022-2026) and the implementation of the strategic plan for Joint Gulf statistical work for the period between 2021 and 2025 to link with the authorities, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Plan 2035, and the activation of Law No. 27 of 1963 on statistics and census to enhance reference management.

For his part, Taqi said in a similar statement to KUNA that since its establishment in 1983, the Authority has been striving to develop the agricultural sector. He stressed the importance of cooperation between government agencies in exchanging data and information and supporting the statistics department, pointing out that this cooperation provides accurate and updated data on the agricultural sector and fisheries, which would analyze trends and provide opportunities to improve strategic planning and development of agriculture so as to enhance productivity. — KUNA

### Photo of the day



**KUWAIT:** The shuttles hopfish or shuttles mudskipper are seen at a beach in Kuwait City on January 28, 2024. The shuttles hopfish is a species of mudskippers native to fresh, marine and brackish waters of the northwestern Pacific Ocean from Vietnam to Korea and Japan. This species occurs in muddy estuaries, tidal flats and swamps and marshes and is capable of remaining out of the water for up to 60 hours so long as it is kept moist. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Arab and UN experts address drugs, crime cases in the region

**CAIRO:** Arab and UN officials and experts gathered on Monday to examine a joint program that addresses a host of issues, including Arab countries' efforts against corruption, organized crime, and narcotics. Their meeting, held at the Arab League headquarters, kicked off at the level of the follow-up committee on implementing the "Regional Framework for the Arab States 2023-2028," a joint scheme designed to tackle issues

in diverse realms. Dr. Maha Bakhit, the director of the legal affairs department at the Arab League, said in a press release that the meeting was held as part of the regular assessment of the activities and projects executed within the common program.

Dr. Bakhit indicated that the agenda included an examination of "subsequent changes," covering ministries and departments tasked with youth,

educational, cultural, human rights, and corruption's issues. Additionally, the topics on the table include works of the departments of justice, interior, and health "that are of paramount significance at present, particularly with respect to combating terrorism, organized crime, fighting corruption, financial crimes, narcotics, and boosting justice," she said.

The meeting brought together Arab

League legal officials and counterparts from the UNODC, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. UNODC's mission aims to contribute to peace and security, human rights, and development by making the region safer from drugs, crime, corruption, and terrorism, including by reducing violence and inequalities within society. The conferees included officials from several Arab states, including Kuwait. — KUNA



## With amazing games and thousands of prizes, IKEA celebrates Family Fun Day

**KUWAIT:** IKEA, the leading brand for life at home organized this weekend a fun-filled playing day welcoming all the families of Kuwait. The event, that took place Friday and Saturday, was attended by more than ten thousand people and brought families together for quality family fun time. "We started considering this idea almost two years ago, to help parents spend quality playing time outdoors with their children away from tablets and phones—facilitating a break from screens for both parents and children. We wanted them to play together, have fun and enjoy the beautiful weather of the winter of Kuwait," said Elisa Albendea, Marketing Director of IKEA Kuwait, Jordan and Morocco.

"As we aim to inspire everyone in Kuwait to have a healthier and more sustainable living, this outdoor event was the perfect opportunity to invite families to connect together for two days away from their daily routines. This initiative is only the start of many more events to come. We intend to be -By your side in all the important moments of life," added Marino Maganto, CEO of IKEA Kuwait, Jordan, and Morocco. During the event, the families relived together the cherished childhood games of the parents, in an exciting experience, featuring family



obstacle races, carnival games, kids' entertainment, and enjoyed delicious meals, snacks, and drinks.

At the race, each game winner received KD 100, while the top three overall race champions won prizes of KD 1,000, KD 500, and KD 250, respectively. Kids and parents alike won thousands of soft toys

at the carnival games. Best of all, the event was completely free for families to enjoy. "We want to bring this enjoyable experience for the people of Kuwait on a yearly basis and look forward to receiving more families each year assuring our commitment: IKEA by your side for a better life." concluded Maganto.







Houthis open seized ship to sightseers

## Iran, Pakistan ‘overcome’ raid tensions



Placards indicate the names of the deceased at a makeshift cemetery, parts of which the Zionist army reportedly bulldozed to exhume bodies, in the eastern Al-Tuffah neighborhood of Gaza. — AFP photos

# No rest for Gaza dead

## Zionists dig up graves as Palestinians bury dead in mass cemeteries under bombing

**GAZA:** Even the dead are not spared by the Zionist war in Gaza, with bodies dug up by Zionist troops and hurried burials happening in hospitals and even a school. In Gaza City’s Al-Tuffah district, shrouded corpses of Palestinians torn from their graves lay atop muddled earth.

The Zionist military had bulldozed the site and exhumed bodies, according to an AFP photographer who visited it earlier this month. The desecration is part of a pattern which the religious affairs ministry in the Gaza Strip said has seen more than 2,000 graves damaged or destroyed by Zionist forces across the territory.

The Zionist military did not immediately comment on the bulldozing of cemeteries, when approached for comment by AFP. Responding separately to allegations that soldiers have snatched bodies from graves, the military told AFP it acts “in the specific locations where information indicates that the bodies of hostages may be located”. “Bodies determined not (to) be those of hostages are returned with dignity and respect,” it said in a statement.

Zionist military campaign has killed more than 26,637 people, most of them women, children and adolescents, according to figures from Gaza’s health ministry. The entity claims the bombardment is aimed at destroying Hamas after the Palestinian resistance group attacked southern Zionist communities and military bases on Oct 7, 2023. Around 1,140 people, mostly civilians, died in the attack and subsequent Zionist military operation aimed at regaining control of communities targeted by Hamas.

### ‘Their souls trembled’

At a school packed with displaced people in the central Deir al-Balah area, Saida Jaber re-



GAZA: A young man sits by the shallow tomb of a person killed in Zionist bombing as bodies are lined up at a makeshift cemetery in a residential neighborhood.

called seeing footage on social media of Jabalia refugee camp’s destroyed cemetery. “I felt that my heart would stop,” Jaber told AFP, adding that her father, grandparents and other relatives were buried at the site in northern Gaza. “I felt that their souls trembled ... I can’t imagine how anyone dares to dig up graves and violate the sanctity of the dead,” Jaber said.

With no stop to the fighting, many Gazans have been unable to reach formal cemeteries and have instead turned to makeshift graveyards. At a school-turned-shelter in the central Maghazi refugee camp, a woman touched the sandy earth where her daughter had been buried in the yard. “My daughter died

in my arms ... we waited day and night and couldn’t send her to the emergency room,” said the woman, who did not give her name.

She told AFP that rockets hit the school compound and ignited gas canisters, causing deadly explosions. A man tending to the site said more than 50 people are buried there, each grave containing three or four bodies, with their names written either on bricks or the adjacent wall.

### ‘Die of grief’

The scale of fatalities is such that AFP journalists have seen mass graves across Gaza. They include rows of bodies buried in the grounds of Gaza’s largest hospital, Shifa, where people have separated graves with stones and plant branches. “If we went to the cemetery, they (Zionist entity) might bomb us and we’d die,” said Arfan Dadar, 46, living in a tent with his family in the hospital compound.

Dadar said Zionist soldiers shot dead his 22-year-old son while he was returning to the hospital in Gaza City. “I marked his grave, (but) now the hospital park is crammed with mass graves. I barely recognize my son’s grave,” he said. Gazans have said they hope they can move their dead once the war ends.

Wael al-Dahdouh, Al Jazeera’s Gaza bureau chief, said he had “no choice” but to bury his son in an overcrowded cemetery in southern Rafah, after the young journalist was killed in a Zionist strike. “We will transfer him to the martyrs cemetery in Gaza after the end of the war. We want his grave to be near to us, so that we can visit him and pray for him,” said Dahdouh. Displaced in Deir al-Balah, Jaber said she longed to return to Jabalia to check on the graves of her relatives. “I will die of grief if they were also swept away,” she said. — AFP

## Iran hangs four Kurds on Zionist spying charges

**PARIS:** Iran on Monday hanged four members of its Kurdish minority on charges of spying for the Zionist entity, defying a campaign for their lives to be spared by rights groups who had described their trial as grossly unfair. The four men were executed at dawn after they were convicted of collaborating with the Zionist entity on a plan to sabotage an Iranian defense site in the central province of Isfahan, according to the judiciary’s Mizan Online website.

It accused them of being “members of a group affiliated with the Zionist spy organization”, in apparent reference to the Zionist intelligence service Mossad. It did not refer to their Kurdish ethnicity which has been emphasized by several rights groups.

There was already alarm that the lives of the four, all aged under 30, were in danger after relatives were on Sunday summoned for a final meeting with them before they were hanged in Ghezel Hesar prison in the Tehran satellite city of Karaj.

Their hanging comes as concern grows over a surge in executions in Iran, which has seen on average two people executed every day so far this month according to campaigners. Amnesty International had said the four men, whom it described as “Iranian Kurdish dissidents”, had been sentenced to death “after a grossly unfair secret trial”. It described their arrests in July 2022 as an “enforced disappearance” and also said they had been subjected to giving “confessions” on Iranian television, a tactic commonly used by the authorities that activists fear is obtained under duress.

### ‘Neither forgive nor forget’

“The execution of these four prisoners was based on confessions under torture and without a fair trial, and is considered an extrajudicial killing,” said Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, director of the Norway-based Iran Human Rights (IHR) group. According to IHR’s toll, at least 65 people have been executed in Iran so far this year.

The wife of Mohsen Mazloum, one of the executed men, lashed out at the decision in a post on X, formerly Twitter. “I will neither forgive nor forget today! I have nothing else to say,” wrote Joanna Taimasi. Taimasi, who now lives outside Iran, had in the last days campaigned for the lives of the four to be spared on social media and through appearances on Persian-language TV channels.

The Kurdish-focused rights group Hengaw said the four, aged between 26 and 28 and all from Kurdish-populated regions of western Iran, “were deprived of their fundamental rights to legal representation, visits, and even communication with their families”. “Even by the standards of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the minimum requirements for a fair trial were not met in their case,” it said.

The spike in executions last week also saw the hanging of Mohammad Ghabadlou, 23, who was the ninth man to be executed in connection with the nationwide protests that swept Iran from September 2022. Iranian authorities had said that the four men executed on Monday were recruited by Mossad “about a year and a half before the operation”. They were sent to African countries for “training courses in the military centers” where Mossad officers were present, the judiciary added. The men were sentenced to death in September 2023.—AFP

## King Charles III, Kate back home after surgeries

**LONDON:** King Charles III and Catherine, Princess of Wales, rested at their homes Monday after both left hospital following separate surgeries, in a double health scare for Britain’s royal family. Head-of-state Charles, 75, left the private London Clinic three days after undergoing prostate surgery. The monarch, dressed in a suit and a black overcoat, waved to crowds as he and Queen Camilla, 76, emerged from the central London facility and got into a waiting car. His departure came hours after Kensington Palace announced that his daughter-in-law Catherine — whose husband is heir to the throne Prince William — had also left the clinic after undergoing abdominal surgery earlier this month.

It is unclear when exactly the 42-year-old princess was discharged but her office said that she was making “good progress” at home at the start of a recuperation that could last months. The pair’s absence has created a frontline staffing shortage within the already slimmed-down monarchy, with William also postponing public engagements to be at his wife’s side and Camilla left as the most visible working royal.

### Gratitude

Charles, who became king upon the death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, on September 8, 2022, has generally enjoyed good health, barring injuries from polo and skiing. The palace announced on January 17 that he would have a “corrective procedure” for the benign enlarged prostate the following week, and he was admitted to the clinic last Friday.

In an update, it said Charles, who spent three nights at the hospital, had rescheduled forthcoming engagements “for a period of private recuperation”. It gave no update on his medical condition, although he was said to have been “doing well” at the weekend.



LONDON: Britain's King Charles III (left) waves as he leaves, with Britain's Queen Camilla, the London Clinic, in London, on January 29, 2024. — AFP

“His Majesty would like to thank the medical team and all those involved in supporting his hospital visit and is grateful for all the kind messages he has received in recent days,” a statement read. Charles wanted to publicize his own case to raise awareness about the condition, which is common in men aged over 50 and affects urination.

Symptoms include a frequent need to go to the toilet and difficulty in fully emptying the bladder. The announcement has prompted a surge in internet searches for the term “enlarged prostate” on the state-run National Health Service (NHS) website.

Catherine, meanwhile, was treated at the hospital nearly two weeks ago and has now returned home to Windsor, west of London, to continue her recovery, according to the Kensington Palace statement. Kate and William sent a “huge thank you” to hospital staff, and said the family “continues to be grateful for the well wishes they have received from around the world”. At the time of her operation, Kensington Palace stressed that her condition was not linked to cancer, without elaborating.

### Tours scrapped

William, Charles’s elder son, has postponed public engagements to be with his wife and to care for their three children, Prince George, 10, Princess Charlotte, eight, and Prince Louis, five, the palace said. The surprise health scares threaten several overseas trips, according to media reports.

William and Kate had reportedly been set to travel to Rome in the coming months for their first joint overseas visit in two years. There has also been speculation that Charles and Camilla would visit Australia this year.

Charles’s sister, Princess Anne, 73, who recently went to Sri Lanka, is said to be ready to stand in for her brother at events in coming weeks. The sudden shortage of senior working royals follows three years of upheaval.

Family patriarch Prince Philip died in 2021, then Queen Elizabeth II the following year. Charles’s younger son Prince Harry — fifth in line to the throne — and his wife Meghan quit their royal roles in early 2020 and relocated to California.—AFP



International

# Iran, Pakistan ‘overcome’ raid tensions

## Foreign ministers praise strong long-term relations in meeting

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Iran pledged Monday to improve dialogue and swap liaison officers as both nations sought to ease tensions after deadly cross-border strikes threatened diplomatic relations. The tit-for-tat raids earlier this month in the porous border region of Baluchistan — split between the two nations — stoked regional tensions already inflamed by the Zionist war on Gaza.

During a visit to Pakistan Monday, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said the hostilities could not be described as a “crisis” because relations had always been strong. “It was natural that we would manage to overcome this,” Amir-Abdollahian told a news conference.

“Through joint cooperation between Islamabad and Tehran, we will not let terrorism endanger relations between us,” Pakistan Foreign Minister Jilil Abbas Jilani told the same briefing that both sides had agreed to strengthen dialogue at all levels and would speed up a plan to place liaison officers in each other’s countries. “We have managed to bring this situation back

to normal in the shortest time,” he said.

**‘Militant targets’**

Tehran carried out strikes against an anti-Iran group in Pakistan on January 16, the same week the nation’s military targeted Iraq and Syria. Two days later, Pakistan responded in kind with a pre-dawn raid on “militant targets” in Iran’s Sistan-Baluchistan province, one of the few mainly Sunni Muslim regions in Shiite-dominated Iran.

It has seen persistent unrest involving cross-border drug-smuggling gangs and rebels from the Baluch ethnic minority, as well as jihadists. The initial Iranian strikes, which Pakistan said killed at least two children, drew a sharp rebuke from Islamabad, with the government recalling its ambassador from Tehran and blocking Iran’s envoy from returning to his post.

Tehran also summoned Islamabad’s charge d’affaires over Pakistan’s strikes, which left at least nine people dead. The two countries, however, last week announced they had decided to de-escalate and allow both ambas-

sadors to return to their posts. On Saturday, gunmen in Iran’s Sistan-Baluchistan province killed nine people, with Islamabad’s ambassador identifying them as Pakistanis. So far, no group has claimed responsibility. The earlier exchange of air strikes by Iran and Islamabad prompted concern from the United States and European Union, who urged restraint, while China offered to mediate.

But both foreign ministers insisted Monday that strong long-term relations and respect for each other’s borders had ensured a swift outcome. Pakistan’s Jilani said good relations between Pakistan and Islamabad were “an important source of stability for the whole region”.

He said both sides had agreed to speed up the development of border markets along the frontier to further encourage trade and cultural exchanges. They would also establish a new “consultative mechanism” at the ministerial level and plan regular meetings to be held in each other’s capitals. “Our discussions were marked by convergences of all issues of mutual interest,” he said. — AFP



ISLAMABAD: In this handout photo by the Pakistan Foreign Office, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Jilil Abbas Jilani (front right) greets his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (front left). — AFP

## Marcos hits back against Duterte’s drug accusations

MANILA: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos on Monday rejected accusations by Rodrigo Duterte that he was a “drug addict”, claiming instead that his predecessor’s long-term use of fentanyl had taken a toll on his health.

Marcos’ comments came after Duterte launched a foul-mouthed tirade against his successor over a campaign to change the country’s constitution, in the latest sign of a breakdown in relations between their powerful families.

Fronting a rally of supporters in his southern stronghold of Davao city on Sunday, Duterte said Marcos was a “drug addict” and had been included in the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency’s (PDEA) list of people linked to illegal drugs.

Duterte provided no evidence for the accusations and the PDEA issued a statement on Monday saying Marcos “is not and was never in its watch list”. “I think it’s the fentanyl,” Marcos told reporters when asked about Duterte’s allegations. “It’s highly addictive, and it has very serious side effects. PRRD (President Rodrigo Roa Duterte) has been taking the drug for a very long time now,” Marcos said.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid many times more power-

ful than heroin. Marcos did not provide any evidence of his allegations. Duterte, whose bloody crackdown on narcotics left thousands of people dead and sparked an international investigation, said in 2016 that he had used fentanyl to ease the pain of a spinal injury.

Duterte said at the time that his doctor had made him stop using it on learning he was “abusing the drug” by using more than the prescribed amount. The two families formed a formidable alliance ahead of the 2022 elections, with Marcos successfully running for president and Duterte’s daughter, Sara Duterte, for vice president.

Since then, however, their so-called “Unity Team” has fractured as they seek to shore up their respective support bases and secure key positions ahead of next year’s mid-term elections and the 2028 presidential race. Sara Duterte and Marcos’ cousin and House of Representatives Speaker Martin Romualdez are widely expected to run for president.

In the latest rift, Marcos has backed a campaign for the 1987 constitution, introduced after his dictator father and namesake was ousted from power, to be changed to allow in more foreign investment—something the Dutertes have publicly opposed. Critics say the effort could pave the way for Marcos to seek another six-year term, which is currently prohibited. That would potentially put him on a collision course with Sara Duterte for the top job.

Sara Duterte said Monday that her brother Sebastian’s suggestion on Sunday that Marcos resign came from “a place of brotherly love” and alleged she was being subject to “despicable treatment” by “some sectors within the circle of the President”. — AFP



DAVOS, Philippines: This video grab taken on January 28, 2024 shows Philippine former president Rodrigo Duterte addressing supporters at a rally in Davao City, in Mindanao island. — AFP

## Zionist strikes kill 7 in Syria, including pro-Iran fighters

BEIRUT: Zionist strikes in Syria on Monday killed seven people, including pro-Iran fighters, a war monitor said, in the latest such attack in the country against groups loyal to Tehran. “(Zionist) strikes targeted a base belonging to Hezbollah and Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, killing seven people” including pro-Iran fighters, said Rami Abdel Rahman, director

of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Two of those killed were Syrian, including a security escort to an Iranian officer, he said, adding it was unclear whether civilians were among the dead in the attack, which struck Sayyida Zeinab, south of Damascus. The Syrian defense ministry also reported an “air attack” which it blamed on the Zionist entity. It said strikes around 1:00 pm (1000 GMT) targeted multiple locations south of Damascus.

It said in the statement, posted on social media, that “a number of Iranian advisers” were killed, before later revising it to remove any mention of the Iranian advisers. Iran’s Tasnim news agency, meanwhile, reported that “the Zionist regime targeted an Iranian advisory center in the Sayyida Zeinab area”.

However, Hossein Akbari, Iran’s ambassador to Syria, denied in a social media post that an advisory center had been struck or that “any Iranian citizens or advisers (were) martyred” in the attack. A previous air strike in Sayyida Zeinab in late December, also blamed on the Zionist entity, killed a senior Iranian general.

Quds Force commander Razi Mousavi was the highest-ranking Iranian general to be killed outside the country since a January 2020 US drone strike in Baghdad killed the elite force’s chief Qasem Soleimani. And on January 20, a strike on Damascus’s Mazzeh neighborhood targeting the Revolutionary Guards’ Syria spy chief killed 13 people, the Observatory had said. The Guards confirmed five members

were killed in that attack, which they blamed on regional arch-foe the Zionist entity.

During more than a decade of civil war in Syria, the Zionist entity has launched hundreds of air strikes in the country, primarily targeting Iran-backed forces as well as Syrian army positions. But such attacks have intensified since four-month Zionist war on Palestine.

The Zionist entity rarely comments on individual strikes targeting Syria but has repeatedly said it will not allow Iran, which backs President Bashar al-Assad’s government, to expand its presence there. Since 2011, Syria has endured a bloody conflict that has killed more than half a million people and displaced millions. Iran says it only deploys military advisers in Syria at the invitation of Damascus. — AFP

## Fierce battles rage in Gaza...

**Continued from Page 1**

which the Zionist entity would suspend the war for about two months in return for the release of over 100 hostages.

The Gaza war has forced more than one million Palestinians to flee to the far-southern Rafah area near the Egyptian border, according to the UN, deepening the humanitarian crisis. Hunger and disease have spread in crowded tent cities where families shelter in makeshift tents against the cold winter rain and mud while fearing more air strikes.

Alarm over their plight has heightened amid a bitter row over the main UN aid agency for Palestinians, UNRWA, after the Zionist entity charged several of its staff partook in the Oct 7 attack. Japan became the latest major donor to freeze funding for the agency that has provided most food, medical and other aid to the 2.4 million people of long-blockaded Gaza.

UN chief Antonio Guterres has pleaded for con-

tinued financial support, saying “the dire needs of the desperate populations they serve must be met”. Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur for the occupied Palestinian territories, warned that suspending funding “overtly defies” an International Court of Justice order to allow more aid into Gaza.

The Zionist entity has argued the UN agency must play no role in post-war Gaza, and Zionist envoy to the UN, Gilad Erdan, charged that funding for it “will be used for terrorism”. Hundreds of Zionist protesters have rallied at the Kerem Shalom border crossing in recent days and repeatedly blocked aid trucks from entering Gaza. And thousands demonstrated Sunday to call for the re-establishment of Zionist settlements in the Gaza Strip, in a rally joined by several far-right ministers.

“If we don’t want another October 7, we need to... control the territory,” said National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir. The Zionist entity seized Gaza in 1967 before withdrawing its troops and settlers from the territory in 2005. Netanyahu in official statements has rejected resettlement in Gaza, but the rally showed that the once-fringe position has gained momentum within his hard-right government. — AFP

## UK unveils plan to ban disposable e-cigarettes

**LONDON:** The UK will introduce legislation to ban disposable e-cigarettes in order to tackle a rise in youth vaping, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced Monday. “You talk to any parent or teacher, they will talk to you about the worrying rise in vaping amongst children,” Sunak told the media during a visit to a school in Darlington, northeast England.

“It’s right we take strong action to stamp this out, banning disposable vapes, taking powers to go after the flavors, the appearance, the packaging, where vapes are displayed in stores,” he added. “Children shouldn’t be vaping.”

Pre-filled disposable e-cigarettes, known as “puffs”, are popular with young people, can have a high nicotine content, come in many flavors and are cheap. The government cited recent figures showing the proportion of vapers under the age of 18 who use disposables has increased almost ninefold in the last two years.

Sunak’s government also plans to introduce fines for shops in England and Wales that sell vapes illegally to children. Health experts welcomed the proposal, with Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty saying the legislation would have “a major public health impact across many future generations”.

Mike McKean, from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, praised the move, which he called “bold action”. “Banning disposables is a meaningful step in the right direction,” he added.

Sunak last year announced plans to eventually make the UK a smoke-free nation. His proposals would make it an offence for anyone born on or after 1 January 2009 to be sold tobacco products — effectively raising the smoking age by a year each year until it applies to the whole population.

“I propose that in future, we raise the smoking age by one year every year. That means a 14-year-old today will never legally be sold a cigarette, and that they and their generation can grow up smoke-free,” Sunak told his Conservative party’s annual conference in October.

At present, the purchase age for tobacco products in England and Wales is 18. Sunak said that smoking was responsible for one hospital admission every minute in the UK, but stopped short of pushing for a total ban on vapes, arguing it was important to keep them “for adult smokers who want to stop”.

However, some Tories are pushing back against his bid to phase out smoking, including former prime minister Liz Truss. She tweeted that the government “should abandon its profoundly unconservative plans for the ban on tobacco sales,” calling it an extension of the “nanny state”.

The UK announcement follows the French parliament’s unanimous vote in December to ban single-use e-cigarettes, although the law still needs backing from France’s upper house Senate and clearance from the EU Commission.

Germany has also signaled an intent to take action while Belgium is awaiting the EU’s approval for a ban. The sale of all vapes is currently banned in over 30 countries, with 79 other countries regulating them through legislation, while 84 countries have no bans or regulations in place, according to the World Health Organization. — AFP



## Kuwait condemns attack on US troops...

**Continued from Page 1**

Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said that Iran now wore “American blood as a badge of honor”. “The entire world now watches for signs that the President is finally prepared to exercise American strength to compel Iran to change its behavior. Our enemies are emboldened,” McConnell said. Others were even more uncompromising. “Hit Iran now. Hit them hard,” Lindsey Graham, the top Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee and a leading hawk, said in a statement.

The dilemmas facing Biden are huge though. Direct strikes on Iranian territory would be a giant escalation, but even lesser action against Tehran’s proxies could fuel the fires of conflict, while destabilizing efforts to reach a ceasefire in Gaza. Further involvement would undermine Biden’s prized policy of extracting America from its “forever wars” in the Middle East — even if the chaotic US withdrawal from Afghanistan on his watch led to a Taleban takeover.

And for all his criticism of Biden, Trump was careful not to call for strikes on Iran — as his

“America First” foreign policy has long called for the United States to get out of its foreign conflicts. “There’s a domestic political risk, which is Biden alienates part of his base progressives, anti-war folks, and at the same time, opens himself up to accusations of wag-the-dog,” said Clarke, referring to a movie in which a US president starts a war to distract from political issues at home. “So I think it’s a really difficult situation.”

There has so far been no claim of responsibility for the strike, although on Sunday the Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed to have launched three drone attacks at bases in Syria, including near the Jordanian border. The group — a loose alliance of Iran-linked armed groups that oppose US support for the Zionist entity in the Gaza conflict and wants them out of Iraq — has claimed dozens of attacks on US and anti-jihadist coalition forces in Iraq.

A spokesman for Iran-backed Hamas, Sami Abu Zuhri, said the Jordan attack was a message that the fighting in Gaza “risks a regional explosion”. The US Central Command (CENTCOM) said late on Sunday the attack had hit the remote Tower 22 logistics support base and that 34 personnel were also wounded, eight of whom required evacuation. There are around 350 US Army and Air Force personnel at the base who operate in support roles, including for the international coalition against the Islamic State group, CENTCOM said. — AFP



International



**HODEIDA:** The Galaxy Leader cargo ship is docked in a port on the Red Sea in the Yemeni province of Hodeida, with Palestinian and Yemeni flags installed on it, during an organized tour by the Houthis in November.



The Houthi minister of information, Dhafallah Al-Shami (second left), inspects the Galaxy Leader Cargo ship in this file photo. — AFP photos

# Houthis open seized ship to sightseers

## Crew whereabouts remain unknown as ship turns into ‘tourist attraction’

**HODEIDA:** More than two months after Yemen’s Houthi rebels captured the Galaxy Leader cargo ship and detained its crew, the Iran-backed rebels have turned the vessel into a domestic “tourist attraction”. For about a dollar per trip, male-only groups of visitors can board wooden boats five times a week to the hijacked car carrier, which the Houthis hail as a trophy in their fight in solidarity with the Palestinians. Since shortly after the Zionist war on Gaza, the Houthis have launched a spate of missile and drone attacks on passing commercial ships which they say are linked to the Zionist entity. A US-led naval coalition has responded by patrolling the Red Sea, and US and British forces have struck military sites of the Houthis, now designated a “global terrorist” group by Washington, to keep open the vital shipping lane.

This has done little to dampen the mood on the sightseeing trips to the seized vessel, which is now decorated with Yemeni and Palestinian flags and banners displaying anti-American and anti-Zionist slogans. On a recent visit, Zubair al-Haidari, from the Yemeni capital Sanaa, said he had travelled for five hours to see the “(Zionist) ship” anchored off Hodeida on the Red Sea coast. It is our “pride and honor... that our armed forces have accomplished this wonderful work in supporting our oppressed brothers in Palestine and in Gaza,” he told AFP. He was among some 10 visitors taking pictures with their mobile phones as they chewed khat, a plant that generates a mild high and is widely consumed in the Arabian peninsula’s poorest country.

On board the ship, some visitors performed a traditional dance featuring the daggers that many Yemenis carry tucked into their belts, accompanied by chants glorifying the Houthis. On the deck of the Galaxy Leader, none of the visitors interviewed by AFP said they had seen the 25 crew members who are Bulgarian, Filipino, Ukrainian and Mexican and whose fate remains unknown.

### ‘Source of pride’

The Galaxy Leader is owned by a British company, which is in turn owned by a Zionist businessman. It had been chartered by a Japanese company when it was captured on November 19 by the Houthis, who said they were acting in “solidarity” with people in the besieged Gaza Strip.

Hizam al-Assad, of the Houthi political bureau, referred to the Galaxy Leader as a “tourist attraction” and said the visitors were “proof that the Yemeni people ... are impatient to meet the enemy and confront him”. Another visitor, Hamada al-Baydani, said he had travelled 400 kilometers (250 miles) from Al-Bayda, to see the seized ship, which he labelled “a source of pride for Yemenis”. Several days after detaining the vessel, the Houthis published a video showing a military general welcoming a group they said was the crew, but the militants have not provided any information on their fate since. After an hour on board under the scorching sun, the visitors made their way back home, chanting “God is the greatest, death to America, death to (the Zionist entity).” — AFP

## Notorious Japanese fugitive dies after 50 years on run: Media

**TOKYO:** Long hair, youthful smile, thick glasses slightly askew: for decades, the black-and-white photo of one of Japan’s most wanted fugitives has been a ubiquitous sight at police stations nationwide. But after nearly 50 years Satoshi Kirishima — wanted over deadly bombings by leftist extremists in the 1970s — reportedly died Monday, days after local media said he had finally been caught. Last week, the 70-year-old revealed his identity after he admitted himself to hospital under a false name for cancer treatment, according to Japanese media. The reports were a sensation in Japan, where his young face is so widely recognized that it has inspired viral Halloween costumes. But police were still scrambling to conduct DNA tests when the man believed to be Kirishima passed away on Monday morning. “Investigators looked into and eliminated past tips, but there is a very high possibility that this individual is actually Kirishima,” a police source told the Asahi newspaper.

### Plain sight

Details are emerging of how Kirishima may have been hiding in plain sight for decades. Born in Hiroshima in January 1954, Kirishima attended university in Tokyo, where he was attracted by radical far-left politics. He joined the East Asia Anti-Japan Armed Front, one of several militant groups active in the era along with the once-feared Japanese Red Army or the Baader–Meinhof Group in West Germany. The revolutionary Armed Front carried out bombings at Japanese companies, including one at Mitsubishi Heavy Industries that killed eight people. It operated in three cells, with fanciful names: “Wolf”, “Fangs of the Earth” and “Scorpion” — Kirishima’s outfit.

Alongside physical descriptors on Kirishima’s wanted posters — 160 cm tall (5 ft 3), full lips, very short-sighted — is a summary of his crime. In April 1975, the young radical allegedly helped set up a bomb that blasted away parts of a building in Tokyo’s upscale Ginza district. No one was killed. He has been on the run ever since. TV Asahi and other outlets said he had lived a double life for years, working at a building contractor in the city of Fujisawa in Kanagawa region, under the alias Hiroshi Uchida. He was paid in cash and went under the radar with no health insurance or driving license, the reports said.

At the nondescript office where the man reportedly worked, someone who knew him told TV Asahi that the suspect had “lost a lot of weight” compared to the wanted photo. The man believed to be Kirishima began to receive treatment for stomach cancer under his own expense, the reports said. It was at a hospital in the city of Kamakura that he finally confessed that he was 70-year-old Kirishima, they added. — AFP



**TOKYO:** A man walks past a case showing many of Japan’s most wanted criminals, including a poster of Satoshi Kirishima (top right) outside a police box in Tokyo on January 29, 2024. — AFP



This handout photo by Indian Navy shows an Iranian fishing vessel after it has been freed by the Indian Navy, off the coast of Somalia in the Indian Ocean. — AFP

## Indian Ocean forces rescue two boats from Somali pirates

**NEW DELHI:** Indian Ocean naval forces said Monday they had freed two fishing vessels hijacked separately by Somali pirates, with Indian sailors rescuing an Iranian boat and commandos from the Seychelles releasing a Sri Lankan trawler. The hijackings off Somalia have fueled concerns about a resurgence of Indian Ocean raids by opportunistic pirates, coming on top of a separate surge of attacks launched by Yemen’s Houthi rebels. Houthi gunmen have launched scores of attacks in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden targeting Zionist-linked vessels in response to the Zionist war in Gaza. International naval forces have been diverted north from the Gulf of Aden into the Red Sea, sparking fears that pirates will exploit the security gap, with the first successful case of Somali piracy since 2017 recorded in December. Pirate attacks off the Somali coast peaked in 2011 — with gunmen launching attacks as far as 3,655 kilometers (2,270 miles) from the Somali coast in the Indian Ocean — before falling off sharply after international navies sent warships and commercial shipping deployed armed guards.

### ‘Utmost courage’

India’s navy said it had deployed its warship INS Sumitra — which was on anti-piracy patrol off the east coast of Somalia in the Gulf of Aden — after receiving a distress message from the Iranian-flagged fishing vessel Iman. “The fishing vessel had been boarded by pirates and the crew taken as hostages,” Indian navy spokesman Commander Vivek Madhwal said, adding that the warship intercepted the boat and then worked to “coerce” the hijackers. The warship “ensured the successful release of all 17 crew members along with the boat”, he added, with the fishing boat then “sanitized and released for onward transit”. The

navy, which released photographs of the Iranian fishing boat and crew, as well as its sailors towing a skiff, did not give further details of the operation or fate of the pirates. Separately, Seychelles forces freed a Sri Lankan vessel “hijacked by armed Somali pirates”, President Wavel Ramkalawan’s office said Monday. The Sri Lankan fishing trawler Lorenzo Putha-4 was seized along with its six-man crew on Saturday, about 840 nautical miles (1,555 km) southeast of Somalia’s capital Mogadishu. “Seychellois special military forces boarded the boat with utmost courage to take complete control of the vessel and rescue our Sri Lankan brothers,” the presidency said in a statement. Sri Lankan navy spokesman Gayan Wickramasuriya told AFP the six crew were safe and that three pirates had been detained.

### ‘Piracy of opportunity’

Eric Jaslin, the head of France-based Maritime Information Cooperation and Awareness (MICA) Center, said last month it was still too early to say if attacks were the result of “piracy of opportunity” or because military resources were “focused on the Red Sea”. India’s navy has been deployed continuously off Somalia since 2008, but in December sent a far larger force — including three guided-missile destroyers and P-8I reconnaissance aircraft to “maintain a deterrent presence”. India, which has close trade ties with Iran, has not joined the US-led maritime task force in the Red Sea to protect international shipping against attacks by the Tehran-backed Houthi rebels. On January 5, Indian navy commandos in the Arabian Sea boarded the Liberian-flagged bulk carrier MV Lila Norfolk after a failed hijacking attempt. Last month, Somali pirates hijacked the bulk carrier MV Ruen. The Bulgaria-owned and Malta-flagged vessel was seized by Somali pirates 380 nautical miles east of the Yemeni island of Socotra on December 16. The pirates, who released one injured sailor into the care of the Indian navy, took the MV Ruen and its remaining 17 crew members to Somalia’s semi-autonomous state of Puntland. — AFP

## Japan’s Moon lander comes back to life

**TOKYO:** Japan’s Moon lander has come back to life, the space agency said Monday, enabling the craft to proceed with its mission of investigating the lunar surface despite its rocky start. The surprise announcement was a boost to Japan’s space program, nine days after the Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) touched down at a wonky angle that left its solar panels facing the wrong way. “Last evening we succeeded in establishing communication with SLIM, and resumed operations!” JAXA said on social media platform X, posting a grainy image of a lunar rock known as “toy poodle”. “We immediately started scientific observations with MBC and have successfully obtained first light for 10-band observation,” it said, referring to the lander’s multiband spectroscopic camera.

### Terrifying minutes

SLIM’s January 20 touchdown made Japan only the fifth nation to achieve a “soft landing” on the Moon after the United States, the Soviet Union, China and India. But on its descent, dubbed the “20 minutes of terror”, the craft suffered engine problems and ended up at a skewed angle, images released by JAXA showed. This meant the solar panels were facing west instead of up, and it was uncertain if they would still get enough sunlight to function. Last week JAXA said it had switched the elevator-sized SLIM off with 12 percent power remaining, hoping that the craft would wake up this week. A JAXA spokesman told AFP on Monday that the SLIM operation resumed “presumably because power generation resumed in its solar battery as it received sunlight”. “We will prioritize what we can do now — observing and collecting information — rather than adjusting SLIM’s position since adjusting the position could lead to a worse situation,” he said. “The daytime (where SLIM is on the Moon) will last until around the end of January and it will be at night from around February,” he said.

### Pinpoint

Helping to repair its reputation after a number of recent mishaps, JAXA said last week that SLIM had landed 55 meters (yards) from its target. This meant that the “Moon Sniper” lived up to its nickname and landed within the 100-metre landing zone, much more precise than the usual range of several kilometers (miles). Before powering the craft off, mission control was able to download technical and image data from SLIM’s descent and of the lunar crater where it landed. Assuming it has enough juice, SLIM can now tackle its main mission of investigating an exposed area of the Moon’s mantle, the inner layer usually deep beneath its crust. Two probes also detached successfully, JAXA said — one with a transmitter and another designed to trundle around the lunar surface beaming images to Earth. — AFP



**TANEGASHIMA SPACE CENTER:** This file photo shows Japan’s moon lander SLIM. — AFP



# Business

TUESDAY, JANUARY 30, 2024

## Unleashing the power of data: ‘Zain Data Office’ established

Al-Gharabally: Zain fosters a business culture deeply rooted in robust governance policies

KUWAIT: Data has stormed the modern business landscape, presenting itself as an invaluable, decisive resource to today's businesses and organizations. It has become the backbone that companies rely on when exploring new growth venues, as it not only helps understand market trends and customer behavior, but also gives the ability and sufficient knowledge to make more insightful decisions and achieve the best possible value.

Many who have insight into market trends see it as the 'digital fuel' behind new growth engines in companies. Today, setting up a data office is no longer an option with a fast-changing world driven by technology. The need for data offices emerged when companies needed a solution to organize and govern a method for using, storing, classifying, and transferring data inside and outside the organization. The rhythm in which businesses operate today exponentially increased with digital transformation, especially for those companies looking for growth, expansion, or even ensuring survival in a fiercely competitive market.

Today, successful enterprises are equipped with the tools and technologies needed to establish data offices to transform raw data into usable information that decision makers can rely on. Although the term "data office" is a relatively new one in some industries and markets, it is not the case for any aspiring company that realizes the value that data provides to stay on track when managing business strategies and growth plans.

The data office consists of a team that specializes in data management and



Nawaf Al-Gharabally with Zain Kuwait's Business Intelligence team.

work Program, which sets the foundational blueprint of data management, practices, goals, responsibilities, technology, and culture that helps ensure usability of all data an enterprise collects.

The Data Governance Program is driven by the global association DAMA to set up standardized data frameworks, policies, procedures, and performance measures across the organization. Data

a complete data governance strategy, so that it can use data more intelligently to empower its business for success and achieve its strategic goals.

While data governance initiatives can be driven by a desire to improve data quality and regulate its use, some believe the main drive behind it is achieving operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. As Zain puts innovation leadership at the heart of its business, it steadily follows a structured approach to data governance, fully understanding that relying on a comprehensive, data-driven workflow will help it identify new opportunities and maintain its competitiveness.

To realize this vision, Zain Kuwait Acting CEO Nawaf Al-Gharabally announced establishing the 'Zain Data Office' that operates a comprehensive program to strengthen the company's commitment to data governance: "This office is a testament to Zain's dedication to not only manage data effectively, but also ensure that data governance is deeply integrated into all aspects of the organization's operations".

Al-Gharabally continued: "To unleash the power of data and harness its full potential, Zain fostered and powered a data-driven culture through world-class management of its data assets so that they are proactively and efficiently managed throughout the organization to ensure their accountability, availability, usability, auditability, trustworthiness, and security. The Zain Data Office aims to enhance data management by implementing effective governance policies, standardizing practices across departments, and significantly improving data quality and privacy."

"We adopted the Zain Data Office initiative because we believe data governance management is a critical step

towards meeting the regulatory compliance obligations under personal data protection legislation, cloud computing frameworks, and sector-specific obligations. Data governance will ensure that Zain can comply with any mandatory data privacy, storage, transfer and processing restrictions," he added. Al-Gharabally further noted: "To build a holistic understanding of our performance and impact, we want to truly understand what impact we are having on our data citizens and service users and use data effectively to optimize and re-design our service offerings. This means moving beyond KPIs to a more complete understanding of performance."



Nadia Al-Saif, Zain Kuwait Business Intelligence Director, said: "Zain ensures that all necessary security, legal, and ethical implications are considered in a consistent, timely, and proportionate way. We want to have a clear understanding of data usage, adopt the principle of sharing data ownership, and ensure that this is proportionate to the risk of using them. In addition, we also want officers at all levels in the organization to be data literate, and to be confident in managing and analyzing that data." Al-Saif added: "We make sure every member of the organization understands the value of data and treat them as assets, and that's why we've launched this initiative. It represents a significant step in Zain Kuwait's journey towards becoming a data-driven enterprise, further solidifying its position as a leader in data governance. Right now, the Zain Kuwait Data Office is not just a functional entity; it is a reflection of the company's commitment to leveraging data as a key driver of innovation, growth, and competitive advantage."

Based on research conducted by various international firms, 20-35 percent of operating revenue is lost due to poor data quality (Total Information Quality Management). 30-40 percent of time is spent by data users searching for data if a clear inventory of data is not available (McKinsey). In addition, 40 percent of CEOs identify poor data integration as a key barrier to performing their regular operations (Deloitte). Over 12 percent of lost revenue could be the value of hidden costs of data redundancy (Experian Data Quality Research).

With this strategic initiative, Zain underscores the importance of data governance in the modern business landscape. The company is keen on ensuring data quality and reliability, which is instrumental in maintaining the integrity of data, and crucial for accurate and informed decision-making. The Data Governance Office helps protect sensitive information, something that is more important than ever today, and plays a key role in safeguarding data against threats and breaches. As the company's operations

grow, the complexity of managing data increases. The Zain Data Office helps streamline this process, ensuring easy access and effective data utilization to rapidly adapt to market changes and seize new opportunities, fostering agility in business decisions and strategies. The Office encourages the company to promote the goals of data governance as a culture where decisions are centered on data and its analysis.

### Data governance goals

- Enhance data quality in reports and analytics.
- Uphold customer personal data protection and privacy.
- Promote a data-driven culture: build a culture where decisions are grounded in data and analytics, leading to more strategic and effective outcomes.
- Meet the requirements of artificial intelligence: as AI tools rapidly grow, data governance plays a central role to ensure commitment and innovation.
- Comply with data legislation: keeping pace with changing legislation by taking a proactive approach to data governance, ensuring privacy and security when using data.
- Data Monetization: explore new venues for the commercial use of data, which leads to gaining valuable insights and implementing innovative projects.

### Key positive impacts of implementing data management

Based on the survey conducted by various international firms

### Decision making

- 70 percent faster, more informed decision-making – SnapLogic
- 23 percent higher accuracy level by business intelligence and analysis – IDC
- 64 percent improvement to current business operations – SnapLogic

### Data growth

- According to the latest estimates, 328.77 million terabytes of data are created each day.
  - It is estimated that 90 percent of the world's data was generated in the last two years alone.
  - In the space of 13 years, this figure has increased by an estimated 60x from just 2 zettabytes in 2010.
  - The 120 zettabytes generated in 2023 is expected to increase by over 150% in 2025, hitting 181 zettabytes.
  - Video is responsible for over half (53.72 percent) of all global data traffic.
- <https://explodingtopics.com/blog/data-generated-per-day>

### Impact of data breaches

- Loss of trust and business: 65 percent lost trust in an organization due to data breach – Varonis
- 80 percent of consumers will defect from a business if their information is compromised in a breach – Varonis
- Lose out to competitors: 52 percent of customers will be lost to competitors who provide better security aspects – Varonis

- Data governance is crucial to ensure regulatory compliance and protection of privacy
- Zain implements effective governance policies to unify practices and enhance data quality
- Data is the 'digital fuel' of the modern business landscape
- Global statistics show 20-35% of operating revenue is lost due to poor data quality
- 30-40% of time spent by data users when searching for data if clear inventory not available

analytics who work together as a single mind to transform data into a clear vision that can help direct the organization. This team uses the latest technology and tools built on artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), and other evolving innovations to define, clean, and organize data and reveal patterns and trends companies usually do not notice in raw data. These findings can help make accurate and fast decisions to increase customer satisfaction, enhance the competitive edge, improve operational efficiency, and increase revenue. As data becomes an invaluable resource for businesses, Zain Kuwait is pioneering in starting the Data Governance Frame-

work Program, which sets the foundational blueprint of data management, practices, goals, responsibilities, technology, and culture that helps ensure usability of all data an enterprise collects.

The Data Governance Program is driven by the global association DAMA to set up standardized data frameworks, policies, procedures, and performance measures across the organization. Data



Zain Kuwait HQ



## Business



Afrah Al-Arbash receives the Best Workplace in the Banking Sector Award.



# ABK receives 'Best Workplace in Banking Sector Award' from International Finance

**KUWAIT:** Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is proud to announce that it has been recognized with the Best Workplace in the Banking Sector award by International Finance. This esteemed accolade is a testament to ABK's unwavering commitment to fostering a culture of continuous learning, employee development, and excellence in benefits and compensation.

ABK's accomplishment comes from its fulfillment of International Finance's requirements and its demonstration of exceptional performance, innovation, and leadership in the banking industry. This involves showcasing effective human resources management, including talent development and a supportive workplace culture that fosters employee wellbeing as well as professional and career growth across the Bank's divisions.

Afrah Al-Arbash, General Manager of Human Resources at ABK, as well as representatives from the Bank, attended the award ceremony held on Jan 18, 2024 where the Bank was celebrated for its commitment to excellence in creating an exceptional workplace environment.

Commenting on the award, Loai Muqames, CEO-Kuwait at ABK, stated, "We are honored to receive this recognition which underscores our steadfast commitment to providing our employees with the resources and support they need to thrive both personally and professionally. At ABK, we believe that an investment in our employees' growth is an investment in the future success of our organization."

He continued, "ABK continues to en-

deavor to create an environment where employees can thrive and excel. We are committed to nurturing a workplace that encourages innovation, growth, and collaboration, ultimately driving the success of our business." On her part, Al-Arbash said, "Investing in the growth and devel-

and professional wellbeing, we have created a supportive and inclusive environment that values each individual's unique contribution." Through its efforts, the Bank has fostered a culture of equality.

Additionally, Al-Arbash highlighted that ABK prides itself on setting the bar high

human resources, retail, governance, and corporate banking. ABK's receipt of the Best Workplace in the Banking Sector award from International Finance solidifies the Bank's position as an industry leader in providing a supportive, rewarding, and dynamic work environment that empow-

(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



Loai Muqames

This recognition underscores our steadfast commitment to providing our employees with the resources and support they need to thrive both personally and professionally



Afrah Al-Arbash

Investing in the growth and development of our workforce is more than just a priority – it's a cornerstone of our organizational philosophy

opment of our workforce is more than just a priority – it's a cornerstone of our organizational philosophy. We offer comprehensive training programs and access to diverse learning opportunities to not only empower our employees, but also cultivate a positive work culture that drives productivity and loyalty."

ABK's commitment to employee wellbeing and its ongoing endeavor to enhance policies supporting diversity and inclusion have significantly contributed to winning this award. Al-Arbash continued, "By prioritizing our employees' personal

when it comes to benefits and compensation. The Bank goes above and beyond to create competitive packages that not only attract top talent but retain existing employees. This contributes to a healthy workplace that allows mutual progressive growth. This award is one of many accomplishments and accolades that ABK has received this year, adding to the Bank's impressive track record of years of achievements. In the past year alone, ABK has been recognized for its outstanding performance, innovation, and commitment to excellence in the banking industry across

ers employees to reach their full potential while delivering exceptional service to customers and stakeholders.

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. This is in addition to ABK's three branches located in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai International Financial Centre

Bank aims to promote financial inclusion by educating Kuwaiti society 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 eahli.com, contact Ahlan Ahli 1 899 899 or visit one of the Bank's branches across Kuwait.

## Qatar inks 15-yr deal to supply gas to Bangladesh

**DOHA:** Qatar has signed a deal with US-based Excelerate Energy to supply Bangladesh with natural gas for 15 years, state-owned QatarEnergy said Monday. Doha will supply Excelerate with one million tons of liquefied natural gas (LNG) a year to be delivered to floating storage units in Bangladesh over the 15-year period starting in January 2026.

The agreement follows a flurry of announcements for Qatari gas supply deals with China's Sinopec, France's Total, Britain's Shell and Italy's Eni, all announced last year. Those deals, lasting 27 years, are the longest agreed in the history of the industry. "We

are pleased to sign this agreement with Excelerate for the supply of up to one million tons per annum of LNG to Bangladesh," Qatar's Energy Minister Saad al-Kaabi said in a statement.

"This new agreement will further strengthen our relationship with Excelerate while also supporting the energy requirements of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and its stride towards greater economic development," added Kaabi, who is also chief executive of QatarEnergy. Asian countries led by China, Japan and South Korea are the main market for Qatar's gas, which has been increasingly sought by European countries since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In June, QatarEnergy signed a deal with Bangladesh's state-owned energy company Petrobangla to supply 1.5 million tons of LNG annually for 15 years. Qatar is one of the world's top LNG producers, alongside the United States, Australia and Russia. It is the largest natural gas supplier to Bangladesh. — AFP



DOHA: Qatar has signed a deal with US-based Excelerate Energy to supply Bangladesh with natural gas for 15 years, state-owned QatarEnergy said Monday.

## Ryanair Q3 profit dives 93% on higher fuel cost

**LONDON:** Irish no-frills airline Ryanair on Monday said net profit dived 93 percent in its third quarter as higher fuel costs offset rising revenues, resulting in a lower full-year earnings forecast. The carrier, which flies mostly throughout Europe, said net profit slumped to 14.8 million euros (\$16 million) in the final three months of 2023 compared with one year earlier. Chief executive Michael O'Leary said Ryanair was narrowing

its forecast for annual net profit to a range of 1.85 billion and 1.95 billion euros. It previously estimated between 1.85 billion and 2.05 billion euros.

"This guidance and the full year result remains heavily dependent upon avoiding unforeseen adverse events" in the group's current fourth quarter, O'Leary added in the earnings statement.

He identified risks as being "the Ukraine war, the Zionist-Hamas conflict and further Boeing delivery delays". In the third quarter, Ryanair's fuel costs surged 35 percent, while revenue jumped 17 percent.

Passenger traffic grew seven percent to 41.4 million, despite higher average fares which helped to offset other rising costs such as higher salaries. Its fourth quarter, or January-March period, is traditionally the airline's weakest. —AFP

## Huawei FreeBuds Pro 3: The only wireless earbuds you'll ever need

**KUWAIT:** There has never been a better time to buy a new pair of wireless earbuds. Do you know why? Huawei has just made a breakthrough in wireless audio. The recently launched premium wireless earphones, the Huawei FreeBuds Pro 3, bring new groundbreaking innovations in sound quality and several other improvements that make the overall experience stellar. One of the limiting factors in earbuds' sound quality is their small size, which makes it challenging to fit speakers that produce high-fidelity sound. But the new FreeBuds Pro 3 solve that with its dual driver system. The call quality is another area that has seen a massive improvement, with the new earbuds offering a 2.5x improvement over its predecessor. Let's take a closer look.

### Experience the sound of perfection

The new FreeBuds Pro 3 comes with an Ultra Hearing Dual-driver system that produces sounds that are rich and detailed. You will hear things you never heard before, from the deepest bass to the highest treble, without any distortion or interference. You will feel like you are inside the music, surrounded by every note and instrument.

The FreeBuds Pro 3 supports L2HC 2.0 and LDAC high-resolution codecs and is certified by both HWA and Hi-Res Audio Wireless. The audio transmission rate can reach 990 kbps, which reduces the delay and deterioration in audio transmission, enabling overall details in music to be well preserved and presented with high fidelity.

Just like the ear canal structure of each person is different, the way they enjoy music is also different. Some like to blast their music, and some prefer a gentler tune. Some wear their earbuds snugly, and some let them dangle a bit. All of these can affect the way the sound is experienced. That's why the FreeBuds Pro 3 can adjust the sound with its Triple Adaptive EQ based on these conditions to let you hear the music the way it was meant to be heard. This ensures that every frequency point in the music is full of tension, without any drag, and that vocals and background music are distinctly layered. You can hear the rise and fall of details and pick apart all the various instruments in a symphony.

### Pure Voice 2.0: Be heard clearly

The FreeBuds Pro 3 seems to take calling very seriously. The upgraded Pure Voice feature, incorporating a high-sensitivity bone conduction microphone, called a Voice Pickup Unit or VPU for short, captures your voice with incredible accuracy and clarity. The high-sensitivity VPU captures your voice through vibrations in the skull while speaking. It is positioned closer to the ear canal than in previous models for

more accurate voice pickup. It is now 2.5 times better than its predecessor, making your voice come through more clearly to the listener.

The earbuds also feature Huawei's proprietary multi-channel Deep Neural Network (DNN) algorithm for calls. This significantly enhances the earbuds' ability to counter high levels of ambient noise. Whether in a bustling mall, subway, airport, or even in windy conditions like the beach or cycling, the person on the other end of the call will think you're in a quiet environment.

### Personalized noise-cancellation

The active noise cancellation in the previous generation of the FreeBuds Pro was already the best in class. But the FreeBuds Pro 3 has taken this to the next level with an upgraded Intelligent ANC 3.0. They feature a smart adaptive noise cancellation feature that adjusts noise cancellation to your surroundings and your wearing style. The updated AI adaptive noise cancellation algorithm works together with the tri-mic hybrid noise cancellation system to offer real-time adaptive noise cancellation. It's like tailoring a bespoke outfit for each user, ensuring a perfect fit and a customised noise-cancellation in all scenarios. You can tune out unwanted noise and tune in to what matters, whether you are on a plane, a train, or a busy street.

### Lightweight comfort

The Huawei FreeBuds Pro 3 are 5 percent lighter than the previous generation, weighing just 5.8g each. New groove designs on the stems make for easy and intuitive control. The charging case is also 4.5 percent smaller than its predecessor, making it more compact and easy to store. The earbuds come with four pairs of silicon tips that can fit a wider range of ear canals, including the new XS-sized ear tips. These tip options make the earbuds more comfortable and secure for more users.

### Long-lasting battery life

Great sound and noise cancellation are all good. But to keep yourself entertained without interruptions, you also need a long-lasting battery. The FreeBuds Pro 3 can give you up to 6.5 hours of playback with ANC off, or up to 4.5 hours with ANC on. With the charging case, you can get up to 31 hours of playback with ANC off, or up to 22 hours with ANC on.

### The earbuds for multi-taskers

The FreeBuds Pro 3 support connections with up to two devices at the same time and it is easy to switch between your devices. If you have two phones and want to listen to your favorite tunes on one phone, the music on the other one pauses when you get a call on one phone. You can answer the call with a tap, and resume the music when you're done. And it works with any Huawei device, any Android or iOS devices and even PCs and smartwatches. The FreeBuds Pro 3 offer incredible sound quality, clear voice communication, intelligent noise cancellation, lightweight comfort, and long battery life. What more could you ask for? So, don't look elsewhere for a pair of earbuds in 2023! You won't regret getting these.



# Kuwait economy ends 2023 on positive note with major gains

## Non-oil activity picked up pace in Q2 2023

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwaiti economy ended 2023 on a relatively positive note, with the final quarter of the year showing tentative signs of a turnaround in bank credit growth, real estate activity and stock market performance. Inflation finally ticked lower in December after being range-bound for most of the year. Sentiment was also hopeful, with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah taking the oath and appointing former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammad Al-Salem Al-Sabah as HHI the Prime Minister to lead a new, predominantly technocratic government.

Q4 2023 was notable for a pick-up in the pace of legislation. Several laws were passed including to annul the local agent requirement for foreign companies, allowing foreign companies to participate in the bidding process for public tenders and penalizing owners of unused, so-called 'white' lands to free up land for residential housing. Measures with potentially positive fiscal implications were also proposed, including excise taxes on tobacco and sugary drinks ('sin taxes') and a 15 percent tax rate for multinational corporations. The latter follows Kuwait's joining in November the OECD-BEPS inclusive framework against tax avoidance.

### Non-oil activity

In terms of economic data, the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) released national accounts figures after a three-year delay. These show that the non-oil economy was more resilient during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic than originally thought, but that from 2021 onwards activity was less robust than inferred from the strong performance of associated, higher frequency metrics. The data showed non-oil GDP expanding 1.5 percent y/y in Q2 2023 after several quarters of negative growth. Growth in Q2 was driven by strong gains in the transportation (+35 percent y/y) and construction (+21 percent) sectors, with the latter reflecting the rebound seen in project awards in 2023.

Oil sector output, on the other hand, declined by -3.9 percent y/y as Kuwait lowered its crude production level as part of its voluntary participation in OPEC+ cuts. The negative performance of the weighty oil sector explains the 1.3 percent y/y contraction in overall GDP in Q2.

The CSB data also published revisions to the historical GDP series. These showed non-oil activity performing better than expected both in 2019 and in pandemic-affected 2020.

Looking ahead to 2024, additional oil sector cuts will likely keep headline growth flat to slightly negative, even as we expect the non-oil sector to post gains of over 3.0 percent, spurred on by refining gains and still growing private consumption.

### Oil prices decline in Q4 despite spike in geopolitical risk

Oil prices fell sharply in Q4 2023, with Kuwait Export Crude (KEC) ending the year at \$79.6/bbl (-18.7 percent q/q; -3.3 percent y/y) and erasing most of Q3's OPEC supply-curtailment gains.

While Q4 saw a spike in geopolitical risk in the aftermath of hostilities in Gaza in October, including subsequent Houthi rebel attacks on Red Sea shipping, the effect on oil prices was negligible. Markets weighed that there was enough idle global spare production capacity to offset any potential supply disruptions, especially amid weakening oil demand. KEC averaged \$84.3/bbl (-16.7 percent y/y) in 2023, having traded at a premium to the usually more expensive physical Brent on the back of tighter medium sour crude fundamentals.

For 2024, we see KEC at \$82/bbl on softer but still solid oil demand growth and supportive OPEC+ supply management. At November's ministerial meeting, Kuwait agreed with the OPEC impulse to deepen and extend 2023's voluntary production cuts into Q1 2024 and possibly longer to balance the market and prevent further oil stock builds. Kuwait's output in Q1 2024 will therefore fall by 135 kb/d to 2.41 mb/d.

### Consumer spending

Central bank card data showed consumer spending growth continuing to normalize post-pandemic. Total card spending grew 8.7 percent y/y in Q3 2023, similar to the 8.4 percent rise recorded in Q2 2023.

Looking to the year ahead, consumer spending faces headwinds including an uncertain global macroeconomic backdrop, lower year-on-year oil prices, heightened geopolitical risk and still-elevated global interest rates, though these are expected to begin easing in H2 2024. But the bulk of the slowdown in spending growth is likely behind us, with growth now more in line with historic trends after a post-pandemic surge. Moreover, consumer confidence could be boosted if the govern-

ment tackles its economic agenda with renewed vigor.

### Real estate activity

Q4 2023 saw the real estate sector post its best quarterly sales performance in more than two years, with sales rising 13.6 percent q/q to KD 771 million. Strong investment and commercial sector activity, the latter including sizable deals in Kuwait City and Al-Ahmadi governorates, as well as a less marked decline in residential sector sales were behind the improvement. Activity benefitted from the end of the summer lull and an expansion in credit to the real estate sector in the final months of the year. Cumulative sales of KD 2.8 billion in 2023 were still an acute 22 percent drop on 2022. Higher interest rates, pricier residential valuations and uncertain prospects were some of the factors at play.

Nevertheless, the government did provide some much-needed legislative clarity with its 'white land law' bill in November, with which it aims to free up the supply side by penalizing the practice of keeping lands idle for a prolonged period. This comes on the heels of the residential cities law, approved in July, which hopes to stimulate large-scale residential development and other key projects through private sector participation. The authorities also hope to shift more of the financing to the private sector to help reduce the fiscal burden. These laws could support supply in the medium-to-long term while demand could be boosted by passage of the draft mortgage law through parliament.

### Project activity dips

Project award momentum slipped slightly in Q4 2023 with KD 621 million worth of projects being awarded, a drop of 9.6 percent q/q. This mainly reflects the high base of the previous quarter—a large one-off infrastructure award—since awarded contract values in absolute terms remain elevated by post-pandemic standards. Total awards in 2023 reached KD2.47 billion, an almost three-fold increase on the previous year and by some margin the best projects market performance since 2017. Last year's strong performance was probably a reflection of the large backlog of pandemic-era projects finally coming alongside an unwinding in labor and material shortages.

Plans to expand the country's oil, electricity and water production capacities with Al-Zour (phases 2&3) and Al-Khairan IWPPs, in particular, are set to top the priorities list going forward. Kuwait Petroleum Corporation also plans

to invest \$9-10 billion annually over the next five years to raise upstream oil and gas production capacity. For 2024, MEED projects has identified KD6.2 billion worth of projects awards that are up for sign-off.

### Inflation rate moderates

Inflation softened in December, slowing to 3.4 percent y/y from 3.8 percent in November and 3.7 percent at end-Q3. The slowdown reflected moderating price rises in the food & beverages (4.7 percent y/y in December from a peak of 7.7 percent in April), housing (2.3 percent from 3.1 percent in November) and transport (2.4 percent from 3.0 percent in November) categories. Inflation accelerated, however, in the furnishings, education, health and recreation & culture categories, though not enough to positively influence the core rate, which fell slightly to 3.4 percent. Inflation averaged 3.6 percent in 2023 (vs. 4.0 percent in 2022) and is forecast to slow again in 2024 to 2.5 percent as food price and supply chain pressures ease further and consumer spending strength lessens.

### Credit and deposits tick up as weak 2023 draws to a close

Private credit to residents showed signs of improvement in Q4, with growth edging up to 1.5 percent YTD (+1.5 percent y/y) in November. Business credit was the primary driver (+1.8 percent YTD; +1.3 percent y/y), helped by the construction (+15.6 percent YTD) and trade (+8.3 percent YTD) sectors especially, while the real estate sector, the largest component of business credit, was up 2.6 percent YTD after being broadly flat-to-negative for most of 2023. Household credit, after being flat in H1 2023, showed further signs of a pick-up (+1.7 percent YTD; +2.1 percent y/y). Resident deposit growth also strengthened in Q4 (+2.9 percent YTD; +2.5 percent y/y). Recent momentum has largely been driven by growth in public institution deposits (+15 percent in Sep-Nov), though these were still down 2.1 percent YTD after declines earlier in 2023.

The CBK's key discount rate ended the year at 4.25 percent, after a cumulative 275 bps increase since March 2022—around half of the US Fed's 525 bps rise over the period. Attention now shifts to the pace of monetary loosening after the Fed signaled that its rate hiking cycle was all but complete. Fed dot-plots projections point to three, 25bps rate cuts in 2024; futures markets see five to six cuts.

## KIB wins international ISO certification for info security management

**KUWAIT:** For the 10th year in a row, owing to its commitment to the highest international standards for security systems efficiency, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) successfully garnered the ISO27001:2022 International Certificate for Information Security Management System. This achievement is a testament to the Bank's unyielding commitment to adopting top-class security systems and state-of-the-art technologies across all its services, guaranteeing the highest levels of security and safety for the customers' bank and personal data.

Commenting on this achievement, Basil Al-Suwaidan, General Manager of the Information Security, Privacy, and Anti-Fraud Department at KIB said: "We are very proud of being granted this prestigious certification for the 10th consecutive year, allowing us to set a new benchmark for data security in the market. This feat further proves our insistence on being distinguished and acknowledges our unwavering efforts to achieve the highest levels of efficiency and adhere to the accredited international standards for information security. It is worthy to note that the new version of the standard includes security controls related to modern risks such as cloud computing and other emerging technologies."

Al-Suwaidan added: "We always seek to adopt a meticulous strategy and approach to information security, which is why we are constantly working with our employees on adhering to absolute confidentiality and privacy of administrative and customer data. We thank everyone who contributed to this achievement, which not only bolsters our position in the market but also reinforces our commitment to safeguarding our stakeholders' information. In doing so, we are able to take further strides toward adopting higher industry standards that enable us to fulfill our customers' and partners' aspirations alike."

Among the many factors keeping KIB in the market lead is the constant fortification of its data security systems, which it pairs with regular investment in its staff's competencies, skills, and general understanding of the latest security challenges in today's market. In parallel with strategic planning, KIB continues to adopt highly accurate precautionary measures to efficiently keep all future security challenges at bay. These efforts are an integral part of the Bank's deeply rooted commitment to achieving comprehensive security and adopting best-in-line technologies and approaches.



Basil Al-Suwaidan



Ahmed Al-Nuwaibit and Abdullah Al-Mashouh with the work teams.

## stc sparks innovation, creativity at its Winter Wonderland Kuwait booth

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, concluded several entertaining educational activities at its booth in Winter Wonderland Kuwait (WWL). Following its strategic partnership with Touristic Enterprises Company (TEC), stc organized the activities alongside strategic partners, demonstrating the Company's commitment to its extensive Corporate Social Responsibility Program (CSR). These initiatives, aimed at creating a positive social impact, highlighting stc's dedication to fostering community engagement through strategic collaborations.

### Innovation, education & digital transformation

In one of the activities, stc's booth became a hub of innovation and learning. In collaboration with Dawrat.com and DJI Kuwait, stc hosted a comprehensive photography course. Under the guidance of Abdullah Al-Mashouh, a renowned trainer and content creator, participants explored the intricacies of drone photography and reel production. The course culminated with the distribution of gifts from stc and a high-end drone pro-

vided by DJI Kuwait for the competition winner. Each participant left the workshop enriched with knowledge and a certificate of participation.

### Gaming & entertainment

Adding to the excitement, stc hosted a PlayStation 5 FC 24 tournament, a football game highly popular amongst the youth in Kuwait and around the world. This special tournament welcomed professional gamers, witnessing the participation of 64 youthful competitors, supported by an enthusiastic crowd of over 200 fans. The event served as a unique platform for emerging gamers to showcase their skills while fostering a sense of community and sportsmanship among participants. In the grand finale, the top three champions were honored with valuable gifts from stc, celebrating their exceptional performance. The tournament's success sheds a positive light on the local gaming community, reinforcing stc's role in promoting digital sports and youth engagement in the region.

### Sustainability and environment amongst youth

Furthering its commitment to nurturing the younger generation, stc, in collaboration with Aspire Club, conducted a unique workshop for children. This workshop focused on sustainable gardening practices using biodegradable newspaper sheets rather than plastic. The objective through the workshop was to educate children on the importance of environmental stewardship and practicing eco-friendly activities. The event, at-

ing suspicious e-mails, as phishing e-mails are usually sent from suspicious domains using the logos of well-known institutions such as banks, telecom companies, or big companies, so that the user cannot distinguish between real and suspicious e-mail. Therefore, the bank advised customers to follow important tips when dealing with e-mails, including always making sure that the e-mail sender is from a legitimate organization, as well as checking the grammar and spelling in the e-mail, as many phishing e-mails are poorly written, and making sure to disregard those emails to avoid being a victim of fraud.

NBK also called for cautious dealing with links and not saving any confidential information such as: debit/credit card number or PIN on the mobile phone, as well as not to write down the PIN on the card or share it with any person, and the same also applies to the "OTP". The bank also advised customers to log out of the mobile banking app or website immediately after the transaction is completed.

The bank also reaffirmed that it will not ask for personal information via e-mail, SMS or phone calls, warning customers not to respond to those messages representing fraudulent attempts to obtain their banking



PlayStation 5 tournament participants.

tended by 50 children aged 4 to 13 years, also included a creative writing workshop titled "My Story from My Creativity," aimed at enhancing their intellectual and writing skills. Guided by professional instructors, the students practiced their creative writing skills by writing a story from the location based on their various senses and experiences.

The activities organized at stc's booth in Winter Wonderland Kuwait in collaboration with its partners showcases the Company's dedication to empowering the community with knowledge, skills, and entertainment. By engaging with various segments of the community, stc aims to create a sustainable and positive impact on the community. The programs emphasized the importance of education, environmental sustainability, and the promotion of technology and innovation as key pillars. Through these efforts, stc aspires to contribute to the economic and social development of Kuwait, aligning with the country's vision for a prosperous future.

stc's CSR program extends beyond single events, encompassing a wide range of activities throughout the year. These include supporting educational initiatives under stc upgrade umbrella, promoting digital literacy, and engaging in environmental conservation projects. The Company also actively collaborates with various non-profit organizations, government entities, and educational institutions to reach a broader audience and make a meaningful difference in the community.



information to steal their money or data. NBK harnesses its huge capabilities in communicating with customers as well as all its digital channels, which the most popular among all Kuwaiti banks, to support CBK's endeavors to protect customers and the economy.

It is worth mentioning that NBK is a key supporter and partner in all CBK's campaigns and initiatives aiming to increase financial and banking awareness among different segments of society. As a leading financial institution in Kuwait, NBK frequently organizes various activities to raise awareness on all topics related to the banking sector, as well as various training courses for its employees to enhance their experience in the areas of combating fraud and financial crime.



## Business



KUWAIT: Jassim Mustafa Boodai stands for a group photo with the participants.



Jassim Mustafa Boodai honors Eng. Abdullah Al-Otaibi of EPA.

# Gulf Bank launches 'A Step Towards Change' environmental sustainability initiative

## Initiative in collaboration with EPA and 5 cooperative societies, marking the initial phase

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank launched on Monday (Jan 29) the environmental sustainability initiative "A Step Towards Change," striving to alter societal behaviors by encouraging the use of reusable bags. The initiative is a collaborative effort with the Environment Public Authority (EPA) and five cooperative societies in its initial phase, including Al-Dahiya and Al-Mansouriah, Al-Shamiya and Shuwaikh, Al-Rawda and Hawally, Kaifan and Mishref.

Jassim Mustafa Boodai, Chairman of the Board at Gulf Bank, and a considerable number of executives from the bank's management attended the launch event for the initiative. Dr Hamad Al-Matar, Chairman of the Committee for Environmental, Food, and Water Security Affairs in the National Assembly, and Engineer Abdullah Al-Otaibi, representing the General Authority for the Environment, were also in attendance. Furthermore, the launch event featured the participation of presidents and officials from the cooperative societies engaged in the initiative.

### Sustainable development

At the launch event, Ahmad Al-Amir, Deputy General Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, stated,



Ahmad Al-Amir speaking.

- We aim to change societal behaviors by promoting the use of reusable bags.
- We have successfully achieved the implementation of Goal No 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals by strengthening partnerships among the various sectors of society.
- The initiative united the public and private sectors, along with cooperative societies, to achieve a shared objective.

environmental strategy outlined in the 'New Kuwait 2035' vision, accompanied by relevant environmental legislation addressing resource conservation, pollution reduction, environmental safety, ecosystem rehabilitation, biodiversity protection, waste management efficiency, renewable energy utilization, and the advancement of national capabilities in environmental initiatives."

He highlighted the bank's significant role in instilling environmental sustainability principles within the community through the launch of impactful initiatives.

The bank also launched its 2024/2030 ESG strategy, providing the fundamental framework for sustainability endeavors in the upcoming phase. Additionally, a high-level Sustainability Committee, led by board member Reem Al-Saleh, was established to oversee the execution of sustainability programs.

Moreover, a comprehensive high-level training initiative for the senior leadership of the bank was launched, intending to prioritize sustainability in all facets of the bank's operations and services.

Al-Amir concluded his remarks

Mustafa Boodai, and Ahmad Al-Amir representing the bank, acknowledged and honored the entities involved in the initiative. Gulf Bank aims to be at the forefront in Kuwait by prioritizing employee engagement within an inclusive and diverse environment. The goal is to provide exceptional customer service while actively contributing to sustainable community development. Leveraging its extensive branch network and innovative digital services, the bank provides customers the flexibility to choose how, and where, they manage their banking transactions, ensuring a seamless and efficient banking experience.

Aligned with its commitment to Kuwait Vision 2035, "New Kuwait," and its collaboration with diverse shareholders to achieve these goals, Gulf Bank is committed to making significant advancements in sustainability across all environmental, social, and governance aspects. This commitment is evident through carefully chosen sustainability initiatives implemented both within and outside the bank.

### Dr Hamad Al-Matar: Thank you Gulf Bank

Dr Hamad Al-Matar, the Chair of the Environmental, Food Security, and Water Affairs Committee in the Kuwaiti National Assembly, remarked that Kuwait is lacking such ambitious initiatives and expressed gratitude to Gulf Bank for undertaking this initiative. It is evident that the individuals responsible for this initiative fully comprehend the importance of the environment and how to engage with the community. Additionally, he mentioned that the Environmental Committee is currently in the process of drafting legislation that would mandate government entities, particularly municipalities, to utilize environmentally friendly bags. This proposed legislation will be presented to the Kuwaiti National Assembly for expedited discussion. Emphasizing the significant environmental harm resulting from plastic bags, he highlighted the distinctive challenges that Kuwait encounters, due to its compact size and widespread use of plastic bags.

Dr Al-Matar continued, stating, "I am pleased and honored to be part of this event, and I am impressed by the professional alignment with sustainable development goals. This indicates that Gulf Bank is in step with global trends in advancing sustainability principles. We encourage all banks and companies to initiate efforts at this level, with the hope that this positive trend will extend to other private sector entities."

### The EPA: A distinguished initiative and a leading role by Gulf Bank

Engineer Abdullah Al-Otaibi, the representative of the Environment Public Authority, expressed appreciation to Gulf Bank for its prominent role in the private sector, particularly through its outstanding initiative for environmental sustainability – 'A Step Towards Change.' He highlighted their dedication to collaborating with all relevant entities to ensure the success of this initiative.

In a press statement at the event, Al-Otaibi emphasized the significant environmental awareness among the Kuwaiti people. He highlighted that altering societal behavior and encouraging the use of reusable bags becomes less challenging when appropriate conditions are established. Moreover, he expressed, "We urge all banks and private sector entities to follow Gulf Bank's lead in introducing top-notch initiatives for environmental protection." Al-Otaibi further highlighted the pressing necessity to decrease the excessive use of plastic, which is having adverse effects on landfills.

Emphasizing the crucial role of the Environment Public Authority in safeguarding the environment, he highlighted its engagement in awareness campaigns and its supervisory role in overseeing violations. The Environment Public Authority actively arranges a variety of workshops and informative lectures for the community.

### Bank employees as ambassadors for the initiative

In line with its dedication to promoting sustainability both within and outside the bank, Gulf Bank initiated an awareness campaign among its employees. The campaign underscores the significance of transitioning to reusable bags, urging employees to serve as ambassadors for the initiative within the community.

### "A Step Towards Change" initiative set to launch on Feb 5

Ahmad Al-Amir revealed that the official launch of the "A Step Towards Change" initiative is scheduled for Feb 5, 2024, at the Al-Dahiya and Al-Mansouriah cooperative society. The initiative's activities will span a week, offering exclusive services to individuals using reusable bags within the cooperative societies. Services include the "Fast Track" service, and the initiative will be accompanied by an awareness campaign across various social media platforms and street advertisements in the specific area of the cooperative society each week. Moreover, engaging competitions for the public are set to be organized.

### The environmental consequences of plastic pollution

The Kuwaiti diving team extracts around 10 tons of plastic waste weekly from the shores of northern and southern Kuwait, including the Kuwaiti islands. Additionally, international reports emphasize that approximately one million seabirds perish annually worldwide, due to plastic ingestion, and certain plastic components take up to 500 years to decompose.



The audience stand during the national anthem.

"Gulf Bank is pleased to announce its achievement in reaching Sustainable Development Goal 17 through the 'A Step Towards Change' initiative. This goal highlights the promotion of implementation methods through collaborations across various public and private sectors, as well as cooperative societies. We anticipate that this collaboration will result in the development of governmental policies and laws, that reinforce and enhance the efforts of the private sector and civil society, in safeguarding Kuwait's environment by minimizing plastic usage."

### 2025 strategy

Al-Amir expressed, "The initiative is integral to Gulf Bank's 2025 strategy, centered on strengthening environmental, social, and governance (ESG) sustainability principles. It aligns with Kuwait's

values. He stated, "Understanding that a thousand-mile journey begins with a single step, we considered it fitting to launch this initiative with a specific group of prominent cooperative societies in Kuwait. Approximately 100,000 reusable bags will be distributed to participants, representing the initial move towards transforming behaviors and culture, seamlessly integrating the habit into their daily routines."

### Sustainability milestones

Al-Amir highlighted that the bank's commitment to integrating sustainability principles, both internally and externally, was emphasized with the publication of the third annual Sustainability Report. This report showcased significant accomplishments in the realms of environmental, social, and governance (ESG)

by acknowledging the Environmental Authority, the Environmental Affairs Committee in the National Assembly, and the cooperative societies involved in the initiative. He also delivered a closing message, emphasizing, "Preserving Kuwait's environment is a shared responsibility that requires collective collaboration from us all."

### Cooperative societies

The chairmen and officials of the cooperative societies participating in the press conference expressed their appreciation to Gulf Bank for launching this noteworthy initiative, commending its goals aimed at reshaping societal behaviors by encouraging the use of reusable bags.

It is worth mentioning that Gulf Bank, with its Chairman of the Board, Jassim



Honoring Dr Hamad Al-Matar.



Honoring Adel Al-Doukhi, the Chairman of Al-Shamiya and Al-Shuwaikh Cooperative Society.

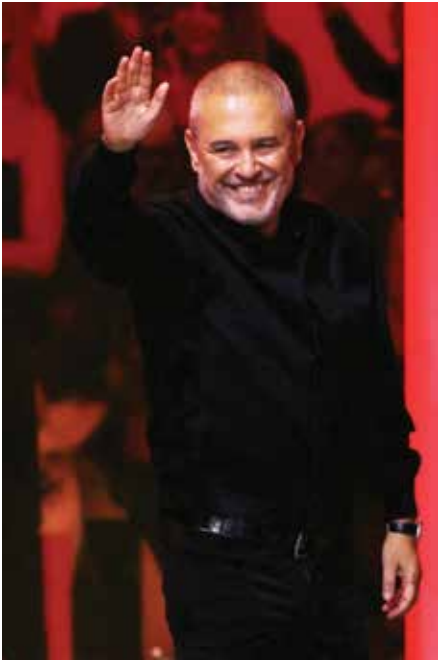


Honoring Ahmed Al-Rashed, Chairman of Al-Dahiya and Al-Mansouriah Cooperative Society.





*Jennifer Lopez*  
steals the  
spotlight at Elie  
Saab's couture



Lebanese fashion designer Elie Saab acknowledges the audience following his Women's Haute-Couture Spring/Summer 2024 Fashion Week in Paris —AFP photos

**E**lie Saab reminded us of his red carpet prowess by hosting Jennifer Lopez in the front row. The Lebanese master of shape and sparkle has dressed her "oh, like hundreds of times," Saab said after the show, and she wanted to support her longtime friend. Lopez caused such commotion when she arrived in the room bathed in ochre light for the collection, titled "Desert Rose," that it ended up with some photographers being escorted from the show. The collection was inspired by the "mystery of Morocco, inside the souk and the light of the desert," Saab said. He highlighted that while similar, it is different than his native country. "The shapes are not the same and the embroidery is different, but it's a sister," he said. Saab looked to the intricate and geometric patterns of the country's architecture. He transposed these to filigree on capes and gowns, with gold working its way across soft sunset colors. The punched metalwork of Moroccan interior design and lighting also played into the bodices and with graphic lines and inlaid florals.

Where he strayed from symmetry in a one-shouldered wrap cape that looped from shoulder to wrist, it added a refreshing air of volume, and an outstretched batwing cape created moody drama when the model walked into the light. It all made for great photos, which is why he is a celebrity favorite for his red carpet gowns. But do they sell? Elie Saab Group chief executive officer Elie Saab Jr. insisted so. "Couture is not just a tool for us. It's not just an image-maker like it is for maybe other brands," said Saab Jr. "For us it is the core of our DNA and is an important part of our business. Of course, it has limitations in terms of growth and expansion because the clientele is very particular, but it remains an important business line." Saab just inked a deal last week with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to stage a fashion show and immersive experience there during its annual festival Riyadh Seasons, which will take place in October. It follows the opening of his flagship there last May.

—WWD.com



Jennifer Lopez at the Elie Saab Haute Couture Spring/Summer 2024 show as part of Paris Fashion Week.



Models present creations by Elie Saab during the Women's Haute-Couture Spring/Summer 2024 Fashion Week in Paris.







# Bullfighting resumes in Mexico City despite protests

**C**heering spectators filled Mexico City's massive bullfighting arena on Sunday, taking in the capital's first bloody show since the Supreme Court last month overturned an earlier suspension, as protesters outside the stadium de-

slowly faded through the evening. Sunday's event, which featured famed Mexican bullfighter Joselito Adame, was the first since a judge in June 2022 ordered an indefinite suspension of the centuries-old practice in Mexico City, agreeing with animal rights activists

jandra Diaz, a 49-year-old educator, told AFP, stressing the "importance of bullfighting culture."

Police outside the stadium blocked protesters, some wearing bull masks and covered in blood-red paint, from entering. Dozens of people had earlier gathered at the central Glorieta de Insurgentes roundabout before marching to the bullring under the banner "Torture is neither art nor culture."

"It's important to be here because they're going to resume their barbarity, their cruelty, their massacre. It must not happen, and we have to send them a pretty clear message," 62-year-old protester Gabriela Martinez told AFP, tears in her eyes. "We are completely against the fact bullfights have returned, and that these events continue to be held where only pleasure is sought through the torture of an animal," Jeronimo Sanchez, director of the NGO Animal Heroes said.

After the high court's decision, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador raised the possibility of a referendum on the future of bullfighting in Mexico City. Four of Mexico's 32 states have already banned the practice, which according to its supporters generated millions in revenues and employed around 80,000 people in 2018. — AFP



manded a permanent ban. Inscribed in the dirt of Mexico's Monumental Plaza de Toros — the largest bullfighting stadium in the world, with seating for over 41,000 — was the phrase: "Freedom. Bulls, living culture."

Trampled by the charging bulls and side-stepping matadors, the message

who had filed suit.

The Supreme Court however revoked that decision last month, without a ruling on the merits. Anti-bullfighting groups are hoping for a final decision in their favor in the coming weeks. "I'm very moved, it's something I've been waiting a long time for," spectator Ale-



Mexican bullfighter Diego Silveti performs during a bullfight event at the Monumental Plaza de Toros Mexico.



A man wearing a traditional mariachi hat watches a bullfight at the Monumental Plaza de Toros Mexico in Mexico City.



Mexican bullfighter Joselito Adame performs during a bullfight event at the Monumental Plaza de Toros Mexico. — AFP photos



An assistant bullfighter kills the bull during a bullfight at the Monumental Plaza de Toros Mexico.



South Korean director Jason Yu (right) poses with French author, journalist and director, president of the feature film jury, Bernard Werber.

## South Korea's Yu wins top award at Gerardmer festival for 'Sleep'

**S**outh Korean filmmaker Jason Yu was on Sunday awarded the prestigious Gerardmer International Fantastic Film Festival Grand Prix for his first feature-length offering, "Sleep". The 34-year-old's movie is a comedy horror about a young couple's lives being turned upside down after

the husband's nightmarish sleepwalking habits terrorize his wife. The Jury Prize was awarded to "Amelia's Children" by Portuguese filmmaker Gabriel Abrantes and Frenchwoman Celine Rouzet's "En Attendant la Nuit" (For Night Will Come).

"Amelia's Children" is about a man

who believes himself to be an orphan but then finds his family. "En Attendant la Nuit" is about a teenager who needs human blood to survive and falls in love with his neighbor.

"When Evil Lurks" by Argentine Demian Rugna won both the Critics' Prize and Audience Award, while Briton

Barnaby Clay's "The Seeding" picked up the Great East Region Youth Jury Award. "Transylvanie" by Frenchman Rodrigue Huart was awarded the Short Film Grand Prize. The Gerardmer festival specializes in films from the fantasy, science fiction and horror genres. — AFP



The prize-winners of the 31st Gerardmer Fantastic Film Festival, (from left to right) Argentine director Demian Rugna for the Audience award and Critics' prize for his film "When evil lurks", French director Celine Rouzet for the Jury prize for her film "En attendant la nuit", South Korean director Jason Yu for the Grand prize for the film "Sleep" and French director Rodrigue Huart for the Short film award for his film "Transylvanie" are pictured after the closing ceremony.



The prize-winners of the 31st Gerardmer Fantastic Film Festival, winner of the short film award, French director Rodrigue Huart (left), winner of the Audience award and Critics' prize Argentine director Demian Rugna (second left) for his film "When evil lurks", winner of the Jury award, French director Celine Rouzet (second right), with French actors Celeste Bunnquell (fourth right), Mathias Legout Hammond (third right) and Grand prize award winner South Korean director Jason Yu pose after the closing ceremony in Gerardmer, northeastern France. — AFP photos



## Sports

# ‘Wake-up call’ as India look for quick fix in second Test

## Hosts remain favourites in the five-match series

**HYDERABAD:** England's attacking “Bazball” style of play trumped India at home in the first Test but pundits and cricketers on Monday said the hosts remain favourites in the five-match series. Rohit Sharma's India lost the nail-biting opener by 28 runs in Hyderabad on Sunday on day four of the Test, after being ahead in the match for most of the opening three days.

England's fearless “Bazball” brand of play devised by coach Brendon McCullum and skipper Ben Stokes has brought the team 14 victories in 19 Tests. “Bazball: Believe the hype”, a headline in the Indian Express daily read. It was India's fourth loss in their last 47 Tests at home since 2013 -- and their first-ever after leading by 190 runs in the first innings of a home game.

“It's just a wake-up call for India,” former England captain Nasser Hussain told Sky Sports. “England have shown that they're not a side to be messed with,” he added. “This is a confident side; they have great self-belief in the way they are playing the game. They are fully behind their captain. They are fully behind their coach.”

Home spinners led by Ravichandran Ashwin came under attack by the opposition's fearless approach led by Ollie Pope's 196, an innings built around sweeps and reverse sweeps. “The India team under-achieve more than any team that I've seen in sport,” former England captain Michael Vaughan wrote in London's Daily Telegraph.

But he said England could not rest on their laurels. “I still think India are favourites to win the series, because they will react... But India will be

second-guessing themselves about what pitches to prepare,” he said.

“I said before the series I thought India were better off preparing a flatter wicket than one with more turn,” he added.

### ‘Hartley and Soul’

India faltered in their chase of 231 and after Rohit fell for 39 off debutant left-arm spinner Tom Hartley, who returned figures of 7-62, the innings crumbled. “Hartley and Soul”, the Times of India newspaper headline read.

The pitch in Hyderabad was not a rank turner but offered help to the spinners like any other sub-continent wicket. But it was the England spinners who got more out of the conditions than the experienced home trio of Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel.

Ashwin, an off-spinner, and Jadeja, a left-arm orthodox, shared five wickets between them in England's second innings but the tourists overcame a big trail to post 420. Pope's unorthodox approach blunted the spin threat and later England's slow bowlers made it count. Hartley rattled the Indian chase along with an injured Jack Leach and part-timer Joe Root. But India coach Rahul Dravid said his team's spinners will come back strong in the second Test starting Friday in Visakhapatnam.

“We have to get more disciplined with where we pitch the ball; we will work on it and we will get better at it as we got some world-class spinners,” Dravid told reporters. “It's not the first time that we've been challenged. One of the good things about our



**HYDERABAD:** England's Tom Hartley (2R) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of India's Srikr Bharat (R) during the fourth day of the first Test cricket match between India and England at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad on January 28, 2024. — AFP

spinners is that they've always come back.”

In England's last Test series in India in 2021, the visitors won the opening game but the scoreline

ended 3-1 in favour of the hosts. India have been unbeaten at home since 2012 when Alastair Cook's England beat them 2-1. — AFP

## ICC reprimands Bumrah for contact with England's Pope

**NEW DELHI:** India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was reprimanded by the International Cricket Council Monday for “inappropriate physical contact” with England's Ollie Pope during the home team's 28-run Test defeat this weekend. The incident occurred during England's second innings when Bumrah, after bowling and completing his follow-through, “deliberately stepped in Ollie Pope's way as the batter went for a run, leading to inappropriate physical contact”, the ICC said in a statement.

Pope's match-winning 196 handed India only its fourth loss in their last 47 Tests at home since 2013 -- but the hosts still remain favourites in the five-match series after losing the first Test. Bumrah had been reprimanded for breaching the ICC code and had “admitted the offence and accepted the sanction” with one demerit point added to his disciplinary record, cricket's apex body said.

The ICC code relates to “inappropriate physical contact” with a player, umpire, spectator or any other person during a match. These breaches carry a minimum penalty of an official reprimand, a maximum penalty of 50 percent of a player's match fee, and one or two demerit points.

Bumrah, who finished the game with six wickets in the match, is considered one of the few all-format new ball bowlers in the modern game. The rare home Test defeat came as a shock for Rohit Sharma's team, which led for much of the first three days.

England's fearless “Bazball” brand of play devised by coach Brendon McCullum and skipper Ben Stokes has brought the team 14 victories in 19 Tests.

Meanwhile, India's Test team has suffered two major blows with bowler Ravindra Jadeja and key batsman K.L. Rahul out due to injury for the team's next clash against England, the cricket board said Monday.

Rohit Sharma's India lost the nail-biting first Test by 28 runs in Hyderabad on Sunday after being ahead in the match for most of the opening three days. India is due to play England in the second of the five-match series in Visakhapatnam starting Friday.

Sarfraz Khan, Saurabh Kumar and Washington Sundar have been added to India's squad, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said in a statement. “Jadeja sustained a hamstring injury during play on Day Four of the first Test in Hyderabad while Rahul complained of a right quadriceps pain,” the BCCI said. The BCCI said its medics are “monitoring the progress of the duo”. — AFP

## Ukraine twins smiling through bombs to go for Olympic gold

**KYIV:** As synchronised swimmers, Maryna and Vladyslava Aleksiiwa are used to having to smile no matter what. The sunny sisters are one of Ukraine's best hopes of a gold medal at the Paris Olympics after winning a bronze in artistic swimming at the Tokyo Games three years ago.

But the trials the 22-year-old twins have been put through—forced to flee their homes, surviving shelling and sleeping in bomb shelters—have tested even their stoicism. They have even had to jump out of the pool and “run to the basement in wet swimsuits” when the explosions got too close, Maryna told AFP.

Russian tanks were stopped in the suburbs of their hometown Kharkiv during the invasion almost two years ago, with the sisters having to leave their sparkly costumes behind when they were evacuated. Regular bombardments have not stopped them from returning to Kharkiv to prepare for the Games, even if the windows of their training pool are still broken from the missile attacks the border city is often subjected to.

“Everything has been bombed: our pool, where we started training, our school, our city centre,” added Maryna. While the Ukrainian army eventually pushed the Russian troops back, Kharkiv is still vulnerable, only 30 kilometres (19 miles) from the border. Last week, 11 people were killed in the latest wave of Russian missile attacks on the city.

It is not exactly the ideal environment for elite swimmers to go for gold, especially when there is no generator to warm the water when the power fails, as it often did last year after the country's electricity grid took a pounding from the Russians.

## Decline and fall of Test cricket?

**PARIS:** A few years ago, an award-winning film “Death of a Gentleman” drew attention to what appeared to be the steady decline of Test cricket as it struggled to ward off the popularity of the shorter game. On Sunday, however, Test match cricket, which has been on the scene since Australia and England first locked horns at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in March 1877, showed there is still life in the format.

An extraordinary day of twists and turns saw two gripping games in Brisbane and Hyderabad reach nail-biting finales. They also launched two new stars, both 24, in England's left-arm spinner Tom Hartley and West Indian fast bowler Shamar Joseph. In Hyderabad, Hartley went from zero to hero, taking 7-62 on his Test debut to help England to a 28-run win over India.

In Brisbane, Joseph, who was working as a security guard a year ago, came back from being helped off the field after being smashed on the toe while batting, to rip through Australia's much-vaunted batting line-up. Playing in only his second Test, he took 7-68 as the West Indies won by just eight runs, their first win in Australia since 1997.

“I feel like we won the series. Even though it's 1-1 I feel like we won the entire series,” Joseph told reporters. Skipper Kraigg Brathwaite said victory was the perfect riposte to former Australia fast bowler Rodney Hogg who had described the West Indies as “pathetic and hopeless”. “We wanted to show the world we're not pathetic,” he said.

Test cricket has come under threat over several decades by the rise first of one-day cricket and latterly from the emergence of T20 - and even T10 - franchises that have sprung up around the world. This month, for example, South Africa withheld its top players from a Test tour to New Zealand so that they could play instead in the domestic T20 tournament.

The money in T20, especially in the Indian Premier League is eye-watering - Australia captain Pat Cummins fetched \$2.47 million for a few weeks' work in the 2024 auction - so it is no surprise that players are attracted. Fans enjoy the thrash, bash and smash as well as the flashing lights, bright colours and party atmosphere while television is attracted by the easier packaging of

### Sleeping in bomb shelters

AFP has been following the sisters on their turbulent path to Paris, an odyssey that has taken them from Kharkiv to Italy, France, Poland, Spain, Japan and back. “When the war started, we did not know what to do,” said Vladyslava, the shy of the two, who often lets her twin Maryna finish her sentences. “But then we understood our main goal could be to show courage all over the world in competitions.” “To show Ukraine is still alive,” Maryna added. “We must show strength.”

With the Russians threatening to take the city in the early days of the war, the sisters fled Kharkiv with the rest of Ukraine's artistic swimming team and trained in Italy for six months. But they were determined to go back to Ukraine to be closer to their parents, training in Kyiv and “sleeping at night in the corridor of a bomb shelter” before returning to Kharkiv.

They have not left their home city—the heart of Ukraine's artistic swimming scene—since then, except for short trips abroad to compete. Even if it is more dangerous, “it's much better to be together, (even) without electricity and music to train,” Vladyslava told AFP during a break in the World Aquatics World Cup in France in May where they won the duet gold.

They visited Montpellier's historic centre to eat ice cream and post stories on Instagram to celebrate. But even in those carefree moments when they joked about the joys of having electricity, the war was never far away.

“I called Mum yesterday, but it was an air raid alert and I was a little bit nervous,” said Maryna at the time. “Mum and Dad said, ‘Don't worry, we're fine.’ So we tried to keep calm and concentrate on our competition.”

When they caught up with the twins again in July at the World Aquatics Championships in Fukuoka, Japan, they struck an even more sombre note. “It is hard to focus when your country is at war and you are away from family,” Vladyslava admitted.



**BRISBANE:** West Indies' Kavem Hodge (L) bats on day three of the second cricket Test match between Australia and the West Indies at the Gabba in Brisbane. — AFP

the shorter game. For all its bells and whistles, however, T20 lacks the nuances and slow-burning drama of the kind seen in Brisbane and Hyderabad. England trailed by 190 on first innings which would normally make an India win a formality—they had never previously lost a Test on home soil in which they held a first-innings lead of 100 runs or more. But thanks to some fine batting from Ollie Pope, who made 196, England were able to set the home side 231 to win.

### ‘Always available’

Hartley, whose first ball in Test cricket three days earlier was hit for six, found the length and enough turn to unsettle the batsmen and guide England to an improbable win late on the fourth day. Ben Stokes described it as “our greatest triumph” since he took over as England captain in 2022.

India and England along with Australia are the three wealthiest countries in international cricket which perhaps makes Joseph's exploits in Brisbane the more significant. From the mid-1970s to the

late 1980s the West Indies were the finest team in the world but decline set in, largely through bad management, to the point where calling them mediocre was a compliment. The team in Australia was missing a slew of top names who had been lured away to play franchise cricket elsewhere.

There were seven uncapped players in the 15-man squad, including Joseph who had not even played a first-class game for Guyana 12 months ago. Overwhelmed in the first Test, the West Indies bounced back in real style with Joseph epitomising a new spirit that teases the prospect of a return to former glories.

And perhaps the best news was what he said after the game when he was inevitably asked if he would be heading to the riches of the T20 circuit. “I will always be here to play Test cricket for the West Indies,” Joseph said with some reverence.

“There will be times when T20 might come around and Test cricket will be there... but I will always be available to play for the West Indies no matter how much money comes towards me.” — AFP



**ROME: (FILES)** Gold medalists Ukraine's Maryna Aleksiiwa and Vladyslava Aleksiiwa pose after competing in the Women's Artistic Swimming duet free final event on August 13, 2022 at the LEN European Aquatics Championships in Rome. — AFP

### Friends killed

“We have friends who are sportsmen who died on the battlefield defending our country... it is an awful time for us.” Yet back on their sofa in Kharkiv on a rare day off in November, they did not turn a hair when the air raid siren sounded, even though Maryna's apartment is on the top floor and more exposed to shelling.

The sirens go off “five or six times every day” she said. “At night also. It's normal.” Every morning they read the news to see if it's safe to train, only going to the bomb shelter when it's really dangerous.

Vladyslava lives next door with her husband, an IT specialist, which is handy because “we always swap clothes, handbags, jackets, shoes,” said Maryna. On their lazy Sunday morning off—the one day they do not have to train at 6:30 am—the sisters wore jeans and jumpers and light makeup in contrast to the heavy

warpaint they put on for performances.

Relaxing on the couch, they put on an Edith Piaf record from their grandfather's vinyl collection, which also included The Beatles and Pink Floyd. Lying on a table nearby was Maryna's bronze Olympic medal from Tokyo. Vladyslava took hers with her when they fled to Italy because it was “the most dear to me”.

“I was sure that they would be stars,” said their childhood trainer, Maryna Krykunova, a tall, elegant woman in a tweed coat, who first came across them when they were eight years old. Even then they were tall and supple and naturally in sync for duets, she told AFP. With girls who are not siblings, “we have to spend a lot of time making them similar”, she said. “With Maryna and Vlada, they are already twins so it's much better.” Unsurprisingly, twins and even triplets are not uncommon in artistic swimming.

### New obstacle

But what used to be an advantage for the sisters may not be a help after a controversial change last year to the way artistic swimming is judged, which has shifted the emphasis from artistic effect to more technical elements. It is yet another obstacle for the twins as their team strives to qualify for the Paris Olympics, which start on July 26.

“Our coaches are unhappy with the change in the rules,” Maryna said, which makes routines look “very unartistic and awkward”. “We must do everything possible so everything is perfect,” said Vladyslava.

The last qualifying rounds are at the world championships in Qatar next month, with the team building up for the European Aquatics Championships in Belgrade in June, a dress rehearsal for the Games the following month.

“This is the most important time in our lives,” said Vladyslava, adding that they were having to prepare in “unequal conditions” compared to their rivals. Russia, which has traditionally dominated the sport, will not be competing at the Olympics after its teams were banned over the invasion. — AFP



## Sports

# Egypt knocked out of AFCON by DR Congo after penalty shootout

## Egypt, DR Congo have won nine of the previous 33 Cup of Nations tournaments

**SAN-PEDRO:** Record seven-time champions Egypt, lacking injured talisman Mohamed Salah, were knocked out of the Africa Cup of Nations on Sunday after losing a penalty shootout 8-7 against DR Congo.

Goalkeeper Lionel Mpassi converted the winning spot-kick in San-Pedro after fellow shot-stopper Mohamed Abou Gabal had seen his kick strike the bar and fly over. A tense last-16 clash finished 1-1 after extra time with Meschack Elia scoring on 37 minutes for DR Congo and Mostafa Mohamed equalising in first-half added time from a penalty.

Liverpool star Salah was injured in a group match against Ghana and returned to his club, who said he would probably only be able to return to the tournament if Egypt reached the final. DR Congo will face Guinea, last-gasp 1-0 winners over Equatorial Guinea earlier on Sunday, next Friday in Abidjan for a place in the semi-finals.

Egypt and DR Congo may between them have won nine of the previous 33 Cup of Nations tournaments, but neither country managed even one victory in the group stage in the Ivory Coast this month. They finished runners-up to Cape Verde and Morocco respectively in mini-leagues with identical records of three draws and three points.

Where they differed was in the number of goals scored with Egypt netting six times, including three from France-based Mohamed, and DR Congo only twice. This was the fifth AFCON clash between the countries from 1970 with the Pharaohs defeating the Leopards three times and losing once ahead of the showdown in the west Ivorian coastal city.



Jurgen Klopp

## Liverpool have 'big job' to replace Klopp: Van Dijk

**LONDON:** Virgil van Dijk admits Liverpool have a "big job" to replace Jurgen Klopp when the German steps down at the end of the season. Van Dijk is coming to terms with Klopp's shock decision to quit once the current campaign is over. The Reds captain does not believe uncertainty over Liverpool's long-term future will affect their ambitions this season. They crushed Norwich 5-2 in the FA Cup fourth round on Sunday in the first game since Klopp's bombshell announcement.

But he knows Liverpool must get it right when they pick Klopp's replacement. "The club will have a big job on their hands, that is well known," Van Dijk said. "To replace not only the manager but the whole staff and there are so many things that will change.

"I'm very curious which direction that will go in but when that will be announced we will see our situation. "It will be the end of Jurgen Klopp's era—I am still part of it that's why I don't like to talk about it—and that is my main focus. "Hopefully we will have the success we all dream of and by then probably there will be more clarification about what the club wants for the future and then we will see." Asked whether he saw himself being part of the next era, Van Dijk added: "That's a big question. I don't know."—AFP

## Australia's Asian Cup credentials face first real test in quarters

**DOHA:** Australia's Asian Cup title credentials and stingy defence will be properly put to the test for the first time in Qatar when they face Saudi Arabia or South Korea in the quarter-finals. The Socceroos' next opponents will be confirmed on Tuesday when Roberto Mancini's Saudi Arabia and Jurgen Klinsmann's South Korea meet in the last 16.

Whoever wins, Australia will face a step-up from anything they have faced so far at the tournament. The bedrock of their pursuit of a second Asian title—they won it on home soil in 2015 -- has been a miserly defence that has conceded one goal in four matches.

"Clean sheets win tournaments," coach Graham Arnold said after defeating Syria 1-0 in the group phase. The Socceroos reached the quarter-finals on Sunday with a 4-0 victory over an Indonesia side ranked 121 places below them. Australia were deserved and ultimately comfortable winners against the lowest-ranked team left at the tournament, but the one-sided scoreline flattered them. Arnold took Australia to the last 16 of the Qatar 2022 World Cup before giving eventual champions Argentina and Lionel Messi a fright in a 2-1 defeat.

The run to the knockout rounds—equalling their best performance at a World Cup—was hailed at home as a major success. At the Asian Cup however they are expected to challenge for the title against far more moderate opposition, and preferably with more attacking verve than they have displayed so far.

Prior to the Indonesia game, Australia had scored four times in three games. The combative Arnold agrees his team need to be better offensively, especially individually, but feels they have been unfairly characterised as overly defensive. "I think back in Australia they'd rather see you lose 1-0 than keep a clean sheet," he said.—AFP

### Controversial goal

Notable absentees through injuries were Egyptian Mohamed el Shenawy, widely regarded as the best Africa-based goalkeeper, and DR Congo playmaker Gael Kakuta. Egypt dominated possession in a cagey opening half until DR Congo snatched the lead with a controversial Elia goal.

DR Congo took a throw-in that Egypt claimed should have been theirs and, while the north Africans protested, Yoane Wissa crossed for Elia to nod into the net at the far post. A VAR review confirmed the goal and the off-field officials were also involved in the Egyptian equaliser a minute into added time at the end of the first half. The South African referee initially waved play on after Dylan Batubinsika elbowed Egypt captain Ahmed Hegazy in the face, but awarded a penalty after reviewing the incident on the monitor.

Mohamed maintained his goal-a-game record in the Ivory Coast by sending Mpassi the wrong way as he slammed the spot-kick into the roof of the net. DR Congo won more of the ball as the second half progressed, but even half-chances for both sides remained scarce with defences marshalled by Hegazy and Chancel Mbemba on top.

In an attempt to bolster their attack, the Congolese replaced veteran forward Cedric Bakambu with Simon Banza, the 14-goal leading scorer in the Portuguese league this season. With Egypt a man short after Mohamed Hamdy was sent-off, DR Congo applied constant extra-time pressure, but could not score a winning goal. —AFP



**SAN-PEDRO:** DR Congo's midfielder #7 Grady Diangana (L) fights for the ball with Egypt's defender #4 Omar Kamal (C) during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2024 round of 16 football match between Egypt and DR Congo at the Stade Laurent Pokou in San Pedro on January 28, 2024. — AFP

## Ali Al-Kharafi wins Kuwait showjumping trophy

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Riding Center Rider Ali Jassim Al-Kharafi came out the winner of "The Stadium" Horse Show Championship that was held at the Marina Beach with the participation of more than 500 riders of both genders.

The grand prize heat at the 140-145 cm height Ali Al-Kharafi and Fawaz Al-Subaie had to go through a differentiation round which was won by Al-Kharafi

in 47.15 seconds without faults while Al-Subaie came out second with 47.15 seconds but with 4 fault points, followed by Yara Al-Hunaidi, Abdullah Al-Awadhi, Ghazi Al-Juwairi and Enaz Al-Enaz.

Al-Kharafi was very pleased with winning the title of the first championship held at the beach with a large number of fans in attendance.

He dedicated his win to Kuwait Riding Center and to the Showjumping fans. Meanwhile, Suffix CEO Ahmad Al-Majed said, "the equestrian sport is continually developing and we decided to have an exceptional championship and organized at the Arabian Gulf beach to reflect a beautiful impression of Kuwait and tell everyone in Kuwait and abroad about our ability to organize events". The winners were awarded by Al-Majed and KIB board member Anwar Bu-Khamseen.



Ali Jassim Al-Kharafi

## Under-fire Klinsmann keeping 'positive' for Asian Cup KO clash

**DOHA:** Under-fire coach Jurgen Klinsmann said he "has to be positive" ahead of South Korea's Asian Cup showdown with Saudi Arabia on Tuesday after stuttering into the last 16. The Koreans conceded six goals in the first round and drew with Jordan and 130th-ranked Malaysia to finish runners-up in their group.

Klinsmann and his players have faced fierce criticism back home, with the German legend being mocked for telling reporters to book their hotels in Qatar until February 10 -- the day of the final. "A coach has to be positive, a coach has to believe in his team and make it happen," the 59-year-old Klinsmann, a World Cup winner as a player, said on Monday.

"If the other team is better and beats you, then you can still go back to the hotel and cancel." South Korea finished behind Bahrain in Group E after conceding a 105th-minute equaliser in a 3-3 draw with Malaysia.

Klinsmann was pilloried for smiling on the bench after Malaysia scored but insisted it was "because I saw it (the goal) coming". He was more interested in talking about Saudi Arabia and said he could see Roberto Mancini's "handwriting" on the team, five months after the Italian took over. The winner of the last-16 tie faces Australia in the quarter-finals. "We have the belief that we can beat Saudi Arabia but it will be a lot of work," said Klinsmann. "It will be a nail-biter. It might go into a penalty shoot-out."

### Attacking threat

Saudi Arabia won Group F but came from a goal down to beat Oman 2-1 with an injury-time winner in their opening game. They also struggled in front of goal in a 2-0 victory over a Kyrgyzstan side that played almost half the game with nine men. They rounded off their group with a 0-0 draw with Thailand. Mancini shrugged off his team's lack of bite in front of goal and said they could profit from South Korea's defensive woes. "If they conceded six goals in the group stage it doesn't change their strength because they have very good players and they score a lot of goals," he said. "We know that if we attack we can have a chance to score," he added. Saudi Arabia have only conceded one goal so far at the tournament and Mancini said they had "improved a lot" since he took over in August.—AFP

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## Chiefs, 49ers set up Super Bowl rematch

### Purdy finished with 267 passing yards with one touchdown



GLENDAL: (FILES) Quarterback Brock Purdy #13 of the San Francisco 49ers hands the football to Christian McCaffrey #23 during the NFL game at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona. — AFP

**LOS ANGELES:** The Kansas City Chiefs and San Francisco 49ers set up a Super Bowl rematch on Sunday after battling through to the NFL championship showpiece on a dramatic day of playoff action.

The reigning champion Chiefs returned to the Super Bowl for the fourth time in five years after upsetting the top-seeded Baltimore Ravens 17-10 in Maryland to clinch the AFC Championship crown.

The 49ers meanwhile advanced to a repeat of their 2020 Super Bowl defeat to the Chiefs after staging a stunning second-half fightback to sink the Detroit Lions 34-31.

The Lions—one of only four teams who have never played in a Super Bowl—looked poised to end that jinx after storming into a 24-7 half-time lead before a shocked 49ers home crowd in Santa Clara.

But San Francisco rattled off 27 second half points at Levi's Stadium to clinch the NFC Championship and punch their ticket

to the Super Bowl taking place in Las Vegas on February 11. Detroit were left rueing their risky second half decisions to pass up two kickable field goals in the second half in favor of fourth down conversions attempts that failed.

On both occasions, San Francisco regained possession and marched upfield to score decisive touchdowns. San Francisco 49ers head coach Kyle Shanahan said his team had been determined to turn things around after being mauled by Detroit in the first half.

"We didn't want to go out like that," Shanahan said. "That would have been a real rough way to end it if we couldn't play better with our group. I'm so proud of the guys. They didn't really care about anything except finding a way to win. You could see it on their faces. You could see it at halftime. You could see it in that third quarter. You could see it all the way to the end of the game."

**'No regrets'**

San Francisco's star running Christian McCaffrey ran in two of the 49ers four touchdowns, but was outshone by young quarterback Brock Purdy. Purdy finished with 267 passing yards with one touchdown and one interception but made a series of crucial scrambling runs at key moments to rally the 49ers.

The 24-year-old revealed the 49ers locker room had been calm at half-time. "No one was rah rah, no one was freaking out. It was just—it's football," Purdy said. "There's a lot of experienced guys on this team, veterans that have, you know, been in crazy situations."

Lions head coach Dan Campbell meanwhile insisted he had no regrets about passing up the two field goal attempts at key points in the second half. "It's easy, hindsight, and I get it. But I don't regret those decisions," Campbell said. "And that's hard because we didn't

come through, and it didn't work out. But I don't regret it."

In the AFC Championship game earlier in Baltimore, the Chiefs downed the top-seeded Ravens with a performance that melded defensive grit with clinical offense. Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson—the presumptive NFL Most Valuable Player—was stifled by Kansas City's swarming defense, while Chiefs counterpart Patrick Mahomes marshalled his team brilliantly to lead them back to the Super Bowl once more.

"It's been a heck of a year, we've been underdogs for the last few games but we never feel like underdogs," said Mahomes, who threw one touchdown and 241 yards with no interceptions. The Chiefs will now face the 49ers in a repeat of their 2020 Super Bowl meeting in Miami in which Mahomes led a late rally to secure a 31-20 victory.

Another Kansas City veteran of that

Super Bowl victory—tight end Travis Kelce—was outstanding in Sunday's win with 11 receptions for 116 yards, which included the Chiefs opening touchdown. Kelce's performance saw him surpass the legendary Jerry Rice in the record books for most all-time postseason catches. The Chiefs star celebrated on the field after the victory with pop icon girlfriend Taylor Swift.

Mahomes, who will be chasing a third Super Bowl ring, had a message for his team-mates after the win. "I told them 'The job's not done'. Our job now is to prepare ourselves to play a good football team in the Super Bowl and try to get that ring."

Baltimore quarterback Jackson meanwhile said he was "angry about losing." "We are a game away from the Super Bowl," Jackson said. "We've been waiting all this time, all these moments for opportunity like this and we fell short." — AFP

## Jordan score twice at death to surge into Asian Cup last eight

**DOHA:** Jordan will meet tournament debutants Tajikistan in the Asian Cup quarter-finals after scoring twice in three minutes deep in stoppage time to stun Iraq 3-2 in a thriller on Monday. Lower-ranked Jordan looked down and out heading into injury time at the end of the game only for Yazan Al-Arab to prod in for a 95th-minute leveller.

If that was hard to believe, better was to come two minutes later when Firas Al-Rashdan curled in from distance to fire Jordan into the last eight. Iraq were left heartbroken and shell-shocked, having gone into the dying minutes dreaming of repeating their fairytale 2007 Asian Cup title triumph.

Jordan face a Tajikistan side in the last eight who are one of the shocks of the competition on their debut. In Monday's other last-16 game, hosts and holders Qatar face Palestine. Jordan were the underdogs and ranked 24 places lower than Iraq but were the better side in an eventful first half.

Midway through the first period striker Ali Olwan was denied when he shot straight at Jalal Hassan with only the Iraqi goalkeeper to beat. The stopper had to be alert on another occasion, rushing out of his box to bravely head the ball away from danger as a Jordan attacker bore down.

In front of a raucous crowd at the 45,000-capacity Khalifa International Stadium, Iraqi midfielder Ibrahim Bayesh stung the fingertips of goalkeeper Yazeed Abulaila from outside the box. Seven minutes from the break, Jordan—who held South Korea 2-2 in the group phase—manufactured another opportunity when Mousa Al-Tamari bustled his way through the Iraqi defence.



DOHA: Jordan's midfielder #10 Musa al-Tamari celebrates his team's win at the end of the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup football match between Iraq and Jordan at Khalifa International Stadium in Doha on January 29, 2024. — AFP

The Montpellier attacker outmuscled two defenders but again found goalkeeper Hassan in the way. In the first minute of injury time Jordan deservedly took the lead. The Iraq defence sloppily presented Yazan Al-Naimat with the ball and he raced towards goal before chipping over a flailing and overworked Hassan. Iraq, who defeated pre-tournament favourites Japan 2-1 in the group stage, went on the attack after the break.

Abulaila denied Bayesh with another spectacular save but Iraq's pressure paid off in the 68th minute when defender Saad Natiq nodded down and in from a corner for the equaliser. Jordan went right up the other end and flashed an effort across goal, before Aymen Hussein controlled the ball unmarked in the box and thrashed for 2-1 and what he thought was Iraq's winner in the 76th minute.

It was his sixth goal of the tournament but he was promptly given a second yellow card for over-celebrating and sent off. Then came Jordan's quickfire double at the death to leave Iraq reeling. — AFP

## Duren double powers Pistons over Thunder

**LOS ANGELES:** Jalen Duren scored 22 points and grabbed 21 rebounds to lead the lowly Detroit Pistons to a 120-104 NBA victory over Oklahoma City on Sunday, snapping the Thunder's five-game winning streak. The Pistons posted just their sixth win of the season despite the absence of leading scorer Cade Cunningham, who was a late scratch to manage knee trouble. It looked like more disappointment for Detroit—who matched a league record for futility with 28 straight defeats this season—when the Thunder jumped to a 10-point lead early in the first quarter.

But the Pistons were up by nine at half-time and never trailed in the second half. Duren's career-high in rebounds included nine of the Pistons' 15 offensive boards. "It's cool," Duren said of his first career 20-20 game, but he was more pleased to put up a win after the Pistons lost four of their previous five games.

That included a double-digit loss to the woeful Washington Wizards on Saturday in Cunningham's first game back from an eight-game injury absence. "It was big-time," Duren said of beating the Thunder, who had 31 points from newly named All-Star Shai Gilgeous-Alexander in a defeat that dropped them to 32-14 -- tied with the Minnesota Timberwolves atop the Western Conference.

"Especially after yesterday—we didn't come out nothing like we wanted to yesterday, we were really flat. Today the main focus was keeping that energy. We knew what type of team this is, they've been playing great this year. We knew we had to come out ready to play," Duren said.

Next up for the Thunder is a clash with the Timberwolves on Monday for top spot in the West. "That's the best thing about the NBA schedule is it keeps turning," said Thunder coach Mark Daigneault. "Tomorrow is a new opportunity, obviously a big challenge for us against a team that we just beat on the road. We've got to throw our best punch in that game."

At Indianapolis, Canadian guard Benedict Mathurin came off the bench to score 24 points and lead the Indiana



DETROIT: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander #2 of the Oklahoma City Thunder dribbles the ball against Jalen Duren #0 of the Detroit Pistons in the first quarter of a game at Little Caesars Arena on January 28, 2024 in Detroit, Michigan. — AFP

Pacers over Memphis 116-110. Cameroonian forward Pascal Siakam and Jalen Smith each added 19 for the Pacers, who improved to 27-20.

**Hawks win on Bey's dunk**

Saddiq Bey grabbed a rebound and jammed in the game-winning dunk with 1.1 seconds remaining to give the Atlanta Hawks a 126-125 victory over visiting Toronto. Trae Young had game highs of 30 points and 12 assists for the Hawks while Bey contributed 26 points and 13 rebounds and Bogdan Bogdanovic added 24 points for Atlanta.

Young's jumper with 27 seconds remaining gave Atlanta a 124-123 lead but Scottie Barnes answered with a jumper to put the Raptors ahead 125-124 with 7.1 seconds remaining. Young missed a final jumper with two seconds to play but Bey grabbed the ball and slammed in the decisive dunk.

Paolo Banchero scored 26 points to lead the Orlando Magic over visiting Phoenix 110-96, the Suns losing despite a 44-point performance from Devin Booker. Kevin Durant was the only other Phoenix player in double figures as the Suns fell to 26-20, sixth in the West. — AFP