



P.21
Building Future- Ready Digital Ecosystems Discover How SBM is Empowering Organizations to Transform with Confidence

P.47
Blackstone drives fresh capital into Cyera, lifting data-security firm to \$9bn valuation

P.61
Netflix Buys Warner Bros., Indicating Shifts in Hollywood's Power Dynamics

“

POWERING SAUDI ARABIA'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION - TODAY AND BEYOND.

Empowering our customers with trusted, world-class technology to advance Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and build a resilient, future-ready digital economy.

Mr. Essam Alshihah, President and CEO, Saudi Business Machines (SBM)



**POWERING
TOMORROW'S
TECHNOLOGY,
TODAY.**

SBM and its Digital Transformation Hub
TECHXAGON are recognized
for leading digital transformation and
smart infrastructure in Saudi Arabia.



sbm.com.sa

TECHXAGON
SBM DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION HUB



**Best CEO in Digital Transformation
& Smart Infrastructure (ICT)**

Mr. Essam Alshiha – Saudi Arabia 2025.



**Best Technology Hub for Digital
Transformation, Research & Development**

TECHXAGON, SBM's Digital Transformation
Hub – Saudi Arabia 2025.



A JUFFALI COMPANY
THE GENERAL MARKETING AND SERVICES REPRESENTATIVE OF **IBM WTC**

An ode to our Readers

Greetings from The Global Economics!

A Very Happy New Year to You!

We are delighted to present the 28th issue of our magazine, where we have discussed in detail the global developments in the last month of 2025, such as China's stimulus to help deal with economic challenges, ASEAN's growing partnerships amid increasing protectionist policies and the new Sino-German collaboration for technology and economic expansion.

December witnessed numerous companies announcing new mergers and acquisitions, revising growth targets for the new year and exploring expansion opportunities. We have written about Jeeves' financial acceleration plan and Blackstone's new investment venture into Cyera.

This edition also delves into various aspects of the ever-growing digital economy like Saudi Arabia's projection to hit \$133 billion by the end of this decade, ByteDance's plans to divest after repeated warnings from President Trump and Disney and OpenAI's newest partnership, which is set to change the face of AI and entertainment.

Inflation has been a major concern for most countries, and in this issue, we have discussed Kuwait's rising inflation levels and also about Bank of Japan's decision to increase interest rates to a 30-year peak. The aviation industry had been making headlines last month with Airbus recalling its jets after a software issue and Jet Luxe's plans to expand its fleet in the US and the LATAM region.

As we step into the new year, we contend with a world fraught with economic uncertainties. But just the past month has shown us that entrepreneurs are rarely fazed by these circumstances, and with every new collaboration coming to light, we may take comfort knowing that the financial and business world offers endless opportunities for those who are willing to seek them out. Finally, we hope you enjoy reading this edition as much as we enjoyed curating it for you.

Cheers!

The Global Economics Family

About The Global Economics Ltd.

The Global Economics Limited stands as a distinguished and esteemed digital and print business magazine, with its headquarters situated in the heart of London. Renowned for its insightful analysis, our publication delves into the intricate currents of global business, offering comprehensive coverage of diverse sectors that define the contemporary economic landscape.

At the core of our mission is the commitment to provide our discerning readership, composed of C-level executives, Directors, and key decision-makers from medium and large-scale enterprises, with thought-provoking and in-depth insights. Subscribers to our magazine gain access to a wealth of knowledge, ranging from nuanced discussions on banking, wealth management, cryptocurrencies, and fintech to broader explorations of technology, real estate, hospitality, energy, and other pivotal industries. Our editorial content ensures that our readers are consistently informed with cutting-edge analyses, positioning them at the forefront of informed decision-making.

The Global Economics Limited also hosts a distinguished Annual Awards Program. This program is meticulously designed to acknowledge and honour key market players across diverse business sectors worldwide. Our prestigious awards not only confer distinction upon the recipients but also amplify their global visibility and recognition.

Open to companies on a global scale, our awards program spans sectors such as Banking, Insurance, Finance, Technology, Hospitality, and Real Estate, among others. Participation in our Annual Awards Program is open and free, embodying our commitment to fostering a culture of recognition and celebration within the global business community.

CONTENTS

World

- 05 - ASEAN: Building Balanced Partnerships with Global Powerhouses
- 07 - China's Politburo Pledges Action to Tackle Trade 'Struggles' in 2026
- 09 - China, Germany Hold Strategic Talks on Nexperia Chip Issues, Trade and EU ties in Beijing meeting

Exclusive Coverage

- 11 - Bridging The Gap: MedQuick's Goal To Align Patients And Providers

Economy

- 13 - Mexico's Senate Moves Ahead with 50% Tariffs on Imports from China, Asian Nations
- 15 - Kuwait's Inflation Edges Up to 2.39%
- 18 - Swiss Exporters Get Relief: US Cuts Tariffs to 15% and Launches \$200 Billion Investment Push
- 19 - Xpeng Accelerates Global Push with Malaysia Based-EV Assembly for Southeast Asia

Exclusive Coverage

- 21 - Building Future- Ready Digital Ecosystems : Discover How SBM is Empowering Organisations to Transform with Confidence



Economy

- 23 - ByteDance Inks Deal To Form Joint Venture To Operate US TikTok App
- 25 - South Korea's Automobile Exports were Expected to Cross \$70 Billion Mark by End of 2025

- 27 - ECB Signals Rate Pause as Eurozone Inflation Edges Closer to 2% Target
- 29 - Saudi Arabia's Digital Economy on Track to Hit \$133 Billion by 2030



Exclusive Coverage

- 31 - Miyar Capital: Redefining Investments and Driving Innovation In Saudi Arabia

Finance

- 35 - Gallagher Re Targets Growth with South Africa's Largest Independent Broker Acquisition
- 37 - The \$200B AI Race: Debt, Revenue, and Risk

Exclusive Coverage

- 41 - Your Facility, Our Priority: UFM's Mantra To Pioneer Growth In Kuwait's Facilities Management

Finance

- 43 - Disney to Invest in OpenAI, Allow IP on Sora
- 45 - Jeeves Rises to \$100 Million to Accelerate Financial-Automation Growth
- 47 - Blackstone drives fresh capital into Cyera, lifting data-security firm to \$9 Billion valuation

Exclusive Coverage

- 49 - Tamkeen Intelligent

Industry

- 51 - Airbus Orders Massive Global Recall of A320 Jets After Software Glitch

- 54 - Australia's National Storage Set For \$3.4 Billion Take Over By Brookfield and GIC
- 55 - Jet Luxe gets a boost for US-Latin America business travel as Caribbean and Mexico fleet expands

Exclusive Coverage

- 57 - 7 Decades Of Development: How tameer Has Shaped Egypt's Urban Landscape

Lifestyle

- 59 - Versace Joins Prada in €1.25 Billion Deal: Fashion Industry Transformations Ahead
- 61 - Netflix Buys Warner Bros., Indicating Shifts in Hollywood's Power Dynamics

Technology

- 64 - Dubai Launches World's First AI-Powered Payment System-Agent Pay
- 65 - China's UBTech Robotics seeks Big Capital Push with \$400 Million Hong Kong Share Deal

Exclusive Coverage

- 67 - We Offer Control, Not Credit: How TRU's Customer-Driven Lending App Is Reshaping Egyptian Finance

Banking

- 69 - Bank of Japan Lifts Interest Rates to 0.75%, Marking a Three-Decade Peak



- 71 - China's CSRC Pushes Brokerages to Build Global Banks and Back Tech Self-Reliance
- 73 - Saudi Banks record 2.5% Q3 Loan Expansion in Corporate Lending, Says Alvarez & Marsal

Our Core Team

EDITOR

Manasa S Murthy
Teri Morales

WRITERS

Prasenjit Bhowmik
Liam Scott
Euan Neilson

PRODUCTION & DESIGN

Tony Rodrigues

HEAD OF MARKETING

William Littlewood

ASSOCIATE MANAGER

Prajjwal Shyale

DESIGN & LAYOUT

Akash P Raikar
Phil Rowley

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGERS

Benjamin Cal
Paul Smith
Victor Calo

BUSINESS ANALYSTS

Lisha Park
Roy Manson
Patrick Harman
Carol Pierce
Ivor Wallace
Susan Lee
Sophie Morrison

The Global Economics Limited
Devonshire House, 582 Honeypot Lane,
Stanmore, London, UK, HA7 1JS

Phone

+44 20 8152 4860 | +44 20455 87611

E-mail

info@theglobaleconomics.com

ASEAN: Building Balanced Partnerships with Global Powerhouses

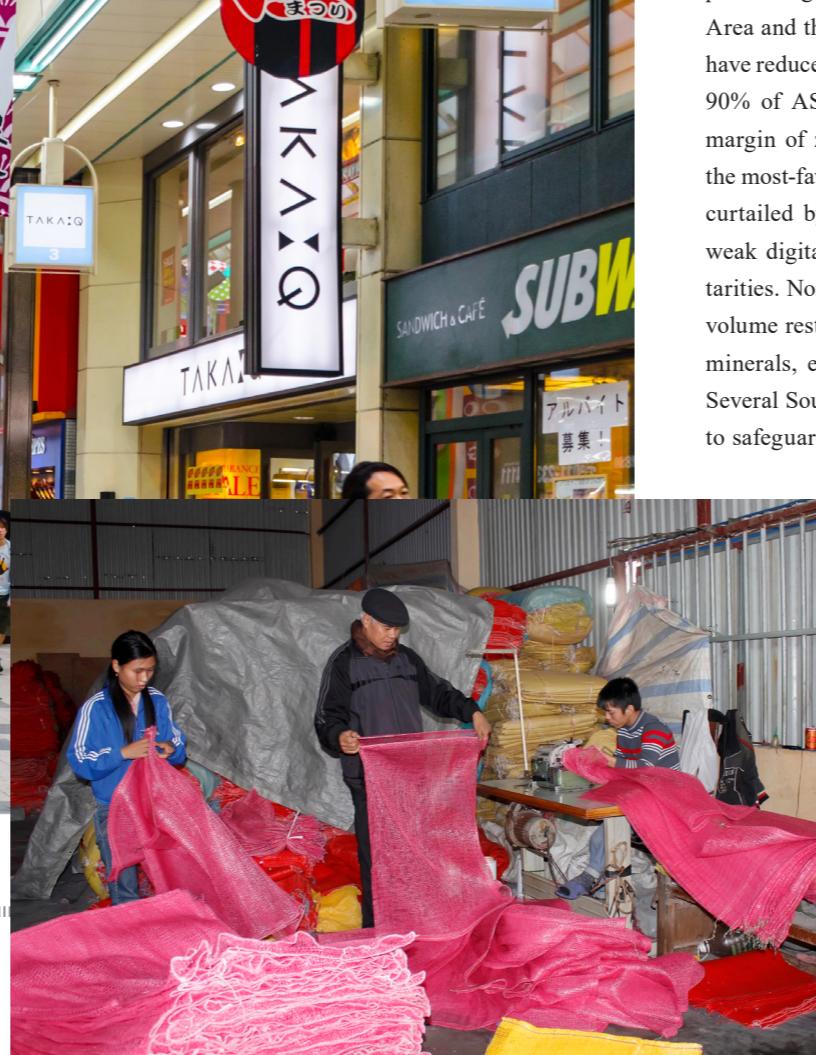


The global trading system has several partners enjoying the benefits of economic growth and development. However, Southeast Asia has been integrated into it not long ago; therefore, it is new to the vulnerabilities that come along. The global trading system is dominated by the United States, which has recently wreaked havoc on allied nations through tariffs and export restrictions. For Southeast Asia, this is both a warning and a call to action. The 11-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) commands a GDP of nearly \$4 trillion, becoming the fourth-largest economy. Despite this, its potential as an integrated production

system and consumer market remains untouched.

The Cost of Fragmentation

The absence of integration is a fundamental flaw. They have had decades of trade liberalisation, yet their intra-regional trade has stalled at over 20% of total trade. In 2023, ASEAN's total trade crossed \$3.5 trillion, but only 24% (\$850 billion) came from intra-regional trade. This is disappointing for a region that had planned back in 2003 to build an ASEAN Economic Community. The problem is their inward economic coherence;



collectively, they have an impressive record for Google trade. Vietnam's exports are mainly bound for the US and EU. Malaysia's share of trading is larger with China than with neighbouring Indonesia or Thailand. The Philippines is focused on North America and Japan. Singapore is mainly a global financial and trade hub. This creates the image of Southeast Asia as more of a single entity than a collective economic bloc.

Structural Barriers to Integration

ASEAN faces a significant gap in income and production sophistication, limiting complementarities. High-income countries demand goods that low-income countries cannot supply, and high earners supply goods beyond the purchasing power of lower earners. The ASEAN Free Trade Area and the Common Effective Preferential Tariff scheme have reduced tariff pressures on almost all goods. More than 90% of ASEAN countries' tariff lines have a preference margin of zero, with preferential rates almost identical to the most-favoured-nation rate. ASEAN's potential is further curtailed by non-tariff barriers, a poor logistics network, weak digital inclusion, and uneven industrial complementarities. Non-tariff barriers are like price controls or import volume restrictions; they tend to be seen in sectors such as minerals, electrical appliances, machinery, and agri-food. Several Southeast Asian nations are reducing these barriers to safeguard domestic industries from foreign competitors,

which in turn hampers markets, discourages intra-ASEAN trade, and raises costs for producers and consumers.

Existing Frameworks and Implementation Gaps

The ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement focuses on facilitating the free flow of goods within the bloc. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership puts in efforts to improve market access among ASEAN member states with their free-trade partners, Australia, South Korea, New Zealand, Japan and China. The ASEAN Single Window reduces customs processing times by implementing the electronic exchange of trade-related documents. The forthcoming ASEAN Digital Economy Framework

Agreement offers a blueprint for developing an open and inclusive regional digital economy. Implementation is an area where most of them lag. The AEC Blueprint 2025, adopted 10 years ago, aims to improve the implementation of unfinished elements from the earlier 2015 Blueprint. There also exist commitments to upgrade the Trade in Goods Agreement, complete the DEFA and improve standards that need to be executed on the ground. The success of these elements

will enable intraregional sourcing, enable companies to expand, reduce costs, and improve the overall region for manufacturing and services investment.

Leveraging Plus-3 Relationships

ASEAN's relationship with China, Japan, and South Korea, popularly known as the Plus 3, brings a unique mix of opportunities and challenges. Intra-regional trade between the two has accounted for 20-25% of total trade volume in the last twenty years. China is the region's manufacturing hub, closely connected with the Japanese and Korean technology and capital goods. These Plus-3 economies supply critical elements, transfer knowledge and expertise and offer access to large markets. ASEAN has used these benefits to improve its electronics, automotive and digital services value chains. This external connectivity is not sufficient to bridge the gap among ASEAN's member states. Mainly, because ASEAN is focused on Plus-3 production networks, forgetting that improved intra-regional integration would benefit the whole bloc. An interconnected ASEAN would strengthen regional demand and resilience.

Balanced Partnerships with Multiple Powers

ASEAN would be able to build a balanced partnership with major global powers like China, the US, India and Japan, only by adopting robust decision-making frameworks, deep internal integration, and strong institutions. The US remains the largest investor in Southeast Asia. American companies have the largest investment compared to the Plus-3 states combined. This creates millions of jobs, both directly and indirectly, in Southeast Asia, favouring long-term commitments to the region. Initiatives like USASEAN Connect, ASEAN-USAID IGNITE, and the US support various fronts to improve economic opportunities. Building balanced partnerships also means reducing dependencies on any one partner. It demands maintaining productive relationships with all major powers while maintaining national sovereignty.

The Path Forward

ASEAN has faced major challenges, like the 1990 Asian financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, and each time it has emerged with resilience. However, its growth lags due to consensus-building, weak implementation, and national challenges, leaving it as a decision-adopter rather than a decision-maker. This will be a major test of ASEAN, with sound economic policymaking serving effective strategic positioning in a world where power, production and politics have become entangled. The decision-making of ASEAN leaders will determine the future of decades of stability, dynamism, autonomy, and prosperity. If not, ASEAN will remain a pawn at the mercy of larger players.

China's Politburo Pledges Action to Tackle Trade 'Struggles' in 2026

China's Politburo hints at increasing concerns regarding trade obstacles despite Beijing being on track to meet its 5% growth target for the current year, driven mainly by its export engine. Leaders in Beijing have also accepted mounting pressures on the world's second-largest economy. They have announced the improvement of coordination in domestic economic work and addressing international economic and trade challenges as the world heads towards a challenging year, clouded by extreme protectionism and tariff threats. The Politburo's announcement of acknowledging external uncertainty and tackling it without delay came shortly after China released reports showing that its trade surplus had exceeded \$1 trillion in 11 months. Their dictionary use of "*struggles*" for calling out international trade relations demonstrates a shift from neutral diplomatic language and reflects the intensity with which Chinese leaders perceive the overseas environment.

Domestic Demand Takes Centre Stage

The Politburo has made strengthening domestic demand the topmost economic priority for 2026, to counter foreign risks. The decision-making body headed

by President Xi Jinping pledged that they need to adhere to domestic demand as the main driver and establish a strong internal market. This is a strategic shift from mainly focusing on exports to building an internal consumption base to maintain growth during strenuous global economic times. The focus on domestic demand expansion highlights the fact that China's huge growth on the shoulders of export output may not be sustainable. Economists expect export growth to slow down in 2026, while consumption may not pick up from one of its weakest stretches in years. Trade tensions with the rest of the world may further increase after Chinese products flooded other markets when exports to the US tanked under President Donald Trump and his tariff barrage. The current Trump administration's stance of extreme protectionism, along with growing concerns in Europe and elsewhere regarding Chinese overcapacity and market disruptions, builds a complex web of challenges that further pushes them into building resilience in the form of internal growth.

Policy Stance: More Proactive, Moderately Loose

The Politburo announced that it would chase progress while maintaining stability in the economic activities in 2026. They

also intend to roll out more proactive fiscal policy and moderately loose monetary policy.

The shifted monetary stance will mark a debut since 2009, as the leaders choose to say "*moderately loose*" language, highlighting a willingness to deploy significant stimulus if required. Senior leaders have committed to strengthening cross-cyclical policy amendments, signalling longer-term planning.

This reflects that the authorities are targeting beyond short-term stabilisation towards structural reforms and stable growth trajectories that can withstand external pressure. They also promised to develop "*new productive forces*", to slow down manufacturing, which was not required mainly in critical sectors. Such language hints towards a focus on advanced manufacturing, technological innovation, and strategic industries, even

as Beijing views overcapacity as a major concern from trading partners. Several custom measures and targets, like economic growth objectives and the size of the budget deficit, will not come out till China's parliament begins its annual session in early March next year. However, analysts expect interest rate cuts to propel growth up to 5%.

Innovation and Industrial Policy

The Politburo has emphasised the need for boosting innovation and acceleration for the development and growth of new productive forces. This will lead to technological self-reliance and advancement in strategic sectors, including artificial intelligence, semiconductors, biotechnology, and advanced manufacturing. Top-level bureaucratic meetings have noted the importance of advancing market-oriented

reforms, adjusting the central-local fiscal relationship, modernising financial regulation, and creating a more consistent and predictable business environment for private firms.

Such focus gained added weight after the April 2025 rollout of the Private Economy Promotion Law, which looks to formalise equal access to production factors and strengthen protections for private sector rights. Critical sectors under "*new quality productive forces*" are anticipated to include commercial aerospace, the low-altitude economy, biomedicine, quantum technology, embodied intelligence, and 6G telecommunications. Various other developments from 2025 expected to receive regular focus include the launch of the innovative drug catalogue to improve biotech research and development, and the use of novel financial instruments to invest patient capital into specialised areas.



Strategic Implications and Trade Tensions

The use of the term "struggles" for international economic relations reflects how Beijing now views its standing in the global economy. They view trade relations not just as commercial negotiations but also as fundamental conquests over economic development and national interests. Internally, it readies the citizens for facing an economic winter emerging out of trade limitations and portrays any adjustment as a strategic move for longer-term stability.

Globally, it highlights that trade agreements should be perceived as short-term relief rather than fundamental change in China's development model or industrial policies. For trading partners, mainly the US and the EU, the tone suggests that worries regarding Chinese overcapacity, subsidies, and market access barriers are unlikely to be resolved through incremental negotiations. Instead, China appears fixated on maintaining its state-led development approach while building local alternatives for foreign markets and technologies.

Outlook: Navigating Uncertainty

The Chinese growth model has yielded 5.3% in the first half of 2025 thanks to exports, fiscal stimulus, and consumption boosts, but the foundations tend to become weaker with each infusion of fiscal aid, with structural integrity further dwindling by the third quarter. The Politburo's acknowledgement of "*international economic and trade struggles*" highlights a realistic assessment of overseas challenges, besides hinting at a willingness to build self-reliance through domestic market development and technological advancement. Whether this strategy can successfully offset export challenges and reclaim lost growth will mainly depend on China's economic trajectory in 2026 and beyond.

China, Germany Hold Strategic Talks on Nexperia Chip Issues, Trade and EU ties in Beijing meeting

While deeper tensions over trade and EU-China ties remain unresolved, senior Chinese and German officials pressed for steps to restore semiconductor supplies in a high-stakes diplomatic exchange this week aimed at stabilizing a tense trade relationship shaken by the dispute over chipmaker Nexperia.

During a two-day visit to Beijing, German Foreign Minister Johann Wadeplul expressed serious concerns about the conflict's impact on European supply chains and urged Chinese officials to help put an end to the uncertainty that has hampered industrial and automotive production throughout the continent. Beijing, for its part, emphasized that third parties must exercise moderation in order to resolve the issue and called on Dutch authorities to stop what it called "*improper administrative interference*."

Nexperia, a Chinese-owned chipmaker with headquarters in the Netherlands, is at the center of the negotiations. Export restrictions and production issues have been brought on by the company's internal conflict and European regulatory actions. The company's division between its Chinese and European operations has increased supply concerns for automakers that depend on its commodity semiconductors, leading to a diplomatic rush to prevent broader industrial repercussions. Even though some export

restrictions have been loosened. In meetings with Wadeplul, Beijing conveyed two messages: first, it reaffirmed calls for communication between the parties within Nexperia; second, it urged European partners to refrain from politicizing commercial ties; and third, it expressed a willingness to alleviate the current shortages of vital inputs for German industry. Senior trade and foreign ministry representatives, among other Chinese officials, presented the issue as essentially a commercial dispute that Beijing wants resolved rather than letting it develop into a long-term supply weapon.

The stakes are existential for Germany, the biggest economy in Europe and a major manufacturing power. Tighter chip flows and limited access to rare earths and other inputs have already put pressure on German automakers and machinery companies. According to reports from the visit, Wadeplul urged China to expedite the issuance of export licenses for materials essential to high-tech manufacturing and to give priority to resolving bottlenecks affecting European producers. Berlin took a measured but firm stance: while commercial integration with China has advantages, domestic industry cannot be jeopardized by strategic reliance.

The Nexperia scandal also highlights a larger European conundrum: how to maintain strategic supply chains while maintaining economic ties with China. Beijing's ability to influence access to chips and minerals gives it leverage in



negotiations with individual EU states, according to commentators. This dynamic has led to calls in Brussels and national capitals to diversify suppliers or put up barriers against coercive trade practices. The episode is an example of how supply-chain control can be used as geopolitical leverage, according to *The Guardian* and other analyses. On the diplomatic front, it is significant that there had been a note of realism. It would appear that they prefer containing and managing crises rather than engaging with each other's confrontational positions. China has encouraged direct talks with Wingtech, whose parent company Nexperia, and the Dutch administrators who are running the operations within Europe. Wingtech has apparently invited administrators from China to talk about controlling the firm. Obviously, there would be complications involved.

As officials head back to capitals on both sides, it will no doubt continue. And so will the larger debate in Europe about how it wants to navigate openness and strategic autonomy. Until then, Nexperia will be a case study on the dangers of industrial dependence and geopolitical ambitions. It's worth noting here that several weeks before these developments, Nexperia had already made some changes. It had laid off employees and also sold some of its assets. It seems that it wanted to diversify. But it might be too soon for Nexperia. It needs more time.

Bridging The Gap: MedQuick's Goal To Align Patients And Providers

MedQuick was born in a time of crisis but has grown into a symbol of connected healthcare innovation. Looking back, what core philosophy guided this transformation from a simple ERP to a borderless digital health ecosystem?

MedQuick started with a very simple belief, which is “healthcare should work around people, not the other way around”. When we began during the COVID period, the immediate need was operational efficiency, so the platform started as an ERP-style solution. However, we soon realised that technology alone is not enough.

The core philosophy that guided our transformation was connectivity with purpose. Every decision since then has been about removing friction between patients, doctors, facilities, and regulators, while keeping care safe, human, and accessible. That mindset is what turned MedQuick into a borderless digital health ecosystem rather than just another software product.

Many tech-driven healthcare platforms focus on efficiency, but MedQuick emphasises empathy. How do you ensure that compassion remains central as AI, IoT, and automation become more deeply integrated into healthcare delivery?

Empathy does not disappear because technology becomes more advanced. In fact, it becomes more important. At MedQuick, we design technology to support human interaction, not replace it. AI and automation help doctors make better decisions and reduce administrative burden, but the relationship between the patient and the caregiver always comes first.

We ensure this by involving clinicians in product design, focusing on clear communication, and building workflows that give healthcare professionals more time with patients, not less. Technology is a tool, compassion is the foundation, and it's what makes us humans.



Eng. Mohammed Aljamal,
Founder and CEO,
MedQuick

With MedQuick's expansion across the UAE, Bahrain, KSA, and Jordan, what are the biggest challenges in scaling healthcare technology across diverse regulatory, cultural, and infrastructure landscapes?

Scaling healthcare technology across different countries is never just a technical challenge. Regulations, culture, clinical practice, and infrastructure vary widely. One of the biggest challenges is alignment, making sure the platform respects local laws and workflows while maintaining a unified global standard. Another challenge is trust, especially in markets where digital health is still new. We address this by working closely with regulators, local partners, and healthcare providers, and by adapting without compromising on quality, security, or patient safety.

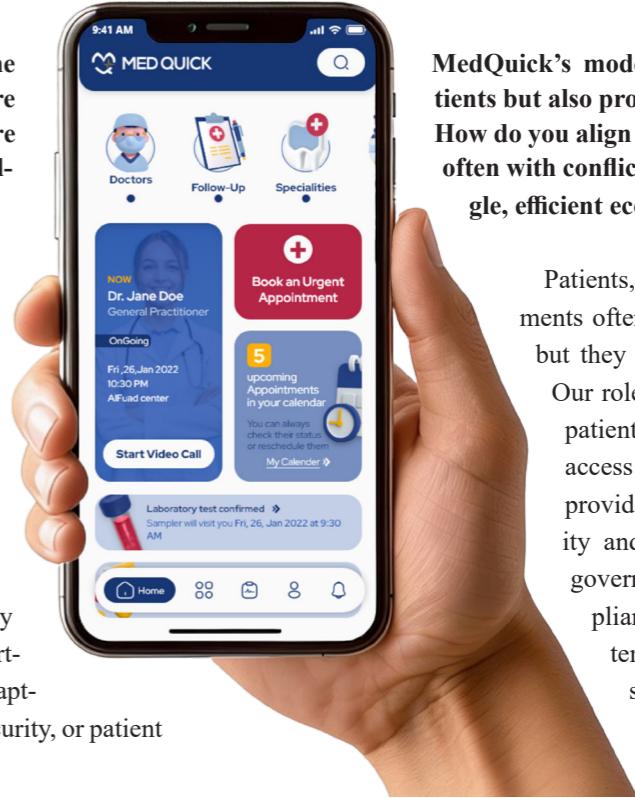
As MedQuick positions itself as a regional leader, how do you see cross-border collaboration and data interoperability shaping the next phase of global healthcare connectivity?

Healthcare cannot be truly connected without strong cross-border collaboration. The future depends on systems that can securely talk to each other while respecting local data laws. At MedQuick, we see interoperability as a strategic priority, not an afterthought.

Global partnerships allow us to share best practices, integrate diagnostics and data responsibly, and support patients who move across borders. Over time, this will help shift healthcare from isolated systems into a more collaborative global network.

In an age where patient data is the new currency, how is MedQuick balancing the need for innovation with stringent data privacy requirements like HIPAA, GDPR, and regional standards such as DHA and NABIDH?

Trust is everything in healthcare. Innovation only works if patients and providers feel safe. MedQuick was built with privacy and security at its core, not added later. We comply with international standards such as HIPAA and GDPR, as well as regional frameworks like DHA and NABIDH, because trust must be consistent everywhere. We apply strong encryption, access controls, audit trails, and governance policies, and we constantly review them as regulations evolve. Protecting patient data is not just a legal requirement for us; it is a responsibility.



MedQuick's model supports not just patients but also providers and governments. How do you align these three stakeholders, often with conflicting priorities, into a single, efficient ecosystem?

Patients, providers, and governments often have different priorities, but they all want better outcomes. Our role is to act as a bridge. For patients, we focus on ease of access and transparency. For providers, we reduce complexity and improve efficiency. For governments, we support compliance, reporting, and system-wide visibility. By designing one platform that serves all three without favouring one at the expense of the others, we create alignment instead of conflict. That is how a real healthcare ecosystem works.

You have described healthcare as something that should be “as easy as ordering food online.” What are the next frontiers for MedQuick in making healthcare more inclusive, particularly for underserved or rural communities?

When I say healthcare should be as easy as ordering food online, I mean it should be intuitive, fast, and available when people need it. The next frontier for MedQuick is a deeper reach, especially in rural and underserved areas. This includes mobile diagnostics, remote monitoring, and partnerships that bring care directly to people rather than forcing people to travel for care. Technology makes this possible, but only if it is affordable, reliable, and adapted to local realities. Accessibility is not about convenience alone; it is about equity.

As MedQuick continues to evolve, how do you envision the company's role in shaping the future of global digital health, not just as a technology provider but as a catalyst for ethical, accessible, and compassionate healthcare worldwide?

Looking ahead, I see MedQuick not just as a technology company, but as a platform that helps shape how healthcare is delivered globally. Our role is to enable ethical, secure, and compassionate digital health at scale. This means supporting governments, empowering clinicians, and giving patients more control over their health. If we do our job right, MedQuick will not be remembered for the software it built, but for the systems it helped improve and the lives it helped connect.

Mexico's Senate Moves Ahead with 50% Tariffs on Imports from China, Asian Nations

In Mexico, the country's senate has approved a comprehensive revision of import duties that will increase tariffs as high as 50 percent on a broad range of goods originating from China and several other Asian economies. The new policy will likely have significant effects on the global trade and supply chain systems as it will result in diplomatic protests from China as a result of actions undertaken by Mexico.

The bill, which follows on the heels of previous passage in the lower house, affects some 1,400 product lines ranging from autos and auto components to textiles and apparel, plastics, footwear, and steel and various consumer goods. Although most goods will see hikes limited to around 35%, some will see duties raised to the maximum 50%, which is the maximum level Mexico can charge and still be within rules set down by the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The lawmakers said it would help stimulate local production and protect small and medium

enterprises from being swamped with low-cost imports. The president of Mexico, Claudia Sheinbaum, described it as a measure within an overall industrial policy. According to government authorities, these tariffs will provide room in the country's budget and will make it attractive for some production processes to be incorporated. It will be particularly so for sectors that are considered fundamental for labor market and technologically advancements. According to analyst sources and local reports, these steps may result in an extra \$2.5-3.8 billion within 2026. The timing is intensely political. For months, Washington has leaned on Mexico and other neighbours to tighten controls on imports from China that might be used to access the US market. With a review of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement due later this year, Mexico's administration seems to be signalling alignment with partners in Washington while trying to rebalance its own trade ledger. Critics say the tariffs risk retaliation and will raise costs for Mexican consumers and firms

reliant on imported intermediate goods. Beijing responded swiftly and furiously. A commerce ministry spokesman denounced the policy as "protectionist" and warned it might harm China-Mexico trade relations and that it should be "corrected" by China. It appears that China will analyze the effects and retain the option of a response, and this stance threatens a reciprocal policy at a moment when global trade tensions already are running high. It remains to be seen what response China will make, whether it will be diplomatic maneuvering, a WTO complaint, or specific actions. As for businesses, there will be an uneven impact. Those Mexican exporters who rely on components sourced from Asia may have an increase in costs, which will then be reflected either in higher prices or margins that these businesses cannot absorb. It could also affect the supply chain components for cars because, while large international automaker companies with operations in Mexico might have adaptive business models, there will be stresses on smaller sector components manufacturers and importers of completely built cars. Indian and South Korean exporters have also warned that they may be affected because the list includes nations without a free trade agreement with Mexico. But there are short-term risks involved, as warned by market analysts. Increasing import taxes might safeguard particular sectors of the country's economy, but it would result in low competition, inefficiency, and potentially higher costs. There might be a legal challenge as well. Countries that will be impacted as a result could raise an issue at the WTO if they perceive that Mexico's strategy does not comply with global norms. Consequently, there might be a prolonged global battle that would make Mexico rethink its decisions regarding protection and openness.



Kuwait's Inflation Edges Up to 2.39%

Kuwait's inflation rate surged in August, mainly driven by an increase in food and beverage costs. The recently released figures revealed the annual rate of inflation to be 2.39%, a 0.07% hike compared to the previous month. This increase highlights the highest figure since March, demonstrating larger inflationary pressure spread across critical consumer categories, though the rate is the lowest amongst its Gulf peers. The Central Statistical Bureau report showcases that the hike in prices in other important sectors, like healthcare, clothing, and housing services, as well as home appliances, communications, and education, are major contributors to the increase in annual inflation. Without adding food and beverages, Kuwait's inflation surged by 1.53% on a year-on-year basis.

Food and Beverages Drive Price Increases

The food and beverages, which contribute 16.7% to Kuwait's Consumer Price Index, are the leaders in pushing inflation higher. Annual food and beverage inflation increased to 5.63% in July, a 0.62% hike from the previous month. This was the fastest increment of food price in the past four

months, partly due to the global commodity price trends as well as regional supply chain dynamics.

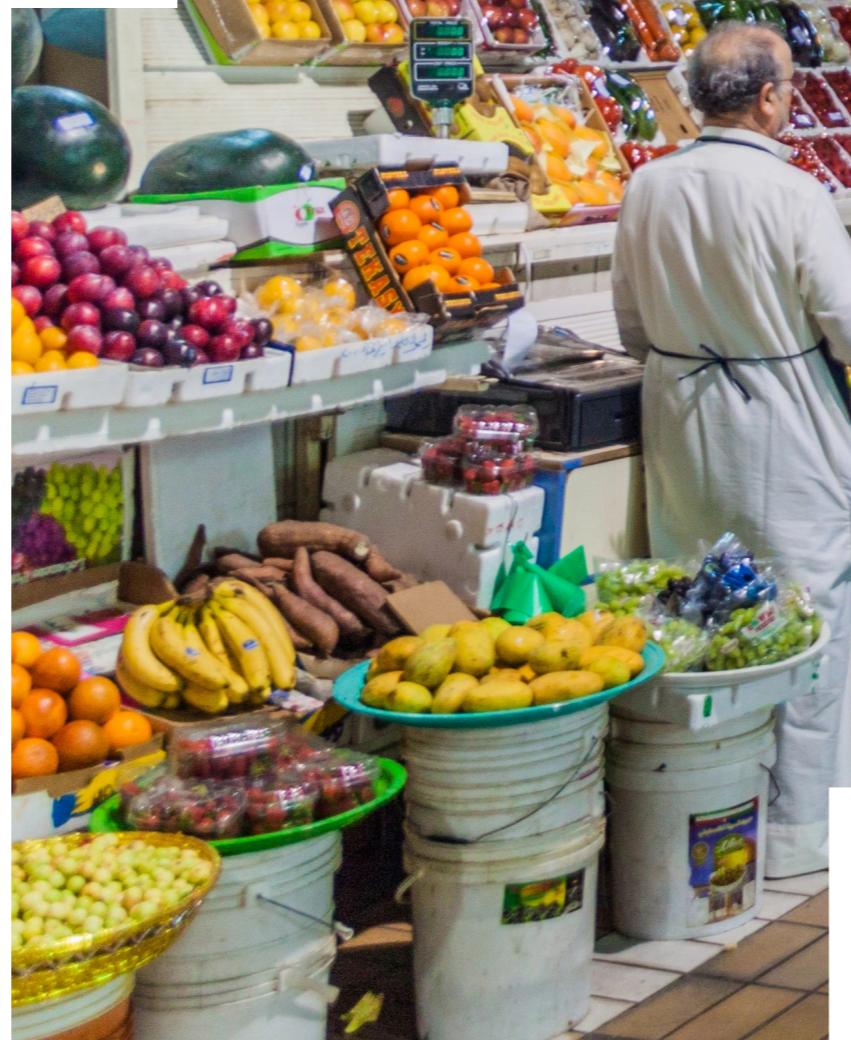
This significant jump in food prices is also visible in other Gulf states, which import a substantial amount of food to meet household consumption requirements. Supply distribution in key export markets, increased logistics costs, and currency volatility have all contributed to accelerating food prices throughout this year.

Housing and Core Inflation Components

Housing services make up the largest portion of Kuwait's CPI at 33.2%, highlighting a 0.98% moderate growth annually. While this rate remains constant compared to previous months, the intensity of housing in the consumption ground makes even the slightest increment have substantial impacts on overall inflation.

Clothing and footwear surged 3.70% annually by July, a slight cooldown from 3.93% in June. Monthly price hikes of 0.27% serve as continuous pressure in the apparel sector.

Transportation costs decreased substantially to reduce inflationary pressures by falling 1.75% annually in July. This represents the seventh consecutive month of year-on-year fall in transport costs, highlighting lower global oil prices and their pass-through to domestic fuel costs. Res-



COUNTRY	2025 INFLATION RATE (%)
KUWAIT	2.39%
SAUDI ARABIA	2.1%
UAE	1.6%
QATAR	0.1%
BROADER GCC AVERAGE	1.7%



The National Bank of Kuwait noted that the revival has been aided by stable improvements in the non-oil sector. The latest Purchasing Managers' Index from S&P Global showed the PMI increasing to over 53 in October from 52 in September, registering a four-month high and signalling a solid upgradation in non-oil business conditions.

S&P Global noted that inflationary pressures relaxed in July, with purchase prices and staff costs rising at their slowest pace in six and four months, respectively. This highlights that consumers might be facing higher inflation, input costs for businesses may be moderating, and further price increments may be potentially curtailed in the coming months.

taurants and hostels have registered a 1.94% inflation, while recreation and culture prices hiked 1.76%. Communications costs have been checked with just 0.48%, reflecting current technological improvements and competitive pressures in the telecommunications sector. Tobacco prices increased a meager 0.07%, thanks to price controls on such heavily regulated products.

Economic Recovery Context

The latest inflation data has arrived in times of economic revival signals. Kuwait's economy returned to positive territory in the first quarter of 2025, recording a 1% year-on-year increase after seven consecutive quarters of contraction. This marked a significant changing point for a struggling economy with the dual challenges of lower oil prices and domestic political gridlock that restricted fiscal policy and reform implementation.

Credit Ratings and Fiscal Strength

In September, Fitch Ratings reaffirmed Kuwait's AA-, which signifies a long-term foreign currency rating with a stable outlook, regarding its strong fiscal position and external balance sheet. Fitch mentioned that the country's external balance sheet stands tall in front of all its rated sovereigns, with net foreign assets projected to rise to 607% of gross domestic product in 2025, up from an estimated 576% in 2024.



Kuwait's fiscal strength also enables continued infrastructure investment and social spending without resorting to inflationary monetary financing. The government's ability to finance development projects and sustain public services via asset reduction instead of debt issuance avoids a potential source of inflationary pressure existing in many emerging markets.

Regional Comparison and Outlook

Kuwait's 2.39% inflation is favorable compared to regional states. Saudi Arabia's consumer price index is predicted at 2.1% for this year. Whereas, the UAE's inflation is anticipated at 1.6%. Qatar estimates inflation of just 0.1% in 2025 and a further 2.6% for next year. The broader GCC average inflation rate is estimated at 1.7% in 2025 and 2% next year.

Regional price stability demonstrates several similar factors: currency pegging with the dollar that brings along US monetary policy credibility, massive fiscal buffers that provide countercyclical spending, huge government involvement in key sectors via subsidies and price controls, and open economies that reap benefits from global goods trade competition.

Furthermore, various elements are affecting Kuwait's inflation pressure. Global food commodity prices are reliant on the mercy of weather-dependent supply shocks and geopolitical disruptions that could propel food inflation even higher. Oil market dynamics further affect transportation costs and, indirectly, government revenues available for maintaining subsidy programs. Domestic economic momentum, if sustained, has the potential to increase consumer price pressures.

Inflation can be controlled by some structural features of Kuwait's economy. Huge significant public sector employment with a controlled remuneration structure; additionally, overdependence on imported goods that deal with international competition and government capacity to digest price shocks through subsidies can help bring inflation under control.

ECONOMY

Issue 28
January 2026

Swiss Exporters Get Relief : US Cuts Tariffs to 15% and Launches \$200 Billion Investment Push



Swiss exporters breathed a cautious sigh of relief this week after the United States agreed to cut its country-specific additional tariff on Swiss goods to 15% – down from the punitive 39% level that had gravely disrupted trade flows this year – alongside a high-profile pledge by Swiss firms to invest roughly \$200 billion in the US by the end of 2028. The twin measures mark a substantive de-escalation of a trade spat that has dented Swiss shipments of watches, machinery, and other premium goods to America.

The tariff reduction – supposed to put Swiss exporters on parity with European Union producers who already enjoyed a 15% level – was framed by Swiss officials as hard-won relief. The White House fact sheet framed the deal as part of a broader effort to “smooth bilateral trade and open markets for sensitive U.S. agricultural and medical exports.” Switzerland signaled meanwhile that the cut would apply retroactively to the date the two sides reached their

declaration of intent. For many Swiss firms, the effect is immediate and tangible. The watch industry, emblematic of high-value Swiss exports, saw a dramatic slump after tariffs were applied earlier in the year, with some data indicating double-digit falls in shipments to the US. Bringing the tariff back to 15% materially eases margin pressure for exporters and should restore some competitiveness in a market that accounts for a significant slice of Swiss luxury sales. Financial analysts say this move will lower costs, unblock stalled orders, and remove an important source of uncertainty for exporters planning production and inventory.

Yet relief is mingled with unease. The deal's headline \$200 billion investment figure – presented as a commitment by Swiss companies to ramp up direct investments in the United States through 2028 – has provoked close scrutiny at home. Critics warn that the pledge could encourage offshoring of capital-intensive activity and research-and-development jobs, shifting economic value away from Switzerland.

even as it secures market access. Business associations and economists are divided: some welcome the prospect of deeper US ties, while others caution about long-term structural consequences.

Public sentiment in Switzerland appears fragile. Recent polls put a sizeable portion of the Swiss population either opposed to or hesitant about the terms of the agreement, with concerns ranging from data-transfer provisions to the potential for increased foreign control of strategic assets. Political hurdles remain: the agreement was published as a joint declaration of intent and must still pass through domestic scrutiny-including parliamentary debate and the possibility of a referendum-before it becomes irreversible policy. That political risk keeps the outlook prudently guarded. To Washington, the agreement brought several wins: reducing a trade friction that had imperiled US supply chains and consumer prices while securing a significant capital inflow pledge, with heightened market access for US farm and medical products. Trade officials cast the deal as reciprocal and targeted, weighing quick tariff relief against commitments favoring US manufacturing and investment. Observers said it also fell into a larger US approach of selected, bilateral deals that try to combine market opening with strategic industrial objectives.

Export orders and confidence indicators for affected industries ticked up, though CEOs emphasized that the finer print matters – rules of origin, customs procedures and the sequencing of investment pledges will determine how much of the \$200 billion translates into new plants, jobs and long-term partnerships in the US. Banks and trade bodies have urged clarity on implementation timelines and safeguards to prevent unintended capital shifts away from Switzerland. The deal is a pragmatic compromise. It closes a painfully asymmetric tariff regime that had penalized Swiss producers while securing a sizeable investment promise the United States can show off as economic gain. Whether it proves a lasting win for Swiss exporters depends on parliamentary ratification, the legal text that follows up from the declaration of intent, and how Swiss companies decide to allocate the promised capital.



Xpeng Accelerates Global Push with Malaysia Based-EV Assembly for Southeast Asia

A crucial move has now been initiated by Xpeng of Guangzhou in its “go global” plans by choosing Malaysia as its right-hand drive assembly point for its operations in Southeast Asia, partnering with EP Manufacturing Bhd (EPMB), for local assembly of its G6 SUV model and X9 MPV lineup of its cars. This initiative has also come into consideration for an asset light approach. Under the deal, the production of the G6 is expected to commence no later than 31st March 2026, while the assembly of the X9, including the Extended-Range (PowerX/REEV) version, is expected to start on 25th May 2026. The entire CKD (Completely Knocked Down) assembly will be conducted by EPMB’s Melaka factory, while the unit PJVM is reportedly granted first right of offer to manufacture any future models of the Xpeng.



The timing and partners involved are revealing. A Malaysian base has turned out to be an attractive proposition for several Chinese automakers of EVs, providing experienced suppliers in the automotive industry, existing scalable right-hand drive technology, and an eager government that wants to boost local electric vehicle car production.

The latest deal by Xpeng follows similar strategies by its rivals and helps rebalance overall production capacity in various markets. For Xpeng, the strategy has very practical gains. With assembly in ASEAN, it should help minimize import tariffs and shipping times, allowing for a better pricing strategy and faster response for car buyers in ASEAN, who are very price-sensitive, in addition to having limited distribution networks for the brand yet. It also serves as a kind of insurance for Xpeng from exchange rate volatility and tensions in international trade, which have affected car manufacturers cum exporters in past years. It also maintains an asset-light strategy for overseas for Xpeng, partnering with different manufacturers instead of setting up their own production facilities overseas, which helps retain their precious cash while pursuing geographic expansion.

EPMB, listed in Bursa and an expert in automotive parts, views this deal as an opportunity for diversification into vehicle assembly and optimal use of its facility in Melaka. As far as the Malay-



sian automakers’ sector is involved, this agreement could spur improvements for suppliers, training, and additional investments, all of which fit well into country strategies aimed at making a Malaysian hub for EVs in the region. Proton’s announcement of an EV plant and other similar local developments already point towards additional involvement by the government of Kuala Lumpur in vehicle manufacturing.

Market response is expected to be a mix. Customers in the ASEAN market have the positive potential of more model variants and potentially lower prices, although competitors and auto distributors in the country are waiting and observing if Xpeng localizes enough components for a visible positive effect on creating more employment and developing suppliers.

From the perspective of investors, production in other countries lowers costs per unit, which dampens the short-term positive effect on margins. Worth noting here is Xpeng’s reporting

on strong sales and overseas shipments this year, a trend they should continue if they are indeed internationalizing.

Strategically speaking, this Malaysian move reinforces Xpeng’s presence in the region and illustrates a general trend: Chinese NEV manufacturers can no longer satisfy themselves with exporting completely built vehicles. Instead, Chinese automakers have been creating a flexible and geographically diversified production chain that corresponds to where the market is-left-hand-drive product lines in Indonesia and right-hand-drive product lines in Malaysia, for instance.

Meanwhile, as the G6 and X9 models of Xpeng Motor roll off assembly lines in Malaysia next spring and summer, the region will be waiting to see if this localization strategy becomes a winning edge or simply another story in the ever-changing game of competing to corner the electric market in Southeast Asia.



Building Future-Ready Digital Ecosystems: Discover How SBM is Empowering Organizations to Transform with Confidence



Mr. Essam Alshiha,
President & CEO,
Saudi Business Machines (SBM)

As the exclusive General Marketing and Services Representative for IBM in Saudi Arabia, how is SBM evolving its offerings to maintain a competitive edge against newer global integrators entering the Saudi market?

Our strategy has always been, and will continue to be, deeply customer-centric. The strength of SBM lies not only in our long-standing alliance with IBM, now spanning around four decades, but in how we localise, enhance, and operationalise global technologies for the Saudi market. IBM brings decades of global innovation and proven enterprise platforms, while SBM adds unmatched local expertise, industry knowledge, and Saudi talent. This combination allows us to deliver solutions that are not only technologically advanced but also aligned with local regulations, market dynamics, and client realities. Over the years, SBM has evolved its portfolio far beyond systems integration. Today, we offer end-to-end capabilities across consultancy, design, build, and operate models. Our sustained success since 1981 is a testament to this balanced approach, global innovation, delivered through a strong Saudi foundation.

With the Techxagon Hub focusing on R&D covering a wide range of technologies like AI, Metaverse, Cloud, Cyber Security, how do SBM's new emerging technologies empower C-suite leaders in their digital transformation and enhance the SBM "Saudi Tech" solutions?

Techxagon represents the evolution of SBM, our heritage, our current capabilities, and our vision for the future. It is not a traditional innovation lab; it is a living, operational hub where emerging technologies are developed, tested, industrialised, and deployed in real-world environments.

Through Techxagon, we enable C-suite leaders to move from experimentation to execution with confidence. Our R&D initiatives are built on enterprise-grade infrastructure and international standards, supported by SBM's deep expertise in consultancy and systems integration.

This allows us to co-create solutions with our clients that are practical, scalable, and aligned with their business objectives. As a result, SBM has developed multiple in-house, "Saudi Tech" products and solutions tailored to the specific needs of our clients. These solutions accelerate digital transformation, directly contributing to the Kingdom's Vision 2030 and beyond by localising technology, strengthening national digital capabilities, and positioning Saudi Arabia at the forefront of innovation and sustainability.

Given that your Advanced Threat Protection Centre (ATPC) operates 24/7, how are you integrating predictive AI intelligence to transition clients from reactive security to a proactive 'defence-in-depth' strategy?

Cybersecurity is no longer about reacting to incidents; it is about anticipating them. SBM was among the first organisations in Saudi Arabia to establish a local Security Operations Center (SOC), designed from the outset to be predictive, adaptive, and resilient. Our ATPC operates on a defence-in-depth

model that integrates AI-driven threat intelligence, advanced analytics, automation, and continuous monitoring.

This enables us to predict potential attack vectors, analyse patterns in real time, and take corrective actions before threats materialise. All of this is delivered in full compliance with Saudi national cybersecurity regulations and frameworks.

By shifting clients from reactive security to proactive cyber resilience, we help protect critical infrastructure, sensitive data, and national digital assets, while enabling organisations to innovate securely and confidently.

While SBM is a Kingdom-wide leader, what are your strategic plans for geographic expansion or cross-border partnerships within the MENA region to support Saudi Arabia's goal of becoming a global digital gateway?

Our immediate priority remains the Saudi market, serving our clients across all regions and industries and delivering projects that advance national digital transformation objectives. Saudi Arabia represents one of the most ambitious and sophisticated digital programs globally, and we are fully committed to its success.

That said, SBM's infrastructure, operating model, and partnerships are designed to scale beyond borders when the time is right. We continue to evaluate selective regional opportunities and cross-border partnerships that align with Saudi Arabia's vision of becoming a global digital hub. When expansion decisions are made, they will be strategic, value-driven, and anchored in exporting Saudi-built capabilities, solutions, and expertise to the wider region.

Through the SBM Academy and talent specialisation programs, how is SBM leading the 'Saudization' of high-tech roles to solve the local shortage of AI and cybersecurity experts?

Technology innovation is only sustainable when it is powered by capable

local talent. This belief is at the heart of SBM Academy. As we expand our R&D efforts and develop in-house products and solutions, we believe these capabilities are best driven by Saudi professionals.

Through the Academy, we collaborate closely with leading global technology partners to deliver specialised, hands-on training programs for Saudi graduates and professionals. Our focus is on future-critical domains such as AI, cybersecurity, cloud, and data.

The objective is not only to train talent but to prepare individuals who can seamlessly transition into real projects and high-impact roles. By doing so, we are creating a sustained social impact, empowering local human capital, advancing Saudization in high-tech fields, and building the foundation for long-term national growth.

As you expand into Digital Manufacturing Solutions like 3D printing and Industrial IoT, which specific frontier technology do you anticipate will be the primary revenue driver for SBM by 2030?

By 2030, value will increasingly be driven by the convergence of technologies rather than a single solution. In our view, AI-enabled platforms, embedded across industrial IoT, smart manufacturing, and data-driven operations, will be the strongest growth drivers.

Digital manufacturing, predictive analytics, autonomous operations, and intelligent supply chains will redefine productivity and sustainability across industries. SBM's strategy is to position itself at this intersection where AI, cloud, cybersecurity, and operational technology come together.

By focusing on integrated, outcome-driven solutions rather than standalone technologies, we aim to deliver measurable business impact for our clients while supporting Saudi Arabia's transition into a fully digital, Industry 4.0-enabled economy.

ByteDance Inks Deal To Form Joint Venture To Operate US TikTok App



TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew said that this new joint venture will be an independent entity that has control over US data protection, algorithm security, content moderation, and software assurance.

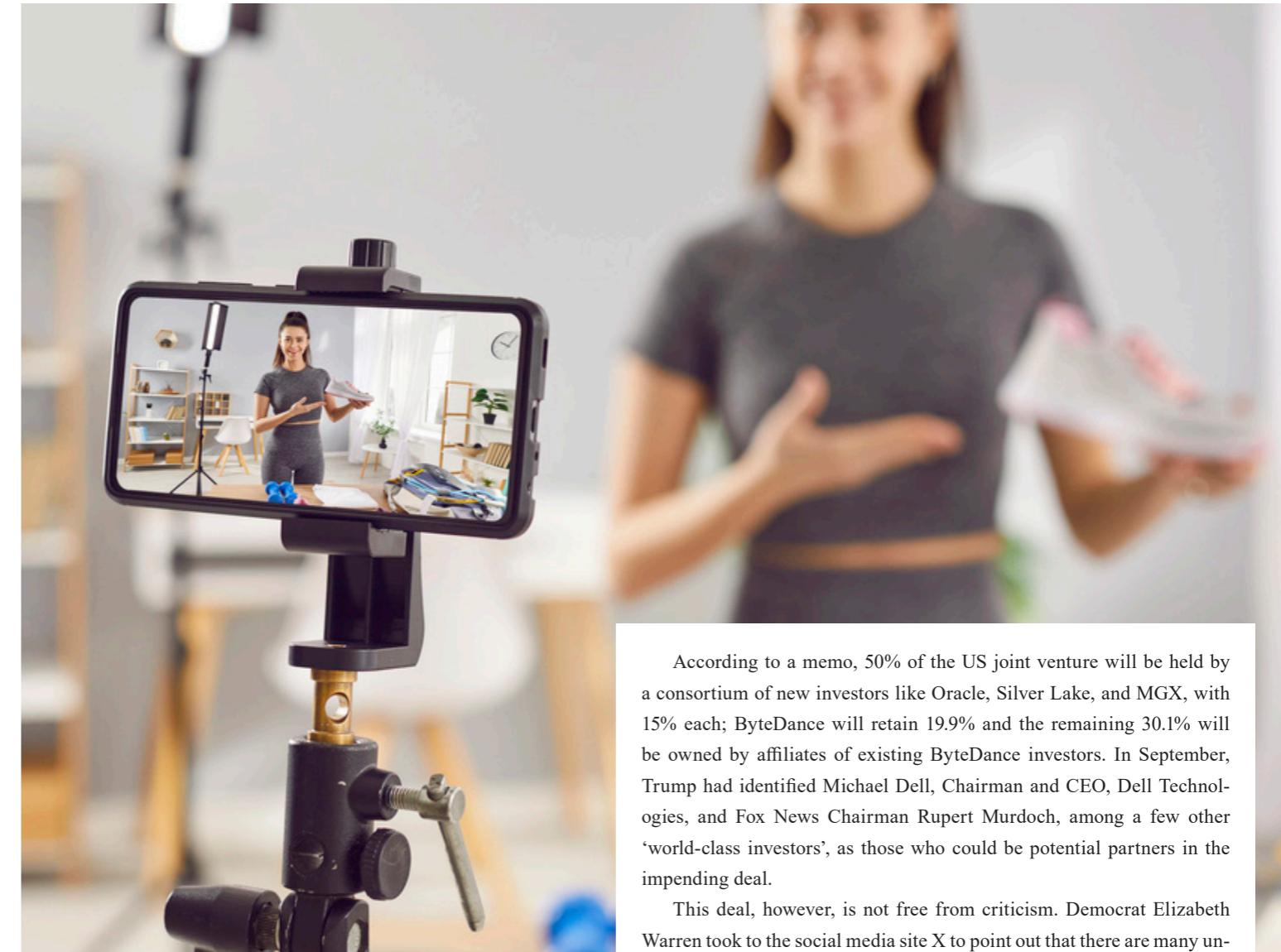
TikTok parent company ByteDance has signed binding agreements with three major investors to form a merger that jointly operates TikTok's US app. This joint venture will be led by US as well as international investors to avert the social media app from being banned. This new venture will be called TikTok USDS Joint Venture LLC, and the three investors are Oracle, Silver Lake, and Abu Dhabi-headquartered MGX.

With over 170 million American users, TikTok has been enveloped by years of uncertainty since President Trump first tried unsuccessfully to ban it back in 2020. The mile marker of a deal is in tune with the April 2024 decision of the Senate to ban the short-video app in the US, unless the Chinese company initiates its divestment.

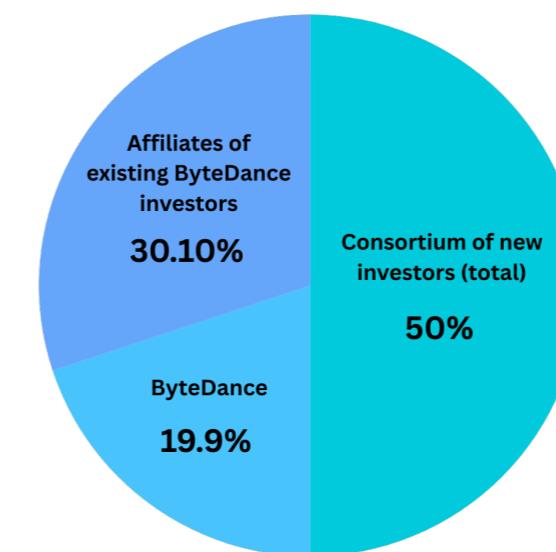
According to the terms of the agreements, the new investors will hold an 80.1% stake while ByteDance will retain a 19.9% stake upon the divestiture. TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew said that this new joint venture will be an independent entity that has control over US data protection, algorithm security, content moderation, and software assurance.

He also added that global product interoperability and commercial opportunities like e-commerce, advertising, and marketing will be managed by TikTok Global's US wing. The deal will take effect on January 22 and is being welcomed after years of efforts to get ByteDance to divest its US business, citing threats to national security.

Republican Representative and Chair, House Select Committee on China, John Moolenaar, has previously said that he would host the new company's top leadership to a hearing in 2026. Despite trying to ban the app, Trump, who has over 15 million followers on TikTok, has credited the app for his victory in the 2024 Presidential elections. The White House also created an official profile on the video app in August.



Stakeholder Groups



- Combined share of Oracle, Silver Lake, and MGX
- Represents ownership by ByteDance's current investor affiliates
- Direct retained ownership

According to a memo, 50% of the US joint venture will be held by a consortium of new investors like Oracle, Silver Lake, and MGX, with 15% each; ByteDance will retain 19.9% and the remaining 30.1% will be owned by affiliates of existing ByteDance investors. In September, Trump had identified Michael Dell, Chairman and CEO, Dell Technologies, and Fox News Chairman Rupert Murdoch, among a few other 'world-class investors', as those who could be potential partners in the impending deal.

This deal, however, is not free from criticism. Democrat Elizabeth Warren took to the social media site X to point out that there are many unanswered questions about the deal. She said that through this deal, Trump is giving his 'billionaire buddies' more control over the content that regular Americans can consume. Warren has called this billionaire takeover of TikTok a 'backdoor deal' and has demanded more transparency.

The April 2024 law required TikTok to cease all operations by January 19, 2025, unless ByteDance had completed divesting its US assets. However, when Trump took charge of the Oval Office on January 20, he chose not to enforce it. In September, he announced that TikTok would remain active, but its algorithm would be retrained and monitored by TikTok USDS Joint Venture LLC's security partners, giving the company until late January 2026 to finalise the deal.

One of the seven board members for the new company will be appointed by ByteDance as part of the deal on TikTok's US operations, and most of the other seats will be held by Americans. TikTok announced on Thursday that algorithm security, software assurance, content moderation, and US data protection will fall under the purview of the US joint venture.

As the 'trusted security partner,' Oracle will be in charge of examining and verifying compliance, which includes safeguarding sensitive US user data, which will be safely stored on a cloud environment in the US run by Oracle.

Despite reservations from certain sects, the deal is likely to receive the necessary regulatory clearances, as Trump himself is heavily involved in orchestrating this deal.

South Korea's Automobile Exports were Expected to Cross \$70 Billion Mark by End of 2025

South Korea's total outbound car shipments were expected to surpass \$70 billion by the end of 2025. The country's automotive export industry was poised to reach a remarkable milestone, setting a new record in both value and global influence. This performance is indicative of South Korea's strategic shift towards diversified markets and environmentally friendly vehicles, even in the face of major international challenges like ongoing tariff pressures and changing market dynamics.

South Korean auto exports for the first eleven months of 2025 totalled about \$66.04 billion, surpassing previous records for the January–November period and indicating that, if current trends continue, annual results will easily surpass the \$70 billion barrier.

The global automotive scene is still difficult. For the majority of the year, shipments have been hampered

by significant tariffs imposed by the United States, South Korea's historically biggest export destination. These tariffs can reach 25% on imported automobiles. Shipments to Europe, Asia, and emerging markets have increased despite the sporadic contraction, mitigating the impact and guaranteeing sustained overall growth. According to indicators for late 2025, auto exports to the United States started to pick up steam in November, reversing an eight-month decline and boosting monthly export totals.

Rather than depending on a single dominant market, South Korean manufacturers have skilfully diversified their global footprint, as demonstrated by this resilience. The exceptional demand for environmentally friendly automobiles, such as hybrids, electric vehicles (EVs), and hydrogen-powered models, has been a key factor in this export success. This change has been spearheaded by major companies like Hyundai Motor and Kia Corporation.



These companies achieved robust sales in North America, Europe, and other regions in 2024, setting new export records for environmentally friendly automobiles.

Indeed, Hyundai and Kia combined to export over 707,000 hybrid and electric vehicles in 2024, while the figure marked a sizable increase on the previous year, underlining South Korea's growing influence in the global green mobility market. Industry experts have identified this performance as part of the response to the demands of the changing consumer preference and the increasingly stringent regula-

tions of the emissions standards in the international market. Hybrid vehicles have actually had accelerated demand in the international market because of their ability. While tariff barriers have complicated access to certain markets, South Korean manufacturers have nonetheless managed to diversify their export destinations. Greater shipments to the European Union, ASEAN members and parts of the Middle East have helped make up for slower U.S. demand, with some regions posting double-digit percentage growth in recent months. In addition, a surprising factor in the export market has been

the emerging market for second-hand vehicles, especially for Russia, Central Asia, as well as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), where the demand has grown quickly.

The export performance of the automotive sector is anything but an isolated success story. It reflects a greater commercial upswing in South Korea, where overall export figures - supported by chips, cars, shipbuilding, and bio-health products - were expected to top \$700 billion for the first time in history in 2025 year. This is a testament to the industry competitiveness that exists in this country and where

cars have remained key. With autos and more specifically environmentally informed ones continuing to capture the attention of the entire world, there is great potential for growth within exports even beyond 2026. As we step into a new year, South Korea's automobile export industry is at a point in history like no other. Going past all previous records and not stopping until they broke through the key \$70 billion milestone, South Korean automobile manufacturers have not only showed resilience in their field but have even showcased ingenuity.

ECB Signals Rate Pause as Eurozone Inflation Edges Closer to 2% Target

As inflation in the euro area approaches the 2% medium-term target, the European Central Bank has announced a cautious pause in its cycle of monetary loosening, laying the groundwork for a difficult balancing act between maintaining economic momentum and keeping price pressures stable.

At their most recent meeting, Frankfurt's policy-makers decided to keep interest rates on hold, emphasizing that although headline inflation has decreased from recent highs, underlying pressures, particularly in the services sector, are still persistent enough to warrant caution.

The language used by the Governing Council indicates at least a temporary halt to easing and suggests the committee is happy to monitor incoming data rather than jump into additional rate cuts. That prudence is based on statistics. According to Eurostat's flash estimate, annual inflation in the euro-area was between 2.1 and 2.2 percent in November, which is close to the ECB's target but still leaves little room for complacency considering how erratic food and energy prices can be. Wages and the robust services sector have been the main drivers of core inflation, which does not include volatile items. These factors contribute to the explanation of the ECB's decision to exercise caution rather than make a firm shift toward rate cuts.

The ECB members' internal discussion led to the decision to pause. Some contend that rates should be held until there is more convincing proof of a long-term decline in wage and service inflation because of the policy's delayed effects and the need to preserve gains in disinflation. Others are receptive to the notion that the tightening cycle has ended, citing better growth data and a diminished need to fight headline inflation. In response, market expectations that had earlier in the year priced in additional easing have been recalibrating.

The ECB's current stance, according to observers, is practical since it maintains optionality while lowering the possibility of policy overcorrection. Senior officials, including Christine Lagarde, have frequently described the bank's strategy as data-dependent, meaning that while it is prepared to respond if inflation picks back up, it is also prepared to remain calm if underlying indicators continue to normalize. Depending on how wages, service costs, and international energy markets change, this "wait and see" approach leaves room for either more modest cuts or a tightening. The picture is complicated by regional differences among member states. The recent modest increase in Germany's inflation figures serves as a reminder that national trends can diverge and affect the overall euro-area. The Governing Council's job is made more difficult by this heterogeneity: a one-size-fits-all approach may be suitable for headline stability but ineffective for localized strains.



Markets have been responding in the usual timid fashion. Bond yields have been fluctuating as the question of the future course of policy is assessed, and there has been a brief strengthening of the euro as the prospect of the ECB not moving rapidly to further loosen policy has emerged. Regarding the economic sector and consumers, the key takeaway is a brief window of stability when the cost of borrowing is expected to neither fall dramatically nor surge.

This is expected to allow the economy time to absorb the effects of the previously tight policy and maintain inflationary expectations. In sum, the ECB's pause signal is a tightly calibrated policy move. It is a strong signal that it is confident that inflation is nearing its target, albeit a signal that is tempered by the realization that it is not at all a smooth-sailing journey going forward. For everyone in the markets, corporate, or household spheres, it is a definite signal that policymakers' signals today must include an appreciation of nuances, that microscopic shifts may yet make a world of difference.

Saudi Arabia's Digital Economy on Track to Hit \$133 Billion by 2030

Saudi Arabia's digital economy is close to crossing the SAR 500 billion mark. This would make up for a 15% contribution to the national GDP and make the Kingdom the Middle East's largest digital economy. It is making strategic investments in fintech, e-commerce, and artificial intelligence, which have the potential to propel the digital economy to over \$133 billion by 2030, making it a global digital powerhouse.

Infrastructure and Connectivity Foundations

Saudi Arabia's digital infrastructure has matched global standards. Internet penetration across the Kingdom has surged by 99%, making it one of the most connected nations globally. Fibre-optic network coverage expanded to reach 3.9 million homes, while mobile internet speeds average 215 Mbps.

The information and communications technology market has also crossed SAR 180 billion (\$48 billion), driven by private sector investments last year. This makes Saudi Arabia the largest technology market in the MENA region. Saudi Arabia was the first nation to open a special zone for cloud computing in the region in 2023. The cloud service providers localise data centres, making it easier for companies to scale cloud storage while maintaining compliance with privacy and data standards.

Artificial Intelligence Leadership

Artificial intelligence is the centre of Saudi Arabia's digital strategy. The Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority, established as the national enforcement authority, oversees the Kingdom's AI strategy to position Saudi Arabia as a global AI leader by 2030. Saudi Arabia ranked first among Arab nations in Tortoise Media's Government Strategy Index for Artificial Intelligence for 2024. It has attracted major technology



players for investment and to raise the workforce. As per a report by PwC, AI is expected to contribute \$135 billion to the Saudi economy by 2030, making it the largest beneficiary of AI technology in the Middle East.

E-Commerce and Digital Payments Revolution

E-commerce is one of the fundamental pillars of the Kingdom's digital economy, driven by the country's youth, tech-savvy population and high internet penetration. Analysts at Deloitte expect the e-commerce market to reach up to \$23 billion by 2027. The number of e-commerce users will increase to over 35 million by the end of FY25. Such growth is aided by expansion in digital pay-

ment infrastructure and increasing consumer trust in online transactions. Saudi Arabia's journey into transitioning to a cashless society is also on the run. Under Vision 2030, the Kingdom aimed to transact over 70% in non-cash mode by the end of 2025, which was already achieved in 2023.

Online payments have increased to over 75% of all retail transactions in 2024. The online share of retail transactions crossed 57% in 2021, exceeding the target set by the Financial Sector Development Programme.

Fintech Innovation and Financial Inclusion

The financial services sector is a pivotal engine in the digital transformation of the Kingdom. Government initiatives like the Saudi Central Bank's Regulatory Sandbox Framework and the Fintech Saudi program have changed the whale scenario, fostering the growth of neobanks and fintech startups.

Noebanks are digital banks offering app-based financial services without any form of physical presence in the market. These institutions are heavily benefiting from SAMA's supportive regulations. They aid in catering to users falling in the underserved categories. Their user experience and easy accessibility help in aligning with the state's push for financial innovation and inclusion.

Digital Government Excellence

Saudi Arabia has been able to rank itself in sixth position globally in the United Nations' E-Government Development Index on the shoulders of its notable presence in digital government services.

The Kingdom also ranks first in digital skills and open digital government and seventh in the E-Participation Index, highlighting success in improving government service efficiency. The Digital Government Authority is responsible for the seamless integration of online governance across all state institutions.

Cybersecurity Imperatives

Cybersecurity is a major threat to such rapid success in digital transformation. The Kingdom lands at the second spot on the global market for malicious email attacks, prompting government prioritisation of cybersecurity investments.

As per IDC, securing cybersecurity will cost over \$1.5 billion by 2027. Cybersecurity measures are crucial for protecting sensitive data and ensuring the continued growth of the digital economy. The more Saudi Arabia strengthens its cybersecurity, the more businesses will have confidence, operating stress free that their data and digital assets are safe.

Public-Private Partnerships

Vision 2030 also propagates the public-private model as a key for development. The National Centre for Privatisation and PPP has awarded approval to over 180 projects, with 250 under review at various stages. Saudi Arabia targets to increase the private sector's GDP contribution from 40% to over 60% by 2030. The kingdom has registered over 500 global companies to set up a regional HQ. Global credit rating agencies have identified such successes. This has made S&P upgrade Saudi Arabia's credit rating to 'A+' from 'A' this March.

Strategic Outlook

The \$133 billion digital economy objective by 2030 happens to be well within reach, owing to current momentum. The first three months of FY25 saw GDP expansion by 2.7% on a YoY basis, mainly due to 4.2% contribution from the non-oil sector. The Kingdom's transition into a digital finance hub from a hydrocarbon revenue-dependent economy is remarkable in its own right. With the newly formed base of tech-savvy population, widespread broadband connectivity, and supportive regulatory environment, the Kingdom is making ways for a sustainable and prosperous future, sealing its position as a global digital player.

Miyar Capital: Redefining Investments And Driving Innovation In Saudi Arabia



Miyar Capital has reached SAR 7.8 billion in Assets Under Management and is delivering impressive returns, particularly with the Saudi Stocks Fund generating a significant Alpha of 16.17% over the benchmark in 2024.

What are the specific tactical shifts or investment philosophies you are prioritising to ensure you continue to stay ahead of the market?

Our investment philosophy is anchored in being market-driven rather than narrative-driven. We prioritise top-down macro positioning, liquidity awareness, and valuation discipline, while remaining highly tactical in execution.

In 2024, the strong alpha delivered by the Saudi Stocks Fund was driven by active sector rotation, selective exposure to beneficiaries of fiscal expansion, and disciplined exit strategies when valuations became stretched.

We deliberately avoid over-owning consensus trades and focus on where the market is mispricing risk versus growth.

Looking ahead, we continue to emphasise capital preservation first, alpha second, with flexibility to shift between equities, cash, and defensive positioning as market conditions evolve.

Mr. Ghassan AlThekair,
MD and CEO,
Miyar Capital

The introduction of products like Direct Murabaha for private portfolios offers returns as high as 6.00% for one-year durations. How has the adoption rate been among your high-net-worth clients for these fixed-term instruments, and do you see an opportunity to launch further hybrid products that bridge the gap between high liquidity and higher yields?

The adoption of Direct Murabaha has been very strong among our high-net-worth and private clients, particularly those seek-

ing predictable returns with low volatility. The 6.00% one-year structure has resonated well in the current rate environment, especially as clients balance between liquidity and yield.

We see a clear opportunity to expand into hybrid solutions- products that combine fixed-income characteristics with selective upside, while maintaining high liquidity and capital protection. Product innovation at Miyar is driven by client demand, not product pushing, and this remains a core differentiator for us.

Your real estate arm is also expanding rapidly, with the Miyar Logistic Park in Jeddah already 50% constructed and new developments underway in Al-Kharj. Do you foresee logistics and industrial assets continuing to dominate your real estate strategy, or will residential projects like Miyar Calma represent a larger share of your portfolio moving forward?

Logistics and industrial assets will continue to be a strategic pillar of our real estate platform, supported by structural demand, e-commerce growth, and supply-chain localisation under Vision 2030. Projects such as Miyar Logistic Park in Jeddah reflect this long-term conviction. That said, we are also selectively increasing exposure to residential developments like Miyar Calma, particularly where we can address affordability, strong end-user demand, and efficient cost structures. Going forward, our real estate portfolio will remain diversified, with logistics as a core anchor and residential as a growing complementary segment.

On the advisory side, Miyar Capital is actively managing M&A, Sukuk issuances, and IPO arrangements. Given the surge in market activity, are you exploring strategic alliances with international firms to broaden your global reach, or is the primary focus to deepen your organic growth within the local Saudi ecosystem?

On the advisory front, we are experiencing strong momentum across M&A, Sukuk, and IPO mandates. Our immediate focus is to deepen our leadership position within the Saudi ecosystem, where deal flow, regulatory clarity, and capital depth are strongest. At the same time, we are selectively exploring strategic alliances with international firms, particularly where they add cross-border execution capabilities, sector expertise, or access to global capital. Any partnership must be value-accretive and aligned with our client-first philosophy, rather than expansion for its own sake.

Your vision statement clearly aims for Miyar Capital to be the leading investment company across the entire GCC.

Currently, your operations are deeply rooted in Saudi Arabia; could you share your roadmap for expanding into neighbouring Gulf markets over the next 3-5 years?

Our ambition is to become a leading investment platform across the GCC, with Saudi Arabia remaining our operational and strategic base. Over the next 3-5 years, our expansion roadmap includes targeted entry into neighbouring Gulf markets through regulated entities, strategic partnerships, and advisory mandates, rather than rapid physical expansion. We believe in scaling responsibly- exporting our investment discipline, governance standards, and product expertise while adapting to each local market's dynamics.

Miyar Capital is committed to “promoting socially responsible investment.” Could you elaborate on how the organisation integrates specific ESG criteria into its asset selection process and if there are new community-focused initiatives on the horizon?

At Miyar Capital, ESG is integrated into our investment decision-making process, not treated as a separate overlay. We assess governance quality, transparency, sustainability of cash flows, and social impact as part of our risk analysis across asset classes.

On the community side, we are particularly focused on initiatives related to financial inclusion, affordable housing, and responsible capital deployment, especially through real estate and structured investment solutions. We view socially responsible investing as a long-term driver of both stability and returns.

Finally, having assembled a leadership team with deep experience from major institutions like Al Rajhi Capital and Olayan, how are you evolving your talent acquisition and organisational structure to maintain your agility and ‘Client First’ culture as you scale beyond the SAR 7.8 billion mark?

As we scale beyond SAR 7.8 billion in assets, our priority is to grow without losing agility. We are investing in talent that combines institutional experience with an entrepreneurial mindset, while keeping decision-making lean and accountable. Our organisational structure is designed to empower investment teams, strengthen risk oversight, and maintain direct senior-level engagement with clients. Culture remains our strongest asset- “Client First” is not a slogan, but an operating principle that guides how we hire, incentivise, and lead across the organisation.





THE ANNUAL GLOBAL ECONOMICS AWARDS - 2024

BANGKOK



GALLAGHER RE

Targets Growth with South Africa's Largest Independent Broker Acquisition

Global reinsurance broker and advisory company Gallagher Re has agreed to buy Resilea Limited, the largest independent reinsurance broking company in Johannesburg, South Africa. Gallagher Re managing director Hamish Dowlen stated that the acquisition will help them improve their presence and scale in Africa by bringing together a highly skilled team of data- and client-led professionals. Through this, the company aims to focus on customer needs and innovative solutions, and to expand its services and broaden its expertise in the region.

Hamish Dowlen, CEO for EMEA at Gallagher Re, stated that including Resilea's experienced professionals will help the company to increase their scale and influence in Africa. This move will expand the company's reach, serve a variety of clients, and help them adapt to the evolving demands of the marketplace. As part of the deal, Iain Macindoe will become the chairman of Gallagher Re's South African operations.

Mathew Macindoe, who was previously Resilea's managing director, will become the regional director and CEO at Gallagher Re South Africa. While the deal did not specify any financial or operational details, the change in leadership reflects Gallagher Re's commitment to using local experts as it continues to expand into new markets. Gallagher Re's ambitions are not limited to South Africa. The company wants to consistently expand beyond South Africa to a global

scale, with a particular focus on the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region. In a recent development, Gallagher Re announced the acquisition of Steadfast Re Pty Limited, a reinsurance broker based in Sydney, Australia. This deal helped them to establish their profile in Australia, adding to their resources and expertise in the area.

Apart from expanding its geography, Gallagher Re is also investing in innovation. The company recently introduced a new cyber reinsurance framework specifically designed for the APAC region. This framework will address the needs of a rapidly evolving market by offering a flexible structure that supports a wide range of reinsurance models and products. It covers areas such as cyber, technology errors and omissions, and cyber property damage, providing tailored solutions for small and medium-sized companies, the midmarket, and larger corporations.

The framework's design allows it to adapt to the needs of the local market as well as those of clients, offering options such as white-labeling, facultative, and treaty structures.

Gallagher Re expects the framework to deliver substantial capacity, with initial minimums set at \$15 million for facultative reinsurance and \$10 million for white labelling and treaty placements. This approach aims to connect available cyber risk coverage with actual demand, enabling insurers and their clients to respond effectively to new and emerging risks.

Gallagher Re has appointed Parrus Kunvarji as executive director to help the company in the APAC



**GALLAGHER RE
MANAGING DIRECTOR
HAMISH DOWLEN STATED
THAT THE ACQUISITION
WILL HELP THEM IMPROVE
THEIR PRESENCE AND
SCALE IN AFRICA BY
BRINGING TOGETHER A
HIGHLY SKILLED TEAM.**

region. Kunvarji has experience in reinsurance strategy, business development, and regulatory compliance, having previously worked at Pacific International Insurance as chief commercial officer and chief risk officer. He plans to grow and expand Gallagher Re across key APAC markets.

According to Gallagher Re's October 2025 Market Watch, the region experienced a slowdown in economic growth in 2024, with the global economy expanding at 1.4% and emerging markets growing by 5.1%. Non-life insurance premium growth is reaching 6%. The company's annual APAC Market Watch report stated a shift in industry focus toward quality and resilience, as competition intensifies and the pace of premium growth slows.

Despite these challenges, there are bright spots in the market. The cyber, electric vehicle, and health insurance sectors have all experienced significant growth, and the APAC cyber insurance market grew by 50% annually.

The \$200B AI Race: Debt, Revenue, and Risk

Charles Kindleberger, American economic historian, explains investment booms and the following bust in his book "Manias, Panics, and Crashes". He explains such booms in two divisions, one which leads to the creation of something productive, like railway systems back in mid-19th-century Britain and the US, and secondly, the ones that do not, like the infamous 17th-century tulip mania in the Netherlands and the subprime mortgage of the early 2000s.

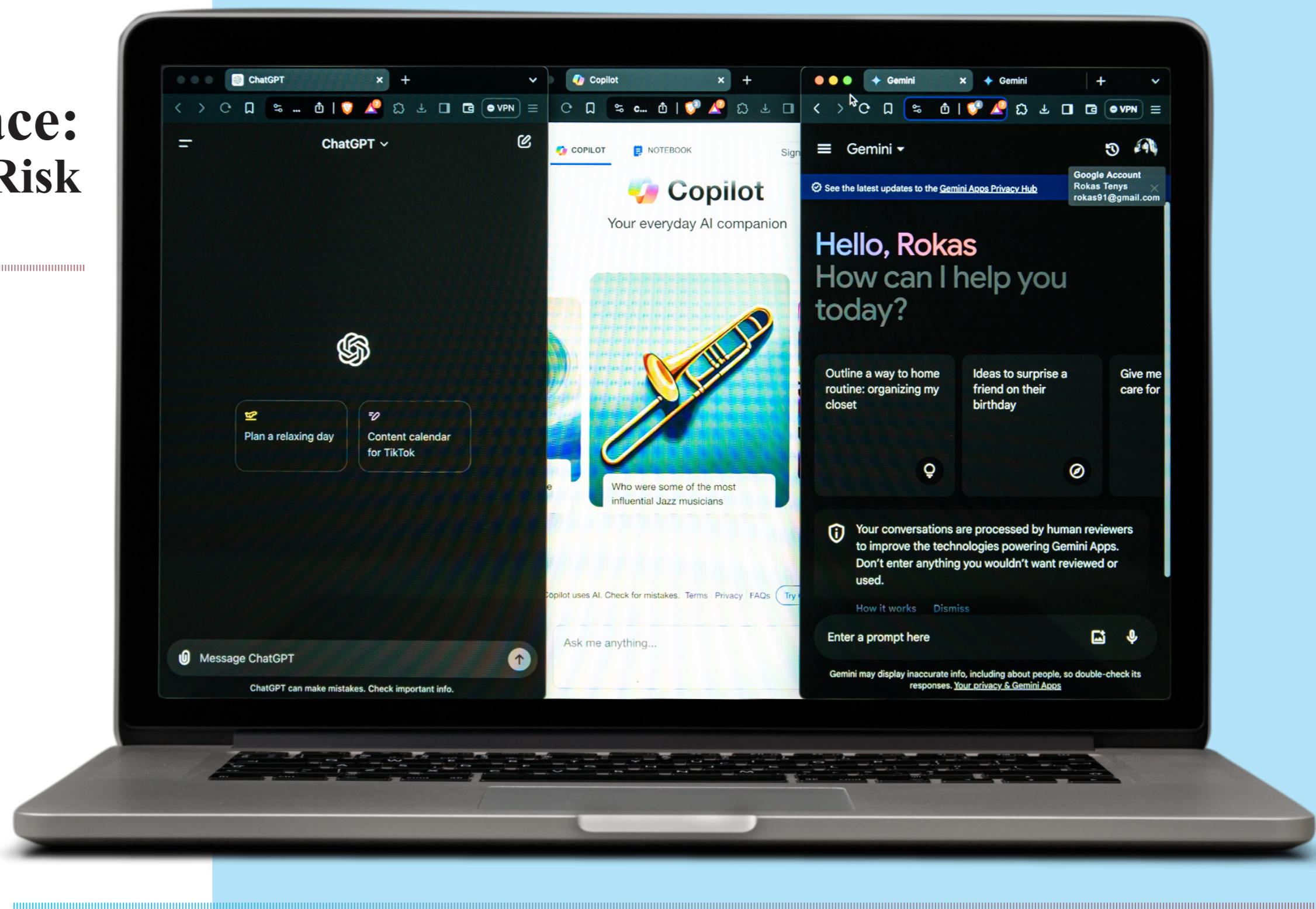
The US, like the rest of the world, is currently in a huge AI speculative boom. As per figures, global spending on data centres had crossed \$290 billion last year. Amongst which the top four tech giants, namely, Alphabet, Microsoft, Amazon, and Meta, have poured in approximately \$200 billion in capital expenditures. This figure has been spiralling rapidly as companies rush to build the advanced computational power required for next-generation AI models. Will such a massive investment build anything useful for anybody and for any purpose? If not, what will it look like?

Real Assets, Real Investment

Kindleberger's work highlights three major questions required for evaluating investment booms. Firstly, what avenues apart from the asset price are increasing in the boom? Here, we are witnessing staggering amounts of investment poured into plants and equipment. In June 2025, data centre construction marked a record \$40 billion annual rate.

An upgrade of information technology infrastructure offers help in multiple ways for firms and governments. In the first half of 2025, AI-related capital expenditures contributed 1.1% to GDP growth in the United States, beating the US consumer as a mode of expansion. Hardware investment in computers and related equipment increased 41% YoY, highlighting orders for servers and GPU systems.

An unfortunate outcome is the adverse impact on the environment, regarding the demand surge for electricity and water. Goldman Sachs reported that global data centre power usage stood at 55 GW last year, with AI using up to 14%. As construction increases, this figure could hit 84 GW by 2027. An estimate suggests that a gigabyte data centre costs around \$80 billion.



CATEGORY	AMOUNT (Approximate)
Global Spending on Data Centres	\$290 billion
Data Centre Power Usage	55 GW
AI Share of Data Centre Power Usage	14%
Projected Data Centre Power Usage	84 GW
Estimated Cost of a Gigabyte Data Centre	\$80 billion

The Debt Question

The second question he asks is whether the investment boom is driven on the shoulders of debt? For AI, it's a complex mix. The biggest companies working in it have sufficient positive cash flow to match up with expenditure; however, supplier financing is being delivered to some tech companies to help other entities buy computer chips.

The credit risks in this saga appear gloomy. Some of the collateral involved will be written off before debt repayment. As capital expenditure increases, so does the exposure to credit markets and the banking system. In late October 2025, Meta closed the largest ever private capital deal to fund its Hyperion data centre, with \$27 billion channelled into an off-balance sheet special purpose vehicle.

Reports suggest that private credit will provide a staggering \$800 billion in the next two or three years and is estimated to have totalled \$450 billion as of the first half of 2025. Oracle, Meta, and CoreWeave have each raised billions in debt or private credit to fund new data centre infrastructure. The question arises whether these risks will pay off or not.

The Revenue Problem

Industry experts are asking how much of this technology will be used. C-suite executives of large companies spread across diverse sectors, which have the potential to provide high demand for AI solutions, state that they expect to witness substantial savings and efficiency enhancement from AI, but fail to identify any additional sources of revenue.

Banks most likely improve efficiencies in document processing, fraud detection, risk management, regulatory compliance, algorithmic investment and trading, and marketing and customer insights. Industrial companies can improve efficiencies by decreasing clerical jobs, inventory and resource management, marketing, and field engineering.

Efficiency Gains and Jevons Paradox

Some suggest that efficiency upgradation could offset the demand for massive infrastructure investment. In February 2025, Chinese LLM firm DeepSeek announced that its V3 model had achieved significant improvements in training and reasoning efficiency. It will bring down training costs by around 18 times in comparison with GPT-4o.

Jevons' Paradox refers to a phenomenon where an increase in technological improvements leads to an increase in consumption of that resource as well. Hence, reports of increased efficiencies might be half-baked, as they might be offset by the increase in training across the broader AI market.

Historical Lessons

The path of technology can be shaped, and the path of the AI revolution is being paved. If anyone, any company or any country sits on its hands and waits, they may not get what they want and

need from the technology. The internet era of the late 1990s provides similar lines. Economist Eugenio Aleman with Raymond James notes that investments of such extent were seen back in the 1990s, in times of establishment of the telecommunications networks. At present, they are now giant complexes to house servers.

The present times are different in several ways. In the dot-com era, when companies had minor revenues, present-day companies have significant cash reserves. However, if project demand falls short of estimates, spending could backfire very badly.

History suggests that tech investment cycles remain volatile. Grid capacity and permit restrictions may also limit expansion despite will and available capital. The question is whether this boom builds railways or tulips, i.e., infrastructure that creates future growth or assets that balloon and collapse.

The answer lies in whether AI delivers on its productivity promises, whether displaced workers find new opportunities, and whether societies can utilise this technology for benefits greater than monetary gains. Such results cannot be anticipated. They will be shaped by decisions made by the government, companies and individuals.



Your Facility, Our Priority: UFM's Mantra To Pioneer Growth In Kuwait's Facilities Management

UFM has established itself as a pioneer in the region, most notably becoming the first company in Kuwait to achieve the globally recognised ISO 41001 certification for Facility Management Systems. How does this certification validate your operational maturity, and in what ways does it set a new benchmark for the facilities management industry in Kuwait?

Achieving ISO 41001 certification marks a significant milestone in UFM's operational journey. As the first company in Kuwait to obtain this globally recognised certification for Facility Management Systems, it validates the maturity of our governance structure, operational controls, and service delivery model. ISO 41001 requires a strategic and structured approach to facilities management, emphasising leadership, risk management, performance measurement, and continuous improvement. For UFM, this certification confirms that our operations are aligned with the best international practices and that facilities management is integrated into organisational strategy rather than treated as a support function. This achievement has set a new benchmark in the Kuwaiti facilities management market, reinforcing the role of facilities management as a value-driven discipline that enhances asset performance, sustainability, and long-term investment protection.

Your portfolio includes managing over KWD 1 billion in assets using advanced tools like the Property Management System (PMS) and Smart Parking solutions to maximise space utilisation. How is this aggressive adoption of digital transformation and smart technologies redefining asset value and efficiency for your investors and property owners?

UFM's strong focus on digital transformation is a deliberate strategic decision. Managing assets valued at over KWD 1 billion through advanced systems such as Property Management Systems (PMS), CAFM platforms, smart parking solutions, and IoT-enabled technologies allows us to maximise efficiency and transparency. These tools enable predictive maintenance, real-time monitoring, optimised space utilisation, and data-driven decision-making. For investors and property owners, this translates into reduced operational costs, improved asset performance, higher occupancy levels, and extended asset life cycles. Digital trans-

formation also enhances reporting accuracy and stakeholder confidence by providing clear visibility into operational and financial performance.

Managing over 8,500 diverse rental units – supported by a 24/7 call centre – truly underscores your motto, "Your Facility, Our Priority". How do you balance the need for standardised, high-quality service with the necessity of tailored solutions for such a vast and varied client base?

Managing more than 8,500 diverse rental units requires balancing standardised service quality with customized client solutions. UFM addresses this by adopting a modular service delivery framework. Core services are standardised through SOPs, ISO-aligned procedures, and quality benchmarks to ensure consistency and compliance. At the same time, service scopes are tailored at the asset and client level based on usage, risk profile, and customer expectations. Our 24/7 call center serves as a centralised operational hub, supported by digital ticketing systems, escalation protocols, and service-level monitoring. This structure allows us to deliver reliable, high-quality services while maintaining flexibility and personalisation across a diverse portfolio.

UFM has successfully diversified its expertise beyond traditional real estate into specialised sectors such as healthcare, sports stadiums, and industrial logistics. As the regional economy shifts, which of these emerging sectors do you anticipate will be the primary growth engine for UFM in the coming years?

UFM's expansion into non-traditional and specialised sectors reflects our strategic vision for long-term growth and regional integration. The company has developed strong capabilities in managing large-scale commercial developments, mixed-use assets, sports facilities, industrial and logistics environments, all of which are experiencing accelerated growth across the region. Looking ahead, UFM is actively planning regional expansion across the GCC and into the Egyptian market, leveraging a scalable operating model supported by global standards and digital systems. This expansion is driven by increasing demand for professional, technology-enabled facilities management that

enhances asset efficiency and supports sustainable urban development. By transferring our operational expertise and standardised frameworks into new markets, UFM aims to strengthen its regional footprint, diversify revenue streams, and position itself as a leading regional facilities management player.

Your Silver Level Corporate Partnership with the International Facility Management Association (IFMA) demonstrates a strong commitment to aligning local operations with global best practices. How does this international collaboration influence your strategic roadmap for strengthening UFM's influential presence across the broader region?

UFM's Silver Level Corporate Partnership with the International Facility Management Association (IFMA) demonstrates a strong commitment to aligning local operations with the best global practices. This partnership provides access to international knowledge, benchmarking tools, and emerging trends shaping the future of facilities management. The collaboration directly influences our strategic roadmap, particularly in areas such as sustainability, workforce development, digital facilities management, and integrated service models. It also enhances UFM's credibility and positions the company as a regional reference point for internationally aligned facilities management practices.

Operating complex facilities often involves navigating market dynamics while maintaining strict Quality, Health, Safety & Environment (QHSE) standards. What are the most significant operational challenges UFM currently faces, and what strategies are you employing to mitigate them while ensuring business continuity?

Managing complex facilities presents ongoing challenges, including cost pressures, workforce availability, regulatory compliance, and evolving client expectations. Maintaining strict Quality, Health, Safety, and Environment (QHSE) standards while ensuring operational efficiency remains a key focus. UFM mitigates these challenges through proactive risk management, continuous training programs, and

technology-driven monitoring systems. Predictive maintenance, safety audits, and digital reporting enable early risk identification and effective response. Business continuity planning is embedded across operations to ensure resilience, safeguard assets, and maintain uninterrupted service delivery under all conditions.

Your CSR initiatives are deeply integrated into your corporate culture, focusing on youth & education, national identity, and environmental protection in alignment with the New Kuwait Vision 2035. Could you highlight a recent initiative where UFM successfully translated these values into tangible community impact?

Corporate Social Responsibility is deeply embedded in UFM's organisational culture. Our initiatives focus on youth and education, national identity, and environmental protection, in alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035. UFM translates these values into practical initiatives through internal awareness programs, employee engagement activities, and environmental campaigns aimed at promoting sustainability and responsible practices. These efforts create measurable social impact while reinforcing our commitment to long-term national development and corporate accountability.

UFM's mission emphasises achieving innovation and sustainability to exceed client expectations in a rapidly evolving market. Looking ahead, how do you envision the role of UFM evolving to meet the future demands of smart cities and sustainable living in Kuwait?

UFM envisions its future role evolving from a service provider into a strategic partner supporting smart cities and sustainable living. As Kuwait advances toward intelligent infrastructure and data-driven urban environments, facilities management will play a central role in integrating technology, sustainability, and operational resilience. Our future strategy focuses on smart FM solutions, AI-driven analytics, energy optimisation, and sustainable asset management. Through continuous innovation and adherence to global standards, UFM aims to exceed client expectations while contributing to sustainable urban growth and long-term economic resilience.

Mr. Ibrahim Abdellatif,
CEO, Executive Department,
United Facility Management



DISNEY TO INVEST in OpenAI, Allow IP on Sora



What can I help with?

+ Enhance this image



In a telling and definitive endorsement that marks the end of Hollywood's experimental stage with generative AI and begins an era of mainstream adoption, The Walt Disney Company today made a comprehensive partnership with OpenAI. As a deal that will include an equity investment worth \$1 billion, it will see OpenAI's video platform, Sora, adopted as the sanctioned creative engine for some of the biggest intellectual properties on earth. The deal, which has been labelled a "*landmark collaboration*" by both firms, will enable OpenAI's Sora and ChatGPT models to produce videos and images based on user input using more than 200 licensed characters from the Disney, Pixar, Marvel, and Star Wars brands.

The latest move brings an end to months of speculation on what Disney CEO Robert Iger would do with regard to the disruption of creative industries. By choosing to invest in OpenAI whilst at the same time issuing a cease and desist letter against competitors like Google, which has also been confirmed this week, Disney has gone ahead and adopted a "*kingmaker*" strategy.

"Disney Magic" Meets The Machine

As per the terms of an exclusive three-year licensing deal, Disney+ subscribers will soon be able to enjoy a whole new level of engagement. From early 2026 onwards, fans will be able to use a special variant of Sora, which will enable them to make short-form videos involving iconic characters ranging from Mickey Mouse and Cinderella to Iron Man and Darth Vader.

"Technological innovation continues to drive the escalation of the dynamic nature of the world of entertainment," Iger said. *"And with this collaboration with OpenAI, we will carry our storytelling mission even further with generative AI, while also honouring and safeguarding our creative community."* Crucially, it also sets tough "guardrails" on the tech to address the ethical worries that led to the 2023 Hollywood strikes.

Picking a Winner

The news represents a monumental victory for OpenAI, giving the San Francisco-based AI research lab something that no competitors have: legal and licensed access to an excellent and culturally iconic source of training data.

Disney is the gold standard of storytelling worldwide."

said Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI

"This partnership illustrates that AI firms and creative visionaries can collaborate responsibly for societal innovation benefits."

Regarding Disney, it becomes a two-fold venture. As Disney invests a whopping \$1 billion and purchases warrants for more equity, it becomes more than just a customer. It becomes a stakeholder in OpenAI's success. At the same time, it diligently enforces the usage of its own intellectual property rights. Only a few days ahead of the news about OpenAI, Disney had allegedly sent Google a cease-and-desist letter, requiring Google, which uses Disney characters for developing its own AI models like Veo Video Generator, to desist from doing so. This "*carrot and stick*" strategy implies that Disney is no longer attempting to prevent AI video production but instead aims to govern it by passing it through a third party they can audit.

A New Era for Streaming

But the inclusion on Disney+ represents a major paradigm shift for the service. It will transition from being a passive vault for storing movies to an active creative platform. Disney will be streaming "*curated*" versions of these UGC-created videos for Sora on its platform. Effectively, it will allow for a managed UGC community that keeps its audience within its "*walled garden*" on the Disney app.

The agreement also goes deep into Disney's organisational structure. Disney will use ChatGPT Enterprise among its employees and will develop their own production tools via OpenAI's APIs. This is seen in a similar instance involving Lionsgate, who partnered with Runway in 2024, though what Disney and OpenAI have put together with a \$1 billion investment will still be dwarfed. Once these features are launched in early 2026, there will be unlimited creative opportunities but within regulated control. However, it seems that these "*trust and safety*" tools will be put to a tough test. OpenAI has pledged to have an appropriate policy about generating damaging material for an underage audience, which will be necessary for maintaining Disney's wholesome brand reputation.

Jeeves Rises to \$100 Million to Accelerate Financial-Automation Growth



In order to accelerate its push into financial automation, Jeeves, a global corporate finance platform best known for its cross-border corporate cards and unified spend-management tools, has secured a new \$100 million financing facility, particularly in Mexico, which is currently regarded as one of the company's fastest-growing markets. The funding was spearheaded by Community Investment Management (CIM) and represents an increase in Jeeves' credit capacity. In order to give the fintech more power to offer cards, payments, treasury services, and the increasingly popular automation features that sit on top of those rails, CIM increased its total committed credit to the business as part of the deal, increasing Jeeves' available credit line from \$75 million to \$175 million.

The new facility is more about operational scale than headline equity for Jeeves, which has undergone significant changes since emerging from stealth in 2021. Although the company has previously raised large amounts of debt and equity, including a well-known Series C that positioned Jeeves as a unicorn, it is the expansion of near-term lending capacity that will most directly enable customer growth and product rollouts in local markets. This type of credit line is essential for supporting corporate cards, working capital products, and the instant settlement flows that consumers now demand, according to the company's own commentary and market reports. For Jeeves, Mexico has become a strategic battlefield.

According to reports, Mexico is now Jeeves' largest market due to strong uptake among mid-market and enterprise clients, which has accelerated the company's presence there due to local demand for integrated spend management, cross-border payments, and embedded treasury services. Strong customer retention metrics and quick revenue growth in the area, according to independent reporting and industry newsletters, support



the group's decision to increase credit capacity locally. From the standpoint of the product, the extra credit opens up two useful benefits. First, it improves Jeeves' capacity to underwrite card limits and offer clients flexible working capital, which is a crucial differentiator for a business whose commercial clients need steady liquidity for expansion.

Secondly, it facilitates the implementation of automation-driven features that transform discrete financial services into an automated workflow for finance teams, such as AI-assisted compliance tooling, real-time reconciliation, and tighter integrations with accounting software. Investors and consumers view this combination-credit plus automation-as the "glue" that transforms cards and payments into a platform. The timing is noteworthy. After multiple cycles of enthusiastic hiring and high burn, there is a renewed emphasis on capital efficiency and product defensibility throughout the fintech industry. Instead of raising immediate equity, Jeeves' decision to expand a committed credit facility indicates a desire to scale revenue-generating activity that makes use of balance-sheet capacity. It's a sign to market watchers that the

company is focusing more on commercial momentum than on headline valuations.

There are risks involved. Credit expansion requires prudent lending and effective risk management, especially when entering regions with complex regulatory environments and FX risks. Jeeves's challenge is therefore finding the balance between speedy expansion and the need for careful management, especially with the expansion into Latin America where the macroeconomic and FX environment is fluid and subject to rapid change. However, the company's experience with its investors and its funding from previous equity raises attests that the business model is sound from corporate credit cards through embedded finance into treasury services. With growing competition emerging in the space for expense management and embedded finance offerings, Jeeves' future will depend on implementation – ensuring that greater credit capacity is backed by consistent product development and revenue growth, especially in Latin America. With reports suggesting that Mexico is currently the firm's fastest-growing market, this funding could very well be the catalyst for success.

Blackstone drives fresh capital into Cyera, lifting data-security firm to \$9bn valuation



Blackstone has placed itself, albeit under the radar, at the forefront of a thriving sector within the cyber-security industry. This comes as it leads a reported \$400 million funding round, valuing Israeli-founded firm Cyera at a staggering price tag of \$9 billion. The development, initially reported by mainstream media, is the latest indication that investors are pouring money into firms offering solutions for rising data risk amid fast-paced AI adoption.

Cyera, which originated in 2021 and is presently considered to be one of the fastest-growing companies in data protection, has developed an AI-native solution to enable organisations to detect, classify, and safeguard sensitive data residing in the cloud, cloud SaaS applications, as well as their own environments. Notably, the demand for respective technology has increased by leaps and bounds, especially when enterprises are eager to adopt generative AI yet struggle with shadow data issues.

The fresh capital would follow a blockbuster June Series E in which

Cyera raised \$540 million and doubled its valuation to \$6 billion.

That earlier round already drew the attention of major venture backers, including Sequoia, Lightspeed and Greenoaks, and helped fuel fast expansion: Reuters reports Cyera nearly doubled headcount to roughly 800 employees and posted steep growth among Fortune 500 customers metrics that, if sustained, make the company an attractive target for large institutional investors.

Blackstone's involvement is particularly newsworthy for two reasons. First, it highlights the degree to which major



to grow its sales, product engineering investments in AI safety and data governance, and further expansion into new geographies. The company has remained clear about its intention to win enterprise customers in regulated industries where data discovery and risk remediation serve their mission-critical objectives.

Investors have shown appreciation for this focus, with the company accumulating over \$1.3 billion in funding in the past 18 months alone, with its valuation shooting up substantially due to the widening scope of its addressable market in data security.

The bigger market context is important. Funding for cybersecurity businesses rebounded in 2025 as venture and growth capital ploughed into companies focused on cloud security, API protections, and AI-centred tooling. Cyera's marquee rounds are emblematic of a tranche of firms that have convinced

backers they can turn data risk into a repeatable enterprise software business with healthy customer retention and expansion economics. Analysts say that investors are now more discerning, favouring companies that have strong unit economics and channel reach, but are still willing to underwrite rapid scale in the most promising names.

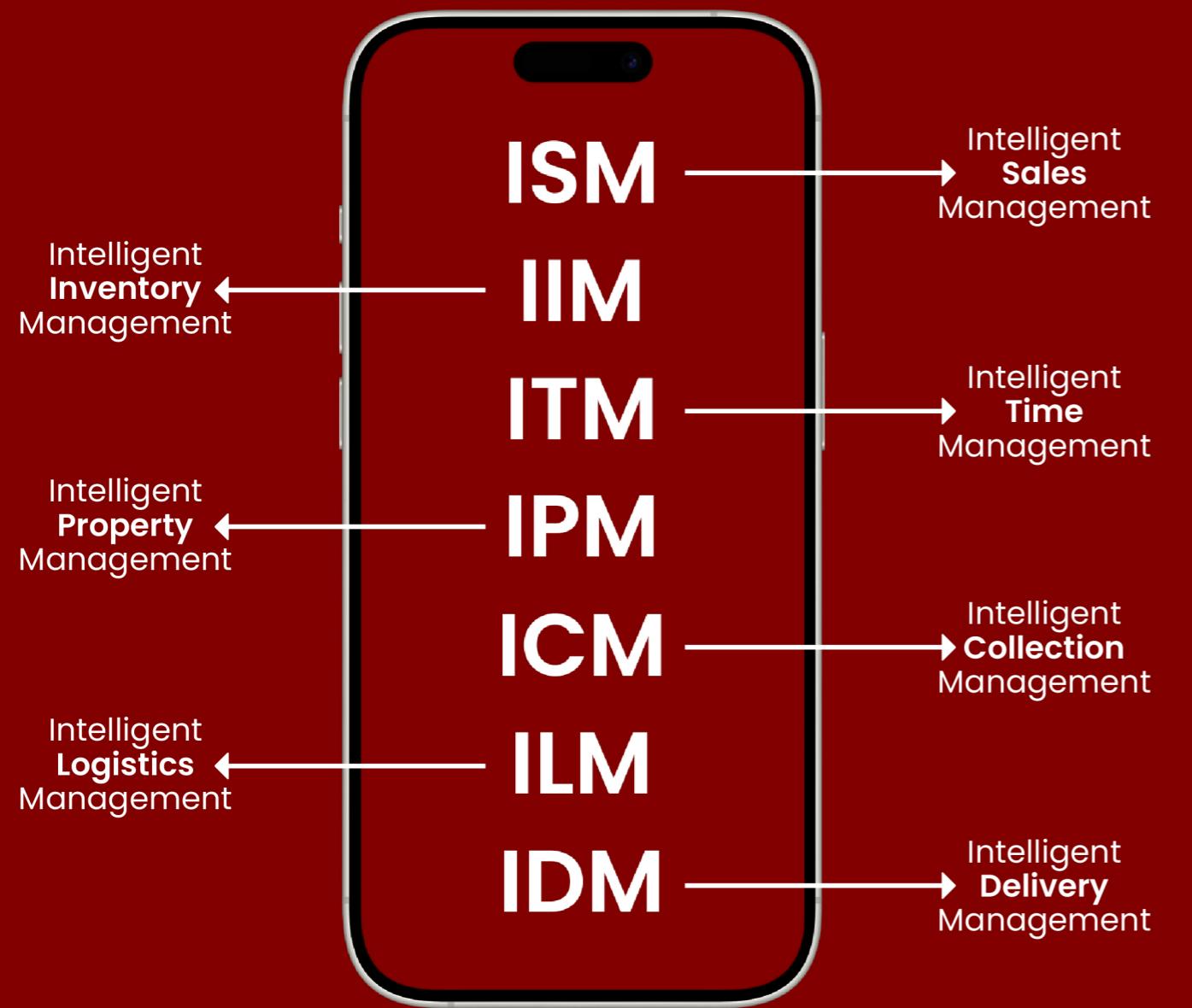
However, there are questions that investors and customers would want answers to. While the private market valuations are rising quickly, there is the expectation of rampant growth, and this is not only capitalized in R&D and channel investments, but the companies are also exposed to the aggressive competition of established security providers and new startups. Furthermore, with the rising global politics of data flow and regulatory challenges, Cyera and its competitors face the challenge of technological and regulatory hurdles.

TAMKEEN

INTELLIGENT



OUR DIGITAL SOLUTIONS



Tamkeen Intelligent: Powering Digital Transformation in Saudi Arabia

As Saudi organizations face rapid change and rising demands for efficiency and transparency, digital transformation has become a business necessity aligned with **Vision 2030**. Tamkeen Intelligent stands at the forefront as a Saudi-grown partner, delivering not just technology, but measurable business outcomes that enable smarter operations, integrated data, and faster decision-making.

A Purpose-Driven Transformation Partner

Founded with a mission to enable intelligent, scalable, and sustainable enterprises, Tamkeen Intelligent has grown over the past five years into a trusted ERP and digital transformation partner in the region. Rather than acting as a traditional system integrator, Tamkeen positions itself as a long-term strategic partner focused on end-to-end business transformation. By combining comprehensive **business consultation services**, deep **ERP expertise**, industry knowledge, and locally developed solutions that extend Microsoft Dynamics 365, Tamkeen has successfully supported more than **100 organizations** and over **300 brands** across sectors including construction, retail, healthcare, manufacturing, real estate, and services.

Addressing the Real Challenges of Digital Transformation

While digital adoption is accelerating, many organizations still face fragmented systems, manual processes, and limited real-time visibility. Tamkeen Intelligent recognized early that technology alone is not enough. Its approach starts with business process redesign, followed by structured ERP implementation and intelligent digital solutions that automate end-to-end business cycles across finance, operations, projects, logistics, and time management. This outcome-driven methodology has reduced manual errors by up to 90%, accelerated financial closing, improved governance and visibility, and increased user adoption—embedding transformation into daily operations, not just IT systems.

Why Microsoft Dynamics 365 Forms the Core

At the heart of Tamkeen Intelligent's delivery model lies Microsoft Dynamics 365 Finance & Operations. Selected for its scalability, security, and enterprise-grade capabilities, Dynamics 365 serves as the unified digital backbone for organizations seeking growth and control.

Where Digital Meets Excellence, Transforming Futures!

Governance, Trust, & Global Standards

In large-scale digital transformation, trust is earned through discipline. Tamkeen Intelligent distinguishes itself through a strong governance model supported by **ISO certifications for Quality Management, Information Security, and IT Service Management**.

"Our ISO certifications are not badges they are embedded into how we operate daily," explains Moharram. "They ensure consistency, accountability, and risk mitigation across every engagement."

From Automation to Intelligence

As enterprise expectations evolve, Tamkeen Intelligent is shifting the conversation from automation to intelligence. Artificial Intelligence is increasingly embedded into its solutions enhancing forecasting, performance analytics, identity management, anomaly detection, and decision support.

Rather than treating AI as a standalone innovation, Tamkeen integrates it directly into ERP workflows, enabling leadership teams to move from reactive reporting to **predictive and prescriptive decision-making**.

Aligned with Vision 2030

Saudi Arabia's **Vision 2030** has created a powerful environment for digital transformation through strong regulations and national initiatives. Tamkeen Intelligent sees this as both an opportunity and a responsibility, investing in local talent, knowledge transfer, and hands-on experience to develop the next generation of Saudi digital leaders.

A Clear Message to the Market

For organizations still hesitant about ERP and AI adoption, Tamkeen Intelligent delivers a clear message: digital transformation is no longer optional. With the right partner, it becomes a structured, secure, and value-driven journey—one that strengthens competitiveness and ensures long-term sustainability.

TAMKEEN
INTELLIGENT

Today stands not just as a technology provider, but as a trusted architect of intelligent enterprises shaping the future of business in



Airbus Orders Massive Global Recall of A320 Jets After Software Glitch

Airbus has ordered an unprecedented global fleet action affecting thousands of its A320 family jets after engineers discovered a vulnerability in flight-control software that can be corrupted by intense solar radiation, prompting what regulators and industry analysts are calling one of the largest recalls in commercial aviation history.

The company said the issue was identified following a mid-air incident that drew urgent scrutiny from aviation authorities and airlines worldwide, and it moved quickly to mandate a software rollback and targeted hardware changes where necessary.

More than 6000 Aircraft Affected

The recall, announced at the end of November, covers roughly 6,000 in-service A320 family aircraft, more than half of the type's global fleet. In many cases, it required operators to install an immediate software fix before the next routine flight.

Airbus and regulators emphasised the action was precautionary and aimed at eliminating the small but potentially serious risk that flight-control data could be corrupted under exceptional space-weather conditions.

Airlines from Europe, North America and Asia reported rapid mobilisation of engineering crews to implement the retrofit, with the bulk of aircraft receiving the corrective software patch within days.

Problem Discovered after the October Incident

Investigators traced the fault to the aircraft's electronic flight-control computers that, under rare circumstances of heightened solar activity, can allow data corruption. The problem first came to light after a JetBlue flight experienced a sudden altitude loss in October, triggering a safety probe and cooperative work between Airbus, the European Union Aviation Safety Agency and other regulators to assess the scale of the exposure.

AUSTRALIA'S National Storage Set For \$3.4 Billion Take Over By Brookfield and GIC

A consortium led by Brookfield Asset Management and Singapore's sovereign wealth fund GIC has secured a binding agreement to take Australia's largest self-storage operator, National Storage REIT, private in a transaction valued at roughly A\$4.0 billion – a deal widely reported in US dollar terms as about \$2.7-\$3.4 billion, depending on the conversion used.

The deal announced to the ASX on Monday will see National Storage securityholders receive A\$2.86 in cash per stapled security – a c.26% premium to the group's late-November trading price – a figure that catalysed a fresh high for the stock as investors digested the offer.

National Storage has quietly become a defensive yet growthy jewel in Australia's real-assets universe. Founded in 1995, the company today operates more than 270 self-storage centres across Australia and New Zealand and is widely regarded as the market leader in a sector that has attracted institutional interest for its resilient cash flows and asset light expansion potential. That strategic profile helps explain the apparent urgency from heavyweight buyers to secure scale in the category.

Australia's beloved storage operating company's board unanimously recommended securityholders vote in favour of the transaction, subject to the absence of a superior proposal and an independent expert concluding that the scheme is in the best interests of holders. The company's scheme booklet filed on the ASX sets out customary conditions including regulatory approvals and investor votes, and points to an expected completion in the second quarter of 2026 if all hurdles are cleared. For Brookfield and GIC, the acquisition is illustrative of a broader strategy: both have been active buyers in global real estate markets as they hunt for stable long-term cash yield and defensive inflation linkage. For Brookfield, it is yet another extension of its property platform in the region, while for GIC, the deal deepens its exposure to a sector where occupancy and demand dynamics have held up even as other property subsectors face cyclical pressure. Analysts have noted that one factor offsetting the modest control premium is the scale of the asset base and the operational upside the consortium believes it can unlock.

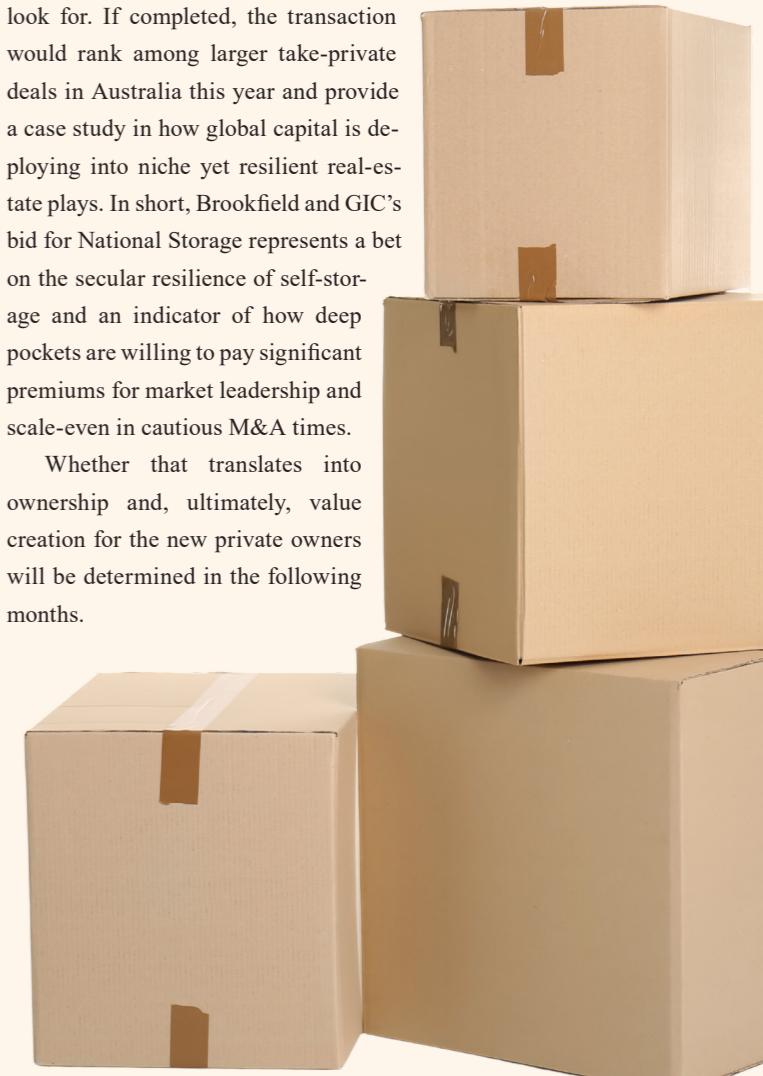
While the headline price has captured attention, market commentators are also watching for two subsequent effects. First, the privatisation of a leading REIT may spur further consolidation in a fragmented self-storage market where scale drives both margin and site-sourcing efficiency. Second, a successful scheme could act as a shot in the arm for M&A activity in Australia-a market which has

seen muted deal flow at various points in 2025 amid tighter financing conditions and valuation caution.

The agreement is still subject to regulatory approvals and the independent expert's report. Rival bidders were not reported as of this date but may appear over the scheme period; history tells that compelling asset classes encourage peer interest when a process is announced publicly. In addition, real-asset transactions at this scale require thoughtful integration planning: asset management, capital spending plans for site refurbishment, and possible expansion into ancillary service offerings will be put under a microscope as the consortium operationalizes the bid into a longer business plan.

The independent expert's report, any rival approaches, and the timing of shareholder meetings needed to approve the scheme are what investors and industry watchers should look for. If completed, the transaction would rank among larger take-private deals in Australia this year and provide a case study in how global capital is deploying into niche yet resilient real-estate plays. In short, Brookfield and GIC's bid for National Storage represents a bet on the secular resilience of self-storage and an indicator of how deep pockets are willing to pay significant premiums for market leadership and scale—even in cautious M&A times.

Whether that translates into ownership and, ultimately, value creation for the new private owners will be determined in the following months.



placement programme where necessary.

Airbus said the panel fault was contained and limited in scope, but the new development heightened scrutiny of supply-chain quality control at a time when producers are already stretched by continued demand and component shortages.

Regulators emphasised that the measures were precautionary and that no systemic safety failure had been identified that would make continued operation unsafe once the prescribed fixes had been applied. For Airbus, the twin challenges of a software vulnerability and a follow-up quality snag represent a reputational test at a time when trust in aircraft manufacturers is high on the agenda for airlines, passengers and investors. As maintenance teams complete the remaining updates and inspections, regulators will continue monitoring fixes and any associated operational consequences.

Airbus said it would publish further technical guidance to operators and work with suppliers to tighten checks on parts production.

The episode has renewed debate over the balance between aggressive precautionary recalls and the practicalities of running a global airline fleet that depends on rapid, reliable action when unexpected defects surface.



Jet Luxe gets a boost for US–Latin America business travel as Caribbean and Mexico fleet expands

In order to better serve the busy US–Latin America corporate travel corridor, Dubai-based private jet operator Jet Luxe has quietly expanded its reach throughout the Americas, deploying additional aircraft into Florida, Mexico, and strategic Caribbean hubs. The expansion, which includes the addition of Hawker 800 series jets in Mexico and several light-to-midsized aircraft positioned in Florida and Latin America, is timed to capture rising demand for time-sensitive charter travel between the US and its southern neighbors.

An intentional operational move is the new aircraft distribution. Jet Luxe shortens repositioning legs and speeds up response times for brokers and corporate clients planning last-minute travel by stationing aircraft near popular charter origins and destinations, such as Miami, Mexico City, and important Caribbean islands. Because many business trips in the area are brief, time-sensitive, and route-sensitive, shorter ferry times directly result in greater availability and lower effective costs for patrons.

Jet Luxe's fleet selections highlight a practical approach. The Hawker 800 family continues to be a workhorse for mid-range regional hops; its cozy cabins, reasonable range, and effective operating economics make it ideal for intra-Caribbean and US–Mexico charters. The Hawker

additions in Mexico are a key component of the company's Latin American push, according to regional interviews and public statements. Jet Luxe can provide a balance between runway flexibility and cabin comfort thanks to these midsized aircraft, which is beneficial for smaller Caribbean airfields and business airports throughout Mexico. In terms of operations, Jet Luxe has collaborated with regional partners and well-established AOC holders to locate aircraft where demand is highest. Ties with regional operators that oversee the commercially certified operations are noted in industry reports.

This model allows a global brand to grow rapidly without having to duplicate every aspect of local infrastructure. Reliability and broker support are highlighted by executive commentary as the main selling points.

With more aircraft on the market, brokers can guarantee clients consistent availability instead of rushing to find ad hoc solutions. From a market perspective, this move mirrors broader trends in private aviation: demand for premium, on-demand travel has bounced back strongly post-pandemic as executives prioritize speed, flexibility, and privacy. Fleet expansion by a boutique operator such as Jet Luxe also reflects a competitive dynamic whereby both global players and niche regional specialists race to lay hands on inventory and membership revenues.



Larger rivals have similarly been beefing up capacity and investments to meet this appetite. The benefits accrue to several stakeholders: corporates get faster, more reliable links for short-notice flights across the hemisphere; brokers secure routable options for clients traveling between US business centers and Latin American capitals; and regional airports see incremental high-yield traffic.

For Jet Luxe, the business case is straightforward: aircraft positioned where demand peaks improve utilization, reduce dead-legs, and enhance the attractiveness of membership and bespoke charter products.

Jet Luxe's incremental fleet build in Mexico, Florida and the Caribbean is more than a capability boost: it is a clear signal that the US–Latin America corporate air travel market remains a priority for private aviation brands seeking growth.

For corporate travellers, the immediate outcome should be improved availability and shorter wait times; for Jet Luxe, the next test will be turning better positioning into consistent revenue and long-term client relationships in a competitive and fast-moving sector.

Jet Luxe's strategic aircraft network expansion in Mexico and the Caribbean puts it in a very strong position in one of the most vibrant corridors in international business travel in the whole world.

Through strategic aircraft deployment based on dynamic demand, Jet Luxe will improve efficiency, responsiveness, and customer confidence. With increasing cross-border trade flows between the US and Latin America, Jet Luxe is poised to make strategic positioning a recipe for sustained growth in private aviation.

7 Decades Of Development: How tameer Has Shaped Egypt's Urban Landscape



Mr. Omar AlZumai,
Board Member

How many housing units has tameer delivered in the residential sector in the past 70 years? How many units in gated projects were delivered since the investor acquisition?

tameer has delivered a total of 27,500 residential units over the past 70 years in the residential sector. Since the investor acquisition, the company has delivered 2,000 housing units within the gated residential projects domain.

What is tameer's strategy in the upcoming period?

tameer's expansion strategy focuses on creating gated mixed-use developments in prime locations in regions, stretching across East Cairo, West

Cairo, and the North Coast, strengthening its footprint through high-value developments that enhance the urban landscape. The company is also elevating commercial and administrative projects while introducing new innovative hospitality concepts, building on its long-standing experience in the hospitality sector with a proven track record of delivering approximately 2,000 keys, with the aim of redefining luxury and lifestyle standards in the Egyptian market.

What are the key time stamps in tameer's heritage?

tameer was founded by the government to develop residential projects in 1954. Over the next two decades, we made a name for ourselves in Egypt's real estate landscape. 1957–1980s was an important time for the company, which led to the creation of some of the brand's most iconic projects. It was a defining era marked by the development of landmark hospitality, educational, and residential projects, including:

- Old Meridian Garden City (1957)
- Mövenpick Aswan – formerly Oberoi (1971)
- Helwan University in JV with SOM (1976)
- Large-scale districts such as New Maadi, Maryland, and Sheraton Heliopolis (1980s)

In 1996, tameer became one of the first real estate companies to be listed on the EGX. The company recorded yet another breakthrough in 2005, with the entry of foreign investors and strategic restructuring for the organisation.

ments while introducing modern luxury amenities, demonstrating tameer's expertise in heritage-sensitive adaptive modernisation. In 1976, tameer, in partnership with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, designed Helwan University, bringing modern international architectural standards to Egypt and creating one of the country's most advanced campuses at the time.

What differentiates Urban Walk from other mixed-use destinations in New Cairo?

Urban Walk was envisioned to be a next-generation urban destination that redefines how people live, work, and connect in New Cairo. Planned as the future downtown of New Cairo, the project is designed to create a fully walkable, people-first environment that blends nature, culture, and vibrant city life into a single, seamless experience. It has been developed in collaboration with renowned global leaders such as Architecture studio in association with Jean Nouvel (France), Gillespies(UK), and Solidere International (Lebanon).

Key features of Urban Walk include:

- **Massive Central Park:** Signature green space six times the size of a football field, fully pedestrian and car-free.
- **Holistic Mixed-Use Composition:** Five connected zones – commercial, central park, entertainment, hospitality, and Medical & Wellness.
- **Prime Location:** Adjacent to AUC, with direct access to airports, major roads, and the monorail.
- **Car-Free, Open-Access Lifestyle:** Encourages walking, interaction, and a vibrant public realm.
- **Comprehensive Ecosystem:** Bringing together work, leisure, retail, F&B, and Medical & Wellness in one connected destination.

What urban design principles were used to create a walkable, community-centric environment in Urban Walk?

Urban Walk emphasises connectivity, accessibility, and human-scale

development. Pedestrian pathways encourage walking and interaction, while the central park provides recreation and social hubs. Flexible spaces such as shared work hubs, lounges, F&B areas, and play zones enhance community interaction, while strategically placed retail, administrative, medical, wellness, and hospitality facilities ensure a self-contained, vibrant environment.

What is the core vision of the commercial development, and how does it address current urban and economic needs in Egypt?

UBL redefines the modern workplace by enhancing creativity, productivity, and employee well-being. It addresses Egypt's growing demand for modern commercial spaces with international design standards and flexible layouts, hosting multinational and local enterprises, supporting national economic growth, and positioning Egypt as a regional business hub.

How does the architecture enhance user experience, sustainability, or commercial potential?

UBL features modern, minimal architecture with open layouts and natural light. Shared spaces encourage interaction while ensuring privacy. Amenities such as fully equipped meeting rooms, shared kitchens, and work pods enhance convenience. The Business Lounge provides a vibrant space for networking, casual meetings, and relaxation, making the development a lifestyle choice beyond a workplace.

How does the project integrate with the surrounding urban fabric and support community needs?

UBL integrates seamlessly with Urban Walk, activating ground-floor retail and F&B spaces, connecting rooftop dining with bridges, and promoting pedestrian interaction. Administrative buildings frame the central park, establishing UBL as a gateway to Urban Walk's phases, creating a vibrant, inclusive urban community where business, leisure, and social life intersect.

How does the project contribute to Egypt's national sustainability goals (e.g., energy savings, green spaces, smart technologies)?

UBL incorporates energy-efficient designs, including curtain walls,



Mr. Saad AlWazzan,
Chairman

Low-E glass, and shading elements. Smart technologies support advanced metering, CCTV, security, and energy management. Water efficiency, native vegetation, and landscaped green spaces enhance ecological sustainability. The massive park promotes recreation, wellbeing, and social gatherings, reducing carbon emissions, improving air quality, and modelling a sustainable enterprise district.

How will UBL contribute to tameer's urban walk to serve as New Cairo's new downtown?

Urban Walk is designed to serve as New Cairo's new downtown, bringing together five interconnected districts Commercial, Entertainment, Hospitality, Medical & Wellness, and The Park into a vibrant, multifunctional urban hub. Within this masterplan, UBL anchors the development by integrating retail, dining, and administrative spaces, generating a continuous flow of activity that supports the surrounding districts. Its secure, ungated design encourages movement and interaction, while The Park connects all areas for a seamless urban experience. With 14,000 parking spaces across Urban Walk, UBL ensures convenient access for business and leisure, reinforcing the vibrancy and functionality of New Cairo's upcoming downtown.

Versace Joins Prada in €1.25 Billion Deal: Fashion Industry Transformations Ahead



Italian luxury fashion house Prada's acquisition of Versace marks one of the largest shifts in the worldwide luxury industry. This acquisition at €1.25 billion confirms that Prada has significant influence within the luxury market and represents a new chapter for fashion in Europe, as these two major brands can now be united in Milan.

The merging of the two brands brings together Prada's signature "ugly chic" minimalism and Versace's daringly extravagant style, which creates a new creative, commercial, and geographic boundary for both brands and the luxury fashion industry.

The €1.25 Billion Power Move

Prada's purchase of Versace, previously owned by Capri Holdings, represents a cash deal that is changing the dynamics of the luxury sector.

The transaction positions Prada as a robust rival to conglomerates like LVMH and Kering, expanding its portfolio to include three major brands: Prada, Miu Miu, and now Versace.

Versace accounted for 20% of Capri Holdings' €5.2 billion in revenue in 2024, while Prada reported a 17% boost to €5.4 billion in annual revenue after the deal. The acquisition was completed on a debt- and cash-free basis, giving Prada operational flexibility and financial strength for further expansion.

Prada has invested heavily to bolster its industrial base, with €60 million spent in 2025 alone to expand and modernise factories, alongside over €200 million invested since 2019 in infrastructure and supply chain efficiency.

These moves put the group in a strong position to scale Versace globally and tap into unrealised potential in categories like leather goods and accessories.

Beyond Milan: Global Repercussions

The merger signals broader consolidation across luxury fashion, as European players build muscle to withstand giants such as LVMH and Kering and intensifying international competition. The deal reverberates across major markets:

- United States:** Buyers may see a more accessible, diversified product range as Versace's distribution expands through Prada's improved retail network.
- Asia:** Prada's disciplined supply chain could supercharge Versace's lagging sales in key Asian markets, where brand recognition outpaces recent financial results.
- India & Emerging Markets:** Consolidation may mean more prominent brand presence and better supply chain organisation, helping the industry respond to surging middle-class luxury demands.

The combination of Italian craftsmanship, creative capital, and scalable retail strategies exemplifies the trend toward multi-brand groups balancing scale with brand autonomy, akin to LVMH's playbook.

Unveiling the High Stakes: When Icons Collide

Challenges are significant for Prada. Versace has struggled in the post-pandemic era under Capri Holdings, with revenues declining 15% to \$193 million (€178 million) in fiscal 2025. The brand needs a reboot in creativity, distribution, and positioning.



There's the risk of over-extension and dilution of brand identities, a perennial challenge for fashion conglomerates. But the opportunities far outweigh the hurdles.

Prada's expertise in retail efficiency and category scaling, proven by its success at Miu Miu, could help reverse Versace's flagging performance.

Statistically, Versace is expected to contribute 13% to Prada Group's pro forma revenues, with Prada itself responsible for 64% and Miu Miu for 22%. The integration allows Prada to exploit untapped growth internationally, relaunch Versace's sexier image, and accelerate expansion in the lucrative accessory and leather segments.

Dare to Reinvent: What's Next Ahead?

what makes them unique.

As Prada integrates Versace into its industrial network while pledging to maintain its creative independence, it will set the pace for future luxury mergers. For fashion, the message is clear: reinvention, synergy, and scalable innovation are the new standards.

The Prada-Versace union is not just about numbers and headlines. It's about reimagining what global luxury stands for, breaking stylistic boundaries, and reshaping how iconic brands engage consumers worldwide.

NETFLIX Buys Warner Bros., Indicating Shifts in Hollywood's Power Dynamics

A development that feels more like a scripted twist than a business update has jolted the entertainment world: Netflix has agreed to buy the film, TV and streaming divisions of Warner Bros., the studio behind franchises such as Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, DC, and Game of Thrones. The move, still awaiting regulatory approval, stands among the most consequential shifts in Hollywood since Disney swallowed Fox in 2019, and Amazon picked up MGM three years later. It is a reminder that traditional studios are increasingly being folded into streaming-led empires.

A bidding contest with a dramatic finish

According to the BBC, Netflix beat its closest rivals, Comcast and Paramount Skydance, with a bid of \$28 per share. Paramount had reportedly offered a dollar less, but its proposal extended to all of Warner Bros. Discovery, including CNN, while Netflix's interest was confined to the film and television arms and the HBO Max streaming business.

Paramount was said to be furious over how the contest unfolded, accusing Warner Bros. of giving Netflix preferential treatment after the streamer put forward an \$83 billion offer. The finer details of such corporate sparring may escape most viewers, but the tensions sounded straight out of a premium TV drama.

Is this an existential crisis for Warner Bros & HBO Max?

For audiences, the biggest talking point is what happens to the vast Warner Bros. and HBO libraries. It's unlikely that every title from The Sopranos to the full Lord of the Rings catalogue would land on Netflix overnight. Even Amazon's takeover of MGM did not place all Bond films permanently on Prime Video.

But as existing licensing agreements expire, some of Warner's marquee shows and films will almost certainly fold into



“
ACCORDING TO THE BBC, NETFLIX BEAT ITS CLOSEST RIVALS, COMCAST AND PARAMOUNT SKYDANCE, WITH A BID OF \$28 PER SHARE.

PARAMOUNT WAS SAID TO BE FURIOUS OVER HOW THE CONTEST UNFOLDED, ACCUSING WARNER BROS. OF GIVING NETFLIX PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT AFTER THE STREAMER PUT FORWARD AN \$83 BILLION OFFER.





Netflix's already enormous collection. That shift raises a practical question: what becomes of HBO Max, scheduled to enter the UK in March 2026? If Netflix pulls HBO's catalogue into its own platform, maintaining a competing streaming service looks increasingly unsustainable. In theory, that might mean one fewer subscription for viewers, though a price rise on Netflix's part would not be shocking.

Cinemas brace in advance for the fallout

While home audiences might welcome the convenience, the US cinema operators are far less enthusiastic. Michael O'Leary, head of Cinema United, described the merger as an "unprecedented threat" to theatrical culture, telling Variety that Netflix's model "does not support theatrical exhibition" and urging regulators to scrutinise the consequences for audiences and the industry.

That anxiety stems from Netflix's habit of giving films brief cinema runs, often limited to prestige projects, before they shift rapidly to streaming. The fear is that, under

Netflix ownership, Warner Bros. releases could follow similar patterns, a sharp break from the studio's long-standing tradition of extended theatrical windows. Some insiders told Variety this week that a two-week cinema window for major Warner titles is not unthinkable.

Yet Netflix's pitch reportedly included a commitment to keep theatrical releases alive, according to The New York Times. If honoured, that would mark a significant adjustment to the company's usual approach.

Hollywood creatives push back

Worries inside the film community ran deep enough that several well-known filmmakers, unnamed but described by Variety as "high-profile", sent a letter to the US Congress before news of the deal even broke. Their message was blunt: allowing Netflix to proceed could "destroy" the theatrical film business. The letter reflects a broader concern that, if a streamer controls a studio of Warner's scale, the balance between cinema and at-home viewing could tilt decisively.

A turning point, depending on who you ask

Whether the merger ultimately broadens choice for viewers or accelerates the retreat of traditional cinema depends on how Netflix chooses to manage its new assets and whether regulators allow the deal to proceed in its current form. What is clear is that another pillar of old Hollywood is shifting into the orbit of a streaming giant, a reminder of how quickly the power map of global entertainment is being redrawn.

Netflix's move to fold Warner Bros. into its world builds a future where many well-known films and series could sit under one roof, a prospect that comes with its own set of worries. Everyone, from directors to cinema owners, is watching closely to navigate through this phase. Their eyes are now fixed on what gets made, how it's released, and who gets to call the shots. However, the impact of this major shift is yet to show its effect, but it has already tilted the scales of Hollywood in a new direction.

TECHNOLOGY

Issue 28
January 2026

Dubai Launches World's First AI-Powered Payment System- Agent Pay

The future of retail shopping has taken a dramatic step forward in Dubai, as the city announced the world's first AI-powered payment system during a live demonstration. The new technology is a significant leap forward in agentic commerce. It is known as Agent Pay, which was introduced by Mastercard in partnership with Majid Al Futtaim at the Dubai Future Forum. The process allowed a user to buy two tickets to a horror film via a voice assistant without having to visit a separate website or manually enter payment details.

Every step of the process, from choosing the movie and seats to making the payment, was managed seamlessly within the conversational AI-driven platform, which shows a vision of the future in which digital agents handle complex shopping tasks on behalf of consumers.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has achieved a significant milestone this year by ranking 21st on the World Happiness Index, surpassing countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and all other Arab countries. This achievement shows a strong sense of community among residents and the government's visionary efforts to improve residents' lives and make them safer. At the center of this success is the government's strategic use of artificial intelligence to streamline and improve services across various industries.

Omar Al Olama, the UAE's Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence, Digital Economy, and Remote Work Applications, witnessed the AI-powered platform Agent Pay being used along with Michael Miebach, CEO of Mastercard.

This AI-powered platform shows how AI agents can simplify the customer experience, including handling tasks like finding the best seats in a movie, selecting showtimes, and finding the closest cinema location before making a secure payment.

The launch was a testament to Dubai's growing reputation as a global leader in innovation, a city where futuristic ideas are brought to life. Dubai is quickly becoming the world's fastest-growing digital innovation hub, with the Dubai Chamber of Digital Economy announcing support for creating and growing 582 digital startups in just the first nine months of 2025.



The increase in entrepreneurship is due to the Emirates' growing influence in the technology industry and its appeal to attract the next generation of global digital pioneers.

Omar Al Olama stated that this success was due to the UAE's mindset of encouraging experimentation with a "why not" attitude. Instead of questioning ideas, they test innovative technologies within controlled environments before adopting them. This forward-thinking mindset helps the UAE to act as a hub for global innovation. It is absolutely convenient to use the AI-powered Agent Pay, but Mastercard and government officials emphasized its security and trust.

Michael Miebach noted that, through the platform, there is potential for unauthorized purchases and fraud, so it is necessary to implement comprehensive safeguards in the system. He added that there is a strong need for controls and protections while aiming for a balance between innovation and consumer safety.

Looking to the future, Miebach offered advice to young professionals entering a workspace shaped by artificial intelligence. He encouraged them to develop skills unique to humans rather than choose a career path that can be easily automated by AI.

Rather than choosing a job that will be replaced with technology, he advised the next generation of young professionals to use their individual strengths and focus on careers that require judgment, thinking, and personal interaction. This advice will be suitable for a broader workforce, where human-centric skills will play an important role, as many global big tech companies invest billions in data centers and AI.

China's UBTECH Robotics seeks Big Capital Push with \$400 Million Hong Kong Share Deal



As it proceeds with a \$400 million share placement in Hong Kong, UBTECH Robotics, one of China's most well-known names in humanoid and service-robot innovation, is getting ready for a significant capital infusion. At a time when robotics is quickly transitioning from futuristic ambition to commercial reality, the fundraising drive represents one of the company's most aggressive moves to date in bolstering its financial foundation and quickening its global expansion.

The Shenzhen-based company, which is well-known for its intelligent service robots and its prominent presence in the fields of education, healthcare, logistics and smart security, plans to use this additional funding to expand manufacturing, strengthen its capacity for research and aggressively pursue international markets. UBTECH seems to be concentrated on making sure it can meet growing demand with both speed and scale as businesses and governments from various regions rush to implement automation solutions.

Industry analysts claim that the company's timing is strategic. Due to workforce shortages, aging populations and increased pressure on operational efficiency, there has been a recent surge in the demand for robotics worldwide, particularly humanoid models intended to support labor-intensive industries. UBTECH is well-positioned to benefit from this momentum thanks to its current portfolio, which includes everything from sophisticated enterprise systems to consumer-grade robots. As a result, the share sale serves as a signal of confidence in the larger robotics ecosystem in addition to providing a capital boost.

Despite navigating a difficult macroeconomic environment, Hong Kong's financial market continues to be a crucial entry point for Chinese technology companies looking for foreign investment. The company's goal to establish itself as a global player rather than just a domestic success story is reinforced by UBTECH's decision to pursue such a significant placement in the city. Given the long-term potential to robotics technologies and the growing recognition of UBTECH's commercial advancements, market observers anticipate strong interest from institutional investors.

Through a combination of technological innovation, strategic alliances and public displays of its humanoid capabilities, the company has been gradually enhancing its reputation. Its robots have

been used in education systems in several nations, displayed at significant international events and incorporated into pilot programs for smart cities. The drive for more funding highlights UBTECH's goal to maintain its lead in a sector where innovation speed is frequently the deciding factor as competition heats up, especially from competitors in the US, Japan and South Korea.

Beyond growth, UBTECH is anticipated to use a sizable amount of the earnings to bolster its pipeline for research and development. This includes developments in AI-driven mobility, autonomous decision-making, human-robot interaction and battery efficiency, all of which are thought to be essential for the next generation of useful and profitable humanoid robots. The company's continuous efforts to lower production costs—a crucial component in making robot deployment more accessible for companies and public institutions—will also be aided by increased R&D investment.

The share placement coincides with an increase in robotics support from governments across the globe as part of larger strategies for economic transformation. Technology is becoming deeply ingrained in daily operations, from warehouse automation and hospitality services to healthcare support systems. By offering solutions that alleviate labor shortages and boost productivity without sacrificing efficiency or safety, UBTECH hopes to capitalize on this structural shift.

The market will be closely monitoring UBTECH's use of its new resources as the fundraising moves forward to see if they will hasten the company transformation into one of the most significant robotics firms in the world. For the time being, the company's audacious move in Hong Kong sends a clear message: UBTECH wants to be at the forefront of the race to spearhead the next wave of intelligent automation.

We Offer Control, Not Credit: How TRU's Customer-Driven Lending App Is Reshaping Egyptian Finance

Your company, TRU, was successfully launched in December 2024, and in just one month, was recognised as the “Fastest Growing Lending App.” What specific, unaddressed gap in the Egyptian consumer finance market did you target that allowed you to achieve such explosive growth right out of the gate?

We entered the market with one insight: Egyptians had access to credit, but not to control. You could borrow, but you could not customise the borrowing experience. TRU changed that by making credit instant, flexible, and fully tailored to the customer.

We launched TRU Flex, giving people the power to choose their own plan, for zero interest and zero purchase fees. This was something the market never offered. Then we pushed the same philosophy further with CTRL, which lets customers adjust their monthly instalment amounts and tenors even after the transaction.

That level of flexibility simply did not exist before, and it is what unlocked our early explosive growth.



Mr. Ahmed Essam Seoudy,
CEO and Managing Director
TRU

Your “TRU Flex” feature offers customers highly flexible options, such as 0% interest or 0% purchase fees. How do you balance this level of customer-facing flexibility with profitability? Is your primary revenue model based on merchant-side fees or on the interest/fees from customers who choose longer, interest-bearing plans?

Here at TRU, we have essentially turned every transaction into a game of affordability. The customer gets to choose, but our economics stays healthy. This has been possible because our partners play a major role in the model. They benefit from higher conversions and bigger basket sizes, while we maintain commercial efficiency without putting pressure on the customer.

Your taglines, “Another Day, Another Good Decision!” and “YOUR Terms & Conditions Apply!” suggest a fundamental shift in the lender-customer relationship. Could you expand on this philosophy? How is TRU actively empowering customers and giving them a level of control that traditional banks and other BNPL services in Egypt simply do not offer?

Our philosophy is simple: give people control and make them feel it. We do this through both our products and our communication. On the product side, TRU Flex and CTRL give customers full freedom over their terms, fees, and tenors. That alone breaks the traditional lending model in Egypt. This spirit is also reflected in our communication strategy.

What sets us apart from our industry counterparts is that we do not market ourselves like a finance company. Instead, we market like a lifestyle brand. Our activations with Al Ahly Sporting Club, our summer skydiving weekends, our creator-led campaigns, and our major cultural moments all reinforce one message: we do things differently!

Your data shows a “Repeated Customers” rate of 30%. In a competitive market with “Bank Cards” and other “BNPL” players, what is your long-term strategy to build customer loyalty and increase this repeat transaction rate to ensure long-term business sustainability?

Our long-term strategy is simple- to make TRU part of everyday life. We are expanding our merchant network, introducing lifestyle categories, and forming strong exclusive partnerships — from travel with EgyptAir to big-tick-

et financing. The more relevant and omnipresent TRU becomes, the more naturally repeated users are.

Your Q4 2025 Roadmap includes plans to launch “Prepaid Cards” and acquire a “Fintech License”. How will these two developments transition TRU from being a consumer finance app into a more comprehensive digital banking competitor in the Egyptian market?

Both moves push TRU into a fully digital banking experience. The prepaid card puts TRU in millions of POS terminals with instant, branch-free activation. And with the fintech license, we can turn any big ticket into small, flexible instalments on the spot.

Together, they shift TRU from a finance app to a fast, fully digital banking alternative.

You have a clear B2B strategy with your “Embedded Finance” white-label platform, already implemented with partners like Sylndr Swift. Looking five years ahead, do you envision this B2B embedded finance arm becoming a larger revenue driver for TRU than your direct-to-consumer app?

Sylndr Swift was the proof of concept for our infrastructure. It is Egypt’s first fully digital auto-lending program, and it runs entirely on our technology. That success showed us the scale to which embedded finance can expand. And now, seeing other players moving into the field of embedded finance is a strong validation of the direction we chose early.

Empowering partners at that scale can become a major revenue engine, potentially even bigger than the consumer app.

Your company highlights that your platform is “Unique” and “in-house developed”, leveraging AI and automation to power a “frictionless experience”. How critical is owning your own technology to your success? Does this proprietary tech stack give you an unbeatable edge in speed, security, and the ability to innovate faster than any competitor?

We are the only player in the market with full in-house tech development. Owning our entire stack gives us total freedom to design unique, frictionless customer journeys, scale quickly, and keep implementation costs low. Our edge in speed, security, and innovation places us in a strong position as the market evolves.



BANKING

Issue 28
January 2026

BANK OF JAPAN Lifts Interest Rates to 0.75%, Marking a Three-Decade Peak

The Bank of Japan (BoJ) has raised its benchmark interest rate to 0.75 percent, the highest level in about 30 years, marking a significant departure from decades of ultra-loose monetary policy that have defined Japan's post-economic-stagnation era and a turning point for the global financial landscape.

Following years of historically low and occasionally negative interest rates, Governor Kazuo Ueda's ongoing efforts to normalize monetary settings have culminated in this unanimous decision by the BoJ's policy board. It reflects the central bank's growing confidence that inflationary pressures have gained enough traction to warrant tighter monetary conditions rather than being a transient phenomenon.

Japan's monetary policy has been characterized for the majority of the last thirty years by efforts to combat persistent deflation and stagnant growth. In an effort to boost borrowing, investment, and consumer spending following the burst of the asset price bubble, the BoJ began implementing zero-interest-rate and later negative-interest policies in the mid-1990s.

Raising rates to 0.75 percent is a significant change from that period. The increase is noteworthy for Japan even though it is small by global standards. The BoJ has been cautious, moving only slowly in the direction of higher borrowing costs, in contrast to central banks in the US and Europe, which have spent recent years aggressively tightening before modestly pivoting.

The BoJ's belief that inflation is becoming entrenched is the driving force behind this change in policy. For more than three years, Japan's core consumer price index (CPI) has been higher than the bank's 2% target. This period of persistent inflation has been mostly caused by higher import costs brought on by a weak yen and ongoing supply pressures from around the world.

Japan's overall economy, however, paints a complex picture. Even as price pressures continue, recent data indicate a slight economic contraction, highlighting the vulnerability of domestic growth.



Therefore, the leadership of the BoJ must weigh the risk of overtightening against the peril of allowing inflation expectations to become unanchored.

Global financial markets responded quickly to this announcement. As expected, the value of the yen depreciated against key currencies, though the expectation was that a tight monetary policy would strengthen it. In contrast, yields of Japan's 10-year government bonds rose to their highest level in several years. In equity markets, relatively greater resilience was shown, with the Nikkei 225 index rising modestly in the wake of the announcement—perhaps in recognition that the increase had been factored into prices.

What the Japanese economy's move means is not limited to the global markets. The BoJ is one of the few major central banks in the world that is going against the trends set by the Fed, among others, which

has recently shown signs of reducing interest rates.

Such higher interest rates could make less attractive so-called *"carry trades,"* in which investors borrow funds in low-yield currencies, such as the yen, to invest in other higher-yielding currencies, a phenomenon that has occurred for years. Higher interest rates could also lead Japanese investors to bring their money back home, potentially impacting international asset prices.

Looking ahead, the BoJ has made clear it remains prepared to adjust policy further if economic conditions evolve in line with

forecasts. Analysts suggest that future rate rises may be measured—perhaps incremental increases over the coming year—rather than dramatic hikes.

Market attention is focused on the upcoming press conference by Governor Ueda as the market awaits any information on the BoJ's view on the concept of "neutral rate," which is defined as a point where money policy is neither expansionary nor contractionary. Another important point that investors would be eager to hear is expectations regarding wage growth challenges.

China's CSRC Pushes Brokerages to Build Global Banks and Back Tech Self-Reliance

The Chinese securities regulator has called on the state's brokerage industry to speed up the establishment of top investment banks, which would be able to compete in global markets. They are also urged to adopt Beijing's indigenous technology for fostering self-reliance, as mentioned in a five-year plan by the Communist Party. Wu Qing, chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC), ordered this message, signalling a fundamentally transformed future for the 14.5 trillion (\$2.05 trillion) Chinese brokerage industry, aiding in critical economic growth. Securities companies will have to double down efforts to fulfil the goal of building China into a global financial powerhouse while adopting self-reliant technology by promoting fundraising and mergers in sectors covering from AI to biopharmaceuticals and renewables.

Regulatory Easing for Top-Tier Firms

The CSRC will reduce the limitations on large and high-quality securities companies, allowing them enhanced access to leverage and capital, while putting differentiated criteria on smaller and foreign-invested firms in the form of ratings and entry barriers. This structured approach reflects Beijing's acceptance that establishing globally competitive investment banks needs size, resources and operational excellence, which current regulatory limitations deny

them. China currently has 107 securities firms serving 240 million clients. These firms have catered to over 1,200 technology companies in public market listings over the past four years and arranged equity and debt financing worth more than 51 trillion yuan. In the same period, the industry's total assets increased 60% to over 15 trillion yuan, while net assets increased 40% to 3.3 trillion yuan.

Strategic Consolidation Drive

The necessity for consolidation is evident since the recent merger activity. China International Capital Corporation (CICC) announced plans to acquire two state-funded competitors, a major step towards Beijing's financial modernisation agenda focused on decreasing support from foreign institutions. According to September 2025 data, the combined total assets of CICC, Dongxing, and Cinda amount to approximately 1.01 trillion yuan (\$142 billion), making the merged entity the fourth-largest brokerage in China. The merger also represents CICC's elevated status from a commercial institution to a strategic arm of the national economic policy.

Technology Finance Priority

Technology finance has emerged as a top priority for 2025 to support new quality productivity development. In August 2025, Chinese regulators announced joint guidelines focused on expanding medium

and long-term bank financing for high-tech manufacturing sectors, including integrated circuits, advanced materials, medical equipment, and industrial software. The policy framework enables new lenient modes of financing activities like listings, bond issuance, and mergers and acquisitions. It bolsters financial firms to build custom credit and investment solutions for firms operating in critical sectors, emphasising Beijing's continued focus on self-reliance in strategic technologies. The framework targets minimal external pressures, demanding that various technological sectors accelerate development. Chiplet technology, which integrates smaller, higher-yield chips to improve performance and yield, is set to speed up. China has established its first native small chip standard, putting chiplet technology as a catalyst for running over technology gaps.



Digital Transformation Mandate

Wu delivered hints that in the coming future, China's financial firms would be increasingly adopting artificial intelligence, big data, and blockchain technology. While speaking at the Eight Member Congress of the China Securities Association, he mentioned that the current era of digital transformation is completely unavoidable and potentially transformative for Chinese capital markets. The CSRC's objective of transformation is not optional but inevitable. It requires firms to indulge in R&D to gain a competitive edge or risk being left behind. A major focus lies in practical deployment rather than theoretical planning. The regulator aims to build innovation pilot zones to function as testbeds that will enable institutions to experiment with AI trading algorithms, tokenised financial products,

and blockchain-based clearing mechanisms under state watch.

Investor Protection and Market Integrity

Wu focused that brokerages should work as gatekeepers, aiding issuers with listing and helping listed companies to run within rules while maximising shareholder value. He called for proper examining systems that prioritise investor returns and requested firms to tap household investment demand, noting that domestic households only invest 15% of their assets in stocks and funds. Technology tends to have a dual nature, especially emerging ones; on one side, they fuel growth; however, on the other, they cause vulnerabilities. As innovation speeds up, regulatory boundaries need to be erected.

The CSRC plans to strengthen monitoring frameworks, deploy real-time risk alert systems, and build emergency response structures that can absorb market shocks to a large extent.

Strategic Implications

The CSRC's extensive plan represents a fundamental restructuring of China's securities industry. Instead of just providing capital allocation for market signals, brokers can function as elements of national security, equipped with new-age technology capacity, fostering self-reliance, and demonstrating financial power globally. For overseas market participants, the reforms stand as both opportunities and challenges. Smoother governance structures and increased transparency help improve the investment environment, while tighter supervision and nationalist priorities could restrict foreign participation in strategic sectors.

The emphasis on technological self-reliance highlights that foreign financial institutions may face increasing barriers in technology-related transactions. In the future, China will foray into fintech regulation, accelerate blockchain integration, build AI-driven compliance systems, and push securities firms towards tech-driven operational models. Markets will embrace automation, transparency and data intelligence; the question is which firms will adapt to changing dynamics to survive this transformation.

Saudi Banks record 2.5% Q3 Loan Expansion in Corporate Lending, Says Alvarez & Marsal

According to the most recent KSA Banking Pulse report from international professional services firm Alvarez & Marsal (A&M), loan growth among the nation's top lenders maintained a healthy trajectory in the third quarter of 2025, providing a compelling indication of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's banking sector resilience and changing credit landscape. Corporate credit was the main driver of the 2.5% quarter-over-quarter (QoQ) increase in aggregate net loans and advances, highlighting Saudi banks' crucial role in supporting the country's economic transformation.

The study, which examines the performance of the Kingdom's ten biggest listed banks, highlights a banking industry in good financial standing, bolstered by robust profits, prudent risk management, and a continuous transition to diversified credit portfolios. The ongoing lending momentum is especially notable given the larger regional and global economic uncertainty that surrounds this performance.

Corporate loans, which increased 3.0% QoQ and greatly outpaced the 1.7% growth in the retail lending segment, were at the heart of the Q3 lending story. Approximately 59% of Saudi banks' total loan portfolios currently consist of corporate lending, which reflects a strategic focus on funding corporate capital expenditures, infrastructure development, and business activity.

This emphasis on corporate clients, which includes major corporations, mid-sized businesses, and important industries propelling Vision 2030 diversification, demonstrates Saudi banks' faith in the demand for commercial credit. Lenders seem well-positioned to support industries like energy, manufacturing, trade, and services, which are crucial to the Kingdom's long-term economic planners, with sufficient liquidity and comfortable capital buffers.

Despite a slight 2.5% increase in total loans, the complex makeup of this growth indicates a structurally balanced bank lending environment. Even though it grew more slowly than corporate loans, retail credit nevertheless contributed to the expansion of credit overall, proving that consumer demand for borrowing is unaffected by tighter macroeconomic conditions.

The report highlights a significant improvement in asset quality during the quarter, with coverage ratios increasing and non-performing loan (NPL) ratios decreasing. These advancements show that banks are expanding their credit books in a responsible manner, upholding the risk controls and careful provisioning that support long-term financial stability.

Efficiency-wise, the Saudi banks continue to improve their operations as indicated by the improvement in the cost-to-income ratio for the third consecutive quarter. This is a result of the banks' efforts in optimizing their activities with the aim of cutting costs further while maximizing revenue sources through both earnings and fees.

The net interest margins showed a small decrease due to an increase in funding costs, a trend that was seen in most markets worldwide due to the change in interest rate environments. However, banks showed a 2.8 percent increase in net income on a QoQ basis due to improvements in other operating income sources such as fees, commissions, and other financial services.

This resiliency in profitability, regardless of margin constraints, reflects the industry's ability to adapt. Banks are embracing more sources of revenue, such as fees and capital markets operations, to compensate for industry pressures in interest income. Such industry dynamics are expected to continue to facilitate earnings resilience through 2026.

Experts believe that the outcomes of Q3 are reflective of a banking system that is growing in terms of maturity and complexity. Coming together for corporate borrowing falls in line with an overall vision concerning the development of the nation's economic priorities, especially that of 'Vision 2030,' which gives importance to the development of the private sector and large-scale infrastructure development.

With a continued shift in diversification of the Saudi economy from being oil-centric to a more diversified one, the impact of commercial lending as a catalyst for banks in terms of growth is also set to emerge. With solid credit fundamentals and a keen strategy on balance-sheet management, banks in Saudi Arabia are set for a major role in the exciting developments in the Kingdom.

We welcome you this

January

to

DUBAI

Awards 2025



NOMINATIONS
NOW OPEN FOR 2026

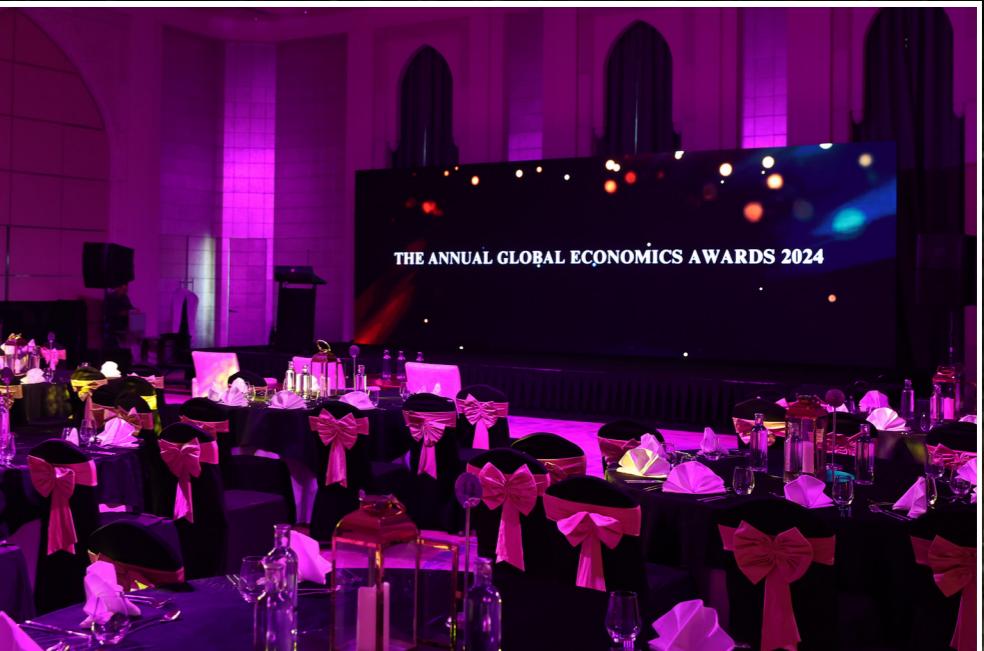
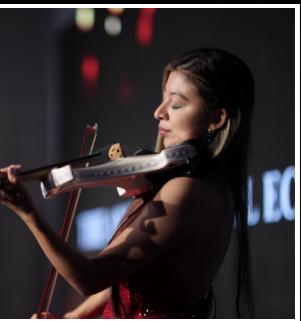
BANKING | FINANCE | INSURANCE | REAL ESTATE | ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY | UTILITY & ENERGY
| TRANSPORTATION | LEADERSHIP | HEALTHCARE | TRAVEL & HOSPITALITY

www.theglobaleconomics.com



THE ANNUAL GLOBAL ECONOMICS AWARDS - 2024

DUBAI





THE **GLOBAL**
ECONOMICS



THE GLOBAL ECONOMICS LIMITED

Devonshire House, 582 Honeypot Lane, Stanmore, London, UK, HA7 1JS

Ph : +44 20455 87611 | E-mail : info@theglobaleconomics.com

www.theglobaleconomics.com