



HM King Hamad lauds Lulu Group's contribution to national economy

TDI | Manama

His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa received Yusuff Ali, Chairman of Lulu Group, yesterday.

The HM King welcomed him and praised his role in supporting Bahrain's trade, economy, and investment sectors. He also noted the success of Lulu Group's business activities across the country.

His Majesty highlighted the company's important role in supplying food and daily goods, especially during current conditions, which ensures people have access to essential items.

HM the King also stressed the



HM King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa meets Lulu group chairman Yusuff Ali and Director of LuLu Retail Juzer Rupawala and other officials

importance of cooperation between government bodies and

the private sector to strengthen Bahrain's food security system.

Yusuff Ali thanked His Majesty for his support and en-

couragement, saying it has helped promote economic

growth and development in Bahrain.

Bahrain Strengthens Food Security and Market Stability Efforts

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His Royal Highness Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, has underscored Bahrain's firm commitment to safeguarding market stability and ensuring the continuous availability of essential goods and services.

During a meeting at Gudabiya Palace, attended by senior officials and private sector representatives, His Royal Highness stressed that proactive measures are being maintained to keep supply chains running smoothly and efficiently across the Kingdom.

The efforts align with the vision of Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, which prioritizes strengthening national food security, particularly amid evolving global conditions.

The Crown Prince highlighted the importance of close coordination between government entities and the private sector, noting that this collabora-



HRH Prince Salman meets with Lulu Group Chairman Yusuff Ali

tion plays a vital role in supporting economic resilience and meeting consumers' daily needs.

Conditions

He also commended the ongoing monitoring of market

We are committed to ensuring consistent food availability in Bahrain, working closely with authorities to maintain uninterrupted supply and stable prices

YUSUFFALI M.A.

In recent weeks, Lulu Group airlifted over 650 tonnes of groceries, fresh fruits, vegetables, and meat into Bahrain through 70 dedicated cargo flights. The operation was carried out in collaboration with Gulf Air and additional chartered air freight services, enabling the swift and efficient movement of essential goods. As part of efforts to oversee

operations and ensure supply continuity, Yusuffali M.A. visited Bahrain yesterday, reaffirming the Group's commitment to supporting national food security initiatives.

The company demonstrated strong global sourcing and supply chain resilience, delivering over 1,500 tonnes of goods through a multi-modal logistics network. This includ-



ed approximately 650 tonnes transported by air, 600 tonnes by road, and 300 tonnes by sea to ensure uninterrupted market supply.

Products were sourced from more than 40 countries, reflecting robust international procurement capabilities and ensuring a diverse range of offerings for customers.

conditions, including enhanced oversight and cooperation with businesses to ensure stable prices and consistent availability of goods.

Special recognition was given to the contributions

of Lulu Group International, which continues to play a key role in securing food and consumer supplies in Bahrain.

In response, Lulu Group Chairman Yusuf Ali expressed

appreciation for the government's continued support, reaffirming the company's commitment to strengthening food security and maintaining reliable supply across the Kingdom.

Unity Above All

Bahrain stands firm in defence of sovereignty, says Interior Minister

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Bahrain's legislative authority held a joint meeting with senior government officials to review recent

developments following Iranian attacks targeting the Kingdom and neighboring countries, and to assess measures to safeguard national security and stability.

The meeting brought together Speaker of the Parliament Ahmed bin Salman Al Musallam, Shura Council Chairman Ali bin Saleh Al Saleh, and Lieutenant General, His Excellency Shaikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, along with senior officials and members of key parliamentary



H.E. Shaikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa

committees.

During the session, lawmakers reaffirmed their full support for Bahrain's firm stance under the leadership of HM King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, and in line with the directives of HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa. They strongly condemned the attacks and stressed the importance of taking all necessary measures to protect national sovereignty.

The legislative body also praised the readiness and vigi-

lance demonstrated by the Bahrain Defence Force, the National Guard, the Ministry of Interior, and other security agencies in responding to evolving threats and maintaining public safety.

Officials highlighted the Ministry of Interior's ongoing efforts to strengthen civil protection measures, safeguard lives and property, and enhance communication with the public to ensure awareness and reassurance.

Speaking during the meet-

ing, Lieutenant General Shaikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa emphasized that the session reflects close coordination between the executive and legislative branches to address current challenges and uphold national responsibilities.

He reaffirmed that Bahrain remains firmly committed to defending its sovereignty and protecting its citizens and residents under the leadership of His Majesty the King.

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Focus on Iranian aggression impact plans, labour market reforms



His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, remotely chaired the 526th Government Executive Committee meeting. The Committee reviewed plans implemented to address the impact of the hostile Iranian aggression against the Kingdom of #Bahrain, as well as proposals aimed at developing labour market procedures.

Calls for Stronger UN-GCC Coordination

Warns of Strait of Hormuz Risks



H.E. Dr. Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani speaks at the event

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The Kingdom of Bahrain reaffirmed its strong commitment to international peace and regional security during a high-level session of the United Nations Security Council, marking the start of its presidency of the Council for April. Addressing the session, Foreign Minister, His Excellency Dr. Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, emphasized Bahrain's focus on strengthening global cooperation, tackling regional security challenges, and enhancing coordination between the United Nations and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Strong Backing

Bahrain's message reflected the support of His Majesty Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and His Royal Highness Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, underscoring the Kingdom's commitment to multilateral efforts that promote peace and stability worldwide. During the session, Bahrain welcomed the adoption of a Security Council resolution submitted on behalf of GCC countries and Jordan, condemning recent missile and drone attacks on civilian infrastructure. The statement noted that the attacks targeted vital facilities, including airports, ports, energy sites, residential areas, and diplomatic missions, resulting in casualties and damage. Bahrain stressed that regional defense systems

successfully intercepted several threats, helping to contain the situation.

Maritime Security

Highlighting strategic concerns, Bahrain warned of increasing risks to navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, a key global trade route. It cautioned that any disruption could have serious consequences for energy markets, food supplies, and international commerce.

In parallel, Bahrain welcomed a resolution adopted by the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, which condemned the attacks as violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, backed by broad international support.

UN-GCC Partnership

Bahrain called for deeper and more structured cooperation between the UN and the GCC, highlighting the Council's role in maintaining regional stability, supporting humanitarian initiatives, and advancing sustainable development.

It also proposed regular engagement, including annual consultations between the Security Council and regional organizations, to strengthen global crisis response mechanisms.

The Minister reiterated its dedication to upholding international law, advancing multilateral collaboration, and working with global partners to ensure peace, security, and sustainable development.

Call for Strong Diplomatic Action

MPs highlight Kingdom's balanced foreign policy and commitment to global peace and security



Keeping the Strait of Hormuz open to international shipping remains a top priority in Bahrain's diplomatic efforts, as we work to strengthen regional security and reduce the risk of further escalation. Through our presidency of the United Nations Security Council this April, Bahrain is committed to advancing dialogue over conflict, minimising the humanitarian impact of wars, and promoting the principles of coexistence and tolerance. At the same time, we continue to mobilise international support to condemn the recent Iranian aggression.

MP KHALID BUANAQ

Bahrain's presidency of the United Nations Security Council reflects the deep international trust the Kingdom has earned through a consistent and balanced foreign policy. At a time of regional challenges, Bahrain continues to demonstrate its diplomatic maturity, commitment to peace, and ability to engage constructively with global partners

MP HISHAM AL AWADHI

Mohammed Darwish and Hasan Barakat
TDT | Manama

Members of Bahrain's Parliament praised the Kingdom's assumption of the rotating presidency of the United Nations Security Council for April, suc-

ceeding the United States. ranian attacks on Gulf states and Jordan underscore the urgent need for a unified and decisive international response to safeguard national sovereignty and preserve regional security and stability. He added that Bahrain's leadership of the Security Council presents a strategic opportunity to amplify the Arab and Gulf voice within the United Nations, reinforce the principles of non-interference, and advance sustainable solutions to ongoing conflicts

MP HASSAN EBRAHIM

MPS described the milestone as a reflection of Bahrain's growing diplomatic stature on the international stage, highlighting the Kingdom's balanced foreign policy and commitment

Bahrain's foreign policy has earned widespread respect for its measured and balanced approach, grounded firmly in sound judgement and adherence to international law. This approach has strengthened Bahrain's position as a trusted and credible partner, capable of contributing meaningfully to efforts aimed at maintaining international peace and security. We anticipate a more active diplomatic role

MP DR AL DHAEN

to global peace and security. Our Parliament reporters, Mohammed Darwish and Hasan Barakat, reached out to MPs to gather their views on the Kingdom's new diplomatic role and expectations for the coming month.

High-Level Gulf Military Coordination Meeting Held in Bahrain

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His Excellency Field Marshal Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, Commander-in-Chief of the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF), held a meeting with senior Gulf military officials to discuss defence cooperation and joint coordination.

The meeting was attended by Lt. Gen. Dhiyab bin Saqr Al Nuaimi, Chief of Staff of the Bahrain Defence Force, along with Maj. Gen. Abdulaziz bin Ahmed Al Bulawi, Commander of the GCC Unified Military Command, and Maj. Gen. Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Ruwaisi, Commander of the Peninsula Shield Forces.

During the meeting, the Commander-in-Chief welcomed the GCC Unified Military Command Commander



H.E. Field Marshal Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa with a senior official

and the Peninsula Shield Forces Commander, praising their continued efforts in strengthening military coordination and joint defence frameworks among GCC member states.

He highlighted the importance of ongoing cooperation between Gulf armed forces, stressing that enhanced integration and coordination contribute to protecting the achievements and security of the Gulf Cooperation Council states.

Metro to Link with Bus Routes

● Ministry expects more people to use public transport in next few year

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Bahrain's planned electric urban rail system will work with bus routes and cycle paths, Transport and Telecommunications, His Excellency Minister Shaikh Abdulla bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, said, as work continues to ready the first metro route and bus use keeps rising.

In a written reply to questions from MP Dr Munir Seroor, the minister said public bus use rose by 17pc in 2023, followed by 1pc in 2024 and 3pc in 2025. Total trips last year reached 12.1 million.

The Ministry expects more people to use public transport in the next few years as it runs campaigns to encourage take-up and expands the network step by step.



MP Dr Munir Seroor

Congestion

Shaikh Abdulla said a wider mass transit network would bring in more users and ease road congestion, above all at peak hours and on holidays. He said the Bahrain Metro was a key part of that plan.

"The Bahrain Metro project is one of the main future parts of these efforts," he said. "It will help public transport carry more



Map of railway project

passengers through a network covering key parts of the kingdom and linking the airport with commercial, residential and educational areas."

He said the electric urban rail network was one of the main

schemes handled by the ministry, adding that work was still being done to ready the route for the first phase in line with the approved plan.

"This stage needs careful planning and joined-up work with all



H.E. Shaikh Abdulla bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, Minister of Transportation and Telecommunications

concerned bodies before building can begin," he said. "That is to make sure the route is prepared in the best way."

Scheme

On cost, the minister said the scheme would be delivered in partnership with the private sector, but no final figure could yet be given because the design had not been completed and market

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A wider mass transit network would bring in more users and ease road congestion, above all at peak hours and on holidays.

and economic conditions were still changing.

"The electric urban rail system will be linked with the public bus network and cycle paths," he said. "This will help cut travel times, make getting around easier for citizens and residents, and reduce reliance on private cars."

He said that would support Bahrain's shift towards a cleaner and more effective transport system.

Shura to Debate Two Key Bills on Investment Guarantees and Training

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Two major legislative proposals will be debated by Bahrain's Shura Council on Sunday, covering foreign investment rules and labour market reform.



Khalid Al Maskati

In the first proposal, a draft law requiring limited liability

companies with foreign partners to deposit an irrevocable BD30,000 bank guarantee for the lifetime of the business has been strongly opposed by the Council's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee.

The committee argued that the measure would increase business costs, discourage foreign investment, and place additional pressure on small and medium-sized enterprises. It also said the proposal lacks proportionality based on company size and sector, and does not align with Bahrain's long-term economic strategy focused on competitiveness and attracting investment.

The draft, which seeks to amend the Commercial Companies Law, will still be debated by the Shura Council despite the committee's recommendation for rejection.

Mandatory Graduate Training

In a separate proposal, lawmakers will also consider a bill requiring large companies with 50 or more employees to provide at least three months of training for university graduates nominated by the Labour Ministry.

The proposal, linked to concerns over graduate unemployment, aims to improve workplace readiness and support the transition from education to employment. It allows the Labour Minister to regulate implementation details through executive decisions.

The bill has received mixed feedback from government bodies, with the Labour Ministry and Tamkeen noting existing national training programmes, while confirming ongoing efforts to support jobseekers through structured initiatives.

Despite differing opin-



Dr Jameela Al Salman, Head of Shura Council's Services Committee

ions, the Services Committee recommended approval of the training bill in principle, highlighting its potential to strengthen workforce development and private sector participation in graduate employment.

Government urges stronger public and private partnerships in the food supply

● Ministry keen to expand and grow sector by providing necessary facilitation

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During a visit to the General Poultry Company, the Minister of Municipalities and Agriculture, His Excellency Wael bin Nasser Al Mubarak, reaffirmed that strengthening local production remains a firm national priority to support food security in Bahrain.

He emphasized the importance of continuously developing national productive sectors and improving their efficiency to increase self-sufficiency levels, ensure the sustainable availability of food supplies, and enhance the Kingdom's strategic reserves.

The remarks came during his visit to the company in the presence of the Undersecretary for Agriculture and Animal Resources, Asem Abdul Latif Abdullah. The minister



H.E. Wael bin Nasser Al Mubarak highlights private sector's key role in implementing Bahrain's national food security strategy

was received by the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the General Poultry Company, Sami Mohammed Zainal, along with board members.

Commitment

Al Mubarak highlighted the ministry's commitment to closely following the progress of national food sector companies and enabling their expansion and growth by providing necessary facilitation. He stressed that the private sector is a key partner in implementing Bahrain's national food security strategy.

He also underlined the im-



portance of coordination between government entities and the private sector, particularly at the current stage, to boost local production, diversify food sources, and ensure a stable and high-quality supply in local markets.

Shura Council Committee Affirms Constitutionality of Draft Amendments to Reform and Penal Laws

Rehab Mohammad
TDT | Manama

The Legislative and Legal Affairs Committee of the Shura Council, chaired by Her Excellency Lawyer Dalal Jassim Al Zayed, reviewed the constitutional soundness of two draft laws amending certain provisions of the Reform and Rehabilitation Institution Law issued by Law No.



Lawyer Dalal Jassim Al Zayed

(18) of 2014, submitted alongside Decree No. (60) of 2025, and the Penal Code issued by Decree-Law No. (15) of 1976, submitted alongside Decree No. (68) of 2025.

The committee also examined the constitutional and legal aspects of the annual report and audited financial statements of the Future Generations Reserve Account for the fiscal year ending December

31, 2024, following its audit by the National Audit Office. It reviewed the audited financial statements of the Unemployment Insurance Account for the same fiscal year, the State's consolidated final accounts, the report on the implementation of the 2024 state budget, and the statement of transfers from the "other estimates" account of ministries and government entities for 2024.

Bahrain to Strengthen National Role in Tourism Guiding Sector

● Draft regulatory decision will prohibit tourism establishments from working with unlicensed guides

Hasan Barakat
TDT | Manama

Citizens now lead the Kingdom's tour guiding sector, as Bahrain moves closer to introducing stricter regulations aimed at tightening oversight and formalising industry standards.

According to a response to a parliamentary question submitted by MP Dr. Mahdi Abdulaziz Al Shuwaikh, the Ministry of Tourism confirmed that Bahrain has 74 licensed tour guides. Of these, 53 are Bahrainis making up around 72 per cent of the total workforce.

The figures highlight a growing emphasis on developing local talent within a profession that plays a key role in shaping how visitors experience Bahrain's culture, heritage, and landmarks.

The Ministry of Tourism



MP Dr. Mahdi Abdulaziz Al Shuwaikh



stated that travel and tourism agencies are required to contract licensed guides when organising tours, ensuring that tourists receive accurate and professional interpretations of the Kingdom's



Bahraini tour guides shape visitors' experiences of the Kingdom's culture and heritage

historical and cultural sites.

Decision

Additionally, authorities revealed that a draft regulatory decision, prepared in coordination with the Bahrain Tourism

and Exhibitions Authority will prohibit tourism establishments from working with unlicensed guides, signalling a significant tightening of industry enforcement.

Officials said tour guid-

ing remains a central pillar of Bahrain's tourism strategy for 2022-2026, particularly in heritage and cultural tourism, where qualified guides are seen as essential in delivering authentic visitor experiences.

The evolving policy reflects Bahrain's wider ambition to strengthen its position as a regional tourism destination while ensuring that the national narrative is presented through trained and locally rooted voices.



Travel and tourism agencies are required to contract licensed guides when organising tours, ensuring that tourists receive accurate and professional interpretations of the Kingdom's historical and cultural sites.

World Autism Day: Support, Accept, Empower Inclusion Is Not Optional, It Is Essential

Neethu Vayalakkara
TDT | Manama

As the world marks World Autism Awareness Day, the United Nations has once again underscored a clear message: autistic individuals are entitled to the same fundamental rights as everyone else. Inclusion, it stresses, is not a choice but a necessity.

The message reinforces a growing global understanding that neurodiversity is part of human diversity, and that every individual—regardless of where they fall on the autism spectrum deserves access to education, employment, healthcare, and dignity.

Moving Beyond Labels

Bringing the conversation into a local context, Dr. Shaikha Rania bint Ali Al Khalifa, founder of Halla Café and the Alia Rehabilitation Center, emphasised that autism cannot be viewed through a single lens.

"They are like fingers—no two are alike," she said in a recent interview with The Daily Tribune, highlighting the wide variation in abilities, strengths, and support needs among autistic individuals.



The Daily Tribune during a recent visit to Halla Café, a space promoting inclusion and empowerment for autistic youth

Her perspective reflects a broader shift in understanding autism not as a uniform condition, but as a spectrum of diverse developmental journeys. While some individuals are capable of pursuing higher education and professional careers, others may require ongoing support—making personalised opportunities and tailored care essential.

Understanding the Scale

A 2025 field study conducted by Arabian Gulf University in collaboration with public hospitals and the Primary Health Care Department at the Ministry of Health found that autism spectrum disorder (ASD) affects

approximately 2.6% of preschool children aged between three and six years.

Behind these figures are families navigating everyday realities shaped by care, therapy, education, and inclusion.

A Parent's Perspective

For many parents, autism is not a statistic but a lived experience.

"As a parent of an autistic child, my journey has been both challenging and deeply rewarding," said long-time resident Charmy Christian.

She highlighted the growing ecosystem of support in Bahrain, pointing to increased



Charmy Christian with her son Andrew, sharing their journey of support, care, and inclusion

awareness and access to specialised education and therapy services.

"In Bahrain, I have found strong community awareness and support for children with special needs, which helps create a more understanding environment for families," she said.

She also noted the importance of institutions such as BISSE and Alia School, along with therapy centres offering ABA, occupational, and speech therapy services. Initiatives like Halla Café, which provides employment opportunities for autistic youth, were also praised as meaningful steps toward inclusion.

When Daily Life Breaks Down

Ghadeer Alkumaish
TDT | Manama

"Your response is valid, whether you feel anxious, calm, or somewhere in between," shared by Dr Mariam Alammadi, a Bahraini psychologist and mental health specialist, as she spoke about the emotional impact of the current crisis on residents across the Kingdom.

In an exclusive interview with The Daily Tribune, Dr Alammadi explained that the situation has created a quiet but constant pressure on people's mental health, even for those who are not directly affected.

"The current situation in the Gulf is creating a constant sense of uncertainty," she told The Daily Tribune. "Even if someone is not directly affected, exposure to news, conversations, and anticipation of what might happen next keeps the body in a state of alert."

According to Dr Alammadi, this constant alertness can lead to difficulty sleeping, irritability, overthinking, and feeling emotionally drained without a clear reason.

Reaction

One of the most noticeable reactions, she said, is the difference in how people are responding. "Some people feel intense fear and avoid leaving their homes because their brain is trying to protect them by reducing perceived risk," she said. "Others may seem completely unaffected, but that does not always mean they are fine. Sometimes it



Dr Mariam Alammadi

is emotional shutdown, and sometimes it is resilience."

"Fear is a normal and necessary response to danger," Dr Alammadi said. "Anxiety becomes a problem when that fear continues even when there is no immediate threat, or when it starts interfering with daily life. Emotional numbness is when someone feels disconnected or flat because the mind is overwhelmed."

Another major concern, she said, is the disruption of daily routines.

"When daily routines are disrupted, it affects mental stability more than people realise," she told TDT. "Routine creates a sense of predictability, and without it, the brain struggles to feel grounded." Changes in sleep patterns, constant checking of news, loss of appetite, and avoiding normal activities are all signs that the nervous system is under strain.

Intensity

"The goal is not to eliminate fear but to reduce its intensity," she said. "Creating a simple routine, limiting exposure to constant news, and staying connected to safe people can help the body feel calmer again." Dr Alammadi believes small steps can make a real difference.

Three-year jail term upheld for tax evasion

Rehab Mohammad
TDT | Manama

A court in Bahrain has rejected an appeal filed by a

defendant convicted in a Value Added Tax (VAT) evasion case, ruling it as if it had never been submitted due to his failure to appear before the court.

The First High Criminal Court had previously sentenced the defendant to three years in prison and ordered him to pay 41,327 dinars, representing the

VAT amount he evaded, along with an equivalent fine.

The case involved charges that the defendant deliberately failed to pay VAT.

Oil climbs, stocks slip as Trump dashes hopes of quick end of war

● **Brent crude jumps eight percent to above \$109**

AFP | London

Oil surged and stocks fell yesterday after Donald Trump threatened more heavy strikes on Iran and offered no solution to reopening the key Strait of Hormuz.

But stocks clawed back some of their losses and oil receded from its highs ahead of a three-day weekend that will allow investors to catch their breaths as they await for new developments in the Middle East war.

Investors had initially found little solace in the US president's address to the nation, in which he again urged countries de-

pendent on the waterway for energy supplies to reopen it themselves.

"Trump didn't offer a clear path to a relatively quick resolution to the Iran war or a reopening of the Strait of Hormuz," said Charles Schwab analyst Joe Mazzola.

After being down more than one percent, European markets closed mixed with London higher, and Paris and Frankfurt slightly lower.

New York shares had opened sharply lower but by late morning had clawed back most of their losses.

Signs of de-escalation had buoyed markets in recent sessions, but Trump's late Wednesday televised speech dashed those hopes.

"Trump's much anticipated address delivered little to nothing new on potential timelines



A man looks at a monitor at the Indonesia Stock Exchange building in Jakarta

or conditions for ending hostilities against Iran," said Deutsche Bank managing director Jim Reid. "There was no signal of the US seeking an imminent off-ramp out of the war."

International oil benchmark,

Brent North Sea crude, which had fallen below \$100 a barrel ahead of Trump's speech, went on to rally around eight percent to above \$109 per barrel, but had retreated to about \$106 by late afternoon in Europe.



Brent crude had fallen below \$100 a barrel ahead of Trump's speech, but then rallied around eight percent to above \$109 after the address dashed hopes of any imminent de-escalation in the war

London was one of the few markets to rise, finishing 0.6 percent higher, boosted by oil companies BP and Shell rising

almost three percent.

Paris dropped about half a percent, even as oil giant TotalEnergies was up almost three percent on reports it made a one billion dollar profit in March trading petroleum products.

Most markets in Europe and the United States are closed Friday for Good Friday.

Earlier in the day, Tokyo closed down more than two percent and Hong Kong and Shanghai also fell.

World Bank Managing Director Paschal Donohoe said he was fearful about the global economic impact of the crisis.

"We are extremely concerned regarding the effect that this will have on inflation, on jobs and on food security," he told AFP as the Bank partners with the International Monetary Fund and International Energy Agency to coordinate aid responses.

Amazon in talks to buy \$9bn satellite telecoms group: report

AFP | Washington

Amazon is in talks to buy US satellite telecoms group Globalstar, seeking to boost its bid to rival Elon Musk's Starlink, the Financial Times reported yesterday.

Citing people familiar with the matter, the British newspaper said the two companies were hammering out the more complex points of the acquisition deal.

It comes after Musk's SpaceX, which operates the Starlink satellite internet service, filed papers for what could be the largest-ever public stock offering.

Starlink says it operates more than 10,000 satellites, offering connectivity to people on the ground.

US tech and e-commerce giant Amazon, founded by billionaire Jeff Bezos, is building a competing network called Amazon Leo, which has more than 200



A technician tests a second-generation Globalstar satellites being built at the Thales Alenia Space offices in Rome (file photo)

satellites in orbit.

Globalstar, whose market value is about \$9 billion, has its own, smaller "low Earth orbit" satellite constellation.

The newspaper said one factor complicating the lengthy talks was the fact that Apple

holds a 20 percent stake in Globalstar, meaning that Amazon and Apple also had to negotiate a deal.

AFP has contacted Amazon, Globalstar and Apple for comment.

The Financial Times report

said no deal had been struck and discussions could still collapse.

Globalstar's share price has soared nearly 230 percent over the past year.

In October, Bloomberg reported that the company was exploring a potential sale with several potential buyers including SpaceX.

Globalstar told the Financial Times it "does not comment on industry speculation or rumours," while Amazon declined to respond.

On Wednesday, a source familiar with the matter confirmed SpaceX's confidential IPO filing to AFP, which would reportedly put the rocket and satellite builder on track to list its shares by July.

Media reports have said the SpaceX IPO could be valued at a whopping \$75 billion or more. SpaceX did not respond to a request for comment.

India says defence exports hit 'all-time high' of \$4 bn

AFP | New Delhi

India's defence exports "skyrocketed" to an all-time high of more than \$4 billion in the last fiscal year, as it looks to boost its arms manufacturing sector, the government said yesterday.

The figures mark a rise of more than 60 percent from 2024, the defence ministry said, and provide a shot in the arm for the South Asian country, which is determined to recast itself as a major producer and exporter of weapons.

"India is marching ahead towards becoming a global defence manufacturing hub," the ministry quoted Defence Minister Rajnath Singh as saying.

"This big jump... in defence exports reflects the growing global trust in India's indige-

nous capabilities and advanced manufacturing strength," Singh said, adding that it had hit an "all-time high" in the fiscal year 2025-26 of 38,424 billion rupees (\$4.15 billion).

Government defence companies produced nearly 55 percent of the exports, with the rest made by private companies.

"This milestone showcases the power of a collaborative and self-reliant defence ecosystem," Singh said.

India exports defence equipment to more than 100 countries, with the United States, France and Armenia among the top customers, according to the defence ministry.

Shipments range from missiles, boats and artillery to radar systems, rocket launchers and electronic components.

Top World Bank official 'extremely concerned' by fallout of Iran war

AFP | Paris

The World Bank is "extremely concerned" about the effect the war on Iran will have on inflation, jobs and food security, and is in talks with member states on how to address immediate needs in the crisis, a top official told AFP on Wednesday.

Managing Director Paschal Donohoe's comments came as his organization announced a new partnership with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and International Energy Agency (IEA) to coordinate aid responses to the war.

Donohoe flagged that countries in Asia and Africa were particularly vulnerable to the energy, price and supply-side shocks of the crisis.

"At the moment, we are consulting with many governments and countries in relation to what their needs will be, and I would anticipate within the next number of weeks that will become far

clearer," Donohoe said.

The United States and Israel launched strikes on Iran on February 28, igniting a war that has engulfed the Middle East, snarled key supply chains and sent energy prices soaring.

The World Bank offers development assistance and immediate budgetary support to member nations in the form of loans and technical assistance.

Donohoe said the organization was currently offering both forms of support in talks with countries in need.

"We are extremely concerned regarding the effect that this will have on inflation, on jobs and on food security," he said. "That is why we will put in place responses that have a financing element and a policy element that can and will be of support."

Discussions regarding financial options -- which could take the form of immediate loans -- were "underway," but were not expected to conclude for "a



Paschal Donohoe, World Bank's chief knowledge officer and managing director

number of weeks."

On the policy advice front, Donohoe expected talks to wrap up "in a few days' time."

Risks go beyond energy

Since the start of the war, Tehran has virtually blocked the key

Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly a fifth of the world's crude oil and liquefied natural gas -- and one-third of its fertilizers -- pass.

Much of that is bound for Asian countries, which have seen energy flows abruptly dry

up, as prices spike and supplies shrink.

Several countries -- including top World Bank borrowers Pakistan, Indonesia and Bangladesh -- have implemented widespread fuel-saving measures to address the crisis, saving what they have for use in key industries and sectors.

Vulnerable countries in Asia and Africa have flagged several issues of concern to the bank.

"They're calling out the income shock that will be created due to rising prices, what that will mean for households and businesses," said Donohoe.

In addition to the shock of lower energy availability -- which can lead to a drop in economic output -- there are also concerns about food security related to fertilizer supply chains being frozen.

Earlier this week, the IMF flagged that the war could have a serious effect on low-income countries if food prices rise sig-

nificantly.

"People in low-income countries are most at risk when prices rise because food accounts for about 36 percent of consumption on average, compared with 20 percent in emerging market economies and nine percent in advanced economies," said an IMF report.

In Africa, South Asia and the Middle East, the IMF warned that a number of countries were already struggling with meager foreign reserves and "limited market access," making them vulnerable to "dangerous" debt shocks.

Donohoe, of the World Bank, said the lender was "well positioned to assist countries in their economic response" and was engaged in "intense" talks with member states.

"While this challenge is going to begin in energy, it really has the ability to have consequences that go across entire economies," he said.

Argentina expels Iranian envoy in row over 'terrorist' label

AFP | Washington

Argentina yesterday expelled Tehran's diplomatic envoy following a war of words with the government of President Javier Milei, which has cheered the US-Israeli strikes on Iran.

Iranian charge d'affaires Mohsen Soltani Tehrani was given 48 hours to leave the country after what Argentina's foreign ministry called "false, offensive and baseless accusations" by Tehran against the South American country.

The expulsion came two days after Argentina, led by Milei who is a top ally of US President Donald Trump and of Israel, designated Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps a "terrorist organization."

Iran's foreign ministry accused Argentina in a statement of "siding with the aggressors" in a "clear violation" of international law.

Argentina's foreign ministry on Thursday cited that statement and what it called Iran's "persistent refusal" to cooperate with the probe into a 1994 bombing in Buenos Aires for expelling the Iranian diplomat.



First responders search for survivors at the site of an overnight Israeli airstrike that targeted a house in the southern Lebanese village of Zibdine

Trump says victory near

Rising oil prices and falling approval ratings shadow Trump's latest wartime address

AFP | Washington

President Donald Trump insisted that the United States was nearing victory in Iran as he laid out his case more than a month into a war that has sent his approval rating tumbling.

In an evening speech from the White House, Trump broke little new ground on how the war would end and vowed two to three weeks further of "extremely hard" strikes against Iran.

"We are going to finish the job, and we're going to finish it very fast. We're getting very close," he said in remarks that largely rehearsed his daily streams of social-media postings and rapid media interviews.

With his approval rating hitting new lows and Americans



US Vice President JD Vance watches as US President Donald Trump gestures after speaking at a televised address

feeling a pinch from soaring oil prices, Trump offered a retroactive explanation on why he joined Israel in the attack launched on

February 28.

Standing before American flags, Trump delivered the type of speech most presidents would

offer at the start of a conflict. Trump on February 28 instead released a video in which he was wearing a baseball cap and no tie.

In his Wednesday address, Trump said the United States was aiming to crush Iran's military, end the clerical state's support for regional armed groups and prevent it from obtaining a nuclear bomb -- a prospect that the UN nuclear watchdog and many observers say was not imminent.

"I'm pleased to say that these core strategic objectives are nearing completion," Trump said in a 19-minute speech.

Gasoline prices in the United States have surged above \$4 a gallon (over \$1 a liter) for the first time in years, while consumer confidence has weakened, dragging down Trump's already

fragile standing on the economy. Oil prices again surged in early trading yesterday and share prices tumbled, with Trump's speech dashing hopes he would call a quick end to the war.

Democratic US Senator Chris Murphy said: "Anyone watching that speech has no idea whether Trump is escalating or deescalating the war with Iran."

"But to be fair, neither does he so," Murphy wrote on X.

Trump again threatened that if Iran does not reach a negotiated settlement with him, the United States would "hit each and every one of their electric generating plants."

"Over the next two to three weeks, we are going to bring them back to the Stone Ages, where they belong," Trump said.

Blasts over Jerusalem

AFP | Jerusalem

Several blasts sounded in Jerusalem, AFP journalists said, after the military issued an alert over incoming Iranian missiles.

At least four blasts were heard as sirens rang out in the city, and the military warned residents to take cover after it "identified missiles launched from Iran toward the territory of the State of Israel".

UAE says air defences responding to missiles, drones

AFP | Dubai

Emirati air defences were responding to missile and drone "threats" yesterday, the United Arab Emirates' defence ministry said.

"UAE air defences... are actively engaging with missiles and UAV threats," the ministry said in a post on X, providing no details about where the projectiles had originated.

Macron says military operation to 'liberate' Strait of Hormuz 'unrealistic'

AFP | Seoul

French President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday that a military operation to liberate the Strait of Hormuz is "unrealistic", expressing frustration at US President Donald Trump's alternating statements on the Iran war.

"There are those who advocate for the liberation of the Strait of Hormuz by force through a military operation, a position sometimes expressed

by the United States," Macron said in South Korea.

"I say sometimes because it has varied, it is never the option we have chosen and we consider it unrealistic," he said.

"It is unrealistic because it would take an inordinate amount of time and would expose anyone crossing the strait to coastal threats from the (Iranian) Revolutionary Guards, who possess significant resources, as well as ballistic missiles, (and) a host of other risks."

European nations say Israel, Hezbollah fighting 'must cease'

AFP | Madrid

Eighteen European countries yesterday urged Israel and Hezbollah to stop fighting as their latest conflict reached one month and with fears over Israeli plans to control part of southern Lebanon post-war.

"Israeli military operations in Lebanon and Hezbollah's attacks must cease," the foreign ministers of the countries

including Italy, Spain, Belgium, Poland and Ireland said in a joint statement.

"We urge Israel to fully respect Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and call on all parties, both Hezbollah and Israel, to halt military action," the statement said.

Lebanese authorities say the hostilities have so far killed more than 1,200 people and

displaced more than one million others.

The European ministers said they were "appalled by the dramatic situation" in Lebanon and called for an end to "unjustified and unacceptable" attacks on civilian targets such as healthcare personnel, aid workers and journalists.

They pledged to continue providing humanitarian relief for the Lebanese population.

1922

Joseph Stalin is appointed General Secretary of the Russian Communist Party by an ailing Vladimir Lenin



1948

US President Harry Truman signs the Marshall Plan to rebuild war-torn Western Europe after World War II, granting an initial \$5 billion in aid to 16 European countries

1973

First mobile phone call is made in downtown Manhattan, NY, by Motorola employee Martin Cooper to Bell Labs headquarters in New Jersey

2016

Panama Papers are published - 11.5 million confidential documents from offshore law firm Mossack Fonseca expose widespread illegal activities



Members of the Druze community assess the damage in a building that was hit overnight by a rocket fired from Lebanon, in the city of Shefa-Amr, or Shefar'am, east of Haifa in northern Israel

Gulf states seek UN mandate for force to protect Hormuz

AFP | United Nations

The secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) called yesterday for the UN Security Council to authorize the use of force to protect the Strait of Hormuz from Iranian attacks.

Iran has placed a stranglehold on the key shipping lane -- threatening fuel supplies and buckling

the global economy -- in retaliation to US-Israeli strikes that triggered the month-old Middle East war.

"Iran has closed the Strait of Hormuz, prevented commercial vessels and oil tankers from transiting, and imposed conditions on some to pass through the Strait," said Jassem al-Budaiwi, head of the GCC.

He spoke in New York at the

first Security Council meeting on cooperation with the GCC, which comprises Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman.

"We call upon the Security Council to assume its full responsibility and take all necessary measures to protect maritime routes and ensure the safe continuation of international navigation," al-Budaiwi said.

British foreign minister Yvette Cooper on Thursday said some 40 countries who joined a virtual meeting on the Strait of Hormuz crisis had demanded "the immediate and unconditional reopening" of the vital shipping route. "Iran is trying to hold the global economy hostage in the Strait of Hormuz. They must not prevail. To that effect, partners today called for the immediate and unconditional reopening of the Strait and respect for the fundamental principles of freedom of navigation and the law of the sea," Cooper said in a statement after the talks.

Putin, Saudi prince seek more efforts to end Mideast war

AFP | Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday called for intensifying political and diplomatic efforts to end the Middle East war during a phone call with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

"Both sides emphasised the need for a rapid cessation of hostilities and the intensification of political and diplomatic efforts to achieve a long-term settlement of the conflict," the Kremlin said in a readout of the call.

Putin and Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler also discussed "problems

with energy production and transportation resulting from the crisis are negatively impacting global energy security."

They stressed "the importance of joint work underway with Russia and Saudi Arabia in the "OPEC+" format to stabilise the global oil market."

Trump sacks attorney general, replaces with ex-personal lawyer



US Attorney General Pam Bondi arrives to listen to US President Donald Trump's televised address

AFP | Washington

US President Donald Trump fired Attorney General Pam Bondi on Thursday and named his former personal lawyer to serve as the acting chief of the Justice Department.

The move, which the Republican president announced in a social media post, comes amid criticism of Bondi's handling of the Epstein files and her failure to successfully prosecute several perceived Trump political foes.

"Pam Bondi is a Great American Patriot and a loyal friend, who faithfully served as my Attorney General over the past year," Trump said on Truth Social. "Pam did a tremendous job overseeing a massive crackdown in Crime across our Country."

Bondi "will be transitioning to a much needed and important new job in the private sector to be announced at a date in the near future," the president said, and will be replaced on an interim basis by Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche.

Bondi has been a staunch ally of the president but has drawn fire from some Trump supporters for her handling of the release of the Justice Department files on convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, who died in a New York jail cell in 2019 while awaiting trial for sex trafficking.

The Epstein affair has been a major political liability for Trump, who was a longtime friend of the disgraced financier.

Bondi has also reportedly drawn Trump's ire by falling short with efforts to prosecute perceived Trump opponents such as former FBI director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James.

According to The New York Times, Trump may name former Republican congressman Lee Zeldin, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), to be the next attorney general.

In the meantime, the post will be filled by Blanche, who was one of the personal lawyers who defended Trump

in the multiple criminal cases he faced after he left the White House in 2021.

Bondi's ouster comes nearly a month after Trump fired Kristi Noem as the head of the Department of Homeland Security.

'Good riddance'

Democratic lawmakers welcomed Bondi's firing.

"Good riddance," said Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts.

"Under Attorney General Pam Bondi, the Department of Justice became a cesspool of corruption," Warren said. "Bondi will be remembered for blocking the release of the Epstein files (and) weaponizing the DOJ to go after Trump's political opponents."

Senator Mark Warner of Virginia said Bondi's "botched handling of the Epstein files" had "denied victims transparency and further undermined trust in our justice system."

"Americans deserve a Justice Department that is actually focused on delivering justice, not on serving a president's agenda of personal and political self-interest," Warner said.

Bondi joined Trump's legal team during his first term impeachment trial, in which he was alleged to have pressured Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to find political dirt on Democrat Joe Biden.

Trump was impeached by the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives but acquitted by the Republican-majority Senate.

Bondi helped push Trump's false claims of voter fraud after he lost the 2020 election to Biden.

She made television appearances on behalf of Trump and pushed to delegitimize vote counting in battleground states as part of the push by the former president to overturn the results of the vote.

Bondi also criticized the criminal cases brought against Trump, appearing in solidarity at his New York trial, where he was convicted of falsifying business records to cover up hush money payments to a porn star.



TOP
4
TWEETS

01



Good call yesterday with @Keir_Starmer. We discussed the situation in the Middle East and the Strait of Hormuz. Iran's actions are putting global economic stability at risk. We will work with our partners to ensure freedom of navigation can resume as soon as possible. We also discussed the upcoming EU-UK Summit. A key moment to deliver on last year's commitments and further strengthen our partnership.

@vonderleyen

02



I extend my warmest wishes to all who are marking #Passover, a holiday celebrating the blessing of freedom. Amid these times of crises, may this be an opportunity to reflect and renew our commitment to peace, cooperation and solidarity.

@antonioguterres

03



Wishing everyone celebrating Passover peace, good health, and joy for you and your loved ones.

@DrTedros

04



Met the leaders of the Government of Lebanon. The message was clear: civilians are paying the price of escalation -- over a million displaced, lives upended, critical infrastructure damaged. The forces that keep Lebanon together must be greater than those pulling it apart.

@UNReliefChief

Disclaimer: (Views expressed by columnists are personal and need not necessarily reflect our editorial stances)

Artemis astronauts await green light for lunar orbit

Orion crew prepares for Moon journey as NASA reviews spacecraft performance

● NASA reviews mission status

● Artemis crew in high Earth orbit

● Minor issues reported, mostly resolved

AFP | Washington

The four Artemis astronauts circling Earth were awaiting the green light from NASA yesterday to head for the Moon and carry out the first crewed lunar flyby in more than 50 years.

The enormous orange-and-white Space Launch System (SLS) rocket blasted off flawlessly from Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Wednesday for the long-anticipated journey around the Moon.

The astronauts -- Americans Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch and Canadian Jeremy Hansen -- spent their first hours in space performing checks and troubleshooting minor problems on their Orion capsule -- including a communications issue and a malfunctioning toilet.

Before getting a few hours of sleep, they ignited the spacecraft's main engine to place it in a high Earth orbit, the US space

50
years have passed since the last crewed mission ventured toward the Moon, a streak this diverse team of four is set to break once they receive their final clearance

agency said.

NASA's mission management team was set to meet later yesterday to perform an assessment of the spacecraft's performance and decide whether to give the go-ahead for the astronauts to begin their three-day voyage toward the Moon.

The "go/no go" decision for the translunar injection burn (TLI) is scheduled for 7:07 pm Eastern Time (2307 GMT).

Assuming everything checks out, the TLI that will send the astronauts on their way is scheduled for 25 minutes later.

Orion is to loop around the Moon as part of the 10-day Artemis 2 mission aimed at paving the way for a Moon landing in 2028.

'Brave astronauts'

US President Donald Trump praised "our brave astronauts" at the top of his televised address on Wednesday evening on the war against Iran, calling the launch "quite something."



The Artemis II crewed lunar mission lifts off from Pad 39B at Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida

Before their rest period, the astronauts performed various checks to ensure the reliability and safety of a spacecraft that has never carried humans before.

NASA said they carried out "proximity operations," which tested how the Orion capsule can move relative to another spacecraft, and maneuvers that mimic what would be needed to dock with a lunar lander.

Among the issues they identi-

fied was a "controller issue with the toilet when they spun it up," said Amit Kshatriya, NASA's associate administrator.

NASA head Jared Isaacman said a communications problem had been resolved and the astronauts were "in great spirits."

"NASA is back in the business of sending people to the Moon," he said.

The mission marks a series of historic accomplishments: sending the first person of color,

the first woman and the first non-American on a lunar mission.

If all proceeds smoothly, the astronauts will set a record by venturing farther from Earth than any human before.

It is also the inaugural crewed flight of SLS, NASA's new lunar rocket.

SLS is designed to allow the United States to repeatedly return to the Moon with the goal of establishing a permanent base



Before getting a few hours of sleep, the astronauts ignited Orion's main engine to place the capsule in a high Earth orbit, performing critical checks including proximity operations that mimicked docking with a future lunar lander

that will offer a platform for further exploration.

It was meant to take off as early as February after years of delays and massive cost overruns.

But repeated setbacks stalled it and even necessitated rolling the rocket back to its hangar for repairs.

Compete with China

The current era of American lunar investment has frequently been portrayed as an effort to compete with China, which aims to land humans on the Moon by 2030.

During a post-launch briefing, Isaacman said competition was "a great way to mobilize the resources of a nation."

Major earthquake in Indonesia kills one, sparks panic

AFP | Manado

A major 7.4-magnitude quake struck off the coast of eastern Indonesia yesterday, killing one person, damaging buildings and sending people running into the streets in panic.

The early-morning tremor in the Molucca Sea between the Sulawesi and Maluku island groups triggered waves up to 75 centimetres (2.5 feet) high in places and prompted a tsunami warning that was subsequently lifted.

"I didn't know what to do. I was just trying to save my family," street food vendor Siti Rohayati, 58, told AFP of the moment the quake hit during the breakfast rush in Manado in North Sulawesi province.

"All that mattered was getting my children away safely. I pushed all three of them and told them: 'Run!'"

One person was killed when a building collapsed in Manado, the region's search and rescue chief George Leo Mercy Randang told AFP.

The victim was "buried under the rubble", he said.

Agency spokesman Nuriadin Gumeleng later said three peo-



Police officers look at a building of the North Sumatra's National Sports Committee of Indonesia (KONI) damaged following a severe 7.4-magnitude offshore quake in Manado, North Sulawesi

ple in Manado suffered light injuries.

The US Geological Survey (USGS) said the tremor hit at a shallow depth of 35 kilometres (22 miles).

The Hawaii-based Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC)

initially said hazardous tsunami waves were possible within 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) of the epicentre along the coasts of Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia.

Elevated waves were observed in nine locations in North Malu-

ku, North Sulawesi and Gorontalo provinces, with the highest hitting 75 centimetres in North Minahasa, according to Indonesia's BMKG geological agency.

The PTWC lifted its warning just over two hours after the tremor, saying the tsunami

threat "has now passed".

Budi Nurgianto, a 42-year-old resident of Ternate in North Maluku province, said he was inside his house when the tremor struck, sending people outside in terror.

"The quake was felt strongly. I heard it first from the walls of the house that shook," he said.

"When I went outside, there were many people outside. They were panicked. The quake was felt (for) quite long, more than a minute.

"I even saw some people leaving their house without having finished their shower."

Aftershocks

Dozens of aftershocks rippled through the area after the main quake, Teuku Faisal Fathani, the head of the geological agency, told journalists in the capital Jakarta.

One of them had a magnitude of 5.9, USGS data showed. An AFP journalist in Manado, about 300 kilometres west of Ternate by sea, said the shaking woke him and others in the city of some 450,000 people.

"I immediately woke up and left my house. People (were) immediately scrambling outside.

There is a school and the pupils rushed outside," he said.

The shaking persisted for "quite long" but he did not see "significant damage", he added.

The PTWC had initially warned that tsunami waves of up to one metre were possible for parts of Indonesia, and smaller ones were possible for the Philippines, Malaysia, Japan, Taiwan, Guam and Palau.

The Japan Meteorological Agency said it expected "slight changes" in the sea level along the Pacific coast from northern Hokkaido to southern Okinawa, but has not issued any warnings.

The earthquake centres of the Philippines and Malaysia also did not issue tsunami alerts.

Indonesia and neighbouring countries experience frequent earthquakes due to their location in the Pacific "Ring of Fire" -- an arc of intense seismic activity where tectonic plates collide that stretches from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin.

A magnitude-9.1 quake struck the westernmost Aceh province in 2004, causing a tsunami and killing more than 170,000 people in Indonesia.

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India emerges as global auto components hub amid supply chain shift: Avendus Report

TDI | Agencies

India's auto components industry is poised for structural growth as global supply chains realign, with process-led manufacturers expected to emerge as key beneficiaries, according to a report by Avendus.

The report highlighted that the global automotive sector is undergoing a "structural reset," driven by electrification, cost pressures, and geopolitical shifts, which is prompting original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) to rethink sourcing strategies. "Cost optimization is becoming a strategic imperative... setting in motion a broader realignment of the auto components value chain," it noted.

India is emerging as a key beneficiary of this transformation. The country has built a competitive manufacturing ecosystem over the past three decades and is now being seen as a preferred global sourcing hub. The report stated that "India today offers a compelling combination of scale, cost competitiveness and a deeply entrenched supplier ecosystem," making it an attractive destination for global OEMs seeking to diversify away from concentrated geographies such as China.

The domestic auto components industry has already crossed USD 80 billion in turnover, growing at over 10 per cent CAGR between FY20 and FY25, and contributes significantly to manufacturing GDP.



A key driver of future growth will be metal-forming processes, which remain central to both internal combustion engine (ICE) and electric vehicle (EV) platforms. "While product architecture may change with electrification, these legacy metal-forming processes remain indispensable to both ICE and EV platforms," the report said.

The domestic metal-forming market alone is estimated at around USD 40 billion in FY25, with strong demand across passenger and commercial vehicles.

Looking ahead, the combined domestic and export market for metal-forming components is projected to grow from USD 53 billion in FY25 to USD 94 billion by FY30, at an annual growth rate of around 12 per cent.

Exports are expected to be a major growth lever, supported

by global sourcing shifts. "OEMs and Tier-1s in the US and Europe are relocating sourcing to lower-cost, higher-scale markets, making India a preferred alternative," the report said.

Additionally, India's dual advantage in serving both ICE and EV segments is expected to provide long-term stability. The report noted that the country is well positioned to capture demand in conventional components while also scaling up EV-related manufacturing, creating a "balanced, transition resilient export model."

Overall, the report underscored that process-focused manufacturers, backed by strong capabilities and export orientation, are likely to capture a disproportionate share of the opportunity as the global automotive industry undergoes transformation.

Macron says Trump marriage jibe does not 'merit response'

● Trump remarks include imitation of French accent

● Comments about Brigitte Macron spark outrage

AFP | Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday Donald Trump's mocking comments about his marriage did not merit a response, calling them "neither elegant nor up to standard"

But after days of tensions over US-Israeli strikes on Iran and over NATO, an apparently irritated Macron launched a broadside of his own, saying "there is too much talk" and "this is not a show".

On Wednesday, Trump made fun of the French president and his wife at a private lunch as he lambasted NATO allies for not joining the war against Iran. The US president imitated a French accent and said that Macron's wife "treats him extremely badly" and that Macron was still "recovering from the right to the jaw".

On a visit to Seoul, Macron,



Trump's mockery referred to a 2025 video that appeared to show Brigitte Macron shoving her husband's face. Macron previously dismissed the incident as a "disinformation campaign," saying they were "joking as we often do."

who was accompanied by his wife Brigitte, said Trump's comments were "neither elegant nor up to standard".

"So I am not going to respond to them -- they do not merit a response," Macron told reporters.

The focus instead should be on "work towards de-escalation" in the Middle East and a ceasefire, Macron said.

"There is too much talk, and it's all over the place," the French president said, apparently referring to numerous policy U-turns by Trump.

"We all need stability, calm,



France's President Emmanuel Macron (R) and his wife Brigitte Macron pay tribute at a memorial ceremony for the victims of the 2008 terrorist attacks, at the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel in Mumbai (file photo)

a return to peace -- this isn't a show!" Macron said.

'Mocking others'

Trump's latest broadside against Macron angered French politicians.

"Honestly, it's not up to par," said Yael Braun-Pivet, president

of France's lower house of parliament.

"We are currently discussing the future of the world. Right now in Iran, this is having consequences for the lives of millions of people, people are dying on the battlefield, and we have a president who is laughing, who

is mocking others," she told France 24.

Even Manuel Bompard, coordinator of the hard-left France Unbowed party who is often critical of the president, rushed to Macron's defence.

"You are aware of the extent of my disagreements with the president, but for Donald Trump to speak to him like that and to speak of his wife in such a manner -- I find that absolutely unacceptable," Bompard told broadcaster BFMTV.

Conservative French daily Le Figaro said: "Another controversial outburst from Donald Trump."

'Still recovering'

Trump mocked Macron and the French in a video posted briefly on the White House YouTube channel before access was blocked.

"We didn't need them, but I asked anyway," Trump said.

"I call up France, Macron -- whose wife treats him extremely badly. Still recovering from the right to the jaw," Trump said.

The US president was referring to a May 2025 news video that appeared to show Brigitte Macron shoving the French president's face on a trip to Vietnam, which Macron later rejected as part of a disinformation

campaign.

At the time Macron denied any "domestic dispute" with his wife, saying they were "joking as we often do".

"And I said, 'Emmanuel, we'd love to have some help in the Gulf even though we're setting records on knocking out bad people and knocking out ballistic missiles. We'd love to have some help. If you could, could you please send ships immediately,'" Trump continued.

He then mimics a French accent to give Macron's alleged answer: "No no no, we cannot do that, Donald. We can do that after the war is won," he said.

"I said, 'No no, I don't need after the war is won Emmanuel,'" Trump said.

"So I learned about NATO -- NATO won't be there if we ever have the big one, you know what I mean by the big one," Trump said, without elaborating.

He also branded NATO a "paper tiger", the latest salvo by Trump and his top officials against the transatlantic alliance since he returned to the White House last year.

On Tuesday, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the United States "is going to have to re-examine" its relationship with NATO once the war against Iran has concluded.

England's Brook, Bethell warned after New Zealand nightclub incident



England's Harry Brook (sitting) and Jacob Bethell (left) during a break in play against New Zealand

AFP | London

England white-ball captain Harry Brook and team-mate Jacob Bethell have been warned about their future conduct after a nightclub incident on the pre-Ashes tour of New Zealand last year.

The Cricket Regulator -- a body independent of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) responsible for enforcing regulations -- on Wednesday issued cautions to Brook and Bethell for breaching player conduct rules.

Brook claimed originally that he was on his own when he got involved in an altercation with a bouncer at a Wellington nightclub on the eve of a one-day international on November 1, an incident that was only revealed two months later.

Brook was fined £30,000 (\$40,000) by the ECB and given

a final warning.

He later admitted that Bethell and fast bowler Josh Tongue had been present, explaining he had lied to try to protect his team-mates and publicly apologised.

Brook and Bethell both played in the match the next day, which England lost by two wickets to complete a 3-0 series defeat.

No action was taken against Tongue, who was not in the one-day international squad at the time. The Regulator "issued a caution notice to Harry Brook and Jacob Bethell in relation to their conduct", said a statement.

It added that both players had accepted they were in breach of the professional conduct regulations.

Many observers believed Brook was lucky to retain the captaincy for the T20 World Cup, where he led England to the semi-finals before losing to India in Mumbai.

Tuchel casts doubt on Foden's World Cup chances

● Foden fails to impress in forward role

● Tuchel questions player's recent lack of rhythm

● Manchester City reduced Foden's playing minutes recently

● Stiff competition arises from Palmer and Bellingham

● England remains winless against top-20 ranked teams

AFP | London

Thomas Tuchel said Phil Foden's place in England's World Cup squad is "not a guarantee" after failing once more to hit peak form for the Three Lions. Foden struggled in an unfamiliar role up front in the absence of Harry Kane in England's 1-0 friendly defeat to Japan on Tuesday.

After a bright start to the season, the 25-year-old has also slipped down the pecking order for Pep Guardiola at Manchester City in recent weeks.

"He tried everything. I would say he was excellent in camp but, yeah, he struggles to show it on the pitch," said Tuchel.



England's head coach Thomas Tuchel (R) consoles England's midfielder Phil Foden (C) as he comes off substituted

"Obviously he didn't have a lot of minutes for City recently, then he came to camp with the brightest smile and was so good in training. And I thought he will just surprise us and will play with the same verve and excitement but he struggles to have the full impact."

Foden has rarely taken his best City form on to the international stage, even on the run to the Euro 2024 final fresh from collecting Premier League player of the year awards.

And he faces stiff competi-

tion from Jude Bellingham, Cole Palmer and Morgan Rogers for an attacking midfield berth in Tuchel's squad.

"It's not a guarantee that he will come," added Tuchel when asked if he can take a struggling player to the finals in North America.

Defeat to Japan was just Tuchel's second in 12 games as England boss, but he is yet to beat a side ranked among FIFA's top 20 over a year into his reign.

After also drawing 1-1 against Uruguay last week, the German

said a difficult March "will not define us" as he remained confident England can end their wait since 1966 to win a major tournament this summer.

"We will not let go of our dream, we will not let go of the question 'why not?'" said the former Chelsea boss.

"Now the most important thing is that the players reintegrate with their clubs, have a good end of the season, and then we have them in pre-camp and prepare them properly and take steps from there."

Slot hoping Salah can still burnish Liverpool legacy

After nine years at Anfield, Mohamed Salah will depart the club at the season's end

● Arne Slot labels Salah a legend

● Nine-year spell nearing emotional end

● Nine-year spell nearing emotional end

● Liverpool fifth in Premier League

● Champions League qualification still uncertain

AFP | London

Arne Slot is hoping Mohamed Salah's farewell can inspire a strong end to Liverpool's season as he declared the Egyptian a living "legend" at the club.

Salah announced last week he will depart the English champions at the end of the season after nine years and 255 goals to date for the Reds.

The 33-year-old had a public spat with Slot in December, declaring he had "no relationship" with the Dutchman after being dropped for three consecutive games.

But since returning from the Africa Cup of Nations in Janu-



Liverpool's Egyptian forward #11 Mohamed Salah (C) is greeted by Liverpool's Dutch coach Arne Slot (L) after being substituted

ary, Salah has returned to being a regular starter in a difficult campaign for Liverpool.

Slot's men sit fifth in the Premier League and are in a battle just to qualify for next season's Champions League.

But the former Feyenoord boss is hopeful of still ending the season on a high in the FA

Cup and Champions League.

Liverpool travel to Manchester City in the FA Cup quarter-finals on Saturday and face holders Paris Saint-Germain in the last eight of Europe's top competition.

"Hopefully he can make his legacy even more special in the upcoming weeks and months

where we still play for something special, but he will always leave this club as a legend," Slot told Liverpool's website.

"To show that hunger every three days, that professionalism, that commitment to the club, to the team, wanting to score again, always wanting to play... that is what stands out for me."

Hopefully he can make his legacy even more special in the upcoming weeks and months where we still play for something special, but he will always leave this club as a legend. To show that hunger every three days, that professionalism, that commitment to the club, to the team, wanting to score again, always wanting to play... that is what stands out for me

ARNE SLOT

Slot's forward options have been hampered by the absence of Alexander Isak for much of his time at the club since arriving for a British transfer record £125 million (\$165 million) in September.

The Swedish striker is set to return to training after suffering a broken leg just over three months ago and has been buoyed by seeing his country qualify for the World Cup this week.

"I think Alex is in a really good place because Sweden qualified for the World Cup yesterday evening and apart from that he's going to train with the group

BETTER YOU KNOW

Despite their December fallout, Slot says Salah's professionalism and hunger still stand out as Liverpool chase silverware in the FA Cup and Champions League

255

goals have been scored by Mohamed Salah in 9 years for Liverpool since arriving from Roma in 2017

again for the first time tomorrow," added Slot on Wednesday.

"Of course it's only his first session, after three or four months, with the team but it's good to have him back because we all know who we signed and we've signed an incredible striker."

Bahrain's young basketball stars take on Germany



Bahrain's twin towers Abdulkadir, Onoduanyi en route to Deutschland

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Bahrain's brightest young basketball talents are set to take Germany by storm as the national youth men's team departs for the 31st Albert Schweitzer Tournament, one of the world's most prestigious under-18 competitions.

Running from April 3 to 12 in Mannheim and Viernheim, the tournament will see the Bahrainis face some of the globe's top youth teams, including Germany, Serbia, Slovenia, Türkiye, Sweden, Italy, Brazil, China, New Zealand, Japan, and Latvia.

Leading Bahrain's delegation is Mr. Nader Al Awadi, Vice President of the Bahrain Basketball Federation (BBA).

He confirmed that all travel and logistics, including routing via Doha, have been meticulously arranged so players can focus entirely on the competition. "We met with parents, confirmed arrangements, and created the right environment for our team to perform at their best," Al Awadi said.

Bahrain has been drawn into Group A alongside Germany, Sweden, Slovenia, Japan, and Türkiye. The team opens its

campaign against hosts Germany on Saturday at 9 PM, faces Sweden on Sunday at 6:15 PM, and takes on Slovenia on Monday at 6:15 PM. After a rest day on Tuesday, they play Japan on Wednesday at 2:15 PM and conclude group play against Türkiye on Thursday at 2:45 PM.

The top two teams from each group will advance to the semi-finals on April 10. Gold and bronze medal games are scheduled for April 11, and classification matches for fifth through 12th place will also be held.

The squad features standout performers from last year's FIBA U16 Asia Cup GBA Qualifiers, including Hasan Abdulkadir, Somto Patrick Onoduanyi, and Yousif Yaqoob Meshael. For these players, the Albert Schweitzer Tournament offers invaluable international exposure and a crucial stepping stone toward the upcoming Gulf Basketball Association qualifiers for the FIBA U18 Asia Cup 2026.

With this talented generation, the BBA hopes to continue Bahrain's rise on the global basketball stage, starting with a strong showing in Germany.

Swiatek announces Roig as new coach

AFP | Paris



Iga Swiatek in action (file photo)

World number four Iga Swiatek yesterday announced that she was working with Francisco Roig, who used to coach Rafael Nadal.

"Welcome to the team, Francisco! Very excited for this new chapter," the 24-year-old Pole wrote on Instagram.

The news came less than two weeks after the six-time Grand Slam winner announced that she had parted ways with previous coach Wim Fissette following her second-round exit at the Miami Open.

It was the former world number one's earliest exit at a tournament since the

Cincinnati Open in August 2021.

She has been in patchy form this year, losing in the quarter-finals at the Australian Open, the Doha Open and Indian Wells.

Roig, 58, spent many years working alongside Nadal's uncle Toni Nadal and then Carlos Moya as part of the Spanish clay court great's team.

Treble-chasing Muharraq awaits semi-final winner

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Defending champions Muharraq are through to the finals of the 2025-26 Zain Bahrain Basketball League after sweeping Al Ahli in three straight games last Wednesday. Manama edged Al Najma 95-92 in overtime to take a 2-1 semi-final lead, setting up a possible finals rematch with rivals Muharraq, who beat them in last month's Khalifa bin Salman Cup final.

The Red Wolves dominated from the first quarter, never letting Al Ahli gain momentum. Across the three games, Al Ahli led for only five minutes and twelve seconds, a testament to Muharraq's consistency. The sweep marked the first in the Eagles' playoff history, a team rarely defeated so decisively.

Bahraini basketball fans had hoped the Muharraq-Al Ahli semi-finals would offer more excitement, especially with Al Ahli aiming to add to their 20 league titles. Yet the series was one-sided. As German coach Peter Schomers said, "We expected a win, though I thought it might be a bit tougher. Once we built a 15-16 point lead, they started to give up. You rarely face resistance in situations like these. I hope the Manama se-



Nader Ali drains a three as Muharraq's bench watches in suspense

ries doesn't go to five games, or we'd have to wait too long for the finals."

For Muharraq, the sweep reinforced their season-long strength under Schomers. "This is the result of a mother's prayers," joked Nader Ali, one of the team's stars. "We aimed from the start of the season to take all the trophies. We were unlucky in the West Asian Super League, but we've won the Khalifa bin Salman Cup, and now we want the league to complete the treble."

While Muharraq advanced smoothly, the Manama-Al Najma series has been a thriller. Three games have been decided by four points or less, one went to overtime, and every contest came down to the final seconds. Manama, the country's most decorated club with 25 league titles, bounced back from a 1-0 deficit to lead 2-1. Al Najma, chasing their first-ever crown, will aim to force a decisive Game 5 when the series resumes Saturday at 8 PM at Khalifa Sports City.

The semi-finals have delivered drama at every turn. Muharraq stands ready, pursuing their fifth league title, while the Manama-Al Najma series more back-and-forth action. With the treble in sight and history on the line, the 2025-26 season is shaping up to be one of the most memorable in Bahraini basketball.

Aali Win While Al Najma Denied Late

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

After a break of more than two weeks, the Nasser bin Hamad Premier League resumed last night with Matchweek 17, delivering late drama and key points at both ends of the table.

At Khalifa Sports City, Aali claimed a 2-1 victory over Bahrain Club to continue their push up the standings under head coach Vinicius Eutropio. Hassan Omar gave Aali the lead in the 24th minute after Jassim Khelaif, who had come on as an early substitute, picked him out. Khelaif drove forward on the counterattack and found Omar in space, and the forward skipped past his marker and guided a low finish beyond goalkeeper Ali Habeeb.

Aali doubled their advantage in the 36th minute when Brazilian Matheus Almeida worked his way through a crowded area on the edge of the box and fired into the bottom corner. Eutropio's side appeared in control for much of the contest, but Bahrain Club set up a tense finish late on.

With two minutes remaining, Mateus Toto reduced the deficit from the penalty spot after a VAR review awarded the spot kick. Alvaro Cardoso



Aali players celebrate victory over Bahrain Club at full-time

was penalised when his trailing hand caught his opponent in the face while contesting a header, and Toto converted to make it 2-1. Aali were then reduced to ten men when Sekou Kaba was sent off for a dangerous challenge on Mohammed Khalid, though they held on to secure the points.

The result lifts Aali to fourth place on 25 points, marking a notable step in their campaign. Bahrain Club remain rooted to the bottom with seven points after a 14th defeat of the season, leaving them in serious danger of relegation.

Elsewhere, Mohammed Alshamlan's Al Najma were denied victory in stoppage time as they

drew 1-1 with Al Shabab at Bahrain National Stadium.

Al Najma took the lead in the 26th minute through Ali Aldoseri, who finished off a well-worked move he had helped to start. Saleh Alzubaidi produced a clever Cruyff turn on the byline to beat his marker before delivering across goal, where Aldoseri was on hand to tap in.

Al Shabab thought they had equalised in the 35th minute when Nigerian Daniel Omokhoa found the net, but the effort was ruled out following a VAR check for offside. They continued to press and eventually found their breakthrough deep into added time.



Adnan Tariq celebrates late equaliser against Al Najma

In the 95th minute, a long ball from Abdulrahman Ali caused chaos in the box, and a failed clearance fell kindly to substitute Adnan Tariq, who finished to secure a point.

The draw leaves Al Najma in eighth place on 19 points, while Mohammed Almuqla's side remain 11th on 11 points and still facing a difficult battle to avoid relegation.

Matchweek 17 continues tonight with reigning champions Muharraq facing Sitra at Khalifa Sports City at 5:15 PM, followed by Budaiya against Al Hidd at Bahrain National Stadium at 7:30 PM. The round concludes tomorrow with league leaders Al Khaldiya taking on Riffa at Bahrain National Stadium at 5:15 PM, and later Al Ahli face Al Malkiya at 7:30 PM at Khalifa Sports City.

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