



Bahrain Women Council Praises Royal Message



TDT | Manama

Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, wife of HM King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and President of the Supreme Council for Women, received a cable of gratitude and appreciation from members of the council in response to her recent message addressed to Bahraini women amid current circumstances.

The council members affirmed that Her Royal Highness's message carried strong support and motivation, resonating with women across the Kingdom and highlighting their contributions, roles, and responsibilities during the ongoing situation.

Bahrain Neutralises 600+ Aerial Threats

TDT | Manama

The General Command of the Bahrain Defence Force confirmed that the Kingdom of Bahrain continues to face repeated aerial threats, with national air defence systems actively intercepting incoming missiles and drones.

In its latest update, the Command revealed that 188 missiles and 445 drones have been successfully intercepted and destroyed since the onset of the attacks, underscoring the effectiveness and readiness of Bahrain's defence capabilities.

Meloni Visits Saudi Arabia, to Also Tour Qatar and UAE

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni travelled to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Friday in an unannounced visit that will also include stops in State of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, according to a government official.

Full Report on **P4**

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Bahrain Leads Cairo Talks

Arab League Condemns Al-Aqsa Closure and Prisoner Execution Law



TDT | Manama

An extraordinary session of the Arab League in Cairo concluded with the adoption of a strongly worded resolution addressing recent developments in Jerusalem, as the Kingdom of Bahrain chaired the high-level meeting.

The session, led by Fawzia bint Abdullah Zainal, Bahrain's Ambassador to Egypt and Permanent Representative to the Arab League, focused on escalating concerns over Israeli measures in Jerusalem, including restrictions on access to religious sites and legislative developments affecting Palestinian prisoners.

Delegates endorsed a Pales-

tinian-proposed resolution condemning the closure of Al-Aqsa Mosque and restrictions imposed on worshippers, describing such actions as violations of international law. The resolution also rejected a recently approved Israeli law concerning the execution of prisoners, labeling it inconsistent with international humanitarian standards.

In her address, Ambassador Zainal underscored the urgency of coordinated Arab action, warning that developments in Jerusalem threaten not only the city's religious sanctity but also regional stability. She called for stronger international engagement to ensure the protection of holy sites and the rights of the Palestinian people.



A view of the Aqsa Mosque is pictured in Old City of Jerusalem on March 6, 2026.



Fawzia bint Abdullah Zainal, Bahrain's Ambassador to Egypt and Permanent Representative to the Arab League

The council further cautioned against policies aimed at altering the demographic and historical character of Jerusalem, including forced displacement and settlement expansion, reaffirming the city's legal and historical status.

Reiterating its long-standing position, Bahrain stressed the importance of a two-state solution, supporting the establishment of an independent Palestinian state along the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

'Can easily open Hormuz, take oil & make fortune': Trump makes 'gushing' claims

P6



Flexible work model introduced across ministries starting tomorrow

TDT | Manama

The Civil Service Bureau has announced an update to its remote work policy, introducing revised attendance arrangements across all government entities, effective Sunday, April 5, 2026, and until further notice.

Under the new directive, in-office attendance will be limited to no more than 50% of the workforce. The move is aimed at enhancing operational flexibility across government departments while ensuring the continuity and efficiency of public services.

The updated framework allows individual government entities to determine which roles require physical presence, based on operational needs and public interest requirements. Exemptions will apply to sectors whose functions necessitate full on-site attendance.

The Civil Service Bureau emphasized the importance of coordination among government bodies to assess appropriate attendance levels and determine workplace arrangements according to job functions. The approach is designed to balance administrative efficiency with evolving operational demands.

In addition, the directive calls for strengthened emergency preparedness across all government workplaces. Entities have been instructed to strictly adhere to safety procedures, alarm systems, evacuation plans, and precautionary measures in coordination with the General Directorate of Civil Defense.

Nurseries and special needs schools reopen tomorrow

Easing of restrictions

- Flexible learning plan
- Support for special education
- Safety-first approach

TDT | Manama

The Ministry of Education announced that nurseries, kindergartens, and schools catering to pupils with special needs will resume in-person operations starting Sunday, while remote learning will continue for all other students until further notice.

The decision follows a recent review of precautionary emergency operating measures introduced earlier. The ministry stated that the updated arrangements aim to provide families with greater flexibility while strengthening access to early childhood education and



Dr. Mohammed bin Mubarak Juma

special education services. Starting Sunday, parents will have the option to send their children to nurseries and kindergartens. Similarly, families of students with special needs in both public and private schools can return to on-site learning, where educational and support services will be provided as normal. The ministry also confirmed that private schools will be permitted to conduct assess-

ments linked to international qualifications under a flexible framework agreed with relevant overseas examination bodies. This measure is intended to ensure students can complete their certification requirements and maintain their academic progression without disruption.

All other students across public and private schools and educational institutions will continue with remote learning arrangements un-

til further notice from the ministry. Education Minister Dr. Mohammed bin Mubarak Juma said the revised plan offers families more choice in early education and special needs services, while also supporting students working toward international qualifications. He added that the initiative includes an alternative assessment pathway, referred to as the "no exam route," designed to help students complete their academic requirements without negatively affecting their results. Dr. Juma also commended both public and private educational institutions for maintaining assessment processes through digital platforms, ensuring continuity in learning and evaluation during the period. He expressed gratitude to school staff and administrators for their cooperation and adherence to the ministry's approved guidelines and procedures.

First phase of Manama Souq redevelopment underway

Focus on Musaqaf entrance, Bab Al Bahrain area

● **Completion expected by Q4 2026**

● **BD680,000 allocated for phase one**

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Work has begun on the first phase of the redevelopment of the historic Manama Souq, the Tourism Ministry confirmed in a written reply to MP Ahmed Al Salloom, as Parliament reviews progress on one of Bahrain's key heritage regeneration projects.

The first phase focuses on the Musaqaf entrance, the walkway leading to the Kanoo Museum, and the Bab Al Bahrain Commercial Complex, with works expected to be completed in the fourth quarter of 2026. The phase is valued at around BD680,000.

The ministry said the project is part of a wider national plan



to preserve Manama's historic identity while upgrading infrastructure and improving the

visitor experience. A joint committee involving relevant government bodies, including the

Bahrain Tourism and Exhibi-

tions Authority and the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities, is overseeing implementation.

Officials said development will follow a unified design approach aimed at protecting the souq's architectural and cultural character, alongside new visitor facilities and infrastructure improvements.

On the parliamentary side, MPs have raised questions on project timelines, funding, trader impact, and heritage protection measures. The ministry said traders have been consulted and briefed on the redevelopment stages to ensure their concerns are considered during implementation.

The government stressed that the aim is to strike a balance between modernization and preservation, ensuring Manama Souq remains a key cultural and historical landmark in Bahrain.



Over 18,000 orphans supported



Acting Secretary-General Ibrahim Dallhan Al Dosari
TDT | Manama

On the occasion of Arab Orphan Day, Bahrain's Royal Humanitarian Foundation reaffirmed its commitment to empowering orphans through developmental care, marking 25 years of humanitarian work.

Acting Secretary-General Ibrahim Dallhan Al Dosari praised the continued support of HM King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and HRH Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, highlighting their role in strengthening the Foundation's mission.

He noted that the Foundation has supported over 18,000 orphans, helping develop their skills and integrate them as active members of society. Under the leadership of HH Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Foundation has enhanced its services and expanded impactful initiatives.

Vigilant and ready to counter any threat

TDT | Manama

Field Marshal Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, Commander-in-Chief of the Bahrain Defence Force, received Lieutenant General HH Shaikh Mohammed bin Isa Al Khalifa, Commander of the National Guard.

During the meeting, Shaikh Khalifa underscored the strength and resilience of Bahrain's defence system. He noted



Shaikh Khalifa affirmed that Bahrain's forces will continue to serve as a strong line of defence, ready to respond effectively to any threat.

that, with the support of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and the continued oversight of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Kingdom's military and security forces remain vigi-

lant and fully prepared.

Shaikh Khalifa highlighted the close coordination among the Bahrain Defence Force, the National Guard and other agencies, reflecting strong cohesion, operational readiness and disciplined performance. The Commander-in-Chief also emphasised the vital national responsibility entrusted to these institutions in safeguarding lives, protecting property and maintaining stability.

GCC Ambassadors Discuss Hormuz Risks with China



Dr. Mohammed Ghassan Mohammed Adnan Shaikho, Ambassador Bahrain to China with senior officials.

TDT | Manama

GCC ambassadors in Beijing held a series of meetings with senior Chinese officials to discuss regional developments and strengthen cooperation.

The meetings were led by Dr. Mohammed Ghassan Moham-

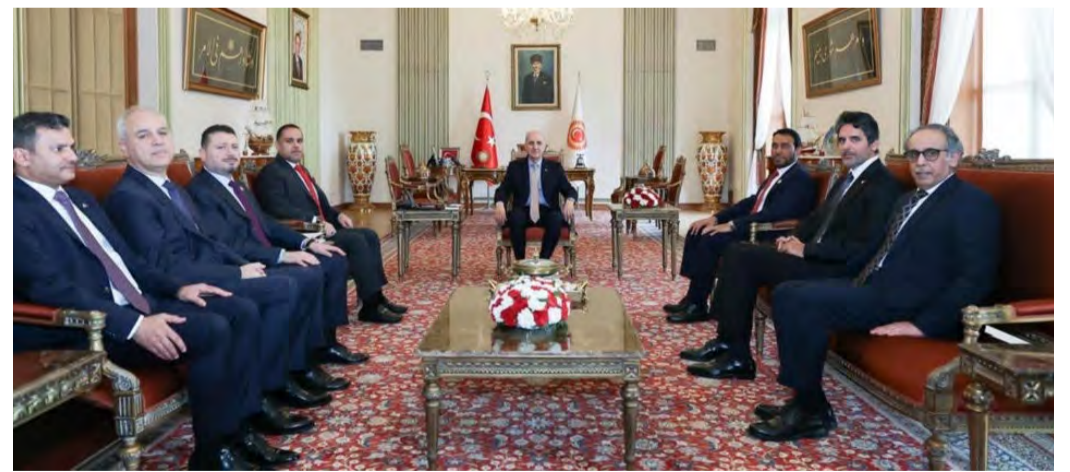
med Adnan Shaikho, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to China and current chair of the GCC Ambassadors Council in Beijing. He was joined by GCC ambassadors accredited to China.

Key topics included Gulf regional tensions, concerns over Iranian actions, and the

potential global economic impact of any disruption to the Strait of Hormuz. The sides also explored ways to enhance bilateral and multilateral coordination.

The Bahraini ambassador also met with Jordan's ambassador in Beijing to discuss matters of mutual interest.

GCC, Jordan Envoys Hold Talks with Turkish Parliament Speaker



TDT | Manama

Ambassadors of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, accredited to the Republic of Türkiye, held a high-level meeting with Professor Numan Kurtulmu, Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, at the parliament headquarters in the capital, Ankara. The meeting

was chaired by Ambassador Bassam Ahmed Marzooq, Bahrain's Ambassador to Türkiye, in his capacity as representative of the current presidency of the 46th session of the GCC.

Discussions focused on the latest regional developments, particularly in light of recent Iranian attacks targeting GCC countries and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and their implications for regional secu-

urity and stability.

The ambassadors stressed that the security of GCC states is indivisible, underscoring that the safety and stability of their peoples remain a cornerstone of regional security. They reviewed the consequences of the attacks, which targeted civilian facilities, service infrastructure, and residential areas, resulting in loss of life and property damage.

What's Next on Parliament's Agenda?

Mohammed Darwish

- Lower threshold for questioning ministers
- New law regulating legal profession (replacing 45-year-old law)
- Autism support policies (health, education, services review)
- Family housing misuse bill likely to be rejected
- Pension loan cycle reform for private-sector retirees
- Bahrain-Jersey tax agreement (double taxation avoidance)
- Housewives' voluntary pension scheme proposal
- Review of the Eskan Bank housing loan cap (BD120,000)

MPs to Vote on New Lawyers Law



Mahmoud Fardan, Chairman of Parliament's Legislative and Legal Affairs Committee

Bahrain's Parliament is set to vote this month on a new law regulating the legal profession, replacing legislation that has been in place for around 45 years.

The bill, approved by the Legislative and Legal Affairs Committee and referred for debate, aims to modernize the legal system, define lawyers' roles more clearly, and strengthen regulations governing legal practice.

Committee Chairman Mahmood Fardan said the draft law impacts the entire justice system, including courts, litigants, and the Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Waqf.

The proposed law introduces a structured classification system for lawyers, outlining progression through different court levels, while also aiming to prevent unauthorized legal practice.

Bill Would Lower Bar for Questioning Ministers

A bill set for debate in Bahrain's Parliament next Tuesday proposes lowering the threshold required to initiate questioning of ministers and introducing the option of holding some sessions in private.

The amendment to Decree-Law No. 54 of 2002 would reduce the required approval for an interpellation from a two-thirds majority to a simple majority, making it easier for MPs to exercise oversight powers.

It also allows questioning sessions to be held behind closed doors if requested by the government, the Speaker, or at least 10 MPs, with the final decision subject to a vote.

Speaker Ahmed Al Musallam and other sponsors said



Ahmed Al Musallam, Speaker of Parliament

the changes aim to strengthen parliamentary oversight tools and improve legislative efficiency.

The Legislative and Legal Affairs Committee has already endorsed the bill and recommended its approval.

Review New Limit for Eskan Bank Housing Loans

A revised bill proposing a BD120,000 ceiling on housing finance provided by Eskan Bank for citizens seeking to build or purchase homes is also on Parliament's agenda.

The proposal seeks to link the loan amount to the applicant's monthly income based on a funding table set by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, while capping total financing at BD120,000.

MP Jalal Kadhem, who introduced the bill, said the aim is to align housing support with



Jalal Kadhem, MP

rising property prices and construction costs, easing financial pressure on families and reducing reliance on additional

personal loans.

The Public Utilities and Environment Committee recommended approving the revised bill after amendments removed the minimum financing threshold and retained only the upper limit.

The ministry, however, said existing housing laws and programmes already address the issue and warned that fixing a cap could increase pressure on the housing budget and reduce the number of beneficiaries.

Housewives' Pension Plan

Parliament is set to debate a proposal allowing housewives to voluntarily join the national pension system, with monthly contributions capped at BD500.

The bill, submitted by Maryam Al Dhaen, would enable women managing households to contribute to the Social Insurance Organisation and receive retirement, disability, and survivor benefits under the same framework as other insured groups.

Supporters say the initiative fills a gap in the current sys-



Dr Maryam Al Dhaen, MP

tem, which covers public and private sector workers and the self-employed but excludes housewives, while also recognising the value of unpaid

domestic work.

The parliamentary Services Committee has recommended approval, citing greater social fairness and improved financial security for families.

However, the Supreme Council for Women raised concerns over financial sustainability and overlap with existing assistance programmes, while the Bahrain Women Union urged broader legal recognition of unpaid household labour.

Lawmakers are expected to deliberate the proposal before taking a final decision.

Family Housing Misuse Bill Faces Rejection

A proposed law to fine landlords or tenants for misusing family housing is set for debate in Bahrain's Parliament on Tuesday, but it is likely to be rejected after unanimous opposition from the Public Utilities and Environment Committee.

The bill seeks to amend Law No. 27 of 2014, allowing municipalities to impose fines of up to one year's rent for violations. However, the committee said existing laws already address



Mohammed Mousa, Chairman of Parliament's Public Utilities and Environment committee

such cases and warned that the proposal would place un-

necessary financial burdens on citizens.

The government and key bodies, including the Real Estate Regulatory Authority, also opposed the bill, citing legal and constitutional concerns, such as the authority to impose fines outside the courts.

Officials argued that current regulations already allow action against violations, such as contract cancellation and service disconnection, making new legislation unnecessary.

New Bill Seeks 2-Year Pension Loan Cycle

A draft law set to be debated in Parliament would allow private-sector retirees to take a pension substitution loan every two years, aligning their benefits with those of public-sector pensioners.

The bill amends Article 144 of Bahrain's Social Insurance Law to make the two-year waiting period start from the date of the last loan, instead of the final repayment date of the previous one.

Lawmakers say the change aims to ensure equal treatment between private and public-sector retirees while easing financial pressure on pensioners and improving living standards.

The government has backed the proposal, saying it supports fairness across pension



Mamdouh Al Saleh, Chairman of Parliament's Services Committee

systems and strengthens the sustainability of social insurance funds.

Parliament's Services Committee has already approved the bill in principle, with full member support, and recommended its passage to the House.

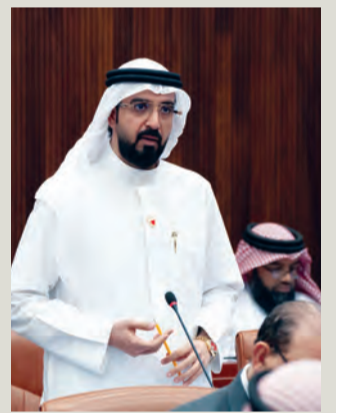
Autism Support Policies

Government policies and national initiatives for people with autism spectrum disorder will be on Parliament's agenda, with MP Hassan Ebrahim set to lead the discussion.

Lawmakers are expected to question ministers on health-care, education, financial support, and social inclusion services for individuals with autism, including diagnosis procedures, treatment pathways, and coordination between state institutions.

The debate will also examine early diagnosis efforts, disability allowance eligibility, and the capacity of rehabilitation centres, alongside oversight of both public and private care providers.

Education support will be a key focus, with MPs seeking details on autism-inclusive schools, specialised class-



Hassan Ebrahim, MP

rooms, teacher training, and integration programmes in mainstream education.

The request highlights rising autism diagnoses in recent years and growing pressure on families due to limited specialist services, high treatment costs, and a shortage of trained professionals.

Bahrain-Jersey Tax Agreement

Parliament is set to debate and vote on a draft law ratifying a tax agreement between Bahrain and Jersey aimed at avoiding double taxation and preventing tax evasion.

The agreement, signed in Manama on 15 September 2025, is designed to strengthen economic cooperation and provide clearer tax rules for individuals and companies operating across both jurisdictions.

The Financial and Economic Affairs Committee recommended approval of the bill, which includes provisions for information exchange between tax authorities while ensuring confidentiality.

The agreement also defines tax residency, rules for business profits, and the treatment of income such as dividends, interest, royalties, and capital gains, while setting mechanisms to resolve tax disputes.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the deal supports Bahrain's international inter-



Ahmed Al Salloom, Chairman of Parliament's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee

ests, enhances financial sector cooperation, and helps protect taxpayers from double taxation.

The Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry also backed the agreement, saying it improves the investment climate and encourages foreign investment.

Iran urged to halt maritime threats and destabilising actions across region

TDT | New York

Foreign Minister Dr Abdullah bin Rashid Al Zayani has called on Iran to immediately halt actions that threaten maritime security and regional stability, warning that continued escalation risks undermining international peace.

Addressing a high-level meeting of the Council of the League of Arab States, Dr Al Zayani urged Iran to refrain from any practices that endanger freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz and Bab Al-Mandab, stressing that such actions have far-reaching consequences beyond the countries directly targeted.

He said Iranian attacks in the Arabian Gulf extend beyond national borders and pose a direct threat to the security and stability of the wider region, calling on Tehran to cease supporting and arming affiliated militias in Arab states.

The meeting was held as part of Bahrain's presidency of the United Nations Security Council for April, under the agenda



Foreign Minister Dr Abdullah bin Rashid Al Zayani during the meeting

item on cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organisations in maintaining international peace and security.

Dr Al Zayani described the current situation as a "dangerous

escalation", citing what he termed ongoing unlawful Iranian attacks against several Arab states, including Bahrain, in violation of sovereignty and international law.

He emphasised that Arab is-

suues remain a central focus on the Security Council's agenda, noting that stronger coordination between the United Nations and the League of Arab States is now an urgent necessity and a legal and political obligation.

The meeting called on the international community to take appropriate measures to ensure Iran's compliance with international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, and to halt all actions that undermine regional peace and stability.

Dr Al Zayani highlighted the growing role of Arab states in strengthening regional solidarity and expanding international partnerships, while supporting peaceful solutions to ongoing crises.

He stressed the need to further enhance cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States to better respond to evolving challenges, with a focus on conflict prevention, de-escalation and advancing political solutions that lead to lasting peace.

The minister also underscored the importance of protecting civilians and strengthening humanitarian responses, while calling for intensified international efforts to end the war in Gaza and secure a sustainable ceasefire.

He reiterated the need to ad-

vance a credible political process that delivers a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue, addressing the root causes of conflict and laying the foundations for long-term peace, security and stability in the Middle East.



As a non-permanent member, Bahrain assumed the presidency for April, during which it is responsible for setting the Council's agenda, chairing meetings, and guiding discussions on global peace and security.

40+ nations meet to address rising maritime tensions in Hormuz

Bahrain participates in UK-led ministerial meeting

TDT | Manama

Ambassador Shaikh Abdulla bin Ali Al Khalifa, Director General of Bilateral Relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain, took part in a ministerial meeting held via videoconference at the invitation of UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper, with the participation of more than 40 countries to discuss developments concerning the Strait of Hormuz.

The meeting reviewed the latest regional developments amid ongoing Iranian attacks on several countries in the region, continued hostilities, and rising

risks threatening international navigation through the strategic waterway. Participants highlighted the Strait of Hormuz as a critical artery for global trade,

energy supplies, and maritime security, warning of serious economic and security implications at both regional and international levels.



Ambassador Shaikh Abdulla bin Ali Al Khalifa, DG of Bilateral Relations at the MOFA, took part in a ministerial meeting

Delegates also commended UN Security Council Resolution 2817, introduced under the leadership of the Kingdom of

Bahrain, which received significant international backing. They emphasized the need to strengthen global coordination

and cooperation to address emerging challenges and ensure the uninterrupted flow of international trade in line with international law and norms.

At the conclusion of the meeting, participants called for sustained consultations among concerned nations and the identification of practical measures to reinforce a unified international response that supports regional stability and safeguards global economic interests.

The meeting was also attended by Shaikha Alanood bint Ebrahim Al Khalifa, Acting Chief of the European Affairs Sector at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Europe's First Post-Conflict Gulf Visit

Meloni Visits Saudi Arabia, to Also Tour Qatar and UAE

TDT | Manama

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni travelled to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Friday in an unannounced visit that will also include stops in State of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, according to a government official.

The two-day regional tour aims to express support for Gulf partners affected by recent Iranian attacks, while also safeguarding Italy's energy security amid growing uncertainty in global oil and gas supplies, the official said. The visit marks the first trip by a European Union leader to Saudi Arabia since the conflict triggered by the United States and Israel at the end



Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni arrives in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.



of February. It comes as Rome grows increasingly concerned about the stability of energy routes and supplies.

Before the conflict, around 10% of Italy's natural gas consumption came from Qatari liquefied natural gas (LNG), while approximately 12% of its oil imports last year originated from the Middle East region.

However, Italy was recently informed that its Gulf LNG supplier extended a pause in shipments due to disruptions linked to the near-closure of the Strait of Hormuz. This resulted in the suspension of 10 cargo deliveries scheduled between April and mid-June.

Zain's 2026 brand valuation increases 16% to reach a record high of **USD 4 billion**

Bader Al-Kharafi: "4WARD strategy propelling the business and brand to new heights"

● **Brand Finance ranks Zain among the top 25 strongest telecom brands globally with an AAA- rating and Brand Strength Index score of 83.3/100**

Manama

Zain Group, a leading provider of innovative ICT and digital lifestyle communications (TechCo) operating in eight markets across the Middle East and Africa, has seen its brand valuation increase by 16.1% in 2026 to reach a record-high USD 4.039 billion. This marks the highest brand value in the company's history and a year-on-year increase of US\$560 million from US\$3.479 billion in 2025, reinforcing Zain's standing among the world's leading telecom brands.

In the Brand Finance Telecoms 150 ranking for 2026, Zain attained a Brand Strength Index score of 83.3 out of 100 with an AAA- brand strength rating and was named the 25th strongest telecom brand globally reflecting the strength of its regional footprint and the continued momentum of its evolution into a TechCo.

The record valuation is supported by a year of strong operational and financial delivery across the business. In 2025, Zain recorded its highest revenues in 16 years, significantly increased its CAPEX investment (a



- Brand value has grown steadily from \$2.2bn (2021) to \$4.0bn (2026). This is an 84% increase.
- BSI improved from 73 to 83, showing stronger brand strength year-on-year.

40% increase to total USD 1.5 billion) in network and technology infrastructure, and continued to strengthen the contribution of its growth verticals, including Fintech, ZainTECH, and ZOI. At the same time, the Group maintained regional leadership in 5G across four markets, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Bahrain, with Kuwait among the first globally to launch 5G-Advanced services, reinforcing the direct link between strategic investment, innovation leadership, and brand value creation.

Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO said: "As one of the region's most admired and recognizable brands, this milestone reaffirms Zain's four decades of leadership in mobile and ICT innovation. Nearly two decades after the launch of the Zain brand in September 2007, our continued rise in brand value reflects the passion, creativity and strategic investment that have shaped a

bold and progressive identity built on compelling customer experiences."

He continued: "Our '4WARD-Progress with Purpose' corporate strategy, anchored in innovation and digital transformation, has inspired a multitude of award-winning campaigns and industry-leading initiatives across Sustainability, Inclusion, Diversity and Equity. These efforts have fostered deep trust and affinity among our customers and employees alike."

"Our ranking as the number one telecom company and among the top three employers across the MENA region on Forbes' annual World's Best Employers list for 2025 reflects our commitment to building a thriving, diverse and inclusive workplace comprised of 8,000 talents."

Mr Al-Kharafi concluded: "Today, Zain connects and empowers 50.9 million customers across its eight markets and en-



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Today, Zain connects and empowers 50.9 million customers across its eight markets and engages over 35.5 million followers on social media. The 4 billion views and 1.5 billion interactions achieved during 2025 reaffirm the strength of our advertising and marketing investments, positioning Zain as one of the region's most loved brands."

BADER AL-KHARAFI, ZAIN VICE CHAIRMAN AND GROUP CEO

gages over 35.5 million followers on social media. The 4 billion views and 1.5 billion interactions achieved during 2025 reaffirm the strength of our advertising and marketing investments, positioning Zain as one of the region's most loved brands."

This milestone brand valuation reflects the cumulative impact of Zain's '4WARD-Progress with Purpose' strategy in translating performance into brand value across multiple dimensions of the business and across all markets operating under the

Zain brand. 4WARD is accelerating the Group's evolution into a purpose-driven, customer-centric, and future-ready regional TechCo. Built around the four strategic forces of Customer Delight, Digital Zain, Purpose and Action, and Collaborative Growth, the strategy is helping translate business performance, brand strength, and long-term relevance into measurable value across the Group's footprint.

The Brand Finance valuation takes into account a broad range of factors, including fi-

financial performance, market capitalization, investor relations, governance and sustainability progress, network investment and quality, digital innovation, venture-building activity, brand health, customer engagement, advertising effectiveness, social media performance, talent and inclusion initiatives, and the continued growth of the Group's diversified digital ecosystem.

The achievement also highlights the contribution of Zain's strategic growth platforms and affiliated businesses, including fintech, ICT, digital infrastructure, enterprise solutions, digital lifestyle services, and innovation-led ventures operating across the Group. Together, these efforts continue to strengthen Zain's market relevance, expand its engagement across customer segments, and reinforce its evolution into a purpose-driven TechCo.

4WARD

Looking ahead, Zain will continue to build on the early momentum of 4WARD by scaling digital infrastructure, expanding AI-driven and enterprise solutions, advancing fintech and digital lifestyle services, and further strengthening the consistency and appeal of the Zain brand across markets. Backed by disciplined execution, purpose-led engagement, and a diversified digital ecosystem, the Group remains focused on creating sustainable value for shareholders, deepening customer trust, and enabling digital progress across the region.

US registers strong job growth in boost to Trump

AFP | Washington, United States

The US economy posted unexpectedly strong job gains in March, data showed yesterday, in a development hailed as a win by US President Donald Trump's administration but seen with caution by analysts.

The world's largest economy gained 178,000 jobs in March, after losing 133,000 in February, and the unemployment rate dropped by 0.1 percentage-points to 4.3 percent, the Labor Department said.

Friday's data significantly beat analyst expectations, with economists polled by Dow Jones Newswires and the Wall Street Journal expecting an increase of 59,000 jobs.

The data was stronger than forecast, "but vastly overstates the sustainable pace of job growth," said Oxford Economics lead US economist Nancy Vanden Houten.

"The end of a strike, seasonal quirks and a rebound after harsh winter weather likely boosted job growth in some sectors," she said. The White House, however, touted the numbers as a major success.

"Americans can rest assured



An attendee looks at an updated design for the new \$400 million ballroom at the White House prior to a vote on the proposal by the National Capital Planning Commission

that after the short-term disruptions of Operation Epic Fury are behind us, America's economic resurgence is set to only accelerate," said spokesperson Kush Desai, referring to the US-Israel war on Iran.

Health care recovery Much of March's recovery was fueled by health care jobs, which have remained resilient even as labor demand has dropped in other sectors.

Health care added 76,000 jobs in March, after having lost jobs the month before, in part due to strike actions.

Employment in construc-

tion also grew by 26,000 in March, although the Labor Department flagged that it had changed little over its level from a year ago.

Federal government employment continued to decline, down 11.8 percent since October 2024. Trump has taken a hatchet to the sector in a drive aimed at cost-cutting and reducing the size of government.

The new data reflected a revision in the figures for January and February, showing employment for those two months combined was 7,000 lower than previously reported.

White House seeks \$1.5tn defense budget

The proposal would lift spending by more than 40%

● **Iran war could be costing as much as \$2 billion a day**

● **The president has framed the defense increase in urgent terms**

AFP | Washington, United States

US President Donald Trump asked lawmakers yesterday to approve a massive \$1.5 trillion defense budget for 2027, as the United States faces rising costs from its war with Iran and mounting global security commitments.

The proposal would lift Pentagon spending by more than 40% in a single year -- the sharpest increase since World War II -- as Washington seeks to sustain military operations and rebuild depleted weapons stockpiles.

The request highlights the growing financial pressure of a conflict now in its fifth week, and sets up a political battle in Congress over how to fund a dramatic expansion of military spending.

US media -- citing closed-door congressional briefings -- have reported that the Iran war could be costing as much as \$2 billion a day, underscoring the scale of the burden even before longer-term reconstruction and resupply costs are factored in.

To offset part of the increase, Trump is proposing around \$73 billion in cuts to non-defense spending -- roughly 10 percent -- "reducing or eliminating woke, weaponized and wasteful programmes, and by returning State and local responsibilities to their respective governments."

The president has framed the defense increase in urgent terms, arguing that military investment must take prece-

dence during wartime, even at the expense of federal social programs.



Trump is urging Congress to approve the bulk of the defense budget -- more than \$1.1 trillion -- through the standard appropriations process, while seeking to pass a further \$350 billion using a party-line mechanism that would bypass Democratic support.

Easter masses cancelled in Dubai because of war

AFP | Washington

All masses in Dubai have been cancelled because of the Middle East war, two Catholic churches in the United Arab Emirates posted on their websites yesterday, just ahead of Easter.

Following government directives, "all Masses at our Church are cancelled until further notice," St Francis of Assisi Church at Jebel Ali in Dubai posted.

The Jebel Ali coastal area has been hit several times by missiles and drones fired by Iran at neighbouring Gulf states in retaliation for the Israeli-US offensive launched on February 28.

"Parishioners are requested to refrain from visiting the Church premises, in the interest of safety and community well-being," the announcement added.

St Mary's Catholic Church in Dubai published a similar announcement on its website, and said Good Friday's mass would be live-streamed online instead, on the church's YouTube channel



A man looks at the residential buildings that were damaged by recent strikes at Vahdat town in Karaj, southwest of Tehran

UN delays Hormuz security vote

Good Friday holiday cited as reason for postponing vote on naval force authorization

AFP | Washington

The UN Security Council has postponed a vote scheduled for yesterday on authorizing the use of "defensive" force to protect shipping in the Strait of Hormuz from Iranian attacks, according to the official program.

The 15-member body was set to vote yesterday morning on a draft resolution brought by Bahrain, but by Thursday night the schedule shifted.

The reason given was that the

United Nations observes Good Friday as a public holiday, according to diplomatic sources -- despite this fact being known when the vote was first announced.

No new date has been given for voting on the draft.

Iran has placed a stranglehold on the key shipping lane -- threatening fuel supplies and roiling the global economy -- in retaliation for US-Israeli strikes that triggered the month-old Middle East war.

President Donald Trump on Wednesday called for countries

struggling with fuel shortages to "go get your own oil" in the Strait of Hormuz, adding that US forces would not help them.

A sixth and final draft greenlights member states -- either unilaterally or as "voluntary multinational naval partnerships" -- to use "all defensive means necessary and commensurate with the circumstances."

It applies to the strait and adjacent waters to "secure transit passage and to deter attempts to close, obstruct or otherwise interfere with international navigation through the Strait of

Hormuz."

The measure would last for a period of at least six months.

The draft resolution has been moulded in a bid to rally several countries that have appeared skeptical, including Russia, China and France.

Revised wording no longer explicitly invokes Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, which allows the Security Council to authorize armed force to restore peace.

The latest version, which was scheduled to be voted on at 11:00 am (1500 GMT) yesterday before

the postponement, also emphasizes the defensive nature of any intervention -- a stipulation that seems to have alleviated French concerns.

Jerome Bonnafont, France's UN ambassador, said Thursday that "it is up to the Council to quickly devise the necessary defensive response" after members voted in March to condemn Iran's blocking of the Strait of Hormuz.

President Emmanuel Macron earlier said a military operation to free the waterway is "unrealistic."

Three tankers, including one co-owned by a Japanese company, have crossed the war-torn Strait of Hormuz while staying close to the Omani Musandam Peninsula to the south of the waterway, maritime traffic data showed yesterday

Ukraine offers to help unblock Hormuz

AFP | Washington

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in remarks made public yesterday said his country could help unblock the Strait of Hormuz, whose closure by Iran has rattled the global economy.

"No one has involved us specifically in the issue of the Strait of Hormuz. During my visits, I told representatives of the Middle East and Gulf countries: Ukraine is ready to help with everything related to

defence," Zelensky said.

He was speaking to a small group of journalists, including AFP, on Thursday.

He cited Kyiv's experience in restoring passage through the Black Sea, which Russia had blocked at the beginning of its invasion of Ukraine.

In a separate interview, Zelensky said reopening the strait would require drone interceptors, military convoys and electronic warfare.

"We stand ready to help with this," he said.



A view of the B1 bridge is pictured, a day after it was destroyed by a strike in Karaj

12 injured in Abu Dhabi after attack intercepted: govt

AFP | Washington

At least 12 people were injured in the emirate of Abu Dhabi yesterday as a result of falling debris following the interception of an attack, the government media office said.

The incident in the Ajban area "resulted in minor to moderate injuries sustained by 6 individuals of Nepali nationality and 5 individuals of Indian nationality, and one major injury sustained by an individual of Nepali nationality," the Abu Dhabi Media Office posted on X.

Pope speaks with Israeli, Ukrainian presidents, urging peace

AFP | Washington

Pope Leo XVI spoke yesterday with the presidents of Israel and Ukraine, discussing the ongoing war and the need for peace.

The American-born pontiff spoke by telephone with Israel's Isaac Herzog and, separately, Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky, in which the humanitarian situation in each war zone was discussed, the Vatican said.

The pope and Herzog "reaffirmed the need to reopen all possible channels of diplomatic dialogue to bring an end to the serious ongoing conflict, with a view to achieving a just and lasting peace throughout the Middle East," a statement said.

"The conversation also focused on the importance of protecting the civilian population and promoting respect for international and humanitarian law," it added.

The calls happened as the pontiff was observing the Catholic Holy Week leading up to Easter on Sunday, and while Herzog was marking Jewish Passover into next week, and as Zelensky, a Jew, was preparing to see Ukraine celebrate Orthodox Easter, which this year falls on April 12.

1949

The North Atlantic Treaty is signed in Washington, DC, establishing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a military alliance among Western nations

1989

US civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated by James Earl Ray at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee



1973

World Trade Center opens in New York as the world's tallest building at 110 stories; later destroyed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks

1975

Microsoft is founded as a partnership by Bill Gates and Paul Allen to develop and sell BASIC interpreters for the Altair 8800



People look at the damage at a factory that got hit by a missile in Petah Tikva, east of Tel Aviv

Trump seeks **\$1.5T** defense budget

The administration plans to secure 350 billion dollars of the requested increase through a specific party-line legislative maneuver, bypassing the need for Democratic support in a move similar to previous tax cut strategies

AFP | Washington

The White House sent a spending proposal to lawmakers yesterday calling for a massive \$1.5 trillion US defense budget next year as it faces increased costs due to the war in Iran.

The total year-on-year increase in Pentagon spending would be the largest since World War II, US media reported, although presidential budgets are wish lists that have to be approved by Congress, rather than binding orders.

The request would represent a 42 percent hike in the Pentagon topline for 2026.

It is part of a proposal that asks Congress to slash non-defense spending by some \$73 billion, or 10 percent, by “reducing or eliminating woke, weaponized and wasteful programs, and by returning state and local responsibilities to their respective governments.”

The Pentagon isn't expected to release a detailed breakdown of the budget request until later this month, but the plan could form a fiscal framework that adds trillions to the already growing federal debt over the next decade, assuming Congress adopts the president's proposals.

Trump called on lawmakers to

42%

is the massive proposed hike in the Pentagon's topline budget for 2026, marking the largest year-on-year increase in military spending since the end of World War II

approve the bulk of the increase through the standard annual government funding process, while passing the remaining \$350 billion via the same party-line legislative maneuver that allowed

Republicans to secure tax cuts without Democratic support last year.

In the lead-up to releasing the proposal, the president and his advisors have emphasized the urgency of boosting defense spending, pointing to the need to replenish weapons stockpiles and other military resources during the ongoing conflict with Iran.

At a private lunch, Trump stressed that defense funding should take precedence over other federal expenditures, even if it meant scaling back social safety-net programs and other assistance.

“It's not possible for us to take care of day care, Medicaid, Medicare, all of these individual things, they can do it on a state basis,” he said, adding that the priority had to be “military protection.”

The White House posted a video of Trump's remarks on its YouTube page and then deleted it.

Democrats and Republicans have recently voiced concern about increasing military spending to the levels Trump has proposed, noting that the administration has not provided sufficient updates on the five-week-long war with Iran.

Israel says it has struck over 3,500 targets in Lebanon in past month

AFP | Tel Aviv

The Israeli military said yesterday it had struck more than 3,500 targets across Lebanon in the month since fighting with the Hezbollah militant group began.

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war on March 2 after Iran-backed Hezbollah launched rockets at Israel to avenge the US-Israeli attack that killed Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei.

Israel has responded with massive strikes across Lebanon and a ground offensive.

The Israeli military said yesterday it had killed approximately 1,000 militants in Lebanon over the past month, with strikes

targeting what it described as “terrorist infrastructure, weapons storage facilities, launch positions, and command and control headquarters” belonging to Hezbollah.

Lebanon's health ministry said on Thursday that 1,345 people had been killed and 4,040 wounded since the start of the war, including 1,129 men, 91 women and 125 children.

The ministry said the toll also included 53 healthcare workers.

Hezbollah has so far not announced its losses.

On Thursday, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz warned that Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem would pay an “extraordinarily heavy price” for escalating at-



Displaced families stand next to their tents at an unofficial camp erected along Beirut's seafront area during a sandstorm



TOP
4
TWEETS

01



Today, on Good Friday, we mark a day of sacrifice. Some New Yorkers will abstain from eating; others will spend hours without speaking. Faith, the Bible tells us, is belief in the things unseen. That belief is what will guide so many of our neighbors in solemn reflection and reverence. I wish all those observing Good Friday a blessed day of peace.

@NYCMayor

02



With a plan, partnership, and the right support, Syria can shift from importing instability to exporting solutions. The world urgently needs a success story – and Syria should give us confidence.

@UNReliefChief

03



Good Friday is a day of reflection, as Christians remember Christ's sacrifice – and the values of compassion and hope that are at the heart of Easter. I wish Christians everywhere a peaceful day.

@Keir_Starmer

04



VP Vance swears in VAG Colin McDonald: “One of the things Colin is going to do is make sure that no fraud...is big enough or small enough to look away from.”

@VP

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

'Breathtaking': Artemis crew **blast** towards Moon

Orion capsule enters a free-return trajectory for the first crewed lunar mission in decades

● NASA confirms successful burn

● Flawless burn lasted just under six minutes

● Mission duration is 10 days total

AFP | Houston

Four Artemis astronauts were zooming towards the Moon late Thursday after a major engine firing, a milestone that commits NASA to the first crewed lunar flyby in more than half a century.

With enough thrust to accelerate a stationary car to highway driving speed in less than three seconds, the Orion capsule engine blasted the astronauts on their trajectory towards the Moon, which they now will loop as part of the 10-day Artemis 2 mission.

In the moments that followed what the US space agency dubbed a "flawless" firing that lasted just under six minutes, astronaut Jeremy Hansen said that "humanity has once again shown what we are capable of."

The astronauts said they were "glued to the window" taking pictures, and later passed a floating microphone back and forth as they took questions from US television networks.

They said the spacecraft was a little chilly and they were still making it a home, but the crew was all smiles.

"There's nothing that prepares you for the breathtaking



aspect of seeing your home planet both lit up bright as day, and also the Moon glow on it at night with the beautiful beam of the sunset," said Christina Koch.

Thursday's nudge came one day after the enormous orange-and-white Space Launch System (SLS) rocket carrying the Orion capsule launched from Kennedy Space Center in Florida for the long-anticipated journey around the Moon.

The astronauts are now on a "free-return" trajectory, which uses the Moon's gravity to sling-shot around it before heading back towards Earth without propulsion.

"From this point forward, the laws of orbital mechanics are going to carry our crew to the Moon, around the far side and back to Earth," NASA official Lori Glaze said.

The astronauts are wearing



This screen grab from NASA's feed shows the four Artemis II crew members as they head to orbit the Moon for the first time

suits that also serve as "survival systems" -- in the unlikely case of a cabin depressurization or leak, they'll maintain oxygen, temperature controls and the correct pressure for up to six days.

The astronauts -- Americans Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Koch along with Canadian Hansen -- spent their first hours in space performing checks and troubleshooting minor problems on the spacecraft that has never carried humans before, including a communications issue and a malfunctioning toilet.

Queried on the toilet situation,

250,000 miles will be travelled by the Artemis astronauts, taking them farther from Earth than any humans before

Koch said she was "proud to call myself the space plumber."

"I like to say that it is probably the most important piece of equipment on board," she said. "So we were all breathing a sigh

of relief when it turned out to be just fine."

'Herculean'

Crewmembers also had their first workouts of the mission on the spacecraft's "flywheel exercise device" -- each astronaut will carve out 30 minutes a day for fitness, a bid to minimize the muscle and bone loss that happens without gravity.

The 10-day mission is aimed at paving the way for a Moon landing in 2028.

Artemis 2 marks a series of historic accomplishments: sending the first person of color, the first woman and the first non-Ameri-



There's nothing that prepares you for the breathtaking aspect of seeing your home planet both lit up bright as day, and also the Moon glow on it at night with the beautiful beam of the sunset

NASA OFFICIAL LORI GLAZE

can on a lunar mission.

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

"There is nothing normal about this," said Wiseman. "Sending four humans 250,000 miles away is a Herculean effort, and we are now just realizing the gravity of that."

The Artemis 2 mission is part of a longer-term plan to repeatedly return to the Moon, with the goal of establishing a permanent base that will offer a platform for further exploration.

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.

Asked about division closer to home and what message they had for Americans, Glover said from his vantage point, "You look amazing. You look beautiful."

"From up here, you also look like one thing," he added. "We're all one people."

Myanmar junta chief elected as president

AFP | Bangkok

Myanmar's parliament elected junta chief Min Aung Hlaing as president yesterday, parliament said, with the ex-military commander set to maintain his rule in a civilian guise after snatching power by force five years ago.

The coup-leading general -- who swept aside democracy in 2021, detaining elected figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi and dissolving her party -- was anointed by pro-military MPs installed in a recent election overseen by the junta he leads.

The vote yesterday across the upper and lower houses of parliament in the capital Naypyidaw saw Min Aung Hlaing secure a huge margin over the second-place candidate in a three-person race.

"We hereby announce Senior General Min Aung Hlaing as president," parliament speaker Aung Lin Dwe announced from a stage in the parliament meeting hall.

He received 429 votes of 584



Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing (C) visits a polling station

cast by MPs, a parliament official said after ballot counting was finished.

While the junta touted parliament's reopening last month as a return of power to the people, analysts describe it as civilian window dressing intended to launder the military's continuing rule.

The pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won more than 80 percent of parliamentary seats contested in the election which concluded in late January, while serving members of the armed forces occupy unelected seats making up a quarter of the total.

10 dead as Russia launches new daytime attacks on Ukraine

AFP | Kyiv

Russian strikes killed at least 10 people in Ukraine yesterday, officials said, as Moscow launched the latest in an increasing number of daytime barrages.

Moscow has been firing aerial broadsides at Ukraine throughout its more than four-year invasion, mostly at night, but in recent weeks it has stepped up daytime attacks.

The Russian military used more than 500 drones and dozens of missiles in its salvo yesterday, according to the Ukrainian air force.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Russia of intensifying attacks ahead of Catholic Easter on Sunday, "turning what should have been silence in the skies into an Easter escalation".

Images from Ukrainian emergency services showed damaged residential buildings, with



Residents of Kyiv shelters in the metro

a block of flats ripped open and rubble strewn on a street.

The attack killed one person and left eight wounded in the capital region of Kyiv, said regional governor Mykola Kalashnyk.

"Unfortunately, animals were also affected by the attack --

approximately 20 animals died due to damage to a veterinary clinic," Kalashnyk added.

Some residents of the capital sheltered in the metro or in basements, AFP reporters saw, but many people sat in cafes unfazed by the attacks and despite blaring air raid sirens.

Classifieds

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Hegseth fires top US army general in new shake-up

Trump continues a high-profile military purge while forces engage in war with Iran

- General Randy George retires with immediate effect
- Pentagon sacks two additional senior Army officers
- General Christopher LaNeve becomes acting chief
- Trump removes multiple top-tier military commanders

AFP | Washington

The Trump administration has fired army chief of staff General Randy George and two other senior figures, officials said yesterday, in a surprise shake-up just as US forces are locked in a major war against Iran.

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth's ouster of George, the top US Army general, meant the latest in a series of high-profile departures from the military since President Donald Trump returned to power a year ago.

There was little in the way of a public explanation for sacking George, a highly decorated veteran who oversaw the army at a time when the United States is more than a month into a punishing bombing campaign against Iran that Trump says will continue several weeks more.



US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth (R) and US Army Chief of Staff General Randy George attend the 2025 National POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremony at the Pentagon in Washington



Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell posted a statement on X late Thursday that George "will be retiring from his position... effective immediately."

During a nearly four-decade military career, George deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan multiple times and also served in positions including vice chief of staff of the army and senior military assistant to then-defense secretary Lloyd Austin during Joe Biden's term as president.

The army's vice chief of staff General Christopher LaNeve will take over as acting chief of staff, CBS reported.

Hegseth previously said LaNeve is "a battle-tested leader with decades of operational experience."

YOU KNOW WHAT

George, a decorated Iraq and Afghanistan veteran, was dismissed without public explanation

Military purge

An official also confirmed that General David Hodne and Major General William Green Jr. were removed alongside George.

Hodne led the Army's Transformation and Training Command while Green was in charge of the Army's Chaplain Corps.

Trump has overseen a purge of top military officers, including the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, general Charles "CQ" Brown, whom he fired without explanation in February 2025, shortly after taking office.

Other senior officers dismissed include the heads of the Navy and Coast Guard, the general who headed the National Security Agency, the vice chief of staff of the Air Force, a Navy admiral assigned to NATO, and three top military lawyers.

The chief of staff of the Air Force also announced his retirement without explanation just two years into a four-year term, while the head of US Southern Command retired a year into his tenure.

North Korea's Kim pets puppies, kittens at Pyongyang pet shop

AFP | Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un petted puppies and kittens with his delighted daughter as they toured a new Pyongyang housing district, state media said yesterday.

The Hwasong area, formerly mostly farmland, is a newly developed residential district with about 40,000 housing units built through a series of projects launched in 2022 under Kim's orders.

It is part of a broader construction push in the capital and across the diplomatically isolated, poor country aimed at improving living standards after years of Western sanctions and state-controlled economic policies.

Streets of the district were "brimming with the joy and excitement of citizens who greeted the auspicious event of moving into new houses", Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

Accordingly, "various service bases to contribute to improving the wellbeing of the inhabitants are stepping up the preparations for inauguration," it said.

Kim, with his teenage daughter Ju Ae, visited a pet shop in the district, where he said:



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (front R) and his daughter Kim Ju Ae (front L) inspecting a pet shop awaiting the opening of the fourth-stage district of the Hwasong Area in Pyongyang

"Households rearing pets are increasing in the capital city and local areas nowadays.

"I saw to it that a new shop was built to sell pets and various accessories and offer the specialized service."

Images released by state media showed a visibly delighted Ju Ae watching cats with her father and petting one perched on a tower while Kim sat just behind her.

In another photo, Kim cradled a white puppy as officials looked

on with broad smiles, while Ju Ae sat beside him watching.

"Referring to the production of various kinds of pet-care tools, feed and veterinary medicines, he (Kim) stressed the need to take measures to increase production in the future," KCNA said.

Kim and his daughter also visited a musical instrument store, with state media images showing the duo looking at guitars and saxophones.

Properly managing and oper-

ating the leisure facilities would "serve as a valuable foundation for the development of socialist civilisation", Kim said, according to KCNA.

The North Korean leader and his daughter also visited a hair salon, and said welfare amenities were "essential" for "ensuring a cultured and hygienic environment and highly civilized living space in the formation of urban districts."

He called for "steadily improving the quality of service on the principle of fully meeting the aesthetic tastes", and "creating a new Korean-style service culture".

In February, South Korea's national intelligence service said that Pyongyang appears to have started the process of designating Ju Ae as leader Kim's successor.

This perception has been stoked by a string of recent high-profile outings including watching a test of nuclear-capable rocket launchers, firing a pistol and trying out the country's new battle tank in large-scale military drills.

Kim ordered the shops to open for the Day of the Sun, the April 15 birth anniversary of his grandfather and national founder Kim Il Sung, KCNA said.

CELEBS

celebs

Zendaya explains why she won't address Tom Holland marriage speculation

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Zendaya has explained why she and Tom Holland won't confirm whether or not they've got married.

The Drama actress' stylist Law Roach claimed last month that the couple had quietly tied the knot, but the Spider-Man co-stars have yet to directly answer if they have got hitched or not, and now Zendaya has explained there are some parts of their relationships that they want to keep for themselves.

Speaking on the New York Times' Modern Love podcast, Zendaya said: "I just feel like for me there is this level of a parasocial investment in my personal relationship.

"I do know that I'm a public person and so is he and I'm also aware that we've grown up in front of people and we've done movies where we fall in love with each other so I really do understand that and I don't want to dismiss that like, 'Stay out of my business' or whatever. "In a lot of ways, I'm also a very private person and I try my best to be able to have things



Tom Holland and Zendaya

for myself and for him as well." The Euphoria star stressed she and Tom are not trying to "hide from the world," but want to "preserve things for ourselves so that we can maintain that joy just within ourselves and our loved ones and our family."

She added: "I hear it but also my own little boundaries of what I like to bring up and talk about but then also what I'm willing to share." Zendaya, 29, recently played coy about the marriage rumours when asked if she has any secrets.

When asked by Extra host Terri Seymour what the biggest secret she has kept in her life is, she replied: "I don't know - that's what secrets are, right?"

Terri then quizzed Zendaya if she had a secret, she answered: "No, nothing that comes to mind."

Zendaya got engaged to Tom in late 2024 after several years of dating, and it was last month that celebrity stylist Law claimed the pair had already tied the knot.

He told Access Hollywood: "The wedding has already happened. You missed it."

When asked if that is "true", Law replied: "It's very true!"

Tom has previously insisted the pair are determined to keep their love affair private because it has "nothing to do with" their acting careers.

He told The Hollywood Reporter: "Our relationship is something that we are incredibly protective of and we want to keep as sacred as possible.

"We don't think that we owe it to anyone, it's our thing, and it has nothing to do with our careers."

Amanda Peet slams 'ridiculous' Hollywood

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Amanda Peet has branded the cut-throat movie industry "ridiculous".

The 54-year-old actress - who is mother to Frances, 19, Molly, 15, and Henry, 11, with her husband David Benioff - has opened up about life in the spotlight and admitted it's a misconception to think Hollywood stars have perfect lives because of their wealth and status - insisting it's all just "smoke and mirrors".

She told Fox News: "It's ridiculous ... It's smoke and mirrors. There's no there there. I mean you name the aphorism, it applies to us.

"It's desperation galore. 'What are they doing over there? Why don't I have that? Why don't I look like that?' That's the bad part."

She went on to add: "In Hollywood, it's hard to - I'm gonna just sound corny. It's competitive, and it's hard to get out of that really sort of competitive mindset where the piece of cheese on the island is too small and there are too many

people going after it." However, Amanda is adamant she's not competing for parts in the same way any more and has found "peace" now she's in her 50s.

She said: "I'm older, so I have much more peace about it, but it's really, really hard to find that, and it is hard not to want to chase your own buzz if you are lucky enough to have any, and instead, just be like: 'What do I really want to do when my alarm goes off in the morning? What do I want to be doing? Is this really what I want to be doing? Is this really helpful or useful to anyone?'"

It comes after Amanda revealed she has been diagnosed with breast cancer. She confirmed her health battle in an essay written for the New Yorker and she has since explained she had to compose herself before discussing the issue with her kids.

Amanda



Amanda Peet

Project Hail Mary star Ryan Gosling accepts invite to visit Days of Our Lives set

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Ryan Gosling has accepted an invitation to visit his soap opera idol Deidre Hall on the set of Days Of Our Lives.

The Project Hail Mary star opened up about his love of soap operas during a recent appearance on the Happy Sad Confused podcast and he revealed watching Deidre played a woman possessed by the devil on Days Of Our Lives taught him how to act - now Deidre has invited him to come visit the cast.

In a video posted on Instagram, Deidre addressed the Hollywood actor and told him: "We're just thrilled to be acknowledged and to be so well spoken of because we work really hard, as you acknowledged ... come over and see what we do in our neck of the woods.



Ryan Gosling

"Nobody will be possessed. And if they are, I'll keep an eye on you."

Ryan then responded by accepting her invitation, telling the ac-

trix: "Deidre Hall, are you kidding me? Yes. This is a very enthusiastic yes to a very cordial invitation to visit you on set.

"I will be there to thank you in person for being my OG [original] acting inspiration. It wasn't Marlon Brando in On the Waterfront. It wasn't [Robert] De Niro in Taxi Driver. It was you."

He added: "Any time, anywhere, I'll be there. I'm not worried about the possession, I'll say a Hail Mary before I get there. It'll be fine and I'll see you on set."

Ryan opened up about his love of soap operas during his appearance on Happy Sad Confused, admitting he didn't have many friends as a kid and spent most of his time watching TV.

The actor explained: "I didn't have a lot of friends growing up. I had TV. I used to pretend to be sick so I could stay home and watch Regis and Kelly. I loved Regis and Kelly and Days Of Our Lives ..."

The Barbie actor went on

Jamie Lee Curtis planned to be a cop

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Jamie Lee Curtis always thought she'd be a police officer.

The Everything Everywhere All At Once actress is amazed to be celebrating almost 50 years in Hollywood because it wasn't how she expected her life to turn out when she was younger.

The 67-year-old actress shared a photo online of herself playing a waitress in an episode of Columbo in 1977 - one of her earliest roles at the age of around 19 - alongside a current-day self and wrote on Instagram: "Next year, I will [have] been an actress for 50 years. I was never going to be an actor. I thought I'd be a cop.(sic)"

The Scarpetta actress re-

flected on how far her career has come since her early days.

She wrote: "I was telling the story on set of my early jobs as an unnamed waitress on a Columbo episode when I was a contract player at Universal Pictures and now I am a producer, HBIC

[head b**** in charge], a costar with Nicole Kidman and collaborator on #scarpetta @primevideo @nowscreeamingpv @blumhouse @comet.pictures @blossomfilms.(sic)"

Jamie insisted she never had a plan in mind for her career.

She added: "There was no future tripping. It was just each job, one job at a time, grateful for any opportunity and patience. Lots of f***** patience."

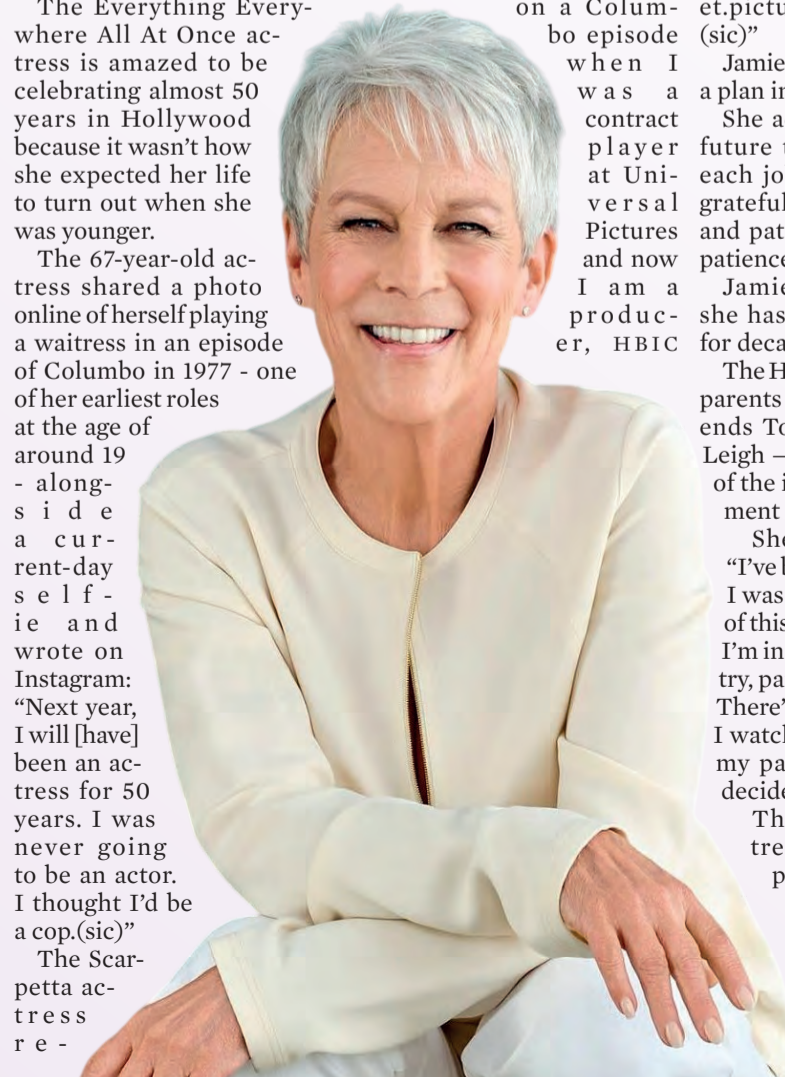
Jamie recently admitted she has been "self-retiring" for decades.

The Halloween star - whose parents were Hollywood legends Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh - has long been aware of the industry's harsh treatment of older performers.

She explained to AARP: "I've been self-retiring since I was 30, saying, 'I'll get out of this,' because the industry I'm in is a cruel, cruel industry, particularly with ageing. There's a dismissal of people. I watched it very much with my parents. So I have just decided to embrace that."

The Freaky Friday actress changed her approach after she turned 60 and started to embrace her new-found "freedom".

The movie star said: "Accepting my crepey skin Jamie Lee Curtis



Bahrain's youth take on German giants

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Bahrain's youth national basketball team begins its campaign today at the Albert Schweitzer International Tournament in Germany, as the Kingdom's rising talents test themselves against some of the world's top sides.

The prestigious under-18 competition, held in Mannheim and Viernheim until April 12, features a strong field including hosts Germany, Slovenia, Sweden, Japan and Türkiye, with Bahrain competing in Group A. The Kingdom opens its campaign tonight against Germany at 9 PM, faces Sweden tomorrow at 6:15 PM, and takes on Slovenia on Monday at the same time. After a rest day on Tuesday, they return to action on Wednesday against Japan at 2:15 PM, before concluding their preliminary



Hassan Abdulqader throws down a dunk during yesterday's training session



Team gathers in a motivational huddle ahead of today's opener

round fixtures on Thursday with a clash against Türkiye at 2:45 PM.

The squad is led by Greek head coach Georgios Vovorras, assisted by national coach Ahmed Aziz, with 14 players selected for the tournament. The roster includes Mehdi Habib, Hussain Madan, Mohammed Adel, Mohammed Farhan, Ali Ferdowsi, Ali Khalil, Yousif Yaqoob Meshael, Hussain Fouad, Ali Hafez, Hassan Abdulqader, Somto Patrick Onoduenyi, Khalid Mohammed, Mujtaba Rayan, and Jock James. Onoduenyi, the Arab youth Most Valuable Player, is among the standout names as Bahrain looks to make an impression on the international stage.

The tournament also serves as a key part of Bahrain's preparations for upcoming regional competitions, particularly the Gulf Championship qualifiers for the FIBA Asia Cup.

Muharraq Assert Title Credentials While Budaiya Slip

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Muharraq moved to the top of the Nasser bin Hamad Premier League table yesterday following a comfortable 3-0 win over Sitra at Khalifa Sports City. Under Portuguese coach Fernando Manuel de Jesus Santos, the reigning 35-time champions set the tone from the opening whistle.

The breakthrough came in the 10th minute when Brazilian Arthur Rezende unleashed a spectacular 40-yard free kick. A deflection left Sitra goalkeeper Omar Ali with little chance, giving the Red Wolves an early lead. From there, the momentum never slowed.

By the 23rd minute, Bahrain international Abdulwahad Al Malood doubled the advantage. Capitalising on a careless turnover from Sitra fullback Vincent Emmanuel, Al Malood chipped the onrushing keeper, using his experience to stay composed under pressure. Before halftime, Angolan striker Elliot Simoes completed the scoring. An end-to-end counterattack saw Sami Frioui drive forward and link with Soufiane Mahrouk, whose pass deflected off Frioui before Simoes reacted quickly to finish



Muharraq's Arthur Rezende lets fly with a stunning free kick to open the scoring against Sitra



Al Hidd's Ebrahim AlOuali battles to retain possession against Budaiya

ish with a half-volley from close range. The result sends Muharraq to the top of the table with 40 points, a single point ahead of rivals Al Khaldiya, though the Red Wolves hold a game in hand. Sitra remain in ninth on 18 points, struggling to climb out of the lower reaches of the table.

Later in the day at Bahrain National Stadium, Budaiya fell 2-0 to Al Hidd in a match that nearly turned on controversy. Budaiya's Abdulaziz Al Shaikh appeared to be sent off in the 25th minute for a dangerous challenge in

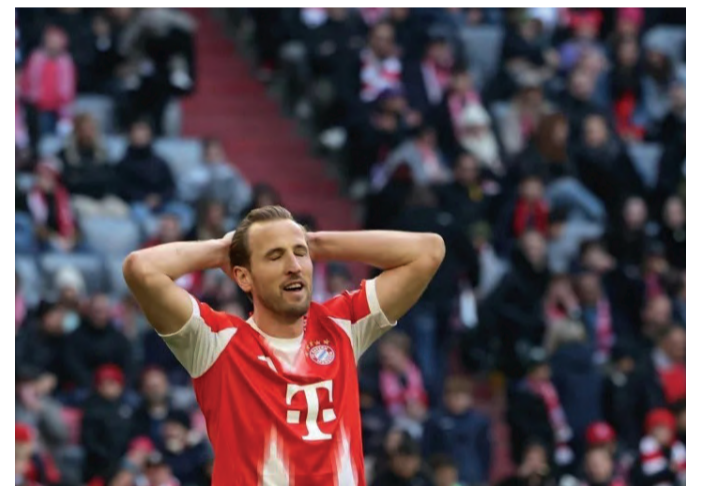
midfield, but VAR intervened to downgrade the decision to a yellow card.

The deadlock was broken in the 56th minute by substitute Oussama Belatreche. A corner from Mahmoud Kayssoumi found the Algerian, who met it with a header to score his eighth goal of the season. Gambian forward Jumai Jallow sealed the win in the 89th minute, finishing clinically after a neat assist from Belatreche. Al Hidd remain in fifth on 25 points under Tunisian coach Chokri Bjeaoui, who took

charge in February, while Budaiya stay 10th with 18.

Looking ahead, Matchweek 17 concludes tonight with two intriguing fixtures. Al Khaldiya have the chance to reclaim top spot when they face fellow title challengers Riffa at Bahrain National Stadium at 5:15 PM, providing a tantalizing preview of next Friday's King's Cup semi-final between the same sides. Later, at Khalifa Sports City, Al Ahli take on Al Malkiya at 7:30 PM, with both teams eager to finish the week on a high.

Kane ruled out of Bayern match with injury, says Kompany



Harry Kane reacts during a match (file photo)

AFP | Munich

Harry Kane will miss Bayern Munich's Bundesliga match at Freiburg this weekend but should be fit for their Champions League clash with Real Madrid next week, coach Vincent Kompany said yesterday.

Kane missed England's friendly defeat by Japan this week with an ankle problem and has not recovered in time to face Freiburg on Saturday.

Bayern take on Real Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu in their Champions League quarter-final first leg on Tuesday.

"Harry trained well until Sunday, then he felt something in his ankle while with the national team," Kompany told reporters.

"That will have an impact on tomorrow's game -- he won't be available. Nevertheless, I'm positive about Tuesday.

"It's not great, I'd like him to play against Freiburg, but as things stand today that won't be possible."

Bayern lead second-placed Borussia Dortmund by nine points in the Bundesliga and can take another step towards a second straight title this week.

But they will be without Kane and his suspended understudy Nicolas Jackson.

Bayern sporting director Christoph Freund also confirmed that Raphael Guerreiro will leave the club at the end of the season, with Juventus reportedly interested in signing the Portugal full-back.

Liverpool's Alisson to miss Man City, PSG matches, says Slot

AFP | London

Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson Becker will miss their FA Cup quarter-final against Manchester City and both legs of the Champions League tie with Paris Saint-Germain, manager Arne Slot said yesterday.

The Brazilian suffered an injury during Liverpool's win over Galatasaray in the Champions League last-16 second leg last month.

The Reds visit Man City on Saturday before taking on reigning European champions PSG at the Parc des Princes on Wednesday, with the quarter-final return leg six days later.

"He will not be part of the Paris Saint-Germain games as well," Slot told reporters.

"He will be out for a bit longer. Towards the end of the season we expect him to be fit again."

Alexander Isak may be fit to play a part against City, though, having returned to training after breaking his leg in December.

"It will take a bit of time to give him a lot



Liverpool's Brazilian goalkeeper #01 Alisson Becker catches the ball (file photo)

of minutes," Slot said of Isak.

"We will make sure we do the right thing in terms of building him up in minutes, but it's a very good thing to have him on the training ground again.

"It would be even better to have him available for games, that's for sure."

Mohamed Salah is ready to play after hobbling off against Galatasaray and then missing Liverpool's loss at Brighton before the international break.

The Egyptian announced last week he will leave Anfield at the end of the season.

Liverpool have endured a tough campaign in the Premier League after winning the title last season and sit in fifth place, battling for a spot in next season's Champions League.

But they remain in the hunt for a seventh European crown, facing a rematch against PSG after a last-16 penalty shootout defeat by the French champions last year.

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Strong competitions at the launch of HM the King's Cup Festival and thrilling conclusion of Bahrain Turf Series

Manama

Under the patronage of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, HM the King's Cup Festival launched at the Rashid Equestrian & Horseracing Club (REHC) race-course in Al Raffa, Sakhir, with the Festival taking place over two days, Thursday and Friday, April 2 and 3.

The first day of HM the King's Cup Festival witnessed strong and exciting competitions, with the participation of elite horses from Bahraini and international stables. These horses engaged in a thrilling battle to win the cups across eight races in the season's premier equestrian event. The second day is set to feature peak competition, with HM The King's Cups for Arabian, imported, and Bahraini-bred horses.

The first day of the festival also included the conclusion of the fifth edition of Bahrain Turf Series, with the sixth and final round taking place, featuring a large number of Bahraini and international horses.

The winners of the final round of the Bahrain Turf Series were crowned, as His Excellency Dr. Mohammed bin Mubarak bin Daina, Minister of Oil and Environment and Special Envoy for Climate Affairs, presented the Al Fateh Cup, sponsored by Bapco Energies, to the winning owner's representative, Philippa Mains,



in addition to presenting awards to the winning trainer's representative, Ali Al Shuwaikh, and the winning jockey, Stephane Ladjadj.

Shaikh Salman bin Mohammed Al Khalifa received the International Handicap Cup from Mr. Ghanesh Bligh, who also presented awards to the winning trainer, Daniel and Claire Kubler, and the winning jockey,

Ebrahim Nader.

His Highness Shaikh Sultan Al Deen bin Mohammed bin Salman Al Khalifa received the second round trophy from Mr. Isa Kanoo, Board Member of Ebrahim Khalil Kanoo Company, the third round trophy from Mr. Jurrien Bongers, General Manager of the Sheraton Bahrain Hotel, and the fourth round trophy from Mr. Mohammed

Shirazi, Managing Director of Bahrain Jewellery Centre.

Mr. Khalid Taqi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Gulf Air Group, presented the first round trophy to the winning trainer, Adel Abdulla, while Shaikh Salman bin Rashid Al Khalifa, REHC's High Committee Representative for International Racing, presented the seventh round trophy to the winning



owner, Mohammed Khalid Abdulrahim, and Mr. Ebrahim Faisal Al Malki, Director of Media and Communications at REHC, presented the eighth round trophy to the winning owner, Abdullah Fawzi Nass.

The racing evening featured strong competitions across all eight races.

Gattuso quits as Italy coach

Gennaro Gattuso resigns following Italy's failure to qualify for a third consecutive World Cup

● Gattuso resigns after Italy fail to qualify for World Cup

● Lost to Bosnia on penalties in playoff final

AFP | Rome

Gennaro Gattuso quit as Italy coach yesterday, as the Azzurri's failure to reach a third straight World Cup continued to send shockwaves through Italian football.

A World Cup winner in 2006, Gattuso leaves after less than a year in charge of Italy, a team which has fallen far behind historic rivals like France and Spain in the last two decades.

Defeat on penalties to Bosnia and Herzegovina in Tuesday's qualification play-off final ended up costing Gattuso his job, as the man who hired him also stepped down as president of the Italian Football Federation (FIGC).

"With a heavy heart, and having fallen short of the goal we set ourselves, I feel my time as head coach of the national team has come to an end," Gattuso said in



a statement.

"The Azzurri shirt is the most precious thing in football, and for that reason it's only right to make way immediately for the federation's future decisions.

"It has been an honour to lead the national team, especially with a group of players who have shown such commitment and dedication."

Gabriele Gravina had asked Gattuso to stay on immediately after elimination in Zenica but his departure, and that of national team general manager



Italy's headcoach Gennaro Gattuso hugs Italy's forward #15 Francesco Pio Esposito and Italy's midfielder #14 Niccolò Pisilli (file photo)

Gianluigi Buffon, paved the way for the 48-year-old's exit after his contract was terminated by mutual consent.

Gattuso took charge of Italy in June last year following the sacking of Luciano Spalletti, himself a victim of a dismal title defence at Euro 2024 and a 3-0 hammering at the hands of Erling Haaland's Norway in their first World Cup qualifier.

His record is impressive on paper, with six wins, one defeat

and one draw in eight matches with 22 goals scored and 10 conceded.

But that draw was the 1-1 with Bosnia which preceded a penalty shoot-out in which Italy missed twice, while the loss was another humiliating one to Norway, this time 4-1 at the San Siro.

Strange choice

Gattuso was considered by many a strange choice to replace Spalletti due to his spotty club

coaching record, and he was heavily criticised after Tuesday's elimination.

Italy were second best nearly the whole game, and completely conceded the initiative when Alessandro Bastoni was sent off not long before half-time.

Bosnia could easily have won the game in normal time but once Italy managed to get to the shoot-out Gattuso selected inexperienced Pio Esposito to take the first penalty, which the

22

goals have been scored and 10 conceded by Italy in 8 matches under Gattuso, but the one draw and one defeat proved fatal in World Cup qualifying

20-year-old smashed over the bar.

The upheaval caused by failing to qualify for this summer's finals in the United States, Canada and Mexico, means the national team will have an interim coach for a friendly with Greece on June 7.

Two former national team coaches in Roberto Mancini, who led Italy to victory at Euro 2020, and Antonio Conte are the names most frequently cited as Gattuso's replacement.

But no new coach will be announced until after the FIGC's board vote on a new president on June 22, Gravina falling on his sword a day after sports minister Andrea Abodi called on him to go.