

## US sending additional Marines, ships

Washington, United States

The United States is sending more Marines and ships to the Middle East two weeks into the US-Israeli campaign against Iran, US media reported on Friday. The Wall Street Journal quoted US officials as saying the Japan-based USS Tripoli and its attached Marines are en route to the region, while The New York Times reported that some 2,500 Marines aboard as many as three ships were headed for the Middle East.

## Patriotism in action: HM King hails ministry's vital role



TDT | Manama

His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, the Supreme Commander of the Bahrain Defence Force, yesterday praised the Ministry of Interior for its key role in maintaining security, stability, and safeguarding the nation's achievements.

During visit to the ministry, His Majesty was received by General Shaikh Rashid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa, Minister of Interior, and senior officials. HM commended the dedication, discipline, efficiency, and patriotism of security personnel in protecting citizens and residents across Bahrain.

HM the King also highlight-

ed the continuous coordination between the Ministry of Interior, the Bahrain Defence Force, the National Guard, and other security agencies, noting their central role in strengthening the national security system and consolidating stability.

His Majesty reiterated Bahrain's firm stance against the

recent unjustified attacks on the Kingdom, Arab nations, and friendly states by Iran, affirming the Kingdom's commitment to peace, cooperation, and good neighborliness.

Bahrain, HM said, will remain a safe haven, advancing steadily in development thanks to the unity, loyalty, and dedication of its citizens.

## Multi-vehicle crash clogs Sheikh Khalifa Bin Salman Street

TDT | Manama

A multi-vehicle collision on Sheikh Khalifa Bin Salman Street near the Buri area, heading towards Hamad Town, caused traffic congestion after an oil spill on the road.

Authorities responded quickly and began clearing the spill to restore the smooth flow of traffic.



Her Highness Shaikha Sheema bint Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Head of Humanitarian Voluntary Initiatives at the Royal Humanitarian Foundation (RHF), visited Salmaniya Medical Complex to check on the health of those injured from Sitra and other areas following the recent Iranian attacks on residential neighbourhoods and civilian sites. The visit was part of the Sheem Al Khair humanitarian voluntary relief initiatives, aimed at providing relief and support to affected families and demonstrating solidarity with victims of the attacks.

## F1 races in Bahrain, Saudi 'cancelled or postponed': source to AFP

AFP | Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Formula One races in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia will be cancelled or rescheduled as the Middle East war engulfs the region, a source with knowledge of the matter told AFP on Friday.

"The F1 in Saudi and Bahrain won't happen at their scheduled time," the source said, requesting anonymity to discuss a sensitive topic.

Formula One will announce soon that the races "have been cancelled or postponed to a later date", the source added. Bahrain is currently scheduled for April 10-12 and Saudi a week later.

Neighbouring Qatar has also been targeted by Iranian attacks with the first round of the World Endurance Championship (WEC) which had been slated for March 26-28 now postponed until October.

## US offers \$10 million for information on Mojtaba Khamenei Agencies

The US State Department is offering up to \$10 million for information on Iran's new Supreme Leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, and other senior officials. The appeal was made public through the department's Rewards for Justice programme.

# Nuclear power on Bahrain's radar

Kingdom mulls peaceful use of nuclear energy

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

Bahrain is studying the potential use of nuclear small modular reactors (SMRs) as part of efforts to diversify its future energy mix, while continuing to expand rooftop solar and other renewable projects.

The Electricity and Water Authority (EWA) said it is assessing the feasibility of emerging technologies, including SMRs, as it explores options that could be incorporated into the national power system. The clarification came in reply to a parliamentary query from MP Ahmed Al Salloom.

Bahrain's power stations currently generate about 20,000 gigawatt-hours of electricity annually, with renewables contributing only about 1.5 per cent. Just 70 homes have rooftop solar systems in service.

EWA said 372 renewable energy projects with a combined capacity of more than 141 meg-



Yasser Humaidan, Minister of Electricity and Water Affairs, Ahmed Al Salloom, MP

awatts are already operational. Work is under way on a further 54 distributed projects expected to raise total capacity to nearly 500 megawatts in the coming years.

Solar remains the main focus, with projects planned across several sites with a total capacity of about 500 megawatts. These include the expansion of Al Dur Renewable Energy Station with capacity of around 100 megawatts.

A tender has also been float-

ed for Bahrain's first solar power plant under a strategic partnership with the private sector, expected to produce about 150 megawatts, alongside plans for central power stations adding a further 250 megawatts.

The authority said the net metering policy introduced under Ministerial Resolution No. 2 of 2017 has helped encourage home solar, allowing households to use generated power and export surplus electricity to

the grid for bill credits. A 2-megawatt wind pilot project has also been launched, while a feasibility study is under way into a floating wind farm. However, current costs do not yet support wider deployment. SMR technology is still under development and has not yet been widely deployed commercially. Any future use would require licensing under international standards.

**BETTER YOU KNOW**

**Bahrain's renewable energy plan, approved in 2017, aims to raise renewables to 20 per cent by 2035 as part of the Kingdom's goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2060.**

Watchful and ready to respond

## Air defences down 121 missiles, 193 drones: BDF



TDT | Manama

A total of 121 ballistic missiles and 193 drones have been intercepted by Bahrain's air defence systems since the start of "hostile Iranian aggression", the General Command of the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) announced.

The command said the Kingdom's skies remain secure, praising the exceptional combat readiness and vigilance of BDF personnel and commending their sustained operational effectiveness in defending the country.

It also urged the public to exercise maximum caution for

their safety. Citizens and residents were advised to stay clear of affected areas and suspicious objects, avoid filming or photographing military operations or debris sites, refrain from spreading unverified information and rely only on official government channels for updates and advisories.

## Mideast war cuts Hormuz strait transit to 77 ships: maritime data firm

London, United Kingdom

Only 77 ships have so far crossed the Strait of Hormuz in March as the Mideast war disrupts one of the world's most vital shipping routes, a maritime data firm reported yesterday.

Lloyd's List Intelligence said most of these vessels belonged to the so-called "shadow fleet" -- ships used to skirt Western sanctions and regulations, typically linked to Russia and Iran.

They are often ageing ships in poor condition, without proper insurance and with opaque ownership.

The 77 transits recorded so far this month compare with 1,229 passages between March 1 and 11 last year, according to Lloyd's List Intelligence.

Over 60,000 volunteers join national relief campaign

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# Over 60,000 volunteers join national relief campaign

TDT | Manama

More than 60,000 volunteers have registered for the “Bahrain is Well Because You Are Its People” campaign, launched through the National Volunteering Platform to support national relief efforts following the Iranian attacks.

Some volunteers have already begun field assignments, while others are being deployed in phases according to operational needs and required expertise. Applications are reviewed, and volunteers are matched with



Authorities said additional volunteers will be contacted in stages based on operational requirements and available assignments.

tasks to ensure their skills are effectively used.

**Requirements**

Opportunities cover health, engineering, logistics, administration, monitoring, and other specialisations as needed.

Tasks include managing shelter centres, assisting with damage in affected areas, contributing to rehabilitation and reconstruction in Sitra, and supporting elderly citizens with daily needs—demonstrating Bahrain’s spirit of solidarity.

## Power bills stayed under BD150 despite summer

Hasan Barakat | Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

Most Bahraini households kept monthly electricity use below 5,000 units even during the peak summer months, with the vast majority of bills staying under BD150, according to figures released by the Electricity and Water Authority (EWA).

The data was provided in reply to a parliamentary question

by MP Mahdi Abdulaziz Al Shuwaikh on household electricity consumption between May and September in 2023, 2024 and 2025. EWA said most domestic accounts did not exceed 5,000 units during the period. Among subsidised homes, the share below that level stood at 95 per cent in May 2025 before easing to 82 per cent by September as summer demand rose. Unsubsidised homes showed little change, with around 98 to 99 per cent staying below the

threshold. In 2025, the number of subsidised residential accounts consuming below 5,000 units fell from 139,553 in May to 87,128 in September as temperatures increased.

Despite the seasonal rise in consumption, the authority said the vast majority of electricity and water bills remained at or below BD150. E

WA said the figures reflect generally moderate consumption patterns among Bahraini households.

## Government says Nurana Island projects already underway

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

The government has rejected a parliamentary call to speed up development on Nurana Island, saying planning and infrastructure works are already in progress.

Authorities noted that planning began after landowners submitted subdivision applications, with the plan approved on 8 December 2011. Infrastructure and urban projects are moving forward in line with Bahrain’s population growth, investment activity, and Bahrain Economic Vision 2030 goals to improve living standards and urban functionality.

The government highlighted Resolution No. 788 of 2024, which links subdivision



approvals to the completion of secondary infrastructure works, ensuring timely delivery of internal facilities. Applicants must now carry out these works within subdivision boundaries and connect them to the main network.

Traffic and planning studies are underway for access to Nurana Island and Seef Marina, with road networks to be

built once designs are approved and funding is allocated. Infrastructure services, including sewerage, will be executed by developers under Ministry of Works supervision.

The government said these measures already meet the aims of the parliamentary proposal, ensuring integrated, sustainable development while protecting public resources.





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## Government backs stronger crisis media planning



Ghanim Al Buainain, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs

**Mohammed Darwish**  
TDT | Manama

The government has backed a parliamentary call for stronger media planning during major incidents and emergencies, saying a specialised crisis team is already in place and response plans are regularly updated.

In a reply to Parliament signed by Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Ghanim Al Buainain, the government said it had reviewed the urgent proposal and supported its objective.

The letter said a qualified team has been formed to manage crises from a media perspective, bringing together specialists in strategic communication, community awareness, media relations, digital media, editing and international communication.

It added that comprehensive media plans have been prepared for risks listed in the National Risk Register and are regularly updated in line with changes to the register and the operations of the National Contact Centre.

The government also conducts training programmes and simulation scenarios to test responses to different emergencies, using both traditional and digital platforms. These exercises involve coordination among government entities through the Government Communication Network.

The plans are implemented through Bahrain Television, Bahrain Radio, the Bahrain News Agency and social media channels, and are reviewed after each use to improve future crisis response.

Dr. Mohammed Ali Bahzad, Ambassador of Bahrain to Belgium and Head of the Kingdom's Mission to the European Union, met with HØlne Le Gal, Director-General Managing Director for the Middle East and North Africa at the European External Action Service. During the meeting, Ambassador Bahzad expressed appreciation for the European Union's solidarity with the Kingdom of Bahrain and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in response to the recent blatant Iranian attacks. He also commended the strong and growing partnership between Bahrain and the European Union across several key sectors, as well as the continued exchange of high-level visits between the two sides. He emphasised the importance of further strengthening cooperation and coordination between Bahrain and the European Union, expanding joint engagement in areas of mutual interest, and advancing bilateral relations to broader levels that serve shared priorities and common interests.

# Free hospital rides for senior citizens

**Hasan Barakat**  
TDT | Manama

Free transport to hospitals for senior citizens could soon become a reality under a parliamentary proposal aimed at making healthcare access easier for the elderly.

The initiative seeks to spare older Bahrainis the difficulty of arranging rides for routine medical visits, particularly those who live alone or cannot always rely on family members to accompany them.

Supporters say transport challenges often stand in the way of regular check-ups for seniors with chronic conditions, sometimes forcing them to delay or



Representative image

miss appointments altogether.

Lawmakers argue that a dedicated service would ease that burden, helping elderly patients

reach hospitals and health centres on time and ensuring they receive proper treatment and follow-up care.



**United Kingdom:**  
People over the state pension age can travel free on local buses nationwide, which helps many elderly residents reach hospitals and medical appointments

## Government says free transport 'already in place'

**Mohammed Darwish**  
TDT | Manama

Free transport for elderly patients attending medical appointments is already being provided through existing health services, the government said in a written response to a parliamentary proposal.

According to the reply, older residents are supported through a range of Ministry of

**Dr Maryam Al Dhaen, MP**



Health initiatives designed to ease access to clinics and hospitals. These include mobile clinics, home care, and hospital transport for patients who need it.

Primary health care centres operate mobile clinics for elderly patients unable to attend in person, offering medical consultations, lab

tests, social support services, and remote consultations with family doctors.

Hospital transport is also available for patients who lack other means of travel or whose medical condition requires transfer in official hospital vehicles. Kidney patients at Salmaniya Medical Complex and the Abdulrahman Kanoo Kidney Centre were cited as examples of those receiving the service.

The government noted that home medical care is provided to patients who cannot visit hospitals, including psychiatric

and cancer patients, particularly among the elderly.

On this basis, authorities said the proposal's objectives are already being met through existing services, which are offered in multiple forms across the health system.

MP Dr Maryam Al Dhaen, who put forward the proposal, said added that there was a clear shortfall in support for the wider strategic plan for elderly care, saying many older people face mobility problems, while some also live with health conditions that require medical devices at all times.

## Primary health centres staffed entirely by Bahraini nurses

**Hasan Barakat**  
TDT | Manama

Primary healthcare centres across the Kingdom are now staffed entirely by Bahraini nurses, achieving 100 per cent Bahrainisation, the government said in a written reply to Parliament. The disclosure came in response to a proposal seeking to raise the Bahrainisation rate in nursing at Salmaniya Medical

Complex and health centres to full national staffing.

The government said qualified Bahraini professionals remain the first choice for employment in the health sector, particularly in medical and nursing roles, as part of efforts to strengthen national participation in the workforce.

It added that a number of non-Bahraini nurses in government hospitals have already

been replaced by Bahraini staff as vacancies arise and funding approvals are secured.

Officials said the expansion of national talent in healthcare is supported by an integrated legal and regulatory framework, including the National Health Insurance Law issued under Law No. 23 of 2018, which aims to ensure sustainable and high-quality healthcare services. Regulations issued by the

Supreme Council of Health, in coordination with the Civil Service Bureau, also govern recruitment, promotions, salaries and incentives for employees in government health institutions.

The government said these measures are intended to support the growth of Bahraini professionals in the sector while maintaining the quality and sustainability of healthcare services.



بنك البحرين الإسلامي



### Important Notice for Ordinary and Extraordinary General Meetings for the year 2025

In light of the prevailing circumstances and in the interest of public safety, the Board of Directors of Bahrain Islamic Bank BISB B.S.C hereby announces that the Ordinary and Extraordinary General Meetings scheduled to be held on Tuesday, 17 March 2026 at 11:00 a.m. Bahrain time, will be conducted virtually through the eAGM Portal at: <https://eagm.bahrainclear.com>

For any inquiry, please contact the Corporate Secretary & Head of Governance on: [board.secretary@bisb.com](mailto:board.secretary@bisb.com)

# Lawmakers push for women's sickle cell facility, government says needs are met

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

Lawmakers are pushing for a dedicated facility for women with sickle cell disease, citing long waits, overcrowding, and privacy concerns, but the government says the Kingdom's needs are already met through a specialised short-stay unit at Salmaniya Medical Complex, which opened in February 2024 and has reportedly cut waiting times and received positive patient feedback.

The unit, designed exclusively for female sickle cell patients, features 12 beds, a waiting area, and a treatment room. Officials said it was created after



Jaleela Alawi, MP

a review of available hospital space by a specialist engineering firm. Since opening, the facility has reduced the period

between registration and triage to five minutes from about 30, while the average wait to see an emergency doctor has fallen to 15 minutes from around an hour. Authorities added that patients have responded positively and no complaints have been received.

The government also highlighted Bahrain's approval of the gene therapy CASGEVY for sickle cell disease, making the Kingdom the first in the region and the second in the world to allow its use. Officials said government hospitals and primary healthcare centres coordinate treatment for both emergency and long-term cases through a unified clinical protocol aimed at reducing hospital admissions.

The proposal for a fully equipped facility was submitted in February 2023 by MPs Jaleela Alawi, Mahmoud Fardan, Mohsin Al Asboul, Ahmed Qarata, and Hanan Fardan. They argued that the current 12-bed capacity is insufficient for Bahrain's 4,393 female sickle cell patients, compared with 4,271 male patients. Lawmakers said that when wards are full, waiting times can stretch to two days, and that a dedicated facility would improve privacy and limit exposure to infections.

The debate reflects a wider discussion over how best to balance specialised care with efficient use of existing hospital resources, as Bahrain seeks to expand access to advanced treat-



Globally, it is estimated that around 300,000 babies are born each year with sickle cell disease, with the majority in sub-Saharan Africa, India, and the Middle East.

ments while managing patient flow and safety.

## MPs urge immediate measures to safeguard fishermen

Hasan Barakat  
TDT | Manama

Lawmakers are urging to take urgent steps to support fishermen and protect the future of this long-standing profession.

A proposal on this is set to be discussed during the upcoming session.

Supporters say the fishing sector has faced several challenges recently, including rising operational costs and pressures that have made it in-



creasingly difficult for many fishermen to continue their work.

Members noted that protecting the profession is not only an economic issue but also a cultural one, as fishing remains an important part of Bahrain's maritime heritage.

They stressed that supporting fishermen would help sustain coastal communities while preserving a craft that has shaped the Kingdom's history for generations.

## Plan to train new Bahraini doctors wins backing

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

The government has backed a proposal to strengthen training and employment opportunities for Bahraini doctors in the private sector.

The proposal calls for the Labour Fund (Tamkeen) to support training for newly graduated doctors in private hospitals through a wage-support model linked to practical work in government hospitals.

In its reply, the government said several programmes are already in place to help Bahraini doctors begin their careers and encourage their employment in private healthcare.

Among them is the six-month "Taheel" programme, which provides advanced training in general medicine. Under the scheme, newly graduated doctors working in the private sector spend two days a week training in government hospitals and three days in private practice to gain



Representative image

practical experience.

Tamkeen also offers wage support to private hospitals and clinics hiring Bahraini doctors, provided salaries are not less than BD800. Additional programmes support career development and specialist training for doctors seeking further qualifications.

The government said these initiatives aim to improve employment prospects for Bahraini doctors, develop their skills and strengthen national participation in the healthcare sector. It added that the proposal's objectives are largely in line with programmes already being implemented.

## Government pledges support to protect maritime trade

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

The government has expressed support for Parliament's call to assist fishermen and seafarers, noting that existing programmes are already designed to sus-

tain the trade and protect incomes.

Authorities highlighted Tamkeen, set up under Law No. 57 of 2006, as a key source of aid. The fund provides schemes for Bahraini workers, including fishermen, to boost productivity and earnings. Sup-

port also covers private firms and holders of commercial registrations through hiring incentives and equipment funding.

The government added that fishing is closely tied to protecting marine resources and food security. Assistance for

diesel, equipment, and supplies is also available via the Bahrain Development Bank. Officials said programmes are continually reviewed to meet the real needs of fishermen while ensuring economic stability and sustainable marine resources for the future.

# Government: Round-the-clock emergency care covers all of Bahrain

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

Health centres, hospital emergency units, ambulance bases, and Civil Defence stations provide round-the-clock emergency care across Bahrain, said Ghanim Al Buainain, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs.

The ministry's statement came in response to a par-



Ghanim Al Buainain,  
Minister of  
Parliamentary  
Affairs

liamentary proposal calling for expanded emergency coverage. Al Buainain said the proposal had been reviewed, but the services requested are already in place.

Nine primary healthcare centres now operate 24 hours a day across all governorates, while gov-

ernment hospitals and Royal Medical Services hospitals handle emergency cases around the clock. Civil Defence stations cover assigned areas, coordinating multiple centres when major fires or serious accidents occur.

The National Ambulance Service operates 13 centres and points—including King Hamad University Hospital, Muharraq, Al Hidd, Hamad Town, the military hospital, Aali, Ma'ameer, Jaw, Mina Salman, Maqaba, and King Hamad Bridge—plus points in Durrat Al Bahrain

and Sitra. These sites are fully equipped to respond immediately, supported by modern communications and geographic systems that help reduce response times.

Al Buainain noted that new ambulance centres are planned in other areas to further strengthen urgent medical care. He added that the aims of the parliamentary proposal are already met through the existing 24-hour health centres, hospital emergency units, Civil Defence stations, and National Ambulance operations.

## MPs call to restore cancelled housing applications

Hasan Barakat  
TDT | Manama

Lawmakers are seeking to reinstate housing applications that were cancelled after applicants' salaries increased.

The proposal urges a review of cases where applicants lost eligibility due to income rises, arguing that many had already spent years on waiting lists and faced uncertainty about their

housing prospects.

Supporters said salary increases, while positive, should not automatically disqualify applicants—especially when higher income does not necessarily make private housing affordable. They added that restoring these applications would provide relief to families still in need of housing support despite modest income growth.



# Jail, **million-BD** fines to curb unlicensed finance

● **Legal update:** Decree-Law No. 37 of 2025 amends Article 161 of the Central Bank of Bahrain and Financial Institutions Law, allowing imprisonment, fines, or both for violations, closing gaps in existing law.

● **FATF compliance:** The changes were introduced urgently to align Bahrain with global anti-money-laundering and counter-terrorist-financing standards ahead of the March 2026 FATF review.

**Mohammed Darwish**  
TDT | Manama

Bahrain plans to introduce jail terms alongside fines of up to BD1 million for breaches of Central Bank licensing rules, as authorities move to curb unlicensed financial and insurance activity and prepare for a March 2026 FATF review. The decree-law aims to close gaps in existing legislation, strengthen oversight, and protect the Kingdom's financial system from money laundering and terror financing.

The measure, contained in Decree-Law No. 37 of 2025, amends Article 161 of the Central Bank of Bahrain and Financial Institutions Law of 2006. Under the new wording, anyone



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

who violates Articles 40 and 41—or rules issued under Article 42—could face imprisonment, a fine of up to BD1 million, or both. Harsher penalties under the Penal Code or other laws remain applicable.

Previously, only fines were allowed. The amendments specifically target unlicensed financial activity and the misuse of protected financial or insurance wording by parties without Central Bank approval.

Article 40 bars anyone from providing financial services subject to Central Bank oversight within Bahrain without a licence and prohibits establishing financial institutions without approval, under the Commercial Companies Law. Article 41 bans unlicensed parties from using the word “bank” or similar

terminology that suggests they conduct banking operations in trade names, addresses, letters, invoices, or notices.

The same restrictions apply to insurance activities. Only parties registered under Article 74 may use terms suggesting they provide insurance, reinsurance, brokerage, loss-adjusting, or agency services.

The government said the decree-law was issued urgently because money laundering and terror financing methods are constantly evolving, and Bahrain must comply with FATF standards while addressing risks identified in its national assessment.

The Ministry of Interior supported the decree-law and its urgency in a written reply and at a 12 November 2025 com-

mittee meeting. Central Bank officials told the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee that the amendment closes gaps in existing law, allows prison, fines, or both, and ensures sufficient time to demonstrate real impact ahead of the FATF review. They warned that failure to comply could lead to Bahrain being grey-listed.

Key financial stakeholders have also backed the measure. The Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Bahrain Association of Banks endorsed the amendment, highlighting its role in strengthening legal and regulatory frameworks to combat financial crime. Parliament's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee recommended the law for approval, with unanimous support from all attending members.



The FATF review refers to an assessment conducted by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an intergovernmental body that sets global standards to combat money laundering, terrorist financing, and other threats to the international financial system.

## Law tightening financial crime penalties heads to Parliament

**Hasan Barakat**  
TDT | Manama

MPs will review amendments aimed at strengthening penalties for financial crimes when Parliament takes up a report by the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee on Decree Law No. 37 of 2025.

The decree amends Article 161 of the Central Bank of Bahrain and Financial Institutions Law (Law No. 64 of 2006) as part of efforts to enhance the Kingdom's financial regulatory framework.

According to the committee's report, the changes are intended to strengthen Bahrain's ability to combat financial crimes and ensure compliance

with international standards on anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing.

The amendments introduce stricter penalties for violations, particularly by virtual asset service providers, to improve deterrence and protect the national financial system.

The move also comes as Bahrain prepares for international assessments of its compliance with recommendations issued by the Financial Action Task Force.

The committee said the measures would support financial stability, improve transparency and reinforce investor confidence while strengthening Bahrain's position as a regional financial centre.

## Government rejects dedicated pharmaceutical zone proposal



**Mohammed Darwish**  
TDT | Manama

Parliament's proposal for a dedicated pharmaceutical industrial zone has been rejected by the government, which said Bahrain can expand the sector within existing industrial areas.

In a written reply, authorities argued that placing pharmaceutical industries in current zones is more economically viable. The Bahrain Economic Development Board is studying investment opportunities and incentives in the sector, while the Ministry of

Industry and Commerce has already identified pharmaceuticals as one of six target sectors under the Industrial Sector Strategy 2022–2026.

The government noted that demand for a specialised zone is limited and leasable space is available, making a stand-alone zone unnecessary. It added that supporting the industry within existing industrial areas, alongside the right infrastructure and incentives, would achieve the proposal's goals.

The proposal had been approved by Parliament in October 2025 after submission by MP Ahmed Al Salloom.

# Ensuring stable food supply

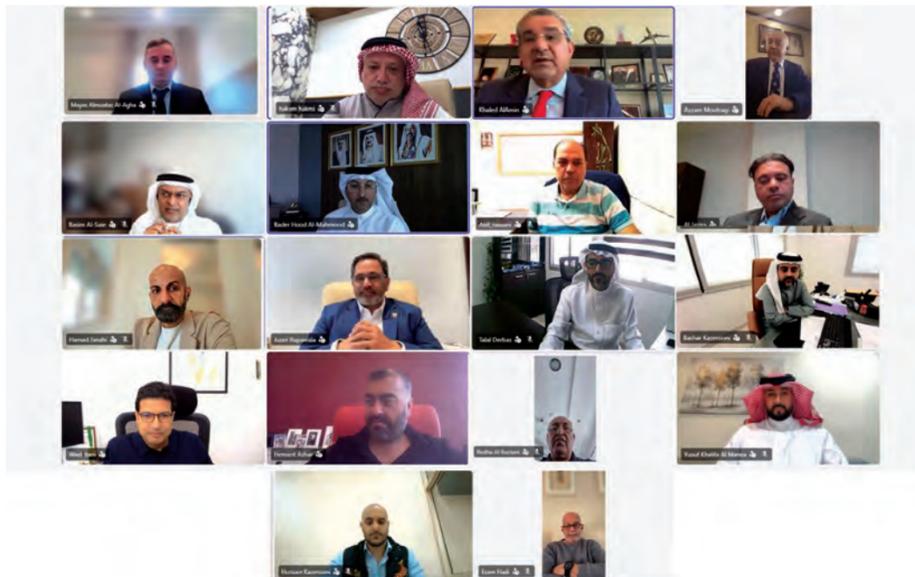
Coordination meeting held between the Chamber, government entities, shipping companies, and food traders

TDT | Manama

The Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) said it will continue coordinating with government entities and the private sector to maintain smooth food supply chains and prevent market disruptions. The Chamber affirmed that these joint efforts have helped achieve relative stability in local markets, reassuring citizens about the continuous availability of essential goods.

Mr. Khalid Al-Amin, Chairman of BCCI's Food Sector Committee, made the remarks during a broad virtual coordination meeting that included representatives from Ports Management, Customs Affairs, the Public Health Directorate, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, APM Terminals, Gulf Air, Bahrain Exports, A.P. Moller-Maersk, and several food traders.

Al-Amin highlighted the role



of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister, whose market visits to check on essential goods and supply

chains reflect the longstanding approach of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa in safeguarding national stability. “Bahrain is well as long as

you, its people, are well,” the Crown Prince stated during the visits—a message that, according to Al-Amin, guides the strategic framework for joint efforts be-

tween public and private sectors to protect market stability and strengthen food security.

The meeting addressed challenges in regional shipping movements and explored ways to ensure the continued flow of food products to the Kingdom. Participants reviewed logistical issues at regional ports and discussed alternative routes for smooth transfers to Bahrain. Matters such as refrigerated container handling, electrical connection requirements, and shipping documentation procedures were also considered.

Proposals were made to accelerate inspections and customs clearance processes, reduce logistical obstacles, and enhance coordination with shipping companies to direct shipments to the most suitable ports. Al-Amin stressed that accurate, up-to-date information on port congestion and regulations would help importers and shipping agents optimise transport operations and avoid delays.

“The statement of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, “Bahrain is well as long as you, its people, are well,” is a message to citizens and traders to strengthen solidarity and protect the stability of the local market.”

MR. KHALID AL-AMIN, CHAIRMAN OF BC

He concluded that the Bahrain Chamber will continue holding coordination meetings to monitor developments, ensure the stability of local markets, and maintain the availability of food commodities, thereby strengthening food security and reassuring consumers of sustainable supplies under all circumstances.

## Maintaining Mental Health in Times of Geopolitical Tension: A Bahrain Perspective



HIMA BINDU KOTA

Periods of geopolitical tension often create invisible psychological pressures that affect societies far beyond the battlefield. The current conflict involving the United States, Israel, and Iran has heightened anxiety across the Middle East. While Bahrain is not a direct participant in the conflict, the country's strategic position in the Gulf and its close security ties with Western allies mean that developments in the region inevitably influence the emotional climate within the kingdom.

For residents of Bahrain, the ongoing tensions are not merely distant headlines. The presence of international naval forces in the region, growing military activity in nearby waters, and the broader involvement of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have created a sense of unease among many people. Bahrain hosts the United States Fifth Fleet, making it an important strategic location in regional security architecture. When conflicts escalate between global powers and regional actors, such strategic assets naturally attract attention and concern.

At the same time, other GCC countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman are also navigating a delicate balance. These nations maintain complex relationships with both Western allies and regional powers. While they are keen to avoid direct involvement in the conflict, their geographic proximity and economic ties to the wider Middle East mean that any escalation has potential consequences for security, trade routes, and energy markets.

In such an environment, the psychological impact on ordinary citizens should not be underestimated. Continuous exposure to alarming news, speculation on social media, and discussions about possible escalation can easily heighten stress levels. Feelings of uncertainty about the future, concerns about family safety, and worries about economic stability can gradually affect mental well-being.

One of the most effective ways to manage anxiety during such times is to exercise discipline in consuming information. In an era of instant news and viral content, rumours and exaggerated reports often travel faster than verified facts. Relying on official government announcements and credible news sources can help people stay informed without becoming overwhelmed.

Equally important is the role of community and social connection. Bahrain's society is known for its cultural diversity and strong sense of social cohesion. In moments of uncertainty, conversations within families, neighbourhoods, and workplaces provide reassurance and perspective. Shared experiences and mutual support can significantly reduce feelings of isolation and fear.

Maintaining daily routines also plays a critical role in protecting mental health. Continuing with work, education, exercise, and social activities helps individuals retain a sense of stability and control. When daily life continues to function normally, it reassures people that despite regional tensions, the foundations of society remain strong.

Finally, perspective is essential. The Gulf region has experienced periods of geopolitical tension before, yet Bahrain has consistently demonstrated resilience through diplomacy, economic adaptability, and social unity. Rather than allowing uncertainty to dominate public sentiment, focusing on preparedness, calm leadership, and collective responsibility can help societies navigate difficult moments.

In challenging times, safeguarding mental well-being becomes as important as ensuring physical security. For Bahrain and its residents, maintaining calm, staying informed, and strengthening community bonds can help preserve the stability and confidence that the nation has long been known for.

*(The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Daily Tribune)*

One of the most effective ways to manage anxiety during such times is to exercise discipline in consuming information.

# Iran defiant

Deadly explosions struck Tehran during Quds Day rallies as the Israel-Iran war widens, bringing missiles, rationing, and mass displacement that destabilize the region, while Iran vows retaliation amid a deepening global oil shock



Black smoke rises following an airstrike as Iranians take part in the Al-Quds (Jerusalem) Day rally, a commemoration in support of the Palestinian people on the last Friday of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, in Tehran

AFP | Tehran

Iranian officials led a pro-government rally as explosions rocked Tehran yesterday, while the US vowed to intensify its bombing and President Donald Trump said it was his "honour" to be killing the Islamic republic's leaders.

The hardline stances -- and fresh strikes unleashed by Israel and Iran -- presaged no let up in the conflict engulfing the Middle East and roiling the global energy market as it is about to enter its third week.

AFP journalists in Tehran reported loud blasts over the city skies, as Israel's military said it had hit more than 200 targets in western and central Iran in the past day.

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told a news conference the US military would bombard Iran more heavily yesterday than

any other day so far in the war.

He also said Iran's new supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, was "wounded and likely disfigured" in the February 28 attack that killed his father and predecessor Ali Khamenei at the start of the US-Israeli campaign.

The United States will be hitting Iran hard over the "over the next week", Trump told Fox News Radio.

### Fresh strikes

While Mojtaba Khamenei has not been seen in public since being named supreme leader, other Islamic republic officials defiantly walked with pro-government demonstrators who waved flags and brandished banners reading "Death to America" and "Death to Israel".

Iran's state media said at least one woman was killed when blasts hit an area near the

demonstration.

"These attacks are out of fear, out of desperation," said Ali Larjani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, who attended the rally to mark Quds Day, the last Friday of Ramadan and a day of support for the Palestinian cause.

"One who is strong wouldn't bomb demonstrations at all. It's clear that it (the enemy) has

failed," said Larjani in a speech broadcast on state TV.

President Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi also attended the rally, while images on Iranian media showed the head of the judiciary being interviewed just as a blast occurred.

Shortly afterwards, state television said Iran had launched a fresh salvo of missiles at Israel.

## Iran arrests man accused of running Starlink internet network: media

AFP | Tehran

Iranian authorities have arrested a man accused of leading a network that sold access to the internet via Starlink terminals, a technology that is banned in Iran, the ISNA news agency reported yesterday.

"A 37-year-old man, who had put in place a network in several provinces of the country to sell access to the unrestricted internet via Starlink, has been arrested" in Shiraz, ISNA reported, citing a deputy police commander for Fars province.

## Iran says no one can exclude it from World Cup

AFP | Tehran

Iran says no one can exclude it from the World Cup later this year, in response to President Donald Trump's warning that their "life and safety" would be at risk in the US.

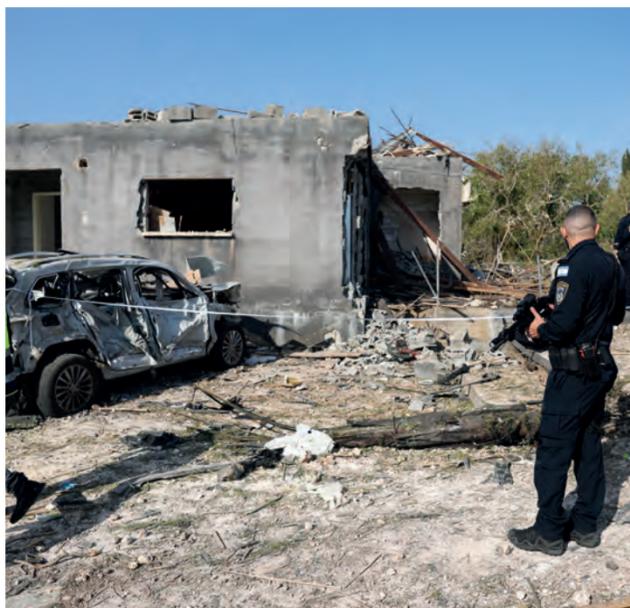
The Iranian team also said in the social media post on Thursday that the United States should not be allowed to co-host the tournament if it could not guarantee the safety of the teams taking part.

Trump's comments came just two days after he told FIFA chief Gianni Infantino the Iranian players would be welcome despite the Middle East war.

"The Iran National Soccer Team is welcome to The World Cup, but I really don't believe it is appropriate that they be there, for their own life and safety," Trump said on his Truth Social platform on Thursday.

Iran's team responded: "The World Cup is a historic and international event and its governing body is FIFA -- not any individual, country.

"Iran's national team, with strength and a series of decisive victories achieved by the brave sons of Iran, was among the first teams to qualify for this major tournament.



Israeli policemen secure the site of a rocket strike in Zarzir, northern Israel

Demonstrators hold a large sign during a protest to call for "an end to the imperialist violence" amid the ongoing war in Iran outside MacDill Air Force Base, where US Central Command is headquartered, in Tampa, Florida



Young Israeli men perform a pre-military training on the beach in Tel Aviv



A US Air Force B-52 Stratofortress bomber lands at RAF Fairford in south-west England



# US vows intense strikes

AFP | Washington

President Donald Trump said in an interview aired yesterday that American forces would strike Iranian targets "very hard" in the coming days, signaling an intensification of the US-Israeli campaign as the war in the Middle East approaches its third week.

Washington and its ally launched the offensive on February 28 with strikes that

killed Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei, triggering a widening regional war that has rattled global energy markets and drawn missile and drone attacks across the Gulf.

"We're going to be hitting them very hard over the next week," Trump told Fox News Radio, adding that he believed Iran's leadership could eventually be toppled by its own people.

"I really think that's a big hur-

dle to climb for people that don't have weapons," Trump said. "I think it's a very big hurdle... It'll happen, but it probably will be, maybe not immediately."

The conflict has triggered turmoil in global energy markets after Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow Gulf waterway through which about a fifth of the world's oil supply normally flows.

## Trump says 'honour' to be killing Iranian military

AFP | London

President Donald Trump said yesterday he feels honored to be killing Iran's leadership.

"They've been killing innocent people all over the world for 47 years, and now I, as the 47th President of the United States of America, am killing them. What a great honor it is to do so!" Trump posted on social media shortly after midnight in Washington.

Trump struck out at media coverage questioning the success of the war, saying "you would incorrectly think that we are not winning."

Iran's military is "being decimated, and their leaders have been wiped from the face of the earth," he said.

"We have unparalleled firepower, unlimited ammunition, and plenty of time -- Watch what happens to these degraded s\*\*\*\*\*s today," Trump posted on Truth Social.



Smoke billows from the site of a strike on the outskirts of Tel Aviv as firefighters work to extinguish the fire

## Mideast war 'benefits no one and harms many': Merz

AFP | Bardufoss

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said yesterday that the Middle East war must end "as soon as possible" as the conflict "benefits no-one and harms many economically, including us".

Asked whether Europeans should make direct contact with Iran to ask for the Strait of Hormuz to be reopened, Merz said: "We are making every effort to end this war...

all diplomatic channels are being used."

Merz stressed that Germany shared the "important goals of the United States and Israel".

"Iran must not threaten Israel and other neighbours," Merz said, adding that Tehran's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes must end and that the Islamic republic "must stop supporting terrorism at home and beyond".

## Building in Dubai financial district damaged after attack

AFP | Dubai

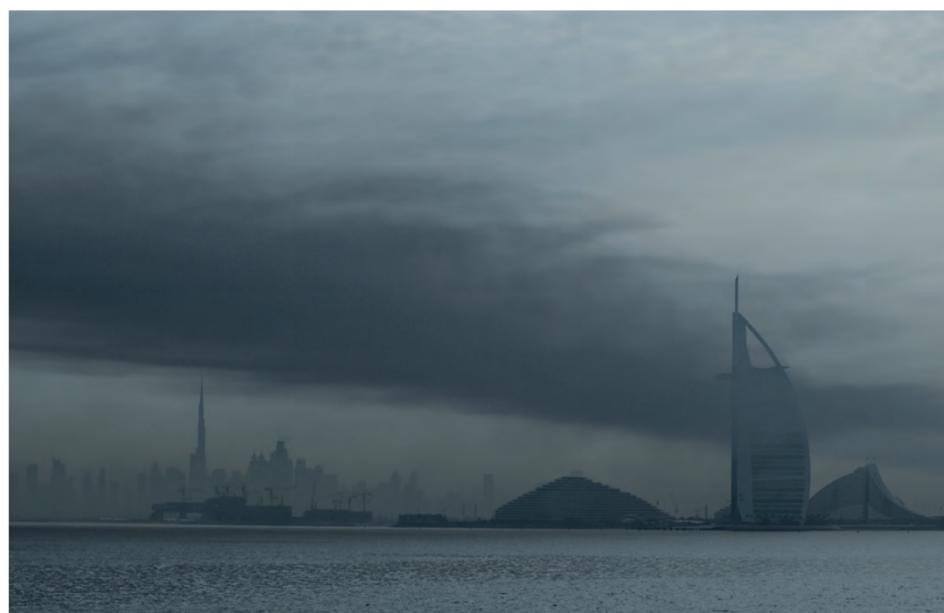
A building in Dubai's financial district was hit by debris from an intercepted attack yesterday, witnesses and an AFP journalist saw, days after firms evacuated the area as Iran threatened US and Israeli-linked economic targets.

On Wednesday, US banking giant Citi, consultancies Deloitte and PwC, as well as other firms closed their offices or told employees to leave, mainly in the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), sources told AFP.

Iran's threats sparked concern at the heart of the Middle East's top financial hub, home to international companies and multi-billion dollar businesses.

Two witnesses described seeing damage to a building in DIFC after hearing loud bangs. Dubai's media office confirmed that the facade of a building in "central Dubai" had been hit by debris from a successful interception.

An AFP correspondent also saw the damaged building in DIFC after hearing the bangs.



Smoke rises above Dubai. Explosions rattled buildings in Dubai and a large cloud of smoke hung over a central area of the Middle East financial hub

"I jumped out of bed -- that was the loudest sound I've ever heard," one of the witnesses living close by told AFP, requesting

anonymity. "It was so loud, I was so sure when I looked out the window that it was going to be some-

thing catastrophic... The ground shook," they added.

Another AFP correspondent described hearing a huge double

blast that rattled buildings and left a large cloud of black smoke hanging over the central district.

On Thursday, a drone fell near DIFC, a day after Tehran threatened to hit US and Israel-linked banks and other economic targets following a reported attack on a bank in Iran.

The United Arab Emirates' air defences have intercepted more than 1,500 Iranian drones and nearly 300 missiles during the Middle East war -- by far more than any other country hit by Iran

Nasser Saidi, a former Lebanon minister and former chief economist at the DIFC Authority, told AFP that DIFC played a "strategic role" in Dubai's long-term economic plan and that was all the more important in the current climate.

"DIFC has transitioned from a regional hub to a top-tier global financial capital," he said.

"The ongoing conflict highlights the necessity of a neutral, soundly regulated and operationally resilient hub," he added.

## Saudis down drone targeting Riyadh's Diplomatic Quarter: defence ministry

AFP | Riyadh

Saudi forces intercepted a drone targeting Riyadh's Diplomatic Quarter housing

foreign embassies, the defence ministry said.

The "hostile drone" was downed "during an attempt to approach the Diplomatic Quarter", the ministry posted on X.

Three more drones were intercepted elsewhere in Saudi Arabia around the same time, the ministry said.

## Two dead as Oman thwarts drone attack: state media

AFP | Muscat

Two people died after security forces intercepted a drone in northern Oman, state media said yesterday.

Both victims in the incident at Al Awahi industrial area were expatriates, the Oman News Agency said, adding that other people were injured.

● An explosion during an annual pro-government rally in Tehran killed at least one person, state media reported

● Top Iranian leaders, including national security chief Ali Larijani, President Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, appeared in public at a Tehran rally, in defiance of US-Israeli strikes

● Iran's Revolutionary Guards warned that if protests broke out in the country, their response would be "stronger" than in January, when thousands were killed

● NATO defences have shot down a third ballistic missile from Iran in Turkish airspace, Turkey's defence ministry said

● An Iranian drone was responsible for the death of a French soldier in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, the first French casualty of the war, his commanding officer said

● Sri Lanka said it would repatriate the remains of 84 Iranian sailors killed when a US submarine torpedoed their frigate off its coast on March 4

● The US embassy in Baghdad has warned of a "risk of kidnapping" of its citizens in Iraq

● An investigation led by a US general officer from outside the US Central Command (CENTCOM) will take "as long as necessary" to determine the facts of a strike on an elementary school in Iran, US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said

# Israel threatens 'increasing price' for Lebanon as UN urges ceasefire

Israeli Defence Minister warned of infrastructure damage and possible territory loss, while UN chief António Guterres, visiting Beirut, urged Hezbollah and Israel to halt the war

● Israel destroys bridge over Litani River

● Israel drops propaganda leaflets over Beirut

● UN launches \$325mn aid appeal

AFP | Beirut

The Israeli defence minister vowed yesterday that Lebanon would pay an "increasing price" in damage to infrastructure in the war with Hezbollah, while the UN urged Israel and Hezbollah to agree to a ceasefire.

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war last week when the Tehran-backed armed group attacked Israel in response to the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in US-Israeli strikes.

Israel yesterday destroyed a bridge over the Litani River between the towns of Zrariyeh and Tayr Falsay, according to state media. The river bisects southern Lebanon, from east to west.

In a statement, the Israeli army described the bridge as a "key crossing" for Hezbollah "from northern to southern Lebanon, to build up its power and prepare for combat".

The attack was the first on Lebanese public infrastructure to be acknowledged by Israel since the start of the Middle East war.

"This is just the beginning and the Lebanese government and the state of Lebanon will pay an increasing price in damage to Lebanese national infrastructure used by Hezbollah terrorists," the Israeli defence minister said yesterday.

He said Lebanon would suffer



A fireball erupts from the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted a building in the southern Lebanese village of Abbasiyyeh

"loss of territory -- until it fulfils its central commitment of disarming Hezbollah".

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Thursday he told the Lebanese government that "you are playing with fire if you continue allowing Hezbollah to operate, in violation of your commitment to disarm it".

## 'Stop the war'

UN chief Antonio Guterres called on Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah to "stop the war" at the start of a visit to Beirut yesterday, as Israel expanded its strikes across the country.

"My strong appeal to those parties, to Hezbollah and to Israel, is for a ceasefire to stop the war," Guterres said.

Guterres launched a \$325 million humanitarian appeal to support Lebanon as it responds to the displacement of hundreds of

thousands of people by the war. Israeli strikes continued yesterday, including an attack that killed eight people in the south Lebanese village of Miyeh w Miyeh near the port city of Sidon, according to the health ministry.

In the nearby village of Irkey, Mohammad Taqi buried his four daughters, aged six to 13, who were killed in an Israeli strike on Thursday along with five relatives.

"The Israeli enemy says every day that it is targeting infrastructure," he told AFP at the funeral, his head wrapped in a white bandage and his face covered in wounds.

"Is this the infrastructure? Have you seen it?" he asked, gesturing to his daughters' bodies.

"I've lost four daughters. I don't have any others. Zainab, Zahra, Malika and Yasmina," he said, adding that he had also lost his parents, brother, nephew

and brother-in-law in the same strike.

## Propaganda leaflets

Hezbollah also launched attacks against Israeli forces yesterday, as part of what it said was a Quds Day operation.

Quds Day is an annual demonstration in support of the Palestinian cause in Iran, on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan.

Overnight Thursday into yesterday, the Israeli army carried out new air raids, targeting an apartment near Bourj Hamoud in Beirut's northern suburbs, an area that had remained untouched by the war.

A photo showed an upper floor of the building with its facade shattered and walls blackened by the strike.

In the eastern town of Bar Elias, an air strike targeted a local official from the Islamist



A picture shows the destroyed Tayr Falsay bridge connecting the villages located south of the Litani with those on the northern side of the river after it was targeted by an Israeli air strike



First aid responders evacuated the wounded from the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted a neighborhood in the town of Mieh Mieh, some five kilometers east of the southern Lebanese city of Sidon

group Jamaa Islamiya, killing his two sons, state media said.

Israel's army also renewed its evacuation warnings, including for Beirut's southern suburbs.

On Thursday it had issued a similar order to residents across a large area about 20 kilometres (12 miles) north of the Litani River.

The order enlarges the zone in southern Lebanon in which res-

idents have been told to leave to cover more than 40 kilometres from the Lebanon-Israel border.

Israeli planes dropped propaganda leaflets over Beirut yesterday, causing loud booms.

One of the leaflets, addressed to the Lebanese people, said: "You must disarm Hezbollah, Iran's shield" and "Lebanon is your decision, not someone else's".

## Turkey confirms third ballistic missile from Iran shot down

AFP | Istanbul

Turkey's defence ministry yesterday said a ballistic missile from Iran had been shot down in Turkish airspace by NATO forces in the third such incident of the Middle East war.

"A ballistic munition launched from Iran and entering Turkish airspace was neutralised by NATO air and missile defence assets deployed in the eastern Mediterranean," a ministry statement said.

Hours earlier, sirens wailed at Turkey's southern Incirlik airbase, a key NATO facility where US troops are stationed, state news agency Anadolu reported.

Local media also reported sirens in Batman, 600 kilometres (370 miles) further east.

NATO air defences shot

down a first ballistic missile fired from Iran on March 4, with a second intercepted on Monday.

Residents of the southern city of Adana, next to Incirlik, were woken by sirens at 3:25 am (0025 GMT) and several posted footage of a fast-moving object that appeared to be on fire, the Ekonomim business news website reported.

According to defence news site SavunmaSanayiST, these objects could be "fragments of a third ballistic missile" or of the interceptor, which would have burned up upon entering the atmosphere before falling back to the ground.

Separately, sirens sounded in Batman around 4:00 am, with reporters saying the alarm appeared to be coming from a military drone base next to the city's airport.

## Afghanistan says six civilians killed in Pakistan strikes

AFP | Kabul

Afghan authorities said yesterday that Pakistan attacks on Kabul and border provinces killed four people in the capital and two in the east, the latest deadly clashes in the long-running conflict.

Pakistani security sources said four "terrorist camps and support infrastructure" were "targeted and destroyed" in Kabul and frontier provinces, as well as an oil storage facility at Kandahar airport.

Islamabad last month launched a military operation against its neighbour, targeting Islamist extremists following growing attacks in Pakistan.

The Taliban government has denied any involvement or the use of Afghan territory for militancy.

Kabul police spokesman Khalil Zadrán said four peo-



Afghan residents stand amidst damaged houses at the site of an overnight Pakistan airstrike, at a residential area in Pol-e-Charkhi on the outskirts of Kabul

ple were killed and 15 wounded when homes were hit in the capital, with women and children among the victims.

His counterpart in the eastern province of Nangahar, Sayed Tayeed Hammad, told AFP that

a woman and child were killed when a Pakistan mortar shell hit a house.

An AFP team in the Guzar area of Kabul saw one destroyed house and around a dozen others that were badly damaged,

with collapsed roofs and walls.

There was a sizeable police presence in the area, and visibly shocked local residents were in the streets, including some with bandaged faces.

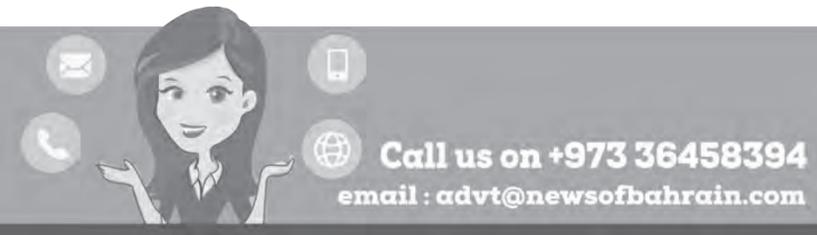
"Two men and two women were martyred," Abdul Rahim Tarakil, a local representative, told AFP.

"There aren't any military posts here... There are only ordinary people, poor people. They don't have any involvement in politics."

Abdul Wahid, a 29-year-old daily labourer, said he and four family members were wounded when his house was hit at about 12:10am local time.

"Suddenly, a noise came from another house. I don't know what happened afterwards. All these bricks fell on me. Women and children were under the rubble as well," he added.

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# Alcaraz gains Norrie revenge to set up Medvedev semi

● Daniil Medvedev beats defending champion Jack Draper

● Jannik Sinner beats Learner Tien

● Alexander Zverev beats Arthur Fils

AFP | Indian Wells

Carlos Alcaraz extended his unbeaten season and got revenge over Cameron Norrie on Thursday to reach the semi-finals at Indian Wells for a fifth straight year.

The world number one from Spain emerged from a see-saw battle with 29th-ranked Norrie with a 6-3, 6-4 victory.

He will meet Russian Daniil Medvedev, who pushed his own ATP winning streak to eight matches with a 6-1, 7-5 victory over defending champion Jack Draper.

World number two Jannik Sinner powered past Learner Tien 6-1, 6-2 to line up a semi-final with fourth-ranked Alexander Zverev, a 6-2, 6-3 winner over Arthur Fils.

Alcaraz, 22, became the youngest player to complete a career Grand Slam with his victory in the Australian Open and followed up with a title in Qatar.

He pushed his 2026 season record to 16-0 with the win over Norrie, who beat him in the Paris Masters in November.

"I struggle a lot with his style,"



Carlos Alcaraz plays a backhand against Cameron Norrie

Alcaraz said of heavy-hitting left-hander Norrie.

"Every time I play against him it's always really tough for me.

"It's a little bit confusing with his style, his topspin forehand, super high. And then the backhand, really flat and really low."

Trailing 4-2 in the opening set Norrie broke Alcaraz at love for 4-3. Alcaraz regrouped with another break and pocketed the set in 31 minutes.

Norrie broke again for a 2-0 lead in the second, but Alcaraz won the next four games.

Norrie saved two match points on his serve before Alcaraz efficiently served out the win.

"I'm finding the right shot," Alcaraz said. "I played well. I played solid. I played aggressive when I could."

Medvedev, coming off a title run in Dubai last month, seized control early against Draper, who had pulled off a gritty win over Novak Djokovic on Wednesday night.

"The first set was unreal, I couldn't miss a ball," Medvedev said. "It was an unbelievable level."

"Second set he tried to give everything he had, and he had an opportunity," Medvedev noted, but the Russian saved the only break point he faced with an ace.



Alexander Zverev became just the fifth player to reach the semi-finals of all nine ATP Masters 1000 tournaments

## Hindrance call

Medvedev then secured the lone break of the second to lead 6-5.

Draper was irked early in that 11th game when the chair umpire, queried by Medvedev, ruled the Briton had caused a hindrance with a raised arm gesture during a point.

Medvedev said he was distracted and the umpire told him it could go to video review, and subsequently awarded the Russian the point.

"Was I distracted big time? No," Medvedev said, but added he thought Draper's gesture affected the quality of one of his forehands in the rally.

"Do I feel good about it? Not really," he said. "But I also don't feel like I cheated or something."

In the other half of the draw, Sinner kept his bid for a first Indian Wells title on track with a straightforward victory over 20-year-old American Tien.

# Svitolina topples Swiatek as Sabalenka, Rybakina advance

● Rybakina beats Pegula confidently

● Sabalenka defeats Canadian teen Victoria Mboko

● Linda Noskova ends Talia Gibson's run

AFP | Indian Wells

Elena Svitolina sent two-time champion Iga Swiatek spinning out at Indian Wells on Thursday to line up a semi-final meeting with Australian Open champion Elena Rybakina.

Ninth-ranked Ukrainian Svitolina surged home to beat world number two Swiatek 6-2, 4-6, 6-4 while Rybakina thwarted Jessica Pegula's comeback bid in a 6-1, 7-6 (7/4) victory over the fifth-ranked American.

World number one Aryna Sabalenka kept her bid for a first title in the prestigious ATP and WTA Masters 1000 event on track, holding off Canadian teen Victoria Mboko 7-6 (7/0), 6-4.

The Belarusian star will face 14th-ranked Czech Linda Noskova, who ended the fairytale run of Australian qualifier Talia Gibson 6-2, 4-6, 6-2.

Svitolina's aggressive attack was too much for Swiatek, who



Elena Svitolina of Ukraine serves against Iga Swiatek of Poland

coughed up eight double faults and looked out-of-sorts in the early going.

The experienced Svitolina made the most of the early chances she was given then held her nerve in a tense third set.

She gained the lone break of the final frame as she won the last three games to take the match.

"I wouldn't say it was the perfect match, but I could stay in the match and fight and find a way after losing second set," Svitolina said.

"There is no champion who is waiting for the mistakes, and

you have to really try to set up yourself in a good position to attack," she added. "I was trying to really open up the court and try to take the advantage, because Iga is such an aggressive player, and she moves really well. So if you don't take the opportunity, she's going to take it."

Svitolina closed it out in style, giving herself a match point with an ace and nailing a forehand volley to reach the Indian Wells semi-finals for the first time since 2019.

"You make me feel a bit old with that stat," quipped the 31-year-old Svitolina, who

returned to the top 10 in the world rankings in February for the first time since 2021 and the first time since becoming a mother.

It was just her second career win over Swiatek in six meetings and her first since 2023. But the victory continued a rich run of form in 2026 that has seen Svitolina capture the title in Auckland and finish runner up in Dubai last month.

For six-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek it was another disappointing quarter-final exit this year after she fell at the same stage in the Australian Open and in Doha.

## Rybakina halts Pegula streak

Rybakina, the 2023 Indian Wells champion, booked a return to the semi-finals with another win over Pegula, who fell to the Kazakh in the semi-finals in Melbourne.

Rybakina recouped a break that had her trailing 4-1 in the second set and put on a serving clinic in the tiebreaker to end Dubai champion Pegula's eight-match winning streak.

Sabalenka's clash with Mboko was also an Australian Open rematch. Sabalenka said the 19-year-old Canadian had made strides since she was swept aside in the fourth round at Melbourne, but the Belarusian's power and precision ultimately proved too much.

# Spurs search for salvation, Arsenal ready for title charge

AFP | London

**T**roubled Tottenham head to Liverpool on Sunday searching for salvation in their increasingly desperate fight against relegation.

Arsenal can move closer to their first Premier League title for 22 years with a win over Everton, while Manchester United meet Aston Villa in a crucial clash in the race for Champions League qualification.

Here we look at three key talking points ahead of this weekend's action:

## Spurs must 'dig deeper' to survive

In grave danger of playing in England's second tier for the first time since 1977-78, Tottenham could hardly have picked a worse venue for their latest attempt to ease the threat of relegation.

If third-bottom West Ham beat Manchester City on Saturday, Igor Tudor's 16th-placed side will have slipped even closer to oblivion by the time they face Liverpool at Anfield.

Beaten in their last six games in all competitions for the first time in their history, Tottenham are just one point ahead of West Ham and fourth-bottom Nottingham Forest, who host Fulham on Sunday.

They were humiliated in a 5-2



Tottenham Hotspur's Brazilian forward #09 Richarlison (L) and teammates warm up before a match (file photo)

defeat at Atletico Madrid in the Champions League last-16 first leg on Wednesday -- a calamitous night that featured Tudor substituting keeper Antonin Kinsky after just 17 minutes due to a pair of mistakes that led directly to goals.

Tottenham's plight is so acute that the club this week told fans they would be given "an extended period" to decide if they want to renew their season tickets due to the "seriousness of the current league position".

With just nine games to save themselves, Tottenham -- winless in their last 11 league matches -- could have done without a trip to Anfield, where they haven't won since 2011.

"Everybody has given everything they've got. It's down to us to dig a little deeper and give it just that bit more," Tottenham defender Kevin Danso said.

"Sometimes there's difficult moments and this is the time to show character."

## Arsenal have title in their sights

Just eight games lie between Arsenal and their holy grail -- a first English crown since Arsene Wenger's 'Invincibles' lifted the Premier League trophy in 2004.

The Gunners are seven points clear of second-placed Manchester City and can extend that lead to 10 points if they beat Everton at the Emirates Stadium on Saturday.

City, who hold a game in hand

on Arsenal heading into this weekend, will kick off at West Ham roughly 30 minutes after the final whistle in the leaders' match. But regardless of what City do in their remaining nine games, Mikel Arteta's men have the destiny of the title in their hands after recovering from a two-game winless run in February by reeling off three consecutive league victories.

City have spluttered too often to mount a convincing challenge, leaving quadruple-chasing Arsenal within touching distance of the title after three successive runners-up finishes.

## Top-four shoot-out

The winner of Manchester United's clash with Aston Villa at Old Trafford on Sunday will take a giant step towards reaching the Champions League.

Third-placed United are ahead of fourth-placed Villa on goal difference, setting the stage for a vital showdown in the race for a top-four finish.

Fifth place is also likely to secure a berth in Europe's elite club competition, but United and Villa can erase any anxiety by landing a top-four spot.

United go into the showdown looking to bounce back from interim manager Michael Carrick's first defeat in seven games in charge -- a 2-1 loss at Newcastle.

## Palace frustrated by AEK Larnaca in Conference League last 16



Zlatan Alomerovic punches the ball away from a Crystal Palace set piece

AFP | London

**C**ystal Palace laboured to a 0-0 draw at home to AEK Larnaca in the first leg of their Uefa Conference League last-16 tie on Thursday.

Palace created a glut of chances on a wet and windy night at Selhurst Park but failed to score against their Cypriot opponents for the second time this season, having lost 1-0 to Larnaca in the league phase.

French forward Jean-Philippe Mateta came on as a late substitute for his first Palace appearance since January 25 after a move to AC Milan collapsed due to concerns over a knee injury.

Oliver Glasner's side will go to Cyprus next week seeking to keep alive their first full venture into European football.

Should they get through, they could meet two-time runners-up Fiorentina in the quarter-finals. The Italians edged past Rakow Czechochowa of Poland 2-1 in Florence thanks to a stoppage-time penalty.

# Al Khaldiya Keep Title Hopes Alive

Hussain Almaskati  
TDT | Manama

**L**eaders Al Khaldiya strengthened their grip on the Nasser bin Hamad Premier League with a comfortable 4-1 win over Bahrain Club last night, while Al Najma snatched a dramatic late 1-0 victory over Al Hidd, underlining the contrasting narratives of Matchweek 16.

At Khalifa Sports City, Al Khaldiya started brightly and took the lead in the eighth minute. Congolese striker Joel Beya converted after a corner saw Ayman Dirani's header strike the crossbar and a second effort was blocked. Beya reacted quickly to the rebound, heading into the roof of the net. Bahrain Club drew level in the 12th minute through Brazilian Matheus Eduardo, who



Al Khaldiya celebrate after Beya's brace

capitalised on a failed attempt to play out from the back. Gabriel Oliveira delivered a low cross into the box, allowing Eduardo to finish into the far corner.

Al Khaldiya regained the lead in the 33rd minute when Tunisian Adem Taous -- who joined the club last month -- struck from distance, his shot taking a deflection past goalkeeper Sayed Mohsen Ali. Dominique Mendy made it 3-1 on the hour mark with a header from Anas Ouahim's corner, before Joel Beya wrapped up the scoring in the 82nd minute after being neatly squared by Ouahim. Play was briefly paused at halftime as safety sirens sounded across the kingdom, in line with Bahrain FA protocols.

Meanwhile, at the Bahrain National Stadium, Al Najma under Mohamed Al Shamlan

claimed a 1-0 victory over Al Hidd thanks to Moroccan forward Zachary Hadji's 79th-minute strike. The first half saw limited attacking pressure, as both sides remained cautious of leaving space behind their lines. Hadji had an early opportunity with a free header that was saved, and Ali Hussain hit the post in the 77th minute, but Hadji reacted quickest to a rebound and calmly slotted home to secure the late winner.

The results move Al Khaldiya to 39 points, two clear at the top, while Bahrain Club remain bottom with seven. Al Najma climb to 9th on 18 points, and Al Hidd remain fifth with 21. Matchweek 16 concludes tonight as Al Malkiya face A'ali at Khalifa Sports City, while Al Shabab take on Al Ahli at Bahrain National Stadium, both kicking off at 9:30pm.

# Gilgeous-Alexander sets NBA record with 127th consecutive 20-point game

AFP | Los Angeles

**S**hai Gilgeous-Alexander broke the NBA record for consecutive 20-point games by recording his 127th in a row on Thursday in an Oklahoma City Thunder home match against the Boston Celtics.

The reigning NBA Most Valuable Player eclipsed the 63-year-old mark of 126 set by NBA legend Wilt Chamberlain when he sank a 20-foot jump shot from the top of the key with 7:04 remaining in the third quarter.

That gave the 27-year-old Canadian guard 21 points for the game and lifted the reigning NBA champion Thunder level with Boston at 69-69.

Gilgeous-Alexander's streak began on November 1, 2024, and since then he has averaged 35.5 points and shot 53.5 percent.

During it Gilgeous-Alexander has had all five of his career 50-point games, 18 40-point performances and 85 30-point games.

Gilgeous-Alexander scored 17 points in the first half, putting himself on the brink of NBA history as the second half began.

He missed a three-point attempt but was later fouled on a drive to the basket and made two free throws to pull within one point of the milestone, setting the stage for his historic basket.

# Arbeloa 'confident' Mbappe fit for Man City trip in Champions League

AFP | London

**R**eal Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa said yesterday he was "confident" that Kylian Mbappe will be available to face Manchester City in the second leg of their Champions League last 16 tie.

"He's getting better day by day," Arbeloa said at a press conference. "He won't be there tomorrow (Saturday, in La Liga against Elche), but I'm confident he'll be on the trip to Man-



Kylian Mbappe

chester."

With Mbappe sidelined by a knee injury and several other key players missing, Real thrashed City 3-0 in the first leg at the Bernabeu on Wednesday, thanks to a hat-trick from Federico Valverde.

City host the second leg next Tuesday and risk being knocked out of Europe by Madrid for the third season in a row.

France forward Mbappe, hampered by a sprain to his left knee since late December, has

not played since withdrawing from the squad to face Benfica in the second leg of the Champions League knockout phase play-off round on February 25.

Mbappe has scored 38 goals in 33 appearances for his club this season.

His expected return for Madrid comes ahead of the international break, where France will face Brazil and Colombia in pre-World Cup friendlies in the United States.

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# Russell leads Mercedes one-two in China GP sprint qualifying

Championship leader extends Melbourne form with dominant qualifying performance in China

● Lando Norris third, Lewis Hamilton fourth

● Piastri splits Ferrari pair in fifth

● Verstappen eighth, 1.734 seconds off pace

● Perez misses session with Cadillac fuel issue

AFP | Shanghai

Championship pacesetter George Russell took pole position yesterday for the Chinese Grand Prix sprint race, leading a Mercedes one-two ahead of Kimi Antonelli.

Russell clocked 1min 31.520sec around the 5.451km Shanghai International Circuit, 0.289sec quicker than Antonelli with world champion Lando Norris 0.621sec behind his fellow Englishman in third.

Joining Norris on the second row for Saturday morning's 19-lap race will be Lewis Hamilton, winner of the China sprint a year ago.

The seven-time world champion was fourth in his Ferrari, 0.641sec slower than Russell.



Mercedes' British driver George Russell gets off the car after getting pole position

"The car's been feeling amazing," said Russell, who leads the championship after winning the season-opening race in Australia last weekend.

"We knew after Melbourne we had a really good car. The engine's performing really well. And today it was a real joy to

drive, so I'm happy," added Russell.

The McLarens left it till late in the final qualifying session to go out for their single flying lap, hoping to take advantage of the track at its quickest.

It paid off as Norris got ahead of the two Ferraris and Oscar

Piastri split them, coming in fifth fastest.

Charles Leclerc, third in Melbourne last week, was sixth fastest.

Pierre Gasly put his Alpine onto the fourth row in seventh.

The Red Bulls struggled for pace again with their new in-



Ferrari ditched their innovative flip rear wing from practice for qualifying after testing it throughout yesterday's sole session—still couldn't match Mercedes' Shanghai dominance

The car's been feeling amazing. We knew after Melbourne we had a really good car. The engine's performing really well. And today it was a real joy to drive, so I'm happy

GEORGE RUSSELL

to Melbourne where last week's opening race was held.

Shanghai has one long straight and several complexes of turns requiring a different approach to battery deployment and energy harvesting in the new cars, which have a 50-50 split between conventional and electrical power.

Russell dominated in practice, topping the timesheets throughout on both medium and soft tyre compounds, clocking 1min 32.741sec to head yet another Mercedes one-two.

Norris was 0.555sec behind in third, with his teammate Piastri next.

Fifth and sixth were the Ferraris of Leclerc and Hamilton respectively.

They had been sporting an innovative flip rear wing in practice, but the Scuderia ditched it for qualifying.

house power units replacing Honda as engine supplier from this season and getting to grips with the new era regulations.

Four-time world champion Max Verstappen was eighth, a colossal 1.734 sec adrift of Russell, and Isack Hadjar was only 10th behind the Haas of Oliver Bearman.

Sergio Perez did not take part in the session because of a fuel issue with his Cadillac, the new team on the grid for 2026.

Teams had only a single practice session earlier yesterday to hone their set-ups in Shanghai, which is a very different track

## Chelsea captain James signs new six-year deal



Reece James in action (file photo)

AFP | London

Chelsea captain Reece James believes the Blues "have everything it takes" to be successful after signing a new six-year contract at Stamford Bridge.

A Chelsea academy graduate, James has been at the club since he was six and the 26-year-old wanted to remain at the club for what he hopes are his "peak years".

James has won five major trophies, including the Champions League and Club World Cup, in over 200 appearances for the club, more than 50 of which have been as captain.

"I have always said I want my peak years to be here, and I truly believe we have everything it takes to build on our previous successes," James said in a club statement.

"I'm excited for the future under this ownership, sporting directors, coach and all the staff and hopefully we will lift many more trophies together over the coming years."

Chelsea won the Conference League and Club World Cup last year, but have failed to seriously contend for the Premier League since an American consortium took control of the club from Roman Abramovich in 2022.

## Guardiola warns title bid 'over' if Man City lose to West Ham

AFP | London

Pep Guardiola believes Manchester City's Premier League title challenge "will be over" if they fail to beat resurgent West Ham on Saturday.

City could kick off at the London Stadium 10 points behind leaders Arsenal should the Gunners beat Everton earlier in the day.

Guardiola's men have a game in hand on the Gunners and home advantage when the sides meet next month.

But they must bounce back from the disappointment of a



Pep Guardiola

3-0 Champions League drubbing at the hands of Real Madrid on Wednesday that means their

chances of progressing to the quarter-finals are slim.

"The league was the most difficult title," Guardiola said yesterday. "So the Premier League always, I believe, is the most difficult one and still we are there, knowing that if we drop points, it'll be over."

The City boss has won six Premier League titles in his nine previous seasons in England.

But his team were well off the pace last season, finishing 13 points behind champions Liverpool, in third spot.

"Now it is a pleasure to be

here. Last season we could not live that in this stage, so it's nice," said Guardiola.

"Always I said when I arrived in the last 10 games every team plays for something -- for relegation, for Europa League, for Conference League, for Champions League, to be champions.

"So it's normal. Now it is no second chances."

West Ham remain in the relegation zone, but have lost just two of their past 11 games in all competitions to climb to within one point of safety and reach the FA Cup quarter-finals.

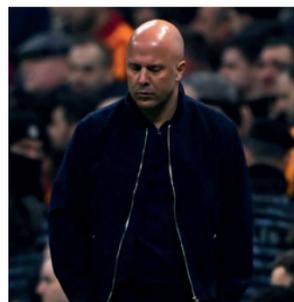
## Slot seeks silverware to save Liverpool's season

AFP | London

Arne Slot said the "bar at Liverpool is always high" as he targets glory in the FA Cup and Champions League to save the club's season following a disastrous Premier League title defence.

Relegation-threatened Tottenham make the trip to Anfield on Sunday nearly a year after their previous visit, when Liverpool sealed the English league title.

Despite splashing out nearly £450 million (\$600 million) to improve their squad in the transfer market, Liverpool go



Arne Slot

into this weekend sixth in the table, 19 points behind leaders Arsenal.

Slot's men were also defeated 1-0 in the first leg of their Cham-

pions League last-16 tie at Galatasaray in midweek and face a daunting trip to Manchester City in the FA Cup quarter-finals.

But the Dutchman said there should be no drop in the demands expected of the English giants.

"Big difference between where we are now and where we were then, that is clear and obvious," said Slot referring to the contrast between facing Spurs now and 11 months ago.

"The bar at Liverpool is always high, it has always been high and will always be high," he said. "We are a top club. The bar

should be set high by the people around us, but we will set the bar just as high.

"This season, of course, we are unable to win the league again but we are still in two cups -- the Champions League and the FA Cup -- where we are competing."

Slot could have Alisson Becker back in goal on Sunday after the Brazil number one missed the trip to Istanbul due to a minor muscle injury.

However, he confirmed club-record signing Alexander Isak is not yet close to a return to action after fracturing a fibula in December.