



Emilia Clarke had breakdown after Game of Thrones

8 **CELEBS**

Saudi King Salman undergoes medical tests: royal court



AFP | Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's 90-year-old monarch King Salman is undergoing medical tests at a hospital in capital Riyadh, the kingdom's Royal Court said yesterday.

"The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques -- may God protect him -- is undergoing medical examinations today... at King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Riyadh," the court said in a statement shared on state media.

In 2024, the Royal Court said he suffered from lung infections, which he recovered from.

He was hospitalised in May 2022, when he went in for a colonoscopy and stayed for just over a week for other tests and "some time to rest", the official Saudi Press Agency reported at the time.

He was also admitted to hospital in March 2022 to undergo what state media described as "successful medical tests" and to change the battery of his pacemaker.

In 2020, he underwent surgery to remove his gall bladder.

India looks to finalise 'mother of all deals' with EU

AFP | New Delhi, India

A trade deal between India and the European Union will be the "mother of all deals", Delhi's Commerce Minister said yesterday, as both sides seek to overcome the final sticking points.

The EU and India's trade chiefs said last week they were getting closer to reaching a deal after days of talks in Brussels.

"This (India-EU trade pact) will be the mother of all deals," Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said, according to the Press Trust of India news agency. The leaders of the EU and India are expected to hold a summit at the end of January.

220 fils (includes VAT)



His Excellency Asif Ali Zardari, the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, departed Bahrain yesterday, concluding an official visit, during which he held talks with His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. The discussions addressed the close relations between the two countries, as well as regional and international developments of common interest. At Bahrain International Airport, the Pakistani President was seen off by Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Amna bint Ahmed Al Rumaihi, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning; Jassim bin Mohammed Al Ghatai, Deputy Governor of Muharraq Governorate; Saqib Rauf, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the Kingdom of Bahrain; Mohamed Ebrahim Mohamed Abdulqader, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; along with a number of officials.

Bahrain, EU discuss strengthening ties and regional stability



Manama

Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, Bahrain's Minister of Foreign Affairs, held a phone call with Kaja Kallas, EU High Representative and European Commission Vice-President, and Constantinos Kombos, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Cyprus, which currently holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The discussions focused on Bahrain-EU relations and ways to advance cooperation between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council, particularly during Bahrain's current GCC presidency.

Officials also addressed regional and international developments, emphasising the need to reduce tensions, promote dialogue and diplomatic solutions, and support initiatives that enhance regional and global security and stability.

Sparks fly over Expat ID validity bill

Proposal caps Expat ID validity at residency length

● Government says IDs are already deactivated

● Ministry warns of cost and operational issues

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

A contentious bill that could fundamentally alter how Expat ID cards are issued has put lawmakers and authorities at loggerheads, as parliament prepares to debate the measure on Tuesday.

If passed, the amendment would stipulate that "in all cases, the ID card for a non-Bahraini shall be valid for

a period not exceeding the duration of his residence in the Kingdom of Bahrain"—effectively tying the card's validity strictly to the holder's lawful residency.

The Parliament's Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security Committee has already urged MPs to reject the proposal in principle, underscoring deep divisions ahead of the debate.

Supporters argue the change would strengthen controls on overstays, curb access to ID-linked services and transactions, and increase fee revenue.

Hassan BuKhammas, Chairman of Parliament's Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security Committee

The government, however, dismisses the proposal as redundant, stressing that ID cards are already automatically deactivated once residency expires, immediately cutting off access to government services, banking and other dealings that require an active card.

The Ministry of Interior added that individuals leaving Bahrain are granted a 30-day grace period to settle their affairs before their ID cards are deactivated.

It also warned that tying card validity to residency periods would create operational complications, as residence permits vary widely in length, including long-term categories such as the Golden Residence.

The ministry further cautioned that the amendment would place added strain on public finances, noting that issuing an ID card costs 14 dinars, while foreign nationals pay 10 dinars under a five-year renewal model.

The National Institution for Human Rights said the proposal does not, in principle, breach equality or directly infringe

YOU KNOW WHAT
A national identity card (CPR) – including for expatriate residents – is generally valid for five years from the date of issuance (and ten years for those aged 70 and above) before it must be renewed. This validity period is not tied to other documents such as a passport or driving licence.

rights and freedoms, but called for a legal mechanism to address humanitarian cases where access to essential services depends on holding a valid ID card.

The Bahrain Bar Society raised no objections, while the Legislation and Legal Opinion Commission recommended leaving ID validity periods to executive regulations for greater flexibility, warning that the proposed change could lead to operational difficulties.

Need for land

Trump threatens tariffs on countries that don't back Greenland takeover plan

AFP | Washington, United States

US President Donald Trump said yesterday he may impose trade tariffs on countries

that don't support his plans to take over Greenland, part of the territory of NATO ally Denmark.

"I may put a tariff on countries if they don't go along with

Greenland, because we need Greenland for national security," Trump said at a health roundtable at the White House.

"I may do that," added Trump.

Trump compared the possible Greenland tariffs to those that he threatened on France and Germany last year over the price of pharmaceutical products.

Fire engulfs restaurant in Arad, no injuries reported



P4

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88% of public hospital doctors are Bahraini

637 Bahraini and 89 non-Bahraini doctors currently serve in govt hospitals

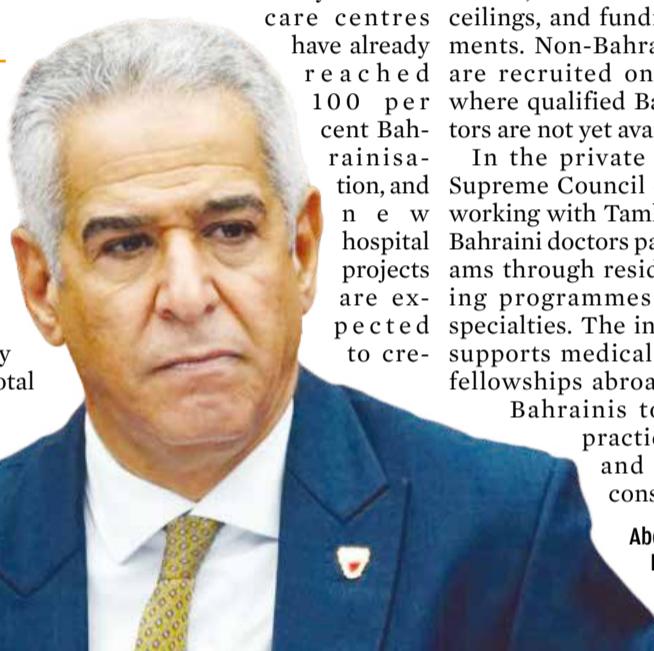
Ministry of Health is expanding training, fellowships, and career paths for Bahraini doctors

Loans, wage support, and incentives for private hospitals aim to strengthen local medical workforce

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Bahrain is pushing ahead with a phased plan to increase the number of Bahraini doctors in government hospitals, where nationals currently account for 637 of the total 726 doctors.

The Ministry of Health outlined the strategy in a parliamentary



Abdulnabi Salman,
Parliament's
First Deputy
Speaker

mentary reply to First Deputy Speaker Abdulnabi Salman, emphasizing that Bahraini doctors remain the first choice across the health system. Medical education in the country extends from board training to fellowships and subspecialty programmes, both locally and abroad, ensuring a steady pipeline of qualified national doctors.

Primary health-care centres have already reached 100 per cent Bahrainisation, and new hospital projects are expected to create additional posts. Government hospitals are expanding specialist training, creating clearer career paths for new graduates, and aligning appointments with the specific needs of each facility.

The phased replacement plan also includes sending Bahraini doctors abroad for fellowship training while carefully balancing shortages in some specialties, available vacancies, job ceilings, and funding requirements. Non-Bahraini doctors are recruited only in areas where qualified Bahraini doctors are not yet available.

In the private sector, the Supreme Council of Health is working with Tamkeen to help Bahraini doctors pass board exams through residency training programmes in needed specialties. The initiative also supports medical and dental fellowships abroad, enabling Bahrainis to complete practical training and qualify for consultant-level

roles.

Cabinet-backed measures further support education and career development, including loans of up to BD30,000, wage support for newly graduated doctors and dentists, and incentives for private hospitals that prioritise Bahraini hires. Wage support covers 70 per cent of the first-year salary, 50 per cent in the second year, and 30 per cent in the third, with a minimum of BD800. Additional measures aim to boost pay and help doctors acquire advanced clinical skills in demand.

YOU
KNOW WHAT

As of the latest health sector data, Bahrain has 10 government hospitals and 24 private hospitals, giving a combined total of 34 hospital facilities across the kingdom.

Government hospitals and health centres record 1.2 million visits in 2025

Government hospitals alone handled 538,308 visits across outpatient clinics and medical and surgical specialties

Primary healthcare centres recorded 707,651 visits between January and November 2025

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Government hospitals and primary health-care centres in Bah-

rain recorded 1.2 million patient visits in 2025, the Ministry of Health told Parliament. In a written reply to MP Jaleela Al Sayed, the ministry said government hospitals alone handled 538,308 visits across outpatient clinics and medical and surgical specialties. The hospital workforce includes 191 consultants in medicine and dentistry, 323 doctors and specialists, and 211 trainee doctors, including residents and senior residents. Between 2024 and 2025, 207 doctors were promoted under approved procedures, with pay grades from the fifth to tenth level, including E6, based on qualifications, experience, and assigned duties.

Primary healthcare centres recorded 707,651 visits between January and November 2025 and have reached 100% Bahrainisation across all medical posts. Staffing includes 584 doctors, comprising 473 women and 111 men, including consultants,

Jaleela Al Sayed, MP

family doctors, general practitioners, dentists, and trainees. Promotions for eligible doctors are underway, with some completed in November 2025 and the remainder expected in early 2026.

On clinic capacity, the Bahrain and Kuwait Health Centre in Hidd has the most general medicine clinics (31), followed by Yousif Abdulrahman Engineer Health Centre (26). Other clinics are spread across 27 health centres and a coastal clinic.

The ministry said estimates of doctor requirements are linked to the Health Insurance Law rollout and are reviewed regularly, taking into account specialty, service demand, staffing ceilings, and budgets. Future staffing needs are met through approved fellowship and subspecialty programmes, allowing doctors to train and progress according to professional requirements, with timelines varying by specialty.

Café worker jailed for three years for throwing hot water at colleague

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

The High Criminal Court sentenced a café worker to three years in prison for throwing hot water at a colleague, leaving her with a 5% permanent disability.

Court records show the man, in his 20s, argued with his Asian

co-worker over handling an order, which escalated into a physical altercation. He hit the woman, knocking her to the floor, before other delivery workers intervened.

Prosecutors said the defendant then stood behind the woman, called her by name, and threw hot water at her from a drink-preparation container,

causing burns confirmed in a forensic report.

The victim told the court she had asked for his help that morning, which he ignored. After opening her account on the cash register and closing his, he attacked her, hitting her and throwing her down. Even after co-workers intervened and she contacted the manager, he fol-

lowed her and poured hot water over her face, striking her again on the head.

During the investigation, the defendant admitted to the assault. He was charged with deliberately causing permanent disability, assault by beating and choking, and continuing the attack after the first confrontation was broken up.

Pakistan, Bahrain pledge closer cooperation on security and drug enforcement



TDT | Manama

President Zardari praised HM the King's wise leadership and his role in deepening the close relations between Pakistan and Bahrain.

In response, the Interior Minister welcomed the positive outcomes of President Zardari's visit, noting that the meeting between HM the King and the Pakistani President highlighted the historical ties and close cooperation between the countries.

The two sides agreed to continue coordinated efforts to combat the threats posed by organised crime and drug trafficking, building on the long-standing partnership between the two nations.

Parliament to debate specialist sports coaches for public schools

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

A proposal to appoint a specialist sports coach in every public school will be debated and voted on in Parliament Tuesday, after unanimous backing from the Services Committee.

Submitted by MPs Dr Mahdi Al Shuwaikh, Abdulnabi Salman, MAMDouh Al Saleh, Hassan Ebrahim, and Dr Hisham Al Ashiri, the plan aims to identify and develop pupils with sporting talent.

Dr Al Shuwaikh said: "Specialist coaches will nurture athletically gifted students and refine their skills."

The Services Committee recommended approval, citing public-interest grounds.

The Ministry of Education

said it supports nurturing student talent but argued that existing PE teachers and school competitions already achieve this. PE curricula cover team and individual sports, and teachers have the expertise to spot and develop promising athletes.

The ministry highlighted Bahrain's 2024 International School Games, where students won 66 medals, ranking fourth among Arab nations and 13th globally, and success at the Gymnasiade international school championship.

It added that school sports will continue to expand, encouraging participation and supporting talented students, and said it remains ready to provide further clarification to Parliament.



Dr Mahdi Al Shuwaikh, MP

Fire engulfs restaurant in Arad, no injuries reported



TDT | Manama

A fierce fire broke out at a restaurant inside a building in the Arad area, causing extensive damage but no injuries, authorities said.

The Ministry of Interior said Civil Defence teams were dispatched immediately after the incident was reported. Fire-

fighters carried out evacuation procedures, brought the blaze under control and conducted cooling operations to prevent it from reigniting.

The fire sent thick black smoke billowing into the sky and damaged a neighbouring building as well as several parked vehicles.

The ministry did not identify the site, but local media reports

said the blaze struck the mini heritage village in Arad. Eye-witnesses described flames engulfing parts of the complex as smoke spread across the area, with strong winds helping the fire spread rapidly.

Images released by the Police Media Centre showed Civil Defence crews battling towering flames as thick black smoke rose

high above the site, partially obscuring nearby buildings. Fire engines were positioned along the roadside while firefighters in protective gear worked at close range, directing powerful water jets at the burning structure.

The photographs revealed extensive destruction, with sections of the building reduced to charred frames and

collapsed walls. Burnt debris, twisted metal and scorched wooden beams were scattered across the ground, highlighting the intensity of the blaze. Hoses snaked across wet road surfaces as crews continued cooling operations amid lingering smoke.

Other images showed firefighters assessing the damage after the flames were brought

under control, while several onlookers stood at a distance watching the operation unfold. Parked vehicles near the site appeared damaged, underscoring the fire's impact on the surrounding area. Authorities confirmed that no one was injured and said an investigation is under way to determine the cause of the fire.

Huge crowd gathers for ISB annual Cultural Fair as celebrations begin on a high note

Manama

The Indian School came alive with colour, music, and celebration as it kicked off its Annual Cultural Fair, presented by Star Vision Events on Thursday, January 15, 2026, marking a major highlight of its Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

H.E Osama Bin Saleh Al Alawi, Minister of Social Development was the chief guest. In his speech the minister said The Indian School marks a significant milestone in fostering a rich educational and cultural environment while shaping brighter futures. Rooted in shared values and the spirit of social harmony, the school reflects the deep ties of the vibrant Indian community with Bahrain. Through dedication and meaningful contributions to society, the ISB stands as a model institution, inspiring future generations, the minister said.

Zeyad Adel Darwish, Undersecretary, Ministry of Social Development, Pambavasan Nair, Managing Director, Amad Baeed Electrical WLL; Ahmed Al Hayki, Former Assistant Undersecretary, Ministry of La-



bour; Mishal Khalid Ahmed, Director, Social Development Minister's Office; Major Khulood Yahya Ebrahim, Chief of Traffic Awareness Division, Traffic Directorate; First Lieutenant Shaikha Ahood Abdulla Ahmed Al Khalifa, Traffic Directorate; Sara Mohammed Al Shaikh, Head, Private Educational Institutions Support Group; Adv. Binu Mannil Varughese, Hon. Chairman, ISB; V. Rajapandian, Hon. Secretary, ISB; V. R Palaniswamy, Principal; R. Ramesh, ISB Fair General Convener; Sethuraj Kadakkal, Chairman, Star Vision Events; Dr. Mohammed Faizal, Hon. Vice-Chairman & Hon. Member – Sports; Ranjini Mohan, Hon. Assistant Secretary & Hon. Member – Academics; Bonny Joseph, Hon. Member – Finance & IT; Mithun Mohan, Hon. Member – Projects & Maintenance; Mohammad Nayaz Ullah, Hon. Member – Transport; Pamela Xavier, Principal, Junior Wing; G. Satheesh, Vice-Principal, Senior School & Academic Administration; Priya Laji, Vice-Principal, Junior Wing; Parvathi Devadas, Staff

Representative; Prince S. Natarajan, General Convener, Platinum Jubilee; Mohammed Hussain Malim, Advisor, Fair Committee; Saji Antony, Former Secretary; Ashraf Kattilpeadika, Fair Coordinator, also were in attendance.

Addressing the gathering, ISB Chairman Adv. Binu Mannil Varughese stated that the Platinum Jubilee celebrations mark seventy-five years of the ISB's steadfast commitment to academic excellence, cultural harmony, and social responsibility. He expressed gratitude to the Bahrain leadership, parents, and community for their enduring support in shaping generations of responsible global citizens.

Prominent businessman and philanthropist Pambavasan Nair, a former ISB parent and long-time well-wisher of the school, was felicitated during the ceremony. ISB Secretary V. Rajapandian gave a vote of thanks.

Students enthralled the audience with vibrant cultural performances, showcasing the rich diversity and talent nurtured at the school. Presented by Star

Vision Events, the two-day extravaganza continues on Friday and promises to be the biggest cultural fair in the school's 75-year history.

Adding star power to the celebrations was a stellar musical line-up. The evening featured a live concert by acclaimed musician and composer Stephen Devassy and his team, known for their innovative musical fusion and electrifying performances. On Friday, the festivities continue with student cultural programmes, followed by a high-energy musical night led by popular playback singer Rupali Jagga, accompanied by Abhishek Soni and their ensemble.

The Annual Cultural Fair stands as a signature event of the ISB's Platinum Jubilee Year 2025, symbolising 75 years of educational excellence, cultural vibrancy, and community bonding in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The excitement is further amplified by an attractive raffle draw, with the first prize being a brand-new MG ZS silver car sponsored by Zayani Motors. Raffle draw will take place on-



line on January 26, as per the guidelines of the ministry. Entry to the ISB Mega Fair is priced at BD 2 per ticket.

AI set to sharpen Bahrain's government services

Proposal Calls for AI Audits, Automation in Public Sector

● **Efficiency and transparency:** AI tools proposed to speed up services, reduce errors, and improve oversight of public spending

● **Wide applications:** From smart audits and complaint tracking to traffic management and public-area monitoring

● **Capacity building:** Plan includes staff training, partnerships with universities, and development of AI tools tailored to Bahrain's needs

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Lawmakers are considering the roll-out of artificial

intelligence (AI) across government ministries, from automating services to smarter oversight of public spending.

The proposal, introduced by MP Hassan Ebrahim alongside Dr Hisham Al Ashiri, Jaleela Alawi, Dr Ali Al Nuaimi, and First Deputy Speaker AbdulNabi Salman, will be discussed in Parliament on Tuesday.



This initiative would develop services, speed up transactions, reduce administrative and financial burdens, and enhance accuracy and transparency in government work

HASSAN EBRAHIM, MP

public. It also suggests systems to monitor operations, flag irregularities, and ensure optimal use of public funds.

Daily-life applications are included, such as smart cameras and visual analysis for public areas, and AI-driven traffic systems to monitor vehicle flows and optimise signal timings.

Sponsors emphasise the need for training government staff, attracting specialist expertise, and partnering with universities and research centres to develop AI tools tailored to Bahrain's needs.

The Nasser Centre for Science & Technology backed the initiative, noting that automating routine tasks can increase output, reduce errors, and free staff for higher-value work. AI-driven data analysis can guide service improvements, reduce costs, and support decision-making through insights and forecasts.

The proposal highlights AI's potential to support internal audits, detect unusual financial patterns, and track performance by analysing complaints and enquiries from the

centre highlighted prototypes tested over three years, including smart financial-audit systems, staff performance and training assessment tools, customer-service platforms, legal-text search tools, complaint

analysis systems, and data retrieval tools for various ministries and agencies.

The Legislative and Legal Affairs Committee recommended approval, with all members agreeing that the proposal serves the public interest.

YOU
KNOW WHAT

Governments worldwide are increasingly using artificial intelligence to improve public services, with around 40% of government AI projects focused on enhancing service delivery and operational efficiency, including automating routine tasks, fraud detection, and citizen engagement.

'Future Consultants' scheme to Bahrainise legal advisory roles set for debate

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

A'Future Consultants' scheme to train Bahrainis for legal advisory roles will be debated in Parliament on Tuesday, following MP Hanan Fardan's warning that over 1,900 law graduates are unemployed, according to the National Audit Office's 2023 report.

The plan aims to prepare graduates for public and private sector legal work, bridging the gap between entry-level skills and employer expectations. Fardan said it draws on the successful



Hanan Fardan, MP

'Future Judges' model.

A joint committee from the Legislative and Legal Affairs Committee and the Services Committee recommended approval, citing public-interest benefits such as increasing Bahrainisation and creating a skilled pool of Bahraini consultants.

The Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Waqf would lead the programme, in coordination with the Ministry of Labour and Tamkeen, recruiting and training graduates. The Labour Ministry highlighted existing initiatives, including trainee placements in law

firms with allowances, Polytechnic training, and language courses.

The Ministry of Justice noted new specialist roles such as private enforcement agents and private notaries, alongside training through the Judicial and Legal Studies Institute. The Civil Service Bureau stressed that Bahrainis are prioritised in government hiring, with expatriates only employed when necessary and required to train nationals.

The proposal will be debated in Tuesday's parliamentary session.

Parliament set for new vote on advertising law preamble

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

An narrow dispute over the preamble of a bill regulating advertising in Bahrain will go to a new vote in Parliament, while the main clauses remain agreed.

The draft law, amending Decree-Law No. 14 of 1973, requires prior approval for advertisement content, empowers municipal authorities to inspect and remove adverts that breach the law, and allows licence suspension or withdrawal. Offenders may face fines of 1,000–20,000 dinars, imprisonment, or both, with each violating advert attracting additional penalties. Courts can also order site restoration at the advertiser's expense.

The disagreement concerns how the preamble references Decree-Law No. 47 of 2002, with the Shura Council updating wording to include electronic media, while the lower house cited only press, printing, and publishing. The Public Utilities and Environment Committee recommended backing the Shura Council version.

Other amendments clarify ministry responsibilities, allow task delegation, repeal an obsolete committee article, and confirm implementation by the Prime Minister and ministers.

Gold bullion drives Bahrain's re-export trade

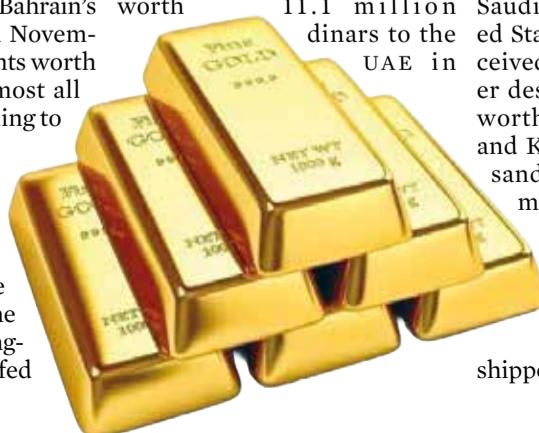
Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Gold bullion topped Bahrain's re-export trade in November 2025, with shipments worth 8.3 million dinars, almost all sent to the UAE, according to monthly trade data.

The figures also show outward sales of gold jewellery to several markets, with Saudi Arabia and the United States among the main destinations, alongside import flows that fed

re-export activity during the same month.

Bahrain exported gold bullion worth 11.1 million dinars to the UAE in



November. Exports of gold jewellery, ornaments and parts reached 3.5 million dinars to Saudi Arabia, while the United States and the UAE each received 1.4 million dinars. Other destinations included Italy, worth 212.5 thousand dinars, and Kuwait, worth 119.1 thousand dinars, with additional markets recorded.

On re-exports, bullion was the largest item across all goods at 8.3 million dinars, with nearly the entire amount shipped to the UAE. Bahrain also

re-exported gold jewellery, ornaments and parts worth 3.5 million dinars to Saudi Arabia, 309.7 thousand dinars to the United States, 212.5 thousand dinars to Italy, and about 134 thousand dinars to the UAE.

Imports during November included gold bullion worth 14.9 million dinars from the UAE, 4.5 million dinars from Switzerland, 392.5 thousand dinars from Australia, and 97.3 thousand dinars from South Africa.

Bahrain also imported gold jewellery, ornaments and parts

worth 9.8 million dinars from the UAE, 1.7 million dinars from India, 535.4 thousand dinars from Italy, and 494.8 thousand dinars from the United States. Further imports came from France at 216.8 thousand dinars, Thailand at 136.4 thousand dinars, and Switzerland at 128.5 thousand dinars, alongside other sources including China, Germany, Lebanon, Spain and Turkey.

The data also recorded imports of semi-worked gold from the UAE worth 66.7 thousand dinars in November.

News in brief

◆ Myanmar tells ICJ Rohingya genocide claims 'unsubstantiated'



allegations that it committed genocide against its Rohingya minority, telling the International Court of Justice that its brutal crackdown was a "counter-terrorism operation." Myanmar is defending itself at the United Nations top court from accusations brought by The Gambia that its actions against the Rohingya breached the 1948 UN Genocide Convention. "This case will be decided on the basis of proven facts, not unsubstantiated allegations. Emotional language and blurry factual pictures are not a substitute for a rigorous presentation of facts," Ko Ko Hlaing, a minister in the president's office, told the court.

◆ An Afghan man went on trial in Germany yesterday accused of ramming a car into a crowd in Munich last year, killing a two-year-old girl and her mother and injuring dozens. The suspect, partially identified as Farhad N., 25, faces two charges of murder and 44 of attempted murder, with prosecutors saying he acted out of a "religious motivation" and expected to die in the attack. The vehicle rampage in February 2025 was one of several deadly attacks linked to migrants which inflamed a heated debate on immigration ahead of a general election that month.

China protests over Philippine coast guard's Xi images



Beijing claims historic rights to despite an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis, has been the site of repeated clashes between Chinese and Philippine vessels.

◆ Myanmar yesterday dismissed as "unsubstantiated"

by The Gambia that its actions against the Rohingya breached the 1948 UN Genocide Convention. "This case will be decided on the basis of proven facts, not unsubstantiated allegations. Emotional language and blurry factual pictures are not a substitute for a rigorous presentation of facts," Ko Ko Hlaing, a minister in the president's office, told the court.

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◆ The Chinese Embassy in Manila said yesterday it has filed a diplomatic protest against a Philippine Coast Guard spokesman over a social media post that included cartoonish images of President Xi Jinping.

Coast Guard spokesman Jay Tariela and an embassy official had been trading barbs since last week over issues concerning the disputed South China Sea. The crucial waterway, which

Beijing claims historic rights to despite an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis, has been the site of repeated clashes between Chinese and Philippine vessels.

SPOTLIGHT

Australia warns of floods, fires after cars washed away



A bushfire burns at Budgee Budgee Bushland Reserve near Dargo, in Australia's Victoria state

AFP | Sydney

Most of that water fell on Thursday.

"We've seen severe-to-extreme heat wave, catastrophic bushfires and now extreme flash flooding in the southwest of the state," Emergency Management Commissioner Tim Wiebusch told reporters.

"It really is a timely reminder that communities need to be prepared for all types of emergencies."

The flash flood cut off the state's Great Ocean Road and forced up to 300 people to flee, officials said. Many of them were reportedly holidaying at caravan camps. One child was injured and airlifted to hospital.

"It was raining, we were all in the tent playing cards with the gang, then we heard shouting," camper Matthew Stanhope told The Age newspaper, saying he and his friends ran to a nearby hill.

"It was lightning fast and quiet too. There's no noise, just all of a sudden the water is up."

Australia's emergency services warned people yesterday to stay prepared for sudden downpours and dangerous bushfires in the country's east after a flash flood swept cars into the sea.

Heavy rains on Thursday sent a deluge of water flowing through some parts of the eastern state of Victoria, which is still battling 10 major bushfires.

Photo and video images in local media showed one car rolling around in muddy waters as it was carried along the Wye River southwest of Melbourne.

Two cars were still partially submerged under the ocean waves yesterday, a few steps from the sandy coastline.

A local record of 186 millimetres (more than seven inches) fell in the 24 hours to yesterday morning in one spot, the state meteorology service said.

Iran protests subside after 'brutal' crackdown

● Internet blackout exceeds 180 hours

● Rights groups report over 3,400 deaths

● Rights group cites "horrifying eyewitness accounts"

AFP | Tehran

The protest movement in Iran has subsided after a crackdown that has killed thousands under an internet blackout, monitors said yesterday, one week after the start of the biggest protests in years challenging the Islamic republic's theocratic system.

The threat of new military action by the United States against Iran has also appeared to have receded for the time being, with a Saudi official saying Gulf allies have persuaded President Donald Trump to give the Iranian leadership a "chance".

Protests sparked by economic grievances started with a shutdown in the Tehran bazaar on December 28 but turned into a mass movement demanding the removal of the clerical system that has ruled Iran since the 1979 revolution.

People started pouring into the streets in big cities from January 8 but authorities immediately enforced a shutdown of the internet that has lasted over a week and activists say is



Iranians residing in Armenia hold a demonstration in solidarity with Iranian protesters, outside Iranian embassy in Yerevan aimed at masking the scale of the crackdown.

Amiry-Moghaddam said authorities under supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have "committed one of the gravest crimes of our time".

He cited "horrifying eyewitness accounts" received by IHR of "protesters being shot dead while trying to flee, the use of military-grade weapons and the street execution of wounded protesters".

Lama Fakih, programme director at Human Rights Watch, said the killings since last week "are unprecedented in the country".

Monitor Netblocks said that the "total internet blackout" in Iran had now lasted over 180 hours, longer than a similar measure that was imposed during 2019 protests.

'Give Iran a chance'

Trump, who backed and joined Israel's 12-day war against Iran in June, had not ruled out new military action against Tehran and made clear he was keeping a close eye on if any protesters were executed.

But with the belligerent rhetoric on all sides appearing to tone down for now, a senior Saudi official told AFP on Thursday that Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman led "a long, frantic, diplomatic last-minute effort to convince President Trump to give Iran a chance to show good intention".

Machado vows to be Venezuela president 'when the right time comes'

● Machado says she 'presented' Trump with Nobel medal

AFP | Washington

Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado has insisted she will be elected president "when the right time comes" despite the United States sidelining her after overthrowing Nicolas Maduro.

President Donald Trump has backed Maduro's former vice president Delcy Rodriguez as interim leader of the oil-rich country following the January 3 US military operation to seize Maduro.

"I believe I will be elected when the right time comes as president of Venezuela, the first woman president," Machado told Fox News's Fox & Friends show broadcast yesterday after she met with Trump in Washington.

Machado's party has presented evidence that Maduro stole the



Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado (R) presents her Nobel Peace Prize to US President Donald Trump

2024 election -- claims supported by Washington and much of the international community.

But Trump has said that

Machado does not have enough support among Venezuelans, and opted to stick with Rodriguez, so long as she toes the line on US access to Venezuela's vast oil reserves.

"I want to serve my country where I am more useful. I got a

mandate, and I have that mandate," Machado told Fox.

Nobel medal

Machado, 58, on Thursday presented her Nobel Peace Prize medal to Trump in a bid to win over the US president.

"He deserves it," she said. "And it was a very emotional moment, I decided to present the Nobel Peace Prize medal on behalf of the people of Venezuela."

It was not immediately clear if Trump kept the award following their White House lunch. The Norwegian Nobel committee says its prizes cannot be transferred.

Trump had campaigned hard to win last year's Nobel Peace Prize for what he says are his efforts to stop eight wars.

Instead it went to Machado, who appeared in Oslo last month to collect her prize -- following a daring escape from Venezuela by boat.

Trump and Rodriguez had their first telephone call on Wednesday and the White House said he "likes what he's seeing" from her.

1773

Captain James Cook becomes the first to cross Antarctic Circle (66° 33' S)



1912

Captain Robert Scott's expedition arrives at the South Pole, one month after Roald Amundsen

1946

United Nations Security Council holds its 1st meeting, at Westminster Central Hall in Westminster, England

1991

Operation Desert Storm begins, with US-led coalition forces bombing Iraq, during the Gulf War

Zelensky hopes for security guarantees plan in new US talks

● Zelensky targets Davos for peace signature

AFP | Washington

President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday that he hopes Ukraine will sign agreements with the United States next week on a plan to end Russia's invasion but lashed out at slow ammunition deliveries from abroad.

US President Donald Trump has been pushing for a halt to the war and has pressured Ukraine to accept peace terms that Kyiv has likened to capitulation to Russia.

Key sticking points remain between Kyiv and Washington, and Ukraine has been seeking clarity from allies about what security guarantees it will receive as part of the plan, which it believes are vital to deter Russia from invading again.

Zelensky told reporters -- including from AFP -- that Ukrainian negotiators were on their way to the United States for more talks.

"We hope there will be more clarity both regarding the documents we have already effectively prepared with the American side and regarding Russia's response to all the diplomatic work that is underway," he added.

"If everything is finalised and if there is agreement from the American side -- because on our side, in principle, I believe we're done -- then signing during



Ukrainian servicemen firing Bm-21 Grad MRLS towards Russian positions near Chasiv Yar in the Donetsk region

Davos will be possible," he added, referring to The World Economic Forum next week.

Air defence depleted

Zelensky also conceded problems with Ukrainian air defence systems at a critical moment in the war.

Some air defence systems supplied to Ukraine by Western allies had run out of ammunition amid a wave of Russian attacks that have devastated his country's energy infrastructure, he said.

Kyiv says more than 15,000 energy workers are racing in sub-zero temperatures to re-

store power plants and substations battered over recent days by hundreds of Russian drones and missiles.

Zelensky has repeatedly called on allies to beef up Ukraine's air defence systems to shield vital civilian infrastructure facilities from daily Russian bombardments.

"Until this morning we had several systems without missiles. Today I can say this openly because today I have those missiles," Zelensky told a press conference in Kyiv.

The attacks have spurred urgent humanitarian concerns, with millions of Ukrainians suf-

fering long periods without electricity and heating during a cold snap where temperatures have dropped to -20C in some parts of the country.

The Kremlin claims its forces only target military facilities.

When it has bombed Ukrainian power plants in previous years, it has blamed civilians' hardships on Kyiv and its refusal to accept Russian peace demands.

AFP journalists in Kyiv -- one of the worst hit cities -- have seen chaos at intersections where traffic lights are off, shops and restaurants closed, and residents warming up and charging phones in emergency tents set up by the

state.

Ukraine relies on its Western partners for several vital advanced air defence systems -- including US-made Patriot batteries.

But Zelensky said during a press conference with Czech President Petr Pavel that all of those units "require constant supplies of missiles".

He urged both European allies and the United States to supply deliveries.

"We received a substantial package in the morning. It's in Ukraine now and we can talk about it.

"But it comes at such cost -- through effort, blood, people's lives," the Ukrainian leader added.

X
TOP 4
TWEETS
01



The world is changing -- often in ways that are unsettling, but also in ways that are inspiring. Even in the rough seas of today, we can anchor our action in peace, dignity & hope. That takes the best efforts of everyone. Let's never give up.

@antoniofuterres

02



What happens in Ukraine matters to our security and to our future. Our 100 Year Partnership with Ukraine demonstrates our steadfast support. We will continue to work together for both of our interests: freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.

@Keir_Starmer

03



I can boost productivity -- but it will also reshape ~60% of jobs in advanced economies. Thank you @JustinWorland for the thoughtful @TIME interview. Let's invest in skills, safety nets, and smart rules, so innovation can lift everyone.

@KGeorgieva

04



7.9 million people in #Venezuela need urgent support: more than a quarter of the population. Humanitarian organizations continue to support the most vulnerable people with humanitarian action: food, health and protection.

@UNReliefChief

Syrians flee Kurdish-held area ahead of deadline



People along with their belongings walk across a damaged bridge as they flee from a Kurdish-controlled area, in Rasm al-Harmal, east of Aleppo city

AFP | Aleppo

Civilians fled a Kurdish-held region of northern Syria yesterday before a deadline set by the army, which seeks to expand its control over the area after driving Kurdish forces from Aleppo.

The government is seeking to extend its authority nationwide following the ousting of long-time leader Bashar al-Assad in December 2024.

The US envoy for Syria, Tom Barrack, posted on X that he was working "around the clock" to prevent any escalation between

Kurdish fighters and government forces, both of which have US backing.

The army has massed significant reinforcements in Deir Ezzor, some 50 kilometres (30 miles) east of Aleppo, and ordered the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to evacuate an area between this region and the River Euphrates to the east.

Civilians have been fleeing the area since Thursday on back roads. AFP correspondents saw some using a rickety bridge to cross a branch of the Euphrates.

South Korean ex-leader jailed for 5 years in first martial law verdict

AFP | Seoul

A South Korean judge sentenced former President Yoon Suk Yeol yesterday to five years in prison for obstructing justice and other crimes linked to his disastrous martial law declaration and in its chaotic aftermath.

It is the first in a series of verdicts for the disgraced ex-leader, whose brief suspension of civilian rule in South Korea on December 3, 2024 prompted massive protests and a showdown in parliament.

Now ousted from power, he faces multiple trials for actions taken during that debacle and in the turmoil that followed.

Yesterday, Judge Baek Dae-hyun at Seoul's Central District Court said he found Yoon guilty of obstruction of justice by blocking investigators from detaining him.

Baek said that Yoon abused his power by turning officials of the Presidential Security Service against the state and used them as his "personal guards" serving his "own safety and private interests".



A blue bus believed to be transporting South Korea's impeached former president Yoon Suk Yeol arrives at the Seoul Central District Court in Seoul

Yoon was also found guilty of excluding cabinet members from a martial law planning meeting.

"Despite having a duty, above all others, to uphold the Constitution and observe the rule of law as president, the defendant instead displayed an attitude that disregarded the... Constitution," Baek said.

"The defendant's culpability is extremely grave," he said.

But Yoon was not guilty of forging official documents due to lack of evidence, the judge said.

Yoon has seven days to appeal, he added.

Prosecutors had called for a 10-year prison term, while Yoon had insisted no law was broken.

After the verdict was announced, his supporters outside the court fell silent for several minutes before breaking into chants of "Yoon again!"

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

CELEBS

Actor McConaughey seeks to patent image to protect from AI

AFP | Los Angeles

Actor Matthew McConaughey has filed recordings of his image and voice with US patent authorities to protect them from unauthorized usage by artificial intelligence platforms, a representative said Wednesday.

Several video clips and audio recordings were registered by the commercial

arm of the just keep livin Foundation, a non-profit created by the Oscar-winning actor and his wife Camila, according to the United States Patent and Trademark Office database.

Many artists are increasingly concerned about the uncontrolled use of their image via generative AI since the rollout of ChatGPT and other AI-powered tools.

Several US states have adopted legislation that serves as consumer

protection against certain AI systems and deepfakes, but much of this applies mainly to malicious use or commercial purposes.

Only a few, notably Tennessee's ELVIS Act passed in 2024, offer more targeted protections for artists against AI-generated cloning or impersonation.

A few actors have taken legal action to assert their rights.

Among the most notable is Scarlett Johansson, who sued the image-generating app Lisa AI in 2023 for creating an AI-gen-

erated avatar in her likeness for an advertisement without her consent.

McConaughey's approach is novel in that he is taking the lead in protecting his image and voice.

The star of "Interstellar" and "Dallas Buyers Club" is no opponent of generative artificial intelligence.

He has acquired a stake in ElevenLabs, a startup specializing in AI voice modeling, and the company has created an AI audio

version of McConaughey -- with his permission.

Attorney Kevin Yorn, who represents McConaughey, said the aim of filing with the patent office was "to make sure that our clients have the same kind of protections that their businesses have."

"The second part is to make sure that our clients are able to capture some of the value that is being created with this new technology using their voice and likeness," he added.

Matthew McConaughey



Emilia Clarke had breakdown after Game of Thrones

Bang showbiz | Los Angeles

Emilia Clarke had a "full mental breakdown" after Game of Thrones ended.

The 39-year-old actress shot to fame playing Daenerys Targaryen in the fantasy drama series from 2011 to 2019 and she admitted she was grateful for the COVID-19 pandemic because it gave her the time to reflect on a decade which had also seen her suffer two brain haemorrhages and her dad pass away in 2016.

She told the New York Times newspaper: "It was the first time in my professional life that I stopped.

"I had a full mental breakdown. It was almost as if the timing of the pandemic was bang on..."

"It forced me to answer some questions I probably could have put off answering for another 10 years...

"[During the show] there was never any time to

stop and consider the meaning of it. I never had the foresight to think, 'You're going to take a minute.'

The Last Christmas actress admitted she is unlikely to ever star in another fantasy project.

She said: "You're highly unlikely to see me get on a dragon, or even in the same frame as a dragon, ever again."

And Emilia was hesitant to take on her latest role, as Bea in spy series Ponies, because she was concerned about the "commitment".

She said: "I was definitely, like, 'A lead in a TV show? I know what that commitment feels like.'"

But the actress knew things would be different because she was given the choice of which of the two main characters she wanted to play.

She noted: "I felt like they were giving me a voice, which doesn't always happen."

Emilia admitted she felt she had very little control in the early days of her career.



Pete Davidson launches podcast series on Netflix

Bang showbiz | Los Angeles

Pete Davidson is launching a new podcast series.

The 32-year-old comedian is set to host a weekly video podcast filmed inside his home, with The Pete Davidson Show premiering on Netflix on January 30.

Pete - who enjoyed huge success as a cast member on Saturday Night Live - told Tudum: "Netflix was the home of one of my first stand-up specials, so it

felt right to bring the podcast there, too. It's me and my friends talking about anything and everything. It's going to be a great time."

The upcoming series will mark Pete's forth collaboration with Netflix, having previously made Pete Davidson: Turbo Fonzarelli and Pete Davidson: Alive from New York, as well as hosting and curating Pete Davidson Presents: The Best Friends in 2022.

Meanwhile, Pete previously revealed that he's found the focus on his personal life to be "traumatic".

The comedian has dated a host of famous women, including Kim Kardashian, Ariana Grande, Kaia Gerber, Margaret Qualley, and

Phoebe Dynevor, but Pete felt frustrated that people often knew him for his high-profile love life, rather than his comedy talent.

Pete - who recently welcomed his first child, a daughter, with girlfriend Elsie Hewitt - said on The Breakfast Club: "It just got to a point where I was ... I got really tired of my whole career just being like my personal life. And living through that is it's sort of traumatic. Like not to be like lame, but like it's traumatic to live in your own crap all the time."

Pete Davidson

Ben Affleck and Matt Damon strike landmark deal with Netflix



Ben Affleck and Matt Damon

Bang showbiz | Los Angeles

Ben Affleck and Matt Damon struck a deal with Netflix to boost pay for all crew members on The Rip.

The Hollywood duo star in and produce the new Netflix film, and they struck a first-of-its-kind deal with the streaming platform to ensure that the behind-the-scenes team profits from the movie's potential success.

Ben, 53, told Variety: "In our experience, every single person that works on

this movie - it's the most collaborative of all art forms. Everybody is vital to it."

Under the terms of their deal, all 1,200 people involved in the production will receive a bonus if the film performs well on Netflix.

Matt said: "Every single person who worked on it should benefit from it."

Ben and Matt have produced the movie through their Artists Equity company.

Ben explained that the overarching ambition behind the company is to "provide the decent middle class wage that was provided for decades in this country ... There's no guarantee that you're going to get rich and successful. But if you work on a project and you are successful, you ought to benefit."

Meanwhile, Matt previously claimed that cinemagoers aren't aware "of how much power they have".

The actor and Ben, his childhood friend, helped to finance the drama movie, Small Things Like These, through their Artists Equity company, and Matt suggested that it represented a sea change in the context of modern cinema.

He told Extra in 2024: "In the '90s there would've been a number of films of this scale. There would've been a number of these every year, and they've been decreasing, obviously, over the years."

Ariana Grande reveals Mac Miller 'encouraged her to be herself' in rare tribute to her late ex

Bang showbiz | Los Angeles

Ariana Grande says Mac Miller "encouraged her to be herself" as she moved into music.

The Wicked actress has recalled her experiences leaving Nickelodeon sitcom Sam and Cat as she started working on her 2013 debut album Yours Truly, and her late ex-boyfriend - who she dated from 2016 to 2018

- encouraged her to "shed that character" and move on.

Speaking on The Hollywood Reporter's Awards Chatter podcast, she said: "I've never talked about this, but actually Malcolm, whom you might know as Mac, encouraged me to be myself. 'And that it was OK to kind of shed that character, and embrace my brown hair, and make R B-influenced pop music and separate and do the brave thing.'

"I never said that. But it was a

great influence, I'm so very grateful for that."

She featured Miller on her lead single The Way, as a nod to the influence he had on her music.

She added: "Not only because he was so perfect for the song, but I also felt like I had him to thank for finding my sound."

Ariana and Miller split just six months before he died in an accidental overdose aged 26 in September 2018, and she has paid tribute to him over the years.

In 2020, she told Apple Music:

"I think that nothing mattered more to him than music ever."

"And he was the kind of person who woke up and rolled into the studio, tumbled out of bed, into the studio next door."

"Nothing was more important. Talk about losing track of time and forgetting to eat, remind yourself to take care of yourself and be a person."

"He was a person who gave literally every single second of his thought and time and life to his music."

Ariana also pointed to the "many incredible and different bodies of work" he left behind.

She had previously reflected on the grief she felt when he passed, acknowledging that while their relationship wasn't "perfect", she still thought he was "the best person ever".

She told Vogue magazine in 2019: "By no means was what we had perfect, but, like, f***. He was the best person ever, and he didn't deserve the demons he had."



Classifieds



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Sinner: Doping ban made me stronger

● Jannik Sinner defends Australian Open title

AFP | Melbourne

Jannik Sinner said yesterday a three-month doping ban last year made him stronger as a person and more relaxed on court as he prepares to defend his Australian Open title.

The 24-year-old arrived at Melbourne Park last year under intense pressure, not knowing his fate after a drugs scandal.

He managed to put aside the noise and win the title but his career was put on hold afterwards as he served the three-month suspension for twice testing positive for a banned anabolic steroid in 2024.

Sinner always maintained the product entered his system unintentionally through a massage from his physiotherapist, who had used a spray containing it to treat a cut.

While the World Anti-Doping Agency said Sinner did not intend to cheat, it ordered him to serve the ban as he was responsible for the actions of his entourage.

"Last year was definitely a much more difficult situation because in this moment last year I didn't know exactly what's going to happen," he said.

"So I tried still to enjoy it when I went out on the court, but still had it in my head kind of."

"It was difficult for me, but



Jannik Sinner in action (file photo)

also for the family. I tried to stay with the people I really love, which at times worked very well. At times it was a bit disappointing, too."

Sinner's ban expired in May and he bounced back to win Wimbledon and the ATP Finals, ending the year as world number two behind fierce rival Carlos Alcaraz.

He said the experience had made him a better person.

"It is what it is, right? After that, I think everything happens for a reason," he said.

"It got me even stronger as a person. The person I've be-

they're not going in the right direction different ways. "Whatever comes on court, result-wise, that's all an extra," he added.

"I live the sport also in a very different way now, which is relaxed, but I give everything I have. It's a balance of everything. So yeah, I'm very happy."

JANNIK SINNER

come it's much more mature in a way because I see things when

they're not going in the right direction different ways.

"Whatever comes on court, result-wise, that's all an extra," he added.

"I live the sport also in a very different way now, which is relaxed, but I give everything I have. It's a balance of everything. So yeah, I'm very happy."

DAD CAHILL

Sinner saw off Alexander Zverev in straight sets to win the title a year ago, having come from two sets down to defeat Daniil Medvedev in the 2024 Australian Open final.



Sinner revealed his physiotherapist's medicated spray caused the failed test—an episode he says made him "more mature and relaxed" entering the 2026 season

Should he win three in a row he would join Novak Djokovic as the only men in the Open era to do so.

The Serbian legend has done the three-peat twice during his 10 titles at Melbourne Park and could meet Sinner in the semi-finals this year, if both get that far.

The Italian will get his campaign under way against France's Hugo Gaston, with master coach Darren Cahill again in his corner.

The pair joined forces in June 2022 and Cahill has overseen Sinner's elevation to the top of the game.

"He's so important for all of us, for all the team. He has this huge experience," Sinner said having convinced the Australian to put his retirement plans on hold.

"He's the man who has under control kind of everything. He's our dad for the whole team."

'Excited' Alcaraz hungry to break Australian Open title drought

AFP | Melbourne

Carlos Alcaraz warned yesterday that he was "hungry" to break his Australian Open title drought and become the youngest man to complete a career Grand Slam, calling it his primary target in 2026.

The world number one from Spain is the title favourite along with two-time defending champion and great rival Jannik Sinner.

The Melbourne Park crown is the only one of the four majors that Alcaraz has never won, his best performance the quarter-finals in 2024 and 2025.

If he goes all the way this year he will surpass fellow Spaniard Rafael Nadal as the youngest man to win all four majors. Nadal was 24 when he achieved the feat.

The 22-year-old Alcaraz, whose only warm-up was a win against Italy's Sinner in a light-hearted exhibition match in South Korea.

"So it's going to be really interesting for me how I prepared, which I think I just made a really good pre-season, just to be in a good shape."



Carlos Alcaraz reacts during a training session

I think this is my main goal for this year. So it's going to be really interesting for me how I prepared, which I think I just made a really good pre-season, just to be in a good shape

CARLOS ALCARAZ

three of the other majors this year for one Melbourne crown.

Underlining just how important winning the Australian Open and nailing the career Grand Slam is to him, he said he could not decide.

"I don't know which one I would choose," he said, smiling broadly.

"Obviously complete the career Grand Slam is something amazing to do, be able to be the youngest that has done it before, you know, is even better."

There has been much focus on Alcaraz's coaching team in the build-up to Melbourne.

In December the six-time major champion abruptly announced that he was splitting from coach Juan Carlos Ferrero after seven hugely successful years together, with assistant Samuel Lopez taking over.

Alcaraz began working with Ferrero, a former world number one, when he was a teenager.

Quizzed by reporters for the reasons behind the surprise split, Alcaraz said that it felt like the right time to end the partnership and was a mutual decision.

"With Juan Carlos, we decided to do it. I'm just having plenty of confidence in the team that I have right now," he said.

"As I said, practice has been really good. I'm just feeling well."

"So just excited about the tournament beginning with the team that I have right now."

Osaka to be 'aggressive' in bid for third Australian Open title

AFP | Melbourne

Naomi Osaka said yesterday she wants to leave the Australian Open with no regrets and will go on the attack as she attempts to win the title for a third time.

The former world number one from Japan has struggled for form, fitness and consistency since the last of her four Grand Slam titles five years ago.

She is now ranked 16 in the world but showed signs of her brilliant best in reaching the semi-finals at the US Open last year.

Osaka, the Melbourne champion in 2019 and 2021, said: "I just hope to be able to look back on this tournament however it ends and not have any regrets."

Osaka, who faces Croatia's Antonia Ruzic in the opening



Naomi Osaka in action (file photo)

round, said that she is leaning on good memories of her past triumphs.

But she also believes she has improved in some aspects of her game and is pleased with her early season form despite defeat to Maria Sakkari at the United Cup this month, when she was battling illness.

"When I reflect on that match I just think about how I couldn't breathe because I was coughing so much," said the 28-year-old.

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Three-time World Champion Michael van Gerwen wins maiden Bahrain Darts Masters title

TDT | Manama

BIC, Sakhir – Michael van Gerwen from the Netherlands was this evening crowned champion of the 2026 Bahrain Darts Masters, which came to a close at Terminal 4 by Beyond in Exhibition World Bahrain.

Van Gerwen, the World Number four and a three-time World Champion, secured the title in the Kingdom for the first time after defeating fellow-countryman and World Number three Gian van Veen 8-6 in a hugely thrilling a 11-Dutch final, played in front of a large and energetic crowd of supporters, many of whom were in colourful fancy dresses and costumes.

Van Gerwen was competing in the Bahrain Darts Masters for only the second time,

and he improved on his runner-up finish in the 2024 edition of the event.

Following the title-decider, which was played best-of-15 legs, van Gerwen was presented with the tournament's glittering champion's trophy, molded in the form of a palm tree. Bahrain International Circuit (BIC) Chief Executive Shaikh Salman bin Isa Al Khalifa and CBX Managing Director Roy Boutagy were on hand for the awarding.

The 2026 Bahrain Darts Masters was organised by BIC, the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC), and sports promoter CBX, and was supported by Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority.

Van Gerwen joins last year's winner Stephen Bunting, reigning back-to-back World Cham-



pion and 2024 winner in Bahrain Luke Littler, and 2022-23 World Champion and the first-ever victor in the Kingdom Michael Smith as title winners in the Bahrain Darts Masters.

This year's event marked the fourth edition of the prestigious competition, which was held as the first round of the 2026 PDC World Series of Darts.

In this evening's final, van

then won the next two legs for a commanding 6-2 advantage, but van Veen battled back with three straight to make it 5-6. The pair then split the next two legs to set up a dramatic finish, and with van Gerwen leading 7-6, he made the most of the opportunity to seal the crown.

Earlier in the evening, Van Gerwen was first to secure his place in the title affair after defeating 2020-21 World Champion Gerwyn Price 7-2 in the best-of-13 legs semi-finals. In the other contest of the last four, van Veen beat former World Matchplay champion Nathan Aspinall 7-4 to book his place in the championship match.

In the best-of-11 legs quarter-finals, a pair of stunning outcomes kicked off the programme, with Littler losing to Price 2-6 and Bunting being ousted by van Gerwen 4-6. Aspinall followed suit with a 6-3 victory over 2023-24 World Champion and current World Number two Luke Humphries, and then van Veen completed the semi-final cast with a 6-1 triumph against Dutch darts star Danny Noppert.

Bahrain open Asian handball championship with emphatic win



Team Bahrain celebrate after convincing opening victory

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Bahrain made a comfortable start to their 22nd Asian Men's Handball Championship campaign yesterday, cruising to a convincing 32-21 win over Jordan in their opening Group B match at the Saad Al Abdullah Sports Hall in Kuwait City. The result gives the kingdom an ideal platform in the continental tournament, which serves as a qualifier for the 2027 IHF Men's Handball World Championship in Germany.

Robert Hedin's men asserted control from the opening minutes, racing into an early lead through Salman Al Showaikh, who was instrumental through-

out the contest. The Bahrainis' defensive discipline and quick transitions troubled the Jordanians, allowing them to steadily build an advantage and go into the break with a commanding 17-10 lead.

Jordan attempted to respond early in the second half, but Bahrain quickly regained momentum. Al Showaikh continued to lead the attack, while Mohammed Ahmed Habib, Mohamed Nasser, Ali Alasheer, and Qasim Qasbar all contributed crucial goals as Bahrain stretched their lead further. The Bahrainis remained composed in the final stages, efficiently closing out the match to secure an 11-goal victory and underline their credentials as one of the tournament favourites.

Al Showaikh was deservedly named Man of the Match after delivering a standout performance, scoring six goals and orchestrating Bahrain's offensive play with authority and composure. Following the match, Bahrain international Mohammed Habib highlighted the importance of the opening win. "We achieved the most important thing at the start of the tournament," he said. "Opening matches are always difficult, but we were ready for the challenge and managed to overcome a match that was not easy at all."

He added: "Every game in this championship is tough. This win gives us strong motivation for what's coming. We didn't come here just to participate, we are taking it step by step and treating



Bahrain's Jasim Khamis in action against Jordan



Salman Al Showaikh named Man of Match

every match on its own."

Bahrain return to action tomorrow when they face China at 6pm, before concluding the preliminary round against Iraq

Verstappen motivated as Red Bull braces for F1 changes



Max Verstappen
AFP | London

Four-time world champion Max Verstappen said he's keen to get to grips with the new car Red Bull unveiled on Thursday for a 2026 Formula One season of massive change.

The team unveiled the livery for their new cars before a few hundred guests at Detroit's Michigan Central Station less than two months before the season opens in Melbourne on March 7.

New rules for 2026 see aerodynamic changes to make cars lighter and smaller along with modifications to engine specifications to make for a greater contribution from electric power in the hybrid units.

"There is a lot of unknown, there are big changes in the engine, in the car," Verstappen said. "Initially I'll take time to adjust during test days. The motivation is very high."

"It always takes a bit of time to get used to things," he added. "You need to understand where the most performance is to be found, get comfortable in the car."