



Taylor Swift among inductees of Songwriters Hall of Fame

8 CELEBS

Gold nears \$5,000, silver shines as stocks slip on turbulent week

HM King sends
letter to Saudi
Crown Prince and
Prime Minister



TDT | Riyadh

His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa sent a letter to His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia.

The message was delivered to Waleed Bin Abdulkarim Al Khereiji, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in Saudi Arabia, during his meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riyadh with Shaikh Ali bin Abdulrahman bin Ali Al Khalifa, Ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

The meeting reviewed ways to expand cooperation in support of shared interests and the spirit of solidarity between the two nations.

Bahraini police personnel arrive in Qatar for "Arabian Gulf Security 4" exercise

TDT | Doha

Bahraini police personnel participating in the joint tactical security exercise Arabian Gulf Security 4 arrived in Qatar.

The exercise will be held from January 25 to February 4, 2026, as part of ongoing cooperation among security agencies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states.

The Arabian Gulf Security 4 exercise focuses on strengthening coordination among security agencies, developing field capabilities, and improving response procedures for emergency situations, in support of security and stability in GCC states.



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Bahrain engages global partners at WEF 2026



P4

No 1 billion dollar was paid

Bahrain's Board of Peace seat comes without charge, Minister Ali AlKhulaif says

● The minister said each country must assess the cost and benefits of permanent membership

TDT | Manama

Bahrain's seat on Trump's Board of Peace comes without the \$1 billion price tag.

Noor bint Ali AlKhulaif, Minister of Sustainable Development and Chief Executive of the Economic Development Board, confirmed this in Davos in response to queries on the matter.

Trump has said the organisation would work "in conjunction" with the United Nations. Invitations were sent to dozens of world leaders, requesting a \$1 billion payment for a permanent seat on the board.

"The \$1 billion figure applies only to a permanent seat, while Bahrain was offered a three-year seat, which does not require such a payment," the minister said during the Prosperity Agenda for the Middle East session at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

In a video of the telecast published by Al Ayam, the minister said: "I think it's worth clarifying here that no \$1 billion was paid."

When asked about the return on investment for countries considering a permanent seat—

The \$1 billion figure applies only to a permanent seat, while Bahrain was offered a three-year seat, which does not require such a payment

NOOR BINT ALI ALKHULAIF, MINISTER OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BOARD



particularly given the high price reportedly sought by former US President Donald Trump—the minister said the decision ultimately rests with individual nations.

"Every country would have its own perspective, its own calculations, its own math," she said, adding that for some countries the cost may make sense, while for others it may not.

The minister declined to comment on whether permanent seats would remain available at the proposed price, reiterating that such decisions are for governments themselves to assess.

His Highness Shaikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, Minister of the Prime Minister's

Court, on behalf of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, participated in the signing ceremony of the Board of Peace charter, held at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

The charter was also signed by Donald J. Trump, President of the United States of America, and His Excellency Nasser Bourita, Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates of the Kingdom of Morocco, formally ratifying the Board of Peace as an international organisation. Following the signing, representatives of several other countries also proceeded to sign the charter.



Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Indonesia, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates have agreed to join the body, which is to be chaired by Trump.



Family outing ends in tragedy as three die, including child, in Sakhir crash



P3

Bahrain reiterates support for Syria's sovereignty

Manama

Bahrain reaffirmed its support for Syria's sovereignty, independence, security, and territorial integrity, noting the country is at a sensitive stage that requires coordinated international efforts to facilitate refugee returns, reconstruction, economic recovery, and sustainable development.

The statement was delivered by Counselor Sama Sameer Al Aliwat on behalf of Bahrain's UN Permanent Representative during a UN Security Council meeting on Syria's political and humanitarian situation.

MPs push for 24-hour Muharraq Health Centre

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

A push to keep Muharraq Health Centre open 24 hours will be discussed in Parliament on Tuesday, as five MPs call on the government to expand the clinic's service for residents of the Second Constituency.

The proposal, submitted by MPs Hamad Al Doy, Abdulwahid Qarata, Badier Al Tameemi, Hisham Al Awadhi and Dr Hisham Al Asheeri, aims to ease pressure on King Hamad University Hospital and Halat Bu Maher Health Center, and respond to the high demand from residents who require regular treatment and medicines.

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

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Family outing ends in tragedy as three die, including child, in **Sakhir crash**

TDT | Manama

What began as a joyful family outing ended in unimaginable tragedy for Ahmed Ali Al-Shuwaikh, his wife, and their eight-year-old child.

Yesterday, a speeding vehicle tore through their plans, leaving the family dead and plunging their loved ones into grief. The family had been enjoying a recreational trip near the Tree of Life in Sakhir when the crash occurred.

The victims were identified by Al Ayam as Ahmed Ali Al-Shuwaikh, his wife Hawraa Makki, and their eight-year-old daughter Reem.

Eyewitnesses told Al Ayam that the accident occurred when a Land Cruiser, driven by two young men, attempted an overtaking manoeuvre. The vehicle collided head-on with the Mazda carrying the family. Passengers in the Land Cruiser sustained injuries, while the family in the Mazda suffered severe losses.

One of the vehicles overturned and came to rest on its roof off the roadside, while debris was scattered across the



The family had been enjoying a recreational trip in the Al-Qarah area when the crash occurred

site, underscoring the violent impact.

operations. The injured were transported to hospital.

The Ministry of Interior confirmed the incident on its official Twitter account, stating that two adults, aged 31 and 29, and a girl had died.

Authorities are continuing investigations and completing necessary procedures at the site. Social media users have called for stricter traffic enforcement and heightened caution in crowded camping areas, espe-

cially as Sakhir attracts families over the weekend. Similar incidents have occurred in the area before. On December 28, 2019, a Bahraini driver was injured after his vehicle overturned near the Tree of Life, high-

lighting ongoing road-safety concerns. Families visiting the site have been urged to remain vigilant, and authorities have reiterated the need for caution in areas popular for weekend outings.

Overfishing threat prompts tighter fishing rules, council says

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

The Supreme Council for Environment has defended Bahrain's new fishing regulations in a reply to Parliament, citing a UN Food and Agriculture Organization study that called for cutting fishing effort by about 45 per cent to restore sustainability.

Responding to a question from MP Mohammed Al Rifai, the council said environmental and technical indicators

show a clear decline in fish stocks, which it linked to overfishing and the misuse of certain methods.

Data from the General Directorate of Marine Resources show 1,373 valid fishing licences, 604 for pearl fishing and extraction, 150 had-

ra trap licences and 744 issued under the 'Bahraini fisher' category, with about 520 Bahrainis actively practising fishing. The council said procedures to require a Bahraini captain on commercial vessels are still being finalised.

The council said recent controls are based on specialist studies, citing Decision No. 205 of 2018 banning bottom trawling nets and Decision No. 6 of 2025 regulating nets, gargoor traps, hadra traps and fishing lines.

Catch data showed finfish landings fell from about 7.8 million kg in 2014 to 3.3 million kg in 2023, before recovering to around 4.7 million kg in 2025. The council said banning the 'karaf' trawling method raised fish and crustacean production by 16.9 per cent in 2019 and helped restore biodiversity and reduce bycatch.

It said temporary restrictions aim to rebuild stocks, protect nursery habitats and support food security. Central Market figures put total fish quantities at 8,315.8 tonnes in 2024 and 6,849.6 tonnes in 2025, with remaining demand met through regulated imports.



Mohammed Al Rifai, MP

Mothers may be allowed to complete children's official paperwork amid court disputes

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Wives could be allowed to complete passport applications, birth registrations, residency paperwork and other government procedures for their minor children during court disputes under a proposal set to be debated in Parliament.



ment on Tuesday.

Submitted by MP Jalal Kadhem, the proposal would grant Bahraini and expatriate wives the authority to handle official transactions related to their minor children across government bodies

without waiting for a court ruling. If both parents are unavailable, the right would transfer to the grandparents.

Kadhem said the aim is to ensure that essential procedures are not delayed or neglected during disputes, stressing that the measure is intended to protect the best interests of children.

The Legislative and Legal Affairs Committee has recommended approval of the proposal.

The Supreme Council for

Women said it was not constitutionally empowered to comment on such proposals, noting that the objective would require either legislative amendments or administrative action.

The Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Waqf said the proposal involves multiple government entities and touches on matters currently under judicial authority. It added that the government would study the proposal in full if Parliament approves and formally refers it for consideration.

Jail, fines proposed for unlicensed nurseries

● The bill amends the Child Law of 2012 and defines two offences

● The Ministry of Education said the changes would strengthen oversight and improve childcare standards

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Unlicensed nurseries could face fines of 200 to 1,000 dinars and possible jail terms under a draft law set to be debated in Parliament on Tuesday.

The bill amends the Child Law of 2012 and defines two offences: establishing a nursery without a licence, and operating



Mamdouh Al Saleh, Chairman of Parliament's Services Committee

a nursery or altering its location or specifications without approval from the Ministry of Education. In both cases, courts could impose imprisonment, a fine, or both.

The amendment clarifies the legal distinction between licensing and prior approval. Estab-

sons with disabilities" and "a person with a disability", in line with Bahrain's commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Services Committee has recommended approval in principle, while the Legislative and Legal Affairs Committee said the bill raises no constitutional issues. The government has also endorsed the proposal.

The Ministry of Education said the changes would strengthen oversight and improve childcare standards, noting that 110 licensed nurseries fall under its supervision in the 2025-2026 academic year.

A transitional clause would give existing nurseries six months to regularise their status. If approved, the law would take effect after publication in the Official Gazette.

Bahrain engages global partners @ WEF 2026

● During the Forum, the delegation engaged in bilateral meetings, roundtable discussions, and high-level strategy sessions

TDT | Manama

A high-level Bahraini delegation, led by His Highness Shaikh Isa bin Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Minister of the Prime Minister's Court, participated in the 2026 World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting, held from 19 to 23 January in Davos, Switzerland, under the theme "A Spirit of Dialogue."

On behalf of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, HH Shaikh Isa bin Salman took part in the signing ceremony of the Board of Peace charter, reaffirming Bahrain's commitment to global cooperation and dialogue.

During the Forum, the delegation engaged in bilateral meetings, roundtable discussions, and high-level strategy sessions, highlighting Bahrain's achievements in economic diversification, sustainability, and



innovation. HH Shaikh Isa also visited the Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates pavilions, reflecting the strong bilateral ties and exploring opportunities for future collaboration.

The delegation addressed key global issues and participated in sessions shaping the international agenda. HE Shaikh Salman bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, Minister

of Finance and National Economy and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Bahrain Mumtalakat Holding Company, spoke on a senior panel titled "New Dawn for Entrepreneurship?" which examined the role of AI in transforming careers, the impact of emerging technologies, and the future of entrepreneurship.

The Bahraini delegation in-

cluded several senior government officials, including HE Shaikh Salman bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, Minister of Finance and National Economy and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Bahrain Mumtalakat Holding Company (Mumtalakat); HE Noor bint Ali Alkhulaif, Minister of Sustainable Development, Chief Executive of the Bahrain

Economic Development Board (Bahrain EDB); HE Abdulla bin Adel Fakhro, Minister of Industry and Commerce; HE Shaikh Abdulla bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, Chief Executive Officer of Mumtalakat; Hamad Yaqoub Al Mahmeed, Director General of the Prime Minister's Office; Yusuf Buhejji, Undersecretary for Research and Projects in the

Prime Minister's Office; Sara Buhejji, Chief Executive Officer of the Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority; HE Iain Lindsay OBE OB, Advisor to the Board at Bahrain EDB; Khalid Taqi, Chairman of the Gulf Air Group; as well as other senior officials from Bahrain's public and private sectors.



Donald Trump formally launched the Board of Peace at the World Economic Forum in Davos on January 22, 2026, signing its founding charter to help oversee a ceasefire and reconstruction efforts in Gaza and signalling ambitions for the body to play a broader role in resolving global conflicts

Aryabhata House Crowned Overall Champions at ISB Youth Festival

Manama

Aryabhata House emerged as the overall champions of the Indian School Bahrain (ISB) Youth Festival Tarang 2025, securing the first position with a total of 1,815 points. The grand award ceremony was held on Thursday at the ISB campus in Isa Town and witnessed enthusiastic participation, vibrant performances, and keen competition among the four houses of the school. CV Raman House delivered a strong performance to secure the runners-up position with 1,717 points, while JC Bose House finished third with 1,685 points. Vikram Sarabhai House concluded the championship standings in fourth place with 1,656 points. The close point differences reflected the high level of talent, dedication, and teamwork displayed by students throughout the festival.

The festival also celebrated individual excellence through prestigious awards. Punya Shaji, a Class V student from Vikram Sarabhai House, was honoured with the esteemed Kalaratna Award, earning 47 points for her remarkable performances. The Kalashri Award was presented to Sannidhyu Chandra, a Class X student from CV Raman House, who secured an impressive 48 points for outstanding artistic achievements.

Group Champion awards were presented across different levels. Ayana Suji of Aryabhata House emerged as the Group



hai House topped the category with 65 points. Aradhya Sandeep of Aryabhata House was declared Group Champion in Level C with 54 points, while Pratyusha Dey of JC Bose House won the Group Champion title in Level D with 50 points.

The House Star Awards recognised the top performers from each house. Deepanshi

Gopal from Vikram Sarabhai House earned 53 points, Priyamvada Neaha Shaju from CV Raman House secured 48 points, Joan Cijo from JC Bose House achieved a remarkable 38 points, and Aarina Mohanty from Aryabhata House earned 64 points.

The ceremony was graced by

dignitaries, including ISB Hon. Chairman Adv. Binu Mannil Varughese, Hon. Secretary V. Rajapandian, Hon. Vice-Chairman and Hon. Member (Sports) Dr. Mohammed Faizal, Hon. Member (Projects & Maintenance) Mithun Mohan, Hon. Member Biju George, Principal VR Palaniswamy, Junior Wing Principal Pamela Xavier, Senior School and Academic Adminis-

tration Vice-Principal G. Sathesh and Staff Representative Parvathi Devadas.

Principal V. R. Palaniswamy welcomed the gathering. Hon. Chairman Adv. Binu Mannil Varughese officially declared Aryabhata House as the overall champions and presented the awards. The programme concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by Hon. Secretary V. Rajapandian.

The cultural evening featured a variety of prize-winning performances, including folk dance, Arabic dance, and cinematic dance. The programme began with the national anthems of Bahrain and India, followed by the recitation of verses from the Holy Quran, the lighting of the ceremonial lamp, and the school prayer.

The ISB Youth Festival Tarang 2025, one of the largest youth festivals in the Gulf region, saw the participation of more than 5,000 students across 121 events. Hon. Chairman Adv. Binu Mannil Varughese, Hon. Secretary V. Rajapandian, Hon. Vice-Chairman and Hon. Member (Sports) Dr. Mohammed Faizal, the Executive Committee Members, and Principal V. R. Palaniswamy extended their heartfelt congratulations to all the winners, applauding their exceptional achievements, commitment, and team spirit, which made the festival a grand celebration of talent and creativity.

Gold nears \$5,000, silver shines as stocks slip on turbulent week

Key figures at around 1650 GMT

New York - Dow:	▼ 0.6% at 49,114.15 points
New York - S&P 500:	▲ 0.2% at 6,917.18
New York - NASDAQ:	▲ 0.4% at 23,531.81
London - FTSE 100:	▼ 0.1% at 10,143.44 (close)
Paris - CAC 40:	▼ 0.1% at 8,143.05 (close)
Frankfurt - DAX:	▲ 0.2% at 24,900.71 (close)
Tokyo - Nikkei 225:	▲ 0.3% at 53,846.87 (close)
Hang Seng Index:	▲ 0.5% at 26,749.51 (close)
Shanghai - Composite:	▲ 0.3% at 4,136.16 (close)
Euro/dollar:	▲ at \$1.1774 from \$1.1751 on Thursday
Pound/dollar:	▲ at \$1.3593 from \$1.3500
Dollar/yen:	▼ at 157.52 yen from 158.39 yen
Euro/pound:	▼ at 86.63 pence from 87.05 pence
West Texas Intermediate:	▲ 2.8% at \$61.02 per barrel
Brent North Sea Crude:	▲ 2.7% at \$65.80 per barrel

● Fellow safe haven silver also continued its rise

AFP | London, United Kingdom

Global stocks were subdued and precious metals hit fresh highs Friday after a turbulent week that saw US President Donald Trump back down from threats to seize Greenland and hit European allies with fresh tariffs.

Gold -- a safe-haven asset -- pushed closer to a record \$5,000 an ounce despite "a calmer end to a chaotic week on the markets", said Dan Coatsworth, head of markets at AJ Bell.

Fellow safe haven silver also continued its rise, blasting through \$101 an ounce amid worries over what Trump may say, or actually do, next.

"Goldnudged ahead... as investors were reluctant to let go of their safety blanket, just in case Donald Trump woke up with

another controversial idea," said Coatsworth.

Sentiment has calmed over the past two days after the US president pulled back from his threat to hit several European nations with levies because of their opposition to Washington taking over the Danish autonomous territory.

European markets sought direction in vain, Frankfurt closing just in the green as London and Paris fell the red side of the line at the end of the week.

Wall Street was a similar picture, with the Dow losing 0.6% around two hours into trading although the broader-based S&P and the tech-heavy Nasdaq were



just in positive territory. Intel plunged 16% after lacklustre expectations on the chip maker's earnings.

Asian markets closed higher.

Powell under pressure

Trump's latest salvo against allies revived trade war fears and uncertainty about US in-

vestment, putting downward pressure on the dollar this week.

Analysts said there was no guarantee that Europe-US relations had improved durably.

The US president's willingness to threaten tariffs over any issue had rattled confidence on trading floors, boost-

ing safe-haven metals, analysts said.

Investors were also preparing for next week's Federal Reserve meeting following economic data broadly in line with forecasts and after US prosecutors took aim at boss Jerome Powell, which has raised fears over the bank's independence.

The bank is tipped to hold interest rates, having cut them in the previous three meetings.

The meeting also comes as Trump considers candidates to replace Powell when the Fed chair's term comes to an end in May.

The Bank of Japan left its key interest rate unchanged ahead of the country's snap election next week, which could impact government spending plans.

After sharp volatility in the wake of the announcement, the yen traded slightly higher.

Next week's US earnings calendar is packed with results from Apple, Microsoft, Boeing, Tesla, Meta and other corporate giants.

Parliament to debate plan for specialised training of finance staff

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

A proposal to expand specialist training and secondments for civil servants involved in accounting, bookkeeping and audit oversight will be debated in Parliament on Tuesday.

Submitted by MPs Jaleela Alawi, Dr Hisham Al Asheeri, Hassan Bokhamas, Mohsen Al Asbool and Khalid Buanaq, the plan calls for Jaleela Alawi, MP

structured training and work placements tailored to employees responsible for professional oversight of the accounting and audit sector.

The Services Committee has recommended approval, saying the proposal aims to improve the quality of financial records and reporting. It noted that some staff in oversight roles lack relevant professional certifications and said stronger expertise is needed as Bahrain

advances projects linked to company taxation.

In its response, the Civil Service Bureau said staff training already operates within a comprehensive legal and administrative framework. It cited the Civil Service Law of 2010 and executive regulations that require government entities to provide field-related training, with the bureau responsible for setting the overall training system and approving missions and courses within approved budgets.

The bureau said training must align with career paths, organisational goals, performance evaluations and state policy. It added that government entities are responsible for preparing and implementing their own training plans, including scholarships and programmes leading to academic degrees and

professional certifications, subject to bureau review. The bureau said its response was preliminary, with the government's final position to be submitted once the proposal is formally referred.

The Ministry of Education told the committee that the approach outlined in the proposal is already in place through its annual training plan. It said staff participate in courses, workshops, conferences and academic programmes linked to their roles, with nominations reviewed by the Civil Service Bureau. Training, it added, is delivered within budget limits and in line with existing regulations.

The Services Committee said its recommendation was based on the public interest and the need to strengthen professional financial oversight.

MPs push for fund to shield economy from crises

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Charity at the heart of the State's duties during disasters and public hardship.

"Social solidarity in confronting disasters and emergencies is a constitutional obligation," he said. "It is one of the pillars the State guarantees and must take steps to make real."

He noted that financial shocks can strike without warning due to global market swings, supply-chain disruptions, maritime risks and sharp oil-price movements amid geopolitical uncertainty.

The proposal aims to draw up a financial emergency plan, reduce exposure for the State budget, and improve investment returns on fund reserves.

Parliament's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee recommended approval, with all members backing the motion on public-interest grounds.

Ali Al Nuaimi, MP

Works ministry reports BD24.6m in roads, plans new sewer schemes

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

The Ministry of Works says it has delivered road projects worth BD24.6 million in the Ninth Constituency of the Capital Governorate since the start of the Sixth Legislative Term, and plans further sewerage works to cover areas still outside the network.

In a written reply to MP Mohsen Al Asbool, the ministry said sewerage coverage across the Capital Governorate stands at 93 per cent, with 90 per cent of



Mohsen Al Asbool, MP
the Ninth Constituency connected. Four schemes are planned to reach the remaining areas,

including Sitra Blocks 607, 608 and 606; Aker Blocks 623 and 624; and Sitra Blocks 611 and 606, serving between 49 and 350 properties each. Some projects are at the detailed design stage, while work schedules will be coordinated to minimise disruption to residents. The ministry said the new schemes aim to improve public health, prevent groundwater contamination, and provide reliable sanitation for growing communities.

On roads, the ministry cited the East Sitra Housing Project, which links the area to main

routes via Shaikh Salman Highway, Road 1 and the Bapco junction. Resurfacing and paving works have been carried out across Aker, Sitra and Ma'ameer, including upgrades to roads 23, 2358, 2373, 2418, 2447, 2435, 2448, 2472, 3313, and Road 9 in Sitra Safalah. One ongoing project is Road 2354 in Aker Block 623, 10 per cent complete at a cost of BD70,000, with work expected to finish in Q1 2026. The ministry said all works are being delivered with attention to traffic management, pedestrian safety, and local accessibility

during construction.

The ministry said a consultant has been appointed to review designs for widening Shaikh Jaber Al Ahmad Al Sabah Highway. Plans include expanding the road from three to four lanes in each direction, constructing flyovers, adding service roads, pedestrian pavements, improved rainwater drainage, upgraded lighting, and traffic signage. The project will also integrate smart traffic management systems to improve flow and reduce congestion.

Projects are prioritised based

on built-up areas, technical feasibility, and coordination with the Capital Trustees Board and municipal councils. The ministry said it continues to consult with residents and community groups to address concerns and ensure development meets current and future needs. It added that public feedback and safety considerations are incorporated into project planning to ensure sustainable urban development, with ongoing collaboration with Parliament on service delivery and emerging infrastructure requirements.

News in brief

- ◆ **Chinese coast guard rescues 13 Philippine sailors in disputed waters**


The China Coast Guard (CCG) rescued 13 Filipino crew members of a cargo ship that capsized in the West Philippine Sea before dawn yesterday. The Chinese Embassy in Manila said a total of 21 Filipinos were on board the ship, "capsized 55 nautical miles northwest of China's Huangyan Dao", Beijing's name for the disputed Scarborough Shoal. This area is about 261 kilometers off the coast of the northern Philippines. The fish-rich Scarborough Shoal is a flashpoint of sometimes violent standoffs between the Philippines and China, which both claim the shoal and its waters as part of their territory. The Chinese Embassy said the CCG dispatched two vessels for the ongoing rescue operations.
- ◆ **Rescuers dug into deep mud searching for at least six missing people yesterday after a landslide from an extinct volcano crashed into a popular campsite in northern New Zealand.**


Police said a 15-year-old was the youngest person unaccounted for after a chunk of Mount Maunganui ploughed into holidaymakers Thursday, smashing a shower block, camper vans and caravans. Battered vehicles were carted away after being pulled out of the mud.
- ◆ **Rescuers dig for six missing in New Zealand landslide**


Rescuers dug into deep mud searching for at least six missing people yesterday after a landslide from an extinct volcano crashed into a popular campsite in northern New Zealand. Police said a 15-year-old was the youngest person unaccounted for after a chunk of Mount Maunganui ploughed into holidaymakers Thursday, smashing a shower block, camper vans and caravans. Battered vehicles were carted away after being pulled out of the mud.
- ◆ **Chile police arrest fourth suspect in deadly wildfires**


Chilean authorities announced Thursday the arrest of a fourth person suspected of causing deadly wildfires that have ravaged the south of the country. The massive fires in recent days have killed at least 21 people and affected some 20,000 others. Firefighters were still battling 19 fires Thursday in the hardest-hit regions of Araucania, Nuble and Biobio.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

White House X account alters protester photo to add tears



The doctored photo shared by the White House on X

AFP | London

The White House's X account on Thursday posted a doctored photo of a protester arrested in Minnesota, showing her face contorted with tears without disclosing that the photorealistic image had been altered.

The edited photo of Nekima Levy Armstrong -- among three people arrested for allegedly disturbing a church service while protesting an immigration crackdown -- illustrates how President Donald Trump's administration is increasingly using deepfakes or AI imagery to make political arguments.

On Thursday morning, Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem posted an image on X showing Armstrong's arrest, her face calm and expressionless.

About 30 minutes later, the White House posted the same image on the platform, but altered to show Armstrong sobbing, her mouth open, forehead wrinkled, and tears streaming down her face.

A caption superimposed on

the image read "ARRESTED," labeling Armstrong a "far-left agitator."

The White House post offered no disclaimer that the image had been edited, and it was not immediately clear whether the alteration was done using an AI tool or other photo editing software.

When reached for comment, the White House redirected AFP to a post on X by White House Deputy Communications Director Kaelan Dorr, who tacitly acknowledged that the image had been modified.

"YET AGAIN to the people who feel the need to reflexively defend perpetrators of heinous crimes in our country I share with you this message," Dorr wrote on X, resharing the White House post featuring Armstrong's altered photo.

"Enforcement of the law will continue. The memes will continue. Thank you for your attention to this matter."

Underneath the White House post, several users questioned why the image had been altered to make Armstrong appear to be crying.

UK says Trump 'wrong' on NATO role in Afghanistan

British officials denounce Trump's claim that allies "stayed back" from front lines

◆ **UK says Trump "wrong to diminish" NATO**

◆ **457 British soldiers died in Afghanistan**

◆ **Families and politicians express anger**

AFP | London

Britain said Donald Trump was "wrong to diminish" the role of NATO troops in Afghanistan, as a claim by the US president that they did not fight on the front line sparked outrage.

In an interview with Fox News aired on Thursday, Trump appeared unaware that 457 British soldiers died during the conflict in the South Asian country following the September 11 attacks on the United States.

"They'll say they sent some troops to Afghanistan," Trump told the US outlet, referring to NATO allies.

"And they did, they stayed a little back, a little off the front lines," he added.

Trump also repeated his suggestion that NATO would not come to the aid of the United States if asked to do so.

In fact, following the 9/11 attacks, the UK and a number of other allies joined the US from 2001 in Afghanistan after it invoked NATO's collective security clause.

As well as British forces, troops from other NATO ally countries including Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Denmark and others also died.

"Their sacrifice and that of other NATO forces was made in the service of collective security



US President Donald Trump speaks to reporters while in flight on Air Force One

and in response to an attack on our ally," Prime Minister Keir Starmer's official spokesman said.

"We are incredibly proud of our armed forces and their service and sacrifice will never be forgotten," he added.

'Heroes'

Care Minister Stephen Kinnock earlier said he expected Starmer would bring the issue up with Trump.

"I think he will, I'm sure, be raising this issue with the president... He's incredibly proud of our armed forces, and he will make that clear to the president," he told LBC Radio.

"It just doesn't really add up what he said, because the fact of the matter is the only time that Article 5 has been invoked was to go to the aid of the United States after 9/11," he added in an

Of the 457 British personnel who died in Afghanistan, 405 were killed specifically during hostile military action, directly contradicting the claim that allied forces remained safely behind the front lines

interview with Sky News.

Defence Minister John Healey said NATO's Article 5 has only

been triggered once.

"The UK and NATO allies answered the US call. And more than 450 British personnel lost their lives in Afghanistan," he said.

The troops who died were "heroes who gave their lives in service of our nation", he added.

Lucy Aldridge, whose son William died aged 18 in Afghanistan, told The Mirror newspaper that Trump's remarks were "extremely upsetting".

Emily Thornberry, chair of parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, denounced them as "so much more than a mistake".

"It's an absolute insult. It's an insult to 457 families who lost someone in Afghanistan. How dare he say we weren't on the front line?" the Labour Party politician said on the BBC's Question Time programme on Thursday evening.

Rights group says it has confirmed over 5,000 killed during Iran protests

AFP | Paris

A US-based rights group said yesterday it has confirmed the deaths of more than 5,000 people during protests that swept Iran, adding that the vast majority were protesters targeted by security forces.

NGOs tracking the toll from the crackdown on the biggest protests in Iran in years have said their task has been impeded by the now two-week internet shutdown, warning that confirmed figures are likely to be far lower than the actual toll.

The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) said it had confirmed that 5,002 people had been killed, including 4,714 protesters, 42 minors, 207 members of the security forces and 39 bystanders.



A cobbler repairs shoes against the backdrop of government buildings that were burnt during recent public protests

But the group added it was still investigating another 9,787 possible fatalities.

At least 26,852 people have been arrested, it said.

Giving their first official toll from the protests, Iranian authorities on Wednesday said 3,117 people were killed.

The statement from Iran's foundation for martyrs and veterans sought to draw a distinction between "martyrs", who it said were members of security forces or innocent bystanders, and what it described as "rioters" backed by the United States.

Of its toll of 3,117, it said 2,427 people were "martyrs".

HRANA said that by issuing their own toll, the authorities had "attempted to solidify the government's official narrative regarding the killings".

41

Claudius succeeds his nephew Caligula as Roman Emperor after the latter's assassination by officers of the Praetorian Guard



1848

James Marshall finds gold in Sutter's Mill in Coloma, California

1857

University of Calcutta is founded as the first full-fledged university in South Asia

1899

Rubber heel for boots or shoes is patented by American Humphrey O'Sullivan

Russia demands Ukraine's Donbas region as Abu Dhabi talks open

Russia insists Ukraine must withdraw from the east as three-way peace talks begin



Russia's President Vladimir Putin welcomes US special envoy Steve Witkoff, US President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and Commissioner of the Federal Acquisition Service, FAS, Josh Gruenbaum during a meeting at the Kremlin

Russian strikes.

The EU, which has sent hundreds of generators to the war-torn country, has accused Moscow of "deliberately depriving civilians of heat".

More deadly strikes

Before the talks began, Kyiv said Russian strikes had killed three people yesterday in the Kharkiv region and four people -- including a father and his five-year-old son -- overnight in the east.

While diplomacy to end Europe's worst conflict since World War II has gained pace, Moscow

and Kyiv remain at odds, in what looks like a deadlock, over the issue of territory.

Hours after Putin met Witkoff -- and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner -- in Moscow, the Kremlin said its maximalist demand that Kyiv withdraw from the eastern Donbas region still stands.

"Russia's position is well known on the fact that Ukraine, Ukrainian armed forces, have to leave the territory of the Donbas," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

"This is a very important condition," he added.

Kyiv, which still controls around 20 percent of the eastern region, has deemed such terms unacceptable.

Germany, a Ukraine ally, said it still had "major questions" over whether Moscow was willing to compromise.

'God willing'

Both sides say the fate of territory in Ukraine's east is one of the main outstanding issues in the search for a settlement to a war that has killed tens of thousands, displaced millions and decimated eastern Ukraine.

"The Donbas is a key issue,"



Despite peace talks, Russia occupies about 20% of Ukraine, and warns it will pursue its objectives militarily if negotiations fail

Zelensky -- who said he and Trump had agreed on post-war security guarantees in Davos -- told reporters yesterday, ahead of the talks.

"God willing (the talks will lead) to ending the war," he added, before cautioning: "It could go differently, but it's a step."

After speaking to the head of his delegation Rustem Umerov, Zelensky said the exact formats of the meetings was yet to be set.

Russian and Ukrainian negotiators are last known to have met face-to-face in Istanbul last summer, in talks that ended only in deals to exchange captured soldiers.

The Abu Dhabi meeting is the first time they face each other to talk about the Trump administration's plan.

Along with security chief Umerov, Kyiv's team also includes Zelensky's new chief-of-staff Kyrylo Budanov, negotiator David Arakhamia and ground army chief Andriy Gnatov.



Yesterday's announcement that there will be no new US tariffs on Europe is positive. At the same time, the EU will continue to stand up for its interests and will defend itself, its member states, its citizens and its companies, against any form of coercion.

@eucopresident



Europe stood firm and united in full solidarity with Greenland & the Kingdom of Denmark. Work on Arctic security continues. We'll step up investments in Greenland and Arctic-ready equipment. And deepen security cooperation with partners in the region

@vonderleyen



Vance on left wing radicals protesting the arrests of criminal migrants: "You have a small band of very far left people who are doing everything they can...try to make ICE out to be the ultimate enemy, and engage in this weird, small-scale civil war."

@VP



One year ago, President Trump signed the historic Executive Order to withdraw from WHO, the organization that covered up the worst pandemic in modern history and attempted to impose ridiculous global mandates. We stand proud in our commitment to American sovereignty.

@USAmbUN

Trump says US 'armada' headed toward Gulf



An aerial view shows the USS Iwo Jima (LHD-7), a US Navy Wasp-class amphibious assault ship, docked at the port of Ponce, Puerto Rico, with the USS Mahan (DDG-72), an Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer

AFP | Washington

President Donald Trump said a US "armada" was heading toward the Gulf and that Washington was watching Iran closely, even after downplaying the prospect of imminent military action and saying Tehran appeared interested in talks.

Trump has repeatedly left open the option of new military action against Iran after Washington backed and joined Israel's 12-day war in June aimed at degrading Iranian nuclear and

ballistic missile programmes.

The prospect of immediate American action seemed to recede in recent days, with both sides insisting on giving diplomacy a chance.

On his way back from the World Economic Forum in Davos, the president told reporters on Air Force One the United States was sending a "massive fleet" toward Iran "just in case."

"We're watching Iran," he said. "I'd rather not see anything happen but we're watching them very closely."

Fury over five-year-old's detention in US immigration crackdown

AFP | Washington

Outrage grew yesterday at the detention of a five-year-old boy in a massive immigration crackdown in Minneapolis, as US Vice President JD Vance defended federal agents' actions.

As "the father of a five-year-old" himself, Vance acknowledged he was stunned by news of the child's predicament at first.

"I think to myself 'Oh, my God, this is terrible. How did we arrest a five-year-old?'" Vance said Thursday, pivoting to say he then did more research and changed his mind because Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detained the child after his father ran from immigration agents.

"Well, what are they supposed to do? Are they supposed to let a five-year-old child freeze to death?"

More broadly, Vance blamed local leaders for disorder on a visit to the troubled mid-western state, which has been



An individual confronts Border Patrol agents during a protest

rocked by increasingly tense protests since federal agents shot and killed US citizen Renee Good on January 7.

The child's detention came as the US attorney general announced Thursday the arrests of three activists accused of disrupting a St. Paul church service in a protest, accusing a pastor at the church of working for ICE.

Thousands of federal agents have been deployed to the Dem-

ocratic-led state, as the Trump administration presses its campaign to deport what it says are millions of illegal immigrants across the country.

The arrests of lawyer and social activist Nekima Levy Armstrong, Chauntly Louisa Allen and William Kelly in connection with a Sunday protest at Cities Church in the state capital St. Paul, were announced by Attorney General Pam Bondi on X.

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

CELEBS

Will Smith almost died in terrifying North Pole dive

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Will Smith narrowly dodged death while scuba diving in the Arctic as part of his Disney+ travel series.

Minutes into the 57-year-old actor's underwater adventure under thick ice, an emergency abort forced

him to ascend into solid ice, and he

accidentally pulled off his mask.

Will recalled the terrifying incident that happened whilst filming Pole to Pole on Tuesday's (20.01.26's) episode of NBC's The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon.

He told the 51-year-old host: "We went scuba diving at the North Pole. So we did a dive under the ice. So you go under the ice, and the ice can be up to 10 feet thick. So we're under, we went out about 40 yards away

... It's like an upside-down ice mountain range.

"We went under, and I start hearing, 'Abort dive! Abort dive! Abort!' And I'm like, 'Oh no.'

"So I went to ascend and hit ice. I was like, 'Oh no, Will, calm down. Calm down.' You have a tether on, and you have to grab your tether and pull yourself back to the hole. I grabbed and accidentally pulled my mask off."

Amid oxygen loss, Will immediately put the mask back on his

face, and he tried his best to calm himself down.

He continued: "I was like, 'Oh no. Will, calm down.'

The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air alum then joked: "And I was like, 'If I get out of here, I'm only gonna do Black stuff from here on out.' I promise, Lord! African American behaviour from here on out!"

Amid calming his nerves, Will felt someone grab "my tether up

safety.

He added: "And when I realised I was good, I just relaxed and I looked around and when I tell you, the sun is coming through the ice, and it went from terror to the most spiritual, beautiful thing. And I was just like, 'Whoever's up there, don't let go of my tether!'"

Will Smith



Taylor Swift among inductees of Songwriters Hall of Fame

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Taylor Swift will be the youngest woman to be inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

The 36-year-old pop singer has qualified for the honour this year because it has been 20 years since the release of her first single, Tim McGraw, and has made it through the ballot ahead of the organisation's 2026 Induction and Awards Gala in New York City on 11 June.

Taylor received the Songwriters Hall of Fame's Hal David Starlight Award, which honours promising songwriters, in 2010 and will

be the first winner of the accolade to receive full Hall of Fame status.

Also set to be inducted later this year are Alanis Morissette, KISS' Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons, and Kenny Loggins, as well as non-performing writers

Walter Afanasieff, Terry Britten and Graham Lyle, and Christopher 'Tricky' Stewart.

Walter is best known as Mariah Carey's co-writer on her hits including My All, Hero, and All I Want for Christmas is You, while Terry and Graham penned Tina Turner's We Don't Need Another Hero and What's Love Got To Do With It.

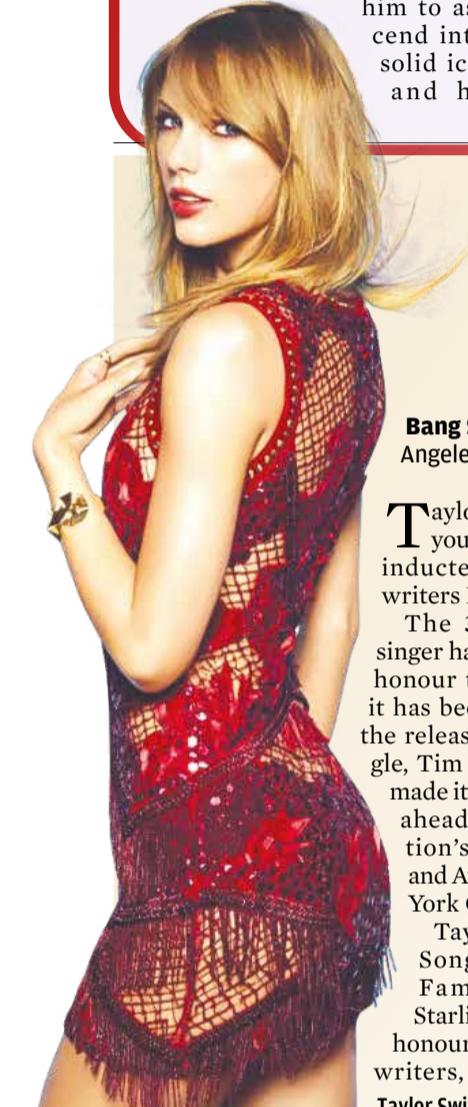
Tricky is responsible for Rihanna's Umbrella and Beyoncé's hits Single Ladies and Break My Soul.

Songwriters Hall of Fame chair Nile Rodgers said in a statement: "The music industry is built upon the incredible talent of songwriters who

create unforgettable songs. Without their artistry, there would be no recorded music, concert experiences, or engaged fans. Everything originates from the song and its creator.

"We take great pride in our ongoing commitment to recognising some of the most culturally significant composers in history. This year's line-up not only showcases iconic songs but also celebrates unity across various genres."

Among the writers who failed to make it through the ballot this year were LL Cool J, Pink, Talking Heads' David Byrne, Sarah McLachlan, and the Go-Gos' Charlotte Caffey, Kathy Valentine and Jane Wiedlin.



Taylor Swift

Kristen Bell to return as Actor Awards host

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Kristen Bell is to host the Actor Awards for the third time.

The Nobody Wants This actress is thrilled to have been invited back to host the ceremony - which was formerly known as the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Awards - and has pledged to show off her musical talents again.

She said

joyed hosting the show every time, so it was an easy decision to come back for a third. What I'm most excited for is the fact that I'll be doing what every actor does best...sing!)

And awards bosses think the 45-year-old star is the perfect host for the ceremony.

Showrunner and executive producer Jon Brockett said: "Kristen Bell knows this show, she knows this community and she knows how to keep everyone entertained and laughing without ever losing the heart of the night.

Having Kristen return to host feels like welcoming back a member of the family. One you actually to hang out with."

The Frozen actress

was the awards' first-ever host in 2018, 23 years after the first ceremony, with Megan Mullally taking over presenting duties the following year. However, there was no official host again until Kristen returned last year.

One Battle After Another leads the nominations for the Actor Awards.

The hit action thriller film has earned a record-breaking seven nominations in total, including individual nods for Leonardo DiCaprio, Chase Infini, Teyana Taylor, Sean Penn, and Benicio del Toro.

Kristen Bell



Chris Pratt

Chris Pratt insists AI will not take his job as an actor

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Chris Pratt will not let artificial intelligence (AI) actors end his acting career.

The 46-year-old star has hit out at AI 'actress' Tilly Norwood and insisted the panic within tinsel town about the computer-generated creation replacing humans in roles is "bulls***".

Chris - who has been acting professionally for over two decades - told Variety: "I don't feel like someone's going to replace me that's AI. This Tilly Norwood thing, I think it's all bulls***. I've never seen her in a movie, I don't know who this bulls*** is. It's all fake, until it's something."

The actor - whose new film, Mercy, shows viewers a future where AI is in charge - thinks it can be an "amazing tool" for filmmakers to tell stories, and

could enable cost-effective productions.

Chris added: "It's inevitably going to disrupt the industry. We're in the midst of an intellectual revolution. We are not the first or last industry to be disrupted by AI, and I think we just keep chugging forward. Great filmmakers

are going to keep making great films, and they're probably going to implement these tools if it helps streamline productions, if it helps bring

the cost of production down, it's inevitable."

But, ultimately, the Guardians of the Galaxy star says AI will not replace the "human soul" - which he thinks is vital in productions.

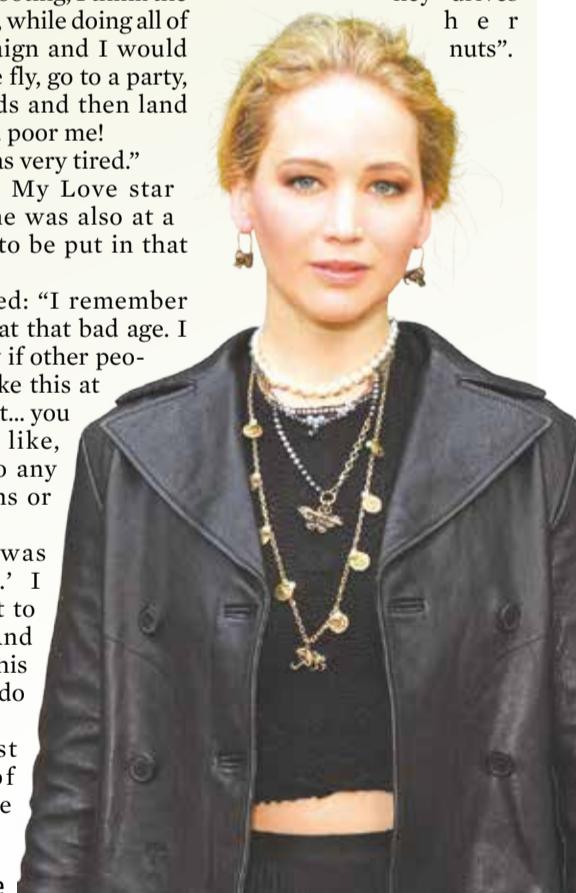
Chris continued: "And I don't think you're going to replace the human soul of a director or a writer, or an actor, or a singer, or any of this stuff that requires human learning, and suffering, and vision, and art."

"There's a soul connection when you're watching a movie. You might not be able to put a finger on what you're digesting, the way you can by saying, 'Oh, my eyes are seeing this. My ears are hearing this.'

"Our hearts also connect to material, and we might not fully comprehend that sense, but it's there, and in the absence of a true connection there, it's just not going to feel right. It's not going to feel good."



Kristen Bell



Jennifer Lawrence wants Saturday Night Live 'do over'

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Jennifer Lawrence wants to do-over of her only time hosting Saturday Night Live.

The 35-year-old actress has admitted her memories of hosting the hit live sketch comedy show back in 2013 are "skewed", and she would love the chance to have another go in different circumstances.

She told Amy Poehler's Good Hang podcast: "I have to go back and do it again because I had walking pneumonia."

"I was under a lot of pressure and doing a lot, and I was shooting one of the Hunger Games movies.

"I was shooting, I think the second one, while doing all of this campaign and I would have to like fly, go to a party, shake hands and then land and shoot... poor me!

"But I was very tired."

The Die My Love star insisted she was also at a "bad age" to be put in that position.

She added: "I remember I was also at that bad age. I don't know if other people were like this at this age, but... you get asked like, can you do any impressions or anything?"

"And I was like, 'No.' I don't want to be like, 'And I can do this and I can do that!'

"I just kind of made

Jennifer Lawrence

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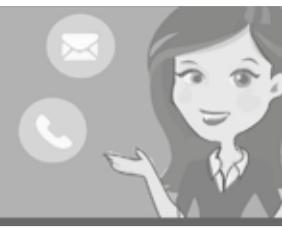
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Captain Fantastic!

Al Sayyad's Heroics Push Bahrain Toward Semis & 2027 Worlds

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Bahrain edged closer to the semi-finals of the 22nd Asian Men's Handball Championship with a stunning 31-28 win over defending champions Qatar in Kuwait City. Unlike their previous dominant double-digit wins, this match truly tested the nationals, with captain Hussain Al Sayyad stepping up to deliver an outstanding 11 goals. The result has put Bahrain just one win away from securing a semi-final spot and automatic qualification for the 2027 IHF Men's Handball World Championship in Germany, while also extending their unbeaten run in the tournament to five matches.

Yesterday's match started at a blistering pace, and from the first whistle, the Bahrainis set the tone. Mohammed Habib Nasser struck early, giving Bahrain a 7-3 lead by the eighth minute, with goalkeeper Mohammed Abdulhussain producing vital saves to keep Qatar at bay. But the reigning champions responded, and by the 16th minute the score was level at 7-7. Skipper Hussain Al Sayyad then steadied his side, scoring vital goals as the first half ended 12-12. His influential performance later awarded him the man-of-the-match honors.

The second half saw Robert Hedin's men gradually seize control. Qassim Qambar opened the scoring, followed



Hussain Al Sayyad celebrates as Bahrain bench erupts

by Al Sayyad and Habib Nasser combining on fast breaks to stretch Qatar's defense. By the 13-minute mark, Bahrain led 25-21 and maintained the advantage for the remainder of the match. Al Sayyad finished with a remarkable 11 goals, while Qassim Qambar was flawless, converting all six of his shots.

For Qatar, Ahmed Mohamed and Frankis Marzo tried to keep their side in contention, but Bahrain's composure and all-round performance proved too decisive.

Coach Robert Hedin had promised that the nationals "still have more in store for the remaining teams," and the

Williams to miss opening F1 test due to car delays



Williams' Spanish driver Carlos Sainz (front) and Williams' Thai driver Alexander Albon (rear) walk on stage past the new Formula 1 car of Williams (file photo)

AFP | London

Williams' preparations for the 2026 Formula One season have been dealt a significant blow after conceding defeat in having their car ready for next week's first testing session in Barcelona.

A major upheaval of the sport's technical rulebook has meant a race against time for teams to be ready for the new season.

The opening five days of testing takes place behind closed doors at the Circuit de Catalunya circuit from Monday.

There are a further two sets of three-day tests in Bahrain next month ahead of the first race in Australia on March 8.

"Williams F1 Team has taken the decision not to participate in next week's shakedown test in Barcelona following delays in the FW48 programme as we

continue to push for maximum car performance," the British team said in a statement yesterday.

"The team will instead conduct a series of tests including a VTT (Virtual Test Track) programme next week with the 2026 car to prepare for the first official test in Bahrain and the first race of the season in Melbourne.

"We are looking forward to getting on track in the coming weeks and want to thank all our fans for your continued support - there is a lot to look forward to together in 2026."

Williams finished an impressive fifth in last year's constructors' championship.

Alex Albon and Carlos Sainz finished eighth and ninth respectively in the drivers' standings last season, with the latter landing two podium finishes to ensure Williams' best season in a decade.

Fuming Kyrgios 'does not know' what comes after Australian Open



Australia's Nick Kyrgios throws his racket during his men's doubles match

AFP | Melbourne

6-4, 4-6, 7-6 (10/4) to countrymen Jason Kubler and Marc Polmans late Thursday.

A drained, hobbling and "pissed off" Nick Kyrgios said he did not know where his career was going next after the former Wimbledon finalist suffered defeat in the first round of the Australian Open men's doubles.

The temperamental Kyrgios and playing partner Thanasi Kokkinakis were dumped out over three sets in a late-night all-Australian clash at a boisterous Melbourne Park.

The 2022 Wimbledon runner-up and Kokkinakis were dubbed the "Special Ks" by local media, but with both struggling physically they went out

Crowd favourite Kyrgios, 30, who has barely played singles in recent years after a series of injuries, is scheduled to play with Canada's Leylah Fernandez in the mixed doubles yesterday, if his weary body recovers in time.

But after that, Kyrgios does not know what the future holds.

"I'm tired. I mean, I've done a lot of travel," said Kyrgios, who beat women's world number one Aryna Sabalenka in a "Battle of the Sexes" exhibition match in Dubai in December that divided tennis fans.

Ferrari unveil 2026 car with Hamilton ready for 'massive challenge'

AFP | Fiorano Modenese

Lewis Hamilton is braced for the "massive challenge" of adapting to the seismic change in technical regulations facing the 2026 Formula One grid as Ferrari unveiled their new car yesterday.

The seven-time world champion and his teammate Charles Leclerc put the SF-26 through its paces at the Scuderia's Fiorano private test track near their Maranello headquarters.

"It's the biggest regulation shift I think our sport has seen, at least in my time," the 41-year-old Briton said.

"But every single time that it has been a shift into a new regulation, it's been a massive challenge.

"Everyone starts from scratch, so it really levels the playing field. Then it's really all about development, who can develop faster, who comes up with the best ideas, and then a unified team growing at the same pace."

Ferrari team principal Fred Vasseur reflected on "an emotional day" seeing their new creation emerge out of the garage and onto the track.

"It went pretty well, huge amount of work but we are all more than happy, it's not the end of the story but the beginning of the season," he said.

"Let's be positive and enjoy



The new Formula 1 Ferrari SF-26 is seen during tests at Fiorano Circuit in Fiorano Modenese

the story."

The Frenchman added: "It was good to see the car leave the garage but it's the start of a new journey."

"Too early for expectations"

Given all 11 teams are in the same boat, starting from scratch, Vasseur was keen to play down expectations for the season-opener in Australia in early March.

"We'll see the situation in Melbourne, today was a first step," said Vasseur.

"The rate of development will be much higher than years before."

"We will see about performance in Melbourne, it's too early for expectations."

For the first time in his illustrious career Hamilton failed to even muster a podium finish last term as Ferrari slumped to fourth in the constructors' standings.

They were last crowned constructors' champions in 2008, with Kimi Raikkonen supplying the last of their 15 drivers' titles

the year before.

Hamilton has admitted that the last time cars were radically changed in 2022 they did not suit his driving style.

He will be desperately hoping the 2026 reiteration will be more to his taste in the twilight years of his decorated career.

He moved from Mercedes to Ferrari in the hope of securing a record eighth world title - but given his woeful debut year now he will be relieved just to win another race.