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## Amir launches national festivities

Sheikh Mishal attends flag-hoisting ceremony at Bayan Palace, luncheon at Azayez farm



**KUWAIT:** (Left) HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah kisses the Kuwaiti flag during a flag-hoisting ceremony at Bayan Palace on Jan 31, 2024. (Right) HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal attends a luncheon at Azayez farm in Abdaly. — KUNA photos (See Pages 2 & 3)

**KUWAIT:** A Kuwaiti flag-hoisting ceremony took place at Bayan Palace on Wednesday under the patronage and in the presence of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, launching nationwide celebrations to mark the country's national occasions. National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, President of Kuwait's Supreme Judicial Council and Head of

the Court of Cassation Adel Boursli and senior state officials attended the event. The motorcade of HH the Amir arrived at the venue and was given a 21-gun salute and warm welcome by the personnel of the army, police and National Guard. HH the Amir then hoisted the flag and the National Anthem was played. The Kuwaiti people cherish the national flag-hoisting occasion, reminiscing about the great ac-

complishments made in all fields and domains and reiterating loyalty and belonging to the dear homeland. Also on Wednesday, in presence of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Al-Quds Fund and Endowment Prince Turki Al-Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud and Al-Sabah family members, a luncheon was held by Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad

Al-Sabah at Azayez farm in Kuwait's northern Abdaly area. This year's celebration of the 63rd National Day and 33rd Liberation Day ushers in a fresh era and honorable march under the leadership of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal, who recently took the helm, succeeding late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to lead the country to new horizons of development and progress. — KUNA

### Kuwait projects KD 5.9bn deficit for 2024/2025

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** The government has sent the draft budget for the 2024/2025 fiscal year, in which it projects a KD 5.9 billion deficit, to the National Assembly for debate and approval, the finance ministry said. The projected shortfall is 13.5 percent lower than the deficit estimated for the current fiscal year 2023/2024 of KD 6.8 billion, according to figures made available by the finance ministry.

The draft budget also projects lower revenues and spending compared to the current fiscal year, which ends on March 31. Projected figures normally change at the end of the fiscal year based on the performance of oil prices, which contribute more than 90 percent to Kuwait's revenues. In the last fiscal year 2022/2023, Kuwait projected a huge deficit but ended the year with a huge surplus of KD 6.5 billion because oil prices were much higher than estimated in the budget.

The finance ministry said it projected oil prices in the next fiscal year at \$70 a barrel, lower than the current oil prices. Revenues in the budget are projected at KD 18.7 billion, 4.1 percent lower than revenues estimated in 2023/2024, mainly due to a drop in oil income from KD 17.2 billion to KD 16.2 billion. On the contrary, non-oil revenues rose by 5.7 percent to KD 2.4 billion from KD 2.3 billion, according to the finance ministry statistics.

Continued on Page 6

### Kuwaitis can apply for ETA for UK travel

**KUWAIT:** In a landmark development, marking the 125th anniversary of Kuwaiti-British diplomatic relations, British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis announced the initiation of the Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) for Kuwaiti nationals. This historic milestone not only celebrates a century and a quarter of official diplomatic ties but also introduces a forward-looking initiative to enhance the partnership between the two nations.

As of Thursday, Feb 1, 2024, Kuwaiti nationals, along with citizens from other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Jordan, can apply for the ETA. The authorization becomes effective for travel to the UK on or after Feb 22, 2024.

### Iran waives tourist visas for Kuwaitis

**KUWAIT:** Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Toutouchi announced the council of ministers in Iran has approved a visa waiver for tourists from 28 countries, including Kuwait, from Feb 4, 2024. The waiver allows citizens from these countries to enter Iran once every six months for a stay of up to 15 days.

Toutouchi told reporters during a press briefing this decision reflects the ongoing efforts to strengthen diplomatic ties between Iran and its neighboring countries, emphasizing the positive trajectory of re-

lations between Iran and Kuwait over the past 62 years. Despite periodic challenges, historical and religious connections have fostered improved relations between the two nations, particularly in the last two years during President Ebrahim Raisi's tenure.

The Iranian community in Kuwait, known for its long-standing presence and commendable contributions, plays a vital role in fostering cultural exchange, he said. With more than 30,000 Iranians residing in Kuwait, the community includes professionals, academics, businessmen and 1,600 students attending Iranian private schools.

Economically, commercial relations between Iran and Kuwait have remained resilient, even amid

Continued on Page 6

### Expats hail family visa opening, but salary cap rankles

By Sajeev K Peter

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's large expatriate community heaved a sigh of relief as the government resumed issuing family visas, although the minimum salary requirement of KD 800 has left many in low-income categories distressed. The exemption from the sala-

ry requirement for those engaged in 14 types of jobs has also been greeted with much joy and excitement.

"It is a big relief for many expats like me who have been waiting for long to reunite with their families," said Yousef Ibrahim, an Indian expat working in a restaurant in Farwaniya. Ibrahim had sent his wife and two children back to India immediately after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and had been waiting for a positive decision on family visas for the last two years.

Many other expats also couldn't hide their excitement as they spoke to Kuwait Times. "The waiting was never in vain," said Dr Hameed Nawaz, a professor at a private university in Kuwait. Dr Nawaz, however, commented that the condition of salary



British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis

waiti travelers are encouraged to explore the diverse offerings of the UK, encompassing its beauty, culture and business opportunities.



**KUWAIT:** Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Toutouchi speaks during a press briefing at the Iranian Embassy on Jan 31, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

cap for eligibility has sent a negative message about the whole purpose of the important decision. "You need to look at the issue from a humanitarian point of view. More than 70 percent of the expats in Kuwait draw less than KD 800 a month. They also have families back home... they also long for a family reunion," he said.

Under revised Article 29, applying for a dependent or family visa for newcomers requires a monthly salary of not less than KD 800, a university degree and a profession that matches the degree. However, a salary below the required amount does not prevent parents residing in Kuwait from bringing their children under the age of five.

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KUWAIT: Kuwait's flag-hoisting ceremony takes place at Bayan Palace on Wednesday under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah . — KUNA photos

# Health ministry raises awareness of cancer, other chronic diseases

## Early detection boosts recovery rates

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi highlighted that educating people about chronic diseases, with a particular emphasis on cancer, is one of the strategic goals of the ministry. Addressing the 9th Gulf Week for Cancer Awareness, held under the slogan "We are with you", the minister noted that spreading health awareness of cancer plays a significant role in boosting early detection rates by 30 percent and increasing recovery rates by the same percentage.

Therefore, achieving these results will reduce treatment periods and complications and save effort and time to speed up diagnosis and recovery, aligning with the main sustainable goals of the ministry in providing optimal care and optimizing the spending of the government on chronic diseases. The Gulf Week, which has been successfully running for nine years now, represents a joint effort between the Gulf Health Council and the Gulf Union for Cancer Control, including many activities in various Gulf countries, the minister said.

Secretary General of the Gulf Union for Cancer Control and Chairman of Cancer Awareness National Campaign (CAN) Dr Khalid Al-Saleh said that the Gulf Week has achieved noble goals since its inception, raising the level of health awareness. He pointed out that about 2,120 events have been implemented since its launch in 2016. Dr Saleh added that the large number of events indicates the success of the partners of the campaign, which are represented by 19 NGOs, government agencies and private sector institutions. Speaking to Kuwait Times, he emphasized awareness of cancer's risk factors and early detection of its symptoms as two of the main aggregators in achieving high and effective recovery rates.

Chairwoman of the Coordinating Committee of the Gulf Week Dr Hessa Al-Shaheen said this year's program includes 60 scientific, social, sports, artistic and entertainment events targeting all segments of society. She explained that raising chronic diseases' awareness wouldn't just help in achieving high recovery rates, but will



Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadi takes a group photo with officials and participants during the event. — KUNA photos



Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi



Dr. Hessa Al-Shaheen



Dr. Khalid Al-Saleh

even call for the adoption of healthy lifestyles that reflect positively on the overall health and psychological state. She expressed her utmost gratitude

to the Gulf Center for Cancer Control and the Gulf Union for Cancer Control for the opportunity to be part of this yearly program.

### In my view Cancer and the media



Dr Khalid A Al-Saleh

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The relationship between cancer and the media is often characterized as one-sided, akin to a mysterious and complex love affair. Oncologists, acknowledging the enigmatic nature of cancer, emphasize that prevention is the most effective method for keeping this disease at bay. They express a fervent hope that the public comprehends the risks associated with cancer, factors that pervade our surroundings such as toxins, food, the environment and detrimental habits like smoking.

It is deemed essential for individuals to be informed about these factors, and doctors aspire for people to recognize the critical symptoms of cancer. These symptoms, although resembling those of benign conditions, necessitate understanding and proactive response rather than unfounded fear that could hinder early detection.

Early detection is paramount for successful recovery, and doctors appreciate the media as a valuable tool for disseminating crucial information to the public, alleviating the burdens borne by those affected by cancer.

Conversely, the media exhibits a less favorable stance toward cancer. It often sensationalizes the disease, instilling fear and perpetuating misinformation. Media representations of cancer patients in movies and series tend to portray them only in dire circumstances, neglecting the positive aspect of recovery. Despite the favorable recovery rates and curability of many cancer types, the media's portrayal tends to focus on the bleak aspects, contributing to widespread fear.

The media's negative impact on cancer extends to the dissemination of false rumors and the promotion of unverified means and medicines as sensational revelations. Such misinformation can inflict harm on patients and their families, with detrimental consequences. Throughout my medical career, I have witnessed the tragic loss of numerous patients due to misinformation propagated for the sake of sensationalism and increased readership.

Western media, a source of scientific news for many news platforms, is prone to publishing inaccurate information and unreliable discoveries to bolster their countries' medical reputation and scientific research standing. Our media often falls victim to these promotions and deceit, ultimately harming patients. A substantial portion of the health budget in Western countries is attributed to the misinformation propagated by their media, leading patients to seek unnecessary treatments based on false information.

In light of these issues, it is imperative that our newspapers and channels seek guidance from scientists and specialized doctors to vet scientific news from Western sources. Only verified and accurate information should be disseminated to eradicate the influence of a Western media "mafia" that profits from disseminating inaccurate and sometimes misleading information.



## 'School activities foster nationalism'

KUWAIT: School activities have a major role in fostering a sense of nationality and social involvement, said Dr. Adel Al-Adwani, Minister of Education and Higher Education, on Wednesday. In a statement following a flag-hoisting celebration, Al-Adwani said such activities serve as the foundation for cultivating a responsible and loyal generation. On the occasion, the Minister congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, and the Kuwaiti people on starting the country's national celebrations. — KUNA



## Dasman Diabetes Institute organizes awareness outreach

KUWAIT: Dasman Diabetes Institute (founded by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences), recently organized an awareness outreach at WHO Kuwait. On this occasion, Tarek Aleryan, Director of Public Relations and Media Services at Dasman Diabetes Institute, stated that the Institute participated

with its mobile clinic, to conduct various preventative medical testing such as blood glucose, pressure, and vital signs, as the Institute believes in the importance of conducting early checks and spreading awareness on diabetes to contribute to the prevention of this disease and its complications.

In addition, booklets, leaflets, flyers, and other material on educational topics such as the healthy plate, intermittent fasting, how to prevent diabetes, insulin doses and several other subjects were distributed to the staff. Aleryan added, "The Institute spares no effort in spreading awareness among all segments of society, noting the importance of the role played by the Institute through these awareness outreach".



# Amir attends luncheon at Azayez farm



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends a luncheon at Azayez farm held by Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah in Kuwait's northern Al-Abdaly area on Wednesday. — KUNA photos

# Kuwait, Saudi Arabia urge Iraq to abide by Khor Abdullah agreement

## Saudi woos Kuwaiti investors and companies

KUWAIT: Kuwait and Saudi Arabia renewed their call on neighboring Iraq to adhere to the agreement signed with Kuwait in 2012 on regulating navigation in the Khor Abdullah waterway. This came in a joint statement issued after His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's visit to the Kingdom on Tuesday and his talks with the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, and Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman Al-Saud.

The two sides noted that the Khor Abdullah agreement entered into force on December 5, 2013 after its ratification by both countries and was jointly deposited with the United Nations on December 18, 2013. They also rejected Iraq's unilateral cancellation of the security exchange protocol hammered out between Kuwait and Iraq in 2008 and its endorsed map signed between Kuwait and Iraq on December 28, 2014, which included a clear and specific mechanism for their amendment and cancellation.

The two sides reiterated support for UN Security Council Resolution No. 2107 (2013), which requests the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to enhance and facilitate search for and determine the fate of missing Kuwaitis and third-country nationals, or restore the framework of the Tripartite Committee and its technical subcommittee, under the supervision of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and return the seized Kuwaiti property, including the national archives.

### Exclusive maritime areas

They urged the UN Security Council to continue following up on these important issues and the UN Secretary General to present a regular report on the achieved progress and UNAMI efforts in this regard in accordance with paragraph four of the aforementioned UN Security Council Resolution, and called on Iraq and the United Nations. The two sides reaffirmed what was stated in a previous joint statement: that Durra Field is located entirely in Kuwait's exclusive maritime areas and that the natural resources in the divided submerged area, including the entire Durra Field, are shared between Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia only, and they have full exclusive rights to exploit them.

They expressed categorical rejection of any claims of rights for any other party in this field or the divided submerged area. The two sides renewed their call for the Islamic Republic of Iran to negotiate over the eastern border for the divided submerged area with Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as one party in accordance with the provisions of international law. The joint statement also noted that the talks focused on boosting economic, commercial, and investment cooperation.

In this regard, the two sides praised the growth of trade relations and mutual investments. They pointed out that the bilateral trade exchange reached KD 900 million (\$2.92 billion) in 2022 and KD 400 million

(\$1.59 billion) in the first seven months of 2023. They stressed the importance of expanding economic cooperation and partnership and achieving economic integration through the opportunities available in the two countries as part of the Kuwait Vision 2035 and the Kingdom Vision 2030. They agreed on facilitating Saudi investments in Kuwait in a number of targeted sectors, including industry, communications, logistics, financial technology, infrastructure, and real estate development.

### Investment opportunities

The Saudi side invited Kuwaiti investors and companies to expand their businesses in the Kingdom and take advantage of the available investment opportunities. The two sides expressed their aspiration to sign an agreement on avoiding double taxation. They said they are looking forward to holding the second session of the Kuwaiti-Saudi Coordination Council, scheduled to be held this year in Kuwait, and to working on implementing the agreed-upon initiatives.

The two sides welcomed the signing of a memorandum of understanding in the field of cybersecurity between the two countries and stressed the importance of continuing to strengthen cooperation in this field. They hailed the signing of an agreement on a railway project to link the State of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which will help enhance trade exchange and economic cooperation between the two countries. They commended their energy cooperation and the successful efforts of the OPEC+ countries to maintain the stability of global oil markets.

They called for continuing this cooperation and urged all participating countries to adhere to the OPEC+ agreement in a way that serves the interests of producers and consumers and supports the growth of the global economy. They agreed to enhance cooperation in oil and gas and their derivatives, hydrocarbon resources, clean technologies, and the execution of projects to ensure the sustainability of global energy supplies.

### Addressing carbon emissions

With regard to climate change, the two sides agreed to increase cooperation in implementing international climate policies that focus on emissions rather than fuel sources by applying the circular economy approach of reducing, reusing, recycling, and removing carbon from the environment to address carbon emissions in an economically sustainable manner and reach carbon neutrality. They called for cooperation and the exchange of expertise related to the latest technologies in hydrogen transportation and storage.

The two sides expressed their desire to maximize local content in energy sector projects through incentivizing innovation and applying emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, in the energy sector. They concurred on upgrading cooperation in a wide array of domains, including communications, technology, the digital economy, innovation and space, the judiciary and justice, healthcare, air, land, and rail transport, ports,

logistics services, and civil aviation; culture and tourism; sports; higher education; and scientific research and media.

They also agreed on enhancing cooperation in energy efficiency, electricity and renewable energy production and usage, marine environment protection, trade exchange, and finance, particularly with regard to implementing financial reforms, diversifying sources of income, enhancing the efficiency and transparency of public finance, and joint coordination on regional and international financial issues. They agreed to intensify cooperation to reach industrial integration in priority sectors and to discuss ways of cooperation between financial institutions in the two countries to provide credit facilities for non-oil goods and products to enhance trade exchange.

### Defense and security

On the defense and security sides, the two sides affirmed their keenness to strengthen defense cooperation in all fields and develop strategic relations and partnerships to protect the security and stability of the two countries and the region. They admired the existing level of cooperation and security coordination between the two countries and affirmed their desire to boost cooperation in combating crimes, especially drug trafficking and dealing; border security; extremism, hate speech, and terrorism; and spreading a culture of moderation and tolerance in order to achieve security and stability in the two brotherly countries.

The two sides welcomed the cooperation between the Public Authority for Industry in Kuwait and the Saudi Standards, Metrology, and Quality Organization. They discussed developments in the Palestinian territories and expressed their deep concern about the humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip due to the brutal occupation's war, which claimed the lives of thousands of defenseless civilians, including children, women, and the elderly, and destroyed vital facilities, places of worship, and infrastructure.

They stressed the necessity of stopping military operations in the Palestinian territories and protecting civilians in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law. They emphasized that the international community must play its role in putting an end to the violations, the occupying power, and putting pressure on it to stop its aggression and prevent attempts to forcibly displace Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, which is a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and international laws.

The two sides underlined the need to enable international humanitarian organizations to carry out their missions in providing humanitarian and relief aid to the Palestinian people. They called for intensifying efforts to reach a comprehensive and just settlement of the Palestinian cause in accordance with the principle of the two-state solution, the Arab Peace Initiative, and the relevant UN resolutions in a way that guarantees the Palestinian people's right to establish their independent state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.



RIYADH: This handout picture shows Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud welcoming Kuwait's Amir HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah upon his arrival for an official visit in Riyadh. — AFP

In this regard, Kuwait appreciated the Kingdom's hosting of the extraordinary joint Arab-Islamic summit in Riyadh, which delivered a unified position of the Arab and Islamic countries towards the current events in Palestine. Kuwait also extolled the Kingdom's efforts to implement the summit's resolutions and its chairmanship of the Arab and Islamic ministerial committee, which tours the world to rally international support for the call to end aggression against Gaza and to press for the launch of a serious political process to achieve lasting and comprehensive peace in Palestine.

The two sides welcomed the International Court of Justice demand on January 26 for the Zionist occupation to take all measures stipulated in the Convention on the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide to prevent a genocide against the Palestinian people. On the Yemeni issue, they reiterated their full backing for international and regional efforts to reach a comprehensive political solution to the Yemeni crisis.

### Yemen initiatives

The Kuwaiti side lauded the Kingdom's efforts and its many initiatives aimed at encouraging dialogue and reconciliation between the Yemeni parties, the role of the two countries in providing humanitarian aid, and the Kingdom's facilitation of delivering that aid to various regions of Yemen. On navigation in the Red Sea, the two sides underscored the importance of maintaining the security and stability of the region and respecting the right to safe maritime navigation therein in accordance with the provisions of international law and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982 in order to preserve the interests of the entire world.

They called for restraint and avoiding escalation in light of the highly charged situation in the region. On the Sudanese issue, the two sides called for preserving the unity, sovereignty, and independence of Sudan and rejected any interference in its internal af-

## Amir thanks Saudi leaders

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable to Saudi Arabia Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, thanking him for the warm hospitality during his visit to the Kingdom. In his cable, His Highness the Amir added that such welcome reflected the historical relations and kinship that bind the two countries.

His Highness the Amir noted as his first foreign visit to the Kingdom since assuming office, he praised the high position held by the kingdom and its pivotal and important role at the regional and international arenas, stressing keenness to consolidate the relations further that bring together the two brotherly countries and peoples.

His Highness the Amir also expressed his deep thanks and gratitude for granting him King Abdulaziz Order, stressing on this occasion his great pride in this generous fraternal gesture. His Highness the Amir finally expressed best wishes for the Kingdom, its progress and prosperity under Prince Mohammad's wise leadership. — KUNA

fairs. They welcomed the commitment of the parties to the conflict to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and confidence-building measures to reach a permanent cessation of hostilities to alleviate the suffering of the Sudanese people. — KUNA

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P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.  
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com  
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to Japan down 27%

TOKYO: Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan in December 2023 declined 27.0 percent from a year earlier to 5.92 million barrels, or 191,000 barrels per day (bpd), down for the third consecutive month, government data showed Wednesday. As Japan's third-biggest oil provider, Kuwait supplied 7.2 percent of its total crude imports, compared with 8.8 percent in the same month of last year, the Japanese Natural Resources and Energy Agency said in a preliminary report.

For the whole of 2023, Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan stood at 224,000 bpd, up 1.1 percent from the previous year, and took up 8.8 percent of total Japanese crude imports. Japan's overall imports of crude oil in December fell 10.2 percent year-on-year to 2.66 million bpd, down for the second month in a row. Shipments from the Middle East accounted for 91.0 percent of the total, down 2.2 percentage points from the year before.


By country, Saudi Arabia remained in the top spot, although imports from the kingdom slid 3.6 percent from a year earlier to 1.17 million bpd, followed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with 901,000 bpd, down 16.4 percent. The US ranked fourth with 139,000 bpd and Qatar fifth with 112,000 bpd, respectively. For the full year 2023, Japan's crude oil imports shrank 6.9 percent on the year to 2.55 million bpd. Japan is the world's third-biggest oil consumer after China and the US.

## Crude oil is down

Meanwhile, the price of Kuwaiti crude oil went down by \$1.82 to \$83.49 per barrel on Tuesday, compared to \$85.31 pb the day before, said the Kuwaiti Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Wednesday. Brent crude oil went up by 47 cents to \$82.87 pb, the same as the West Texas intermediate, up by \$1.04 to reach \$77.82. — KUNA

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KUWAIT: Kuwait Journalists Association has called on all members of the association to fulfill their financial obligations for the year 2024. Members should contact the association secretariat between 9:00 am and 4:00 pm to settle their subscriptions and receive their membership IDs for the current year. Payments can be made in either cash or through K-Net. Subscription payments are accepted from Jan 1, 2024 until March 31, 2024.




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# 'Colors of Music' paves way for artists

## CAP exhibits the first competition of its kind in Kuwait



CAP exhibition

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: "Colors of Music" paves the way for artists to step into a mesmerizing journey. LAPA LOYAC organized a competition that weaved together the enchanting realms of music and art, allowing artists to express diverse cultures from their evocative creations through a symphony of colors and melodies. Kuwait Times visited the exhibition at CAP (Contemporary Art Platform), where participating artists shared their experiences and described their works.

"Engaging in this competition was a truly exhilarating journey for me as an artist. The challenge of crafting my artwork within a four-hour timeframe, coupled with the infusion of classical soft music, was a challenge, however, it fueled my creative process. It was a unique opportunity to weave my artistic expression seamlessly into the universal language of music and I'm grateful for everyone who made this possible. As a portrait artist, drawing under the influence of classical soft music has been a transformative experience for me. The elegant melodies and gentle harmonies serve as a muse, guiding each stroke of my pencil or brush with a sense of grace and emotional depth," Ala'a Murtadha told Kuwait Times.

On his part, Philip Kamble said: "I am a watercolor artist based in Kuwait for a long time. I was really challenged in this competition, as I had to draw something with acrylic, but I took up this opportunity to challenge myself. The music that I listened to was traditional Persian music. As I was listening to the music, the first thing that popped in my mind was the Persian carpet, so it is in the background of my artwork, and in the foreground is a lady dancing. As the music progressed into different beats, I thought of bringing somebody into action while they are dancing a kind of celebration."

Reem Al-Hamdan, an admirer and rider of Arabian horses, dedicated her artwork to capturing the beauty of Arabian horses. "I started with animation, but my journey took a turn, focusing on Arabian horses, as I love their traits that resonate with our identity as Arabs, such as loyalty and dignity. Despite being uncertain of the kind of music I would get, I was willing to include an Arabian horse in my drawing. Luckily, as I randomly selected a piece of paper, it revealed traditional Arabic music, which is relevant to my preferred subject. Hence, you see an Arabian horse in my artwork coupled with abstract elements."

Saad Al-Ghadhouri said: "I listened to melancholic



Philip Kamble



Reem Al-Hamdan



Saad Al-Ghadhouri



Ala'a Murtadha

Chinese music. The nature of the music led me to select contrasting colors that would symbolize joy and help balance out the dramatic elements within the artwork."

Ziyad Al-Shami, member of the LAPA LOYAC marketing team, provided further explanation. "LAPA LOYAC is an academy specialized in arts and dance. We are here today at 'Colors of Music' exhibition that is happening for the first time in Kuwait. The idea is to basically merge music and fine art. Different artists applied, and after the reviewing process by our judge Amira Behbehani, the participating artists were chosen," he said.

"During the competition, we gave the artists random genres of music without letting them know what genre they were going to listen to, because the entire



Traditional Arabic art by Al-Hamdan



Persian artwork by Kamble



Chinese artwork by Al-Ghadhouri

competition is about making artists finish an artwork within four hours, as the music length is four hours. You can find a QR code next to each artwork displayed in the exhibition to let you know what kind of music was played while drawing the picture," he added. Shami expressed his satisfaction, saying: "We are so happy to see different kinds of artwork from different artists that represent the diversity of our world."



Classical soft art by Murtadha

## KFA launches community initiative

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Festivals Association (KFA) launched the community sustainability initiative (Mumtann: Grateful) under the slogan "safe hand and a giving hand." The program is aimed at promoting sustainable humanitarian initiatives, positive behavioral change towards the environment, and the formation of successful partnerships between various sectors of the country.

The chairman of the board of directors of the association, Dr. Tariq Al-Obaid, told the Kuwaiti news agency (KUNA) after meeting with the Director General of the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources, Engineer Nasser Taqi, that the authority launched the initiative in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, the Environment Public Authority, and Kuwait Oil Company. This is in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Plan 2030 and Kuwait Vision 2035.

Al-Obaid added that the initiative enhances the role of specialized NGOs in the community. This is

done through various means, including tourism, entertainment, cultural community programs, and qualitative initiatives. He stated that creativity and innovation are the keys to the success of the Sustainable Development Goals, while sustainable qualitative initiatives are the catalysts.

Al-Obaid pointed out that the (Mumtann) awareness and quality initiative focuses on providing a distinguished model for forming successful partnerships between governments, the private sector, and civil society based on common goals and visions and consolidating sustainability in society for development and environmental protection.

For his part, Taqi said that the initiative translates the principle of community partnership between various entities and is of particular importance in promoting awareness of environmental and positive behavior as it directs students and the educational sector on various ways to improve and preserve the environment. The initiative also added to the sustainable agricultural tourism initiative launched recently by the Festivals Association in cooperation with the Agriculture Authority to promote sustainable green initiatives in the community and provide a distinguished model for consolidating the principles of sustainability. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Officials pose for a group photo during the launch of Kuwait Festivals Association's community sustainability initiative.



Imran Khan gets more jail time

## India court allows Hindus to pray in disputed mosque

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This picture taken on January 12, 2024 in Antakya shows a general view of housing containers erected by Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency.

# Ancient Antioch turns into container city

## Survivors mourn lives lost year after Turkey-Syria quake

ANTAKYA, Turkey: Mevlude Aydin cannot bring herself to visit the graves of her daughter and husband or the dozen other relatives she lost in Turkey's catastrophic earthquake one year ago. The trauma of seeing her ancient home city of Antakya turned into unrecognizable ruins is too much for the 41-year-old to bear.

"Our Hatay is gone. Completely gone," Aydin said at one of the depressingly cramped container homes the government has built for survivors across the devastated Hatay province of which Antakya is the capital. "I want to go to the cemetery to visit our children but I simply can't. I just don't want to see the city in that state. I get physically sick. My sugar levels spike."

The February 6, 2023, disaster killed more than 50,000 people and erased swathes of entire cities across Turkey's southeast in the middle of the night. No place was affected more than Antakya — a mountain-rimmed cradle of Muslim and Christian civilizations known throughout history as Antioch.

Ninety percent of its buildings were lost and more than 20,000 people died in the city and its surrounding province. Antakya's survivors have been left to deal with the shock in fenced-off camps composed of hundreds of identical homes that look like shipping containers. Families

have access to running water and power that the government offers for free. But grim-faced police guarding their entrances give these miniature metal cities the air of prison camps.

### 'No purpose'

Cağla Ezer sits on the opposite end of the flattened city in a similar container and mourns the life she has lost. "There is never any excitement anymore. No purpose," the 31-year-old mother of two said. "The goal is to get through another day, to survive the day unharmed."

Local leaders estimate that Hatay's population has shrunk to 250,000 from 1.7 million since the quake. Nearly 190,000 had been housed in containers by November. Most of those who remained in the province had no relatives to stay with in other parts of Turkey or were simply too attached to their land. But that land bears little resemblance to what stood before the first 7.8-magnitude quake struck.

Antakya has been transformed from a bustling city with a pulsating nightlife and ancient architecture into a patchwork of vast empty spaces and skeletal remains of buildings. Standing all alone in the center of one such debris-strewn field is the green metal container of Fevzi Sislioglu.

The 65-year-old throat cancer sur-

vivor set it up with the help of some kind-hearted neighbors at the spot where his hardware store once stood. "I am selling whatever wasn't looted from my original store," Sislioglu said in a barely audible voice. "I have no electricity here, no water and very few customers. But I have to keep going. I have to take care of my wife and two children."

### 'Morale boost'

The remaining vendors of Antakya's Uzun Carsi bazaar — a partially covered network of 1,500 shops that was once an important stop on the ancient Silk Road — looked equally glum. Officials intend to start bulldozing its remaining buildings as a safety precaution by May. The plan is for a new and safer bazaar to emerge in its place. "Hopefully we will see better days and have an even more beautiful market," shop association president Mehmet Hancer Gunduz said over a glass of turnip juice. "I believe in that."

The glow coming from the Umut Et restaurant (meaning either "Umut's Meat" or "Keep the Hope") offers Resim Devir and his family a rare reason to smile. The original eatery was destroyed and a new one built using only wood and steel. Many survivors still fear entering cement buildings because so many of them crumbled and trapped initial survivors under tons of



ANTAKYA: Fevzi Sislioglu, 65 years old, poses at the door of his container shop erected on empty land on January 12, 2024. — AFP photos

debris. "It's one of the few places where you can escape the stress," Devir said over a multi-course meal. "We need a morale boost to survive these days."

### Children's games

Umut Et owner Mustafa Kassab thinks it will take at least one or two generations for Antakya to start resembling its former self — and for normal business to return. "People have still not been able to overcome the psychological effects of

the earthquake," Kassab said. "And financially, they are strapped." Yazgin Danisma can see the pain reflected in the games her three children play in the paved and soulless alleys between rows of containers in her fenced off camp. "I can hear the children talk among themselves about running away. But I still want to live in Antakya," the 31-year-old said. "The children have developed a fear. Whenever they play, the game always ends in a pretend earthquake," she said. — AFP

## How Bukele became South America's most popular leader

SAN SALVADOR: Polling as the most popular leader in Latin America — possibly even the world — El Salvador's Nayib Bukele has inspired calls for hard-handed tactics across a region tired of violence and losing faith in democracy.

Despite accusations he is abusing human rights and trampling on the constitution to consolidate power, Bukele's crackdown on drug gangs has won him the adoration of a nation and the esteem of leaders hoping to emulate his example ... and voter support. Bukele, 42, enjoys approval ratings around 90 percent according to numerous polls, ahead of elections Sunday he is expected to win hands down.

### How did he do it?

After a weekend of particularly bloody gang violence, a parliament loyal to Bukele decreed a state of emergency in March 2022 that suspended the need for arrest warrants, among other civil liberties. Under the provision, authorities have rounded up nearly 80,000 suspected gangsters, many of them locked away in a prison — the largest in the Americas — that Bukele had specially built.

The complex is a major target for rights observers due to allegations of inhumane conditions and widespread abuses, including the detention of minors and torture. But despite these concerns, and fears that many innocent people have gotten caught up in Bukele's dragnet, El Salvador last year

recorded its lowest homicide rate in three decades.

This prompted Bukele to boast it was now "officially the safest country in all of Latin America." It was not long ago one of the deadliest. The young, social-media-savvy Bukele's online presence has also helped bolster his popularity. He has 5.8 million followers on X.

### Will others follow?

Presidents Xiomara Castro of Honduras and Daniel Noboa of Ecuador — countries beset by violence perpetrated by gangs with links to powerful international cartels — have both evoked the Bukele example. And people in countries as far away as Chile and Argentina, where crime is seen as a growing problem, have been calling for a tougher government approach echoing El Salvador.

There is even a term for it: Bukelization. But Bukele's success is not only down to his gang war. "It's the failure of what preceded," analyst Michael Shifter of the Inter-American Dialogue thinktank in Washington told AFP. "It's the sclerosis of the political class. A political class that became completely removed from society and what its demands are and what its needs are."

Last year, only 48 percent of Latin Americans said they believed democracy was the best form of government, according to the Latinobarometro polling agency, based in Chile. In 2010 support for democracy stood at 63 percent. In times of insecurity, "all



MEJICANOS, El Salvador: An aerial view of a mural at the Zacamil apartment complex depicting Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele is seen on January 26, 2024. — AFP

people in Latin America like authoritarian narratives," said Ana Maria Mendez Dardon, director for Central America for the Washington Office on Latin America, an NGO promoting human rights and justice.

### Can it last?

Bukele represents a break from a recent Latin American trend of voting out incumbents. Given that he has delivered on his promise to reduce violence, voters "are willing to make the tradeoff," said Shifter. "They realize they may be losing some liberty and they realize that he's going for a second term that's not constitutional, but they are willing to accept that as long as they get some benefits," he said.

"And they're getting benefits in terms of being able to take their kids to the park or whatever it is without con-

stant fear." El Salvador's constitution does not allow successive presidential terms, but a Bukele-stacked Supreme Court has allowed him to run.

In the longer term, analysts expect the country's economic woes will turn voters away, and point to migration numbers that have remained high. "The honeymoon will end," Latino-barometro director Marta Lagos told AFP. "There's a bit of an idealized view of what Bukele has done. The Latin American who wants to live in El Salvador does not know the living conditions in El Salvador," she said.

According to the UN's OCHA humanitarian organization, more than a quarter of the country's 6.3 million people live in poverty. Bukele may also not be able to indefinitely hold out against gangs with ties to powerful, multinational cartels. — AFP

## Three-stage Gaza truce plan being examined: Source

PALESTINE: Hamas is reviewing plans for a three-stage truce with the Zionist entity which foresee a weeks-long halt to the Gaza war, a source in the Palestinian militant group told AFP on Wednesday. The movement said earlier this week it was mulling proposals drawn up by mediators in Paris for a second truce nearly four months since the war began.

While a November pause to the fighting lasted a week, the latest accord aims to pave the way for an initial six-week halt to the fighting. Over that period the Zionist entity would release between 200 and 300 Palestinian prisoners who are not deemed high-security detainees, in exchange for 35 to 40 hostages held in Gaza, the Hamas source close to Egyptian and Qatari mediators said.

"Only women, children and sick men over 60" who are captive in Gaza would be freed at this stage, the Hamas source told AFP, declining to be named given the sensitivity of the issue. The war has displaced the vast majority of Gaza's population of 2.4 million and prompted the United Nations to warn famine is imminent. Under the new agreement, aid deliveries would be boosted with the entry of 200 to 300 trucks per day. "The first stage includes negotiations around the withdrawal of the Zionist forces and enabling the return of displaced people to Gaza (City) and the north of the strip," the source said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ruled out pulling the Zionist entity's armed forces from Gaza, but in a meeting with some families of hostages on Wednesday he vowed to bring the captives home. "We are making every effort, but the more discreet these efforts are, greater are the chances of success," he said in a statement issued by his office. "There is a real effort to bring everyone back ... it's too early to say how it will unfold, but these efforts are underway as we speak." — AFP

## International

# India court allows Hindus to pray in disputed mosque

## Official archaeological survey supports Hindu belief that mosque was originally temple

**VARANASI, India:** An Indian court weighed in on one of the country's most sensitive religious disputes Wednesday by permitting Hindu worshippers to pray inside a mosque in the city of Varanasi. The Gyanvapi mosque is one of several Islamic houses of worship that Hindu activists, backed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party, have sought for decades to reclaim for their religion.

It was built in the 17th century by the Mughal empire in a city where Hindu faithful from across the country cremate their loved ones by the Ganges river. The court in Varanasi ruled that Hindu worshippers — who believe the mosque replaced a destroyed temple to the deity Shiva — could pray in the building's basement. Its verdict ordered district authorities to "make proper arrangements within the next seven days" to facilitate worshippers.

The decision is the latest in a long-running legal saga over Gyanvapi's future. This month, India's official archaeological agency said a survey of the site appeared to corroborate the belief that it was originally home to a temple, according to local news reports. Emboldened right-wing Hindu groups have laid claim to several Muslim sites of

worship they say were built atop ancient temples during Mughal rule.

Last week, Modi presided over a grand inauguration ceremony in the nearby city of Ayodhya for a Hindu temple built on grounds once home to the centuries-old Babri mosque. Hindu zealots had torn down that mosque in 1992 in a campaign spearheaded by members of Modi's party, sparking sectarian riots that killed 2,000 people nationwide, most of them Muslims.

The decades-long court battle that ensued over the future of the Babri site ended in 2019 when India's top court permitted the construction of a temple to the deity Ram, who according to Hindu scripture was born in the city.

Members of Modi's party routinely refer to India's history of Muslim rule under the Mughal emperors as a time of "slavery". The prime minister described last week's opening of the temple as "the advent of a new era". Calls for India to enshrine Hindu supremacy have rapidly grown louder since Modi took office in 2014, making its roughly 210-million-strong Muslim minority increasingly anxious about their future. — AFP



VARANASI, India: People make their way along a street past police personnel standing guard near the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi on January 31, 2024. — AFP

## The \$12.5 billion fraud that has shocked Vietnam

**HANOI, Vietnam:** Retired nurse Nga put her life savings into a bond at Vietnam's SCB bank, but now cannot access her money after being caught up with tens of thousands in a multibillion-dollar scam that has shocked the nation. Now, property tycoon Truong My Lan is facing a trial in the country's biggest ever fraud case, accused of embezzling \$12.5 billion by investigators after being arrested in a national corruption crackdown analysts say has hit the economy and unsettled foreign investors.

Lan, chair of major developer Van Thinh Phat, is said to have swindled the cash from Saigon Commercial Bank (SCB) for years, leaving unsuspecting investors out of pocket and leading hundreds to stage rare protests in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Nga — a pseudonym to protect her identity — is among the 42,000 victims of the Van Thinh Phat scandal identified by police. "My children urged me to spend the money, to travel, but I did not. I put my whole life savings there," said the 67-year-old Hanoi resident, showing AFP the bond certificates worth around \$120,000 issued by SCB. "I planned to use the money to maintain our house ... to help my kids."

Police say those caught up in the scam are all SCB bondholders who cannot withdraw their money and have not received interest or principal payments since Lan's arrest in October 2022. Lan, who is married to a wealthy Hong Kong businessman, is accused of setting up fake loan applications to withdraw money from SCB, of which she owned a 90 percent stake.

Between February 2019 and September 2022, her driver transported the equivalent of more than \$4.4 billion in cash from SCB's headquarters in Ho Chi



HO CHI MINH CITY, Vietnam: This photo taken on December 7, 2023 shows a biker using a mobile phone in front of the headquarters of the Saigon Commercial Bank (SCB). — AFP

Minh City to her nearby home and Van Thinh Phat's head office. Her alleged asset appropriation is equivalent to around three percent of Vietnam's 2022 GDP.

### "Tip of the iceberg"

Despite a wave of high-profile arrests under the anti-corruption drive, the size of the scandal has shocked the country, said Linh Nguyen, lead analyst for consultancy Vietnam at Control Risks. "Now it's raised the question: are there any other cases of a similar scale out there?" she told AFP. "If one businesswoman with one company and one bank could leverage such huge capital from the economy, then how about in other banks and in other companies?"

Banking expert Bui Kien Thanh also warned the scandal may be "just the tip of the iceberg". "In my view ... many, many other banks are doing the same thing, although maybe to a lesser extent," he said. Eighty-five others will face trial alongside Lan, including former central bankers, ex-SCB executives and former government officials.

Among them is one former employee at the State Bank of Vietnam — the central bank — who is ac-

spending. The finance ministry said that wages and subsidies are projected to account for 79.4 percent of total spending. Wages and related spending are estimated at KD 14.8 billion and subsidies at KD 4.7 billion.

Capital spending is estimated at KD 2.8 billion. The draft budget will be reviewed and studied by the National Assembly's budgets committee. The Assembly will then debate and pass it before it closes the term in the summer.

engineers, doctors, teachers, nursing and medical staff among others.

"Undoubtedly, there will be a positive impact on Kuwait's economy as well," said Wilson D'Souza, who works for a travel agency. "Opening family visas will help boost both the aviation and hospitality sectors in the country. Growing traffic in and out of Kuwait will definitely enhance revenues of local airlines, hotels and restaurants and generate new jobs in multiple sectors. There will be a positive impact on Kuwait's retail sector as well with a significant jump in consumer spending," said D'Souza. Kuwait's aviation and travel industry have been gradually recovering from a setback they sustained following the outbreak of the COVID pandemic.

tions about Iran's involvement in attacks on American bases, the ambassador dismissed them as mere claims, emphasizing the need for evidence.

Touching on the Durra field issue, the ambassador said Iran expressed readiness for constructive cooperation and dialogue, viewing it as a technical matter that can be resolved through understanding. He also prayed for the success of the new Kuwait government.

In terms of visa waiver conditions, only ordinary passport holders from the mentioned countries are eligible. Multiple entries or extended stays require different types of visas from Iranian diplomatic missions abroad.

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry's Deputy for Consular, Parliamentary and Iranian Expatriates Affairs Ali-Reza Bigdeli said the move aims to promote tourism, foster regional cooperation and strengthen people-to-people ties between Iran and the 28 countries included in the visa waiver. The countries include Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, Bahrain, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tunisia, Tanzania, Mauritania, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, Seychelles, Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, Brunei, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belarus and India (by air).

used of accepting \$5.2 million in bribes to conceal SCB's violations and poor financial situation. Other top business leaders targeted in the anti-corruption drive — and accused of massive fraud — include Truong Quy Thanh, the head of soft drink giant Tan Hiep Phat Group.

He is to be prosecuted along with his two daughters for allegedly appropriating \$31.5 million. Do Anh Dung, chairman of developer Tan Hoang Minh Group, will also face trial for illegally acquiring \$355 million in a bond sale to more than 6,500 investors.

### Economic impact

The anti-graft drive has even dealt a blow to Vietnam's economy. Luc Can, chief economist at state-owned bank BIDV, said during a recent panel discussion. Last year the government disbursed just 65 percent of its annual target for public investment capital, he said.

With many fearful of being caught up in the crackdown, everyday transactions within business and the state apparatus have slowed. The economy grew just over five percent in 2023, missing the government's 6.5 percent target. Meanwhile, the price of gold — a safe haven in times of turmoil and uncertainty — hit a record high in the country last month, surpassing global rates by a third.

Linh, of Control Risks, said the trend showed ordinary Vietnamese feel it is "safer to keep money under your pillow or in gold bars in your safe box at home". She added that some foreign investors had also been spooked, even as they have broadly praised what they see as the campaign's aim to improve rule of law. "It doesn't mean that (foreign investors are) going to run away or shift their interests into other countries," Linh said. "It might just be they're delaying... until everything settles down."

For Nga, who has logged her case with police, justice cannot come soon enough. "Those that committed these crimes must be duly punished," she said. "I trust and I hope that I can get back my money as I did nothing bad to anyone." — AFP

## Chief prosecutor assaulted with hammer in Maldives

**MALÉ, Maldives:** The top criminal prosecutor in the Maldives was recovering from an assault with a hammer Wednesday, a rare attack against a public official in the upmarket archipelago tourist destination. Hussain Shameem was on his way to work when an unidentified attacker pounced on him and injured his left arm, a police official told AFP. In a post on Facebook, Shameem said he was back home with his family and vowed to keep up his work, also sharing a photo of himself with his arm in a sling.

"I was attacked this morning... fractured my left hand," he wrote, without giving further details of the incident. "Back home with family... will be back at work stronger and be back running, cycling and swimming even faster." The main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) said the attack was politically motivated. But police said they suspected a link to criminal prosecutions handled by Shameem, a senior lawyer promoted to the top job in 2019.

The attack on him came three days after violent scenes in parliament when legislators rejected the appointment of three cabinet posts, including the position of attorney general. Ruling party legislators attempted Sunday to block a vote by the main opposition — who with their allies hold the majority in parliament — on the cabinet appointed by recently elected President Mohamed Muizzu.

Videos shared on social media showed at least one lawmaker bleeding from the neck after being caught up in a violent scrum inside the chamber, leading to the temporary suspension of business. Legislators were seen yanking off microphones and using plastic trumpets to disrupt proceedings in chaotic scenes. — AFP

## Kuwait projects KD 5.9bn deficit...

Continued from Page 1

Spending is projected at KD 24.6 billion, a reduction of 6.6 percent from the previous year's KD.26.3 billion, which was Kuwait's largest

## Expats hail family visa opening, but...

Continued from Page 1

"I am happy that I can apply for a visa for my husband and child now," said Samar El-Mousa, a staff nurse at a private clinic in Sharq.

Expatriates who do certain jobs are exempt from these requirements, subject to conditions drawn up by the General Administration of Residence Affairs. According to Article 30, there are 14 types of jobs under this category. These include judges, advisors,

## Iran waives tourist visas for...

Continued from Page 1

challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Toutouchi highlighted the potential for increased trade, offering opportunities for enhanced food security for Kuwait due to Iran's proximity, competitive prices and the quality of Iranian goods.

Addressing geopolitical concerns, Toutouchi said Iran's stance on resistance factions in the region emphasizes their independence in decision-making and actions, denying external influence. Regarding the International Court of Justice's ruling on the Zionist entity, Iran sees it as a positive step but emphasizes the need for Islamic countries to take effective measures independently.

Responding to queries about a potential American preemptive strike, Toutouchi stressed the importance of regional stability and warned of the consequences of such actions. Iran remains prepared to respond if its sites are attacked, he cautioned. Regarding accusa-

## Arab-American snub for Biden signals trouble

**WASHINGTON:** Arab-American anger over Joe Biden's Zionist policy could cost him dearly in November's US presidential vote, as a community with electoral influence in key swing states turns against him. Over the weekend, the Democratic incumbent's campaign manager traveled to Dearborn, Michigan — home to the largest concentration of Arab-Americans in the United States — and was snubbed by a group of a dozen or so officials, including the Detroit suburb's mayor.

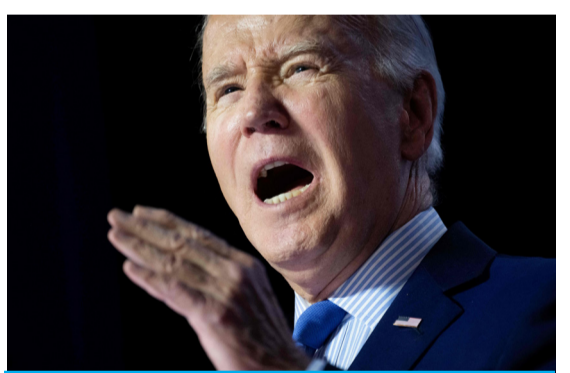
Biden has asked Congress for billions of dollars in additional military aid to the Zionist entity and his government has vetoed multiple UN Security Council calls for a ceasefire in the conflict, leaving many Muslims and people of Middle Eastern heritage feeling betrayed by the Democratic Party, their former political home.

"When elected officials view the atrocities in Gaza only as an electoral problem, they reduce our indescribable pain into a political calculation," Mayor Abdullah Hammoud wrote on X about why he chose not to meet Julie Chavez Rodriguez. His comments were cheered by Dearborn residents, who expressed anguish at the daily horrors in Gaza since the Zionist entity began a military offensive following deadly attacks and hostage-taking carried out by militant group Hamas on Oct 7.

### 'Call for a ceasefire'

"It is a genocide that's happening against our families and our people, and people have been responding very strongly," Amer Zahr, a law professor and comedian, told AFP. "We're not supporting Joe Biden under any circumstances — or any politician frankly — that is not willing to simply call for a ceasefire," added the 46-year-old former surrogate for Bernie Sanders.

Come Nov 5, Biden faces a tough rematch against likely opponent Donald Trump. Swing states like Michigan, Arizona, Georgia, Pennsylvania and Virginia, with significant proportions of Muslims and Arab-Americans, could be crucial. These socially and economically conservative groups were once seen as natural Republican voters, but their allegiances shifted after 9/11 as a result of the surveillance pol-



US President Joe Biden

icies and perceived Islamophobia of the George W Bush administration.

Biden won decisively among Arabs and Muslims in 2020. But according to an analysis by Youssef Chouhoud, a quantitative social scientist at Christopher Newport University who looked at polling data from sources including nonprofit Emgage and the Council on American-Islamic Relations, many could stay home or vote for a third party in 2024. "In Michigan, for example, that could mean Biden would lose about 55,000 votes, or about a third of the 154,000-vote margin of victory he earned over Trump in 2020," Chouhoud wrote on The Conversation.

### Biden protesters

Biden's speeches and campaign events meanwhile are increasingly marked by pro-Palestinian disruptors, exposing the faultlines within Democratic circles with younger, more progressive corners of the party highly critical of the president. Not even the prospect of a second term for Trump — who enacted an immigration policy widely decried as a "Muslim ban" that he says he'll bring back with a vengeance if elected — is enough to dissuade voters like Zahr. "We're not going to respond to the lesser of two evils argument, we are going to reject that," he said, adding: "We're not going to be held responsible for the alternative."

Samra'a Luqman, a 41-year-old community organizer who co-chairs the "Abandon Biden" movement in Michigan, went further, suggesting some of the community may vote for Trump in protest. "The goal is ultimately not just to abandon Biden, but to ensure that we oust Biden," she told AFP — adding that she was still proud of some Democrats, including Hammoud and congresswoman Rashida Tlaib. — AFP

## International

# Imran Khan gets more jail time

## Pakistan ex-PM, wife sentenced to 14 years in graft case

ISLAMABAD: Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan was sentenced Wednesday to 14 years in jail on a graft charge, a day after he was given a 10-year prison term in verdicts handed down just a week before national elections.

Khan and his wife were found guilty of graft in a case involving gifts he received while premier, after he was Tuesday handed 10 years in a case related to leaking state secrets. Pakistan goes to the polls next Thursday in a ballot already marred by allegations of rigging, with Khan barred from running and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party subject to a massive crackdown. "Another sad day in our judicial system history, which is being dismantled," a party spokesman told media.

It was not immediately clear if Khan's sentences were to run consecutively or concurrently following a trial held inside the jail where he has been detained for much of the time since his arrest in August. But his lawyer, Salman Safdar, confirmed to AFP he had been sentenced alongside his wife, Bushra Bibi, who had been on remand throughout the trial.

Intazar Hussain Panjutha, one of Khan's legal team, said Bibi had surrendered herself to authorities. Bibi, a faith healer who met Khan when he approached her for spiritual guidance, rarely appears in public and only wearing a face-covering hijab when she does.

The pair married in 2018, months before Khan was elected prime minister. About 127 million Pakistanis are eligible to vote next Thursday, with Khan

and his PTI at the center of debate despite being squeezed out of the limelight.

On Tuesday a bomb blast claimed by the Islamic State group near a PTI rally killed four people and wounded six others in the Balochistan provincial capital of Quetta. PTI said three of its activists had been killed in the blast, just hours after Khan was sentenced.

### Buried by court cases

Since being ousted in 2022, Khan has been buried by court cases he claims have been triggered to prevent his return to office after a campaign of defiance against Pakistan's military kingmakers. The 71-year-old had accused the powerful military — with whom he ruled in partnership for much of his tenure — of orchestrating his ouster in a US-backed conspiracy.

When Khan was first arrested in May last year, riots broke out across the country. But his street power was killed by a military crackdown that saw thousands of supporters detained — 100 of whom are facing closed-door military trials — and dozens of senior leaders forced underground.

"You have to take revenge for every injustice with your vote on February 8," Khan said in a statement posted on his X profile reacting to his 10-year sentence on Tuesday. "Tell them that we are not sheep that can be driven with a stick."

As a result of the ongoing crackdown, PTI has moved most of its campaigning online, where it has



LAHORE: Pakistan's former Prime Minister, Imran Khan (right) along with his wife Bushra Bibi (left) looks on as he signs surety bonds for bail in various cases on July 17, 2023. — AFP

been bogged down by state-imposed internet blackouts. The party founded by former cricket star Khan has also been stripped of its cricket bat election symbol — in a nation where literacy lags, making icons vital for identifying candidates on ballot papers.

Nawaz Sharif — head of one of the two dynastic

parties that have historically helmed Pakistan — has returned from self-imposed exile and seen his myriad convictions dissolve in the courts. Analysts say it is a sign the three-time former prime minister is the favored candidate of the military, which has directly ruled Pakistan for just under half its history. — AFP

## Spain MPs reject Catalan amnesty bill in blow for PM

MADRID: Spanish lawmakers on Tuesday rejected a deeply divisive Catalan amnesty bill with the headline separatist party that demanded it voting against it on the grounds it did not go far enough.

The bill will now be sent back to a parliamentary commission in a major setback for Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez that highlights the fragility of his parliamentary support.

The bill was rejected by 179 votes to 171 in the 350-seat parliament where Sanchez's left-wing minority government is dependent on a patchwork of support to pass legislation. The law will apply to those wanted by the justice system over the 2017 Catalan independence bid, first and foremost the exiled leader of the headline separatist JxCat party, Carles Puigdemont. He was Catalan regional leader in 2017 and fled to Belgium to avoid prosecution.

Although JxCat had demanded the law in exchange for its parliamentary support to secure Sanchez another term in office, it tipped the balance by voting against the bill on Tuesday after its last-minute amendments were rejected.

The move angered the government, with Justice Minister Felix Bolanos saying it was "incomprehensible" they voted against a bill they had agreed on, siding with the right-wing parties that sought "to imprison and outlaw them".

JxCat wanted to amend the text to guarantee the amnesty would apply to anyone accused of "terrorism" or "treason" — wording absent from the current bill — over allegations raised in two separate legal probes into Puigdemont.

"This text is a good starting point... but it has holes that Spain's prejudiced justice system can use to leave the amnesty in tatters," JxCat lawmaker Miriam Noguera told lawmakers in the debate.



MADRID: A man waving a Spanish flag sits at a terrace as a plenary session takes place before a vote on the government's controversial amnesty bill, in front of the Congress of Deputies in Madrid on January 30, 2024. — AFP

## Eight million displaced by Sudan war: UN

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia: The number of people uprooted by the war between rival generals in Sudan is around eight million, the United Nations said on Wednesday. UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, who is visiting Ethiopia, rallied international donors to open their wallets to fight the crisis, describing the situation as "serious".

"The conflict has increased in intensity and in impact on civilians," Grandi told the press in Addis Ababa. "Since April 2023, so less than a year ago, eight million people have been displaced from their homes in Sudan," he said, adding that more than 1.5 million had fled to six neighboring countries. The conflict between Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, commander of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), erupted last April. Diplomatic efforts to end the violence continue after numerous ceasefires have been broken.

Grandi, who was later to visit Sudan, called on donors to boost support for the influx of refugees, warn-

Both investigating magistrates have been accused by the left of harboring political ulterior motives after announcing on Monday they would be extending their probes. "We are not terrorists," said Noguera, warning lawmakers "not to embarrass the Europeans by trivializing terrorism."

### 'Rolling out the red carpet'

For many on the Spanish right, Puigdemont is seen as public enemy number one. "This law ... is a joke and its only purpose is to keep Sanchez in power," said right-wing opposition leader Alberto Nunez Feijoo ahead of the vote.

"Sanchez wanted to bring Puigdemont to justice and now they are rolling out the red carpet for him. He left Spain in the boot of a car and now he'll return in Sanchez's Falcon," he jeered, referring to the prime minister's private plane.

Even if the bill eventually passes, it will face numerous hurdles before becoming law, with Feijoo's Popular Party (PP) vowing to slow its passage through the Senate, where it holds an absolute majority. The measure has also drawn fierce opposition from some members of the judiciary and is facing legal challenges that could jeopardize its future.

On Monday, a magistrate extended his probe into whether Puigdemont had sought Russian support for a Catalan state, citing evidence of "close personal relationships" between his inner circle and Russian diplomats and spies.

According to El Pais, the probe could end in treason charges against Puigdemont that would fall outside the amnesty law. A second magistrate is looking into Democratic Tsunami, a secretive protest group that blockaded Barcelona airport after Spain jailed nine Catalan separatist leaders in late 2019 over the independence crisis.

In November, the magistrate said Puigdemont had a "leadership" role within Democratic Tsunami, indicating the charges he faces "could be classified ... as terrorism". Last week, the Socialists were forced to amend the bill to ensure it would apply to those accused of "terrorism" as long as it didn't involve "a serious violation of human rights". — AFP



BANGKOK: Former Thai prime ministerial candidate and Move Forward Party MP Pita Limjaroenrat arrives to speak to media at the Thai parliament in Bangkok on January 31, 2024. — AFP

## Thai court orders end to royal insult law reform bid

BANGKOK: Thailand's progressive Move Forward Party, which won most seats at the last election, was Wednesday ordered to stop campaigning to reform the kingdom's tough royal defamation laws, as a top court ruled the policy was unlawful. MFP upended Thailand's political order by coming first in the general election last May, but its promises to reform the military, business monopolies and lese-majeste laws were opposed by the kingdom's powerful conservative elite.

The Constitutional Court on Wednesday ruled that the party's campaign pledge to reform Thailand's strict laws protecting King Maha Vajiralongkorn amounted to an attempt to "overthrow the monarchy". The unanimous ruling by nine judges could pave the way for MFP to be dissolved under laws governing political parties.

The court said MFP's attempts to amend the royal defamation law showed "an intent to separate the monarchy from the Thai nation, which is significantly dangerous to the security of the state". "There are prohibitions on the exercise of rights and freedoms that affect the country's security and peace, order of the state, and good morals," it said.

The court ordered MFP and its former leader Pita Limjaroenrat to immediately stop all attempts to amend or abolish the lese-majeste laws, whether through speaking, writing or other means. Pita — who stepped down as party leader last year and now acts as a senior adviser — said the ruling was a "lost opportunity" for parliament to discuss an important issue. And he insisted the party had no wish to overthrow the Thai constitutional order.

"We refuse that the attempt was an alibi nor was it an attempt to cause any deterioration of the monarchy and did not have any intention of separating the monarchy with the national security," he said in English after the verdict. MFP's forerunner, the Future Forward Party, was dissolved by court order in 2020 and Pita said he was aware the same fate could await the party now. "We are preparing accordingly," he told reporters.

After MFP's election success last year, Pita was blocked from becoming prime minister by conservative forces in the Senate, ostensibly because of the threat he and the party posed to the monarchy. Last week, he returned to parliament after the Constitutional Court cleared him of breaching election laws in a separate case that could have seen him barred from politics.

### Tough sentences

The lese-majeste law is intended to protect the king — a revered, semi-divine figure in Thai society — from insult, and those breaking it can face up to 15 years in jail per offence. But critics say the legislation has been interpreted so broadly in recent years as to shield the royal family from any kind of criticism or mockery.

This month, a man was sentenced to 50 years in prison for a series of Facebook posts deemed insulting to the monarchy. And in March last year, a man was jailed for two years for selling satirical calendars featuring rubber ducks that a court said defamed the king.

The yellow bath toys were an unexpected symbol of mass youth-led street protests that shook Bangkok in 2020. Reform of the lese-majeste law, known in Thailand as 112 after the relevant section of the criminal code, was a major theme of the demonstrations, which featured unprecedented public criticism of the royal family. — AFP



TRIPOLI: Illegal migrants from Egypt sit in a courtyard during a deportation operation in the Libyan capital Tripoli on January 31, 2024. — AFP

## Libya deports migrants back to Egypt: Official

TRIPOLI: Libyan authorities on Wednesday began sending 350 irregular migrants to their home country Egypt, an immigration official told AFP. War-torn Libya has become as a key departure point on North Africa's Mediterranean coast for migrants, mainly from other parts of Africa, risking dangerous sea voyages in the hope of reaching Europe.

Libya's rival administrations last year agreed on a Tripoli-based anti-immigration body tasked with coordinating deportations of foreigners who are in the country illegally. "The body to combat illegal immigration has started the process of deporting 350 Egyptian nationals who were in an irregular situation," said migration agency spokesman, Colonel Haytham Belgassem Ammar, referring to the Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration, which is part of the interior ministry.

Already on Tuesday, 323 migrants, many of them women, were sent back to Nigeria on flights from the capital Tripoli and the northwestern city of Benghazi in coordination with the International Organization for Migration. "More expulsions are planned in the coming days," Ammar said. Libya sent 600 irregular migrants back to Egypt in November and a further 650 in December. All of those being sent back via bus to the border with Egypt on Wednesday were men, including some children, Ammar said.

In 2023, a total 23,361 migrants of African or Asian nationality, mostly from Nigeria, were sent back to their homelands from Libya, he added. "I was going to cross to Lampedusa in Italy when I was apprehended," one of them, 16-year-old Ziyad Salama Abdellatif, told AFP. He said he had spent nine hours at sea before being intercepted some 120 kilometers (75 miles) off the coast of Libya. — AFP



ADRE: This file photo shows a general view of the Ourang refugee camp in Adre where refugees fleeing the conflict in Sudan live. — AFP

# Business

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2024

## NBK reports KD 560.6 million in net profit for financial year 2023

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) released its full year 2023 financial results for the twelve months period ended Dec 31, 2023. The Group recorded a net profit of KD 560.6 million (\$1.8 billion), up 10.1 percent year-on-year from KD 509.1 million (\$1.7 billion) in 2022.

As of the end of December 2023, total assets grew by 3.7 percent year-on-year to reach KD 37.7 billion (\$122.8 billion), whereas customer deposits surged by 8.8 percent to reach KD 21.9 billion (\$71.6 billion). Meanwhile, total loans and advances stood at KD 22.3 billion (\$72.6 billion), up by 6.1 percent year-on-year, while attributable shareholders' equity reached KD 3.7 billion (\$12.0 billion), growing by 7.3 percent year-on-year. In terms of distributions, the Board of Directors proposed a cash dividend distribution of 25 fils per share for the second half of 2023, bringing the total cash dividends for the year to 35 fils; a payout ratio of 50 percent of profits attributable. The Board of Directors also proposed the distribution of 5 percent bonus shares. The proposed distributions are subject to approval by the Annual General Assembly, which is scheduled for March 2024. Earnings per share (EPS) stood at 68 fils per share for the year 2023, compared to 61 fils in 2022.

Hamad Al-Bahar, Group Chairman commented on the financial results: "In 2023, NBK achieved robust financial results, showcasing the adaptability of our business model and affirming our consistent progress toward delivering enduring long-term value to our customers, shareholders, and communities".

"We persist in making substantial strides in executing our strategic agenda, and we are confident that the initiatives undertaken in the past year will serve as a catalyst for even stronger performance in the future," Al-Bahar continued. He also emphasized that NBK has a robust balance sheet and a stable capital base, providing support for meeting the expanding needs of its customers while simultaneously striving to achieve optimal returns for its shareholders.

Al-Bahar expressed optimism that the operational



**Hamad Al-Bahar:**  
The Board of Directors proposes cash dividends of 25 fils per share for 2H 2023, bringing the total dividend for the year to 35 fils.



**Isam Al-Sager:**  
Throughout 2023, we continued to leverage the benefits of our diverse business portfolio and strategic investments in talent and technology.

environment in Kuwait will gain momentum in the upcoming period, particularly following the attainment of political stability. This positive outlook is further bolstered by the appointment of new prime minister and government, placing a priority in its agenda on addressing economic challenges and fostering efforts to restore confidence in the business climate. "Throughout the past year, NBK solidified its pioneering position as a leading contributor to social responsibility in Kuwait; affirmed through contributions exceeding KD 28 million across various sectors, including health, care for children and society, environmental initiatives, sports and education," Al-Bahar stated.

Al-Bahar emphasized that sustainability has become a pivotal driver to enhance the Bank's long-term growth opportunities. He highlighted that NBK continues to undertake numerous significant initiatives supporting responsible business practices, contributing to the sustainable development of Kuwait's economy. The latest of these initiatives was becoming a signatory of the United Nations Global Compact; recognized as the largest sustainability initiative for responsible business practices.

Meanwhile, Isam J. Al-Sager, Vice Chairman and Group CEO, said: "In 2023, we delivered a robust performance, experiencing growth in both revenues and

profits. The favorable operational performance persisted across our business, as we continued to leverage the advantages of our diverse business portfolio and strategic investments in talent and technology".

Al-Sager underscored that NBK's primary business sectors demonstrated strong performance throughout the year, registering increased momentum in the operational performance across key areas including international operations and wealth management. These key segments are witnessing substantial expansion in alignment with the Group's strategic plans to grow in main markets and enhance its offerings in investment and wealth management services.

"The Group's net operating income surged by 15.6 percent annually, reaching KD 1.2 billion, driven by the growth of net interest income and fees and commissions", Al-Sager added. He further explained that the growth in profitability aligns with the strength of NBK's financial position. The expansion of the loan portfolio, total assets in general, and customer deposits was sustained while maintaining robust asset quality levels, thanks to NBK's prudent risk management policy.

"In 2023, we witnessed a compelling demonstration of the strength of our investment philosophy in growth initiatives, underscoring the value of our customer-centricity. This played a pivotal role in the sus-

tained growth of our diverse business sectors as we persistently invested in the future throughout the year. A central focus was placed on enhancing our digital capabilities to better serve our customers. We also introduced innovative products and solutions crafted to assist our customers in seamlessly meeting their banking needs," Al-Sager confirmed.

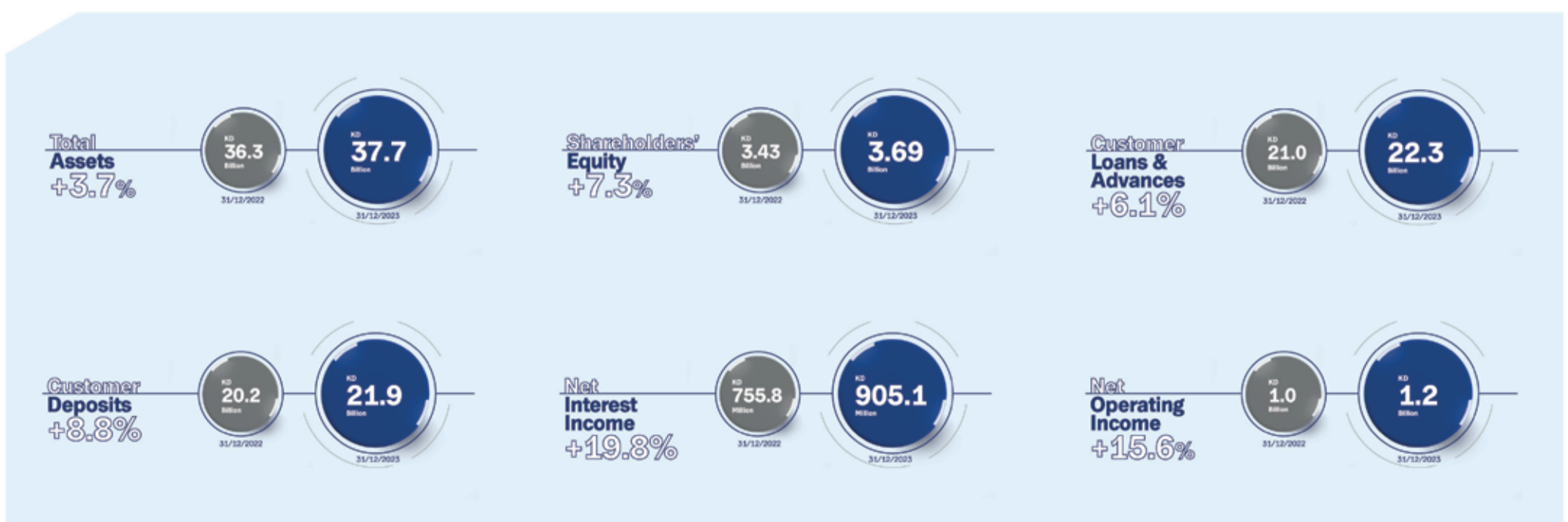
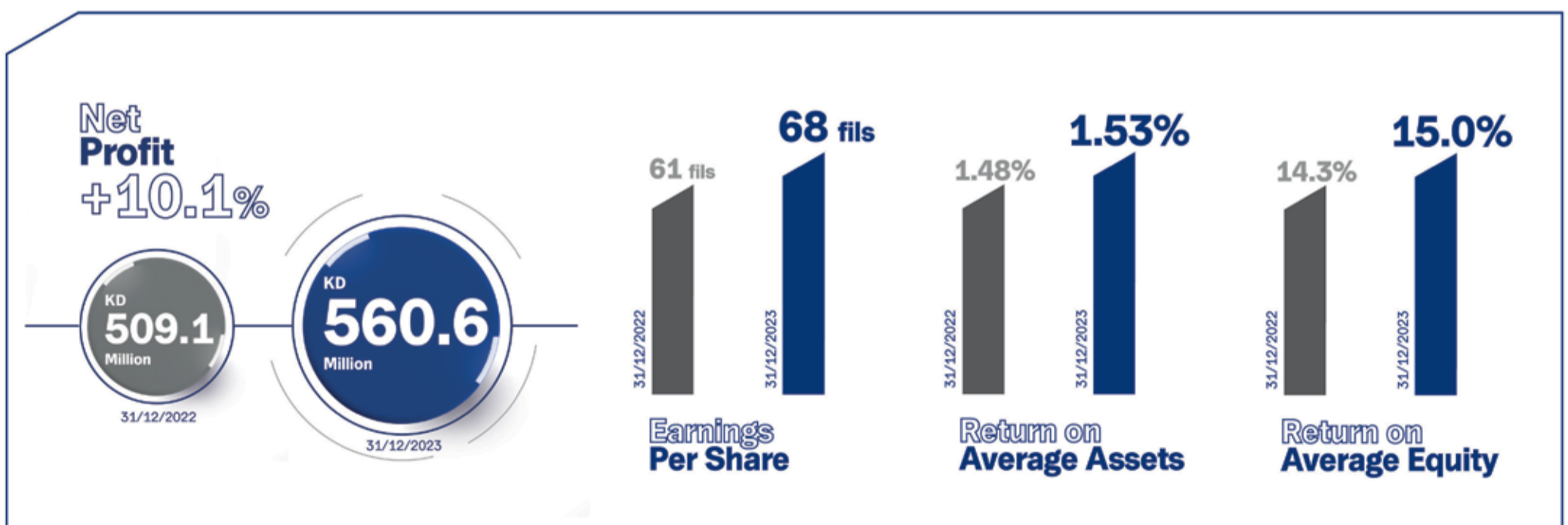
He emphasized that throughout the year, NBK maintained a steadfast focus on positioning its customers at the core of its priorities, supporting their financial goals through the provision of innovative digital services and products. Notably, the bank garnered several prestigious accolades during the year, including the recognition for being the most innovative bank worldwide in delivering digital banking services by Global Finance Magazine.

"As we navigate the opportunities and challenges that the year 2024 may present, our commitment remains unwavering in maintaining a focus on profitability, capital robustness and sustainable growth. We also acknowledge the importance of closely monitoring various challenges, particularly the escalating geopolitical tensions. Consequently, we approach the future with a sense of caution, mindful of the potential impacts on the operational environment in the region," Al-Sager said.

He highlighted that the Group, guided by a commitment to responsible leadership, has embraced a new trajectory for its ESG strategy through the formal adoption of a framework for ESG standards. This commitment is evident in the integration of ESG principles into products and services, including offerings such as green mortgage loans, consumer loans for electric cars, eco-friendly housing loans and sustainable finance value propositions.

In addition to that, NBK is committed to reducing its total operational emissions by 25 percent by 2025 and strives to achieve net-zero operationally by 2035. These efforts are integral to the Bank's comprehensive plans to attain carbon neutrality by 2060. These initiatives have played a role in improving NBK's MSCI ESG ratings to BBB, in their 2023 review.

### Financial Highlights For Year 2023





## Business

# As Tunisia's economy falters, medical tourism flourishes

## Sector generates around \$1.1 billion in annual revenues

**TUNIS:** At a fertility clinic in Tunis, Bintou Yunoussa hopes doctors can finally help her conceive — one of more than two million foreigners who travel to Tunisia annually for medical procedures. While Tunisians face economic hardships and their government is mired in debt, medical tourism has thrived and authorities are looking to expand the profitable sector even further.

Yunoussa, from Niger, said a relative had recommended the private clinic in the Tunisian capital after three years of unsuccessful treatments. "My sister-in-law had twins after an insemination carried out in Tunisia," the 25-year-old told AFP. "That's why I chose to come here."

She was accompanied by her sister Khadija, 32, who had her eggs frozen five months ago in the same clinic, which specializes in medically assisted reproduction. Nadia Fenina, a health ministry official, said Tunisia's highly specialized private clinics and skilled staff make it a leading medical tourism destination. "Tunisia is number one in Africa in terms of healthcare demand and supply," Fenina told AFP.

Medical tourism has bounced back from a coronavirus-era halt, and the sector generates around 3.5 billion dinars (\$1.1 billion) in annual revenues — about half of Tunisia's overall tourism income last year.

"Medical tourism is linked to the general tourism sector, because a foreign patient is also a tourist who generally does not come alone," said Fenina. "The promotion of medical tourism depends on the development of the tourism sector" as a whole, she added.

Accounting for nine percent of Tunisia's gross do-

mestic product, tourism is crucial for the debt-stricken country where the economy has slowed down, with a World Bank estimate putting growth for 2023 at a modest 1.2 percent. Last year, the small Mediterranean country of 12 million people drew nearly nine million tourists, according to official figures.

They included more than 500,000 foreign patients hospitalized in Tunisia and about two million others who had received same-day care, officials say.

### Chance to relax

The Tunis clinic where Yunoussa was treated received 450 patients for in vitro fertilization last year, many of whom from sub-Saharan African countries where some treatments may be unavailable or hard to access, said Dr Fethi Zhiwa. Others came from elsewhere in North Africa as well as Western countries like Britain, Switzerland and Canada, said the doctor, citing affordable rates and Tunisia's "world-renowned fertility specialists" as the main drawing points.

Many European medical tourists come for cosmetic surgery, representing 15 percent of all treatments for foreigners in Tunisia, Fenina said. Mohamed, a 59-year-old Libyan who gave his first name only, visits Tunisia twice a year to see his cardiologist for regular check-ups following an operation. "This doctor saved my life, I will never change him," he said.

Travelling with his wife, the couple planned to use the latest trip to also "spend a few days relaxing in Tabarka", a town on Tunisia's northwestern coast,



**TUNIS:** Tunisian doctor and professor of gynecology Fethi Zhiwa specializing in infertility, examines Bintou Yunoussa, 25, at a clinic in Tunis. — AFP

Mohamed said. Tourism has "strong potential" in Tunisia and can grow "if we overcome some obstacles and limitations", said Fenina.

Direct flights to more African destinations and simpler visa procedures could help, she said, "which is why we are working to implement a medical visa". The health ministry is also working on better coordination between medical tourism agencies, healthcare

providers and other stakeholders, and collaborating with the private sector to set up facilities geared towards an elderly European clientele.

While the country has seen an alarming rise in anti-migrant sentiment, marked by violence and fiery remarks last year by the president painting "hordes" of Africans as a threat, Yunoussa said she felt welcome in Tunisia. "I feel at home here," she said. — AFP

## Gulf Bank to announce Al-Danah millionaire winner on February 1

**KUWAIT:** With representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Ernst & Young in attendance, Gulf Bank will announce the grand prize winner in the annual draw for the Al-Danah Millionaire account on Thursday (Feb 1, 2024) at 10.30 am. The announcement will be made during a live broadcast ceremony from Al-Shaheed Park, accessible through the bank's social media channels. This momentous occasion signifies the 21st millionaire in the history of Al-Danah draws and holds particular significance as it announces the first winner following the increase in the prize's value to KD 2 million in 2023.

In celebration of this occasion, Mohammad Al-Qattan, General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, conveyed, "we are thrilled to broadcast this exceptional annual event to our customers, and we extend our best wishes to all eligible participants." Highlighting the bank's commitment to rewarding customers, he noted that the annual grand prize for the Al-Danah Millionaire account draw has been increased from KD 1.5 million to KD 2 million, solidifying its position as the world's largest cash prize linked to a bank account.

Al-Qattan explained that the annual draws for the Al-Danah Millionaire account consistently result in the recognition of two millionaires in notable draws



**Mohammad Al-Qattan**

Al-Qattan concluded by stating that the bank aims to solidify its leading position in Kuwait through the modification of the Al-Danah account draw structure and the introduction of innovative products and services, in line with customer aspirations and needs.

### Participation conditions

Conditions for participation are inclusive, open to both Kuwaitis and expatriates. To open an Al-Danah account, customers must maintain a minimum balance of KD 200. By keeping this balance, they automatically qualify for upcoming Al-Danah Millionaire draws. If the balance falls below KD 200, a monthly deduction of KD 2 will be applied until the minimum balance is restored. Opening a new account or depositing additional funds automatically makes customers eligible for the Al-Danah draws.

Gulf Bank encourages Al-Danah customers to enhance their chances of winning by increasing deposited amounts through the convenient online payment

service available on the bank's website and mobile application. Al-Danah Millionaire stands as one of Kuwait's oldest savings accounts, crafted to instill a culture of saving within the community and reward regular savers for their commitment. We urge everyone to open an Al-Danah account, save consistently, and enjoy the array of benefits it offers to customers.

### Key features

Among the many advantages provided to Al-Danah Millionaire account holders, it distinguishes itself as Kuwait's exclusive account that carries over the winning chances from the previous year to the next, highlighting Gulf Bank's unwavering commitment to acknowledging and rewarding customer loyalty.

Additionally, the Al-Danah Millionaire Account provides unique services, including the Al-Danah Exclusive Deposit Card service, enabling customers to deposit cash at their convenience. The calculator service, available on the bank's website (e-gulfbank.com/AlDanah) and mobile app, allows customers to assess their winning probabilities in the Al-Danah Millionaire monthly, quarterly, and annual draws.

To enter in the upcoming Al-Danah Millionaire draws, customers are required to uphold the specified balance. They have the option to visit Gulf Bank branches in person, conduct direct transfers through the online banking service, utilize the WhatsApp service at 1805805 for immediate inquiries, communicate with Gulf Bank's representatives, or contact the customer service center at the same number for assistance. Further information about the account and the winners can be found on the website.



## Microsoft, Google ride AI wave as revenues surge

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Microsoft and Google delivered solid corporate earnings on Tuesday as the tech giants said demand for artificial intelligence services stoked revenue. The tech titans have made big bets on generative AI, with their cloud computing divisions seeing a boost in demand as clients seek the hefty - and more expensive - computing power that drives the technology.

Microsoft has moved the fastest and furthest into the AI space, investing in ChatGPT-maker OpenAI and pushing AI across products while others chose to move more carefully. The company said sales leaped to \$62 billion for the October to December period, up 18 percent year-on-year and above the \$61.1 billion projected by analysts.

The AI revolution has helped propel Microsoft past Apple as the world's biggest company by market capitalization at more than three trillion dollars in value. The company's share price is up a staggering 70 percent from a year ago. "We've moved from talking about AI to applying AI at scale," said Satya Nadella, chairman and CEO of Microsoft.

Crucially, revenue for Microsoft's Azure cloud services jumped by 30 percent in the period, driven by the bigger computing needs that come with the adoption of AI. Overall, Microsoft's cloud services sales were up by 24 percent, the company said. "By infusing AI across every layer of our tech stack, we're winning new customers and helping drive new benefits and productivity gains across every sector," Nadella said.

Google also credited AI for boosting its profit in the same quarter. Alphabet reported a profit of \$20.7 billion on revenue of \$86.3 billion, with strong contributions from video-sharing platform YouTube and its cloud computing unit. Still mainly driven by ads, full-year revenue at Google reached \$307.4 billion, up 8.7 percent from the previous 12 months.

Ads brought in a total of \$65.5 billion in the quarter, compared with \$59 billion in the same period the prior year. While better than last year, this was lower than some market expectations and Google's share price was sharply lower in after hours trading on Wall Street.

But sales in Google's cloud-computing business climbed 26 percent, supporting the company's argument that it too is a major AI provider. Google trails Microsoft and Amazon's AWS, which are the world's top providers of cloud computing services. The search engine juggernaut has for years discreetly developed AI powers but was caught off guard when OpenAI in late 2022 released ChatGPT and teamed up with Microsoft to make its capabilities available to users worldwide.

Alphabet Chief Executive Sundar Pichai told an analyst call that his company's newly developed Gemini AI model would deliver new capabilities across all products for the company.

Matching moves by Microsoft with its office tools, Google has already infused its Google search engine as well as Gmail and other tools with AI's powers. — AFP



**Al-Dirwaza mega draw winner**

## KIB announces winner of Al-Dirwaza account's mega draw

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced the name of the winner in the first Al-Dirwaza account mega draw, based on customers' November and December balances. Fadhel Abdulkareem Fadhel Abdullah Al-Mansouri won the grand prize of KD 100,000 after the draw was held in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as well as representatives from the bank.

On this occasion, Ali Al-Sane, Manager - Product Development, Digital Innovation and Data Intelligence at KIB, said: "Today, we are witnessing significant success, notable interest, and strong motivation that encourage customers to save and enjoy the benefits and rewards of their savings. On this occasion, we are pleased to congratulate the winner of the first mega draw for Al-Dirwaza account. We wish all account customers greater chances of winning in the upcoming draws." He added: "At KIB, we constantly strive to be innovative in all solutions and products that enable us to reward our customers and achieve the highest levels of satisfaction and trust among them. This is done by offering the best banking experience that solidifies our relationships with them, meets their needs and expectations, and suits their modern lifestyle, in line with our main 'Bank for Life' slogan."

Al-Sane also noted that KIB continues to embrace an expansion strategy in its banking campaigns, aimed at encouraging customers to open

an Al-Dirwaza account digitally through the Bank's digital platforms. These platforms include the "KIB Online" platform and the "KIB Mobile" application.

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

Al-Dirwaza is a draw account as well, whereby numerous winners are announced throughout the year. Al-Dirwaza account holders are eligible to enter the monthly and mega draws on the condition of maintaining at least KD 100 in their accounts. Al-Dirwaza account is also in compliance with the provisions of Islamic sharia and approved by the KIB's Sharia Supervisory Board. Furthermore, the account comes with a wide range of benefits, including the ease of opening the account, which does not require a salary transfer, and the customer's ability to open it remotely without visiting a branch through KIB Online on the Bank's website or KIB Mobile application on smartphones.

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

## Qatar awards \$6bn in contracts for oilfield expansion

**DOHA:** Qatar has awarded engineering contracts worth \$6 billion for the expansion of its offshore Al-Shaheen oilfield, state-owned QatarEnergy said on Wednesday. The four engineering, installation and procurement contracts will increase production at the field — the country's largest — by 100,000 barrels per day, according to the firm. "By awarding these contracts, we are taking an important step towards realizing the full potential of Al-Shaheen field, which produces around half of Qatar's crude oil today," said Energy Minister Saad Al-Kaabi, who is also QatarEnergy CEO.

Al-Shaheen, some 80 kilometers (50 miles) off Qatar's northeastern coast, currently produces 300,000 barrels per day and is operated through the North Oil Company, a joint venture between QatarEnergy and France's TotalEnergies which holds a 30 percent stake. "I would like to thank North Oil Company and our longtime strategic partner TotalEnergies for their great efforts towards unlocking the true potential of Qatar's hydrocarbon resources," Kaabi said in a statement. —

## US private sector job gains slow more than expected

**WASHINGTON:** Private sector hiring in the United States fell more than anticipated in January, according to data Wednesday from payroll firm ADP, following efforts to cool the world's biggest economy and tame inflation. The United States added 107,000 jobs in the private sector this month, ADP said, slowing from a revised 158,000 in December. Most of the job gains were in service-providing sectors including leisure and hospitality and trade, transport and utilities. But other service industries such as information lost positions. "Progress on inflation has brightened the economic picture despite a slowdown in hiring and pay," said Nela Richardson, ADP chief economist, in a statement. A resilient labor market has helped to support consumers and in turn, spending, even as households drew down on their pandemic-era savings and as higher interest rates raised borrowing costs. The Federal Reserve lifted interest rates rapidly in recent years, aiming to quell a surge in inflation by easing demand. — AFP

# Boubyan Bank records net profit of KD 80.4 million for year 2023

Bank registers a profit growth rate of 39% • Board recommends cash dividends of 8 fils, 6% bonus shares

- We are looking forward to increasing our market share and developing solutions and services to meet the increasing demand
- Boubyan completed its 5-year strategic plan "Boubyan 2023" expanding locally, regionally and internationally

- Innovative and creative staff ideas increase the bank's productivity and profitability
- Supporting and empowering entrepreneurs and business owners tops the priorities of Boubyan's strategy
- Nomo launched many products and services on par with top international financial institutions

KUWAIT: Boubyan Bank recorded a net profit of KD 80.4 million for the year 2023; a growth rate of 39 percent compared with 2022, with an earnings per share of 18.8 fils; while continuing its precautionary approach by allocating KD 31.7 million in provisions. The Board recommended cash dividends of 8 fils and 6 percent bonus shares.

Chairman of Boubyan Bank Abdulaziz Abdullah Dakheel Al-Shaya commented: "We are very happy with the continued growth of our financial results in 2023, which reflects the robustness of our financial position, the sustainability of our profits, and the success of Boubyan's strategy aiming towards perfection and to reinforce the bank's status as one of the major financial institutions regionally, and the third largest bank in terms of financing portfolio and total assets in the Kuwaiti market."

Al-Shaya pointed out that all of the bank's key indicators witnessed a remarkable growth in 2023, where the total combined assets of Boubyan Bank Group increased to KD 8.4 billion at a growth rate of 7 percent. Moreover, the total of customers' deposits grew by 9 percent to reach KD 6.5 billion, while the financing portfolio grew by 7 percent to reach KD 6.3 billion, and operating income grew by 8 percent to reach KD 218 million.

Al-Shaya sincerely thanked the shareholders, investors, and all Boubyan's customers for their confidence and loyalty to the bank, and reiterated the Board's full and ongoing support to the efforts of the bank's highly-professional executive management, which wisely steers the bank towards achieving the best results, while thanking all the bank's employees for their dedication throughout last year.

## A year of achievements and solid performance

On his part, Boubyan Bank's Vice-Chairman & Group Chief Executive Officer Adel Abdul Wahab Al-Majed stated: "Year 2023 witnessed the achievement of goals, milestones, and expansions, regionally and internationally, thanks to the solid pillars upon which the Group's vision and strategy are based. The Bank completed its 5-year strategic plan "Boubyan 2023" started back in 2019, with the objective of positively transforming its business operations to make Boubyan an exceptional banking model that makes its mark in the Islamic banking industry."

He added: "As we celebrated our 19th anniversary since the start of Boubyan's journey marked with successful banking milestones, the bank managed - through well-studied approach - to become a leading franchise despite the fierce competition among the banking sector's institutions, thus following a tailored path that reinforces customer satisfaction levels, leading to the achievement of a 96 percent customer-satisfaction score among all Islamic and conventional local banks."

"The bank's market share and its ongoing growth reflect the high levels in customer service and digital excellence, which are the outcome of the bank's clear strategy, professional executive team, and continued investment in our human resources with special focus on our national cadres", Al-Majed added.

## Awards and international ratings

In 2023, the bank received 22 awards, recognitions, and international ratings from renowned global institutions across various domains and business sectors, which reinforced our banking and digital leadership and emphasized the strength of

**Abdulaziz Al-Shaya: Financial results reflect the bank's solid financial position and the success of our strategy to reinforce the bank's status as one of the major financial institutions in the region**



**Adel Al-Majed: Boubyan stands out as an exceptional banking model, making its mark in the Islamic banking industry**



the strategy the bank has been adopting since many years locally, regionally, and internationally.

In recognition of the bank's excellence in developing solutions and its long-established leadership in digital transformation, the bank received the award for the "World's Best Islamic Digital Bank" for the 9th consecutive year, and the awards for the "Best Islamic Digital Bank in Kuwait", the "Best Islamic Digital Bank in the Middle East", and the "Best SME Banking in Kuwait - Digital" from Global Finance.

Additionally, the bank received the award for the "World's Best Islamic Retail Bank", and was ranked as the "Safest Islamic Financial Institution in Kuwait", and the second safest one GCC-wide by Global Finance as well, in addition to being named the "Most Transformed Islamic Bank" and the "Best Bank for Digital Solutions" by Euromoney.

At the corporate finance level, Boubyan Bank received the award of the "World's Best Islamic Structured Products House" by Euromoney. This emphasized the bank's leadership in acquiring a share of corporate finance in the Kuwaiti market, and reinforcing its competitive abilities in offering outstanding corporate financing solutions and products.

Moreover, Boubyan Bank continued topping the pyramid of customer service in Kuwait, evidenced by earning two awards from Service Hero, the international consumer-driven customer satisfaction index. The bank was named the Best Islamic Bank in Customer Service for the 13th year in a row since 2010, in addition to receiving the First Place Award in Customer Service as a Country Winner across all economic sectors in Kuwait.

Furthermore, our ratings from Moody's, S&P, and Fitch remain stable at A2, A, and A respectively. As for the ex-government support (or xgs) rating assigned by Fitch, the introduction of such new criteria communicates Fitch's view of the creditworthiness of Boubyan excluding assumptions of extraordinary government support. Boubyan was assigned the second highest rating in Kuwait as per such criteria.

## Products and services

Boubyan offers a group of innovative services, products, and digital solutions through its retail and corporate Apps. Such offerings add value to customers and show the bank's keenness to maintain its leadership in innovation to ensure supporting its customers, enriching their banking experience, and making things easier, especially amid the competition across various business sectors. This reflects the bank's ongoing approach to develop the digital infrastructure and to offer the best services in the field of digital payments.

In 2023, Boubyan opened a number of new branches, bringing the number to 48 branches across Kuwait, which were fully upgraded and modernized as per the latest international systems and standards. The branches were well-manned with

competent banking professionals along with all resources that guarantee customers enjoy a swift, convenient, smooth, and unique banking experience that keeps pace with the developments of banking services.

As regards business accounts, Boubyan took it upon itself to empower their holders with the necessary experience to apply on the ground, and to incentivize their growth opportunities through the launch of SoftPOS available through the SoftPOS App, and the launch of the new update of the e-Pay service, which enables the digital collection of payments. The new update added new payment solutions with exceptional features, most of which were offered for the first time in Kuwait, such as the "Payments Scheduling" and "e-Pay Mandoob" services, and the "eRent" service available on the corporate App to help them manage and follow-up with their investment properties, and to collect monthly rents digitally all through one digital platform.

In an attempt by the bank to provide customers with unique banking experiences, this year saw Boubyan Bank's launch of its new Premium Account, which is a custom-tailored product to its affluent customers, bringing them unique services and products that meet their daily needs and make them easier inside and outside Kuwait.

## Corporate social responsibility

With the conclusion of 2023, Boubyan managed to stand out as an excellent role model in CSR and in the support of sustainability through many events and initiatives that made a clear mark and emphasized the bank's social excellence, as well as its ongoing plans, which were crowned with the "World's Best Islamic Bank for CSR" by Global Finance in recognition of the bank's prominent CSR role in supporting various segments of the society, which confirms that the bank is on the right track to reinforce sustainable development inside and outside Kuwait.

The most outstanding aspect about Boubyan Bank's CSR approach is its diverse domains through the bank's various contributions, and volunteer and charitable efforts, which suit different age segments. For example, the CSR program covers health, sports, youth, educational, environmental, and many other activities in areas that have a significant influence on the bank's successful journey, and its improvement towards achieving sustained growth.

Boubyan Bank continued its successful humanitarian initiatives through its 6th Noor Boubyan Campaign, which headed for the Islamic Republic of Mauritania in collaboration with the International Islamic Charitable Organization and the Dinarain Initiative to continue the campaign's humanitarian mission in developing countries, through the performance of more than 14,000 cataract-removal surgeries over 6 campaigns across a number of African countries, with the

participation of a group of Kuwaiti volunteer doctors.

To continue supporting the projects of young Kuwaitis, Boubyan organized Kuwait Coffee Festival's activities in collaboration with more than 45 restaurants and specialty coffee shops of young Kuwaiti entrepreneurs, which was well-attended by more than 88,000 visitors over the 2-day festival amid unique family and entertaining atmosphere, with a group of various activities, events, and prizes.

## Our human resources... the pillar of success

We can safely say that Boubyan's employees are one of the main pillars of its continued success, as they embrace and adopt Boubyan's future vision, the thing which comes in line with the principle of diverse job roles at the workplace, which greatly contributes to the introduction of innovative and creative ideas and deliverables, which significantly increase the bank's productivity and profitability.

As a result, the bank managed to reach the highest percentage of national manpower across the private sector, which now exceeds 81 percent, while effectively taking many decisions that largely contributed to an increased number of women in leadership positions, along with the overall increase of female cadres at the bank who now account for 30 percent.

## Nomo Bank ... International expansion

In 2023, Nomo Bank, the digital bank of the Bank of London and the Middle East "BLME", a subsidiary of Boubyan Bank Group, launched unique products and services that put it on par with top financial institutions. Additionally, Nomo inked new partnership agreements such as the partnership with Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank "ADCB" and Al-Hilal Digital Bank to give citizens and residents of UAE an opportunity to benefit from the innovative services and solutions by Nomo Bank through ADCB - Nomo and Al-Hilal Nomo Apps.

Moreover, Nomo launched its new multicurrency account, which allows customers to perform their banking transactions in six different currencies, enabling them to make payments in local currencies in more than 25 countries spanned across Europe and the Middle East within seconds using Nomo App, in addition to immediately benefiting from remittance and fund-transfer services, coupled with the possibility of automatically linking the account with Nomo Card and Apple Pay.

Nomo managed to position itself as one of the best sharia-compliant property finance options in the United Kingdom, as it offers a group of integrated real estate, finance, and advisory services related to ownership of real estate properties in the UK market to its customers in Kuwait and the region, through partnerships with major real estate companies such as Ayan Real Estate, Blueprint, and Great Portland.

## US Fed rate decision could hold clues on timing of future cuts

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve is almost certain to hold its key lending rate steady for a fourth consecutive meeting Wednesday, as inflation continues to inch closer towards its long-term target of two percent.

But analysts and traders will be looking beyond the headline figure — which is likely to remain unchanged — for any indication of how soon the US central bank could start cutting rates.

Following a post-pandemic surge in inflation, the Fed rapidly hiked interest rates in a bid to bring the price-increase measurement back down towards its goal of two percent — with surprising success.

In recent months, the Fed's target inflation rate, which strips out volatile food and energy prices, recently fell below an annual 3.0 percent, while economic growth remained robust at 2.5 percent in 2023 and unemployment stayed close to historic lows.

"The data to date has been stunningly good," KPMG chief economist Diane Swonk wrote in a blog post this week. But despite the strong numbers, the Fed's work remains unfinished. That is why policymakers on the rate-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) are widely expected to keep the central bank's key lending rate unchanged Wednesday at a 23-year high of between 5.25 and 5.50 percentage points. This week's meeting should serve "to confirm that the FOMC has left behind its tightening bias and has more intensely begun the discussion around rate cuts," Deutsche Bank economists wrote in a note to clients.

The hints could either come in the rate decision itself, or in Fed Chair Jerome Powell's press conference later in the day. But Powell must also "be cautious to curb his enthusiasm at the press conference so that he does not inadvertently trigger a major financial market rally," as happened after the last rate decision in December.

In its December meeting, the Fed raised its economic outlook for the year ahead, and signaled it expects as many as three quarter-percentage-point rate cuts in 2024, sparking a wave of optimism in financial markets that the central bank could cut rates as soon as March. When the Fed lowers interest rates, US consumers usually get cheaper access to credit, meaning the cost of everything from car loans to mortgages becomes cheaper, while company valuations see a boost. — AFP

## LuLu Hypermarket launches 'Hala Shop & Win' promotion

KUWAIT: LuLu Hypermarket, the regional retail leader, celebrated Kuwait's festival month of 'Hala February', with the launch of an exciting 'Hala Shop & Win' promotion that runs from Feb 1 to March 16 at all LuLu Hypermarket outlets in the country. The six-week long promotion that extends throughout the month of February and well into mid-March provides shoppers with a one-off opportunity to shop unhurriedly at their own pace for a range of products that are being offered at special discounts, while enjoying the

many celebratory events featured during the promotion period. A special promotional offer during the 'Hala Shop & Win' festival is the chance to win several enticing prizes, with every purchase of KD 5. Among the exciting prizes are a Nissan Patrol SUV for one lucky winner, two Nissan XTrails for two winners, and 30 iPhones of the latest iPhone 15 Pro version for 30 lucky winners.

Hala Shop & Win promotion not only provides shoppers with the chance to shop for products at amazing discounts, but also gives lucky winners the incredible opportunity to drive away in a legendary Nissan vehicle or own the latest iPhone.

LuLu Hypermarket went all out with their Hala Shop & Win festival to make the month of Hala February memorable for shoppers with a host of celebratory events, promotional offers, discounts and much more, which ensured that customers not only enjoyed their shopping experience but also had the opportunity to win big. With the Hala



Shop & Win promotion, LuLu Hypermarket once again proved its commitment to customer satisfaction, and to provide them with an unforgettable shopping experience during each visit to the hypermarket.

## Mine-to-motor lithium supply chain takes shape in Germany

**BITTERFELD-WOLFEN, Germany:** Once a byword for environmental disaster due to its heavy industry and mining, the city of Bitterfeld-Wolfen is poised to become a key site for Germany's ambitious green transition.

It is here that the country's first large-scale lithium refinery has been set up, with an aim to play a pivotal role in a European plan to mine and refine its own supplies of raw materials needed to power a fleet of new-generation vehicles. The white powder the plant will start pumping out from May is a key ingredient in electric car batteries and part of the European Union's recipe to reduce its dependency on foreign imports. The take-off in demand for batteries was "foreseeable", said AMG's CEO Stefan Scherer, and his company has been "able to ride the wave".

Bitterfeld-Wolfen in eastern Germany had been picked to house the new factory because of its "proximity to clients", Scherer said. The plant's installation closer to battery makers could counter supply risks for Europe, whose reliance on imports has come to be seen as a liability amid rising geo-

political tensions — most notably with China.

The Asian giant is not the biggest producer of raw lithium, but possesses a majority of the world's processing capacity, as well as a big chunk of battery production.

The exposure to potentially unreliable suppliers — and a desire to have a larger share of the industry — is behind EU plans unveiled last year to increase domestic extraction and processing of lithium and 33 other "critical" materials. "We are already in talks with politicians to discuss the financial resources for future expansion," said Scherer, whose factory is at the centre of the new network.

The first module at AMG's plant will be able to produce 20,000 tons of lithium hydroxide annually — enough for around half a million car batteries, depending on the size, said Scherer. More units could be added over time to increase production fivefold to 100,000 tons, enough to cover "up to 20 percent" of the demand in Europe, he speculated. The EU plan to secure supplies aims to do 40 percent of its processing for the designated critical materials domestically by 2030.



BITTERFELD-WOLFEN, Germany: The construction site of AMG Lithium GmbH, a subsidiary based in Germany and part of the AMG Clean Energy Materials division of AMG Critical Materials NV at the Bitterfeld site in Bitterfeld-Wolfen, eastern Germany. — AFP

For German industry — and particularly automakers — bringing lithium production closer to home "increases their resilience in case of international supply chain tension", said Yoann Gimbert, e-mobility analyst at the Transport and Environment think tank.

Companies that need to exchange raw material supplies quickly to get a product that meets their standards could be a case in point. "Instead of having to laboriously ship these containers back to Asia via Hamburg,

you can bring them a few 100 kilometers here to Bitterfeld either by truck or ideally by train and we can exchange them practically within a few days," Scherer said.

While the AMG's project will initially be supplied with lithium from the company's mine in Brazil, the raw product could eventually come from closer to home. Close to Germany's border with France, the Australia-based group Vulcan Energy began a pilot scheme at the end of last year to filter lithium from

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2024

## Iran plays on color at fashion exhibition



Visitors, including fashion and clothing designers, visit the annual exhibition on fashion and clothes designed by young Iranian designers, at the Sadabad Palace Complex, north of the Iranian capital Tehran.

**M**oving away from dark clothing, Iranian designers are trying to strike a fine balance between a growing trend favoring bright colors and the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women. "As a young woman, I choose clothes in a modern design with bright colors," 22-year-old designer Hadis Hassanlou told AFP at a fashion exhibition in the historic Saadabad Palace in Tehran.

Since shortly after the 1979 revolution, women in Iran have had to observe a strict dress code and wear loose-fitting garments while also covering the head and neck. When they venture out into the streets, many women opt for head-to-toe black chadors. But in recent years, Iranian designers have also sought to include brighter colors in their creations. New designs at the exhibition, where some 50 garments were on show, included everything from black chadors to long floral-patterned dresses and coats fitted at the waist.

"When designing, I first take society's norms and rules into consideration," said designer Sanaz Sarparasti. She says her colorful designs aimed to keep up with growing trends among young Iranian women. They "want to be freer, more modern and more up-to-date in how and what they wear", Sarparasti said. The strict dress code for women has been the subject of heated debate since nationwide protests following the death in custody in September 2022 of Mahsa Amini.

Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian Kurd, had been arrested for allegedly breaching the dress code. During the protests, many women demonstrators cast off their headscarves or even burned them. Others increasingly began to flout the clothing rules, leading to a severe crackdown by the authorities.

### Strict norms

Designers say the shift to brighter colors has not been easy, especially as many women still stick to darker shades. "Societal norms and the country's regulations often require darker colors," said Afshin Parsaee. "We still need to produce them as well," the designer said. Besides wearing a hijab covering the head and neck, women who work in government offices are required to wear dark, long Islamic uniforms. At the exhibition, Culture Minister Mohammad Esmaili said clothing was "the most important cultural symbol of any civilization", and hailed what he called the "modest" characteristic of Islamic clothing in Iran.

Hassanlou said she has sought to combine colors with Iran's traditional art of calligraphy in her designs which she says are derived from "original Persian fashion" that has evolved over thousands of years. "One of my goals when designing an outfit is that it be modern and colorful, even while following calligraphic tradition," she said. Others hope to see their work one day in prominent fashion capitals.

"We've put on the agenda promoting Persian clothing fashion week in Paris, Milan and London," said Hadis Pazouki, head of the country's national fashion, clothing and lifestyle foundation. "We believe that exquisite Per-



This photograph shows creations displayed during the annual exhibition on fashion and clothes designed by young Iranian designers, at the Sadabad Palace Complex, north of the Iranian capital Tehran. — AFP photos



A visitor looks at creations displayed during the annual exhibition on fashion and clothes designed by young Iranian designers.



Visitors, including fashion and clothing designers, visit the annual exhibition on fashion and clothes designed by young Iranian designers.



This photograph shows creations displayed during the annual exhibition on fashion and clothes designed by young Iranian designers.



sian clothes can be worn by anyone, not only Iranians."

For fashion exhibition visitor Fatemeh Fazeli, 19, the shift to brighter colors has been a welcome change. "I can never wear a dark-colored headscarf ... except at funerals," she said. "When you wear bright colors your mood changes and you feel better." — AFP



This photograph shows a creation displayed during the annual exhibition on fashion and clothes designed by young Iranian designers.



This photograph shows creations displayed during the annual exhibition on fashion and clothes designed by young Iranian designers.



A visitor looks at a creation displayed during the annual exhibition on fashion and clothes designed by young Iranian designers.



A visitor looks at creations displayed during the annual exhibition on fashion and clothes designed by young Iranian designers.



Visitors at the annual exhibition on fashion and clothes designed by young Iranian designers.



A visitor looks at creations displayed during the annual exhibition on fashion and clothes designed by young Iranian designers.

# Bolivian prisoners pass time, earn money building miniature cars



Aerial view of the San Pedro prison in La Paz.— AFP photos



Tin cars made by inmates of the San Pedro prison are sold outside the prison in La Paz.



An inmate of the San Pedro prison makes a tin car to be sold at the Alasita fair in La Paz.

In a prison in La Paz, inmate Julio Mamani beats a metal sheet from which he is building a tiny truck his wife will try and sell at a craft fair. She will take it to the La Alasita market, where Bolivians flock once a year to buy scaled-down model vehicles, houses and other items that according to the Aymara Indigenous belief will one day bring them the same items, but in real life. The tradition has proved a boon for prisoners like 59-year-old Mamani who sell their creations for between \$10 and \$30 apiece.

Mamani spoke with AFP from a cell that serves as a kitchen and workshop where he makes miniatures with three other inmates of the overcrowded San Pedro prison. Built in the 1990s for 400 inmates, San Pedro today houses about 3,800. Mamani, who did not want to talk about the criminal accusations against him, said he had not been to court for a year despite the law limiting pre-trial detention to six months.

Only about a third of Bolivia's 24,824 prisoners have been convicted of a crime, according to the ombudsman's office, which estimates overcrowding at about 168 percent. Despite his predicament, Mamani welcomes the chance to learn a new skill and earn some money for his family. He made about 120 miniature cars and trucks for his first market a year ago, he said, mainly from old milk cans his wife brings on visits with the permission from the prison authority.

The Alasita craft fair, Bolivia's biggest, opened Wednesday for three weeks, as part of a festival honoring Ekeko, a deity of abundance. David Lujan, serving a 12-year-sentence for a crime he declined to reveal, makes motorcycle replicas mainly out of wood at San Pedro, where he participated in carpentry classes.

"It helps to keep busy" and to "earn a bit of money," the 29-year-old told AFP. He intends to pursue the skill further once he is free. "I like art and miniatures. I feel proud," he said. Prison director Juan Carlos Limpas told AFP the inmates and their ingenuity were proof that "nothing is impossible." "They are doing impossible things despite the limitations of overcrowding," he told AFP.— AFP



An inmate of the San Pedro prison makes a tin car to be sold at the Alasita fair in La Paz.



An inmate of the San Pedro prison shows a motorcycle he made with wood to be sold at the Alasita fair in La Paz.



An inmate of the San Pedro prison works with wood to make handicrafts to be sold at the Alasita fair in La Paz.



An inmate of the San Pedro prison makes a tin car to be sold at the Alasita fair in La Paz.



View of the workshop where inmates of the San Pedro prison make handicrafts to be sold at the Alasita fair in La Paz.



An inmate of the San Pedro prison works with wood to make handicrafts to be sold at the Alasita fair in La Paz.



Inmates of the San Pedro prison make tin cars to be sold at the Alasita fair in La Paz.

## Lifestyle

# 'Tim-Houthi Chalamet': Handsome TikToker spreads Yemen rebels' message

Gazing smoulderingly into the camera as he boards a hijacked ship, a young influencer is gaining attention as he promotes a controversial cause: Yemen's Houthi rebels and their attacks in the Red Sea. Rashed Al-Haddad, 19, has become a minor celebrity for his social media posts, some set to triumphant music and showing him brandishing the red, white and black flag of Yemen, with a large ceremonial dagger thrust into his belt. Though not a member of the Iran-backed group, the telegenic TikToker with cherubic curls, who lives in the rebel-held capital Sanaa, has been dubbed "Tim-Houthi Chalamet" by social media users for his resemblance to "Wonka" star Timothee Chalamet.

"I received many offers to participate in fashion shows and advertisements, but I decided to take advantage of this fame for the Palestinian cause," he told AFP. Haddad's profile has grown alongside the rise in international attention on war-torn Yemen after Houthi attacks on shipping — launched, the group says, in protest at the Zionist entity's war against Palestinian Hamas militants in Gaza — triggered US and British reprisal strikes.

The attacks led the United States to redesignate the Houthi a "terrorist" organization, with ships being diverted thousands of miles around Africa and threatening to disrupt everything from car factories to natural gas deliveries. The fresh-faced teen received millions of views for his video of a trip to the Galaxy Leader, the Zionist-linked cargo ship that was captured in November and is now being paraded as a trophy of war. He presents an alternative to the grizzled image of the Iran-backed Houthi, who seized Yemen's capital in 2014. A Saudi-led coalition intervened the following year to prop up the internationally recognized government, plunging the country into a brutal war that has since resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths.

### 'Millions of views'

"When I started on TikTok, I posted videos of the ship (Galaxy Leader) that was seized by the Yemenis. When I posted the video clips, they reached millions of views within four days," he told AFP in Sanaa, wearing a combat belt with a rifle slung across his lap. "After that, the account was banned (by TikTok) and deleted permanently." Haddad



Rashed Al-Haddad, 19, a Yemeni TikToker and influencer, who has been dubbed "Tim-Houthi Chalamet" by Western Internet wags for his resemblance to "Wonka" star Timothee Chalamet, talks to a friend on the phone during an interview at his home in the Houthi-controlled capital Sanaa. — AFP photos

said his Instagram account with 70,000 followers was also deleted along with his Facebook profile. Both platforms, owned by Meta, ban hate speech.

In contrast to Haddad's videos, the Houthi are often seen holding mass demonstrations where weapon-toting crowds chant: "Death to Israel, death to America!" "Three of my TikTok accounts were banned as well, but I have created new accounts, and thankfully, the num-

ber of followers is increasing," Haddad said, shrugging off comparisons with Hollywood's Chalamet. "I did not care that (social media users) compared me to this actor, but I was happy in another way," he said.

"I was happy that I would be able to send messages to the West, because many foreigners followed me." Haddad also insisted that despite the focus on his looks, he remained committed to

his cause. "I'm not interested in being famous because of my handsomeness, there is definitely something more important," he said. "I'm not thinking of becoming famous because I'm handsome in order to do advertisements or to be an actor. "The most important thing is our basic cause, Palestine, and we are all on the side of Palestine." — AFP



## App lets Indigenous Brazilians connect in own languages

Aerial view shows the Parque das Tribos neighborhood, where indigenous people from 35 ethnic groups are currently living in Manaus, state of Amazonas, Brazil.



Tikuna's Indigenous woman, Cristina Quirino Mariano, writes a message using the app Linklado.



Tikuna's Indigenous woman Cristina Quirino Mariano writes a message using the app Linklado.



Witoto's Indigenous leader and teacher, Vanda Witoto, writes a message using the app Linklado in Manaus, Amazonas State, northern Brazil. - AFP photos

For Indigenous communities in the Brazilian Amazon, getting online is a challenge. Now, a smartphone app is making it easier to connect by allowing them to use their own native languages. Hyper-connected Brazil has more cell phones than people — over 250 million, for a population of 203 million, according to communications consultancy Teleco.

But even when they have smartphones and Internet connections, the sprawling country's 1.7 million Indigenous inhabitants have often been excluded from the connectivity revolution, since devices typically have keyboards in Brazilian Portuguese and not Indigenous languages. "Linklado," an app developed by two young friends from the Amazon region, offers a fix: It is a digital keyboard enabling native communities to write with the mix of Latin letters, bars, swoops, accents and other marks used in many Indigenous alphabets in Brazil.

Launched in 2022, it is helping Indigenous users communicate with each other and the world, whether from far-flung villages deep in the Amazon or the cities and towns that dot the region.

"Linklado has done so much good for Indigenous peoples, including me," says Cristina Quirino Mariano, 30, a member of the Tikuna people. "Before, we couldn't write on our phones. Now we can," she told AFP, speaking Portuguese, Brazil's official language. The original inhabitants of the land now known as Brazil had oral traditions before Portuguese colonizers arrived in the 16th century.

When Europeans began writing

down these languages, they denoted the different sounds by adapting the Latin alphabet with symbols known as "diacritics." But these alphabets were unavailable on cell phones — until now.

The situation "left Indigenous people sending audio messages on their phones, because they couldn't write exactly what they wanted to say," says



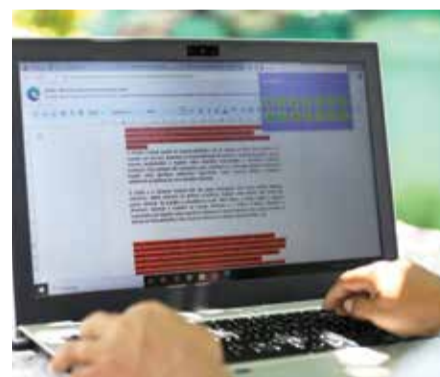
Tikuna's Indigenous woman Cristina Quirino Mariano shows a book she translated into the Tikuna language using the Linklado app.

Noemia Ishikawa, Linklado's project coordinator. The 51-year-old biologist had trouble getting her own research translated. "I spent 14 years complaining we needed a keyboard to fix this problem," she says.

### Four-day challenge

Today, "the app works for every Indigenous language in the Amazon," around 40 in all, says Juliano Portela,

who developed it with a friend, Samuel Benzecry, when he was just 17. Both natives of the Amazon region in northern Brazil, the pair are now studying in the United States. Benzecry, who knew about the difficulties some of their Indigenous neighbors had writing on their phones, enlisted Portela, a programming whiz, to find a solution. "At first, I



Tikuna's Indigenous woman Cristina Quirino Mariano writes a message using the app Linklado.

was going to make a physical keyboard. But then I realized it wouldn't be practical, because some Indigenous people don't have computers," Portela told AFP.

"It took us four days to make the app. We had no idea it would be so fast." They began testing their creation in May 2022, then launched the official version that August. It has been downloaded more than 3,000 times since. But the number of users is higher. "A lot

of Indigenous people are still using the test version we sent out on WhatsApp, which people forwarded to each other," Portela says.

### Getting paid to translate

Linklado is free. But it offers an option for non-speakers to pay to have texts translated into Indigenous languages. The revenue-generating project is helping Indigenous women — who are often left out of Latin America's biggest economy — earn income with their knowledge of local languages. Rosilda Cordeiro da Silva, a 61-year-old Indigenous languages teacher, is part of the app's pool of translators. "It's been very positive for me," she says.

Having the digital keyboard, she adds, "has made me surer of myself when I translate." The app is also helping the effort to save Indigenous languages at risk of dying out. Vanda Witoto, a 35-year-old Indigenous activist, hopes it will help "save the Bure language, which is spoken by the Witoto people."

"This keyboard means we don't have to use characters that don't belong to our language," she says. Beyond the Amazon, saving endangered languages is a global challenge. Fully half the world's languages — mostly Indigenous ones — are at risk of disappearing by the turn of this century, according to a 2018 report by the United Nations. — AFP



Tikuna's Indigenous woman Cristina Quirino Mariano shows her son Roney de Misacki how to use the app Linklado.



Tikuna's Indigenous woman Cristina Quirino Mariano writes a message using the app Linklado.

## Sports

# England hint at all-spin attack as depleted India look to level series

## Coach hints Bashir could start if England go 'quids-in' with spin attack

**VISAKHAPATNAM:** Ben Stokes' England side could go with an all-spin bowling attack against an inexperienced India batting line-up when the second Test begins in Visakhapatnam on Friday. Rohit Sharma's side suffered only their fourth home defeat in 47 Tests since 2013 last week in Hyderabad as England came from 190 runs behind on first innings to record a stunning 28-run victory.

India will be without seasoned Test players Virat Kohli, KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja as they attempt to level the five-match series on a pitch that is expected to turn sharply from the start. They have brought in uncapped batsmen Rajat Patidar and Sarfaraz Khan to replace the injured Rahul and Kohli, who opted out of the first two Tests for personal reasons.

Spinner Washington Sundar comes into the squad for Jadeja. England's uncapped spinner Shoaib Bashir finally joined his England teammates on Sunday after a visa delay. Coach Brendon McCullum hinted Bashir could start if England go "quids-in" with a four-pronged spin attack.

"We won't be afraid to play all our spinners," New Zealander McCullum told SEN Radio as England look to extend their series lead to 2-0. Left-arm spinner Tom Hartley took nine wickets on debut in Hyderabad but lone pace spearhead Mark Wood toiled for 25 wicketless overs meaning Bashir "comes into the calculations," said McCullum.

"We'll have a look at conditions and make a call. You're not going to get every call right, especially over here," he added. Slow bowlers accounted for 18 of India's 20 wickets in the first Test, the other two were run-outs, and England will decide their line-up

after assessing conditions in the southern city. "It's hard to read some of the wickets but we'll make a decision and go quids-in on trying to commit to that. Then we'll see where we land," said McCullum.

### 'Line-up looks weak'

"Baz" McCullum and skipper Stokes have led a huge turnaround for England's fortunes with 14 wins in 19 Tests on the back of a swashbuckling style of play dubbed "Bazball". Former India spinner Harbhajan Singh warned that India's lack of Test batting experience was a worry. "Yes, there is Rohit Sharma, but the next best run-scorer is (Ravichandran) Ashwin," he said on his YouTube commentary channel.

"In terms of batting, the line-up looks weak," he added, saying that a tricky spinning pitch could work against the hosts. "This batting unit is young, they need time, and if they get a good track, they might even perform well," he said.

England's Ollie Pope demonstrated how to handle conditions in the second innings in Hyderabad with an outstanding 196 to turn the game on its head. Pope's 112-run sixth-wicket stand with wicketkeeper-batsman Ben Foakes, who made 34, was peppered with sweep shots both sides of the wicket that blunted the Indian spin attack.

"Quite a few of the lads have a game plan that will do well on those pitches," said Foakes. "It's more of a mindset shift of how to go about it, because in those conditions the bowler is a massive favourite to win the contest.

"Before there was a fear of getting out and that put us in our shells. "Accepting that you probably are



**HYDERABAD:** In this file photo England's Ben Duckett is clean bowled by India's Jasprit Bumrah during the third day of the first Test cricket match between India and England at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad on January 27, 2024. — AFP

(going to get out) on those sorts of surfaces, you can actually go and dominate at times as well." India have been unbeaten in a home Test series since England,

under Alastair Cook, won in 2012. On England's last tour three years ago, India recovered from losing the first Test to take the four-match series 3-1. — AFP

## Pakistan host India Davis Cup tie for first time in 60 years

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan host arch-political foe India this weekend in their first Davis Cup tennis clash on home soil in six decades — one of the few encounters in any sport between the two nations in years. The two sides meet in a Group 1 playoff fixture on the grass courts of the Pakistan Sports Complex in Islamabad, although it has yet to be decided if spectators will be allowed because of security concerns.

When India and Pakistan were forged out of violent partition 76 years ago, the split also created one of sport's greatest rivalries — mostly in cricket, but also in hockey and other events. But political differences over Kashmir mean sporting teams from each side rarely visit the other unless taking part in sanctioned multi-national events.

"Hopefully this tie will act as an example of a bridge between Pakistan and India, as I'll love to see the Indian cricket team play in our country in the near future," home player Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi told AFP.

India team manager Sunil Jayman said the team were looking forward to the tie. "The whole team is extremely happy and excited to be in Pakistan," he told AFP. India last played a Davis Cup match against Pakistan in 2019, winning 4-0 in neutral Kazakhstan. Pakistan last played on Indian soil in 2006, according to news outlet India Today.

Neither side is rated particularly high in the world tennis pecking order, but Pakistan's Qureshi said he expected a competitive clash. "Three of their players are in the top 100 of the world doubles rankings while the singles players are also competitive — especially on the grass court," he said.

"We'll try our level best to compete and give our all on the court." The two doubles and two singles matches take place on Saturday and Sunday, with Monday set aside as a reserve day in case of rain. — AFP

## France reduces crowd numbers for Olympics opening ceremony

**PARIS:** The French government announced Wednesday that it had slashed the crowd size for the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics this July amid security and other organizational worries. The traditional opening parade for the Games is set to take place in boats on the river Seine on July 26, the first time a summer Olympics has opened outside the main athletics stadium. After months of speculation about the number of people permitted to watch the flotilla, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin told the France 2 channel on Tuesday "around 300,000" ticketed fans would attend.

That is half the 600,000 that Darmanin had suggested in 2022 and is even smaller than the most recent estimates of 400-500,000, underlining the complexity of securing an event over six kilometres (four miles) of river. "I know that we have the best security forces in the world and that we will succeed in showing not only that we can win medals (at the Olympics) but that we can play host to the world without any problems," Darmanin told the channel.

The idea of a spectacular open-air parade with hundreds of boats gave cold sweats to many in the French security establishment because of the difficulty of controlling the crowds and the risk of terror attacks. Organizers and the Paris mayor's office had initially imagined up to two million people in attendance, a source close to the negotiations told AFP.

Authorities have also had difficulties in persuading historic Parisian booksellers who line the river from temporarily removing their kiosks in order to make space for spectators. The artistic director in charge of the ceremony, theatre director Thomas Jolly, told AFP last week that contingency plans were in place in the event of a direct terror threat or severe weather. "We have lots of different plans, but the location for the ceremony will remain the Seine," he said.

### 'Iconic'

Darmanin said that 100,000 tickets had been sold for the best vantage points on the lower banks of the



**PARIS:** (FILES) This handout illustration released on December 15, 2021 by Paris 2024 Olympic Committee shows Paris Olympics opening ceremony on July 26, 2024 which will take part on the River Seine, breaking the long-held Summer Games tradition of a stadium procession of athletes and officials. — AFP

river, while another 200,000 would be given free access to the upper banks. The figure of 300,000 people did not include others "who live and who will be able to rent to have parties along the Seine", Darmanin added, referring to the hundreds of buildings that overlook the famed waterway.

The open-air boat parade is in keeping with promises to make the Paris Olympics "iconic", with the local organizing committee keen to break from past traditions in the way it stages the world's biggest sporting event.

The 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics ceremony is generally considered to be the most spectacular in history while the 2012 London ceremony, overseen by "Trainspotting" director Danny Boyle, won rave reviews for showcasing Britain's quirky side.

The huge opening ceremony in Paris with hundreds of thousands of free tickets was also part of the organizers' vision of a "people's Olympics" that would be widely accessible to the public. That ambition has been undermined by high ticket prices for the sport, particularly for the athletics, leading to criticism from many Parisians.

### Terror risk

The head of the Paris capital region, Valerie Pécresse, welcomed Wednesday's downgrade of the opening ceremony to 300,000 people — still several times the number who usually witness the Olympics parade in an athletics stadium.

"It seems to us to be a much more reasonable level that provides security and safety for spectators as well as for travellers on public transport," she said of the figure. One senior French security figure told AFP recently that organizers had had "eyes bigger than their stomachs" when planning the opening and that their initial crowd estimates were "too high."

France was placed on its highest alert for terror attacks in October after a suspected Islamist burst into a school in northern France and stabbed a teacher to death. The country has been consistently targeted by Islamic extremists over the last decade, particularly from the Islamic State group, while the Zionist entity's war against Hamas in Gaza is seen as exacerbating domestic tensions. "The terror risk is extremely strong," Darmanin added on Wednesday. The Olympics are set to take place from July 26-August 11 followed by the Paralympics from August 28-September 8. — AFP

## Sri Lanka trial Test reset in Afghanistan tour

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka hope to revive their flagging Test fortunes with new five-day captain Dhananjaya de Silva taking the helm for their one-off match against Afghanistan starting Friday in Colombo. The island nation is dead last on the World Test Championship rankings and their last match in October at the same ground saw a humiliating innings and 222-run loss to Pakistan in their worst ever home defeat.

De Silva, a middle-order batsman and handy off-spinner, takes charge ahead of a full tour slate for the year including a three-Test series in England. "Very excited about what is about to unfold with my cricket career. More so Sri Lankan Test cricket going forward," de Silva told AFP.

Three uncapped players are among Sri Lanka's 16-member squad as part of a generational refresh heralded by the appointment of different captains for the Test, ODI and T20 sides earlier this month. Fast bowler Kasun Rajitha, who missed the recent home series against Zimbabwe due to injury, has made a comeback into the side.

Afghanistan are making a name for themselves in white-ball cricket but have had less chance to impress in five-day matches since being granted Test status in 2017. Friday will be their first Test against Sri Lanka and eighth overall.

"We are committed to strengthening our red-ball cricket and building a formidable Test side as well," Afghanistan Cricket Board chair Mirwais Ashraf said in a statement this week. The visitors landed in Colombo on Tuesday missing star leg-spinner Rashid Khan who is recovering from back surgery.

Qais Ahmad, who has featured in a single Test match, is his expected replacement. Afghanistan mainstay and open-



**COLOMBO:** Afghanistan's Ibrahim Zadrán arrives at the hotel in Colombo on January 31, 2024 prior to play one-off test, three one day international (ODI) and three T20 cricket matches during their tour of Sri Lanka. — AFP

ing batsman Ibrahim Zadrán will drive the tourists' attack and has an impressive white-ball record in Sri Lanka, where he notched up two of his five ODI hundreds. Both teams will play three ODIs in Kandy and three T20 matches in Dambulla after the Test.

### Test squads

Sri Lanka: Dhananjaya de Silva (capt), Kusal Mendis, Dimuth Karunaratne, Nishan Madushka, Angelo Mathews, Dinesh Chandimal, Sadeera Samarawickrama, Ramesh Mendis, Asitha Fernando, Vishwa Fernando, Kasun Rajitha, Kamindu Mendis, Prabath Jayasuriya, Lahiru Udara, Chamika Gunasekara, Milan Rathnayake.

Afghanistan: Hashmatullah Shahidi (capt), Ibrahim Zadrán, Abdul Malik, Noor Ali Zadrán, Rahmat Shah, Bahir Shah, Nasir Jamal, Ikram Alikhil (wk), Mohammad Ishaq (wk), Qais Ahmad, Zia-ur-Rehman, Zahir Khan, Yamin Ahmadzai, Nijat Masood, Mohammad Saleem, Naveed Zadrán. — AFP

## McIlroy sees PGA wins as cheapened without Rahm

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Rory McIlroy says PGA Tour triumphs at venues such as Pebble Beach and Riviera will be devalued in the absence of two-time major winner Jon Rahm and other star players following their defection to LIV Golf. And the four-time major champion from Northern Ireland says it's more important to complete a merger between LIV and PGA Tour than it is to sort out punishments for defectors to the Saudi-backed upstart circuit.

Speaking on Tuesday ahead of Thursday's start of the Pebble Beach Pro-Am, McIlroy was asked if wins at the California venues were cheapened without Rahm, Dustin Johnson and other top players who jumped to LIV. "Yeah," McIlroy said. "I'd like to win here and stand up with a trophy on 18 green and know that I've beaten all of the best players in the world, so yeah."

McIlroy, who spoke of conversations with 2023 Ryder Cup teammates Rahm and Tyrrell Hatton before they signed with LIV Golf, said golf needs to reunite top players even if it delays sorting out any punishment for players who went to LIV but want to play future PGA Tour events.

"Life is about choices. Guys made choices to go and play LIV, guys made choices to stay here. If people still have eligibility on this tour and they want to come back and play, let them come back," McIlroy said. "It's hard to punish people. I don't think there should be a punishment—obviously I've changed my tune on that

because I see where golf is and I see that having a diminished PGA Tour and having a diminished LIV Tour or anything else is bad for both parties."

Talks on a framework merger agreement between the PGA Tour, DP World Tour and LIV's Saudi backers, the Public Investment Fund (PIF), have extended beyond a December 31 deadline in order to sort out a deal to please all sides in golf's bitter civil war.

"It would be much better being together and moving forward together for the good of the game," McIlroy said. "The faster we can all get back together and start to play and start to have the strongest fields possible I think is great for golf."

"We're potentially about to do a deal with PIF, who owned the large majority of LIV, and hopefully seeing things come back together here at some point," McIlroy removed himself from the PGA Tour Policy Board last year, needing to focus on his game instead of working on a merger deal. "I just didn't feel like I could influence things the way I wanted to," he said. "I felt like I was just banging my head against the wall."

### The sooner the better

McIlroy said a deal is near between the PGA Tour and Strategic Sports Group (SSG) that would see a \$3 billion investment in the tour. "I just hope they get it done," McIlroy said. "They were supposed to vote on it Sunday night and there was a delay. They were supposed to vote on it last night and there was a delay."

"I feel like this thing could have been over and done with months ago. For all our sakes the sooner we sort of get out of it and have a path forward, the better." World number 16 Hatton jumped to LIV after talks with McIlroy about the move. "Everyone needs to do with what's right for them," McIlroy said. "I had a long talk with Tyrrell on Sunday, completely understood where he was coming from. — AFP

## Sports

# S Korea set up Australia clash, Uzbeks plot Asian Cup 'surprise'

## Uzbeks play hosts and holders Qatar after beating Thailand 2-1

DOHA: Son Heung-min's South Korea came back from the dead to beat Saudi Arabia 4-2 on penalties on Tuesday and join dark horses Uzbekistan in the Asian Cup quarter-finals. South Korea will face Australia in the last eight while the Uzbeks play hosts and holders Qatar after beating Thailand 2-1.

Second-choice goalkeeper Jo Hyeon-woo was the hero for South Korea in Doha, saving penalties from Sami Al-Najei and Abdulrahman Ghareeb in the shootout. Jo was only playing because of a serious knee injury to regular stopper Kim Seung-gyu in training earlier in the tournament.

After a nail-biting game ended 1-1, Hwang Hee-chan scored the decisive penalty for Jurgen Klinsmann's side, who are aiming to end a 64-year Asian Cup title drought for South Korea. Saudi coach Roberto Mancini disappeared down the tunnel before Hwang took the winning penalty.

"I think this win gives the team an enormous amount of energy," said Klinsmann, who faced fierce criticism in South Korea following draws with Jordan and Malaysia in the group phase. "It gives the team even more spirit. This is a group of players that I really enjoy working with because they have a lot of heart."

His opposite number Mancini said he had not meant "to disrespect anyone" by leaving the pitch before the shootout had concluded. "I apologize, I thought it was finished," the Italian said. In front of a crowd of 40,000 at Education City Stadium, Abdullah Radif opened the scoring for the Saudis 33 seconds after coming on as a half-time substitute.

South Korea had several chances to equalize but

left it until the death to do so, sub Cho Gue-sung popping up in the 99th minute to rescue his team and force extra time. Klinsmann's men dominated both periods of extra time but were guilty of over-elaborating and could not put the ball in the net.

Saudi Pro League sides have shelled out to lure big-name players while Saudi Arabia is set to host the 2034 World Cup, all part of a broader move into global sport. But they are out of the Asian Cup in the last 16 and their wait for a fourth continental crown — and first since 1996 — goes on.

### 'Why not?'

Srecko Katanec said that his Uzbekistan side can "surprise" Qatar in the quarter-finals despite being depleted by injury and illness. The Uzbeks took the lead against Thailand in the first half with a cool Azizbek Turgunboev finish through the legs of the goalkeeper.

Thailand were the lowest-ranked team left at the tournament but they hit back just before the hour with an even better goal, from distance, by substitute Supachok Sarachat. Uzbekistan went ahead again midway through the second half when highly rated 20-year-old CSKA Moscow attacker Abbosbek Fayzullaev struck from outside the box. This time Thailand had no reply, despite some late pressure.

Uzbek coach Katanec felt his side should have scored two more goals in the first half but was delighted with the result, given they were missing several first-choice players. "Imagine what kind of work I have to do," said the Slovenian, adding that he is missing five players who would normally start.



AL-RAYYAN: South Korea's midfielder #07 Son Heung-min runs with the ball past Saudi Arabia's defender #04 Ali Rajami during the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup football match between Saudi Arabia and South Korea at Education City Stadium in al-Rayyan, west of Doha. — AFP

None will be available to face Qatar on Saturday, he said. "We also have some virus, many players are ill, but we performed well and our players did their job," he said. Despite being short of his best side Ka-

taneec struck a defiant tone, saying: "We can surprise Qatar, why not?" Pre-tournament favourites Japan enter the last-16 fray on Wednesday when they play Bahrain, while Iran face Syria. — AFP

## S Africa knock Morocco out of Africa Cup

KORHOGO: Morocco became the latest giants to be toppled at a shock-filled Africa Cup of Nations when they fell 2-0 to South Africa on Tuesday, while Mali also booked a quarter-finals place. Evidence Makgopa and Teboho Mokoena scored in the second half for Bafana Bafana, who once again proved a bogey team for the Atlas Lions, whose Achraf Hakimi missed a penalty.

Since becoming the first African side to reach the World Cup semi-finals in Qatar two years ago, Morocco have lost two of 13 matches, and both defeats were inflicted by South Africa. The shock last 16 result in the muggy Ivory Coast coastal city of San-Pedro came after Mali overcame Burkina Faso 2-1 in Korhogo with Lassine Sinayoko scoring what proved the key goal.

Morocco join defending champions Senegal, Tunisia, Algeria, Cameroon and Burkina Faso as teams ranked among the top 10 in Africa heading home early. On Saturday, South Africa will face Cape Verde in Yamoussoukro after hosts Ivory Coast and Mali clash in Bouake.

In the other quarter-finals, Victor Osimhen-inspired Nigeria face Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo meet Guinea on Friday. South Afri-

ca, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and DR Congo are former champions while the other four title contenders are hoping to conquer Africa for the first time.

While Morocco, thanks to their World Cup heroes, were favored to eliminate South Africa, two factors suggested there was a chance of a shock. South Africa had won two and drawn two of five previous Cup of Nations meetings with Morocco from 1998.

And despite being an African powerhouse for decades, Morocco have consistently flopped at the Cup of Nations since their lone triumph 48 years ago. Coach Walid Regragui called the repeated failures an "African curse" and the former national team full-back saw clinical South Africa pull off a deserved victory. Makgopa stayed just inside to fire Bafana in front on 57 minutes and Morocco squandered a great late chance to equalise when Hakimi fired a penalty against the crossbar and over.

### Red card

A foul on Mokoena by Manchester United midfielder Sofyan Amrabat led to a VAR review that ended with a straight red card as he was the last defender. Set-piece specialist Mokoena fired the free-kick past Yassine Bounou and high into the net at the near post. Sinayoko scored his third goal at the Cup of Nations as Mali reached the quarter-finals for the first time since 2013 by defeating Burkina Faso 2-1 in Korhogo earlier on Tuesday. An early Edmond Tapsoba own goal got Mali off to a great start in the last 16 tie and Sinayoko doubled the lead just after half-time.

Captain Bertrand Traore reduced arrears from a

penalty for Burkina Faso, who had the ball in the net again only for Issoufou Dayo to be ruled offside. Victory was a welcome change of fortune for Mali, who have had two first round and two last-16 exits since finishing third in South Africa 11 years ago.

"It was a really tough match against a good side. We had to work extra hard, but I am glad we eventually got the result," said Sinayoko. "We can celebrate this victory while keeping at the back of our minds that there is still a lot of work ahead."

The match in the northern Ivorian city kicked off in 36 degrees Celsius (97 Fahrenheit) heat and Mali needed only 133 seconds to score the second fastest goal in the tournament. A powerful Amadou Haidara header off a cross rebounded off the post, struck the left foot of Tapsoba and rebounded into the net for an own goal.

Watched by Confederation of African Football (CAF) president Patrice Motsepe from South Africa, the football rarely excited the almost-capacity 19,154 crowd until the half-hour mark. Then, Sinayoko stung the fingers of goalkeeper Herve Koffi with a hard close-range shot that was parried.

Mali went two goals ahead two minutes into the second half as Sinayoko broke clear of Tapsoba and beat Koffi with an angled shot. But the lead was halved on 57 minutes when Boubakar Kouyate handled a cross and Traore converted his third penalty of the tournament as Mali goalkeeper Djigui Diarra dived the wrong way.

Long-serving defender Dayo thought he had levelled in the final minute of regular time by heading a free-kick past Diarra, but was ruled offside. — AFP

## Tajikistan wrestles with football fever after Asian Cup exploits

DOHA: Tajikistan's national sport is traditional wrestling but the poorest country in the former Soviet Union is now just two wins away from football's Asian Cup final. The Central Asian nation are making their debut in the tournament and coach Petar Segrt said there were "no limits" after beating the United Arab Emirates on penalties in the last 16.

On Friday in Qatar they face Jordan in the quarter-finals, something few outside the world's 106th-ranked team expected before the competition began. Alovodin Buriev, a commentator for Tajikistan's TV Varzish and who has reported on football for over 35 years, said the players were "already heroes".

"Until this Asian Cup, we didn't have stars. Now all our players are stars," he told AFP in Doha. "In our last five games we have been very, very good. Our national team doesn't play like that." Land-locked Tajikistan is bordered by Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China. It gained independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union and has been led by 71-year-old President Emomali Rahmon for over 30 years. His regime has been criticized by rights organizations for restricting freedoms and cracking down on the opposition. Rahmon's eldest son Rustam has played a key role in the development of football in the country of about 10 million people.

He helped found Istiklol, a club based in the capital Dushanbe, in 2007 and he even played for them as a striker. Istiklol have since gone on to win the Tajikistan Higher League for the past 10 seasons. An expanded Asian Champions League has also allowed Istiklol, who have 10 players in Tajikistan's 26-man Asian Cup squad, to make a splash outside their own country.

In 2021 they pulled off a 4-1 win over Saudi Arabia's Al-Hilal, who have won the Champions League a record four times and last summer signed Brazilian Neymar and a host of other top international players. "This was the first time that Istiklol had the chance to play these sort of teams, so to go there and win 4-1 was a massive accomplishment," said Martin Lowe, a football writer for website The Asian Game.

Lowe says the Tajikistan national team have made "a gradual improvement" over the past few years. But their progress has exploded at the Asian Cup under the leadership of larger-than-life coach Segrt, who was not always universally popular. The charismatic Croat has fostered a family spirit, saying "the most important thing is to make harmony between people". The team were stunned when star striker Manuchekhr Dzhalilov was diagnosed with cancer late last year, and again when midfielder Amirbek Dzharaboev was ruled out of the Asian Cup through injury. In keeping with his family ethos, Segrt has brought both players to Qatar to cheer on the team. But defender Zoir Dzharaboev — Amirbek's brother — says there is more to the coach than just charity. "Of course our coach is very positive, very kind," he said. "But he knows what time he has to be totally friendly and kind, and what time he has to be hard and strict towards us." — AFP

## Beamon auctions off 1968 Olympic long jump medal

NEW YORK: Half a century after his 29-foot long jump at the 1968 Mexico City Summer Olympics, Bob Beamon's record still stands — though he is ready to part with his gold medal. "It's time for me to pass it on," the 77-year-old told AFP, ahead of the award's auction by Christie's on Thursday in New York.

Beamon's historic leap — technically at 8.9 meters, or 29 feet and 2 1/2 inches — shattered the previous record by nearly 22 inches. It remained a world record until the 1991 Tokyo World Championships, and still stands as the top Olympic jump.

Amid a growing sports memorabilia market, the experts at Christie's have valued it between \$400,000 and \$600,000. "The auction was an excellent way to showcase the medal, but also to preserve the memories of it," Beamon told AFP, adding he hopes it finds its way to someone who "understands the significance of athletic achievement."

The approaching Paris Games, set for July, make for plenty of opportunities to display the gold in exhibitions for the public, he mused. Beamon still remembers the "extraordinary day" that was October 18, 1968, after almost missing the games due to overstepping two of his qualifying jumps.

But "that day... everything was perfect for me. The wind was perfect. The weather when I jumped was perfect," he recalls. "It rained right after I jumped." "I made a couple of mistakes in the preliminaries and I wanted to make sure that in the finals, I would get a fair jump, a legal jump," he said.

"But to my surprise, it was not only a jump, but it was an incredible moment in history." It wasn't the only piece of history made in Mexico City: those were the same games that saw John Carlos and Tommie Smith expelled from the competition after raising their fists during the US national anthem to protest discrimination against African Americans.



NEW YORK: The Olympic gold medal presented to Bob Beamon for the men's long jump at the Games in Mexico City in 1968 is on display at Christie's in New York on January 29, 2024. It was the long jump of the century and it's still an Olympic record, but Beamon is going to part with the gold medal he won at the Mexico-1968 Olympics, after a historic leap of 8.90 m. — AFP

Smith and Carlos were castigated in much of the US media and sporting world — but that didn't stop Beamon, also Black, from raising his fist on the podium the very next day. "It was a very important day for Tommie and John. Unfortunately, at that time, it was

not interpreted in that sense," Beamon said. These days, Beamon has gotten back into drumming — a childhood passion he dropped when "sports became number one to me." The title of a recent album he recorded, with a jazz and funk group? — AFP

# Classifieds

## Clinics & Hospitals

### Clinics

|                |          |
|----------------|----------|
| Kaizen center  | 25716707 |
| Rawda          | 22517733 |
| Adaliya        | 22517144 |
| Khaldiya       | 24848075 |
| Kaifan         | 24849807 |
| Shamiya        | 24848913 |
| Shuwaikh       | 24814507 |
| Abdullah Salem | 22549134 |
| Nuzha          | 22526804 |

|                     |          |
|---------------------|----------|
| Industrial Shuwaikh | 24814764 |
| Qadsiya             | 22515088 |
| Dasmah              | 22532265 |
| Bneid Al-Gar        | 22531908 |
| Shaab               | 22518752 |
| Qibla               | 22459381 |
| Ayoun Al-Qibla      | 22451082 |
| Mirqab              | 22456536 |
| Sharq               | 22465401 |
| Salmiya             | 25746401 |

### Hospitals

|                    |          |
|--------------------|----------|
| Sabah Hospital     | 24812000 |
| Amiri Hospital     | 22450005 |
| Maternity Hospital | 24843100 |
| Mubarak Al-Kabir   | 25312700 |
| Chest Hospital     | 24849400 |
| Farwaniya Hospital | 24892010 |
| Adan Hospital      | 23940620 |
| Ibn Sina Hospital  | 24840300 |

## Change of Name

I, **Shaima Sultana** D/o. Mohammed Saheb R/o. 19-2-21/11/F/25, Indiranagar, Tadban, Bahadurpura, Hyd-T.S, have changed my name as **SHAIMA** given name and **SULTANA** surname.  
(#4600 31/01/2024)

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

## Japan beat Bahrain to reach Asian Cup quarters

Saudi football chief brands Mancini penalty walkout 'unacceptable'



DOHA: Bahrain's goalkeeper #22 Ebrahim Lutfallah saves a shot by Japan's forward #09 Ayase Ueda during the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup football match between Bahrain and Japan at al-Thumama Stadium in Doha on January 31, 2024. — AFP

DOHA: Kaoru Mitoma returned as Japan survived a second-half wobble to set up an Asian Cup quarter-final with Iran or Syria after a 3-1 win over Bahrain on Wednesday. The four-time champions looked to be cruising in their last 16 game in Doha after goals either side of half-time from Ritsu Doan and Takefusa Kubo. But an own goal from error-prone goalkeeper Zion Suzuki let Bahrain back in the game until Ayase Ueda restored Japan's cushion just under 10 minutes later.

It was Ueda's fourth goal of the tournament. Japan were boosted by the return of Brighton winger Mitoma, who came off the bench in the second half to play his first game since injuring his ankle on December 21. But questions remain for Hajime Moriyasu's side, who were the pre-tournament favourites but have yet to keep a clean sheet in four games in Qatar. Japan came close to opening the scoring in the 10th minute when Ueda thumped a header towards

goal from a corner, only for Bahrain goalkeeper Ebrahim Lutfallah to claw it away. Bahrain also had chances to take the lead but it was Japan who struck first in the 31st minute.

Right-back Seiya Maikuma unleashed a shot from distance that cannoned against the post and Doan reacted fastest to stick home the rebound.

Japan were forced into a change when Celtic midfielder Reo Hatate went off injured five minutes later, with Hidemasa Morita coming on.

Kubo doubled Japan's lead in the 49th minute after a VAR goal check. The Real Sociedad forward looked to be in an offside position when the ball broke loose to him in the box, but the final ball had come off a Bahrain defender.

What looked like being a stroll for Japan turned into a bad dream when Suzuki turned the ball into his own net in the 64th minute.

The 21-year-old, who has made a string of mis-

takes at the Asian Cup, misjudged a punch and got tangled up with Ueda to fumble the ball over the line. Ueda calmed Japan's nerves in the 72nd minute when he drilled the ball home after a sweeping move forward. Mitoma was involved in several late chances after coming on in the 68th minute, but could not get on the scoresheet.

Meanwhile, the president of Saudi Arabian football said Roberto Mancini's disappearing act before the end of the penalty shootout in the team's Asian Cup exit was "completely unacceptable".

The Italian did not stick around to see South Korea's Hwang Hee-chan eliminate his Saudi side in the last 16 in Doha with the decisive spot-kick. Following a 1-1 draw, South Korea won 4-2 on penalties on Tuesday and will face Australia in the quarter-finals in Qatar. Mancini, 59, apologized afterwards for walking down the tunnel before their fate was sealed, saying: "I thought it was finished."

But Saudi Football Federation president Yasser Al-Mishehal made clear his unhappiness in an interview with Saudi broadcaster SSC. "The coach's exit is completely unacceptable and we will discuss with him why this happened," he said. "He has the right to explain his point of view and then we will decide the appropriate action." Mancini took Italy to European Championship glory in 2021 and was appointed Saudi coach in August last year on a deal until 2027, taking him beyond the next World Cup.

It was reported that he was offered more than \$25 million to join the big-spending Saudis, who are set to host the World Cup in 2034. Mancini's job does not appear to be at immediate risk, despite the defeat extending Saudi Arabia's wait for a fourth continental crown. They lost won it in 1996. "Technically we are satisfied with the performance presented in the Asian Cup," said Mishehal, adding: "I do not like to rush into anything." — AFP

## Newcastle back on track as Schar double sinks Villa

BIRMINGHAM: Newcastle ended their four-game losing streak in the Premier League as Fabian Schar's double inspired a 3-1 win against Aston Villa on Tuesday. Switzerland centre-back Schar struck twice in the space of four minutes late in the first half at Villa Park.

Alex Moreno's second half own goal increased Newcastle's advantage and Ollie Watkins' reply came too late to spark a Villa escape act. For the first time since beating Fulham on December 16, Eddie Howe's side were able to celebrate three points, although they managed victories in the FA Cup against Sunderland and Fulham during their winless league run.

Newcastle are up to seventh place as they try to salvage European qualification from a difficult season. "It was mixed emotions for me because that is an elite team. The mixed part is that we haven't seen that for a number of weeks. We looked much more like ourselves," Howe said.

"We knew all eyes were on us. We've been on a disappointing run in the Premier League, especially away from home. It was a big result." The defeat was a major blow to fourth placed Villa's unexpected title challenge, leaving Unai Emery's men five points behind leaders Liverpool, who have a game in hand.

It was Villa's first home league defeat in 17 matches since losing to Arsenal in February 2023. Villa have boasted the Premier League's best home record so far this season. But Newcastle thrashed them 5-1 at St James' Park at the start of the campaign and once again they were too strong for Emery's team.

"It's a little frustrating. Today we have to accept because they deserve it. Newcastle's power is in the set pieces. The first 60 minutes, they were better," Emery said.

### Moreno misery

With the transfer deadline looming on Thursday, Newcastle have seen Miguel Almiron, Callum Wilson



BIRMINGHAM: (From L) Newcastle United's Brazilian midfielder #39 Bruno Guimaraes, Aston Villa's Italian midfielder #22 Nicolò Zaniolo and Newcastle United's Paraguayan midfielder #24 Miguel Almiron fight for the ball during the English Premier League football match between Aston Villa and Newcastle United at Villa Park in Birmingham. — AFP

and Kieran Trippier all linked with moves, while Howe does not expect to make any signings. Against that troubling backdrop, Howe will have been encouraged by his side's much-needed victory.

Emiliano Martinez rescued Villa when Anthony Gordon burst through on goal, the Argentine keeper standing his ground to repel the Newcastle forward's shot. Lacking their usual cohesion, Villa took nearly half an hour to land their first shot on target, but Matty Cash's strike lacked the power to beat Martin Dubravka. Newcastle seized the lead in the 32nd minute when Trippier's corner looped into the six-yard box, where Schar held off Ezri Konsa and stretched to guide his shot past Martinez.

The Magpies struck again four minutes later as another Trippier corner was only cleared to Gordon, whose deflected shot hit the bar and bounced

off Martinez before Schar applied the finishing touch from close-range.

The gloss was taken off Newcastle's dream half when Isak limped off just before the break. Villa midfielder John McGinn was inches away from reducing the deficit with a header that flashed just over.

But Newcastle put the result beyond doubt in the 52nd minute. Almiron's low cross was prodded goalwards by Jacob Murphy and Moreno's sliding attempt to block only succeeded in diverting the ball into his own net. Adding to Moreno's misery, the Villa defender was left with a painful injury in a particularly sensitive area after he collided with the post during his failed bid to clear.

Watkins got one back in the 71st minute with a sliding close-range finish from Leon Bailey's cross for his first goal in seven games. — AFP

## Warriors down Sixers, Embiid injury scare

SAN FRANCISCO: Stephen Curry conjured a 37-point masterclass as the Golden State Warriors sent the Philadelphia 76ers spinning to a fourth straight defeat with a 119-107 victory on Tuesday.

Warriors star Curry drained eight three-pointers in a devastating display of shooting that gave struggling Golden State and the Chase Center home crowd a much-needed lift after the team's shaky first half of the NBA season.

The Sixers meanwhile were left sweating on an injury to reigning Most Valuable Player Joel Embiid, who limped off in the fourth quarter after Warriors forward Jonathan Kuminga fell heavily on his left knee as the two men wrestled for a loose ball.

Embiid, who sat out the Sixers' previous two games with knee and Achilles soreness, had been cleared to play on Tuesday shortly before tip-off. But the Cameroon-born center was clearly not fully fit and appeared to be struggling to move freely throughout the game.

The decision to start Embiid looked even more questionable when he was hurt in the tussle with Kuminga late on. "They're going to do an MRI tonight or tomorrow," Sixers head coach Nick Nurse said after the game. "It's unrelated to what's been bothering him, so we're just waiting on that."

"Obviously medical cleared him to play, and Joel was a big part of that. He said he was feeling good." Curry meanwhile said the Warriors victory couldn't have come at a better time as the seven-time NBA champions look to get their season back on track.

The Warriors, who were left reeling earlier this month after the death of assistant coach Dejan Milojevic, are 12th in the Western Conference standings with a 20-24 record. — AFP