

Bahrain Basketball League semi-finals tip off tomorrow

The Zain Bahrain Basketball League semi-finals begin tomorrow at Khalifa Sports City Hall, with Muharraq vs Al Ahli at 8 PM and Manama vs Al Najma at 6 PM. | P16

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Defense plans reviewed

His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, remotely chaired the 523rd Government Executive Committee meeting. The Committee reviewed plans implemented to address the impact of the hostile Iranian aggression towards the Kingdom of Bahrain, as well as amendments to laws related to developing the industrial sector.

Malaysia stands with Bahrain amid Iran threats



HRH Prince Salman

Prime Minister Ibrahim

TDT | Manama

Prince and Prime Minister, yesterday received a telephone call from Prime Minister Ibrahim.

The Honourable Dato' Seri Anwar bin Ibrahim, Prime Minister of Malaysia, affirmed his country's solidarity with Bahrain, expressing its condemnation of the Iranian attacks targeting the Kingdom.

During the call, they exchanged Eid Al-Fitr greetings.

He underscored Malaysia's support for Bahrain in safeguarding its security and the safety of its territory, citizens, and residents.

HRH Prince Salman and Prime Minister Ibrahim affirmed the depth of Bahrain-Malaysia relations, highlighting the continued growth of bilateral cooperation and coordination across various sectors.

This came as His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown

His Royal Highness also expressed his appreciation for Malaysia's support towards the Kingdom.

Moroccan national dies protecting Bahrain: BDF

TDT | Manama

The General Command of the Bahrain Defence Force has announced with profound sorrow the death of one of the civilian contractors in the UAE Armed Forces, a Moroccan national, while on duty alongside BDF personnel.

It issued the statement while extending its deepest condolences to the UAE Armed Forces and to the family of the deceased.

The contractor was serving in defence of the Kingdom against the ongoing treacherous Iranian missile and drone attacks that have targeted Bahraini territory since 28 February 2026.

The General Command also confirms that a number of its personnel, alongside those from the UAE armed forces, sustained injuries while repelling Iran's treacherous aggression.

All wounded were evacuated immediately and given the necessary medical attention.

The General Command continues to monitor their recovery.



The majority have since been discharged from the hospital,

with most injuries assessed as minor to moderate.

BDF personnel remain fully operational and resolute at their posts, defending the Kingdom's airspace, territorial waters, and land with unwavering resolve against all threats to national security and stability.

The General Command calls upon all members of the public to source information exclusively from official channels and to refrain from sharing unverified reports.

Royal support drives Bahraini youth success

TDT | Manama

The qualitative achievements of Bahraini youth across various sectors reflect the vision and significant support of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.

This was affirmed by Her Excellency Rawan bint Najeeb Tawfiqi, Minister of Youth Affairs, as the Kingdom marks Bahraini Youth Day today.

She emphasised that HM the King has established youth empowerment as a firm national priority, granting young people the confidence to be true partners in the nation's development and construction.

The Minister noted that the directives of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, have contributed to a clear government approach that places youth at the heart of national development pathways.

Safe operations

Bahrain hospitals, schools, and public services continue without interruption

● Vital sectors' proper planning, risk management reduce impact of Iran attacks

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

State bodies in Bahrain kept hospitals open, shifted schools to remote learning and kept public services running during the recent Iranian attacks, Mamdouh Al Saleh, chairman of Parliament's Services Committee, said.

Al Saleh said the way health, education, municipal and other services kept going showed that government agencies had working emergency plans and could deal with sudden events without halting daily life for citizens and residents.

"The service sectors in Bahrain have shown that they have an integrated system based on advance planning and risk management," he said. "Services for citizens and residents continue

without interruption."

He said public hospitals and health centres kept treating patients, while the Ministry of Education moved lessons online so teaching could go on.

Municipal services, road upkeep and other core work also carried on during the regional tensions, he said.

According to Al Saleh, that was the result of years of planning, work on infrastructure and investment in Bahraini staff.

He said the Ministry of Health, led by the Minister, Her Excellency Dr Jaleela bint Al Sayed Jawad Hassan, kept hospitals and health centres operating, while medical, nursing and administrative teams remained at work.

Infrastructure

Al Saleh said the Ministry of Works, led by H.E. Ebrahim bin Hassan Al Hawaj, carried on with infrastructure schemes, upkeep of public facilities and work on key roads.

He added that the Ministry of Municipalities Affairs, led by H.E. Wael bin Nasser Al Mubarak,



Mamdouh Al Saleh



"Services for citizens and residents continue without interruption."

— MAMDOUH AL SALEH

The government agencies have prepared emergency plans that could deal with sudden events without halting daily life for citizens and residents.

allowed teaching to continue without a break.

Projects

He said the fact that infrastructure, housing and public service projects were still going showed that Bahrain's development plans had not been thrown off course by regional tensions.

"Strong states are judged not only by how they deal with crises, but by whether they can carry on with development plans at the same time," he said.

Al Saleh urged citizens and residents to follow guidance issued by the relevant authorities, saying this would help protect public safety and support efforts to maintain security and stability.



'New normal'

Signs of gradual business revival as shoppers return cautiously

● **Malls' visitor numbers increasing**

Neethu V
TDT | Manama

Businesses across Bahrain are adapting to a new normal as the Kingdom navigates evolving geo-political conditions.

In commercial areas such as Manama and Seef, footfall has been lower compared to usual post-Eid activity, although signs of gradual recovery are emerging.

Major retail destinations including The Avenues and City Centre Bahrain are reportedly witnessing improved visitor numbers compared to the initial days of the situation, as residents gradually return to malls for shopping and leisure, albeit with caution.

Activity

However, local retailers note that activity during Eid was relatively strong, followed by a gradual slowdown in the subse-



Shopper at a local retailer shop

quent days, though better compared to the initial days of the conflict.

Service providers, particularly in the banking sector, continue to maintain operations through both branches and digital platforms. Al Salam Bank has

resumed full operations across all branches from March 25, 2026.

"The resumption of operations in all our branches today, as conditions improve, reaffirms our commitment to providing a comprehensive banking expe-



Mohammed Bouhaji

rience," said Mr. Mohammed Bouhaji, Chief Retail Banking Officer.

The bank also highlighted its digital services.

Similarly, National Bank of Bahrain has resumed operations across most branches, with services returning to regular hours under enhanced safety measures while continuing to promote digital banking.

Other banks in the Kingdom, including BBK, Ahli United Bank, and Bahrain Islamic Bank, continue to operate through their branch networks with regular or adjusted hours, while also maintaining uninterrupted services via digital platforms.

Bahrain delivers statement on behalf of GCC states, Jordan

Geneva

His Excellency Ambassador Abdullah Abdulatif Abdullah, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the United Nations Office and other international organisations in Geneva, delivered a statement on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan during the 61st session of the Human Rights Council.

The statement was delivered in support of a request to convene an urgent debate to prioritise the unlawful Iranian attacks and address their human rights implications without delay.

It affirmed that, since 28 February 2026, the Islamic Republic of Iran has carried out unjustified military attacks targeting the territories of several countries, including the Kingdom of Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman, the State of Qatar, the State of Kuwait, and the Hashemite Kingdom

of Jordan.

The attacks have affected civilians and critical infrastructure, resulting in casualties and significant damage, including to essential systems sustaining civilian life.

Concerns

The statement also raised concerns over the safety of air and maritime navigation, particularly in the Strait of Hormuz, as well as the impact on supply chains and global energy market stability.

It stressed that these actions constitute a flagrant violation of international law, the United Nations Charter, international human rights law, and international humanitarian law, and pose a direct threat to regional and international peace and security.

It further noted the clear position of the international community, including the condemnation by the United Nations Secretary-General and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2817 (2026), which strongly denounced the attacks.

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Kingdom honours youth talents, achievements

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Bahrain will mark its annual Youth Day today, a national occasion celebrating the talents, achievements, and contributions of the Kingdom's youth.

The day reflects the strong commitment of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa to place young people at the heart of the Kingdom's development and reform agenda.

His Highness Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, His Majesty's Representative for Humanitarian Works and Youth

Affairs and Chairman of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (SCYS), highlighted the central role of youth in reinforcing national cohesion and progress.

Wealth

"Bahraini youth are the Kingdom's true wealth and source of renewed strength, who have proven themselves to be active partners in making national achievements through their creativity and excellence," he said, emphasising that empowering



HH Shaikh Nasser

young people remains a strategic priority.

HH Shaikh Nasser also noted



HH Shaikh Khalid

the ongoing support of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown

Prince and Prime Minister, which enables youth participation in innovation, entrepreneurship, and key sectors of national development.

He affirmed that the SCYS will continue implementing initiatives and quality programs to hone youth skills and increase their opportunities to shape the future.

Milestone

His Highness Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa, First Deputy Chairman of SCYS, President

of the General Sports Authority, and President of the Bahrain Olympic Committee, underscored the significance of Youth Day as a milestone recognising achievements across sports, education, and community initiatives.

"This national occasion embodies the spirit of solidarity within Bahraini society, where youth stand alongside all segments of the community in a manner that reflects deep loyalty to the nation and its leadership," he said.

Partners in progress

Shura chairman praises Bahrain's 'next generation' on Youth Day today

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Bahrain marks Youth Day today with praise for the achievements and talents of young Bahrainis.

Shura Council Chairman Ali bin Saleh Al Saleh says the occasion follows His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa's vision of preparing a rising generation able to meet the years ahead and play a full part in the Kingdom's development in the region and further afield.

Al Saleh says HM the King's care for young people stems from a belief that they are the country's true wealth, a key source of its progress and a firm part of its growth.

He says the Shura Council will keep supporting laws and state policies that give youth a stronger role and greater responsibility in Bahrain's development path.



The lawmaker also praises the work of the government, led by His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, saying its programmes across key sectors help young people build skills, develop their talents and find real openings to contribute to the country.

He says this is clear in training programmes, national contests and initiatives, support for youth projects and constructive ideas, and their role within

"They are the country's true wealth, a key source of its progress and a firm part of its growth."

— ALI BIN SALEH AL SALEH, SHURA COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

Team Bahrain in winning local and international success.

Al Saleh says the council is keen to continue working closely with the government and to strengthen laws that serve young people and deepen their place in the country's wider development drive.

Efforts

He also praises the efforts of His Highness Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Representative of His Majesty the King for

Humanitarian Work and Youth Affairs and Chairman of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, and His Highness Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa, First Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, Chairman of the General Sports Authority and President of the Bahrain Olympic Committee.

The legislator says the programmes and initiatives run through the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports help build young people's skills and abilities, encourage creativity and high achievement, and strengthen the presence of Bahraini youth in regional and international forums.

He adds that this work helps them achieve success across different fields and deepens a culture of giving and leadership among the country's youth, in line with the King's vision and guidance.

Reaching new heights

Hasan Barakat
TDT | Manama

Dr. Mohammed Ibrahim Al Aseeri, Chief Executive of the Bahrain Space Agency (BSA), has described the Bahraini Youth Day as a national moment that captures the depth of care and attention given to young people.

He said the day stands as a celebration of a generation shaped by opportunity, guided by leadership, and driven by ambition.

Behind these achievements lies a framework of continuous support.

The vision of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, alongside the empowerment led by His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, has created pathways for young Bahrainis to grow and lead.

This is further strengthened by the ongoing follow-up and dedication of His Highness Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, whose role in advancing youth initiatives continues to open doors across sectors.

In the field of space, that im-



"What defines Bahraini youth today is not only their creativity but their ability to face challenges and turn them into opportunities."

— DR. MOHAMMED IBRAHIM AL ASEERI, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE BAHRAIN SPACE AGENCY (BSA)

pace is becoming increasingly visible.

Young Bahrainis at the BSA have contributed to national, regional and international achievements, reflecting a level of academic excellence, research capability and leadership that is earning recognition far beyond the Kingdom.

Time to celebrate young achievers

● Praise for royal support

Rehab Mohammad
TDT | Manama

The Youth Affairs Committee of the Shura Council, chaired by Reda Ibrahim Monfaredi, affirmed that Bahraini Youth Day represents an important national occasion to highlight the role of young people in the country's comprehensive development.

The committee noted that Bahraini youth continue to achieve outstanding accomplishments that reflect their awareness and ability to contribute effectively to nation-building.

It added that the occasion showcases the Kingdom's leading model in strategically investing in and empowering youth to build a prosperous future.

On the occasion of Bahraini Youth Day, celebrated annually on March 25, the committee praised the continuous support and forward-looking



Reda Ibrahim Monfaredi

vision provided to Bahraini youth by His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, describing him as the primary supporter of youth development.

It also highlighted the ongoing follow-up and strong support of His Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister.

The committee said this comprehensive care has helped establish an advanced national system that empowers youth, develops their skills, expands their creativity, and strengthens their role as active partners in national development.

Human rights report details civilian impact of Iranian attacks in Bahrain

TDT | Manama

The Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society (BHRWS) has released its first monitoring report documenting civilian casualties and property damage resulting from recent attacks targeting residential areas in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

According to the report, several neighbourhoods, particularly in Sitra City, were hit by drone strikes, causing injuries to civilians, including children, and damage to homes and private property.

The incidents raise concerns over the protection of civilians and adherence to international



Faisal Fulad submits the first report to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva and to the Arab Organization for Human Rights in Cairo

based on field visits to hospitals and temporary shelters, enabling direct assessment of the

conditions of the injured and affected families and evaluation of medical and humanitarian services provided.

It also highlights the response efforts by Bahraini authorities, including medical care for the injured, the provision of emergency shelters, and measures to maintain public security and stability.

"The protection of civilians is a fundamental principle of international law," said Faisal Fulad, Secretary-General of the BHRWS. "Respect for UN principles and international humanitarian law is essential for ensuring regional security and stability."



Unstable weather

The Kingdom of Bahrain witnessed renewed rainfall across most areas yesterday afternoon, continuing the unstable weather patterns seen over the past two days, which are expected to persist until next Friday. Rainfall ranged from moderate to heavy, with hail reported in some locations, accompanied by noticeably stronger winds. Conditions are forecast to intensify overnight.

'Damage spreads far faster online'

Lawyer warns anonymous online abuse can lead to jail or fines in Bahrain

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Anonymity online offers no shield from Bahrain's criminal law, with abusive posts, messages and comments able to leave their writers facing jail or fines, lawyer Jassim Al Issa said.

Speaking to The Daily Tribune, Al Issa said the speed of social media had turned a stray message or post into something far more serious.

"A message, a comment or a post can turn into a crime of electronic insult or defamation," he said. "The space is digital, but the law still reaches it."

He said such cases are dealt with under Bahrain's Penal Code, Law No. 15 of 1976, as well as the Law on Information Technology Crimes, Law No. 60 of 2014.

Honour

Article 365 of the Penal Code states that anyone who publicly abuses another person in a way that harms that person's honour or standing can face up to one year in prison or a fine of up to BD100.

Article 366 says that if the insult or defamation takes place by telephone, or in front of the injured party and others without provocation, the penalty can reach six months in prison or a fine of up to BD50.

If it happens directly in front of the injured party with no one else present, the punishment is a fine of up to BD50.

Risk

Al Issa said the same legal risk can arise from acts many users treat lightly, such as posting an



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"A false name does not keep you out of reach. Each word written or sent can turn into criminal liability."

— JASSIM AL ISSA, LAWYER

abusive remark on social media, sending an email carrying insult or defamation, or sharing photos or recordings of accidents and injuries without the consent of the person affected.

He said the penalty can include jail and a fine, above all when the harm is meant and the material spreads to a large audience.

"A post can reach hundreds, even thousands, within minutes," he said. "The damage spreads far faster online."

Trouble

He said investigators can still face trouble in tracing those behind such acts, since some use false names or sham accounts, and some accounts are run from outside Bahrain.

There is also the need to prove criminal intent, meaning the

case must show that the words were used to harm the victim's name, honour or social standing.

Even so, Al Issa said Bahrain's courts deal with online insult and defamation with the same seriousness as older forms of the offence, and at times pay even closer heed because of the speed and reach of online circulation.

Insult

He urged anyone exposed to insult, defamation, threats or the posting of harmful images to keep messages and posts as digital proof, go to the relevant authorities as soon as the harm occurs, and avoid replying before the material has been properly recorded for legal use.

"A false name does not keep you out of reach," he said. "Each word written or sent can turn into criminal liability."

Businessman jailed, fined for VAT evasion

Hasan Barakat
TDT | Manama

A five-year prison sentence, a fine exceeding BD247,000, and deportation to follow have brought a high-profile tax evasion case to a decisive close, placing financial accountability at the centre of the courtroom.

What unfolded was not only a legal matter, but a clear moment where numbers turned into consequences.

The High Criminal Court ruled to imprison the defendant for five years and impose a fine of BD247,559.551, while obliging him to repay the same amount in value added tax he was found to have evaded.

Deportation

The court further ordered his deportation upon completion of the sentence.

The case involved the owner of a food retail business who was convicted of evading VAT payments through the submission of inaccurate declarations to the National Bureau for Revenue, alongside failing to maintain proper accounting records and tax documentation.

Gold price decline reshapes Mother's Day spending

● Dipping from BD56 to BD47 within a week

Hasan Barakat
TDT | Manama

This year, the moment felt different.

Eid arrived carrying more than celebration. It arrived with Mother's Day, and in between the two, something quietly powerful unfolded across Bahrain's gold markets.

Emotion met timing, and for once, prices did not stand in the way.

The Daily Tribune observed a surge in activity inside jewellery shops during the Eid holidays, but this was not just seasonal demand. It was deeply personal.

Men stood longer than usual at display counters, quietly calculating what they could af-



Buyers calculate purchases amid regional tensions

ford, and what they wished they could give.

Children whispered suggestions, pointing at pieces they believed their mothers would love.

Mothers, often the ones who give, became the ones being thought of.

Conversations inside these shops no longer ended with

"maybe later", but with "let's take it".

The drop in gold prices changed everything. The price of 21 carat gold fell to around BD47, down from nearly BD56 just a week earlier, a decline of about 15 per cent. Suddenly, what felt out of reach became possible.

Shop owners say demand rose

by more than 60 per cent compared with Ramadan.

This rare overlap between Eid and Mother's Day gave gold a different meaning.

A bracelet became a quiet thank you for years of sacrifice. A necklace became a long overdue apology. A ring became a promise to do better, to be more present.

Some purchases were small, but the intention behind them was not.

Balance

Behind this moment lies a market shaped by uncertainty, regional tensions, and global decisions that continue to push prices up and down without warning.

But inside Bahrain's gold shops, something else held steady.

People choosing their mothers, while they still can.

'Surge of digital misinformation'

● Public urged to verify online content

Hasan Barakat
TDT | Manama

A surge in unverified videos, images and breaking "news" circulating on social media in Bahrain has prompted calls for greater public awareness and caution when sharing information online.

Amani Al Nefaei, a PhD researcher in digital media, urged users to verify content before forwarding it.

She warned that not all material shared on digital platforms reflects reality.

Her remarks come as emotionally charged posts continue to spread rapidly, often outpacing factual reporting.

Old footage has been re-circulated as current, while edited videos and unverified claims have gained traction, sometimes unintentionally and in other cases with the aim of causing confusion.

Sources

Experts say the absence of traditional verification processes has allowed information to reach the public without clear sources, increasing the risk of misunderstanding and uncertainty.

Authorities and media professionals have advised the public to rely on official and trusted platforms, including the Bahrain News Agency, national television and radio, the National Communication Centre, and established news-



Amani Al Nefaei

The spread of false or misleading information could affect public confidence, social stability and economic activity if left unchecked.

papers for accurate updates.

They stressed that responsibility for limiting the spread of misinformation also rests with individuals, particularly in verifying content before sharing it.

The warning comes amid advances in artificial intelligence and digital editing tools, which have made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between authentic and manipulated visual content.

Officials caution that the spread of false or misleading information could affect public confidence, social stability and economic activity if left unchecked.

Members of the public have also been encouraged to remain calm, seek information from reliable sources and avoid amplifying unverified reports.

Court orders company to compensate supervisor

● Despite claims of data leak

Rehab Mohammad
TDT | Manama

A well-known company attempted to convince the High Labour Court to dismiss a supervisor's case by filing a criminal complaint and presenting witnesses, alleging that he had leaked company information to a new employer.

Based on this claim, the company argued that his dismissal was justified.

However, the court ruled in favor of the employee and ordered compensation.

According to lawyer Taqi Hussain Taqi, the plaintiff had been working for the defendant company under an open-ended contract as a work supervisor with a monthly salary of BD500.

He was unexpectedly dismissed without a valid reason or prior notice, and the company failed to pay his employment



Taqi Hussain Taqi, lawyer entitlements, prompting him to file the case.

In its ruling, the court stated that the employee was dismissed without legitimate grounds and without observing the legally required notice period.

The company, represented by legal counsel, argued that the dismissal was justified due to the alleged disclosure of work secrets and presented two witnesses to support its claim.

However, the court found their testimonies unconvincing and ruled that the company failed to prove the legality of the dismissal.

Public hospitals running as normal

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Bahrain's public hospitals and health centres are operating as normal, with no medical services hit by the Iranian aggression and its aftermath.

Dr Mohammed Al Awadhi, Director of Public Health at the Ministry of Health, said tests, consultations and vaccinations are all still available, and said the Kingdom's health system is fully ready for any emergency.

He said the emergency plan allows support from military and private hospitals when needed, through a joined-up system in which the committees in charge remain in close touch.

Outcomes

The plan was drawn up before the recent events, he said, and covers a range of scenarios and likely outcomes.

Since the start of the events, health bodies have been working to reassure citizens and residents and to keep services running without a break in hospitals and health centres alike.

Dr Al Awadhi said work to strengthen the health service is being carried out under the guidance of His Majesty King



“The Kingdom's health system is fully ready for any emergency.”
— DR MOHAMMED AL AWADHI,
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH AT THE
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister.

Effort

He said this work falls under the Supreme Council of Health, led by Lieutenant-General Dr Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulla Al Khalifa, with follow-up from Health Minister Jaleela Al Sayed, in what he described as a one-team effort across the health sector.

Civil servant jailed for taking bribe



● Five years in prison and fined BD2,800

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

A civil servant has been jailed for five years and fined BD2,800 after the First High Criminal Court found him guilty of taking a bribe.

The court also ordered his removal from his post and barred him from holding public office or performing public work.

In the same case, an Arab businessman was sentenced to one year in prison and fined BD2,800, with deportation to follow once he has served his sentence.

The court also ordered the bribe money to be seized.

The case dates back to 2023.

Task

Prosecutors said the first defendant, as a public employee, asked for and accepted money for himself in return for doing a task he claimed fell within his job.

He told the second defendant he could speed up some of his transactions for BD2,800.

During questioning, the first defendant admitted that he had continued dealing with the businessman after his duties had ended, and had tried to speed up his transactions and pay the related fees.

The businessman was also charged with taking part in the offence through agreement and assistance.

Transactions

Prosecutors said he agreed to pay the money as a bribe in return for faster handling of his transactions, and that the offence took place on that basis.

Buried drugs

Man jailed, fined BD5,000 and set for deportation over drug trafficking scheme

Rehab Mohammad
TDT | Manama

A man has been sentenced to five years in prison, fined BD5,000 and ordered deported after being convicted of drug trafficking using a “dead drop” method.

The case began when police received a tip-off from a confidential source reporting that an Asian man had been seen hiding an item beneath a pile of stones in what was suspected to be a drug drop location.

The source also provided video footage showing the suspect placing a small bag at the site.

Location

Police units were dispatched to the location, where officers recovered a transparent bag containing a substance later identified as drugs.

Shortly after, the suspect returned to the area, noticed police presence and attempted to flee but was apprehended following a brief pursuit.

A search revealed 35 small packets of suspected drugs in his possession.

Residence

Authorities later searched the suspect's residence, where additional quantities of heroin and methamphetamine were found, along with a weighing scale and packaging materials.

Investigators said the items indicated involvement in drug distribution.

During questioning, the suspect admitted to using the



Image used for illustrative purposes only



A confidential source reported that an Asian man had been seen hiding an item beneath a pile of stones in what was suspected to be a drug drop location.

“dead drop” method to supply narcotics in exchange for money.

Examination of his mobile phone uncovered messages, images and location markers linked to the activity.

Arrest

In court, the defence argued that the arrest and search procedures were invalid.

However, prosecutors presented video evidence, seized narcotics, laboratory results and the suspect's confession.

The court found the man guilty and handed down a five-year prison sentence, a BD5,000 fine and deportation upon completion of his term.

Veteran Manama zari trader passes away



Mohammed Saleh Al Zari
Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Mohammed Saleh Al Zari, one of Bahrain's best-known sellers and tailors of ‘zari’ robes, died yesterday after a working life of more than 75 years in one of the kingdom's oldest dress trades.

His death leaves Manama Souq without one of its most familiar old hands.

For decades, his name was bound to the making and sale of Bahraini and Gulf dress through a long-running family shop passed down from his father, Haji Saleh Al Zari, who first worked in Souq Al Safarin before moving to Bab Al Bahrain Avenue.

Mohammed Saleh Al Zari worked from Bab Al Bahrain Street from 1979 until 2004, when he moved to his shop in Yateem Centre, where he remained a well-known face among shoppers looking for old-style clothing and embroidery.

The family trade goes back to 1950, and Al Zari's name stayed close to the look and making of traditional Bahraini and Gulf wear through those years.

He helped keep the art of zari in view in both the souq and the wider public.

Home at last: Filipino workers return safely from Bahrain

TDT | Manama

For 42-year-old nurse and mother, Nanette Pahit Pandan from Surigao City, returning home from Bahrain was more than just a journey; it was a step toward safety, renewed hope, and peace of mind.

She was one of 89 Overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) who were repatriated from Bahrain, part of a larger contingent that included 317 workers and 26 dependents.

The repatriates came from across the Gulf region, including Saudi Arabia (Riyadh and Al Khobar), Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar, and were gathered in Riyadh, which served as the main jump-off point for their journey back to the Philippines.

At dawn on March 23, a chartered flight carrying 343 OFWs and their families landed at Villamor Air Base, marking a crucial step in the Philippine government's ongoing efforts to bring its citizens home from the Gulf region amid rising tensions.

“I slept well for the first time in three weeks,” she shared, her voice carrying both relief and exhaustion. “For several days, I



Filipino repatriates from across the Gulf region await departure

hardly managed to rest, preoccupied with the sounds outside, uncertain if I would wake up safely each morning.”

The weight of uncertainty and fear had kept her on edge, and only now, with the journey home secured, could she truly feel a wave of tranquility and gratitude wash over her.

Upon arrival in the Philippines from the fourth chartered flight, the repatriates were immediately welcomed by various government agencies that provided essential assistance, including food, temporary accommodation, transportation support, psychosocial services,

“For several days, I hardly managed to rest, preoccupied with the sounds outside, uncertain if I would wake up safely each morning.”

— NANETTE PAHIT PANDAN

and reintegration programs.

Recently, 38 OFWs from Bahrain were repatriated as part of the previous batch.

The homecoming represents the Philippine government's ongoing efforts to assist and safely bring home Filipinos affected by the current situation in the region.

Pandan shared that she and her fellow OFWs stayed at a hotel in Riyadh for two nights after arriving around 11:30 p.m. on March 20.

By the evening of March 22, at approximately 10:00 p.m., they left the hotel and headed to Riyadh Airport to prepare for their flight back to the Philippines.

She left behind her beloved furbaby, Caesar, in her residence in Gudaibiya.

NBB announces **reopening** of branch Network across Kingdom

Manama

The National Bank of Bahrain (NBB) has announced the full reopening of its entire branch network across the Kingdom, in continuation of its earlier decision issued on 19th March. All branches will resume operations, with the exception of the Bahrain International Airport branch, which will remain closed until further notice.

The full reopening follows a comprehensive assessment of the operating environment, with the Bank taking all necessary steps to ensure the safety and wellbeing of its employees and customers, while maintaining the continuity of its services.

NBB confirms that its branches will resume operations in



The full reopening follows a comprehensive assessment of the operating environment, with the Bank taking all necessary steps to ensure the safety and wellbeing of its employees and customers, while maintaining the continuity of its services.

line with standard working hours, with precautionary measures in place across all locations. Customers are encouraged to continue utilising the Bank's digital banking channels and ATM network for convenient access to services.

The Bank remains committed to closely monitoring developments and working in coordination with the relevant authorities to ensure the continued safety of its operations and the communities it serves.

BBK resumes full branch operations across Bahrain

Manama

BBK, a leader in retail and corporate banking in the Kingdom of Bahrain has announced the resumption of normal operations across its branch and financial malls network throughout the Kingdom of Bahrain from Wednesday, March 25, 2026, restoring regular in-person service across all locations.

The Bank stated that all branches are ready to receive customers and provide the full range of banking services during standard business hours. Staff across the branch network will be in place to assist customers and ensure transactions are completed smoothly and effi-



The Bank stated that all branches are ready to receive customers and provide the full range of banking services during standard business hours. Staff across the branch network will be in place to assist customers and ensure transactions are completed smoothly and efficiently, in line with day-to-day service expectations.

ciently, in line with day-to-day service expectations.

Customers will continue to have uninterrupted access to the Bank's advanced digital banking services, including the BBK Mobile app, the digital zones at the branches and other digital channels and the 24/7 call center, enabling them

to complete their banking transactions at any time, from any location.

This return to normal operations reflects BBK's continued commitment to providing a comprehensive suite of banking services and financing solutions tailored to the needs of its diverse customer base. Operations will

continue to be conducted in line with the highest standards of efficiency and reliability, supported by ongoing enhancements to infrastructure and internal systems designed to safeguard accuracy and security, further reinforcing BBK's position as a trusted financial partner amid evolving market conditions.

Oil, stock trading spiked before Trump's Iran remarks: media

AFP | London, United Kingdom

Thousands of oil contracts -- a higher volume than normal -- traded 15 minutes before US President Donald Trump pledged to halt strikes on Iranian energy infrastructure, sending prices tumbling, financial media reported Tuesday.

Between 1049 and 1050 GMT on Monday, oil trading volumes surged to around \$580 million, according to the Financial Times. Bloomberg put the value at \$650 million.

During those two minutes, at least six million barrels of Brent crude and West

Texas Intermediate changed hands, far above the roughly 700,000-barrel average recorded at a similar time over the previous five days, Bloomberg reported.

About 15 minutes later, Trump stepped back on his threat to attack energy sites citing "very good" talks to end the war in a social media post, which sent crude prices plunging more than 14 percent.

The traders who bet on prices dropping ahead of the announcement would likely have profited from Trump's sudden reversal, prompting some analysts to question whether some

market participants had acted on prior information.

"What stands out here isn't just the size of the trades, but the timing," Stephen Innes, an analyst at SPI Asset Management told AFP.

"Traders are not clairvoyant. When positioning shifts minutes ahead of a market-moving headline, it usually means someone is acting on...intel before the story broke," he added.

Similarly, S&P 500 stock index futures showed an unusual burst of trading activity early Monday, about 15 minutes before Trump's social media post, CNBC reported.

Senator Chris Murphy, responding to a social media post that alleged a single \$1.5 billion purchase of S&P 500 futures just before Trump's announcement, called it an example of "mind blowing corruption."

"A \$1.5 BILLION BET... 5 minutes before Trump's post. Who was it? Trump? A family member? A White House staffer? This is corruption. Mind blowing corruption," the Democratic lawmaker said on X.

The speculation about insider trading has also spread to prediction markets, which allow people to bet on the likelihood of thousands of global events.

CNN reported that one trader made \$1 million from dozens of well-timed bets on Polymarket that correctly predicted US and Israeli military actions against Iran.

Based on findings from Bubblemaps, an analytics company that tracks blockchain transactions, this particular bettor has had a pattern of prescient bets, including hours before Israeli's October 2024 strikes

on Iran, CNN reported.

Innes noted that the oil market is "not just traders speculating on price; it's a tightly connected ecosystem of physical players, refiners, shippers and governments, all operating within overlapping information channels."

He added that the activity could have been driven by a large producer hedging against a potential price drop, given that oil futures had surged 40 percent since the start of the war.



Inside the Vote as Chamber Maps Out Every Step



Hasan Barakat
TDT | Manama

Flow

For many, voting is a moment that lasts minutes. But behind that moment, every step must be clear.

At a consultative meeting ahead of the Bahrain Chamber elections, officials walked through the full voter journey, from entry to exit, in a plan de-

signed to prevent confusion, delays and missed opportunities.

Election Committee Chairman Abbas Abdulmohsen Radhi confirmed that preparations are complete and that the process will run smoothly and on time, highlighting the strategic location of the Bahrain International Exhibition Centre in Sakhir.

Movement

The process begins at Door 2, the main entrance, leading

voters to registration in Hall B, where up to 35 counters and four help desks will operate to minimise waiting.

Voters then move to a waiting area before entering the voting hall. Once ballots are cast, they exit through Door 1. Door 3 is reserved for candidates, with two large halls allocated as their base.

Clarity

Nine tables will be staffed

by the Election Committee, alongside a dedicated transparency team. A large screen will broadcast the process live, reinforcing visibility and trust.

Each candidate will be assigned a defined space for campaign advertisements, with guidelines requiring the Chamber's logo; organisers stressed the need to maintain order and avoid overcrowding.

Accuracy

Officials stressed that small details can determine whether a vote is counted.

Voters must use designated pens, avoid folding ballot papers, and ensure only the required circles are filled. Any extra marks could lead to automatic rejection. Each ballot carries a serial number and barcode, with results processed electronically before announcement.

Details

Voting will take place on Saturday, 28 March 2026, from 8am to 10pm at the Bahrain International Exhibition Centre in Sakhir. Members must settle dues at least seven days prior and vote in person, with up to 18 candidates selectable.

On that day, the path is simple. Walk in, follow the route, cast the vote, and walk out knowing it counted.

Philippines declares 'national energy emergency'

● The state of emergency was declared just hours after the country's energy secretary said the Philippines planned to boost the output of its coal-fired power plants

● Indonesia had assured the Philippines it would place no limits on coal orders.

AFP | Manila, Philippines



a coal fired power plant in Oyon Bay in Masinloc town, Zambales province, north of Manila

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos declared a state of "national energy emergency" yesterday, citing risks to the domestic fuel supply and energy stability created by the Middle East war.

The state of emergency was declared just hours after the

country's energy secretary said the Philippines planned to boost the output of its coal-fired power plants to keep electricity costs down as the war wreaks havoc with gas shipments.

"A state of national energy emergency is hereby declared in light of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, and the re-

sulting imminent danger posed upon the availability and stability of the country's energy supply," the executive order released Tuesday evening said.

The order authorises the country's Department of Energy to make advance payments of 15% to secure fuel contracts while taking direct action

against hoarding or profiteering.

"The declaration... will enable the government, through the (energy department) and other concerned agencies, to implement responsive and coordinated measures under existing laws to address the risks posed by disruptions in the global energy supply and the domestic economy," the order said.

The order also grants the transportation department the ability to direct public transportation fuel subsidies and reduce or suspend toll charges and aviation fees, while fast-tracking aid to individuals in "crisis situations".

The Philippines, which has some of the region's highest energy costs, is heavily dependent on imported fuel to keep its power plants running.

Leaning on coal

Energy secretary Sharon Garin told reporters earlier Tuesday that with the cost of LNG (liquefied natural gas) soaring, the

country would "temporarily" be forced to lean even more heavily on the carbon-belching fossil fuel.

While hoping to "maximise" the use of local coal, the Philippines was also keeping the option of upping its purchases of coal from top supplier Indonesia, the energy secretary said.

"We talked to the generation companies, the coal-powered plants, to check how much they can increase their generation," Garin said, calling it a "temporary measure" that could start as early as April 1.

"If we are successful in implementing this, at least we can decrease the electricity rate hikes because of the conflict in the Middle East," she said.

Indonesia, meanwhile, had assured the Philippines it would place no limits on coal orders.

"There's no restriction on our importation of coal from Indonesia as of today," Garin said, adding increased purchases may not be necessary.



The archipelago nation of 116 million relies on coal for about 60% of its electricity generation.

President Marcos in January announced a "significant" discovery of natural gas made near the country's rapidly depleting Malampaya offshore natural gas field.

It was hoped the discovery could extend the life of the field, which supplies about 40% of power to main island Luzon and was expected to run dry within a few years.

EU says illegal for Slovakia to charge foreigners more for diesel

AFP | Brussels, Belgium

Slovakia's decision to make foreign drivers pay more for diesel runs afoul of European Union laws, the European Commission said yesterday.

Bratislava announced this and other measures last week to limit sales of the fuel, citing the suspension of oil supplies from a pipeline through Ukraine, as energy prices soared globally due

The government of Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico last week began restricting diesel sales at service stations, allowing customers to only fill a car tank and a container of up to 10 litres.

to the war in the Middle East.

"We consider that this measure is highly discriminatory and against EU law," commission spokesman Ricardo Cardoso said of the diesel price for foreign motorists.

"While we understand the

need to support citizens, and at this time in particular, measures must not discriminate between nationality, nor should they undermine the integrity of our single market," he told a press conference.

The commission would "take

the appropriate legal action" to ensure compliance, Cardoso added.

The Druzhba pipeline has been at the centre of a spat between Slovakia, Hungary and Ukraine.

Kyiv has said the pipeline

supplying Russian oil to Europe was damaged by Russian strikes on Ukrainian territory in late January.

Landlocked neighbours Slovakia and Hungary, whose leaders foster close ties with the Kremlin, have accused Kyiv of deliberately delaying the reopening of the pipeline.

The government of Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico last

week began restricting diesel sales at service stations, allowing customers to only fill a car tank and a container of up to 10 litres.

It also said that foreign drivers, who currently take advantage of lower prices in Slovakia, would be charged more, paying a price calculated on the averages charged in Austria, Poland and the Czech Republic.

Islamabad talks offer

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Islamabad is prepared to host negotiations to stop the US-Israeli war with Iran, after mounting speculation it could act as a mediator.

Gulf 'breakdown'

The Gulf states will need to re-evaluate their shared security after the war, which has resulted in a "breakdown of the security system," a Qatar foreign ministry spokesman said.

G7 war discussion

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio will meet G7 counterparts in France on Friday to discuss the war, the State Department said.

While all G7 nations are close US allies, none has unambiguously offered support for the offensive on Iran, angering President Donald Trump.

Trump has since announced his government is speaking with Iran, a claim denied by Tehran.

Iraq deaths

A strike in western Iraq on Tuesday killed 15 fighters, including Saad Dawai al-Baiji, provincial commander and head of operations in Anbar for the former paramilitary coalition Hashed al-Shaabi, also known as the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF).

The PMF is now part of Iraq's regular army but also includes some pro-Iranian groups. It has blamed the attack on the United States.

UAE defence ministry says civilian contractor killed in Bahrain

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

The UAE defence ministry said on Tuesday that a Moroccan contractor with the Emirati military was killed in Bahrain in an Iranian attack, with Manama saying the man had been assisting the local armed forces.

"The Ministry of Defence mourns the loss of a Moroccan civilian contractor serving with the UAE Armed Forces, who was martyred during a routine mission in the Kingdom of Bahrain following an Iranian missile attack," the UAE ministry said in a statement on X.

Bahrain's military had announced that a UAE army personnel was killed in its territory while helping Bahraini forces defend against Iranian attacks.



IRAN: ALTERNATIVE ROUTE EMERGES IN THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ

— Karachi Crude oil tanker
— Jag Vasant LPG tanker
- - - - Maritime territorial boundaries according to OSM

Data source: Bloomberg
Map data: OSM, ESA WorldCover fused with Copernicus Sentinel-1, processed by AFP, JAMA, GEBCO



A Palestinian man climbs on the remnants of an Iranian missile that landed in the Israeli-occupied West Bank village of Hares

Iranian media reported US-Israeli warplanes had struck two gas facilities and a pipeline

Strikes continue

War showed no sign of de-escalation

AFP | Tehran, Iran

Iran and Israel traded fresh strikes yesterday as the Middle East war ground on, though a diplomatic push to bring Iran and the United States to the negotiating table appeared to be gathering pace.

The three-week-old war, sparked by US-Israeli attacks that killed Iran's supreme leader, has upended global energy markets, roiled the world economy and spiralled throughout the region, even dragging in safe-haven Gulf nations.

Speculation has mounted that Pakistan could emerge as a mediator following an offer from its prime minister, a day after US President Donald Trump unexpectedly announced productive talks with Iran -- a claim Tehran

swiftly denied. On the ground, however, the hostilities continued, with Israel's army saying it had conducted a "large wave" of airstrikes across several areas of Iran including the central city of Isfahan.

In Tel Aviv, Israel reported four people wounded after missile fire from Iran, with AFP images showing rub-

ble-strewn streets and the side of a three-storey building in ruins.

Earlier, Iranian media reported enemy warplanes had struck two gas facilities and a pipeline, hours after Trump stepped back from his weekend threat to attack energy sites, citing the attempts at diplomacy.

Bahrain, Kuwait, the United

Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia all said they had intercepted renewed drone and missile attacks, as Iran kept up retaliatory strikes on US-allied Gulf states.

'Friendly countries'

Trump on Monday said his administration was speaking with an unidentified "top person" in Iran, and extended by five days

an ultimatum for the Islamic republic to reopen the Strait of Hormuz or see its power plants obliterated.

But Tehran's parliamentary speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, said "no negotiations" were underway, accusing Trump of seeking "to manipulate the financial and oil markets".

US media outlet Axios reported that US negotiators Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner may meet an Iranian delegation for talks in Pakistan as soon as this week, with Vice President JD Vance possibly joining.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Tuesday that he had spoken with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, promising Islamabad's help to bring peace to the region.

'There's nothing left'

Israel pounded Beirut's southern suburbs throughout the night, while a strike on Bshamoun, south of the capital, killed two people on Tuesday, according to Lebanon's health ministry. "There's g left. It's all burned or destroyed... No walls, the windows are gone, the fa-

cade is gone, all my hard work has been lost," said Abbas Qassem, 55 from Bshamoun, weeping at the damage to his flat. In Beirut, AFP images showed smoke billowing from gutted buildings, as rescuers picked through the rubble and twisted metal. Strikes also targeted sev-

eral service stations linked to Iran-backed Hezbollah, which Israel has vowed to dismantle.

Israel's attacks in Lebanon have killed more than 1,000 people, according to Lebanon's health ministry, and displaced more than a million others.

Axios reported Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner may meet an Iranian delegation for talks in Pakistan

France urges Israel 'to refrain' from seizing south Lebanon zone

AFP | Paris, France

Israel should "refrain" from sending in forces to take control of a zone in south Lebanon, France's foreign minister told AFP yesterday, saying such a move would have "major humanitarian consequences".

"We urge the Israeli authorities to refrain from such ground operations, which would have major humanitarian consequences and would exacerbate the country's al-

ready dire situation," Jean-Noel Barrot said.

Israel said earlier its military would take control of south Lebanon up to the Litani River, around 30 kilometres (20 miles) from the border.

Lebanon's government has acted against Iranian interests and withdrew its approval of the Iranian ambassador's accreditation

tion on Tuesday, a decision Barrot hailed as "courageous".

Iranian ambassador Mohammad Reza Sheibani was told to leave Lebanese territory by Sunday.

"I wish to commend the statements and actions of the Lebanese government... which this morning took a courageous decision by expelling the Iranian ambassador," Barrot said, accusing Hezbollah of dragging Lebanon into a new conflict.

Beirut has accused Iran's Revolutionary Guards of commanding Hezbollah's operations in its war against Israel.



Smoke rises from the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted the eastern outskirts of the southern Lebanese coastal city of Tyre

31

Christians celebrate the first Easter, according to calendar maker Dionysius Exiguus

1436

Florence Cathedral (Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore), started in 1296, is consecrated by Pope Eugene IV. Designed by Filippo Brunelleschi with support from Cosimo de' Medici, it features the largest dome in the world at the time.



1807

British Parliament abolishes the slave trade throughout the British Empire; a penalty of £120 per slave is introduced for ship captains

1960

First guided missile launched from a nuclear powered submarine (USS Halibut)



Israeli emergency service personnel gather at the site of an Iranian missile strike in Tel Aviv

Amazon's cloud arm says service disrupted after drone attacks

AFP | Manama, Bahrain

Amazon's cloud arm told AFP yesterday that its service in Bahrain had been disrupted, after drone attacks hit the region.

An Amazon Web Services (AWS) spokesperson said the disruption was ongoing, without specifying the exact location affected or any potential damage done.

"The AWS Bahrain Region has been disrupted as a re-

Amazon's facilities in San Fernando de Henares, the biggest in Spain



sult of the ongoing conflict," the spokesperson said, adding that the company was helping affected customers migrate to AWS servers elsewhere in the world.

"We are working closely with local authorities and prioritising the safety of our personnel." The country's main telecommunications company sent a message to its customers apologising for a "technical problem" affecting its operations.

Qatar said the war had caused the "breakdown of the security system in the Gulf region."

Push for talks mounts

China FM tells Iran counterpart 'talks better than fighting'

AFP | Beijing, China

China's top diplomat urged his Iranian counterpart in a phone call Tuesday that "talking is always better" than fighting, after Tehran denied Donald Trump's claim that negotiations were underway.

The US president said on Monday his administration was speaking with an unidentified "top person" among Iran's leadership, as he extended by five days a deadline to hit the country's power plants.

But Tehran's parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf insisted "no negoti-

ations" were taking place, accusing Trump of seeking "to manipulate the financial and oil markets".

Beijing remains a key partner of Iran, but has said it "does not go along" with Tehran's strikes on Gulf states hosting US bases and has urged a ceasefire.

According to China's foreign ministry, Wang Yi told Abbas Araghchi he hoped "all parties can seize every opportunity and window for peace and start the peace talks process as quickly as possible".

The Iranian foreign minister said vessels could "safely pass through" the strait, except

those belonging to "countries currently engaging in conflict", the statement added.

He also told Wang that "the Iranian side is committed to achieving a comprehensive end to the conflict, not just a temporary ceasefire", and thanked China for its humanitarian assistance.

The call was held "at the request" of the Iranian side, according to the ministry.

Trump had been due to visit Beijing this month, but postponed the trip to deal with the war's fallout and has urged China and others to help reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

India's economic fundamentals strong, ample coal, petrol available, PM Modi says

Reuters | New Delhi

The fundamentals of the Indian economy are strong and the country has adequate availability of petroleum, fertilisers and coal to weather trade and energy disruptions caused by the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday.

The conflict, which began last month, has disrupted sectors from air travel to shipping and gas supplies, including by the near-closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which serves as a conduit for 40% of India's crude oil imports.

India has sufficient petroleum availability, with strategic reserves currently exceeding 5.3 million metric tons, and work underway to create reserves of another 6.5 million metric tons, Modi told parliament's lower house on Monday.

"The inherent strength of India's economic fundamentals has ... provided significant support to the nation during this period," he said.

Adequate arrangements have also been made for fertilisers supply for the summer sowing season that starts in June-July, and for coal to meet the rising demand for electricity as temperatures rise, he added.

The

South Asian country - the world's most populous and its fastest growing major economy - still relies on coal for three-fourths of its electricity generation, even as it ramps up renewable energy generation at a record pace.

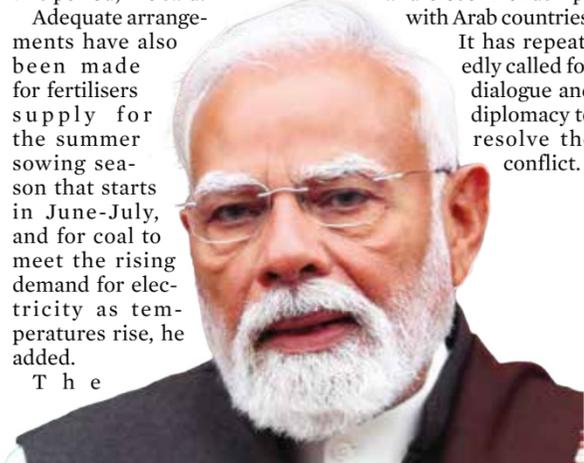
The Indian economy is estimated to grow by 7.6% in the fiscal year ending March 2026, the National Statistics Office said last month. It is projected to grow between 7% and 7.4% in FY27.

Analysts say a prolonged crisis in the Gulf region could significantly dampen India's growth in FY27 due to surging energy costs and supply chain disruptions.

Modi had emphasised the importance of ensuring shipping lanes remain open and secure despite the war during a conversation with Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian on Saturday.

India is walking a tightrope in the war, boasting historical cultural ties with Iran, strong, strategic relations with Israel, and close friendships with Arab countries.

It has repeatedly called for dialogue and diplomacy to resolve the conflict.



Modi says 'useful' talks with Trump on ME war

AFP | New Delhi, India

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday that US President Donald Trump had called him to discuss the Middle East war -- and the importance of the Strait of Hormuz.

Modi said it was a "useful exchange of views", adding that India "supports de-escalation and restoration of peace at the earliest", he wrote on social media.

Maritime traffic through the Gulf chokepoint -- which normally carries a fifth of the world's seaborne crude -- has come to a virtual standstill since US-Israeli strikes on Iran last month, triggering a regional

US Ambassador Sergio Gor also said on social media that the leaders had discussed the war, "including the importance of keeping the Strait of Hormuz open".

conflict that has rattled global energy supply chains.

"Ensuring that the Strait of

Hormuz remains open, secure and accessible is essential for the whole world," Modi said.

US Ambassador Sergio Gor also said on social media that the leaders had discussed the war, "including the importance of keeping the Strait of Hormuz open".

India is the world's second-largest buyer of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), which is used for cooking and predominantly sourced from the Middle East -- and supplies through the Strait of Hormuz have been strangled by the conflict.

Modi has urged states to curb black marketing and avoid panic, stressing that India's energy supplies remain stable.



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01



Received a call from President Trump and had a useful exchange of views on the situation in West Asia. India supports de-escalation and restoration of peace at the earliest. Ensuring that the Strait of Hormuz remains open, secure and accessible is essential for the whole world. We agreed to stay in touch regarding efforts towards peace and stability.

@narendramodi

02



In its latest State of the Global Climate report, @WMO shows that 2015-2025 were the hottest 11 years on record, with heat stress affecting people of all ages on every continent.

Workers are especially vulnerable: around one-third of the global workforce (1.2 billion people) is exposed to workplace heat risk each year.

Rising temperatures affect health in many ways, increasing fatigue, injuries, dehydration, kidney strain and mental stress. According to @Lancet Countdown data, heat-related deaths have surged by 63% since the 1990s.

As a driver of our warming world, climate change also amplifies public health risks such as vector- and water-borne diseases.

@WHO works closely with @WMO to address the impacts of climate change on health systems—including extreme heat—by strengthening health facility readiness to cope with higher temperatures.

Every heat-related death is preventable.

@DrTedros

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

Mammals cannot be cloned infinitely, mice study discovers

The finding rules out all sorts of scenarios involving clones that have been dreamt up in science fiction.

AFP | Paris, France

There is a limit on how many times a mammal can be cloned before suffering “mutational meltdown”, Japanese scientists have discovered, after making 1,200 clones over two decades that started off with a single mouse.

The 58th generation of mice did not survive, establishing for the first time that mammals cannot be cloned an infinite number of times, the scientists said in a study published on Tuesday.

It had been hoped that this method, which involves making clones of other clones, could have a range of



uses in the future, including saving endangered species or mass-producing animals for their meat.

“We had believed that we could create an infinite number of clones. That is why these results are so disappointing,” the study’s senior author Teruhiko Wakayama of the University of Yamanashi told AFP.

It was Wakayama’s team that cloned the first mouse in 1997, a year after the famous Dolly the Sheep became the first-ever mammal clone.

For the new research, the scientists first cloned the original female mouse in 2005.

Once a mouse reached three months old, they were cloned again, resulting in three or four new generations every year.

Over the next 20 years, they carried out more than 30,000 cloning attempts that creat-

ed over 1,200 mice. The process involves removing the DNA-containing nucleus of a cell from a donor animal and implanting it into an unfertilised egg from which the nucleus has been removed.

“Critical turning point” In the first few years, the method’s success rate steadily rose -- reaching over 15% at one point -- and the mice appeared to all be identical.

This gave the scientists hope that they could make clones indefinitely.

However there was a “critical turning point” around the 25th generation, according to the study published in the journal Na-

ture Commu- ni- cations. After that point, harmful genetic mutations built up over the generations, and each new set of mice was less likely to survive.

By the 57th generation, only 0.6 percent survived. Despite their accumulating mutations, these mice were still healthy.

However all the mice in the 58th generation died shortly after birth.

“There were no visible abnormalities in the pups, and the cause of death is unknown,” Wakayama said.

The scientists sequenced the genomes of some of the clones, finding that they had three times more mutations than mice born via sexual reproduction.

the first empirical demonstration” that this meltdown occurs in mammals, it added.

The finding could also rule out all sorts of scenarios involving clones that have been dreamt up in science fiction.

For example, Wakayama joked that this finding meant it would have been impossible to create so many clone troopers in the Star Wars prequel “Attack of the Clones”.

It could also affect any plans to preserve Earth’s genetic resources in a vault in the hope of re-cloning a new population following some catastrophe in the future, the study pointed out.

Wakayama is also working on new ways to collect cells from animals without harming them, as part of efforts to bring endangered species back from the brink.

His team has already successfully made clones from cells found in urine -- and are currently working to do the same with faeces.

They also had larger placentas -- and some were missing a copy of their X chromosome.

“It was once believed that clones were identical to the original,” Wakayama said, but this was clearly not the case.

Wakayama admitted his team has “no idea” how to overcome this problem, suggesting that perhaps the answer was to develop a better cloning method.

The importance of sex

Importantly, when the later clones -- even in the 57th generation -- mated with male mice, they had healthy offspring with fewer mutations.

This discovery demonstrates “that sexual reproduction is indispensable for the long-term survival of mammalian species,” the study said.

It also supports a theory called Muller’s ratchet, which “predicts that in asexual lineages, deleterious mutations inevitably accumulate, ultimately producing mutational meltdown and extinction,” the study said.

The research “provides



The first animal ever cloned from an adult cell was Dolly the sheep in 1996, proving that specialised adult cells can be reprogrammed to create an entirely new organism.

NASA to build \$20 bn moon base, pause orbital lunar station plans

AFP | Washington, United States

NASA’s chief on Tuesday said the US space agency will invest \$20 billion to develop a base on the Moon, while suspending its plans to create the lunar orbital space station known as Gateway.

“The agency intends to pause Gateway in its current form and shift focus to infrastructure that enables sustained surface operations,” Jared Isaacman said in a statement given during a day-long event at NASA headquarters in Washington.

“Despite challenges with some existing hardware, the agency will repurpose applicable equipment and leverage international partner commitments to support these objectives,” he said.

The European Space Agency among other international organizations were partners on the planned Gateway project.

It’s the latest shake-up at



NASA in the wake of changes to the Artemis program, which aims to send Americans back to the Moon and establish a long-term presence there, paving the way for eventual missions to Mars.

The Gateway orbital lunar station was meant to serve both

as a point of transfer for astronauts headed to the Moon as well as a platform for research.

The suspension of the initiative isn’t entirely surprising: some had criticized it as wasteful or a distraction from other lunar ambitions.

Isaacman said NASA now

plans to spend \$20 billion over the next seven years to construct the lunar base over dozens of missions, “working together with commercial and international partners towards a deliberate and achievable plan.”

“There will be an evolutionary path to building humanity’s first permanent surface outpost beyond Earth, and we will take the world along with us.”

Artemis 2 on deck Isaacman, who took the helm of NASA late last year, abruptly announced less than a month ago that it was reshuffling its Artemis program that has suffered multiple delays in recent years, as it aims to ensure Americans can return to the Moon’s surface by 2028.

That goal remains unchanged, but the US space agency is shifting its flight lineup to include a test mission before an eventual lunar landing to improve launch “muscle memory,” Isaacman said.

Hezbollah calls on Lebanon to ‘immediately reverse’ expulsion

AFP | Beirut, Lebanon

Hezbollah yesterday called the decision by Lebanon’s foreign ministry to expel the newly appointed Iranian ambassador a “sin”, and demanded the authorities “immediately reverse” the move.

“Hezbollah calls on the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister to demand

that the Minister of Foreign Affairs... immediately reverse this decision because of its dangerous repercussions,” the Iran-backed group said in a statement, calling the move a “national and strategic sin”.

The foreign ministry had earlier given the Iranian diplomat until Sunday to leave the country.

Two suspected of spying for Russia arrested in Germany, Spain

AFP | Berlin, Germany

A man and woman accused of spying for Moscow on a drone supplier in Germany have been arrested, officials said yesterday, the latest case of alleged Russian espionage amid the Ukraine war.

Berlin, one of Kyiv’s key military backers, has faced a flood of suspected espionage, sabotage and disinformation plots directed by Russia since

the full-scale invasion began in 2022.

In the latest case, the man, a Ukrainian national partially identified as Sergey N., was arrested in Alicante, Spain on February 17 by local police under a European arrest warrant, German federal prosecutors said.

The woman, a Romanian national identified as Alla S., was arrested on Monday in Germany, they said.

Aid flotilla arrives in Cuba as US oil blockade bites

● Two more ships are due to arrive

● Trump subsequently threatened to slap tariffs on any country shipping oil to Cuba

AFP | Havana, Cuba

The first boat of a flotilla carrying medical supplies, food and solar panels reached Cuba on Tuesday to aid the island as a US fuel blockade deepens its energy crisis.

The Maguro shrimp fishing boat docked in Havana three days later than hoped after battling strong winds, currents and a pesky battery during its journey from Mexico.

As they approached Havana's colonial-era fortification, the international activists stood on the cabin roof of the boat -- symbolically renamed "Granma 2.0" as a tribute to the yacht used by Fidel Castro's guerrilla fighters to launch their revolution in 1956.

They held a sign reading "Let Cuba live" while others waiting for them on the dock chanted "Cuba yes! Blockade no!"

"I wish everyone would unite, even Cubans abroad, and come and do the same because it is the



People ride an electric three wheel motorcycle as the vessel Maguro -- symbolically renamed "Granma 2.0" as a tribute to the yacht used by Fidel Castro's guerrilla fighters to launch their revolution in 1956 -- arrives from Mexico with humanitarian aid as part of the Nuestra America convoy, docks at the port of Havana

people who are suffering," said Amado Rodriguez, a 59-year-old driver walking near Havana Bay.

The first shipments arrived by plane from Europe, Latin America and the United States last week as part of an air and sea mission, dubbed Our America Convoy, to bring some 50 tonnes of aid to Cuba.

Two more ships are due to arrive Tuesday or Wednesday.

Activists say the mission, which had the support of the government, aims to bring relief

to Cubans amid a de facto US oil blockade that President Donald Trump launched in January.

Critics have slammed the effort as benefiting the communist government more than ordinary people.

Convoy organizer David Adler, a US citizen, told AFP the mission brought urgently needed aid directly to Cubans and showed the world "the human costs of Trump's siege on Cuba."

"It demonstrated that international solidarity can tri-

umph over forced isolation," said Adler, coordinator of global left-wing group Progressive International.

The country has suffered seven nationwide blackouts since 2024 -- two of them this past week -- due to aging thermoelectric plants and oil shortages.

The situation has deteriorated since Trump ordered a military operation to capture Cuba's chief regional ally, Venezuelan socialist leader Nicolas Maduro, in January -- depriving the

island of its main oil supplier.

Trump subsequently threatened to slap tariffs on any country shipping oil to Cuba.

Trump's 'greed'

The Maguro left from Mexico's Yucatan peninsula Friday carrying 32 people, including activists from Australia, Brazil, Ecuador, Italy, Mexico and the United States, and AFP journalists.

As the boat motored across the sea, Brazilian activist Thiago Avila said other nations should come to Cuba's aid.

"We cannot allow the world and international law to be buried under the greed of Donald Trump," Avila told AFP.

"That's why we are here, that's why people decided to mobilize for this and decided to donate."

Avila was among the organizers of a flotilla that had tried to bring aid to Gaza last year despite a naval blockade. That effort was intercepted by Israeli forces.

Fellow Brazilian activist Lisi Proenca said the group was applying the experience it gained from the Gaza flotilla to bring aid to Cuba.

"The interesting thing is that we're able to carry much larger items, like solar panels," she told AFP.



Cuba is the only country in the world where all children receive free education and health-care from the state.

'Political sideshow'

In addition to daily outages, fuel prices have soared, public transport has become rare and trash is piling up as garbage trucks are no longer running.

Cuba has blamed Washington for the country's hardship, pointing to the fuel blockade and a decades-old trade embargo.

Cuban exiles and other critics, who say the communist government is to blame for the economic crisis, said the convoy is giving political support to Havana.

"All of this is nothing more than a political sideshow," Luis Zuniga, a former Cuban political prisoner now based in Miami, told AFP.

"The electricity crisis in Cuba does not stem from the oil embargo imposed by (Trump). It dates back to long before that," Zuniga said.

Xiaomi quarterly profit slumps despite annual EV gains

AFP | Beijing, China

Chinese electronics giant Xiaomi announced a dip in quarterly profit yesterday after slower smartphone sales, while electric vehicles drove a modest surge in annual revenue.

The Beijing-based firm, one of the world's largest smartphone makers, has expanded rapidly since its launch in 2011 to produce home appliances and electric vehicles and is now eyeing the artificial intelligence market.

Its performance is considered a bellwether for consumer sentiment in China, where authorities are seeking to make domestic spending the main driver of economic growth.

Xiaomi's total revenue last year was 457 billion yuan (\$66 billion), up 25 percent from the previous year, according to a filing with the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

Adjusted annual net profit reached 39 billion yuan, up 43.8 percent compared to 2024.

However, adjusted net profit was down 23.7 percent on-year in the last three months of 2025, the first quarterly decline since mid-2024 and the biggest drop since the same

period in 2022.

Xiaomi said "headwinds" at the end of last year had hurt its business but defended its economic strength.

"In the fourth quarter of 2025, despite headwinds such as significantly increased memory (chip) costs and intensifying industry competition, we maintained resilience across all business segments," the company said in the statement.

Electric vehicles were a bright spot.

Xiaomi entered China's highly competitive EV market in 2024, aiming to win over buyers with a range of high-tech features.

It reached 411,082 vehicle deliveries in 2025 -- surpassing a goal of 350,000 -- to notch 106.1 billion yuan in revenue from its business segment covering smart EVs and AI.

"In 2026, we will strive to achieve the target of delivering 550,000 vehicles for the entire year," Xiaomi said in the statement.

Its business segment that includes smartphones, the company's traditional strength, still accounted for the bulk of sales, with revenue reaching 351.2 billion yuan last year.



Australia, EU agree sweeping new trade pact eight years in the works

● The two sides also agreed to step up cooperation on defence as well as on critical raw materials.

AFP | Canberra, Australia

The European Union and Australia struck a long-awaited free-trade deal on Tuesday, while also agreeing to boost defence cooperation and access to crucial rare-earth minerals in the face of global uncertainty over trade.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen's visit to Australia comes as the 27-nation bloc and the import-reliant nation navigate renewed energy vulnerability sparked by the war in the Middle East.

Key sticking points on Australian use of European geographical names as well as how much beef can be exported to the continent were overcome to reach the deal after eight years of negotiations.

Another compromise will see Australian winemakers allowed to use the term "prosecco" domestically, but they must stop using it for exports after 10 years.

Australia will also be allowed to keep using some geographical



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (R) and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese walk through the corridors of Parliament House in Canberra

names, such as feta and gruyere, in cases where producers have used the name for at least five years.

And European carmakers will benefit from Australia raising the threshold for a luxury car tax on electric vehicles -- three-quarters will now be exempt.

The two sides also agreed to step up cooperation on defence as well as on critical raw materials.

Addressing the Australian parliament on Tuesday, von der Leyen described a world that was "brutal, harsh and unforgiving".

In that context, she said the EU and Australia were bound by common values and must work together to mitigate over-reliance on countries such as China for rare-earth minerals.

A 'fair deal'

Von der Leyen told Australian lawmakers that the agreement on trade was a "fair deal, and one that delivers for your businesses and one that delivers for our businesses".

Under the accord, the EU said it expected exports to Australia to grow by a third over a decade.

The quota of Australian beef allowed into the bloc will increase more than 10 times the current level over the next decade. That upset both Australian farmers, who had hoped for more, and their European peers, who had pushed for the opposite.

Australia's National Farmers' Federation said it was "extremely disappointed" by a deal that European agriculture lobby group Copa-Cogeca said included "unacceptable" concessions.

Others were more pleased. European carmakers group ACEA welcomed the pact and the EU's top business lobby, BusinessEurope, hailed it as "a win for both sides, geopolitically and economically".

EU firms exported 37 billion euros (US\$42.9 billion) of goods to Australia last year, and 31 billion euros of services in 2024.

And Australia said the deal could add AU\$7.8 billion (US\$5.4 billion) to its gross domestic product by 2030.

Australia's largest export market is China, and the United States is its largest source of investment.

However, Canberra has redoubled efforts to diversify export markets for farmers since a 2020 dispute with Beijing saw agriculture shipments blocked for several years, and the global imposition of US tariffs last year.



The EU-Australia trade deal eliminates tariffs on over 99% of goods traded between the two sides.

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Pressure on Italy as play-off hopefuls **eye** 2026 World Cup

Sixteen teams compete for four remaining European places in first 48-team tournament

● Italy face Northern Ireland in Path A semi-final

● Italy have not qualified since 2014

● Ukraine, Kosovo seek first World Cup appearance

AFP | Paris

The final line-up for the 2026 World Cup will be decided over the next week, with 16 teams competing for the last four places allocated to European countries.

Twelve runners-up from the qualifying groups and four teams that earned spots through their UEFA Nations League results have a second chance to punch their ticket to football's global showpiece.

These are the four play-off routes that will determine the remaining qualifiers for the first 48-team World Cup:

Path A

Four-time World Cup winners Italy face immense pressure as they attempt to qualify for a first appearance at the tournament since 2014.

After lifting the trophy in 2006, Italy's record at the World Cup has been dire. They suffered two successive group-stage exits before missing out entirely on the 2018 and 2022 editions.

In order to avoid another qualifying failure Italy must overcome Northern Ireland in Bergamo on Thursday, before a potential final against Wales or Bosnia and Herzegovina on March 31.

"It's only normal that there's pressure - only if you had no blood in your veins would you



A FIFA World Cup trophy is displayed at the Akron Stadium, where it arrived as the second part of its tour in Zapopan, Mexico

not feel it," said Italy coach Gennaro Gattuso, who played in the 2006 final which the Azzurri won on penalties against France.

Northern Ireland are big underdogs against Italy but hope to end a 40-year absence from the World Cup.

Wales host Bosnia in Cardiff in the other semi-final.

Manager Craig Bellamy said earlier this month that he "feels a responsibility" to lead Wales to a second straight finals. Their appearance in Qatar was the country's first at the World Cup in 64 years.

Path B

Ukraine's footballers will hope to lift the morale of a war-torn country by competing at a first World Cup in 20 years. To get there, they need to beat Sweden on neutral ground in Valencia and then Poland or Albania.

Sweden picked up just two points in a dismal qualifying campaign but a team now coached by former Chelsea and Brighton boss Graham Potter will get another shot on the strength of their Nations League performances.

However, Sweden will be

without key man Alexander Isak as the Liverpool forward is not yet ready to return from a broken leg suffered in December.

Poland can count on Robert Lewandowski who is eyeing a third World Cup, but Albania -- led by former Arsenal and Barcelona defender Sylvinho -- believe they have what it takes to qualify for the first time.

Path C

Kosovo stand two wins away from a first major tournament a decade on from their admission to UEFA and FIFA. They came second in their qualifying group after two wins over Sweden and a victory in Slovenia.

"It's a massive opportunity for us. The whole country is buzzing with excitement. Everyone's over the moon," Kosovo captain Vedat Muriqi told FIFA.com.

Mallorca striker Muriqi sits second only to Kylian Mbappe in La Liga this season with 18 goals. The 31-year-old is also Kosovo's

all-time record scorer.

Slovakia, who last featured at the World Cup in 2010, host Kosovo in Bratislava while Turkey and Romania square off in Istanbul.

Turkey have not played at the World Cup since a surprise third-place finish in 2002. Ro-

18

goals in La Liga this season put Kosovo's record scorer Vedat Muriqi second only to Kylian Mbappé heading into the crucial play-off fixtures

mania's most recent appearance was in 1998.

Path D

Troy Parrott's heroics snatched the Republic of Ireland a play-off berth, but there is much still to be done if the Irish are to return to the World Cup stage.

Ireland, who haven't featured at the tournament since 2002, head to Prague to take on the Czech Republic in the semi-finals. The winner of that tie will host the final against Denmark or North Macedonia.

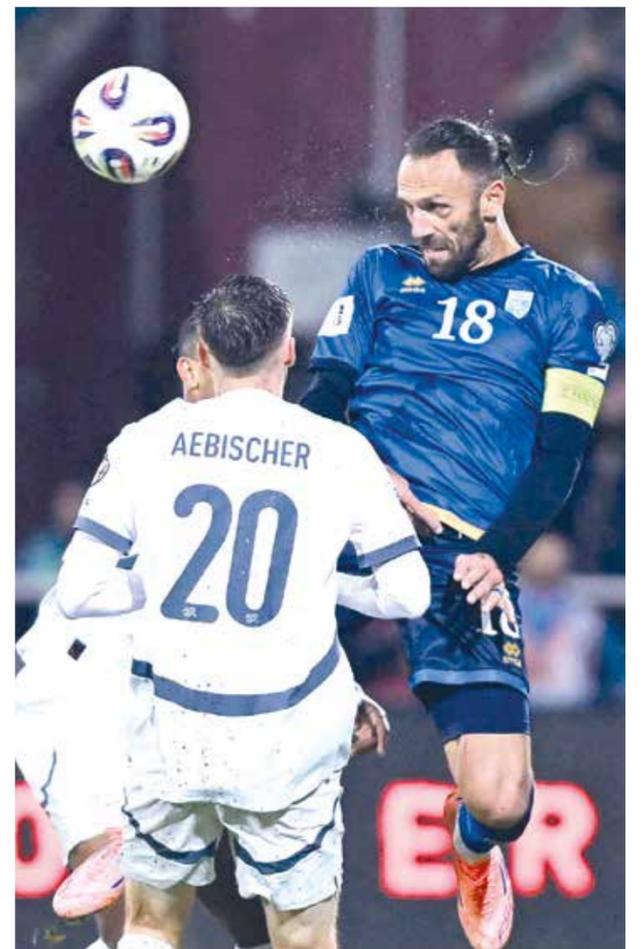
"There's a quiet confidence in the group growing together, it's great to see but we know there's a lot of hard work to come," said Ireland assistant John O'Shea.

Denmark missed out on automatic qualification after a dramatic defeat in Scotland but will be expected to see off North Macedonia, whose lone tournament appearance came at Euro 2020.

Kasper Schmeichel is absent for Denmark after revealing last week that he may have played his final game, with two surgeries required to repair his damaged shoulder.



Italy's Gennaro Gattuso looks dejected after being defeated during the FIFA World Cup 2026 European qualification football match between Italy and Norway (file photo)



Kosovo's forward #18 Vedat Muriqi heads the ball



Four-time winners Italy are under immense pressure to avoid a third consecutive qualifying failure, having not appeared at a World Cup tournament since their group-stage exit in 2014

Sinner, Sabalenka **march on in** Miami as more seeds crash out

Medvedev joins Alcaraz, De Minaur as early Miami casualties



Jannik Sinner of Italy serves to Corentin Moutet of France



Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus returns a shot against Qinwen Zheng of China

● **Sabalenka beats Zheng Qinwen 6-3, 6-4.**

● **Sinner defeats Corentin Moutet 6-1, 6-4**

● **Defending champion Mensik loses to Tiafoe in three sets**

● **Gauff, Pegula advance to quarters**

AFP | Miami

Jannik Sinner and Aryna Sabalenka kept their "Sunshine Double" dreams alive with emphatic victories at the ATP/WTA Miami Open on Monday as defending men's champion Jakub Mensik joined a slew of seeds who crashed out.

Sinner and Sabalenka are bidding to join an elite band of players who have won Indian Wells and the Miami Open back-to-back, and arrived in Florida

brimming with confidence after their respective victories in the California desert earlier this month.

Women's world number one Sabalenka, defending the Miami title she won for the first time last year, cruised into the quarter-finals with a 6-3, 6-4 demolition of China's 2024 Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen.

Sinner, who is chasing a second victory in Miami after lifting the title in 2024, was similarly comfortable in his third-round clash with French 30th seed Corentin Moutet, winning 6-1, 6-4 to advance to the last 16.

Sabalenka is aiming to become only the fifth woman to complete the Indian Wells-Miami double after Steffi Graf, Kim Clijsters, Victoria Azarenka and Iga Swiatek.

On Monday's form, few would bet against the big-hitting four-time Grand Slam champion from Belarus, who comfortably disposed of 23rd seed Zheng in 1hr 25min.

"She's a tough opponent and



I'm super happy with the level I played at today," Sabalenka said in her on-court interview. "I can definitely say that it felt like home.

"I feel like I'm getting better, serving better, getting used to these conditions, which are tricky. But I'm getting more and more comfortable with every match," added Sabalenka, who faces unseeded American Hailey

Baptiste in the quarter-finals.

Baptiste was one of three American women to advance to the last eight on Monday.

Fourth seed Coco Gauff downed Romanian veteran Sorana Cirstea 6-4, 3-6, 6-2, while fifth seed Jessica Pegula beat another Romanian, Jacqueline Cristian 6-4, 6-1.

Canada's Victoria Mboko, seeded 10, upset Russian eighth seed Mirra Andreeva 7-6 (7/4), 4-6, 6-0 to set up a quarter-final with Czech 13th seed Karolina Muchova, who strolled past Alexandra Eala of the Philippines 6-0, 6-2.

Sinner stroll, Mensik falls

In the men's draw, Italian second seed Sinner was always in control against France's Moutet on the Hard Rock Stadium's main court.

Sinner will face unseeded American Alex Michelsen in the last 16. Michelsen defeated Chile's Alejandro Tabilo 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 earlier Monday.

But while Sinner sailed through, defending champion

“She’s a tough opponent and I’m super happy with the level I played at today. I can definitely say that it felt like home. I feel like I’m getting better, serving better, getting used to these conditions, which are tricky. But I’m getting more and more comfortable with every match”

ARYNA SABALENKA

Jakub Mensik was among the latest crop of seeds to tumble out, losing a gruelling three-setter against 19th seed Frances Tiafoe 7-6 (7/4), 4-6, 7-6 (13/11).

A 2hr 55min slug-fest was decided by a marathon third set tiebreak when Czech 20-year-old Mensik saved six match points before finally succumbing.

US hope Tiafoe, who himself saved two match points in the

final tiebreak, sealed victory after converting his seventh match point when a Mensik return of serve drifted wide.

Tiafoe will face France's Terence Atmane in the last 16. Atmane powered into the fourth round with a 6-3, 1-6, 6-3 upset of Canadian seventh seed Felix Auger-Aliassime on Monday.

Auger-Aliassime joined a lengthening list of seeds who have stumbled in the early rounds in Miami that includes Indian Wells runner-up Daniil Medvedev, who was shown the door earlier Monday in a 6-0, 4-6, 7-5 loss to Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo.

Medvedev's exit followed the departures of world number one Carlos Alcaraz, Australian fifth seed Alex De Minaur and eighth seed Ben Shelton.

Another French player, 31st seed Ugo Humbert, beat Kazakhstan's Alexander Shevchenko 6-4, 7-6 (7/2).

Third seed Alexander Zverev got past Croatian veteran Marin Cilic 6-2, 5-7, 6-4.

Pistons halt Lakers streak while Spurs, Thunder win

AFP | London

Daniss Jenkins scored a career-high 30 points as the Detroit Pistons halted the Los Angeles Lakers' nine-game winning streak with a 113-110 victory on Monday.

A heavyweight showdown between Eastern Conference leaders Detroit and the in-form Lakers did not disappoint, with Los Angeles recovering from a 16-point deficit in the second half to take the game to the wire.

Austin Reaves put the Lakers 110-109 ahead with 30 seconds remaining with a floating jump shot but Jenkins scored Detroit's final four points for a hard-earned win.

Luka Doncic, who finished with 32 points, launched a last-

gasp three-point attempt that could have forced overtime, but his effort fell short.

Detroit lined up again without star point guard Cade Cunningham, absent indefinitely after suffering a collapsed lung.

In Cunningham's absence, Jenkins stepped up to lead the Pistons, while Jalen Duren added 20 points with 11 rebounds and Duncan Robinson 12 points.

"I'm no longer surprised," Pistons coach JB Bickerstaff said of Jenkins.

"When he's gotten the opportunity he's delivered for us.

"Whether it's throughout the game or in clutch moments, he finds a way to impact winning. He deserves a lot of credit tonight."



Daniss Jenkins takes applause from Detroit fans after leading the Pistons to a 113-110 defeat of the in-form Los Angeles Lakers

The Lakers will wrap up a six-game road trip against the lowly Indiana Pacers on Wednesday before returning to California.

Doncic's 32 points were complemented by 24 from Reaves.

LeBron James narrowly missed out on a triple-double, scoring of 12 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds.

Detroit improved to 52-19 to extend their lead at the top of the Eastern Conference to five games clear of the Boston Celtics (47-24).

The Lakers fell to 46-26 and remain third in the Western Conference with a two-game cushion over fourth-placed Houston.

Elsewhere, the Oklahoma City Thunder made it 12 wins in a row with a 123-103 blowout over the Philadelphia 76ers on the road.

The depleted Sixers were

never in contention against the Western Conference leaders, who led by double-digits from early in the second quarter.

Reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 22 points on a night when six Thunder players finished in double figures.

The win kept Oklahoma City three games clear of the chasing San Antonio Spurs with a 57-19 record. San Antonio stayed in touch at the top of the West with a 136-111 drubbing of the Miami Heat in Florida.

Victor Wembanyama's 26 points led the Spurs scoring, with Dylan Harper and Keldon Johnson each scoring 21 points off the bench.

Stokes eager to lead England **recovery** after 'hardest period of captaincy'

Leadership group stays intact as Ben Stokes pledges to learn from recent team failures

● England lose Ashes 4-1

● ECB backs Stokes, McCullum, Key

● Midnight curfew enforced after Australia tour

● Home Tests against New Zealand start June

● Stokes is recovering from a groin injury

AFP | London

Ben Stokes reckons the past three months have been the "hardest period" of his time as England captain but is determined the current leadership group can oversee a revival in the Test team's fortunes.

Earlier on Monday, the chief executive of the England and Wales Cricket Board, Richard Gould, confirmed Stokes, managing director Rob Key and coach Brendon McCullum would all stay in their posts despite the team's 4-1 loss on their five-Test tour of Australia, which ended in January.

Key denied suggestions Stokes and McCullum had fallen out in Australia, despite the pair offering contrasting messages dur-



England's Ben Stokes signs autographs for fans after the fifth Ashes cricket Test

ing a desperately disappointing series loss.

Stokes, in an emotional Instagram post, said he was determined to learn from his mistakes following the lowest period of his near four-year spell as England captain, with Key and McCullum still the right men to be alongside him.

"Being England captain is the

greatest honour a player can be given and I do not take it for granted," Stokes wrote.

"It has its highs and it has its lows, it makes you want to smile, it makes you want to cry. It completely and utterly consumes you and feels like it's the only thing in your life at times.

"The last 3 months has without a doubt been the hardest

period of my captaincy journey, it's tested me in so many different ways and I'm sure every other captain has gone through this as well.

"Baz (McCullum), Rob and myself have the passion and desire to take this team forward, we are going to give you everything we have, we know we made mistakes along the way



The Ashes defeat marked England's eighth Test loss in their last nine matches across all formats

and we have learnt from those mistakes, you learn more from failure than success."

In addition to England's poor performances on the field, there were reports of excessive drinking by players on a break, raising concerns about the dressing-room culture.

Revelations followed that vice-captain Harry Brook had been involved in an altercation with a nightclub bouncer on the pre-Ashes visit to New Zealand.

A midnight curfew has since been enforced, while the ECB are trying to recruit a new national selector after Luke Wright resigned for family reasons.

Stokes has not played since suffering a groin injury in the fifth Ashes Test in Sydney in January, but is set to feature for Durham in the County Championship ahead of this season's home Test programme.

England have three Tests

Baz (McCullum), Rob and myself have the passion and desire to take this team forward, we are going to give you everything we have, we know we made mistakes along the way and we have learnt from those mistakes, you learn more from failure than success

BEN STOKES

against McCullum's native New Zealand in June before a trio of matches against Pakistan in August and September.

Stokes added: "I have learnt a lot about myself but the most important thing that I want the fans to know is that..."

"I F****G love cricket, I F****G love this team, I F****G love being England captain and I have got so much more to give to this role and I'm so happy that I get to do it with Baz and Rob.

"We all appreciate every single person who supports us. We do what we do for many reasons but one of those reasons is to bring our supporters and fans happiness and a sense of pride and we will aim to do those things as much as we can in the future.

"See you all in June for the start of the Test Match summer."

Mbappe says injury is behind him, all systems go for World Cup

● Mbappe missed 54 days with knee sprain

● Longest injury absence of his career

● France play Brazil Thursday, Colombia Sunday

AFP | Madrid

French superstar Kylian Mbappe says the knee injury that kept him sidelined for almost two months is "behind him" and there had never been a concern he would miss this year's World Cup.

The 27-year-old Real Madrid striker admitted he had not been at his best mentally during the 54-day absence -- the longest of his career.

"There was a lot of frustration, anger and anxiety," the French captain said.

Mbappe, who along with the French squad flies to the United States yesterday for friendlies against Brazil on Thursday and then Colombia Sunday, came on as a substitute for a few minutes in last week's Champions League last-16 match at Manchester City.

He also played over 25 minutes for Real -- for whom he is



Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe celebrates scoring (file photo)

top scorer this campaign with 38 goals in 34 appearances -- in the 3-2 derby win over Atletico on Sunday.

"It is behind me," he said of the injury.

"I put myself under a regime where I wanted to return gently but with a hunger to play.

"I hope I am going to be able to play during the international break and make a difference."

The France captain -- a World

Cup winner in 2018 and runner-up in 2022 -- said he had been annoyed by the rumour mill suggesting his injury was more serious than it actually was.

He had avoided undergoing surgery after scans he had in Paris at the beginning of March revealed he would not require an intervention.

"Lots of people gave their own diagnosis, I heard many false

things," said Mbappe, who was appearing at an event of an insurance company he invested in in Paris on Monday.

'Not at my best'

Mbappe said there had never been a doubt about the injury preventing him from playing at what will be his third World Cup finals in June.

"No, that was never a topic of discussion," he said.

It is behind me. I put myself under a regime where I wanted to return gently but with a hunger to play. I hope I am going to be able to play during the international break and make a difference

KYLIAN MBAPPE

"At worst I could have had a partial rupture (of the ligament) which would have ruled me out till April.

"There was never a debate about the World Cup or the climax to the season with Real Madrid."

In spite of the sprain and the resulting pain the former PSG star played part of January and February, admitting he and Real "had tried to manage it as best as possible".

"One has to look at the positive, today, I have no pain and we are still in the hunt for trophies, that is what is most important," he said.

"We will have time afterwards to assess how it was handled.

"I am not going to go into the details, I will say I was not at my best in handling this period, I was not the happiest of players but I am delighted that is behind me now.

Mbappe battled through pain in January-February before scans confirmed no surgery needed, silencing rumours while maintaining Real Madrid's trophy hunt

"All (the pain) is gone." Mbappe said he was looking forward to pitting his wits against the Brazilians, who are managed by Carlo Ancelotti, who coached the Frenchman in his first season at Real.

"It might be a friendly but when you play Brazil, the greatest footballing nation with five World Cup wins, it is unbelievable to play against them," he said.

"It is a team who could win the World Cup, it is good to compare how we are at the moment with them.

"Even if we cannot take a lot of learnings out of this get together, we can nevertheless take some. "One thing is for sure we are not going there for a holiday, we are going there as a step in our preparations for the World Cup."

Griezmann to leave Atletico for Orlando at end of season



Antoine Griezmann reacts during a match (file photo)

AFP | Paris

Antoine Griezmann will leave Atletico Madrid for MLS side Orlando City at the end of the season, the two clubs announced yesterday.

Atletico's all-time record goalscorer has agreed a two-year deal with Orlando and will become the latest veteran star to move to North America. "The forward travelled to Orlando, with the club's permission, during the two days of rest granted to the first team, to finalise his contract with the Florida side," Atletico said in a statement.

The 35-year-old Griezmann will be hoping to sign off in style and cap his 10th season as an Atletico player with a second major trophy at the Rojiblancos, after the 2018 Europa League.

Atletico will face La Liga rivals Barcelona in the Champions League quarter-finals next month and take on Real

Sociedad in the Copa del Rey final on April 18 in Seville.

Griezmann, who won the 2018 World Cup with France, retired from international football in 2024 after scoring 44 goals in 137 caps for Les Bleus.

He has netted 211 times for Atletico, surpassing the previous record of 173 set by Luis Aragones.

Griezmann joined Atletico in 2014 from Real Sociedad and has made 488 appearances for the club, who he left for Barcelona in 2019 before returning two years later, initially on loan.

Griezmann has scored 13 goals in 43 appearances for Diego Simeone's Atletico this season.

The MLS will add Griezmann to the ranks of well-known players to have made the switch from Europe in recent seasons, including his former Barcelona teammates Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez.

Bahrain Basketball League semi-finals tip off tomorrow

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

The 2025-26 Zain Bahrain Basketball League semi-finals tip off tomorrow night at Khalifa Sports City Hall in Isa Town, with top-seeded Muharraq facing fourth-placed Al Ahli at 8 PM and second-placed Manama meeting third-placed Al Najma at 6 PM.

Both series are best-of-five, with the finals set for April 5 if a semi-final ends in three games, or April 8 if extended to four, leaving open the possibility of a Muharraq-Manama rematch for the league title.

Muharraq enter the playoffs brimming with confidence. The reigning league champions lifted their second trophy of the season on Monday night, defeating Manama 80-73 in the Khalifa bin Salman Cup final, which was played behind closed doors due to regional conflicts.

Reflecting on the victory, power-forward Mohamed Ameer said: "It means a lot to me. I hope this is not the last championship and that next year will be full of more titles. I want to celebrate the fans who could not be with us today and hope they are proud of what we have achieved."



Captain Bader Abdulla Malabes lifts Muharraq's fourth league title last season

Their momentum is further reinforced by a clean sweep over Al Ahli in the cup semi-finals series (93-87 and 96-80), which gives them an added edge heading into tomorrow's matchup.

First in the league with a 14-1 record, Muharraq will rely on captain Bader Abdulla, sharpshooter Michael Warren, and Ameer to maintain their high standard under coach Peter Schomers.

Manama also arrive in strong form, holding a 9-6 record to sit second in the league. The Blues, guided by coach Salman Ramadhan, overcame Al Najma 78-66 and 77-75 in the cup semi-finals, giving them confidence ahead of tomorrow's clash.

Ali Jaber and Ahmed Salman will be key to providing scoring and leadership as they aim to overcome an Al Najma side that has consistently given them tough challenges in recent matches.

Al Najma (8-7) and Al Ahli (7-8) enter as underdogs but will look to test the top two sides.

While both teams hope to engineer an upset, all eyes remain on Muharraq and Manama, whose recent cup final offered a glimpse of the intensity and rivalry that could carry into the league championship series.

Bahrain Victorious brace for wind-tested sprint at Ronde van Brugge

TDT | Manama

Bahrain Victorious will line up at today's Ronde van Brugge, targeting a sprint finish while preparing for heavy wind and rain that could shape a far more selective race. The event, a reworked version of Brugge-De Panne, kicks off a key block of cobbled Classics ahead of the Tour of Flanders.

Starting and finishing in Brugge, the 202.9 km route begins at the historic Markt, heads south through Torhout, Wingene, and Beernem, then returns to the Brugge area for a decisive circuit phase. Riders will tackle a cobbled section on Briersweg (1.3 km) and exposed sections along the Damse Vaart, where crosswinds are expected to create echelons and splits well before the finale.

Sports director Nikolas Maes stressed the challenges of the new course. "It's a new parcours, so we don't know exactly how the race will unfold, but it's clear that the wind and rain will make it very hard," he said. "These conditions usually create echelons, with the race opening up and coming back together repeatedly. It will be crucial to be attentive from the start



Men's peloton rolls out from Bruges at the 2025 Classic Brugge-De Panne, now called the Ronde van Brugge

and stay in the front group."

Bahrain Victorious will target the sprint with experienced fast man Phil Bauhaus and in-form Zak Erzen, who recently finished sixth at GP Monseré. Oliver Stockwell and Kamil Gradek

will protect the leaders early, while Alberto Bruttomesso, Daniel Skerl, and Attila Valter focus on positioning ahead of the key sectors.

Maes added: "We have the ambition to go for the sprint, but

the harder the race becomes, the more difficult it will be to be there in the final. With Phil's experience and Zak's current form, we believe we can survive in a reduced group of around 20-25 riders."

IPL's Bengaluru to keep 11 seats empty in honour of stampede dead



A view of Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru

AFP | Bengaluru

Sunrisers Hyderabad.

The Bengaluru team, including star batsman Virat Kohli, will warm up for the game in tops sporting the number 11 and wear black arm bands for the match.

Along with the permanently empty seats, CEO Rajesh Me non said: "This is a tribute to our fans, who will always remain a part of our journey."

After the tragedy, authorities deemed the venue unsafe due to structural and crowd management deficiencies, and moved important fixtures elsewhere.

Eleven supporters aged between 14 and 29 died in a stampede outside the stadium in June after RCB won the IPL for the first time.

The lucrative T20 tournament begins its 2026 season on Saturday when RCB host