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7 Gunshots in DR Congo's Goma as protesters attack embassies



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Trump repeats call to expel Gazans

Khamenei: Zionist entity on 'its knees' • Iran FM: Send Zionists to Greenland



GAZA: People push a car loaded with personal belongings along Salah al-Din road in Nuseirat as displaced Palestinians make their way to the northern part of the Gaza Strip on Jan 28, 2025. — AFP

WASHINGTON/GAZA: An idea floated by US President Donald Trump to move Gazans to Egypt or Jordan faced a renewed backlash Tuesday as hundreds of thousands of Gazans displaced by the Zionist-Hamas war returned to their devastated neighborhoods. A fragile ceasefire and hostage release deal took effect earlier this month, intended to end more than 15 months of war.

After the ceasefire came into force, Trump touted a plan to "clean out" the Gaza Strip, reiterating the idea on Monday as he called for Palestinians to move to "safer" locations such as Egypt or Jordan. The US president, who has repeatedly claimed credit for sealing the truce deal after months of fruitless negotiations, also said he would meet Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington "very soon".

Jordan, which has a tumultuous history with Palestinian movements, on Tuesday renewed its rejection of Trump's proposal. "We emphasize that Jordan's national security dictates that the Palestinians must remain on their land and that the Palestinian people must not be subjected to any kind of forced displacement whatsoever," Jordanian government spokesman Mohammad Momani said.

Qatar, which played a leading role in the truce mediation, on Tuesday said that it often did not see "eye to eye" with its allies, including the United States. "Our position has always been clear to the necessity of the Palestinian people receiving their rights, and that the two-state solution is the only path forward," Qatar's foreign ministry spokesman Majed Al-Ansari said.

Following reports that Trump had spoken with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi at the weekend, Cairo said there had been no such phone call. "A senior official source denied what some media outlets reported about a phone call between the Egyptian and American presidents," Egypt's state information service said.

On Monday, Trump reportedly said the pair had spoken, saying of Sisi: "I wish he would take some (Palestinians)." After Trump first floated the idea, Egypt rejected the forced displacement of Gazans, expressing its "continued support for the steadfastness of the Palestinian people on their land".

France, another US ally, on Tuesday said any forced displacement of Gazans would be "unacceptable". It would also be a "destabilization factor (for) our close allies Egypt and Jordan", a French foreign ministry spokesman said. Moving Gaza's 2.4 million people could be done "temporarily or could be long term", Trump said on Saturday. Zionist far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said he was working with the prime minister "to prepare an operational plan to ensure that President Trump's vision is realized". Smotrich, who opposed the ceasefire deal, did not provide any details on the purported plan.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Flag-hoisting ceremony on Feb 2

KUWAIT: Bayan Palace will host a flag-hoisting ceremony on Sunday, Feb 2, 2025, signaling the beginning of Kuwait's national celebrations. This was announced following the Cabinet's weekly meeting on Tuesday, in which Cabinet members extended greetings to HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti people. (See Page 3)

Traffic awareness drive launched

KUWAIT: The interior ministry has launched an awareness campaign to explain the main fines and penalties in the new traffic law in Arabic and six other languages: English, Farsi, Hindi, Bengali, Urdu and Tagalog. The campaign can be accessed from the ministry's account on X or from the ministry's website. (See Page 3)

Philippine labor ban denied

KUWAIT: Kuwait Union of Domestic Labor Offices denied on Tuesday reports on social media that the Philippines government has issued a ban on sending workers to Kuwait. "Those reports are unofficial and no statement has been issued by the Philippines government in this connection" the Union said in a statement. The Union represents dozens of offices that recruit domestic helpers from several countries.

Google Maps to rename locations

WASHINGTON: Google has said it will restore the name Mount McKinley to North America's highest peak from Denali and rename the Gulf of Mexico to the "Gulf of America" on its Maps app, complying with executive orders by Donald Trump. Google noted that users outside the United States will continue to see both the original and new names of the Gulf of Mexico and Denali, as is always the case for disputed locations. — AFP

Zionists vow to cut UNRWA ties, with US blessing

UNITED NATIONS: The Zionist entity will cease all contact with the UN's Palestinian relief agency UNRWA and any other body acting on its behalf, its UN envoy said Tuesday, after repeatedly accusing the organization of undermining its security. UNRWA's offices and staff in the Zionist entity play a major role in the provision of healthcare and education to Palestinians, but Zionist officials have long clashed

with the agency. UNRWA has brought in 60 percent of the food to have reached Gaza since the start of the war on Oct 7, 2023.

"The legislation forbids UNRWA from operating within the sovereign territory of (the Zionist entity), and forbids any contact between (Zionist) officials and UNRWA," said the envoy, Danny Danon. He was speaking ahead of a UN Security Council meeting on the Zionist entity's passage of legislation ending the organization's legal footing in the Zionist entity within 48 hours. "(The Zionist entity) will terminate all collaboration, communication and contact with UNRWA or anyone acting on its behalf," he said.

The Zionist entity claims that a dozen UNRWA employees were involved in the deadly Oct 7, 2023

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DeepSeek a 'wake up call'; Microsoft in talks to buy TikTok

MIAMI: US President Donald Trump said on Monday that Chinese startup DeepSeek's technology should act as spur for American companies and said it was good that companies in China have come up with a cheaper, faster method of artificial intelligence. "The release of DeepSeek, AI from a Chinese company should be a wake up call for our industries that we need to be laser-focused on competing to win," Trump said in Florida.

Investors sold technology stocks across the globe on Monday over concerns the emergence of a low-cost Chinese artificial intelligence model would threaten the dominance of the current US-based AI leaders. "I've been reading about China and some of the companies in China, one in particular coming up with a faster method of AI and much less expensive method, and that's good because you don't have to spend as much money. I view that as a positive, as an asset," Trump said.

"I view that as a positive because you'll be doing that too, so you won't be spending as much, and you'll get the same result, hopefully," he said. Trump said Chinese leaders had told him the United States had the most brilliant scientists in the world, and he indicated that if Chinese industry could come up with cheaper AI technology, US companies would follow.



NEW YORK: Commissioner-General of UNRWA Philippe Lazzarini speaks during a UN Security Council meeting at UN headquarters on Jan 28, 2025. — AFP

"We always have the ideas. We're always first. So I would say that's a positive that could be very much a positive development. So instead of spending billions and billions, you'll spend less, and you'll come up with, hopefully, the same solution," Trump said.

Trump also told reporters on Monday that Microsoft is in talks to acquire TikTok and that he would like to see a bidding war over the app. TikTok, which has about 170 million American users, was briefly taken offline just before a law requiring its Chinese owner ByteDance to either sell it on national security grounds or face a ban took effect on Jan 19.

Trump, after taking office on Jan 20, signed an executive order seeking to delay by 75 days the enforcement of the law. Trump said last week that he was in talks with multiple people over buying TikTok

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First AI classroom without teachers sparks UK debate

LONDON: Britain's first teacherless AI classroom may be an "outlier", but it underlines the potential benefits and risks of a UK government drive to roll-out artificial intelligence in education, experts say. David Game College, a private school in central London, is nearly six months into a trial in which students are taught core curriculum subjects for the GCSE state exams sat by 16-year-olds by AI platforms.

"Teaching and education will be transformed by AI. There is no doubt about that, and AI is not going to go away," said co-principal John Dalton, urging people to become "agile and adopt it". The AI systems "monitor" how the students respond to course



LONDON: GCSE student Massa Aldalate sits at her desk in an AI-classroom at David Game College on Jan 16, 2025. — AFP

material and provide the school with "feedback information about their learning habits", he explained.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer this month laid out a vision to harness the power of artificial intelligence and pledged to make Britain an "AI superpower".

The government says the technology could help educators with lesson planning and correction, and has developed its own AI lesson assistant called "Aila" aligned with the UK's national curriculum.

Instead of teachers, the class at David Game College has real life "learning coaches", who are qualified as teachers but do not necessarily know the content of subjects and instead guide students through using the AI systems. They also mentor them in soft skills like debating and financial literacy.

The pilot, which currently has seven students and plans to have one coach for them, is a "leap of faith", Dalton admitted. Dalton, a biology teacher, told AFP the AI platforms can assess a student's knowledge "with a greater degree of accuracy than your average teacher" to enable more personalized teaching. "I believe that AI will augment and it will change the role of teachers," he said.

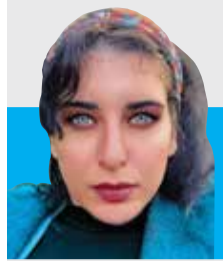
However, Rose Luckin, a professor at University College London (UCL) who researches AI

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In my view

Zionist entity is at war with itself and Hamas triumphed



By Farah AlHashem

The ceasefire agreement between the Zionist entity and Hamas, brokered in January 2025, marks a pivotal moment in the ongoing conflict that has shaped the Zionist entity's future. Following the Oct 7 attacks, known as the "Al-Aqsa Flood", the Zionist entity finds itself at a critical juncture, facing not only the geopolitical fallout but also internal fractures that threaten its political, social and economic stability.

The terms of the ceasefire, which include the release of over a thousand Palestinian prisoners — many convicted of fabricated crimes — have ignited fierce debates across the Zionist entity's political spectrum. What is clear is that the deal is a victory for Hamas. Both leftwing and rightwing Zionist media outlets have declared that the Zionist entity lost the war, with the deal failing to address the deep-seated issues of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict. Instead, it has exposed the profound divisions within Zionist society, including within its government.

The Zionist society is deeply fractured. As Haaretz reported, the resignation of the Zionist entity's top general following the Oct 7 attacks signals a collapse in military leadership and a loss of faith in the government's handling of national security. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, once hailed as a dominant force in Zionist politics, now stands increasingly isolated. His government, already strained by ideological rifts, fractured further when far-right Minister Itamar Ben Gvir resigned in opposition to the ceasefire deal. This further exposes the cracks within the Zionist entity's political infrastructure.

The debate over the ceasefire agreement — particularly over the release of Palestinian leaders — has become emblematic of the moral and political dilemmas facing Zionists. As some Zionist journalists have pointed out, Zionists are confronted with difficult questions about violence, occupation, and Gaza's future. Many are beginning to acknowledge that the status quo can no longer continue.

Netanyahu's vulnerable position

Netanyahu's position, once seemingly unshakable, is now under intense scrutiny. His decision to ally with far-right parties to secure his leadership has left him politically vulnerable. The resignation of Ben Gvir represents another crisis in a government already weakened by internal rifts. Speculation is rife about whether Ben Gvir might return to government, but doing so could only escalate tensions within the coalition.

Internally, political instability is spilling over onto the streets. Settlers, particularly in the West Bank, have expressed anger over the ceasefire, with violent incidents — such as the burning of Palestinian property — spiking in recent days. This surge in violence underscores the widening divide within Zionist society and its growing inability to maintain unity and order.

Hamas: A resilient resistance

While the Zionist entity grapples with its internal divisions, Hamas emerges from the ceasefire as a resilient and formidable adversary. The terms of the ceasefire, which include the release of Palestinian prisoners and the cessation of hostilities, are viewed by many as a significant concession to Hamas. The movement has shown remarkable resilience throughout the conflict, demonstrating that it remains a powerful force in Gaza with no intention of disappearing from the political landscape.

Many Zionist media outlets have declared that for the first time, the Zionist entity has "lost" a war. In this reflection, it has become clear that Hamas has gained far more than it has sacrificed during this round of fighting.

What Hamas gained

Hamas has made significant gains from the conflict. The international shift in public opinion is one of the most notable achievements. By framing its cause as one of resistance to occupation, Hamas has garnered substantial support, both regionally and globally. The release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners is another key concession, with many of these prisoners serving life sentences for acts against the Zionist entity.

Despite the losses it suffered during the war, Hamas has rebuilt its military capabilities. Its forces in Gaza are now reportedly stronger than before, numbering around 12,000 fighters. The reconstruction of Gaza, though severely damaged, is expected to receive substantial international aid. Given Hamas' control of the region, much of this aid will likely bolster its position.

Hamas has also gained leverage through the ongoing hostage negotiations. Even after the ceasefire, the hostages held by Hamas continue to serve as bargaining chips, ensuring the group can extract further concessions from the Zionist entity in the future.

Zionist entity at a crossroads

As the Zionist entity moves into 2025, it faces an uncertain future. The ceasefire with Hamas may have temporarily halted the bloodshed, but it has done little to resolve the deep-rooted issues that continue to divide Zionist society. The political establishment is fractured, with tensions running high both in government and on the streets. Meanwhile, the economic and human costs of the war have left the Zionist entity weakened, its position on the global stage increasingly precarious.

Ultimately, the ceasefire has only underscored the profound divisions within the Zionist entity, and the continuing occupation of Palestinians remains a source of both moral and political strain. As the Zionist entity stands at this critical crossroads, the question remains: Will it continue to rot from within? Many Zionist journalists argue "that the ongoing occupation is the root of the entity's crisis, and without a complete resolution of this issue, the Zionist entity as it stands today will cease to exist."

NOTE: Farah AlHashem is a former diplomat, award-winning political journalist and multitiered filmmaker with a distinguished career spanning over 17 years in media production across print, TV and online platforms. AlHashem's career includes notable positions at leading global institutions such as the Associated Press, UNESCO and the United Nations. Currently, she serves as the Media Content Supervisor at Kuwait's Ministry of Information.

KPC empowering Kuwaitis

Citizens make up 91% of the corporation's workforce

KUWAIT: The CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah, said that the percentage of the Kuwaiti national workforce in the corporation and its subsidiaries has reached 91 percent, stressing commitment to developing and empowering Kuwaiti cadres at all levels. Sheikh Nawaf Al-Sabah added in an interview with Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the establishment of the corporation that it has contributed since its establishment to supporting the development process in the country, as it achieved many great achievements and successes until it became a main pillar of the national economy.

He explained that the corporation, since its establishment on January 27, 1980, has succeeded in creating an integrated national legacy built on solid foundations of hard work, dedication, and relentless pursuit of innovation and continuous change with every stage of the development of the oil sector. He pointed out that the Kuwaiti oil sector, led by the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, is characterized by fixed and solid practical values, adding that the corporation follows clear strategies and is committed to work procedures and the ability to implement best practices with innovation and flexibility and that "innovation is the compass of the oil sector in its journey to success."

He stressed that interest in the human element is a pillar of work in the oil sector, noting that the oil sector has invested over the decades in generations of Kuwaitis and contributed to developing their skills and enhancing the culture of learning and development, which was reflected in the employees of the oil sector and made them an example of excellence, discipline, and leadership with confidence.

He stated that the corporation is heading towards its golden jubilee in five years, which coincides with the middle of the road towards achieving the strategy of the corporation and its subsidiaries

until 2040, stressing that it realizes that the global changes sweeping the global oil markets will require flexibility and innovation from it, especially since the global economy still needs oil as a source of fuel, in conjunction with the international community's need to reduce harmful emissions and combat climate change.

He explained that what distinguishes Kuwaiti oil is that it is one of the lowest global oils in terms of production costs and carbon dioxide emissions, stressing the corporation's awareness of the importance of Kuwait's role in global markets and that its most important directions in the next five-year plan are to increase production by 2030 while continuing to strive to reduce harmful emissions by investing in innovative technologies and digital transformation. He mentioned that the history of Kuwait Oil Company has proven its skill in extracting oil from onshore fields, "and now, thanks to God, the company has succeeded in marine exploration, and the best evidence of that are the Al-Nukhdha and Al-Jul'ah fields."

Reducing harmful emissions

Sheikh Nawaf Al-Sabah said that Kuwait Oil Company seeks to add about 200,000 barrels per day of marine resources by 2035, adding that in addition to oil production, some marine discoveries will enhance the production of associated gas, which represents a qualitative addition that supports meeting the increasing demand for energy, especially in the electricity generation sector, as natural gas is the primary source of fuel in power plants.

Regarding reducing harmful emissions, he confirmed the institution's endeavor to invest in carbon capture technologies resulting from its operations in the oil sector, as work will be done to seize carbon emissions and store approximately 26 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions in 2050. He stated that the corporation is studying potential options for carbon capture from several sources within its

operations in various sectors (production and refining) in order to reduce carbon emissions and enhance crude oil production.

He pointed out that artificial intelligence is an essential part of the Corporation's strategy for digital transformation with the aim of enhancing operational efficiency, supporting decision-making, and promoting innovation in various fields. He stressed the Corporation's focus on applying artificial intelligence and machine learning to improve operational processes such as predictive maintenance and intelligent data analysis with the aim of providing strategic insights that enhance decision-making in various aspects of work and integrating artificial intelligence to improve environmental sustainability through technologies to monitor emissions and develop solutions that reduce environmental impacts.

Digital educational platforms

Regarding the development and empowerment of Kuwaiti talents, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Sabah explained that the Corporation is working to train and develop them at every level of their professional lives and supports their continuous learning, pointing to the launch of digital educational platforms and e-learning units that focus on operational excellence and a framework for guidance led by leaders of the oil sector to hone the skills of promising youth.

He stated that cooperative education programs have also been introduced with the best universities in Kuwait, which creates a flood of young talents ready to enter the industry armed with practical knowledge and experience. He expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation to all employees of the Corporation and its subsidiaries for their dedication and loyalty, as they were the driving force behind the successes achieved under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. — KUNA

India's prestigious honor for Shaikha Al-Sabah for promoting yoga in Kuwait

KUWAIT: The government of India conferred the prestigious 'Padma Shri' award on Shaikha Shaikha Ali Al-Jaber Al-Sabah of Kuwait on January 25, 2025 for her efforts in promoting yoga in Kuwait and the region. She is the first Kuwaiti national to receive a Padma award and among the select eight international recipients of Padma Shri this year, Indian Embassy in Kuwait said in a press statement on January 28.

Padma Shri award is one of the highest civilian awards of India and is awarded for distinguished service in any field. The award is given in various disciplines/fields of activities, art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service, etc. The award is traditionally announced on the occasion of the Republic Day of India. The award

is conferred by the President of India at ceremonial functions which are held at Rashtrapati Bhawan usually around March/April every year.

Shaikha Al-Sabah is credited with the inception of the first licensed yoga studio in Kuwait. The studio named 'Daratma' combines Arabic word 'Dar' (home) with Sanskrit word 'Atma' (soul) thus epitomizing a deep connection with India. She has been a pioneer in the field of yoga education in Kuwait. She is also the co-founder of Shems Youth Yoga in Kuwait. Due to her efforts, the Ministry of Commerce & Industry of Kuwait introduced a yoga education license in Kuwait which is now accessible to all. Her contributions have also played a key role in promoting yoga within the region, the release added.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Shaikha Al-Sabah during his visit to Ku-



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (right) with Shaikha Shaikha Ali Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

wait in December, 2024 and conveyed his deep appreciation for her stellar efforts. It may be noted that based on Prime Minister Modi's proposal of a 'Yoga Day' in his address to the UN General Assembly in September 2014, the resolution on 'International Day of Yoga' piloted by India was co-spon-

sored by 177 countries, including Kuwait and adopted unanimously by the UN General Assembly. Since 2015, the world celebrates the International Day of Yoga on June 21 every year. The Indian embassy in Kuwait has been organizing the International Day of Yoga in Kuwait on June 21 every year.

Yemen touts Kuwait's unwavering backing

KUWAIT: Yemeni Foreign Minister Dr Shaya Zindani has commended Kuwait's unwavering support to Yemen, citing relentless positions in this regard by the Kuwaiti political leadership, represented by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. He made the statement to KUNA and Kuwait TV while giving a lecture at the Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Kuwait Diplomatic Institute on the latest Yemeni situation and the efforts of the international coalition and Kuwait to re-stabilize Yemen and put a peaceful end to its crisis.

The Yemeni foreign minister, who is in Kuwait on an official visit, said that the Yemeni people appreciate Kuwait's humanitarian, charitable, and developmental aid to their country. He pointed out that Kuwait always stands side by side with the Yemeni people in joy and sorrow, speaking highly of fraternal relations between both countries and their brotherly peoples. Zindani added that his visit to Kuwait mainly aimed at promoting bilateral relations between Kuwait and Yemen and creating new horizons of cooperation in various domains.

Kuwait, Uzbekistan open doors for economic ties

KUWAIT: Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) affirmed Tuesday that Kuwaiti companies have succeeded in setting global standards in vital sectors that are considered the backbone of the national economy, such as finance, logistics, healthcare and petrochemicals and at the same time open doors for cooperation and mutual investment with Uzbekistan.

This came in a press statement by the Chamber of Commerce on the occasion of receiving an investment delegation from the Republic of Uzbekistan headed by Deputy Minister of Investment, Industry and Trade Shahrukh Gulamov, in the presence of Uzbekistan's Ambassador to the country Ayub Khan Yunusov, and with the participation of a group of Kuwaiti investors.

The statement praised the bilateral relations between the two countries, adding that the presence of the delegation reflects his country's confidence in the great potential offered by Kuwait as a promising economic and investment destination. The statement affirmed the Chamber's commitment to building bridges of cooperation that were strengthened



Yemeni Foreign Minister Dr Shaya Zindani gives a lecture at Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Kuwait Diplomatic Institute. — KUNA

MoUs signed

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdullah Al-Yahya, met with visiting Yemeni peer Foreign Minister Dr Shaya Zindani and his accompanying delegation. Ways to enhance the strong bilateral relations, in addition to the latest regional and international developments, were

discussed during the meeting. According to a ministry statement, both sides signed two memoranda of understanding: one on facilitating bilateral consultations and another for the purpose of training, signed by the Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute on behalf of Kuwait and its Yemeni counterpart. — KUNA



Meeting of the Uzbek investment delegation with Kuwaiti companies at the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry. — KUNA

during the convening of the first Kuwaiti-Uzbek Joint Committee for Economic, Trade and Scientific Cooperation last November.

The statement said that Kuwait always seeks to strengthen its international relations with the aim of creating a more diverse and prosperous economic environment, stressing that Kuwaiti businessmen have a strong desire to explore external opportunities that contribute to developing infrastructure, achieving food security, improving education and promoting the use of renewable energy sources within Kuwait. For his part, Gulamov expressed his thanks to the Chamber of Commerce for its cooperation in strengthening bilateral relations between the

two countries, praising the great efforts made by the two parties during 2024, as two conferences were held in Kuwait and the third in Uzbekistan.

In turn, Ambassador Yunusov considered that organizing such events by the Chamber of Commerce would contribute to developing bilateral relations between the two friendly countries, noting the upcoming visit of the Uzbek President to Kuwait next February, which aims to strengthen economic relations. The meeting witnessed a visual presentation on the Uzbek economy, as it is one of the most important exporters of gold and minerals in the world, in addition to providing incentives and exemptions to investors. — KUNA

Local

Flag-hoisting to launch national celebrations

Cabinet congratulates Kuwait leadership during weekly meeting

KUWAIT: The Cabinet held its weekly meeting on Tuesday at Bayan Palace, chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Following the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sharida Abdullah Al-Maousherji stated the following: On the occasion of the flag-raising ceremony that will be held at Bayan Palace on Feb 2, 2025, marking the start of the national celebrations of Kuwait, the Cabinet extends its sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and the honorable Kuwaiti people, asking God Almighty to return this national occasion to Kuwait every year while it enjoys goodness, prosperity and flourishing.

The representative of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Noura Suleiman Al-Fassam informed the Cabinet of the results of the forum held in the Swiss city of Davos during the period from 20 to 24 -1-2025 and the content of her speech during the forum in which she referred to the expectations and aspirations towards the prospects of economic development in light of the challenges and opportunities available, pointing to geopolitical risks, climate change and risks associated with artificial intelligence, which are among the most prominent global challenges for the year 2025. The minister stressed that these challenges require close cooperation between the public and private sectors to employ technology to achieve economic growth.

On the other hand, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the current session of the Ministerial Council of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya, informed the Cabinet of the results of his visit last Friday to Lebanon, accompanied by the Secretary-General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States

of the Gulf, Jassem Mohammed Al-Budaiwi, and the content of his meetings with the President of the Lebanese Republic, General Joseph Aoun; the Speaker of Parliament, Nabih Berri; the Prime Minister-designate, Najib Mikati; the Prime Minister-designate, Dr. Nawaf Salam; and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Abdullah Bou Habib.

This confirmed the commitment of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries to support Lebanon's sovereignty, its security, stability, territorial integrity, and the importance of implementing comprehensive political and economic reforms to ensure that Lebanon overcomes its crises.

The Council of Ministers also reviewed the visual presentation submitted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya, and a number of officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the system of mechanizing institutional resources (mechanizing the accounts of diplomatic missions), which aims to develop a strategy to avoid all the comments received from the regulatory authorities and to quickly enable the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to complete transactions related to the accounts of the military, cultural, and health offices through the embassies abroad in order to preserve public money.

The Council of Ministers reviewed the recommendations contained in the minutes of the Ministerial Committee for Economic Affairs. In this regard, the Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, Dr. Mahmoud Abdulaziz Bushehri, informed the Council of Ministers of the procedures taken by the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy regarding the white paper on energy transformation in Kuwait.

He also informed the Cabinet of the signing of a memorandum of understanding by the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy on Monday with the company (ABC Transco Limited Energy), which, with its strategic partner (General Electric Vernova), has submitted as a developer, operator, and investor to establish a



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah presides over a Cabinet meeting on Tuesday. — KUNA

power generation station with a total capacity of up to 3,000 megawatts—using gas turbines (power station) with all its infrastructure accessories, stressing that the memorandum of understanding comes under the directives of the political leadership.

The Cabinet also reviewed the reports of the financial controllers' offices for the fiscal year (2023/2024 - 2024/2025) and decided to refer them to the Government Performance Follow-up Agency to coordinate with the relevant government agencies to benefit from the results and recommendations contained in those reports

and take the measures it deems appropriate to achieve the public interest in accordance with the provisions in force in this regard.

On the other hand, the Cabinet reviewed a number of topics included on the agenda. The Council of Ministers approved the minutes of the Supreme Committee for the Investigation of Kuwaiti Nationality, which included cases of loss, withdrawal, and revocation of Kuwaiti nationality from some persons, in accordance with the provisions of Decree Law No. (15) of 1959 regarding Kuwaiti nationality and its amendments. — KUNA

Poland-Kuwait talks focus on arms deal, security, tourism

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: The delivery of Polish weaponry to Kuwait, which is still under negotiation, will be among key topics during the visit of Andrzej Szejna, Poland's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. Speaking at Poland's travel roadshow on Tuesday, Szejna highlighted that this matter would be addressed in his upcoming meetings with Kuwait's Minister of Defense and Deputy Minister. He added that the discussions will cover a range of topics, including the situation in the Middle East, particularly Gaza and Syria, the war in Ukraine, and Poland's transatlantic relations with the United States and NATO.

Military cooperation will also be addressed, particularly in light of the 2023 agreement between Poland and Kuwait, which enabled the training of Kuwaiti military cadets in Poland. Szejna described the relationship between the two countries as "closer than ever," particularly in the area of security. He pointed to decades of cooperation and recalled that Poland was part of the coalition that liberated Kuwait during the Gulf War.

Furthermore, Szejna noted that the discussions would explore opportunities linked to Kuwait's leadership of the GCC and Poland's upcoming European Union presidency, aiming to strengthen ties between the two regions. Szejna also highlighted that Poland's motto for its EU presidency in the first half of 2025 is "Security,



Andrzej Szejna, Poland's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs is pictured during his opening speech at Poland Travel roadshow event.

Europe." According to a Saudi think tank, this approach could present new opportunities for collaboration, aligning with GCC objectives.

The think tank further emphasized that security cooperation would be a priority during Poland's presidency, building on the momentum from the first EU-GCC Regional Security Dialogue in Riyadh in January 2024. This platform could expand collaboration in key areas such as cybersecurity, counterterrorism, and combating disinformation. Additionally, Poland's presidency aims to foster regional stability in the Middle East by leveraging both the EU's diplomatic influence and the GCC's regional expertise.

The deputy minister also underscored the growing tourism connections between Poland and Kuwait. "We would like to highlight our openness to tourists from Kuwait," he said. "Poland is becoming an increasingly at-



Osama Al-Makhyaal, Assistant Undersecretary for the Tourism Sector at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

tractive destination for Kuwaiti travelers, and the number of visitors is steadily rising. This is one of the reasons for our presence here in Kuwait, along with representatives from the Polish Tourist Organization."

In his opening speech at the event, Osama Al-Makhyaal, Assistant Undersecretary for the Tourism Sector at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information, highlighted the long-standing relationship between Kuwait and Poland, built on mutual respect and cooperation. "We look forward to further strengthening this relationship, especially in the field of tourism, where there is significant potential for mutual growth and cultural exchange," he stated. He continued, "Poland's culture and natural attractions make it a destination worth discovering. From our side, we affirm Kuwait's commitment to exploring new opportunities for cooperation in tourism to deepen the ties between our two friendly nations."

Interior launches multilingual traffic awareness campaign

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Interior has launched an extensive awareness campaign to educate the public about the new traffic law amendments. The campaign is being conducted in six languages to ensure it reaches all citizens and residents in Kuwait. In a statement released on Tuesday, the Ministry announced that, in addition to Arabic, the campaign will be available in English, Farsi, Hindi, Bengali, Urdu and Tagalog. The campaign aims to promote traffic and legal awareness by clarifying the updated provisions of the traffic law.

This initiative is part of the Ministry's broader efforts to enhance traffic safety, ensure compliance with regulations, and reduce accidents, ultimately fostering a safer driving environment. To achieve this, the campaign will utilize both traditional and social media platforms, supported by visual and audio awareness materials in multiple languages. This approach reflects the Ministry's commitment to creating a comprehensive legal environment that respects Kuwait's cultural and linguistic diversity, the statement concluded. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Participants are pictured during the opening of the group discussion program to study the level of maturity in the field of cybersecurity. — KUNA

CITRA supports digital economy

KUWAIT: The Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) said on Monday that the year 2024 witnessed exceptional successes in its work, stressing keenness to continue its role in developing digital infrastructure in addition to enhancing its pioneering role in supporting the digital economy. This came in a speech delivered by Acting Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Communications Authority Abdullah Al-Ajmi during a press conference held to review the achievements of the Authority in 2024 and its vision for 2025.

Al-Ajmi said that the Communications Authority achieved record revenues during the first half of the fiscal year (2024-2025), exceeding KD 75 million (about \$243.4 million), thanks to improving operational performance and increasing collection in vital areas, including landing station licenses, licenses for telecommunications companies, and revenues from leased international connection circuits. He added that the Authority is keen to avoid the challenges associated with the maintenance of marine communications cables. It has recently launched the new regional corridor linking Kuwait and Frankfurt as an integrated alternative to traditional marine routes, as it is characterized by low latency, making it a reliable option for major companies and international service providers, as it allows directing data traffic from Kuwait to Europe via Iraq in a safe and efficient manner.

He explained that within the efforts of the Authority to launch the latest technologies in communications networks, it launched (last year) the first phase of the direct extension registration service in addition to launching new frequencies in preparation for launching the advanced fifth generation technology (5G), which is the latest and highest level in the communications networks sector.

Within the framework of the Communications Authority's keenness to develop the information technology sector and keep pace with the latest related developments, a land lease contract was signed with Google to establish modern data centers for cloud computing services in Kuwait. He noted the importance of this project in enhancing digital infrastructure and supporting digital transformation efforts



The acting Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Communications Authority Abdullah Al-Ajmi delivers a speech during a press conference held to review the achievements of the Authority in 2024 and its vision for 2025. — KUNA

in the public and private sectors by providing advanced and secure cloud services, which enhances the position of Kuwait as a reliable regional center for data services.

Al-Ajmi pointed out that the Authority also concluded a memorandum of understanding last year with Huawei to develop the information and communications technology sector, in addition to signing a contract with Kuwait Telecommunications Company to lease a plot of 5,698.5 square meters to establish an administrative headquarters and a multi-storey parking building in the Capital Governorate, which represents a strategic step towards enhancing cooperation between the sectors, supporting the communications and information technology sector in Kuwait, and encouraging investments that would enhance the infrastructure and drive the national economy.

He added that in light of the keenness to organize the communications and information technology sector and better meet the needs of beneficiaries, the Communications Authority launched its new organizational structure last year, including a comprehensive update of the affiliated sectors with the creation of new departments and sections with the aim of enhancing its effectiveness in organizing the sector, in addition to launching the (Kashif) service, which aims to show the name of the calling party and its number to the recipient of the call with the aim of documenting incoming calls via communications networks in Kuwait in order to reduce calls from unknown sources. — KUNA

Panels discuss cybersecurity, exchange ideas

KUWAIT: Abdullah Al-Salem University hosted a program on Monday that includes discussion panels to study and measure the level of maturity in the field of cybersecurity, organized in cooperation with the National Cybersecurity Center and Oxford University. The program's opening speech was delivered by the university's Vice President for Scientific Research and Graduate Studies, Dr. Sorour Al-Otaibi, who said that the discussion panels, which will continue until January 29, represent a "pivotal step" towards understanding the level of maturity in institutions by applying global standards that contribute to improving the digital infrastructure and protecting it for the Comprehensive Measurement Model (CMM) implemented by Oxford University experts.

Al-Otaibi added that the CMM aims to help countries and institutions identify strengths and weaknesses and analyze gaps while submitting a final report that includes recommendations to improve the cyber performance process. He stated that this initiative comes as a result of fruitful cooperation between the governments of Kuwait and Great Britain and Northern Ireland, "which reflects the depth of relations and keenness to cooperate in various fields, which serves the interests of both countries."

Kuwaiti-British Desert Warrior 8 exercise launched

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Army General Staff announced on Tuesday the launch of the joint Kuwaiti-British Desert Warrior 8 exercise in Mubarak Armored Brigade 15, which will continue

until February 16. The General Staff said in a press statement that the exercise is part of the Kuwaiti Army's scheduled military training and exercises with friendly countries to raise the level of performance and combat readiness through training, joint work, unification of military concepts and enhancing means of military cooperation between the two sides. It added that the exercise aims to provide all capabilities and harness all capacities to achieve maximum benefit from joint training and exercises to exchange expertise and raise the level of combat readiness. — KUNA



In my view

Gulf promotes cancer awareness campaign



By Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

local@kuwaittimes.com

There is no doubt that Gulf leaders are striving hard to unite the region. This great effort is due to the belief in the unity of Gulf nations and also to create a model for others. All Gulf institutions need to seek ways to remove any obstacle to Gulf cooperation, whether at the governmental or civil level.

On November 15, 2000 (24 years ago), in Kuwait, during a large conference of the Kuwait Society for Preventing Smoking and Cancer, the Gulf delegations discussed the importance of cooperation in creating awareness of cancer diseases and after taking necessary procedures and discussing with official associations in the Gulf, the establishment of the Gulf Union for Cancer Control was announced on March 19, 2002. This includes about twenty associations in all GCC countries.

Since then, Gulf awareness has become a positive image in all Gulf societies and there is a unified Gulf cancer conference held every year. This has helped in creating awareness and the member states have benefited from each other's experiences. Also, it laid the first building blocks for the establishment of support groups for cancer patients. There have been joint publications, including social media messages, to increase the awareness among the people in the Gulf region on the risk factors of cancer diseases and for early detection. Officials have also established a peer-reviewed scientific journal for cancer research.

This magazine gave doctors the opportunity to publish their scientific research fairly and professionally. The federation also established an awareness group to help the countries in need and experts have visited many countries—raising awareness and providing medical aid, training and treatment. A special website has been dedicated to health-related news and to create awareness for Gulf Awareness Week, which extends to the first week of February every year. The Minister of Health, Dr Ahmad Al-Awadi, will inaugurate the event on the second Sunday of February.

30th Al-Qurain Cultural Festival will be launched on February 3

KUWAIT: The National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) announced that the 30th edition of the Qurain Cultural Festival will kick off on Feb 3 and will continue until Feb 12 under the slogan "Thirty Years of Leadership and Giving." The council explained in a press statement on Monday that the festival embodies a journey of three decades of cultural creativity, as it presents a schedule full of events that combine arts, music, literature and intellectual seminars.

The statement quoted the assistant secretary for the culture sector at the council and vice president of the 30th Qurain Cultural Festival, Aisha Al-Mahmoud, as saying that there is a distinguished collection of events that will be included in the festival, which are in line with what the cultural arena needs in terms of movement that is compatible with the current era and the developments and modern technologies that have accompanied it in all its fields.

Al-Mahmoud stated that the Qurain Festival aims to enhance the cultural movement in the country and the region while shedding light on local and international creativity in the fields of art, music, theater, and literature and also reflects Kuwait's interest in preserving national heritage and keeping pace with future cultural challenges. She added that the Jaber Al-Ali Theater at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center will host the opening ceremony of the festival, while the morning and evening events and activities include a photo exhibition from 'Kuwait's Past' that will be held at The Avenues Mall and another exhibition on the National Council's publications accompanied by the exhibition "Al-Qurain: Thirty Years of Leadership and Giving that will be held at the Faculty of Arts at Kuwait University in Shadadiyah".

She indicated that a lecture entitled "The Geological Archaeological Impact of the Subiya Area" will be held at the Kuwait National Museum in addition to a cultural forum entitled "Thirty Years of Creative Culture in Facing Future Challenges". The main symposium of the Al-Qurain Cultural Festival will be entitled "The Dialectic of Criticism and Creative Text" and will continue for three days in two morning and evening sessions at the St. Regis Hotel. Al-Mahmoud said that the festival will include the late writer Abdulaziz Al-Babtain's lighthouse at the Al-Babtain Central Library for Arabic Poetry in appreciation of one of the pioneers of the cultural renaissance in the country, while the "Panorama of the Qurain Cultural Festival" will be held at the Kuwait National Library. —KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Pigeons flying above a beach near the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Causeway in Kuwait City on January 28, 2025. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Workshop reviews Kuwait nuclear security system

Gulf nation committed to agreements related to nuclear security

KUWAIT: The Executive Commissioner for International Cooperation at the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research and the National Liaison Officer with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Dr Nader Al-Awadhi, affirmed that Kuwait pays great attention to strengthening its national nuclear security system. This came in Al-Awadhi's speech on the occasion of the launch of a workshop to review the national plan for the sustainability of nuclear security in Kuwait, which is organized by the institute in cooperation with the Radiation Protection Department at the Ministry of Health and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The workshop will continue until next Thursday with the participation of representatives from several bodies, including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, the General Administration of Information, the General Fire Force, and the General Administration of Customs. Al-Awadhi explained that the workshop aims to review the achievements of the national plan for the sustainability of nuclear security in Kuwait and update it to keep pace with emerging security needs, with a focus on prioritizing to ensure maintaining an effective and sustainable nuclear security system.

He added that the workshop will address the six functional areas of the international plan to support nuclear security, which are the policy and national strategy, the legislative and regulatory framework, and the field of deterrence, detection, response, assurance, and continuous improvement. He pointed out that Kuwait, as a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, is committed to implementing all agreements related to nuclear security, including the International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards for radioactive and nuclear materials, as well as taking effective measures to prevent illegal access to radioactive and nuclear materials.

He explained that Kuwait is one of the first countries in the region to prepare an integrated nuclear



KUWAIT: Participants attend a workshop to review the national plan for the sustainability of nuclear security in Kuwait.— KUNA

security support plan since 2009 in cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency and with the participation of all relevant national authorities, stressing that this national plan is a qualitative addition to the public security system in the country to enhance human, institutional, and technical capabilities in various aspects of nuclear security.

He stated that this plan also aims to enhance nuclear security by monitoring and securing radioactive sources, developing a national emergency response plan, combating illicit trafficking in nuclear and radioactive materials, and enhancing border control, adding that it contributes to achieving sustainable development goals by developing a comprehensive and integrated nuclear security system.

He stressed that Kuwait has taken important steps to enhance its national nuclear security system by ratifying the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and its amendment of 2005 and joining the International Convention for the Sup-

pression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, in addition to the tasks of the Department of Radiation Protection at the Ministry of Health, which plays a pivotal role in developing a comprehensive regulatory framework for nuclear security and regulating the use of radioactive sources.

Al-Awadhi praised the role played by the International Atomic Energy Agency in supporting national efforts to enhance nuclear security, noting that a mission from the agency's International Advisory Service for Physical Protection concluded in 2023 that Kuwait had established a nuclear security system in line with international standards, with recommendations to enhance current practices. He expressed his thanks to the International Atomic Energy Agency for its effective contribution to holding this workshop, hoping that it would contribute to enhancing international cooperation and exchange of expertise to achieve national and regional goals in this field. — KUNA



Officials pose in front of the 14th aid plane to Syria. —KUNA photos

Kuwait sends 14th planeload of aid to Syria

KUWAIT: The 14th Kuwaiti plane took off on Tuesday to Damascus International Airport with 40 tons of food and necessary relief material on board as part of the "Kuwait is by Your Side" campaign. This plan was prepared by Al-Salam Association for Humanitarian and Charitable Works in coordination with various state ministries. Director of Al-Salam Association Hamad Al-Aoun told KUNA before takeoff that the campaign continues to dispatch relief materials to implement the directives of the Kuwaiti leadership to support and assist the people of Syria.

Al-Aoun pointed out that the selection of the shipment was done in coordination with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society, consisting of basic food ma-

terials such as flour, dates, beans, lentils, and other long-lasting items that could be stored for a long period to meet the needs of the families there. It also contains blankets, winter clothes, jackets, and other winter supplies to support a stable and warm winter for them, he added. Al-Aoun noted that the association is preparing to send more diverse relief aid as long as the Syrian people are in need of assistance, with the help of the Kuwaiti people and government.

On his part, Al-Salam Association Advisor Jasser Al-Tammar told KUNA that Kuwait does not spare any effort in harnessing its energies to highlight its pioneering humanitarian role in the region in an effort to support security and stability, especially the neighboring brotherly and friendly countries among them. He affirmed that the association is cooperating with its contributors to support humanitarian work and to continue giving and making efforts aimed at meeting the needs of Syrian families. This is the fifth airplane that was sent by the Al-Salam Association, with a total amount estimated at about 170 tons of various aid. Today's plane brings total aid to Syria so far to 403 tons.— KUNA



14th Kuwaiti plane took off to Damascus International Airport with 40 tons of food and necessary relief material.





Congo rebel gains to boost illicit mineral trade

Trump set to halt supply of HIV, malaria drugs to poor countries

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Russian diplomats make first Syria visit since Assad's fall

EU foreign ministers agree to ease sanctions on Syria, including the energy sector



DAMASCUS: People walk in front of the historic Hejaz train station, with the new Syrian flag hanging on the building, on January 26, 2025. — AFP

MOSCOW: The first Russian official delegation to visit Syria since the toppling of long-term Moscow ally Bashar Al-Assad has arrived in Damascus, Russian news agencies reported on Tuesday. The visit comes with Moscow keen to secure the fate of two military bases there and after Russian President Vladimir Putin denied that Moscow had suffered a strategic "defeat" in the Middle East following the fall of Assad.

The Russian delegation due to meet the new leadership of the war-ravaged country included deputy foreign minister Mikhail Bogdanov, who is also Putin's special envoy on the Middle East and Africa, as well as Alexander Lavrentyev, the president's special envoy on Syria, the RIA Novosti agency reported. It said it was "the first visit by Russian officials to Damascus" since Assad fled in December in the face of a lightning rebel advance across the country.

Moscow was one of Assad's key backers, intervening in Syria's civil war in 2015 in his favor. He and his family fled to Russia after his ouster by the Syrian opposition. Russia is now seeking to secure the fate of its naval base in Tartus and its air base at Khmeimim — both on Syria's Mediterranean coast and Moscow's only military outposts outside the former Soviet Union — with the new Syrian authorities.

A report by RT Arabic, a Russian state-controlled channel, said the delegation is set to meet Syria's new leader Ahmed Al-Sharaa, Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani and other officials. Russia's Bogdanov was a diplomat in Syria in the 1980s and 1990s and speaks Arabic, according to the foreign ministry website. Lavrentyev took part in previous negotiations with Assad.

Al-Sharaa leads an Islamist group — Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) — that is banned in Russia as a

"terrorist" organization. The organization is rooted in Al-Qaeda's Syria branch but has more recently adopted a more moderate tone. RT Arabic reported that Bogdanov described the visit as aimed at strengthening historic ties based on shared interests, and underlined Russia's hopes for Syrian unity and independence.

'Deep strategic interests'

Al-Sharaa in December noted the "deep strategic interests between Russia and Syria" in an interview with the Al-Arabiya TV channel. "All Syria's arms are of Russian origin, and many power plants are managed by Russian experts ... We do not want Russia to leave Syria in the way that some wish," Al-Sharaa added.

Ukrainian diplomats visited Syria's new rulers in December, with Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga urging Al-Sharaa to expel Russia from the country. "We believe that from a strategic point of view, the removal of Russia's presence in Syria will contribute to the stability of not only the Syrian state, but the entire Middle East and Africa," Sybiga told Al-Sharaa while in Damascus, according to a statement.

The Russian delegation's visit comes amid a flurry of diplomatic activity by the new rulers, aimed at building ties and easing sanctions. EU foreign ministers on Monday agreed to begin easing sanctions on Syria starting with key sectors such as energy.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Friday stressed the importance of "ensuring that the new government prevents Syria from becoming a source for international terrorism" and "denying foreign malign actors the opportunity to exploit Syria's transition". Saudi Arabia's top diplomat, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, was received by Sharaa on Friday, making his first visit since Assad's overthrow. — AFP

Families reunite in northern Gaza after months of agony

GAZA: Umm Ali Muheisen skipped across the road when she saw her daughter and grandchildren after 15 months separated by the war in Gaza, clutching them in a tight embrace as Palestinians reunited with loved ones after a ceasefire. Their reunion was one of many taking place just inside northern Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of displaced people returning from the south are going back looking for surviving family members and whatever remains of their homes. "I want to hold them. I want to get enough of them. I have not seen them for 15 months. I missed them so, so much," Muheisen said, lifting her little granddaughter.

The Zionist entity's massive military assault on Gaza was more intense in northern Gaza than anywhere else in the tiny coastal enclave, and civilians there were repeatedly ordered by the entity to leave. None who did so were allowed to return to the north until Sunday — a condition of the ceasefire agreement concluded earlier this month and many of them are now heading home.

Muheisen had been waiting since the morning at the first roundabout after the checkpoint into the north half of Gaza for her daughter Souad Atallah, along with her son-in-law and two grandchildren. All around her people were on the move. Men, women and children marched, carrying huge packs on their backs or clasped in their arms. Some pushed wheelchairs or prams laden with suitcases and bags. Mopeds pulled trailers loaded with belongings.

At the checkpoint, vehicles were queuing for miles to get back into the north. The roundabout was



GAZA: A woman embraces a man after crossing the Netzarim corridor from the southern Gaza Strip north into Gaza City along Gaza's coastal Al-Rashid Street on January 27, 2025. — AFP

a popular spot for reunions. With phone and internet connections very weak, it was an easy place to meet and groups could be seen hugging, kissing and crying with joy. "Separation is hard and the waiting is harder. I have been waiting for them since the morning. The waiting is hard, hard," Muheisen said.

Her daughter, Atallah, left with her family at the start of the war, when southern areas of Gaza seemed safer. Although the north continued to be hit hardest, the Zionist entity's assault left no corner of the Gaza Strip untouched, and most families had to flee repeatedly as waves of bombardment smashed further areas of the territory. "I have been waiting for 15 months to leave the south. My family, my sisters, my family, everything, our houses, are all here, all here in the north. I regret the day I left the north for the south. I was waiting night by night, hour by hour," Atallah said. — Reuters



ZAATARI CAMP: People ride motorbikes on a street at the Zaatari camp for Syrian refugees on January 13, 2025. — AFP photos



Syrian refugees at the Zaatari camp wait for departure approvals to return to their country.

Jordan camp refugees divided on whether to return to Syria

ZAATARI CAMP, Jordan: They have lived for years in Zaatari, the world's biggest refugee camp for Syrians, but many are unsure they want to return home from Jordan even after the ouster of former president Bashar Al-Assad. They fear the security situation might once again deteriorate after 13 years of civil war, and some say their homes have been destroyed while others lost their jobs and feel they have nothing to go back to.

In 2012, a year into the war in Syria, neighboring Jordan opened Zaatari camp to host people fleeing the conflict. It is now home to 75,000 people, according to UN figures.

To begin with, it was a squalid collection of tents dotting an arid landscape, but over time, it grew into a town of prefabricated homes, supplied with free electricity, water, health and schools. On a street named the Champs-Elysees, after the famed Parisian avenue, 60-year-old shop owner Yousef Hariri told AFP he wanted to stay in Zaatari with his family, where they feel safe. "I can't go back. That would mean losing everything and selling the shop would be hard," said Hariri, whose store sells construction materials. "The situation in Syria is not good at the moment and it is not clear what will happen. Prices are through the roof and there are armed rebels. Our houses are destroyed."

The war in Syria, which began with Assad's crackdown on democracy protesters in 2011, forced

millions of people to flee the country, with most of them seeking refuge in neighboring countries. Tens of thousands have returned since opposition groups ousted Assad on December 8, but most refugees have yet to make the journey home.

'Injustice and tyranny'

Most of the refugees in Zaatari came from the south Syrian province of Daraa, near the Jordanian border. It was, earlier in the conflict, home to 140,000 people. Refugees in the camp receive cash assistance for food, and they have the right to work outside the camp. "Where are we going to go back to?" said Khaled Al-Zoabi, 72, who has lived in the camp since 2012, and who cited the destruction wrought by the war. "The refugees' finances aren't good enough for anyone to return, and no one knows what will happen in Syria," he said. "We fled the injustice and tyranny of Assad's gangs in Syria, where human life had no value. Here, I feel I am a human being, and I prefer to stay," said the shop owner.

To date, there is no financial assistance to help people return. Radwan Al-Hariri, a 54-year-old father of three, said his contacts in Syria had all advised him to stay put. An imam at a mosque, the grandfather of 12 children all born in Zaatari said that in Syria, "no one helps you and there is no work". According to the Jordanian authorities, 52,000 Syrians have returned home through the Jaber border crossing between the two countries since Assad's overthrow. "Insecurity remains a concern. There is still a lot of instability, armed clashes in some parts of the country and an increasing number of civilian casualties due to remnants of war and unexploded ordnance," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees spokesperson in Jordan Roland Schoenbauer. — AFP

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International

Trump 'not 100% sure' he's barred from third term

Trump's tone remains light-hearted as congressman proposes to amend constitution

MIAMI: US President Donald Trump once again hinted at the idea of serving a third term, saying he was "not 100 percent sure" he was barred from doing so under the constitution, which forbids it. Trump has repeatedly alluded to the possibility that he might go beyond the current two-term limit for US presidents — but while he often strikes a light-hearted tone the remarks remain provocative. "I've raised a lot of money for the next race that I assume I can't use for myself, but I'm not 100 percent sure, because I don't know ... I think I'm not allowed to run again," Trump told an audience of Congressional Republicans in Miami.

To laughter, Trump turned to Republican House Leader Mike Johnson and added:

"I'm not sure, am I allowed to run again? Mike? I better not get you involved in that argument." Trump was inaugurated for his second spell in the White House a week ago, becoming just the second president in US history to serve two non-consecutive terms. US presidents are limited to two terms in office by the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution, which was ratified in 1951 — partly as a response to Franklin D Roosevelt's unprecedented four terms as president from 1933-1945.

A Republican in the US House introduced a super-long-shot resolution last week to change the constitution to allow Trump to get another term. Trump has alluded to extending his stay on a number of

occasions and joked about it as recently Saturday, during a rally in Nevada. "It will be the greatest honor my life to serve not once, but twice - or three times or four times," he said with a laugh, before adding to cheers from the audience: "Headlines for the fake news."

In November, in another speech to House Republicans shortly after his election win, Trump said: "I suspect I won't be running again unless you say, 'He's good, we got to figure something else.'" Trump told an audience of conservative Christians in July: "Christians, get out and vote. Just this time ... Four more years, it'll be fixed, it'll be fine, you won't have to vote anymore." — AFP



MIAMI: US President Donald Trump gestures on stage alongside Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (left) at the House Republican Members Conference Dinner, in Miami, Florida on January 27, 2025. — AFP

Trump to halt supply of HIV, malaria drugs to poor countries

LONDON: The Trump administration has moved to stop the supply of lifesaving drugs for HIV, malaria and tuberculosis, as well as medical supplies for newborn babies, in countries supported by USAID around the globe, a memo reviewed by Reuters showed. On Tuesday, contractors and partners who work with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) began receiving such memos to stop work immediately, sources said. The move is part of a wider freeze on US aid and funding put in place since Trump took office on Jan. 20, while programs are reviewed.

One such memo went to Chemonics, a large US consulting firm which works with USAID on the supply of medicines for a range of conditions worldwide. The memo covers the firm's work on HIV, malaria and tuberculosis as well as contraception and maternal and child health supplies, one USAID source and one former USAID official told Reuters.

"This is catastrophic," said Atul Gawande, former head of global health at USAID who left the agency this month. "Donated drug supplies keeping 20 million people living with HIV alive. That stops today." Chemonics and USAID did not immediately respond to Reuters' requests for comment.

Interruptions in treatment for diseases mean that patients risk getting sick, as well as, in the case of HIV in particular, transmitting the virus to others. It



US President Donald Trump wears a "Make America Great Again" baseball cap during a fire emergency briefing in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

also means drug-resistant strains may emerge, Gawande said. He said other partners had also received notices that meant they would be unable to deliver medicines to clinics even if they had them in stock, or open the clinics if they are funded by the US.

That includes organizations working with 6.5 million orphans and vulnerable children with HIV in 23 countries, he said. Trump ordered a 90-day pause in foreign development assistance on Jan 20, the day he took the oath of office, pending assessments of efficiencies and consistency with US foreign policy.

His administration has also put on leave about 60 senior career officials at the USAID, sources familiar with the matter told Reuters on Monday. The administration's actions threaten billions of dollars of life-saving aid from the world's largest single donor. In fiscal year 2023, the US disbursed \$72 billion in assistance. It provided 42 percent of all humanitarian aid tracked by the United Nations in 2024. — Reuters

reported rising state censorship in recent years and the public has shifted to consuming much of its news from social media.

"The mainstream media is already compromised. That's the reason why many journalists turned to YouTube," YouTube journalist Asad Ali Toor told AFP in the capital Islamabad, where more than 150 journalists rallied against the bill. "The state wants the same control of social media as it is controlling the mainstream media," Toor said. Around 50 journalists also protested the bill outside the press club of the southern city of Karachi on Tuesday afternoon.

Analysts say the government is struggling with legitimacy after elections last February plagued by rigging allegations, and with popular former prime minister Imran Khan jailed on corruption charges he insists are politically motivated. Khan's supporters and senior lieutenants in his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party have faced a severe crackdown, with thousands rounded up and Khan's name censored from television.

Much of PTI's campaigning has moved online

Gaza, the majority civilians.

Meanwhile, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Tuesday that Gaza had brought the Zionist entity "to its knees", in a reference to the recent ceasefire in the Palestinian territory. "The small, limited Gaza brought the Zionist regime, armed to the teeth and fully supported by America, to its knees," Khamenei said during a meeting with officials in Tehran.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi meanwhile appeared to mock Trump's plan to relocate Palestinians, saying instead Zionists should be sent to Greenland to resolve the issue. "Instead of Palestinians, try to expel (Zionists), take them to Greenland, killing two birds with one stone," he said, in an interview with Sky News that was posted on his official Telegram channel. "They can resolve the problem of Greenland and the (Zionists), it would be a good place for them," he added.

The US president has also for years touted a purported plan to take over the autonomous Danish territory of Greenland, telling reporters on Saturday he believed the United States would "get Greenland". Earlier on Tuesday, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman, Esmail Baqaei, had also criticized the idea of moving Palestinians out of Gaza. "Political coercion and demographic manipulations will not be able to force the Palestinians to migrate," Baqaei said in a post on X, adding that Gaza is the Palestinians' "homeland and they've paid (an) extremely high price to remain there". — Agencies

made a proposal to merge with TikTok, with the US government getting up to half of the new company in future, a source told Reuters. The reported talks mark the second time that Microsoft has been in the frame to acquire TikTok. During his first term, Trump ordered TikTok to separate its US version from ByteDance citing national security concerns.

Microsoft emerged as a top bidder in 2020, but the talks soon collapsed, and Trump's divestment push ended a few months later when he left office. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella called that the "strangest thing I've ever worked on". The US government had a "particular set of requirements and then it just disappeared," he said in 2021. — Reuters

US Justice Dept fires officials who prosecuted Trump

WASHINGTON: The US Justice Department fired a number of officials on Monday who were involved in the criminal prosecutions of President Donald Trump. "Acting attorney general James McHenry made this decision because he did not believe these officials could be trusted to faithfully implement the president's agenda because of their significant role in prosecuting the president," a Justice Department official said.

The official did not specify how many people had their employment terminated, but US media outlets said it was more than a dozen and several were career prosecutors with the Justice Department. Special Counsel Jack Smith, who brought two federal cases against Trump, resigned earlier this month.

Smith charged Trump with plotting to overturn the results of the 2020 election and mishandling classified documents after leaving the White House. Neither case came to trial and Smith — in line with a long-standing Justice Department policy of not prosecuting a sitting president — dropped them both after the Republican won November's presidential election.

The firing of the Justice Department officials involved in prosecuting Trump was not unexpected. Trump had vowed before the election to fire Smith "on day one" and accused the Justice Department under Democratic president Joe Biden of conducting

where the party's young tech-savvy base has continually called for protests. PTI senator Syed Shibli Faraz called the new law "highly undemocratic" and said it would "fuel the political victimization" of their supporters.

Facebook, TikTok and WhatsApp are among the most popular social media platforms in Pakistan, where low digital literacy fuels the spread of false information, conspiracy theories and deepfakes. Some YouTube journalists blur the line between reporting and heavily partisan commentary tailored to their millions of followers.

Many lack proper fact-checking skills and contribute to spreading false information, sometimes garnering thousands of views. "I am sure that in the future, the anarchy caused in society through social media will be controlled," government minister Tanveer Hussain said as the bill was approved. It will now be passed to the president to be rubber-stamped.

The new law says social media platforms must register with a newly established regulatory body, with non-compliance potentially leading to tempo-



WASHINGTON: A protester stands outside the E Barrett Prettyman US Courthouse on Jan 9, 2023, during a hearing on immunity for Donald Trump. — AFP

a "political witch hunt" against him. In his inauguration speech, Trump said he would end the "vicious, violent, and unfair weaponization of the Justice Department and our government."

In his final report, Smith said Trump would have been convicted for his "criminal efforts" to retain power after the 2020 election if the case had not been dropped. Trump was charged with conspiracy to defraud the United States and conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding — the session of Congress held to certify Biden's win that was violently attacked on January 6, 2021 by a mob of Trump supporters.

Smith also prepared a report into Trump's alleged mishandling of classified documents but it is being withheld because charges are pending against two of his former co-defendants. Trump faces separate racketeering charges in Georgia over his efforts to subvert the election results in the southern state, but the case will likely be frozen while he is in office. — AFP

rary or permanent bans. It also grants Pakistan's intelligence agencies the authority to investigate disinformation and allows any citizen to file a case.

Senior journalist Asif Bashir Chaudhry, a member of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, told AFP the government had assured reporters they would be consulted but they were "betrayed and backstabbed". "We genuinely wanted a law against misinformation, but if it's not being done through open discussion but rather through fear and coercion, we will challenge it on every available platform," Chaudhry said. "Even under dictatorships, legislation was not forcefully rammed through parliament the way this government is doing now."

Social media site X was shut down in the wake of February's election, as posts alleging vote tampering spread on the platform. Digital rights activist Nighat Dad told AFP there has been "one restrictive law after another, introduced under the guise of public interest or national security". The real intent is "consolidating power and controlling the narrative," she said. — AFP

international community, jeopardizing any prospect for peace and security," he said. But the United States threw its weight behind the move of its closest Middle East ally, accusing Lazzarini of overstating the impact of the decision. "The United States supports the implementation of this decision," said Dorothy Shea, a United States representative to the UN. "UNRWA exaggerating the effects of the laws and suggesting that they will force (out) the entire humanitarian response is irresponsible and dangerous," she said. "What is needed is a nuanced discussion about how we can ensure that there's no interruption in the delivery of humanitarian aid and essential services. UNRWA is not and never has been the only option."

A ceasefire and captive release deal between the Zionist entity and Hamas is now in place in Gaza, intended to bring an end to the more than 15 months of war. The fighting provoked a deep humanitarian crisis, destroying hospitals and sparking outbreaks of infectious diseases while hundreds of thousands of Gazans faced starvation conditions and have depended on food aid. — AFP

idea of a classroom. "But this is just much more efficient if you actually want your studies to be done."

One of her favorite subjects is English, although she had been concerned how an AI platform would tackle the creative discipline. "(For) English, I thought you just have to have a teacher with you. Apparently not, because it worked," she explained. "You just have the work in front of you. You answer the questions, and it makes sense."

National Education Union — one of the two main UK teacher unions — last week said it was "pleased to see the focus on training for teachers in the use of digital tools" by the government. But Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the NEU, warned the government's ambitions must be "matched by significant investment in technology and IT infrastructure for schools".

And Luckin questioned "exactly how effective is this AI tutor", adding she hoped the pilot would provide "solid evidence" on whether AI is having a positive or negative impact. She also voiced concerns about whether there is "sufficient social learning" for students, although the college says pupils have plenty of time with classmates. — AFP

Pakistan outlaws disinformation with 3-year jail term

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan criminalized online disinformation on Tuesday, passing legislation dictating punishments of up to three years in jail and prompting journalist protests accusing the government of quashing dissent. The law targets anyone who "intentionally disseminates" information online that they have "reason to believe to be false or fake and likely to cause or create a sense of fear, panic or disorder or unrest".

It was rushed through the National Assembly with little warning last week before being approved by the Senate on Tuesday as reporters walked out of the gallery in protest. Pakistan media workers have

Trump repeats call to expel Gazans...

Continued from Page 1

For Palestinians, any attempts to force them from Gaza would evoke dark memories of the "Nakba", or catastrophe — the mass displacement of Palestinians during the Zionist entity's creation in 1948. "We say to Trump and the whole world: we will not leave Palestine or Gaza, no matter what happens," said displaced Gazan Rashad Al-Naji.

Almost all of the Gaza Strip's inhabitants were displaced at least once by the war that has leveled much of the Palestinian territory. On Monday, after Hamas and the Zionist entity agreed over the release of six hostages this week, "more than 300,000 displaced" Gazans were able to return to the north, according to the Hamas government media office.

"I'm happy to be back at my home," said Saif Al-Din Qazaat, who returned to northern Gaza but had to sleep in a tent next to the ruins of his destroyed house. "I kept a fire burning all night near the kids to keep them warm... (they) slept peacefully despite the cold, but we don't have enough blankets," the 41-year-old told AFP. The Zionist offensive has killed at least 47,317 people in

DeepSeek a 'wake up call'; Microsoft in...

Continued from Page 1

and would likely have a decision on the popular app's future in 30 days. The US president has previously said that he was open to billionaire Elon Musk buying the social media app if the Tesla CEO wanted to do so. Musk, however, has not publicly commented on Trump's offer.

More recently, AI startup Perplexity AI on Sunday

Zionists vow to cut UNRWA ties...

Continued from Page 1

assault, and insists that other organizations can pick up the slack to provide essential services, aid and reconstruction — something the UN disputes. A series of probes, including one led by France's former foreign minister Catherine Colonna, found some "neutrality related issues" at UNRWA — but stressed the Zionist entity had not provided evidence for its chief allegations.

The agency's chief Philippe Lazzarini said UNRWA's "capacity to directly provide primary healthcare for millions of Palestinians, and to resume education for hundreds of thousands of children, far exceeds that of any other entity". He called the Zionist entity's actions against UNRWA a "relentless assault" that is "harming the lives and future of Palestinians across the occupied Palestinian territory". "It is eroding their trust in the

First AI classroom without teachers...

Continued from Page 1

in education, said AI was an "outlier" with an uncertain future in British classrooms. While she agreed the technology would transform the role of teachers, Luckin told AFP it was "impossible" to say what that role might become. "I don't want to be overly negative about it, because unless we try these things, we won't see how they work," Luckin said.

Student Massa Aldalate, 15, has been won over to AI learning. "I was unsure at the beginning ... And then after actually being with it for a long time now, you can see the evidence right in front of you," she said, sitting on a swiveling chair surrounded by computers. Does she miss a traditional classroom? "Not really," she replied, adding people attach "sentimental value" to the

Thousands escape Congo's largest city as M23 takes control

UN rings alarm as bodies seen on Goma streets, crowds attack embassies in Kinshasa



KINSHASA: Protesters gather as smoke billows from burning tires during a demonstration against the escalating conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo in Kinshasa, on January 28, 2025. — AFP photos



GISENYI: A Congolese refugee fleeing ongoing clashes in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo styles the hair of a young girl from her family after their arrival at the Rugerero transit camp in Gisenyi on January 28, 2025.

GOMA: Dead bodies lay in the streets, gunfire rang out and hospitals were overwhelmed in east Congo's largest city Goma where M23 rebels backed by Rwanda faced pockets of resistance on Tuesday from army and pro-government militias. A day after the rebels marched into the lake-side city, protesters in the capital attacked a UN compound and embassies including those of Rwanda, France and the United States, expressing anger at what they said was foreign interference.

M23 fighters entered Goma on Monday in the worst escalation since 2012 of a three-decade conflict rooted in the long fallout from the Rwandan genocide and the struggle for control of Congo's abundant mineral resources. Goma is a major hub for people displaced by fighting elsewhere in eastern Congo and aid groups seeking to assist them. Now the fighting has sent thousands of people streaming out of the city — some had recently sought refuge there from M23's offensive since the start of the year.

Democratic Republic of Congo's gov-

ernment and the head of UN peacekeeping have said Rwandan troops were present in Goma, backing up their M23 allies. Rwanda has said it is defending itself against Congolese militias. Goma residents and UN sources said dozens of troops had surrendered, but some soldiers and pro-government militiamen were holding out. People in several neighborhoods reported small arms fire and some loud explosions. "I have heard the crackle of gunfire from midnight until now ... it is coming from near the airport," an elderly woman in Goma's northern Majengo neighborhood, close to the airport, told Reuters by phone.

Reports of rape, looting

Jens Laerke, spokesperson for the UN humanitarian office (OCHA), told a briefing in Geneva colleagues had reported "heavy small arms fire and mortar fire across the city and the presence of many dead bodies in the streets." "We have reports of rapes committed by fighters, looting of property

... and humanitarian health facilities being hit," he added. Other international aid officials described hospitals overwhelmed with wounded being treated in hallways. "The town is a powder keg," Willy Ngumbi, a bishop in Goma, said. Explosives had hit a house where priests were staying and the maternity ward of a Catholic hospital on Monday, he said by phone. "The youth are armed and the fighting is now taking place in the town."

Francois Moreillon, head of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Congo, told Reuters a medicine warehouse had been looted, and he was concerned about a laboratory where dangerous germs including ebola were kept. "Should it be hit in any way by shells which could affect the integrity of the structure, this could potentially allow germs to escape, representing a major public health issue well beyond the borders of the DRC," he said.

In Kinshasa, 1,600 km (1,000 miles) away from Goma, angry crowds burned tires, chanted anti-Rwanda slogans and

attacked embassies of several countries seen as favorable to Rwanda, leading the police to fire tear gas. "What Rwanda is doing is with the complicity of France, the US and Belgium. The Congolese people are fed up. How many times do we have to die?" said protester Joseph Ngoy.

The Rwandan, French, US, Ugandan, Kenyan, Dutch and Belgian embassies were targeted. Videos posted online and verified by Reuters showed dozens of people looting the Kenyan embassy, while others showed looting had spread to other locations including a supermarket.

Fear of spiral

The UN and global powers fear the conflict could spiral into a regional war akin to those of 1996-1997 and 1998-2003 that killed millions, mostly from hunger and disease. Corneille Nangaa, leader of the Congo River Alliance that includes the M23, has suggested the rebels' aim is to replace President Felix Tshisekedi and his government in the capital.

UN peacekeepers have been caught up in the fighting. South Africa said three of its men were killed in crossfire between government troops and rebels and a fourth had succumbed to wounds from earlier fighting, bringing the number of its fatalities in the past week to 13.

M23 is the latest in a string of ethnic Tutsi-led, Rwandan-backed insurgencies that have brought tumult to Congo since the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda 30 years ago, when Hutu extremists killed Tutsis and moderate Hutus, and then were toppled by the Tutsi-led forces that still dominate Rwanda.

An estimated 1 million Hutus, some of them refugees and others genocide perpetrators, poured into Congo, and Rwanda says Hutu-led militias and their government allies pose a threat to Congolese Tutsis as well as Rwanda itself. Congo rejects Rwanda's complaints, saying Kigali has used its proxy militias to control and loot lucrative minerals such as coltan, which is used in smartphones. — Reuters

What is behind east Congo's M23 insurgency?

KINSHASA: An insurgency led by M23 rebels in east Democratic Republic of Congo has escalated and reached the city of Goma, worsening a humanitarian crisis in a region that suffered two devastating wars between 1996 and 2003. Here is some background on the conflict.

Who are M23?

M23, which refers to the March 23, 2009, accord that ended a previous Tutsi-led revolt in eastern

Congo, is the latest group of ethnic Tutsi-led insurgents to take up arms against Congolese forces. It launched the current rebellion in 2022.

The group has accused the government of Congo of not living up to the peace deal and fully integrating Congolese Tutsis into the army and administration. It also vows to defend Tutsi interests, particularly against ethnic Hutu militias such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), founded by Hutus who fled Rwanda after participating in the 1994 genocide of close to 1 million Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

Since the start of 2025, the rebels have seized new territory and reached Goma, the capital of North Kivu province, prompting hundreds of thousands more people to flee their homes.

For more than a year, M23 has controlled Congo's coltan-mining region of Rubaya, generating an estimated \$800,000 per month through

a production tax, according to the UN. Coltan is used in the production of smartphones and other equipment. The group's spread into new territories in recent weeks gives it scope to acquire more mining revenue, analysts say.

Why is Rwanda involved?

The government of Congo, U.N. officials and Western powers including the United States have accused Congo's neighbor Rwanda of fueling the conflict by deploying thousands of its own troops and heavy weapons on Congolese soil in support of M23. The accusations are based on a 2022 report by a UN Group of Experts that said it had "solid evidence" that Rwandan troops had been fighting alongside the M23 rebels.

Rwanda, which denies backing the rebels, says it has taken what it calls defensive measures and accuses Congo of fighting alongside the FDLR,

which has attacked Tutsis in both countries. Rwanda has a long history of military intervention inside Congo. It and Uganda invaded in 1996 and 1998, claiming they were defending themselves against local militia groups.

Other forces

UN peacekeepers are supporting the Congolese army's efforts to curb the M23 as part of the MONUSCO mission's years-long mandate to counter the many rebel groups active in eastern Congo. An agreed withdrawal of the mission from Congo has been paused due to the deteriorating security situation. As of December, there were nearly 11,000 peacekeepers on the ground, mostly in the east.

The 16-member Southern African Development Community (SADC) also extended its military mission in Congo late last year. Both forces have suffered losses since the start of 2025. — Reuters

Congo M23 gains to boost illicit mineral trade

KINSHASA: A lightning advance in Congo's mineral-rich eastern borderlands is set to boost the M23 rebellion's illegal mining revenues, with analysts predicting a further surge in illicit trade in minerals including coltan and gold through neighboring Rwanda. The Rwanda-backed insurgency entered Goma, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo's largest city, this week, marking a major turning point in a conflict with government forces that has raised fears of a spillover into a broader regional war.

The rebels, which Rwanda denies supporting, have long been funded at least in part by the illicit mineral trade. Those revenue flows intensified after M23 — the latest in a long line of Tutsi-led rebellions — seized the coltan-rich Rubaya area in April, UN experts found.

Congo is the world's top producer of tantalum and cobalt, a key component in batteries for electric vehicles and mobile phones, and is also home to significant coltan and gold deposits. "Mineral exports from Rwanda are now over a billion dollars a year," said Jason Stearns, a political scientist at Simon Fraser University and former UN investigator. "That's about double what they were two years ago. And we don't know how much, but a fair chunk of that is from the DRC."

Rwanda's ambassador-at-large for the Great Lakes region Vincent Karega rejected the idea that M23 was trafficking Congolese minerals. He did not directly address allegations that his government is involved in their illicit trade. "Do you think it's possible to fight and still have time to mine natural resources and refine them?"



GISENYI: Congolese refugees fleeing clashes carry their belongings as they arrive at a transit camp in Gisenyi on January 28, 2025. — AFP

said Karega, who has been sent to the border with Congo to oversee the crisis.

Lack of transparency

Rebels recently captured the mining town Lumbishi in South Kivu province. Numbi, an eastern mining area in South Kivu rich in gold, tourmaline, and tin, tantalum and tungsten — so-called 3T minerals used in computers and mobile phones — is also under threat. "Lumbishi and its gold mines are likely to prove a significant source of revenue for M23, in part because gold is much easier to monetize than coltan and tin," said Gregory Mthemba-Salter, director of Phuzumoya Consulting.

He said gold was likely to make its way to Dubai via Rwanda and possibly Kenya. In 2023, UAE declared importing about \$885 million in gold from Rwanda, a 75 percent jump from the previous five-year average, according to a Reuters analysis

of UN Comtrade data. Rwanda is not a major gold producer.

In addition to exerting administrative control over Rubaya, M23 has also created a monopoly for the export of coltan to Rwanda from the nearby Bibatama mine, UN experts said in a December report. The mine is one of the world's largest deposits of coltan, used in cellphones and laptops.

The group collected at least \$800,000 per month in taxes on coltan production and trade, according to the report, with Congolese output mixed in with Rwandan production. Jean Pierre Okenda, a Congo-based rights lawyer specialized in extractive industries, said Rwanda was not a member of any international transparency initiatives, making it hard to track its minerals. "There is a lack of transparency of the mining operations and ... a lack of transparency of the geological information," he said. — Reuters



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Business

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2025

NBK announces net profit of KD 600.1 million for FY 2024

Bank achieves y-o-y profit growth of 7.0% • Board of Directors proposes a cash dividend of 25 fils per share for H2 2024

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has announced its financial results for the financial year ended December 31, 2024. The bank reported a net profit of KD 600.1 million (\$1.9 billion), compared to KD 560.6 million (\$1.8 billion) for the financial year 2023, an increase of 7.0 percent year-on-year.

Earnings per share (EPS) stood at 69 fils by the end of 2024, compared to 65 fils by the end of 2023. Meanwhile, total assets as of December 2024 grew by 7.1 percent year-on-year, reaching KD 40.3 billion (\$130.9 billion).

Customer deposits grew by 4.2 percent, totaling KD 22.9 billion (\$74.2 billion) as of December 2024. Meanwhile, Group loans and advances reached KD 23.7 billion (\$76.9 billion) by December 2024, reflecting a growth of 6.4 percent year-on-year. In the meantime, shareholders' equity also saw an increase, standing at KD 3.9 billion (\$12.7 billion), up by 5.9 percent year-on-year.

In terms of distributions, the Board of Directors has proposed a cash dividend of 25 fils per share for the second half of 2024, bringing the total cash dividend for the year to 35 fils, equivalent to around 50 percent of net profits. Furthermore, the Board has recommended the distribution of bonus shares at a ratio of 5 percent. These proposed distributions are subject to the approval at the Annual General Assembly (AGM).

Adapting to changing conditions

Commenting on the bank's annual financial results, Hamad Al-Bahar, NBK Group Chairman stated, "In 2024, we delivered strong performance, showcasing the resilience and adaptability of our flexible, diversified business model in response to varying economic conditions. This success was bolstered by a robust capital base, high asset quality, strong liquidity, and prudent risk management."

He explained that the bank remains committed to balancing the achievement of optimal returns for its shareholders while ad-



Hamad Al-Bahar



Isam Al-Sager

ressing the evolving needs of its customers. He further emphasized that sustainability has become a key driver in strengthening the bank's long-term growth prospects, as it continues to implement significant initiatives that support responsible business practices and contribute to the sustainable development of Kuwait's economy.

"In 2025, NBK aims to accelerate its sustainable financing efforts, targeting a sustainable asset portfolio of approximately \$10 billion by 2030," stated Al-Bahar. He further highlighted that the bank continues to implement various initiatives as part of its efforts to achieve carbon neutrality.

Al-Bahar stated that throughout 2024, NBK strengthened its social contributions by launching and supporting numerous programs and initiatives across various sectors, including health, social development, the environment, youth, education, and women's empowerment. These efforts are aimed at reinforcing the foundations of sustainable development in alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035 and the National Development Plan (NDP), further advancing NBK's leading position as the largest contributor to social responsibility in Kuwait.

Sustainable growth

Meanwhile, Isam J Al-Sager, NBK Vice Chairman and Group CEO, said: "Despite heightened geopolitical tensions regionally and globally in 2024, along with their adverse economic repercussions and the onset of declining interest rates, NBK successfully maintained its trajectory of sustainable growth. The Group's net operating income grew by 7.2 percent year-on-year, reaching KD 1.3 billion (\$4.1 billion)."

Al-Sager emphasized that NBK's financial results for 2024 reflect exceptional operational performance across its various business sectors, particularly its core banking operations. He highlighted the significant contributions of the Group's international operations and Boubyan Bank, the Group's Islamic banking arm, to both revenues and net profits during the year. Al-Sager highlighted NBK's ongoing efforts to expand its customer base by offering innovative digital products and services of international standards, coupled with exceptional customer service. He emphasized the bank's continued investments in technology and innovation, reinforcing its leadership in digital banking solutions that

drive sustainable growth. These efforts not only maximize value for customers and shareholders but also contribute positively to our communities and to all stakeholders. This commitment has earned the bank numerous prestigious accolades, including being named the "Best in Innovation- Global Winner" for 2024, for the second consecutive year by Global Finance magazine.

Al-Sager emphasized that NBK Group is dedicated to further advancing its reputation as a trusted financial partner by fostering deeper relationships with existing customers and capitalizing on emerging opportunities. He highlighted the Group's commitment to reinforcing its leadership in investment and wealth management services across the region, noting the launch of the "NBK Wealth" brand in 2024, which has established the largest wealth management entity in Kuwait and positioned it among the leading providers in the region.

Al-Sager highlighted NBK's significant advancements in sustainability during 2024, emphasizing the bank's commitment to its ESG strategy, which underscores its leading role in shaping a more sustainable and prosperous future for all. He noted that NBK was the first bank in Kuwait to join the Partnership for Carbon Accounting Financials (PCAF) and achieved a major milestone by issuing Kuwait's first green bonds, valued at \$500 million, solidifying its position as a trailblazer among financial institutions in the country.

In the meantime, Al-Sager emphasized NBK's unwavering commitment to investing in human capital, highlighting that in 2024, the bank continued to attract and nurture young talent through top-tier training and development programs aligned with international standards. These initiatives aim to cultivate a highly skilled generation of banking professionals, with a particular focus on digital competencies that have become indispensable in the evolving landscape of banking transactions driven by advanced technology and artificial intelligence.

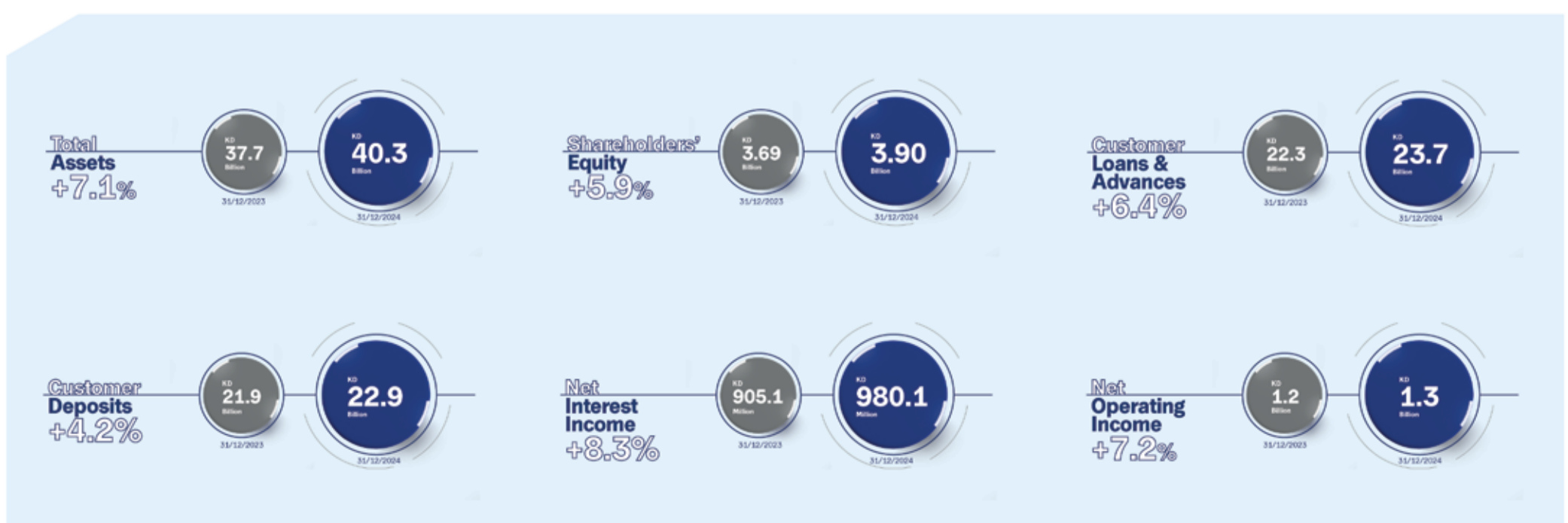
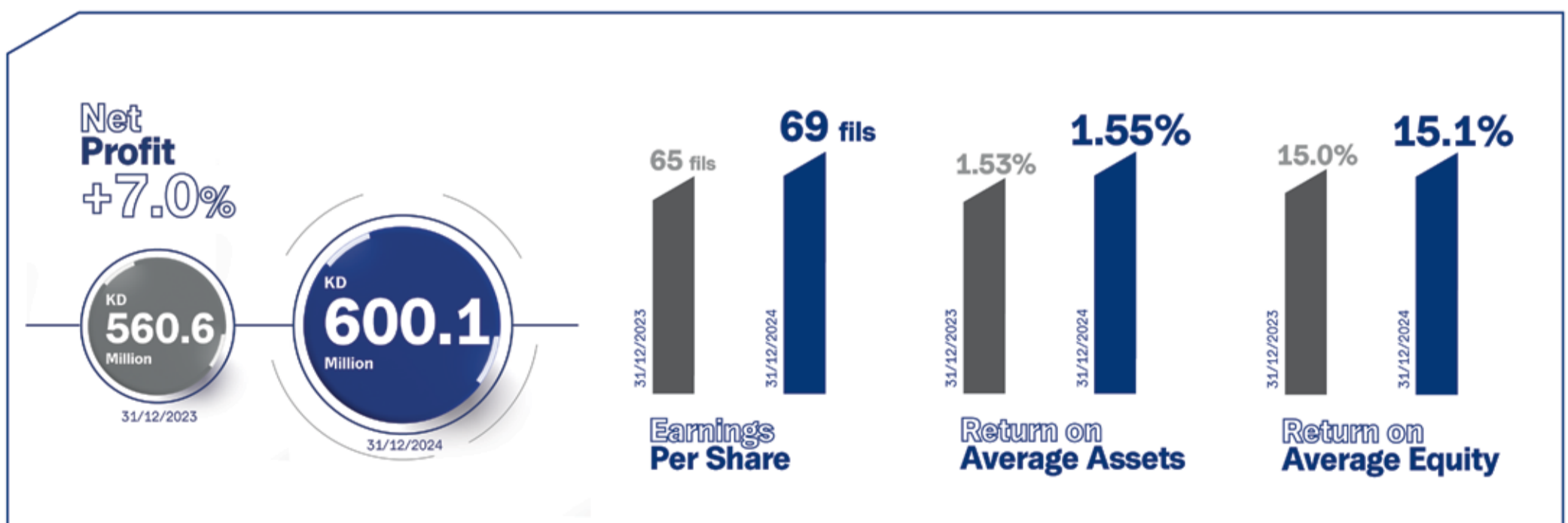
Operational environment

Regarding his outlook for the operational environment in 2025, Al-Sager expressed optimism about the continued momentum in project awards, building on the progress achieved in 2024 amid political stability. He noted that with decision-making now centralized within the government, processes have become more streamlined and efficient. Al-Sager also expressed hope that this positive trajectory would be complemented by the enactment of key laws and legislations aimed to bolster domestic economic growth. Al-Sager emphasized that NBK aims to play a pivotal role in financing upcoming mega projects, further solidifying its position as the government's primary partner in funding major strategic initiatives. He highlighted that the anticipated improvement in project awards, coupled with the downward trajectory of interest rates, is expected to positively impact credit demand across both corporate and retail sectors. However, he acknowledged the persistence of certain challenges that could have adverse economic repercussions, particularly the ongoing geopolitical tensions at both regional and global levels.

Key financial indicators for FY 2024

- Net operating income stood at KD 1.3 billion (\$4.1 billion), up 7.2 percent year-on-year
- Total assets grew by 7.1 percent year-on-year, at KD 40.3 billion (\$130.9 billion)
- Total loans and advances increased by 6.4 percent year-on-year to KD 23.7 billion (\$76.9 billion)
- Customer deposits grew by 4.2 percent year-on-year to KD 22.9 billion (\$74.2 billion)
- Shareholders' equity amounted to KD 3.9 billion (\$12.7 billion), registering an annual growth of 5.9 percent.
- Strong asset quality metrics, with NPL/gross loans ratio at 1.34 percent and an NPL coverage ratio of 263 percent

Financial Highlights For Year 2024



Business

KFH reports KD 601.8 million in net profit for 2024, an increase of 3.0%

Earnings per share reach 36.37fils, an increase of 3.0%

KUWAIT: Chairman of Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Hamad Abdulmohsen Al-Marzouq said that, by the grace of Allah, KFH has reported historic net profit of KD 601.8 million attributable to the shareholders of the bank for the year ended 2024; an increase of 3.0 percent compared to 2023.

Earnings per share reached 36.37 fils for the year 2024, an increase of 3.0 percent, compared to 2023.

Net Financing income for the year ended 2024 reached KD 1,147.0 million; an increase of 18.7 percent compared to 2023. Net operating income for the year ended 2024 reached KD 1,030.7 million, an increase of 9.0 percent compared to last year. Depositors' accounts reached KD 19.2 billion for the year 2024. The capital adequacy ratio reached 19.89 percent for the year 2024, which is above the minimum requirement, compared with 18.18 percent as of December 31, 2023. This demonstrates KFH's strong capital base.

The Board of Directors considered the distribution of cash dividends to shareholders of 22 percent (including 10 percent in HI 2024). The Board of Directors also considered the distribution of bonus shares of 8 percent after the approval of the General Assembly and the competent authorities.

Historic financial results

Al-Marzouq said that during 2024, KFH succeeded in achieving a solid financial performance by reporting record annual financial results. KFH also achieved growth in operating income, profits, financing portfolio and all key financial indicators. The Bank also succeeded in achieving the strategic objectives and enhancing the Group's leading standing after the completion of the largest-ever merger project in the Kuwaiti banking sector, and the successful integration of operations with the (formerly) Ahli United Bank - Kuwait (AUBK) as part of its landmark cross-border acquisition of Ahli United Bank - Bahrain, one



Hamad Al-Marzouq



Khaled Al-Shamlan

of the largest deals in the region. This historic move paved the way for the creation of a giant financial entity, with a reach spanning 11 countries worldwide through a large international network of around 615 branches. It also paved the way for KFH's ambition of becoming one of the world's top 100 banks within the next decade.

The highest market share

Al-Marzouq added that KFH tops all banks and companies listed on Boursa Kuwait with a current market cap approximating KD 13.6 billion. KFH also achieved a remarkable feat, ranking as the leading Kuwaiti company and tenth in the Middle East on Forbes's annual ranking of Top 100 Listed Companies for 2024.

\$1 billion Sukuk

Al-Marzouq mentioned the successful issuance of a 5-year Senior Unsecured Sukuk of \$1 billion, the second issue under KFH \$4 billion Sukuk Program. He explained that the aim of the Sukuk issuance is to enhance KFH's long-term funding sources, in addition to financing its overall operations.

Promoting the future of Islamic Finance

He noted that the Group has demonstrated its capabilities in promoting the future of Islamic finance worldwide. This is evident in the successful conversion of Ahli United Bank in Bahrain, UK, and Egypt into Islamic banking in a record time and high efficiency.

Building a sustainable banking model

Al-Marzouq further noted that KFH con-

tinued its endeavors in building a sustainable banking model within the (ESG) framework, noting the inclusion of KFH in the FTSE4 Good Index Series. KFH was also awarded "A" rating by MSCI ESG Index. He also mentioned KFH's participation in the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The Bank also signed the first-of-its-kind Global Takaful Alliance agreement with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and released the first-of-its-kind Carbon Footprint report in Kuwait's banking sector. KFH continues to issue its sustainability reports, reflecting its commitment to environmental leadership and responsible banking.

Prominent role in the local economy

Al-Marzouq noted that KFH played a prominent role in supporting the local economy and contributed to the development of the infrastructure by financing large scale projects across various sectors. KFH also strengthened its role, at the banking level in Kuwait, as a strategic partner of small, medium-sized enterprises where many of them began their success story by financing granted by KFH.

Solid financial position

Meanwhile, KFH Group Chief Executive Officer, Khaled Yousef Al-Shamlan, said that KFH's solid operating performance led to growth in operating income, profits, financing portfolio and all key financial indicators. He noted that KFH maintained its solid balance

sheet and enhanced the Group's financial position. He pointed out that KFH continued its efforts to achieve financial solidity and sustainable growth, capitalizing on the resilient business model, assets quality, abundant liquidity, continuous diversification of financing and wide geographical spread in different markets worldwide, most prominently Kuwait, Bahrain, Turkey, Egypt, UK and Germany.

Expanding green finance scope

Al-Shamlan revealed that KFH increased investment in green Sukuk with a total investment of \$653.2 million in 2024, an increase of 162.3 percent compared to last year (\$249 million in 2023).

He added that KFH maintained its top 3 position in the ILM sukuk primary dealer list and continued to be the first ranked ILM secondary market dealer for the 4th consecutive year amongst several international and regional banks, affirming KFH's position as a core player in the short-term ILM Sukuk market.

Digital transformation

Al-Shamlan stated that KFH continued its innovative streak, developing digital financial solutions tailored to the needs and aspirations of its customers. The Bank also implemented numerous projects of services and products and finance. It developed the technological infrastructure, cybersecurity defenses and AI technology adoption, and cooperated with Fintech companies.

He added that "tam" bank is Kuwait's only fully Sharia-compliant digital bank, offering a unique and modern banking experience. Tam's success was recognized by several industry-leading awards. Most prominent of which is Euromoney's "Best Digital Bank in Kuwait" award.

Empowering human talents

Al-Shamlan highlighted KFH's distinctive role in empowering the national talents and competencies, noting that the Bank offered more than 115,000 training hours to about 4,000 employees. Additionally, 26 managers across the Group participated in the Building Leadership Excellence program. 19 employees were accepted in KFH scholarship

program, and 39 employees graduated from Forssah program for recent graduates. In recognition of these efforts, KFH received 13 prestigious global awards in Human Resources from the renowned Brandon Hall Group.

Social responsibility

Al-Shamlan indicated that KFH succeeded in launching value-added community initiatives that catered to various segments of society. These initiatives encompassed supporting community capabilities, caring for individuals with special needs, launching awareness campaigns, safeguarding the environment, supporting sustainable practices, empowering the youth, in addition to supporting innovation and various health and sport initiatives. He also mentioned commencing the reconstruction project of the damaged area in Al-Mubarakiya. The contract, signed with the project's contractor and Kuwait Municipality, involves reconstructing approximately 17 buildings, along with the development of some neighboring structures with an estimated cost of around KD 8 million. KFH's efforts also encompassed various strategic initiatives in social responsibility.

47 prestigious awards

In appreciation of its exceptional efforts, Al-Shamlan said that KFH received 43 awards and 4 rankings at the Group level from different global and regional entities. Most notable of these awards are: "World's Best Islamic Financial Institution" Award from Global Finance magazine, "Kuwait's Best Bank" and "Kuwait's Best Bank for ESG" from Euromoney. In addition, KFH was named "Bank of the Year - Kuwait" by The Banker and was awarded with the "Corporate Social Responsibility - Middle East" award from EMEA Finance Magazine.

Thanks and appreciation

Al-Shamlan commended the support of the Board of Directors and the regulatory authorities for supporting the banking sector. He also praised the efforts of Executive Management, all employees, partners, and stakeholders for their key role and stressed the continuous efforts to maintain KFH's leading position locally and globally.

Praise be to Allah

601.8

KD Million

Net Profit for Shareholders - 2024

Highest in Kuwait
Banking Sector

	2024	2023	%
Net Profit for Shareholders "KD Million"	601.8	584.5	3.0
Earnings per Share "Fils"	36.37	35.31	3.0
Net Financing Income "KD Million"	1,147.0	965.9	18.7
Net Operating Income "KD Million"	1,030.7	945.4	9.0
Total Assets "KD Million"	36,703	38,010	(3.4)
Financing Receivables "KD Million"	19,070	19,425	(1.8)
Depositors' Accounts "KD Million"	19,220	21,813	(11.9)
Shareholders' Equity "KD Million"	5,519	5,316	3.8

* Financing receivable and depositors accounts decreased due to the effect of Sale "Kuwait Finance House - Bahrain", as well as the impact of foreign currency fluctuations during the current year.

Dividends to Shareholders and Investors

	2024	2023	2024 %
Cash Dividends, including the interim cash dividend by 10% distributed during the current year (interim cash dividend by 10% was distributed during last year)	22%	20%	
Proposed Bonus Shares	8%	9%	

	2024 %
Investment Deposit "Al-Khumasiya"	4.650
Investment Deposit "Continuous"	4.200
Investment Deposit "Al-Dimah" 12 Months	4.000
Investment Deposit "Al-Dimah" 6 Months	3.825
Long Term Investments Plans	3.700
Investment Deposit "Al-Sedra"	3.350
Investment Saving Account	0.250

Profits will be credited to their bank accounts

The proposed dividends for 2024 are subject to the approval of General Assembly and other regulatory entities.

بيت التمويل الكويتي
KFH

Business

Billionaire financier Scott Bessent confirmed as US treasury secretary

Wall Street veteran expected to help Trump implement his economic agenda

WASHINGTON: Billionaire hedge fund manager Scott Bessent won Senate approval Monday to become US Treasury secretary, placing him at the forefront of implementing Donald Trump's economic agenda — which is already triggering global jitters.

Bessent, a Wall Street veteran who was born and raised in South Carolina, has defended the Republican president's tax cutting and tariff proposals while urging efforts to secure supply chains and the dollar's global status. On Monday, he cleared a confirmation vote with a comfortable margin of 68-29, with bipartisan support.

As Treasury chief, Bessent will have a hand in the administration's tax policies and its budget, confronting the debt limit and steering plans that could lead to fresh tariffs.

Mike Crapo, who chairs the Senate Finance Committee, said Monday that Bessent was "committed to restoring the prosperity and opportunity" seen under Trump's leadership. But Ron Wyden, the top Democrat on the committee, warned it was unclear that Bessent would serve as a check on Trump's economic plans, which could weigh on consumers and small businesses.

Bessent, 62, has said he would back tougher sanctions on Russian oil majors as a way to end the war in Ukraine, while signaling a hawkish approach on Chi-

na. Trump returned to the White House this month vowing lower taxes to aid Americans squeezed by high costs of living, and tariffs to pressure other countries to align on US concerns.

The president has warned of tariffs on allies and adversaries — including major trading partners Mexico and Canada on February 1. Now all eyes are on how his Treasury chief walks the line between supporting these efforts and avoiding tensions that may roil the world economy.

At his hearing, Bessent disagreed that Trump's proposed duties on imports would be paid for domestically, noting that levies can be used in negotiations, to remedy unfair trade practices or to boost revenues. He also took aim at government spending and high budget deficits. He will have to grapple with Trump's promised tax cuts — alongside their consequences for the US economy — as he begins his role. The Treasury Department has oversight across areas from federal finances to bank supervision. It also oversees US sanctions.

Bessent is the first Senate-confirmed openly gay cabinet official in a Republican administration. He has been based in Charleston, South Carolina, with his husband and their two children. Bessent has known the Trump family for three decades and was friends with the president's late brother Robert, he



WASHINGTON, DC: Billionaire hedge fund manager Scott Bessent testifies before the US Senate Finance Committee during his confirmation hearing for Treasury Secretary in the Dirksen Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill. — AFP

previously said. "I was all-in for President Trump," he said on Trump ally Roger Stone's radio show.

Bessent attended Yale University and served as chief investment officer of Soros Fund Management, the macroeconomic investment firm of liberal billionaire George Soros.

In 2015, he raised capital, including \$2 billion from

Soros, to start his own hedge fund.

More recently, Bessent said he had not spoken to Soros in years. Bessent is chief executive at Key Square Group, but has committed to resigning from the position at the hedge fund and divesting his partnership share upon confirmation.

During his confirmation hearing, Bessent recounted taking an internship in finance — a job that came with an office pullout sofa, allowing him to live in New York rent-free. "I've been involved in the financial markets ever since," he told lawmakers. "My life has been the only-in-America story that I am determined to preserve for future generations."

Urging for all tools to be used "to realign the economic system to better serve the interests of working Americans," Bessent has criticized "unfair distortions" in global trade. He previously floated the idea of Trump nominating a "shadow Fed chair" to dilute the influence of Federal Reserve chief Jerome Powell. But he has since dropped the idea and stated that he supports the central bank's independence in policymaking.

"President Trump is going to make his views known, as many senators did," Bessent said in his hearing on January 16. He added that on monetary policy, the Fed's rate-setting committee "should be independent." — AFP

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka ends ban on vehicle imports

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka announced the lifting of a five-year ban on vehicle imports Tuesday as the country showed further signs of emerging from its worst economic meltdown. Information Minister Nalinda Jayatissa said buses, trucks and utility vehicles will be allowed in from Saturday under a phased removal of restrictions in place since 2020.

"We are moving very cautiously because we don't want a surge of imports that will deplete our foreign reserves," Jayatissa told reporters in Colombo.

"Depending on the demand, we will open imports of other categories of vehicles such as cars, motorcycles and three-wheelers." He said the imports were necessary to generate much-needed tax revenue, and the government hoped to cap imports at about \$1.2 billion this year.

Current tax rates on vehicles are over 300 percent. Sri Lanka spent \$1.4 billion on vehicle imports in 2019, the last full year before the import ban was imposed in March 2020.

The island nation earlier attempted to end the ban on commercial vehicle imports in August 2023, but importers were unable to open letters of credit while the country was still in default on its foreign debt. Sri Lanka formally ended its status as a bankrupt nation in December after securing debt restructuring deals with both bilateral and private creditors. — AFP

Kazakhstan to produce shale oil in 2025

ASTANA: Kazakhstan will produce shale oil for the first time later this year, officials said Tuesday, hoping to boost the Central Asian state's flagging economy. The country has been hit by a decline in oil prices since 2022 and faces high inflation and a weakening currency.

"The first production of shale oil in Kazakhstan is expected this year," Prime Minister Olzhas Bektenov told a government meeting. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said Kazakhstan needed to exploit "technologically complex oil deposits" as well as the vast "reserves of shale oil".

Kazakhstan is a major energy producer, with the oil and gas industry accounting for around 20 percent of the national economy. It has agreed to limit oil production as part of an agreement with the OPEC+ group of energy exporters, but regularly exceeds its quota. Shale oil extraction is complicated and specifically outlawed in some countries, including France, because of the dangers it poses to the environment and people.

The process involves a method known as fracking, or drilling into the ground to extract oil and gas from shale rock. Tokayev said shale oil production was needed with the Kazakh economy growing "insufficiently." GDP expanded by 4.8 percent last year, but inflation is still high, at 8.6 percent, and the local currency — the tenge — is losing ground against the US dollar. — AFP

What is DeepSeek and why is it disrupting AI sector?

BEIJING: Chinese startup DeepSeek's launch of its latest AI models, which it says are on a par or better than industry-leading models in the United States at a fraction of the cost, is threatening to upset the technology world order. The company has attracted attention in global AI circles after writing in a paper last month that the training of DeepSeek-V3 required less than \$6 million worth of computing power from Nvidia H800 chips.

DeepSeek's AI Assistant, powered by DeepSeek-V3, has overtaken rival ChatGPT to become the top-rated free application available on Apple's App Store in the United States.

This has raised doubts about the reasoning behind some US tech companies' decision to pledge

Gulf Bank: Verify request before approving Mobile ID authentication requests

KUWAIT: As part of its continued commitment to promoting financial literacy among all segments of society, Gulf Bank has raised awareness among its customers about the dangers of cyber fraud. The warning follows incidents where customers have unknowingly approved authentication requests through the "Kuwait Mobile ID" app without verifying the sender or understanding the purpose of the request.

This warning is part of Gulf Bank's ongoing support for the Diraya campaign, organized by the Central Bank of Kuwait in partnership with the Kuwait Banking Association. The campaign is focused on raising financial awareness within the community, educating the public about the role of the banking sector and how to make the most of the services offered by banks.

The Bank clarified that customers may receive unexpected authentication requests through the "Kuwait Mobile ID" app, even if they did not initiate a payment. In some instances, customers may approve the request without fully verifying it. Gulf Bank emphasized that if a customer un-

intentionally approves a fraudulent transaction through the "Kuwait Mobile ID" app, they could be at risk of security breaches. Fraudsters may illegally use Civil ID numbers to conduct fraudulent activities.

Gulf Bank urged everyone to remain cautious and ensure that any authentication request is legitimate before approving it. If customers notice any suspicious activity or have concerns about transactions, they are encouraged to contact the Bank immediately for assistance.

The Bank also highlighted the importance of regularly updating account passwords and utilizing available security features — such as two-factor authentication — to protect financial transactions. Furthermore, customers were advised to remain cautious of fraudulent tactics designed to obtain personal banking information or OTP codes. Gulf Bank further recommended that customers refrain from engaging with suspicious emails and ensure that any websites used for online shopping are secure, with trusted payment gateways, to avoid falling victim to fraud.

DeepSeek founder Wenfeng puts focus on China innovation

BEIJING: Liang Wenfeng, the 39-year-old founder of Chinese AI startup DeepSeek, has in the matter of weeks become the face of China's tech industry and its hope of overcoming an ever-tightening noose of export controls imposed by the United States. Liang had kept an extremely low profile until Jan. 20, when he was one of nine individuals asked to give a speech at a closed-door symposium hosted by China's Premier Li Qiang. He gave two rare media interviews to Chinese media outlet Waves last year and in 2023, but apart from that has stayed mostly out of the public eye. DeepSeek did not respond to a request for an interview.

At the symposium, the millennial's youthful appearance contrasted with the grey-haired academics, officials and state-owned conglomerate heads sat around him, pictures and video published by Chinese broadcaster CCTV showed. But the fact Liang was invited to share his opinions on Chinese government policy highlights Beijing's recognition of DeepSeek's role in potentially upending the global AI order, in China's favor. DeepSeek launched a free AI assistant last week that the firm says uses less data at a fraction of the cost of current services, triggering a global selloff in tech stocks.

Last year, Baidu CEO Robin Li spoke at a similar symposium chaired by the Chinese premier. Li, who announced China's first ChatGPT rival in March 2023, said in an interview that same year China would never recreate Microsoft-backed OpenAI's success and that Chinese firms should focus on applying existing AI models for commercial purposes.

billions of dollars in AI investment and shares of several big tech players, including Nvidia, have been hit. Below are some facts about the company shaking up the AI sector worldwide.

The release of OpenAI's ChatGPT in late 2022 caused a scramble among Chinese tech firms, who rushed to create their own chatbots powered by artificial intelligence. But after the release of the first Chinese ChatGPT equivalent, made by search engine giant Baidu, there was widespread disappointment in China at the gap in AI capabilities between US and Chinese firms.

The quality and cost efficiency of DeepSeek's models have flipped this narrative on its head. The two models that have been showered with praise by Silicon Valley executives and US tech company engineers alike, DeepSeek-V3 and DeepSeek-R1, are on par with OpenAI and Meta's most advanced models, the Chinese startup has said.

They are also cheaper to use. The DeepSeek-R1, released last week, is 20 to 50 times cheaper to use than OpenAI o1 model, depending on the task, according to a post on DeepSeek's official WeChat ac-



Liang Wenfeng

Under Liang's leadership, DeepSeek deliberately avoided app-building. Instead, it concentrated research talent and resources on creating a model that could match, or better OpenAI, and it hopes in the future to continue focusing on cutting-edge models that will be used by other companies to build consumer and enterprise-facing AI products.

Liang's approach stood out in a Chinese tech industry that was used to taking innovations from abroad, from smartphone apps to electric vehicles, and quickly scaling them up, often much faster than the countries where the inventions were first made. "China's AI can't be in the position of following forever. We often say that there is a gap of one or two years between China's AI and the United States, but the real gap is the difference between originality and imitation," Liang said in an interview with Waves in July last year.

Liang's interviews reveal a belief that China's tech industry had reached a crossroads where it lacked the confidence but not the capital needed to engage in fundamental R&D breakthroughs.

"In the past thirty years, (China's tech industry) has only emphasized making money, and ignored innovation. Innovation is not solely driven by business, it also needs curiosity and a desire to create," he said

count. But some have publicly expressed skepticism about DeepSeek's success story.

Scale AI CEO Alexandr Wang said during an interview with CNBC on Thursday, without providing evidence, that DeepSeek has 50,000 Nvidia H100 chips, which he claimed would not be disclosed because that would violate Washington's export controls that ban such advanced AI chips from being sold to Chinese companies. DeepSeek did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the allegation. Bernstein analysts on Monday highlighted in a research note that DeepSeek's total training costs for its V3 model were unknown but were much higher than the \$5.58 million the startup said was used for computing power. The analysts also said the training costs of the equally-acclaimed R1 model were not disclosed.

Who is behind deepseek?

DeepSeek is a Hangzhou-based startup whose controlling shareholder is Liang Wenfeng, co-founder of quantitative hedge fund High-Flyer, based on Chinese corporate records. Liang's fund announced



Gulf Bank aims to be Kuwait's leading bank, fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace to deliver exceptional customer service while contributing sustainably to the community. Through its extensive branch network and innovative digital services, the bank empowers customers to conduct banking transactions conveniently and efficiently, ensuring a seamless experience.

In alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035, "New Kuwait," and its commitment to fostering collaborative partnerships, Gulf Bank is dedicated to driving robust sustainability initiatives across environmental, social, and governance (ESG) dimensions. The bank is committed to implementing strategically selected and diverse sustainability programs both internally and externally.

In July, DeepSeek has taken the decision to make all its models open-source, unlike its US rival OpenAI. In open-source models, the base code is publicly available for any developer to use and modify at will. Liang's interviews reveal he has bought into the open-source culture that US tech insiders previously argued was one reason the US' Silicon Valley held an edge over its Chinese counterparts.

"Even if OpenAI is closed-source, it cannot stop others from catching up...Open-source is like a cultural practice, rather than a business practice...a company that does this will have soft power."

Liang grew up in the southern province of Guangdong, which during the eighties and nineties led the country in adopting market capitalism. Liang said back then he was surrounded by people who valued starting a business over studying, but he was more academically inclined. He would go on to enrol in the elite Zhejiang University at age 17, majoring in Electronics and Communication Engineering before pursuing a master's degree in Information and Communication Engineering, which he completed in 2010.

Liang then co-founded a quantitative hedge fund in 2015, which uses complex mathematical algorithms for trading as opposed to human analysis. The fund's portfolio totaled over 100 billion yuan (\$13.79 billion) by the end of 2021 but in April 2023, it announced on its WeChat account that it would expand its remit beyond the investment industry and concentrate resources to "explore the essence of AGI". DeepSeek was created a month later. OpenAI defines AGI (Artificial general intelligence) as autonomous systems that surpass humans in most economically valuable tasks.

DeepSeek's employees are mainly graduates and PhD students from China's top universities, whom Liang believes prefer to work for DeepSeek because it is tackling the biggest challenges in AI. "What attracts the best talent is obviously the solving of the world's hardest problems," he said in July. — Reuters



This photo illustration shows the DeepSeek app logo displayed on a mobile phone in Brussels on January 28, 2025. — AFP

in March 2023 on its official WeChat account that it was "starting again", going beyond trading to concentrate resources on creating a "new and independent research group, to explore the essence of AGI" (Artificial General Intelligence). DeepSeek was created later that year. — Reuters

Business

Boubyan Bank's net profits grow at 20% rate to reach KD 96.8 million in FY 2024

Bank recommends 10 fils in cash dividends and 5% in bonus shares



Abdulaziz Al-Shaya

- Performance and metrics showcase the bank's robustness and our potential to maintain our banking leadership
- We are committed to reinforcing solutions and investments that reflect our ability to confirm our status in the Kuwaiti banking sector



Adel Al-Majed

- Another year of milestones coincides with our 20th anniversary
- Our balanced growth strategy based on enhanced banking activities has been a success, and we keep pace with international developments in the banking industry
- Scaling up our business in line with our strategy to ensure continued success

KUWAIT: Boubyan Bank has announced KD 96.8 million in net profits for FY 2024, at a growth rate of 20 percent, compared with 2023, while the earnings per share amount to 21.6 fils, and the Board of Directors recommended to distribute 10 fils in cash dividends and 5 percent in bonus shares.

Key financial indicators of 2024 show that the bank's assets grew to KD 9.4 billion at a growth rate of 12 percent compared with last year, while the bank's financing portfolio grew by 10 percent to KD 6.9 billion, and operating income grew by 13 percent to KD 246 million, meanwhile, the bank's market share of local financing increased to 12 percent.

Boubyan Bank's Chairman Abdulaziz Abdullah Dakheel Al-Shaya commented: "We are proud of the bank's financial results until the end of FY 2024, which recorded significant growth across most of our financial indicators. These results were the fruit of strategic diversification of the bank's products, services, and investments, which

20 years of growth and sustained profitability

On his part, Boubyan Bank's Vice-Chairman & Group Chief Executive Officer Adel Abdul Wahab Al-Majed, stated: "Boubyan Bank's financial results in 2024 are the most outstanding ones in the bank's history, being the highest historically. Moreover, this coincides with our celebration of the bank's 20th Anniversary. This solid financial performance is attributed to the unwavering commitment to the development of the most diversified and resilient business model to reinforce our leadership, in addition to our investment in cutting-edge fintech and the launch of innovative solutions, which reiterates our complete readiness for any future challenges on the long-run."

"Since its inception, Boubyan Bank has succeeded in reinforcing its franchise and brand as one of the leading banks in the Islamic banking industry, owing to its adoption of balanced growth strategies based on enhanced

of customers and investors, in addition to maintaining the level of customers' trust at its best."

Shaping the digital future

Boubyan Bank's digital transformation strategy gained a significant momentum, being a real and living example for succeeding in being highly competitive regionally and internationally in digital banking services, and in encouraging innovation and sustainable digital growth towards accelerating transformation and making financial transactions more convenient, thus enabling Boubyan to be in the forefront of the digital banking scene and to be the favorite bank for the youths' segment.

It can be safely said that owing to the proactive vision and well-studied plans, which focused on tech-innovation and investment in technology and AI, the bank managed to lead fundamental technological and digital developments in advanced digital transformation across its banking business to upgrade the digital infrastructure

of various business areas, thus continuing the journey of successes, awards, and international recognitions from prestigious international institutions, which reinforce the bank's leadership, internationally, locally and regionally. Speaking of digital leadership, the bank's successes crowned it with 6 prestigious awards from Global Finance, the internationally renowned publication. The icing on the cake was the award for the "World's Best Islamic Digital Bank" for a full decade atop major Islamic financial institutions, coupled with receiving a similar award in the same domain atop the Middle East and Kuwait, in addition to the award for the "Best Corporate/Institutional Digital Bank in Kuwait".

Additionally, the bank's Business Banking Department serving SMEs, received two awards for the "Best SME Banking/SME Platform in Kuwait" and the "World's Best SME Payments Innovation".

Moreover, the bank received two awards, namely the "Most Innovative Bank" and the "Best Digital Banking Initiative" by MEED, the internationally renowned publication. This came as a part of its MENA Banking Excellence Awards 2024.

campaign with Dazzah card for intending spouses among the bank's customers, and PRIME campaign for the youths' account.

Enriching human resources

Boubyan Bank innovated a unique model to promote the value of developing leadership skills and forging leaders with exceptionally unique competencies that perfectly aligns with the strategy of developing leaders and promoting the creativity and innovation culture among employees, which comes in handy especially with the young expertise and competent cadres available at Boubyan across various levels. The bank further dedicates all necessary resources to the learning, growth, and development of its human cadres.

On another note, the score of the Organizational Health Index survey "OHI" taken by all Group employees improved to 86 percent, while the total staff participation across the bank and its subsidiaries increased to 89 percent, placing the bank among the top 3 institutions regionally, and at the top decile of all prestigious institutions that took part in this survey globally.



reflect our status in the Kuwaiti Banking Sector. This led to the enhancement of our operational performance, thus leading to a good growth in profitability, despite the conditions and contingent developments in the operational environment.

"After the completion of our past 5-year strategy 'Boubyan 2023', the bank started a new chapter with its new 5-year strategy, titled 'Boubyan 2028', which focuses on pursuing sustainable profitability and continuing the adoption of digital transformation standards, innovation, and resilience as a key driver to improve operational efficiency. This aims to instill the values of the strategy across the Group and to ensure the growth of all concerned parties, including employees, customers, shareholders, and the community as a whole", he added.

Al-Shaya thanked the shareholders, investors, and all Boubyan's customers for their confidence, and reiterated the Board's full and ongoing support to the efforts of the bank's highly-professional executive management, which contributed to the achievement of the best results, while thanking all the bank's employees for their continued dedication to work.

banking activities. The bank has further managed to stamp its vision to become the leading Islamic bank with high creditworthiness, credibility and reliability. This was clearly reflected through the bank's financial statements, sustained profitability, and prudent management of risks, business and operational activities, leading to the success of Boubyan's Strategy aiming 'towards perfection', and leading to increased profitability, market share, and international presence, coupled with outstanding performance, and products and services that attract customers, particularly our digital offerings", he added.

Al-Majed went on to add: "Boubyan follows a well-studied strategic approach to ensure continued success and excellence, while aiming to expand the scope of its services and branches in a balanced way in a manner that ensures sustained growth and meeting the increasing needs of customers, all while maintaining the quality of its services and improving core banking activities. The bank is keen on exploring promising investment opportunities, diversifying funding sources, and boosting the Group's funding potentials, which positively reflects on increasing the confidence

of its digital services and reinforce the infrastructure of its digital solutions' portfolio to be in the forefront of institutions that support investing in digital services atop the Kuwaiti banking sector's institutions.

Significant growth in corporate banking

The Corporate Banking Group witnessed a significant growth in 2024, as it offered a wide set of Sharia-compliant financing products that cater for the needs of corporate customers. Over the past year, the Corporate Banking Group succeeded in making significant milestones due to the ongoing diversification and improvement of products and services, coupled with its continued offering of innovative and more flexible banking services to keep pace with the accelerated development in financing transactions to meet the banking needs of corporate customers.

Prestigious awards across various business areas

During 2024, Boubyan Bank demonstrated its excellence and leadership as it received many domestic, regional, and international awards, in addition to prestigious rankings and ratings that crowned the bank's efforts across var-

Sustainable community initiatives and empowering entrepreneurs

Over the past 20 years, Boubyan Bank's CSR initiatives have been unprecedentedly successful. The bank retained the special award for the "World's Best Islamic Bank for CSR" for the second year in a row from Global Finance, the internationally renowned publication. This confirms that Boubyan's CSR strategy is on the right track towards achieving its goals, and that it aligns well with various segments of the society through its activities and day-to-day work, coupled with the bank's commitment to ESG standards.

The bank's community initiatives and efforts over the past year focused on many aspects such as the youths, sports, and wellness, in addition to Boubyan Bank's program for the holy month of Ramadan and how it embodies the meanings of social cohesion.

Entrepreneurs and owners of SMEs represent a very important segment of Boubyan Bank's customers, being the first bank of choice for the youths. Boubyan has a unique set of digital banking solutions that support and empower entrepreneurs to achieve their future financial goals, while opening up new growth opportunities and horizons to develop their entrepreneurship, enhance their operational efficiency, and expand the scope of their services to meet the requirements of the job market in Kuwait and the region, in addition to considering them major partners in all innovative solutions and products offered by Boubyan.

Strategic partnerships and marketing campaigns

Boubyan continued reinforcing its strategic partnerships which largely contributed to bringing exceptional experiences, promotions, exclusive benefits and value-adding solutions, and unique services to the lifestyle of our customers, thus enhancing their satisfaction levels. Such partnerships included the one with Acico Group and Enabill, the leader in the business of restaurants' digitalization, and continuing our strategic partnership with Holistic, the leading advisory company, which offers its services to entrepreneurs and business owners, in addition to our partnership with Snowdrop, a leader in enriching the data of financial transfers and payments.

To confirm that it is the closest to customers, Boubyan launched many marketing campaigns where customers were rewarded with exceptional instant prizes beyond their expectations. Additionally, the bank gave customers the best exclusive benefits as in the credit cards' summer campaign, "Every Tap Gets You Closer to Your Dream" Campaign, the Honeymoon

Boubyan managed to maintain its status as a banking institution that is keen on attracting the best national cadres and striving to improve its business environment, evident by receiving the award for "Excellence in Manpower Nationalization", awarded to the bank for the sixth time by the GCC Council of Ministers of Labor & Social Affairs, for its success and excellence in increasing the percentage of national manpower banking sector in 2024, where the bank achieved 82 percent at the level of empowering and recruiting national manpower.

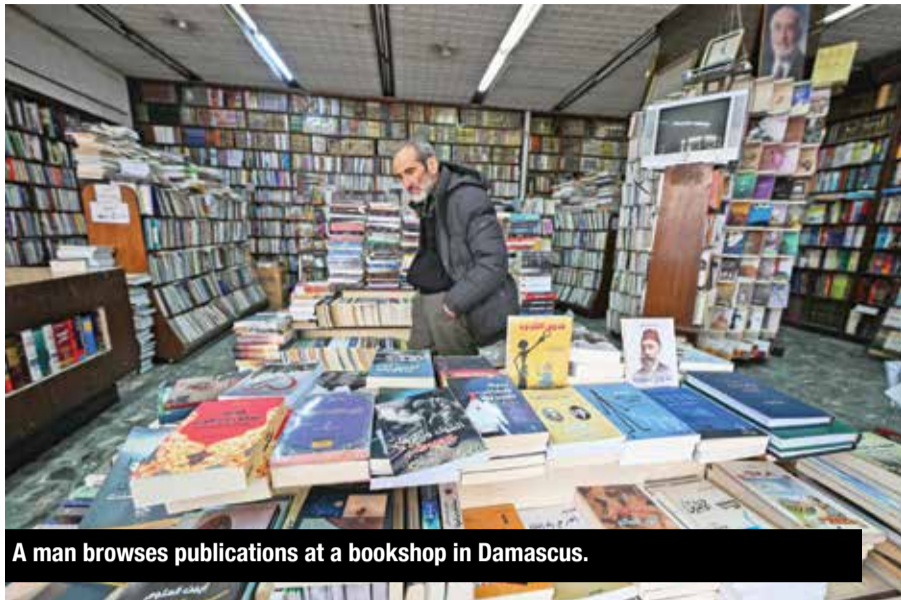
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During 2024, Nomo Bank, the digital arm of the Bank of London and the Middle East "BLME", a subsidiary of Boubyan Bank Group, continued its expansion journey, while focusing on meeting the international banking and investment needs of customers, with a commitment to offer unique promotions and exclusive banking experience to them, in addition to offering them unique international investment opportunities. All such offerings are Sharia-compliant and they enable customers to grow and manage their savings and wealth internationally in a convenient manner with a bigger value across all business aspects.

.....

Boubyan Bank continues focusing on customer service and on building sustainable trust, which led to its continued recognition with the "Best Islamic Bank in Customer Service" award for the 14th year in a row by Service Hero, the consumer-driven customer satisfaction index. The bank reinforced this leadership atop all Islamic and conventional local banks by achieving a Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) score of 96 percent.

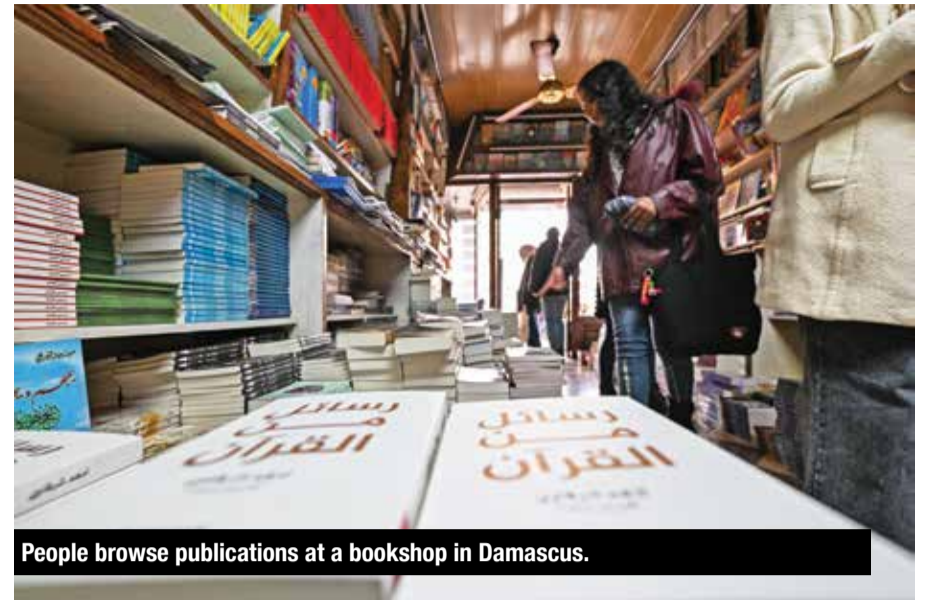
Lifestyle



A man browses publications at a bookshop in Damascus.



People browse publications at a bookshop in Damascus. — AFP photos



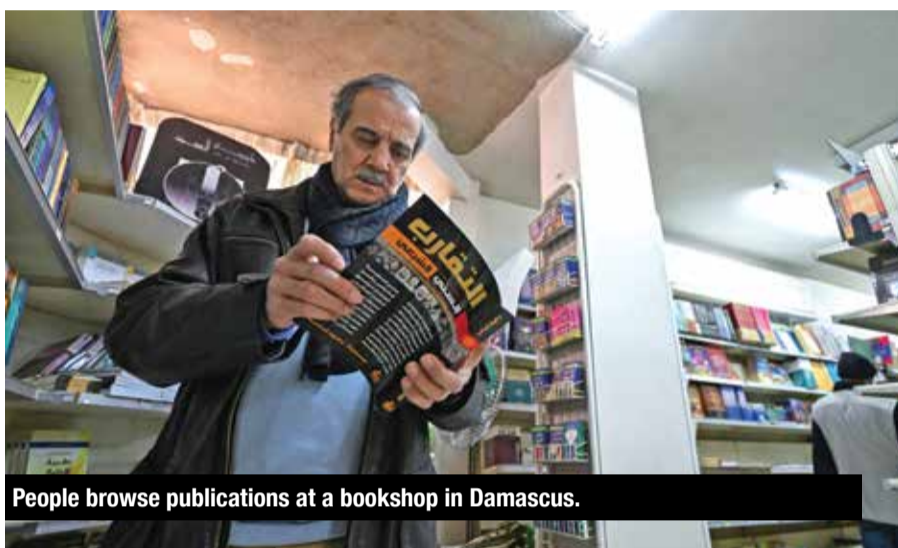
People browse publications at a bookshop in Damascus.

Books banned under Assad now on sale at Damascus shops

Books recounting torture in Syrian prisons or texts on radical Islamic theology now sit openly in Damascus bookstores, no longer traded in secret after iron-fisted ruler Bashar Al-Assad's ouster. "If I had asked about a (certain) book just two months ago, I could have disappeared or ended up in prison," said student Amr al-Laham, 25, who was perusing stores near Damascus University.

He has finally found a copy of "Al-Maabar" (The Passage) by Syrian author Hanan Asad, which recounts the conflict in Aleppo from a crossing point linking the city's rebel-held east with the government-held west, before Assad's forces retook complete control in 2016. Last month, Islamist-led rebels captured the northern city in a lightning offensive, going on to take Damascus and toppling Assad, ending more than half a century of his family's oppressive rule.

"Before, we were afraid of being marked by the intelligence services" for buying works including those considered leftist or from the ultra-conservative Salafi Muslim movement, Laham said. While many say the future is uncertain after Assad's fall, Syrians for now can breathe more easily, free from



People browse publications at a bookshop in Damascus.

the omnipresent security apparatus in a country battered by war since 2011 after Assad brutally repressed peaceful anti-government protests. Syria's myriad security agencies terrorized the population, torturing and killing opponents and denying basic rights such as freedom of expression. Assad brutally repressed any hint of dissent and his father Hafez before him did the same, notoriously crushing a Muslim Brotherhood-led rebellion in the 1980s.

'Didn't dare ask'

Several books that were previously banned and only available to Syrians if they were pirated online now frequently pop up on footpath displays or inside bookshops. They include "The Shell", by Syrian author Mustafa Khalifa, a devastating tale of an atheist who is mistaken for a radical Islamist and detained for years inside Syria's infamous Tadmur prison. Another is "My Aunt's House" — an expression used

by Syrians to refer to prison — by Iraqi author Ahmed Khairi Alomari. Prison literature "was totally forbidden", said a bookshop owner in his fifties, identifying himself as Abu Yamen. "Before, people didn't even dare to ask — they knew what awaited them," he told AFP.

Elsewhere, the owner of a high-profile publishing house said that since the 1980s, he had stopped printing all political works except some "very general (essays) on political thinking that did not deal with a particular region or country". Even so, Assad's "security services used to call us in to ask about our work and our sales — who came to see us, what they bought, what people were asking for", he told AFP, requesting anonymity. He said security services were often "uncultured" when it came to literature, recalling an investigator who insisted he wanted to question Ibn Taymiyya, a Sunni Muslim theologian who died in the 14th century.

'Sold in secret'

In shelves at the entrance of his Damascus bookshop, Abdel Rahman Suruji displays leather-bound works emblazoned with golden calligraphy of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, a medie-

val Muslim theologian and important Salafi ideologue. Also on display are tomes by Sayyed Qotb, a theoretician behind the Muslim Brotherhood who inspired its radicalization. "All these books were prohibited. We sold them in secret, just to those who we could trust — students we knew or researchers," said Suruji, 62.

Now, they are in "high demand", he said, adding that his new customers include Damascus residents and Syrians who have returned from abroad or visiting from former rebel bastions in the country's north. Suruji said that although he learnt to tell a real student from an informant, a dozen security agents went through his bookshop from top to bottom in 2010, confiscating "more than 600 books". Mustafa Al-Kani, 25, a student of Islamic theology, came to check the price of a collection of Sayyed Qotb's works. "During the revolution, we were afraid of looking for certain books. We couldn't have them in our possession, we used to read them online," he said. "Just publishing a quote from Sayyed Qotb could get you thrown into jail," he added. — AFP



Maria del Mar Terron Martinez, 29, and her father Marco Antonio Terron, 59, ride their modified motorcycle in Acolman, Mexico. — AFP photos



HOLLYWOOD CAMEO FOR MEXICO'S SCRAP MERCHANT ANTHEM



Maria del Mar Terron Martinez poses for a portrait during an interview with AFP.



Marco Antonio Terron stands next to his modified motorcycle during an interview with AFP in Acolman, Mexico.



Aerial view shows Maria and her father Marco riding their modified motorcycle.

The jingle of itinerant scrap merchants has long been part of Mexico City's soul. Now it has made a cameo appearance in Hollywood in the Oscar-nominated narco-musical "Emilia Perez." The Mexican capital's nine million residents are already more than familiar with the voiced recording played from speakers on junk dealers' vehicles offering to buy mattresses, refrigerators and other unwanted items. The slogan, which has been adapted by French director Jacques Audiard for his Spanish-language transgender cartel musical that picked up 13 Oscar nominations last week, was created by Mexican scrap merchant Marco Antonio Terron.

A megaphone on his three-wheeled vehicle blares out his daughter's voice: "Se compran colchones, tambores, refrigeradores, estufas, lavadoras, microondas, o algo de fierro viejo que vendan" (We buy mattresses, drums, refrigerators, stoves, washing machine, microwave or any scrap metal you're selling). The jingle known as "Fierro viejo" (scrap metal) was recorded 20 years ago after Terron grew tired of constantly shouting out to potential customers himself. "So I thought of recording my slogan," he told AFP.

He wrote down some words and recorded his daughter Maria del Mar, who was nine years old at the time, singing them. In the following days, several other scrap metal dealers offered to buy the cassette tape. "I must have sold a total of four copies," Terron said. "I don't know what they did with them, but the following year, you could hear 'Fierro viejo' all over the city," he

added. Visitors need only spend a few days in Mexico City to hear the voice of Maria del Mar. "It's part of the national culture," said one Mexico City resident, Marcos Lugo.

'We buy diamonds...'

The jingle has become an unofficial anthem, played by Mexican football fans at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, though without any obvious boost for their team. It is not the first time that the entertainment industry has used the slogan. "For a few years now, brands, films, TV series have been asking us if they can use our song. It doesn't bother us. The only thing we want is for them to respect and pay the royalties," Terron said. The jingle is even registered with the National Copyright Institute, according to the family's legal adviser Rolando Trevino.

In the "Emilia Perez" soundtrack, French singer-songwriter Camille Dalmis and composer Clement Duclot tweaked the words to say: "We buy diamonds, passports ... we don't buy my body, my soul, my life, my love." Maria del Mar Terron, now 29, said her greatest pride was not the jingle's appearance in Hollywood, but being able to help scrap merchants like her father to eke out a living. "I still like working with my dad in my free time, it reminds me where this song comes from," she said. "Whether it's hot or rainy, we're on the street every day - it's very tiring work," her father said. — AFP

New film claims 'Napalm Girl' photo credited to wrong journalist

The makers of a new documentary alleging the iconic "Napalm Girl" photo was deliberately credited to the wrong photographer - claims denied by the Associated Press - said Sunday that it is "critical" to "share this story with the world." "The Stringer," which premiered at the Sundance film festival, chronicles an investigation into rumors that the devastating image which helped change global perceptions of the Vietnam War was actually taken by a little-known local freelancer.

Nick Ut, the AP staff photographer credited with the photo of a nine-year-old girl fleeing naked from a napalm strike, won a Pulitzer Prize. He has always said that he took the photo. Ut's lawyer attempted to block the film's release. AP published a report last week detailing its own investigation into the controversy, which found "nothing that proves Nick Ut did not take the photo," but said it had not yet been granted access to the film's research.

"AP stands ready to review any and all evidence and new information about this photo," the organization said in an updated statement Sunday. The new film was triggered when Carl Robinson, the photo editor on duty in AP's Saigon bureau on the day the image was captured, began speaking out about the provenance of the photo. In the film, Robinson says he was ordered to write a photo caption attributing the photo to Ut by Horst Faas, AP's two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning chief of photos in Saigon.

"I started writing the caption... Horst Faas, who had been standing right next to me, said 'Nick Ut. Make it Nick Ut,'" says Robinson. After interviewing Robinson, the filmmakers identified the long-lost name of a Vietnamese freelance photographer who is visible in other photos of the infamous scene at Trang Bang on June 8, 1972. They eventually tracked down Nguyen Thanh Nghe, who states in the film that he is certain he took the photo. — AFP



French chef Paul Marcon (center) celebrates after winning the 2025 Bocuse d'Or cooking competition.



Danish chef Sebastian Holberg Svendsgaard celebrates on the podium with his team after winning the silver medal.



Swedish chef Gustav Leonhardt celebrates on the podium with his team after winning the bronze medal.

FRANCE SAVORS COMPETITIVE COOKING WIN AS RESTORING LOST PRESTIGE

After major investments in a bid to restore its lost national culinary prestige, France savored victory Tuesday at the world's most prestigious international cooking competition, the Bocuse d'Or. Paul Marcon, son of the former winner Regis Marcon, clinched the title late on Monday in France's gastronomic capital Lyon, 30 years after his much-garlanded father. The biennial event, which takes place in front of a boisterous live audience, was founded in 1987 by late French cooking legend Paul Bocuse.

Having seen Scandinavian countries dominate over the last decade, France's team has professionalized and attracted funding from public authorities and private donors in a sign of the importance of the title for national identity. "It's a childhood dream. It's a source of pride to take France to the top again," a visibly emotional Marcon, 29, told reporters on Monday evening after being hoisted onto the shoulders of his colleagues in his chef's whites. "Today I hope that we light up the eyes of all the cooks and cooks-to-come in France," he added.

In total, 24 countries competed



French chef Paul Marcon (center) celebrates after winning the 2025 Bocuse d'Or cooking competition. — AFP photos

in the 2025 edition, with the Danish team, winners of the last edition, taking silver and Sweden the bronze medal. Marcon and his team wowed the judging panel with a pie filled with deer braised in red wine, foie gras and wild mushrooms, accompanied by celery and followed by apple flavored with French liqueur Chartreuse.

'Navel-gazing'

The quality of cooking on display at the Bocuse d'Or is seen by observers as increasing every year as countries invest in their delegations for national marketing purposes or to raise the profile of their gastronomic traditions. France has won just one medal in the last decade -- Davy Tissot having

clinched gold in 2021 -- with Scandinavian nations maintaining a grip on the top positions with their precise, minimalist and environmentally-conscious cooking. Until Monday's victory by Marcon, the United States -- whose food the French have long looked down on -- had won more medals than France over the last 10 years. "France

was navel-gazing," Tissot told AFP recently, "while people around us were moving forward." Olivia Gregoire, then France's trade and tourism minister, admitted last year that France had been "outstripped by the performance and influence of other countries."

Realizing that the country had fallen behind, Team France head Romuald Fassenet began searching for new funds and resources when he took over in 2019 and he found an ally in President Emmanuel Macron, who became the first French leader to visit the Bocuse d'Or. Around 600,000 euros (\$630,000) were raised for this year's French team led by Marcon from private donors and the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region surrounding Lyon, which is headed by ambitious conservative politician Laurent Wauquiez. A national centre for gastronomic excellence, called the Paul Bocuse Institute, was formally launched in January in Lyon to train chefs for international cooking competitions. Marcon has also created an "ambassador for French gastronomy", naming former presidential chef Guillaume Gomez to the role last year. — AFP



This undated handout photo shows an aerial view of the southern tip of the Bikar Atoll and Bikar Islands in the Marshall Islands. — AFP photos

Marshall Islands guards 'treasures' with new marine sanctuary

Marshall Islands declared on Tuesday its first national marine sanctuary, protecting a "pristine" expanse of tropical Pacific Ocean home to deep-sea sharks and green turtles. Like many Pacific islands, the low-lying Marshall Islands are highly vulnerable to climate change and rising seas, which has placed "extreme pressure" on its biodiversity, the World Bank warned in 2021. It announced Tuesday that it has banned fishing in the waters surrounding two northern isles, an area teeming with vibrant corals, rare giant clams and elusive deep-sea sharks.

"The only way to continue benefiting from the ocean's treasures is to protect it," Marshall Islands President Hilda Heine said in a statement. "I am proud of our country's first marine sanctuary, which certainly won't be its last." The sanctuary lies to the east of Marshall Islands' Bikini Atoll, which the United States bombarded with experimental nuclear bombs throughout the 1940s and 50s. It covers 48,000 square kilometers (18,500 square miles) -- dwarfing Switzerland -- and surrounds the uninhabited atolls of Bikar and Bokak, which are renowned green turtle nesting grounds.

"We aim to preserve the ecological integrity of this region to ensure that these two atolls remain pristine for future generations," the country's Marine Resources Authority told AFP in a statement. Conservationist Enric Sala

said Marshall Islands was home to some of the healthiest marine ecosystems in the Pacific Ocean. "This new marine sanctuary protects global biodiversity jewels," said Sala, who founded the National Geographic Pristine Seas expedition that surveyed the atolls in 2023. "These pristine atolls are time machines that show us what the ocean

shall Islands -- population 40,000 -- are a chain of coral atolls and volcanic isles lying between the Philippines and Hawaii. Its economy relies heavily on fishing. Non-profit Global Fishing Watch estimates that at least one-third of domestic government revenue comes from tuna alone. Illegal fishing operations have regularly plundered its waters over



This undated handout photo shows Fore reef of Bokak Atoll in the Marshall Islands.

was like before humans, and what coral reefs could be in the future if we so wish," he told AFP.

The 2023 trip documented "little-known deep-sea communities with potentially new species of fish", a "large abundance of vulnerable species" and "abundant deep-sea sharks". The Mar-

shall Islands in 2011 set aside almost two million square kilometers (750,000 square miles) for what it said was the world's largest dedicated shark sanctuary. — AFP

Games music composer with ambition to define an artform

Far from the bleep-driven video game soundtracks of yesteryear, French composer Olivier Deriviere is determined to help craft the audio sensation of a medium he believes is still finding a voice of its own. Deriviere's twin passions for music and gaming have driven a career creating music for massive-selling games including Ubisoft's "Assassin's Creed", sometimes managing projects equal in scope to a film soundtrack. "I think we need to get away from the reflex that we need to look at our 'big brother' cinema and say that we're going to do the same thing," Deriviere told AFP.

"If you compare what video games offer in artistic terms, it's vast compared to the cinema or theatre," he adds. Deriviere's personal journey with games began very early in life. "I've never left the house without a console since I was six years old," the 46-year-old says. That passion has borne him up to creating music for one instalment in the massively popular "Assassin's Creed" series, or million-selling "A Plague Tale: Innocence", released by Asobo in 2019.

But his current project, "South of Midnight" by Canadian developer Compulsion Games is "my biggest creation yet," Deriviere says. The tracks he plays back borrow their sound from the American South setting of the adventure game, set for release on April 8. More than 100 recording sessions have gone into the work, split between Nashville in the US, London's legendary Abbey Road studios and the composer's own workspace in the Paris suburbs.

'Set off a revolution'

Deriviere enjoyed "a musical childhood" growing up in Nice with his businessman father and choir-leader mother. "When I was five years old, I was getting into U2 and Pink Floyd thanks to my dad, while my friends were listening to French songs," he remembered. It was at the same time that he was first exposed to video games. "The day someone first showed me a Commodore 64 moving a pixel around, it set off a revolution in my brain," Deriviere said. He went as far as learning to code so that he could write music on the machine.

Deriviere struggled to find his niche, making false starts into several music and computing courses before securing a scholarship to the Berklee College of Music across the Atlantic in Boston. A regular at the city's Symphonic Orchestra, he struck up a friendship with John

Williams, writer of soundtracks to many Steven Spielberg movies and the "Star Wars" saga.

Deriviere says that the film legend became an "example" for him, teaching him to be patient. Back in France, his first work on a game came with 2004's "Obscure", developed by a small studio. Since then, he has worked on around 20 releases including the mega-blockbuster "Assassin's Creed" series. "I got started in a tiny little room. A computer, two speakers and that was it," he remembered with a smile. Now in demand from international developers, he employs six people in his 300-square-metre (3,200 square feet) studio.



French video game music composer Olivier Deriviere poses for picture in his recording studio in Malakoff, on the outskirts of Paris. — AFP

No substitute

Percussion fan Deriviere clutches a pair of drumsticks as he wanders from the recording booths to the editing suites to keep up with multiple projects, some of which are still under wraps. But in his spare minutes, he allows himself a few rounds of tennis game "Top Spin" in a room stuffed with consoles going back decades. "I've always played, I've never stopped," the composer says. For Deriviere, creating a piece of music has two stages: first writing a score, but then integrating it into the game to reflect the player's input.

The second task would normally be tackled by a game's music designer, rather than the composer. But "I do both", Deriviere said. "Since I play video games, I understand this language and that's an advantage." In "South of Midnight", Deriviere is attentive to the actions of protagonist Hazel, accompanied by a choir of girls' voices, as well as developing the tracks connected with the vast creatures that inhabit the game's universe. — AFP

Sports

Zain renews strategic partnership with Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait

Contributing to building a new generation of professional Kuwaiti athletes



Nawaf Al-Gharabally and Mohammed Al-Marzouq sign the strategic partnership.



Al-Gharabally and Al-Marzouq with executives from Zain and the Academy.

KUWAIT: Zain has renewed its strategic partnership with Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait for the third time, in collaboration with Tamdeen Sports, a subsidiary of Tamdeen Group. The Academy, the first of its kind in the Middle East, marks the global tennis champion Rafael Nadal's first academy outside Spain.

The partnership agreement was signed at the Academy's headquarters, located in the Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber International Tennis Complex, in the presence of Zain Kuwait CEO Nawaf Al-Gharabally and Tamdeen Sports CEO Mohammad Mustafa Al-Marzouq, alongside executives from both companies.

Zain has proudly supported this renowned international academy as a strategic partner since its inception in 2020. This aligns with the company's comprehensive corporate sustainability strategy, which aims to reflect the role of Kuwait's private

sector in fostering sports and actively contributing to developing a new generation of professional Kuwaiti athletes across various sports disciplines, enabling them to represent their nation at prominent local, regional and international arenas.

Zain remains committed to participating in and supporting major projects that reflect Kuwait's strong standing in sports. The company's efforts embody the wise vision of the country's leadership in nurturing youth and athletes and advancing the sports movement in line with the highest international standards.

The Rafa Nadal Academy, situated within the Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber International Tennis Complex, is the first of its kind in the Middle East and represents Nadal's first global expansion outside his hometown of Mallorca, Spain. The tennis legend has won 22 Grand Slam titles.

The Academy boasts a wide range of advanced

facilities and a team of internationally recognized coaches and trainers who offer group and individual training in fitness, tennis, padel, and squash. It leverages the expertise of the Rafa Nadal Academy in Spain, where the training team works to develop young players and train beginners looking to explore and enjoy tennis.

The Academy embodies the spirit and commitment of Rafael Nadal, renowned for his work ethic, resilience, and sportsmanship. His legacy inspires players to strive for excellence both on and off the court. The Academy's training methodology, identical to that followed in Spain, is built around five core pillars: tennis training, physical training, mental conditioning, nutrition and competition.

The Academy features 15 tennis courts, a state-of-the-art fitness center, two squash courts, three indoor padel courts, a swimming pool and a boxing ring. The main covered multi-purpose stadium

has a seating capacity of over 5,000, while the outdoor secondary court accommodates 1,500 spectators.

All facilities are equipped with the latest global technologies, adhering to the highest standards. The Academy also includes a dedicated members' lounge offering healthy dining options, sports shops, and proximity to key amenities such as a 5-star hotel, 360 Mall, and a multi-storey parking facility for 2,000 vehicles.

Zain believes in the vital role the private sector plays in advancing youth and sports in Kuwait. The company translates this belief into action by sponsoring and supporting numerous major sports projects and events nationwide. The company also continues to support and encourage a large number of Kuwaiti athletes representing Kuwait in local, regional, and global arenas, celebrating their achievements year after year with pride.

Eliasch promises climate for change if elected president

PARIS: Johan Eliasch says he was as surprised as anyone that he threw his hat into the ring to succeed Thomas Bach as IOC president but he told AFP he is the right person to meet the disparate challenges that lie ahead, especially the pivotal issue of the environment.

Eliasch is a highly successful businessman and renowned environmentalist — making him a pertinent candidate in light of the recent wildfires in 2028 Games host city Los Angeles — and has been president of the International Ski Federation since 2021. He hopes such a CV will dazzle his electorate, the International Olympic Committee members, when they choose one of the seven candidates to be Bach's successor in March this year, even if he has only been a member since July.

Eliasch may lack the profile of athletics icon Sebastian Coe and the inside knowledge of the IOC that Juan Antonio Samaranch Junior possesses after two decades as a member, but he believes he has the skillset required to run the most powerful body in sport.

"I have been an adviser to governments on protecting the environment and taking action on climate change," he told AFP in an interview this month. "I have been very involved in technology, I have run a major company. I run the biggest winter sports federation, which provides 55 percent of all events in the Winter Games.

"The bottom line is if they are looking for somebody with a lot of experience and expertise I am your man," Eliasch, who refers to himself as Anglo-Swedish as he has spent more time in Britain than his country of birth, said the new president arrives at a crucial moment. "We are at a crossroads where expectations are very high and if you get things wrong it will not be a soft landing, it will be a crash landing," he said. "So it is important to have the right person steering us into the future and there are going to be some very big decisions coming up in sport." Eliasch, who says as he will be 63 come the election, it will be "his last hurrah".

'Slippery slope'

On key issues such as the environment and sustainability he has a proven track record — for example, he founded Cool Earth, a charity dedicated to rainforest conservation in 2006. "I was always passionate about nature," he said.

"There is an existential threat, though, centering around food, water and climate security. "If you cut down rainforests in one part of the world rain falls in different places, then agricultural land becomes non-productive and people start moving round, which provokes conflicts."

The art-loving Eliasch, a keen sportsman himself who has tried his hand at skiing, curling, tennis, golf and motor sports, said the LA fires were a taste of what is to come. "We can't afford to take our eye off the ball for even just a second, as far as climate change is concerned," he said. "The LA fires — the destruction and heartbreak they've caused, and how close they've come to LA28 venues — it shows us the urgency, and how vigilant and prepared and well-resourced we must be to avoid, manage and contain these extreme weather events. "Because the sad fact is we're going to see more of them in the future, not less." — AFP

Kuwait hockey team concludes training camp

ABU DHABI: Kuwait national hockey team concluded on Tuesday its training camp in the UAE in preparation for the 9th Asian Winter Games in the Chinese City of Harbin. The Kuwaiti national team is participating in four different competitions in the Winter Games: Hockey, Speed skating, Figure skating and Curling. In a statement for KUNA, President of Kuwait Winter Games Club and head of the delegation Fahaid Al-Ajmi said that the Kuwaiti team benefited from the 12-day long training camp, in which they have played three friendly matches with professional Emirati teams in preparation for their first match in the tournament against Kyrgyzstan, due next Monday.

He said that the players conducted three training sessions daily with the aim of enhancing physical fitness, and practicing on the technical and tactical plans set by the technical staff. This camp was an opportunity for the team to develop and strengthen the chemistry among players especially after competing in the local league, he noted.



Kuwait national hockey team with officials.

He, meanwhile, pointed that the other three Kuwaiti teams participating in different competitions of the Winter Games have also concluded their training

camp in Qatar, Switzerland and Malaysia. Al-Ajmi expressed his appreciation for the great support provided by the Kuwaiti Olympic Committee and the Public Authority for Sports for the Kuwaiti Winter Games Club as it is the most important factor for progress and development. — KUNA

Australia's Smith set to pass 10,000 Test runs in Sri Lanka

GALLE: Australian batting great Steve Smith begins a tour of Sri Lanka just one short of entering the elite club of 10,000 Test runs ahead of Wednesday's opening match in Galle. Smith, who will captain the team for the two-match series in the absence of Pat Cummins, has amassed 9,999 runs in 114 matches at an average of more than 55.

The 35-year-old is all but assured of becoming the 15th batsman in the world — and fourth Australian after Ricky Ponting, Allan Border and Steve Waugh — to achieve the milestone. Smith said the landmark would not be on his mind when he walks out at the picturesque Galle stadium overlooking the Indian Ocean.

"Honestly, I'm trying not to think about it too much," he told reporters on Tuesday. Smith suggested it had played on his mind "a bit too much" during Australia's fifth and final Test against India in Sydney this month, where his 33 and four left him agonizingly short.

"Now it's just about focusing on the job at hand," he said. Travis Head will open the batting in place of 19-year-old Sam Konstas on a pitch that is expect-



GALLE: Australia's captain Steve Smith (L) carries the Warne-Muralitharan trophy as he walks with his Sri Lankan counterpart Dhananjaya de Silva (R), on the eve of their first Test cricket match at the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle on January 28, 2025. — AFP

ed to favor spinners and at a venue where Sri Lanka have won 27 of the 46 Tests played. "Travis will bat at the top, but we'll finalize the XI after another look at the pitch tomorrow morning," Smith said. "The wicket has changed a bit since yesterday, so we'll weigh our options."

Inglis debut?

Australia, who have already set up a World Test

Championship (WTC) final with South Africa at Lord's in June, will be looking to stamp their authority as the number-one Test team. Smith was coy on whether wicketkeeper Josh Inglis, 29, was in line for his Test debut.

"He has solid defence, plays spin well, and scores all around the wicket," Smith said. "If he gets his chance, I'm confident he'll grab it with both hands." Sri Lanka, led by Dhananjaya de Silva, will be looking to reclaim the Warne-Muralitharan trophy, named after late Australia hero Shane Warne and Sri Lankan spin wizard Muttiah Muralitharan.

Sri Lanka hammered the visiting Australians 3-0 in 2016 but the last series in 2022 ended 1-1, with both matches played in Galle. "The last time we won the Warne-Muralitharan Trophy was in 2016, which was also my debut series. A lot of players from that campaign are still in the mix and we believe we have what it takes to repeat history," de Silva told reporters.

"Another incentive for us is the chance to finish third in the WTC standings if we win 2-0. That would be a tremendous achievement." The hosts have injury worries, with opener Pathum Nissanka out due to a groin injury and de Silva struggling with a side strain.

"Pathum is a key player and we're hopeful he'll be fit for the second Test. Whoever steps in will have a good opportunity to make a mark," de Silva said. Oshada Fernando, a seasoned campaigner with a knack for pling up runs in domestic cricket, is the frontrunner to replace Nissanka. — AFP

Siao Him Fa eyes third European skating gold

TALLINN: France's Adam Siao Him Fa returns from injury with a third consecutive European men's figure skating title in his sights as the continental showcase glides into action on Wednesday in Tallinn. The five-day competition in Tondiraba Ice Hall features 34 nations just over a year before the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan-Cortina but without athletes from Russia and Belarus. Siao Him Fa remains the favourite despite missing the ISU Grand Prix final and French national championships with a right ankle injury.

Before injury struck, Siao Him Fa had won a third

French Grand Prix gold and was third in the Cup of China. But it remains to be seen how the 23-year-old's ankle holds up during the short programme on Thursday and free skate two days later.

The world bronze medallist will face the challenge of compatriot Kevin Aymoz who recaptured the French national title in his absence, and has the season's top score for a European (282.88). Aymoz is targeting his first European podium aged 27 after coming back from the nightmare at last year's Europeans where he slumped to 31st before ending his season prematurely. "Last year, I burned myself out," said six-time French champion Aymoz. "The next day after Europeans, I woke up in the morning and I was sad to not be dead in my sleep," he said after taking silver in Skate America in October.

"So I think today I'm just happy to be alive and having fun on the ice and be myself and don't care about anything else. I'm just free, and that's what I

feel today. "For me, it's a comeback." Aymoz took silver in his two Grand Prix events in Finland and Skate America, and was sixth in the Grand Prix final. However he has never done better than fourth at Europeans. Daniel Grassl, a European silver medallist in 2022, was fourth in the Grand Prix final, and is a medal contender along with fellow Italian Matteo Rizzo, a three-time continental medallist.

The women's competition remains open with Belgian Loena Hendrickx not defending her title after a season plagued by fitness and injury concerns. "Bad luck continues to haunt me this season," said the 25-year-old two-time world medallist. "Just when the problems from the beginning of the season seemed to be overcome and everything finally started going according to plan, I sprained my ankle." Georgia's Anastasiia Gubanova won gold in 2023 and was runner-up last year, but struggled to eighth-place finishes at both her Grand Prix assignments. — AFP

Sports

New Champions League first phase set for frantic finale

Arsenal and Inter need only draw in order to secure their last-16 spots

PARIS: The new league phase of this season's expanded Champions League is all set for a frantic conclusion on Wednesday, as 18 matches are played simultaneously across Europe and the likes of Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain battle to avoid an early exit.

AFP Sport rounds up what is at stake ahead of the final round of games in the league phase:

Top 8 places up for grabs

There is a real incentive for finishing in the top eight places of the giant, 36-team standings—those sides will skip the two-legged knockout round play-offs next month, getting some precious rest as they advance straight to the last 16 in March.

Liverpool, with seven wins out of seven, and Barcelona are the only two teams to have already guaranteed a place in the last 16 after seven games in the league phase.

Arsenal, Inter Milan, Atletico Madrid, AC Milan, Atalanta and Bayer Leverkusen occupy the other six spots for now, but so much could change on the final night. After all, Stuttgart in 24th position are only three points behind Leverkusen in eighth, with 15 sides in between them. Arsenal and Inter need only draw away to Girona and at home to Monaco respectively in order to secure their last-16 spots.

With so little between teams in terms of points, so much could boil down to goal difference, setting up a potentially chaotic final night.

Who could be eliminated?

Big names like reigning champions Real Madrid, last season's runners-up Borussia Dortmund, Bayern Munich and Juventus are all still hoping to clamber

into the top eight, but are already guaranteed to at least be in February's play-off round.

In fact, only nine of the 36 teams will come into the final matchday still fighting to secure qualification for the next phase, including former European Cup winners PSV Eindhoven and Benfica. The biggest name under threat is Manchester City, with the 2023 champions currently languishing in 25th position, one place and two points outside the qualifying spots.

Pep Guardiola's team were beaten 4-2 away at PSG last week and have taken a single point from their last four games in the competition. "Today we don't deserve it," Guardiola said when asked following the PSG defeat if the new format was fair.

"What is the argument that it isn't fair? I said to the players to accept it and recover. We have to recover our game, that is what we have to do." There is jeopardy for City, but at the same time they know a win in their last match will take them through, and they will be expected to overcome Club Brugge at the Etihad Stadium.

PSG's win at home to City eased their fears of being eliminated, although it could still happen—the French champions go to Stuttgart, where a draw will be enough to take both teams through. For others, the heaviest price to pay for inconsistent results in the league phase will be having to go into the play-offs.

"The table does not lie. At the moment we aren't a top team. Top teams don't lose as many games. But we still have the feeling that we're in a process and on a good path," said Bayern's Joshua Kimmich after his team's 3-0 loss at Feyenoord last week.

What will happen next?

The teams finishing from ninth to 24th in the



SHENLEY: Arsenal's Ghanaian midfielder #05 Thomas Partey (C) takes part in a training session at the Arsenal Training center in Shenley on January 28, 2025, on the eve of their UEFA Champions League football match against Girona. — AFP

standings will go into Friday's draw for the play-offs, with the first legs to be played on February 11 and 12 and the return matches a week later. The teams finishing between ninth and 16th will be seeded, and the draw will be based on a pre-determined bracket. This means the teams finishing ninth and 10th will face the side either in 23rd or 24th place, while 15th and 16th will face either 17th or 18th.

There is nothing to stop teams from the same country facing each other, and teams can also be drawn against opponents they already met in the league phase. Much is bound to change on Wednesday, but based on the current standings PSG could play French rivals Lille in the play-offs, while Bayern or Real Madrid could play Juventus or Celtic. — AFP

Ivory Coast will hold on to AFCON trophy: Coach Fae

RABAT: Ivory Coast coach Emere Fae is confident his team can become the first country since Egypt in 2008 to successfully defend the Africa Cup of Nations title. The 2025 edition kicks off in Morocco on December 21. The draw was in Rabat on Monday paired the defending champions with Cameroon, Gabon and Mozambique in Group F.

Ivory Coast will begin their title defence against Mozambique on December 24 in Marrakesh, then face five-time champions Cameroon and Gabon. Group winners and runners-up are guaranteed round-of-16 slots and the best four third-placed teams also qualify.

"Sorry Morocco, but we are bringing the trophy back to Abidjan," said Fae, who replaced French coach Jean-Louis Gasset after a humiliating four-goal 2024 AFCON group loss to Equatorial Guinea. Fae, who was assisting Gasset and had never coached a senior team, led a remarkable u-turn that culminated in a 2-1 final victory over Nigeria.

"There are so many great teams coming to Morocco, but I have no intention of making our supporters cry," he said. "The key to success for the Elephants will be great preparations. That is a non negotiable," he told reporters in the Moroccan capital.

Egypt, whose last of a record seven AFCON titles came in 2010, face South Africa, Angola and Zimbabwe in Group B, considered by many observers as the toughest of the six mini-leagues. Coach Hossam Hassan acknowledged that the me-



RABAT: The results of the draw of the CAF 2025 AFCON Africa Cup of Nations football tournament are displayed on stage during a ceremony in Rabat. — AFP

dia spotlight would be on prolific Liverpool scorer Mohamed Salah and new Manchester City signing Omar Marmoush, but said Egypt had many stars. "We are lucky to have Mohamed, one of the greatest footballers in the world, and the talented Omar, but watch out for many other Egyptians who will impress in Morocco," he said.

'Stress'

Morocco coach Walid Regragui, the mastermind behind the shock third-place finish at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, admitted that stressful days lay ahead. "My country has been waiting since 1976 to win the Cup of Nations again. There will be stress and pressure for sure, but I am hopeful that we can succeed."

"A key factor in our favor will be the Moroccan people. They are the best football supporters in the

world. That said, it is vital that we respect all our opponents, starting with Comoros." Morocco face 2022 AFCON giant-killers Comoros in the tournament opener in Rabat on December 21, then Mali and Zambia in Group A.

The Atlas Lions finished fourth when they previously hosted the AFCON in 1988. That tournament consisted of just eight teams, compared with 24 this year. Recently-appointed Nigeria coach Eric Chelle gave little away after the Super Eagles were drawn in Group C with Tunisia, Uganda and Tanzania.

"I am in charge of a good team, but there are 23 other good teams coming to Morocco, and they all have good coaches," said Chelle. Morocco will use a record nine stadiums, including four in Rabat, for the AFCON. Agadir, Casablanca, Marrakesh, Fes and Tangier are the other venues. — AFP

Neymar, Al-Hilal agree to terminate contract: Club

PARIS: Brazilian star Neymar on Monday ended his injury-plagued 18 month stay in Saudi Arabia as his club, Al-Hilal said they had "agreed to terminate the player's contract by mutual consent". "The club expresses its thanks and appreciation to Neymar for what he has provided throughout his career with Al-Hilal, and wish the player success in his career," said a club statement posted on social media.

The 32-year-old former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain forward played just seven times since joining the club in August 2023, despite a reported salary of around \$104 million a year. Neymar, the subject of what is still the biggest transfer in foot-

ball history when he joined Paris Saint-Germain from Barcelona in 2017 for a fee of 220 million euros (\$230 million), joined Al-Hilal in August 2023.

He followed fellow superstars Cristiano Ronaldo and Karim Benzema to the lucrative Saudi league. But two months after his arrival in Riyadh, he ruptured a cruciate ligament in his left knee while playing for Brazil in a World Cup qualifier in October 2023, which kept him on the sidelines for a year.

He returned for Al-Hilal with two brief appearances in October and November but injured a hamstring and has not played since. He said he is targeting the World Cup. The club's coach Jesus said recently: "He can no longer play at the level we are used to. Things have become difficult for him, unfortunately." Earlier in January, Neymar said he was aiming to play in the 2026 in the US, Canada and Mexico.

'Last shot'

"I know this will be my last World Cup, my last shot, my last chance and I will do everything I can

Man City face Brugge 'final' in last shot at CL salvation

MANCHESTER: Manchester City have reached do-or-die territory in the Champions League earlier than expected ahead of what Pep Guardiola has described as a "final" against Club Brugge on Wednesday.

City have disproved the suggestion a new format to Europe's top club competition would remove any jeopardy for the top clubs as Guardiola stares down the barrel of failing to make the Champions League knockout stages for the first time in his career.

The English champions have endured a torrid season both in their Premier League title defence and on the continent. A run of one win in 13 games, which included Champions League defeats to Sporting Lisbon and Juventus, between October and December was the nadir of City's fall from grace.

Guardiola's men have since turned a corner in the Premier League, winning four of their last five games to climb back into the top four. But the deeper problems at the heart of City's struggles were exposed last week as Paris Saint-Germain roared back from 2-0 down to inflict a damaging 4-2 defeat on the 2023 champions.

The loss of Ballon d'Or winner Rodri to a season-ending knee injury in September has been a devastating blow and compounded by a series of fitness issues at centre-back, where Ruben Dias, Nathan Ake and John Stones have all missed large chunks of the campaign.

Former captain Kyle Walker shocked the club with a request to leave earlier this month before joining AC Milan on loan. All of which has forced City to rip up their initial plans and spend big in the January transfer window.

More than £120 million (\$150 million) has already been splashed on Egypt forward Omar Marmoush and young defenders Vitor Reis and Abdulkodir Khusanov. However, that trio will not be able to help against Belgian champions Brugge, who have not lost in 21 games in all competitions, as they are not eligible for this stage of the Champions League.

"We would not be doing it if our players were fit but today I think we have two central defenders, no more than that, and with our holding midfielders we are struggling," said Guardiola of the January splurge.

"After eight years together we have so many players who are more than thirty years old and the other reason is the amount of problems we have with players' availability. It is an absolutely normal process." — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

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Adaliya	22517144
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Kaifan	24849807
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Qadsiya	22515088
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Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

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Amiri Hospital	22450005
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Amen Thompson, Rockets sink Celtics late

BOSTON: Amen Thompson made a game-winning floater with 1.3 seconds remaining to polish off a career night, lifting the visiting Houston Rockets to a 114-112 victory over the short-handed Boston Celtics on Monday night. The bucket in the lane gave Thompson a career-high 33 points. He also finished with nine rebounds and four assists to help Houston get a win in coach Ime Udoka's return to Boston, where he was at the helm during the 2021-22 season. Payton Pritchard had one last chance to win the game for the Celtics, but his full-court heave at the buzzer only found the top of the backboard. Dillon Brooks drilled a career-high 10 3-pointers en route to a game-high 36 points for the Rockets, who won despite once trailing by 12 points in the fourth quarter. Jaylen Brown put up 28 points for the Celtics, who were without Derrick White (shin), Sam Hauser (hip) and Al Horford (toe).

Lakers 112, Hornets 107

Anthony Davis set season highs with 42 points and 23 rebounds to help Los Angeles win against host Charlotte. LeBron James racked up 22 points, seven rebounds and eight assists for the Lakers, who have won four straight games and six of their past seven. Miles Bridges tallied 26 points and eight rebounds to lead the Hornets, who have lost three of their past four games. Charlotte played most of the game without LaMelo Ball, who exited in the second quarter due to a left ankle sprain. He scored seven points in nine minutes.

Heat 125, Magic 119 (2OT)

Tyler Herro scored 30 points and had a season-high 12 assists, leading host Miami to a double-overtime win over Orlando. Miami's Bam Adebayo added 26 points — including six in the second OT — plus 10 rebounds and nine assists. Prior to the game, the Heat suspended Jimmy Butler for the third time this season — all for conduct detrimental to the team. Butler's latest ban has him out indefinitely. Franz Wagner led the Magic with 29 points. With 33.5 seconds to go in regulation, Nikola Jovic lobbed a pass for Kel'el Ware to dunk, putting Miami on top 108-106. Five seconds later, Wagner beat a double team by banking in a shot, tying the score and forcing overtime.

Cavaliers 110, Pistons 91

Darius Garland scored 22 points and Dono-



BOSTON: Payton Pritchard #11 of the Boston Celtics defends Fred VanVleet #5 of the Houston Rockets during the second half at TD Garden on January 27, 2025 in Boston, Massachusetts. The Rockets defeat the Celtics 114-112. — AFP

van Mitchell added 21 as Cleveland snapped a season-worst three-game losing streak with a win over visiting Detroit. Jarrett Allen recorded his 25th double-double of the season with 15 points and 11 rebounds for the Eastern Conference-leading Cavaliers, who never trailed and improved to 22-3 at home. Cade Cunningham led Detroit with 22 points on 9-of-26 shooting. Malik Beasley scored 19 points off the bench, Jalen Duren had 12 points and 16 rebounds and Marcus Sasser chipped in 11 points.

Kings 110, Nets 96

De'Aaron Fox scored 16 of his 30 points in the third quarter as Sacramento erased a nine-point deficit and pulled away down the stretch for a victory over Brooklyn in New York. The Nets took their seventh consecutive defeat overall and saw their home losing streak reach 11 games. Domantas Sabonis logged 21

points, 22 rebounds and 10 assists for the Kings, his seventh triple-double of the season. D'Angelo Russell scored 19 points for the Nets, who fell to 1-12 in their past 13 games. Tosan Evbuomwan and Jalen Wilson added 15 points apiece.

Knicks 143, Grizzlies 106

Karl-Anthony Towns posted another double-double and had 16 points during a strong third quarter that helped New York pull away for its most decisive win of the season, a rout of visiting Memphis. Towns finished with 24 points and 11 rebounds for his 37th double-double of the season. Mikal Bridges scored a game-high 28 points to lead seven scorers in double figures for the Knicks. Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 21 points for the Grizzlies, who had their second six-game winning streak of the season come to an end. Memphis' Desmond Bane had 16 points while Ja Mo-

rant, Santi Aldama and Brandon Clarke finished with 10 apiece.

Raptors 113, Pelicans 104

Jakob Poeltl had 21 points, 14 rebounds and three blocks as Toronto defeated visiting New Orleans to stretch its winning streak to four games. Scottie Barnes added 21 points, 11 rebounds, eight assists and three steals for the Raptors, who have won six of their past seven games. Zion Williamson scored 31 points and CJ McCollum put up 22 points for the Pelicans. New Orleans coach Willie Green was ejected in the fourth quarter for arguing with the officials.

Bulls 129, Nuggets 121

Zach LaVine scored 21 points and Nikola Vucevic produced 20 points and 10 rebounds to lift Chicago to a victory against visiting Denver. Seven players scored in double figures for Chicago, which shot 45.3 percent (24-for-53) from long range and overcame a triple-double from Denver's Nikola Jokic. Lonzo Ball contributed 18 points for the Bulls. Jokic had 33 points, 14 assists and 12 rebounds. Christian Braun scored 28 points, but Denver took its second consecutive loss after an 8-1 stretch.

Timberwolves 100, Hawks 92

Anthony Edwards scored 23 points, Julius Randle added 20 points and Minnesota held on for a win over Atlanta in Minneapolis. De'Andre Hunter scored a career-high 35 points to lead Atlanta. Fellow reserve Clint Capela chipped in 10 points and 15 rebounds. The Hawks played without their top two scorers, guard Trae Young (hamstring) and forward Jalen Johnson (shoulder). Young is averaging 22.8 points per game, and Johnson is averaging 18.9 points per contest.

Mavericks 130, Wizards 108

Klay Thompson drained seven 3-pointers in the first quarter on the way to a game-high 23 points and Dallas handed visiting Washington a 14th straight loss. It was a rout from the start, as the Mavericks needed just 6:13 to open up a 24-5 lead before going into the second quarter ahead 42-16. Reserve Olivier-Maxence Prosper tied his career high with 20 points as Dallas won for the second time in three games. Bilal Coulibaly led the Wizards with 16 points, while Jordan Poole and Corey Kispert each added 15 points. — Reuters

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