

**Piastri outshines Mercedes duo to go fastest in Japan practice**

McLaren shows pace at Suzuka as rivals struggle for rhythm and consistency | P12

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# THE DAILY tribune

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Ukraine, Saudi signed air defence deal: senior officials



AFP | Kyiv, Ukraine

Ukraine and Saudi Arabia have signed an air defence agreement during President Volodymyr Zelensky's visit to the kingdom facing Iranian drone attacks, two senior officials said yesterday.

"The point of the agreement is that Ukraine will support them in developing all the necessary components of air defence, which they currently lack," one official said of the document which, according to another was signed on Thursday.

Ukraine has proposed swapping its interceptors for vastly more expensive air-defence missiles that Gulf countries are using to down Iranian drones. Ukraine says it needs more of them to fend off Russian missile attacks.

The deal signed "is not only about interceptors as such, but about building a system, integrating it with other air defence components, Ukrainian experience in its use, AI, and all the other elements of data analysis needed to counter Shaheds and other drones," one of the officials said.

G7 urges end to attacks on civilians in Middle East war

AFP | Cernay-La-Ville, France

G7 allies yesterday urged a stop to attacks against civilians in the Middle East war, after a foreign ministers' meeting in France attended by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio almost one month into the US-Israeli assault against Iran.

Having skipped the first day of the meeting at the historic monastery turned luxury hotel complex outside Paris, Rubio had a full day of talks with counterparts from leading industrialised democracies at the Vaux-de-Cernay Abbey outside Paris. A final communique on the war in the Middle East called for "an immediate cessation of attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure."

## BDF 'strong shield'

HM King praises force's readiness, unity and professionalism

TDT | Manama

The Bahrain Defence Force acts as a "strong shield" for the Kingdom, underpinned by its readiness, unity and professionalism, His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa said.

During a meeting with BDF officers, held in the presence of Field Marshal Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, BDF Commander-in-Chief, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces praised the force for its high level of combat readiness and professionalism.

King Hamad said the courage and efficiency of personnel in carrying out their duties, along with their close coordination across various units and with security agencies, reflect the advanced state of preparedness within the force.

His Majesty affirmed that ongoing development efforts



across all branches of the armed forces are aimed at further enhancing readiness and operational efficiency to fulfil their sacred duty of safeguarding the nation and protecting

its citizens.

The King reiterated that members of the Bahrain Defence Force remain a steadfast pillar of the Kingdom, embodying the unity and solidarity that

define Bahraini society.

His Majesty also expressed his wishes for continued success and dedication among all personnel in serving the country.

# 'Incredibly effective'

UK envoy praises Bahrain diplomacy amid ongoing conflict

TDT | Manama

Bahrain's diplomatic push amid the ongoing regional conflict has won strong praise from the United Kingdom's Ambassador to Bahrain, Alastair Long, who described the Kingdom's international engagement as "incredibly effective" at a critical juncture.

"Every part of the Bahraini system is working terrifically hard at the moment," Mr Long said in an Instagram post, highlighting a coordinated national response spanning defence, civil protection and diplomacy.

Speaking after a meeting with Foreign Minister Abdul Latif bin Rashid Al Zayani, the envoy said that while frontline institutions remain crucial, Bahrain's diplomatic corps has stood out in recent weeks.

He pointed to Bahrain's role



at the United Nations Security Council, where it currently holds a seat, noting that the Kingdom recently helped secure a resolution condemning Iranian attacks in the region with strong international backing.

The ambassador added that Bahrain is intensifying efforts to ensure freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hor-

muz, describing it as vital to regional security and global trade.

Looking ahead, he noted that Bahrain will assume the presidency of the Security Council in April, while also chairing the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League — a rare convergence of leadership roles he said is being handled with "ease and professionalism".

Despite these diplomatic gains, Mr Long stressed that Bahrain's priority remains safeguarding the nation, countering threats and restoring economic activity — particularly by reopening key trade routes.

He concluded by commending Bahrain's leadership for leveraging diplomacy to defend national interests and reinforce regional stability.

Gulf Air extends Dammam operations to April 2026

TDT | Manama

Gulf Air has extended its temporary flight operations from King Fahd International Airport, located in Dammam in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, through April 2026.

The airline confirmed that its Dammam-London Heathrow Airport service will run until April 11, 2026. Services from Dammam to Mumbai, Nairobi, Cairo, Chennai, Bangkok, Casablanca and Manila have been extended until April 30, 2026. Gulf Air is currently operating flights to 10 temporary destinations via Dammam as part of these arrangements.

The carrier will provide ground transport between Bahrain and King Fahd International Airport for passengers with confirmed bookings on these flights.

It added that transit visa assistance through Saudi Arabia will be offered to passengers travelling to and from Bahrain, limited to those using the airline's organised ground transport. Travellers whose final destination is Saudi Arabia must arrange and hold a valid entry visa independently.

Bookings are available via the airline's website, mobile app, and authorised travel agents.



US and Israel hit nuclear sites

AFP | Tehran, Iran

US-Israeli strikes hit two Iranian nuclear facilities yesterday, as America's top diplomat left a meeting with his G7 counterparts to declare that Washington expects its military operation to prove victorious within a couple of weeks.

Rubio also said that he had won support from his G7 colleagues to oppose Iran's attempts to impose a toll on ships crossing the Strait of Hormuz, a key sea lane for oil and gas shipments from the Gulf.

Iranian media reported a US-Israeli attack on the Khondab heavy water complex in central Iran, citing a local official, while the country's atomic energy agency said a uranium processing plant 600 kilometres away in Ardakan was also hit.

Israel's army confirmed that it struck the two facilities, while the Iranian sources said there was no release of radioactive material at either site.

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# ‘We feel safe @ home’

Residents praise Bahrain’s defence and leadership amid crisis



Times like these remind us of the true meaning of security and the critical role of those on the front lines defending us

TDT | Manama



Everything in our lives has positives and negatives, but these events have shown us just how united our people are and how much security we feel thanks to our brave soldiers and wise government



There is a sense of solidarity among people as they have done during the past difficult times

“We don’t feel like we’re at war; we feel safe at home with our families”

This was the response of one resident when asked how they were coping — and it was far from an isolated view. Speaking with others revealed a consistent sense of calm and trust across the Kingdom.

“Seeing our soldiers inter-

cept threats every day gives us peace of mind,” another resident said, highlighting the visible efforts of the Bahrain Defence Force in protecting the nation.

Most residents said they feel secure despite the ongoing crisis. “There is a sense of solidarity among people as they have done during the

past difficult times,” they said, praising both the Bahrain Defence Force and the country’s leadership.

Citizens noted that every period has its challenges, but recent events have reinforced the strength and cohesion of Bahraini society. “Everything in our lives has positives and negatives, but these events have shown us

just how united our people are and how much security we feel thanks to our brave soldiers and wise government,” one resident said.

The public also emphasised the importance of family, community, and mutual support. “We realized the importance of standing together,” another resident said. “We learned to

appreciate what we have, to be careful with our resources, and to protect our loved ones. Times like these remind us of the true meaning of security and the critical role of those on the front lines defending us.”

The crisis, they added, has strengthened family bonds and community ties. “We check on each other more now,” a resident

said. “We communicate more with friends and relatives, and we make sure everyone is safe. It has made us feel like one big family.”

Overall, residents expressed gratitude for the Kingdom’s leadership and defence forces. “Our government and our armed forces give us reassurance,” one resident concluded. “They make us feel protected, united, and confident that Bahrain will remain safe.”

## Shops face closure, BD20,000 fines under new consumer bill

Tougher rules on discounts, promotions, and breaches

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

Shops could face closure, suspended registration, and fines of up to BD20,000 under a new government bill sent to Parliament aimed at tightening consumer protection.

The draft law, referred to MPs under Decree No. 18 of 2026, would amend parts of Law No. 35 of 2012. It has been sent to Parliament’s Financial and Economic Affairs Committee for review.

Among its key measures, the bill expands the definition of authorities responsible for consumer protection. Any ministry, commission, or department overseeing a sector would be empowered to act, rather than just a single office.

The bill also allows the minister—or a delegated official—to impose administrative penalties on businesses that fail to address legal breaches. Penalties could include temporary shop closures of up to three months, suspension of commercial registration for

six months, or cancellation until the violation is corrected. Daily fines of up to BD1,000 for a first offence and BD2,000 for repeat violations within three years are proposed, with total fines capped at BD20,000. Factors such as seriousness, persistence, gain, and harm caused would guide the fines.

Businesses would generally be given seven days to rectify violations after a warning, though penalties could be applied immediately in urgent cases. Firms could appeal a penalty to the minister within 15 days, with a seven-day window for a response.

Failure to respond would be treated as a rejection,

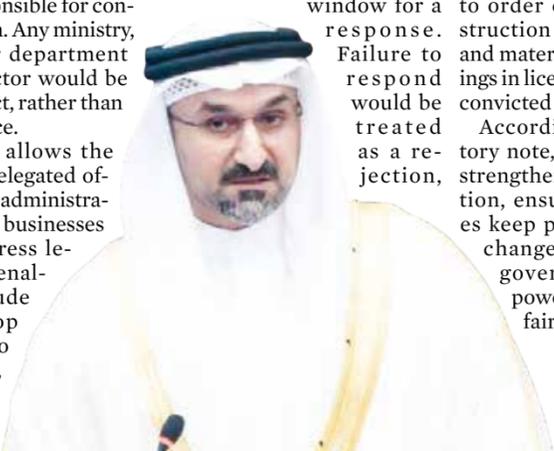
allowing the case to proceed to court within 60 days.

The draft also introduces a licensing system for promotional campaigns, discounts, and clearance sales. After Cabinet approval, the minister would issue rules covering licence conditions, procedures, and fees.

Suppliers would be required to deliver goods and services in accordance with agreements, with the relevant department authorised to review contracts, guarantees, and invoices at the supplier’s request.

Criminal provisions would allow courts, upon conviction, to order confiscation or destruction of offending goods and materials, and publish rulings in licensed media, all at the convicted party’s expense.

According to the explanatory note, the reforms aim to strengthen consumer protection, ensure market practices keep pace with economic changes, and provide the government with clear powers to act against unfair practices.



Abdulla Fakhro,  
Minister of Industry and  
Commerce

## Interior ministry rejects online claims; opens investigation

TDT | Manama

The Ministry of Interior has confirmed that an investigation is under way into the death of 32-year-old Mohammed Abdulmohsen Mohammed, following social media reports on the case.

Authorities said the man had been detained by the National Intelligence Agency

on charges of espionage, accused of passing information to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps related to critical national infrastructure, with the intent of facilitating attacks against the Kingdom. His arrest, the ministry said, was carried out under a valid warrant.

The ministry also dismissed images circulating

online that allegedly show injuries sustained by the deceased, describing them as inaccurate and deliberately misleading.

The case has been referred to the Special Investigation Unit at the Public Prosecution, which will conduct a full and independent probe into the circumstances surrounding the injuries and the cause of death.

## 12-hour shifts at Muharraq Health Centre running smoothly

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

Muharraq Health Centre’s 12-hour working day has not put extra pressure on nearby 24-hour facilities, the Health Ministry said in response to MP Abdulwahid Qarata. Urgent care for the centre’s registered patients remains available through other health centres in Muharraq.

The centre operates in two shifts from 7am to 7pm, Sunday to Thursday, offering general medicine, dental care, mother and child services, early screening, diabetes and chronic disease clinics, as well as pharmacy, lab, and X-ray services. Six health centres in the governorate operate on different schedules: Shaikh Salman



Abdulwahid Qarata, MP

Health Center runs 7am–2pm, Muharraq Health Centre, NBB Arad, and NBB Dair from 7am–7pm, while Halat Bu Maher and the Bank of Bahrain and Kuwait Health Center in Hidd operate 24 hours.

Since July 2022, patients needing care outside Muharraq Health Centre hours can access any of the nine 24-hour cen-

tres, including Halat Bu Maher nearby. Staffing is spread across shifts, with appointments still available during operating hours. From July 2022 to end-2025, Muharraq Health Centre saw 392,410 visits, while Halat Bu Maher handled 345,758 urgent cases, 19.86% of which were referred from Muharraq Health Centre.

The ministry said 8,622 urgent cases were sent from Muharraq Health Centre to government hospitals under approved triage rules. It noted Halat Bu Maher is better suited for a 24-hour operation due to size, capacity, and location. Work has also begun on Galali Health Center, which will increase capacity and ease pressure on existing facilities in Muharraq Governorate.

# End to prison labour?

## Bills push rehabilitation shift

● **Draft laws propose replacing prison labour with rehabilitation**

**Mohammed Darwish**  
TDT | Manama

Compulsory work linked to prison sentences could be replaced with structured rehabilitation and training programmes under two draft laws set to be reviewed by Parliament on Tuesday.

One bill proposes amendments to the Penal Code, while the other targets the law governing reform and rehabilitation centres. Together, they aim to align Bahrain's penal system with a more reform-focused approach centred on reintegration.



Under the proposed Penal Code changes, inmates serving custodial sentences would be assigned rehabilitation and training programmes within reform and rehabilitation centres. These would be tailored to individual circumstances, with the goal of correction and social reintegration.

The second bill would amend Article 18 of the reform and rehabilitation law, making participation in such programmes mandatory for inmates deemed fit, as far as possible in line with their existing skills or trades. Executive regulations would define the structure of these programmes, including their nature, working hours, rewards and conditions, as well as pro-

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

visions for training outside the centres in coordination with relevant authorities.

The amendments would also revise terminology across the 2014 law, replacing references to "employment" with "rehabilitation and training", and "work reward" with "rehabilitation and training reward".

**International Labour Organisation**

The government said the proposals follow observations by the International Labour Organisation and its expert committee, which raised concerns over provisions allowing compulsory labour alongside prison sentences. According to the explanatory note, such provisions may conflict with the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention No. 105, which Bahrain joined in 1998.

The convention prohibits the use of forced labour as punishment for expressing views, participating in strikes, or enforcing labour discipline.

Parliament's Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security Committee has recommended both bills for approval in principle, with unanimous support from members present.

The Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Waqf said the amendments would bring national laws in line with international standards and modern reform principles. The Ministry of Interior also backed the proposals.

The National Institution for Human Rights expressed support, noting the changes respond to international recommendations and reinforce Bahrain's commitment to eliminating forced labour practices.

## Bahrain-Saudi Double Tax under review

**Hasan Barakat / Mohammed Darwish**  
TDT | Manama

A draft law aimed at preventing double taxation between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia is set for review in Parliament on Tuesday, spotlighting cross-border income and financial clarity.

Referred under Decree No. 16 of 2026, the bill has been recommended for consideration by Parliament's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee.

Submitted by the government, the draft law seeks to regulate how income is taxed between the two countries, limit tax avoidance, and ensure that individuals and businesses are not taxed twice on the same earnings. The measure is expected to benefit workers commuting between the two nations, entrepreneurs managing cross-border businesses,



and families with income tied to both economies, who often face uncertainty over taxation.

The legislation applies to residents of one or both states and covers income taxes imposed by either country, its administrative divisions, or local authorities. It also provides key definitions and clarifies how residency is determined when both sides could classify the same person as a tax resident.

The draft further states that the agreement will not affect financial privileges granted to diplomatic and consular missions under international law or special bilateral agreements.

## Lights of reassurance remain

### Shop closed for hiking flashlight prices

**Hasan Barakat**  
TDT | Manama

Raising prices on flashlights, known in high demand across the Kingdom, has landed a shop owner in hot water.

This swift action by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce followed complaints that shops were illegally hiking prices of essential goods.

Several residents told the Daily Tribune: "In times of uncertainty, small lights have become a source of reassurance for households. Yet some retailers are exploiting the situation, hiking prices on these must-have items."

As part of the crackdown, the Ministry's Inspection Directorate conducted checks across 102 retail outlets in Manama, Al Hidd, Diyar Al Muharraq, East Riffa, and Isa Town. Officials



verified pricing, ensured the availability of goods, and monitored compliance with laws and regulations.

Officials said the administrative closure serves as a warning to retailers attempting to take advantage of the public during a critical period.

Residents explained that their use of small lights is driven by caution, not fear. "We rely on these for practical reasons—especially families with children or elderly members," one shopper said. "Access to essentials at fair prices gives a sense of trust and stability."

The Ministry urged consumers to report any suspicious price hikes through its call centre at 80001700, the "Tawasul" system, email at inspect@moic.gov, or other official communication channels.

## Stronger consumer safeguards on the way



**Hasan Barakat**  
TDT | Manama

Lawmakers are set to strengthen Bahrain's consumer protection framework, with a renewed focus on everyday transactions and boosting market confidence.

The government-backed proposals, scheduled for dis-

cussion on Tuesday, aim to enhance safeguards, clarify regulations, and ensure commercial practices keep pace with evolving market activity.

The parliamentary session will examine how the amendments could reinforce consumer trust while maintaining a balanced and fair market environment.

## Ex-Executive director must repay BD53,000 in misuse of cheques

● **An accounting expert calculated the total misappropriated at BD58,936, mostly withdrawn in 2009 and 2010.**

**Mohammed Darwish**  
TDT | Manama

A former executive director has been ordered to repay more than BD53,000 after the Court of Cassation upheld a ruling that he misappropriated

funds from his employer using blank cheques signed by the business owner.

The top court rejected his appeals, leaving the previous ruling in place. Court findings showed that the ex-manager abused his position by filling in over 29 blank cheques, naming himself as the beneficiary, and transferring the money to his personal account and to a private cleaning company he owned.

The business owner had entrusted him with signed blank cheques to handle company affairs. An accounting expert

**The former director claimed the sums were part of a partnership or wages, but the court rejected this, noting they far exceeded his monthly salary of BD500 and amounted to unlawful taking.**

calculated the total misappropriated at BD58,936, mostly withdrawn in 2009 and 2010. The former director claimed the sums were part of a partnership

or wages, but the court rejected this, noting they far exceeded his monthly salary of BD500 and amounted to unlawful taking.

Earlier, the High Civil Court of Appeal had overturned the first-instance dismissal and ordered compensation. It stated that fault had already been established by a prior final judgment awarding temporary compensation of BD5,001, meaning the question of wrongdoing could not be re-litigated.

With the Court of Cassation's refusal of further appeals, the ruling is now final, ending a protracted legal dispute.

# Jobless fund income falls 38.5pc as MPs urged to reject accounts

Shift to short-term investments and rising payouts raise concerns over long-term sustainability

● Assets down 11% to BD546.4m, with securities value dropping 25% while deposits surged 77%

● Unemployment payouts jump, narrowing surplus between contributions and benefits

● Operating cash flow swings to BD77.7m outflow despite strong inflows from investment sales

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

Net investment income at Bahrain's unemployment insurance fund fell



38.5% in 2024, prompting Parliament's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee to urge MPs to reject the audited accounts, citing weaker returns and long-term risks.

The Social Insurance Organisation (SIO) said the fund remains solvent and plans an

actuarial study in 2026. It noted that repeated withdrawals—including about BD200 million in recent years—and benefit changes forced a shift towards short-term investments, limiting returns.

Total assets fell 11% to BD546.4 million from BD614.9

million in 2023. Securities, still the largest component at 65.1% of assets, dropped 25% to BD355.8 million. Meanwhile, bank balances and term deposits surged 77.1% to BD129 million, now making up 23.6% of assets.

Net investment income de-

clined to BD13.95 million from BD22.69 million. Income from securities dropped sharply to BD1.27 million from BD9.66 million, while interest income slipped to BD12.51 million from BD13.74 million. Property income edged down to BD332,000 from BD357,000.

On the operational side, contributions fell 1.6% to BD87.6 million, while total benefits rose 17% to BD40.41 million. Unemployment compensation jumped 87% to BD6.55 million, and allowance payments increased 5% to BD32.17 million, reducing the surplus to BD47.19 million from BD54.41 million.

Cash flow weakened, with operating activities swinging from a BD3.96 million inflow in 2023 to a BD77.69 million outflow in 2024. Investing activities generated BD109.04 million, driven by BD323.3 million in securities sales against BD207.03 million in purchases. Cash reserves rose 89% to BD66.41 million.

Although net assets increased 15% to BD530.87 million due to a drop in liabilities to BD15.58 million, the committee said this masked underlying risks. It warned that rising payouts and lower returns could strain the fund, despite a clean audit from KPMG Fakhro.

## Bahrain, Pakistan move to allow prisoners to serve terms at home

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

A bill sent to Parliament would allow convicted Bahrainis and Pakistanis to serve prison terms in their home country under a transfer agreement signed between the two nations.

The draft law, referred under Decree No. 19 of 2026, has been assigned for initial review by Parliament's Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security Committee. The agreement, signed in Bahrain on December 31, 2025, aims to regulate prisoner transfers, ensure proper enforcement of sentences, and support rehabilitation after release.

Under the 22-article pact, transfers may be requested by the prisoner or a legal representative, but require approval from both governments. The prisoner must be a citizen of the receiving country, with a final conviction and at least six months of the sentence remaining, unless an exception is agreed or the term is life im-



Representative image

prisonment. The offence must also be recognised as a crime in both countries.

Transfers are barred if they affect the sentencing country's sovereignty or security. Prisoners must give written consent, or be represented if unable to do so.

Once approved, the receiving country takes over enforcement of the remaining sentence, generally maintaining its type and

duration. Adjustments may be made only with prior consent and without increasing the penalty.

The agreement also covers pardons, sentence reductions, and reporting requirements. Bahrain's Ministry of Justice and Pakistan's Ministry of Interior will act as central authorities, with all communication conducted through diplomatic channels in English.

## Tougher penalties proposed for blocking agricultural drains

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

Blocking or damaging agricultural drains could soon carry tougher penalties under a new government bill before Parliament.

The draft law seeks to amend Bahrain's 1985 legislation on agricultural drains, introducing stricter punishments and wider powers for

authorities to act against violations. It also updates provisions to align with the current administrative structure.

According to the explanatory note, the changes aim to protect drainage systems, maintain the safe flow of water, and safeguard farmland and public interests. Authorities would be able to step in immediately to remove violations, reducing delays in

clearing blocked or damaged channels.

The bill contains five articles in addition to the preamble. It revises terminology in Decree-Law No. 4 of 1985, amends Article 9, and expands definitions under Article 1 with new clauses. It also introduces two new provisions—Article 8 bis and Article 8 bis (1)—with the final article setting out implementation.

## New GCC tax rules to allow flexible excise levies

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

Parliament is set to review a government bill ratifying amendments to the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) excise tax agreement, allowing greater flexibility in how the levy is calculated.

The proposed changes would permit excise tax to be applied as a percentage of a product's value, a fixed amount per unit, or a combination of both. The

explanatory memorandum says this aims to give GCC states more options in setting tax systems while supporting deeper economic integration.

The amendment also revises the definition of "value of excise goods," clarifying it as the value on which tax may be calculated, rather than strictly the value used.

Key articles of the agreement would be updated. Provisions on setting and adjusting tax rates—previously in Article 3—

would move to Article 6. The revised Article 6 would empower the GCC's Financial and Economic Co-operation Committee to determine how the tax is calculated. It also specifies that the taxable value is based on the retail price, excluding excise tax and value added tax.

Changes to Article 16 would give each member state authority to set payment rules, timelines and procedures for collecting the tax.

## Public hospitals log 91,000+ foreign visits, over BD1 million in revenue

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

Non-Bahraini patients made tens of thousands of visits to Bahrain's government hospitals and health centres in 2025, generating over BD1 million in revenue while continuing to rely on public healthcare services.

In a reply to MP Mahmood Fardan, the Health Ministry said hospitals recorded 91,503



Mahmood Fardan, MP

clinic and emergency visits by non-Bahrainis in 2025 (up to October), with 16,143 admitted for inpatient care. Patients stayed an average of four days, bringing in BD902,353.

The figures show a stable trend. Visits stood at 93,368 in 2024 and 91,363 in 2023, while inpatient numbers were 15,372 and 15,590 respectively. Revenue from hospital services reached BD1.37 million in 2024

and BD1.24 million in 2023, with average stays of five days in both years.

At primary healthcare centres, 18,039 non-Bahraini patients were treated in 2025, generating BD126,276. This marked a decline from 21,222 visits in 2024 and 27,767 in 2023, with revenues also falling over the same period.

The ministry also highlighted exemptions granted under the

2017 fee resolution. In hospitals, 16,795 patients were exempted in 2025, compared with 13,509 in 2024. At health centres, exemptions rose to 72,572. These apply to groups such as GCC nationals, families of Bahrainis, emergency cases, and certain humanitarian situations.

Fees are set under official resolutions and are being updated as part of the country's wider health insurance rollout.

# MPs urged to reject reserve accounts despite \$72m profit

Idle cash, higher fees and gaps in disclosure put the fund under parliamentary scrutiny despite strong annual gains

● **Rising profits, lingering doubts: Fund posts 12.2% profit growth, but MPs question transparency and management**

● **Cash under scrutiny: \$72.17 million left idle, raising concerns over missed investment opportunities**

● **Expenses and fees: Operating costs up 17%, portfolio management fees surge 45.5%, despite stronger overall returns**

**Mohammed Darwish**  
TDT | Manama

Bahrain's Future Generations Reserve grew to \$924.2 million in 2024 and made a \$72.1 million profit, but MPs are still being urged to reject its accounts over idle cash, higher fees and gaps in disclosure.

Parliament's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee said the annual report and audited statements for the year to



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

31 December 2024 should not be approved, even though the National Audit Office said the accounts gave a fair view of the fund's finances, results and cash flows.

## Lacks clarity

The committee said disclosure around the running of the account was not clear enough. Members had agreed at a meeting on 7 January 2026 to visit the reserve's pharmaceutical factory to inspect the project and see what it was producing,

but the visit was later cancelled without a clear reason and without new details on the fund's other investment projects. At the same meeting, the fund's management said the factory had secured the licences needed from the National Health Regulatory Authority (NHRA) to manufacture 17 medicines and that a visit could be arranged once a suitable date was fixed. Management also told the committee that work on the reserve's administrative building was due to finish by 31 May 2026 and that

leasing space there was expected to bring in income.

## No clear investment policy

Members also said there was no clear investment policy for the fund's assets and no clear plan for its property holdings, whose value fell in 2024 from a year earlier. They pointed too to \$72.17 million left in cash and cash equivalents rather than put to work, saying the sum could have earned more for the account.

## Weaker returns and higher costs

The committee also raised two linked concerns: weaker returns and higher costs. Profit as a share of total assets fell to 7.8pc in 2024 from 8.4pc in 2023, and there were no fixed deposits in 2024 after such deposits had yielded 7pc the year before. Operating expenses rose to \$7.11 million from \$6.07 million, driven mainly by a 45.5pc rise in portfolio management fees to \$5.79 million. Pay for those overseeing the account went up 10.5pc to \$821,509, and audit fees rose 6.3pc. In reply, the fund's management told the committee that the reserve invests through specialist global portfolio managers whose fees rise as the amount invested grows, and said care was taken to keep adminis-

trative costs below 1pc.

## Stronger yearly profit

Even with those objections, the fund's books showed a larger reserve and a stronger yearly profit. Total assets rose from \$768.9 million in 2023 to \$924.2 million in 2024. Total financial reserves reached \$917.99 million, up from \$765.37 million. Accumulated reserves climbed to \$621.72 million from \$542.71 million, and retained earnings rose to \$296.84 million from \$224.71 million. Net profit for the year came in at \$72.13 million, up 12.2pc from \$64.28 million in 2023.

## Oil revenue

Money transferred into the reserve from crude exports fell to \$79.02 million in 2024 from \$92.38 million in 2023, a drop of 14.5pc. The report linked that fall to lower oil prices and to the price-linked deduction system then in force. Brent crude ended 2024 at about \$74.6 a barrel, down 3.1pc over the year. For the 2023 and 2024 financial years, the reserve received between one and three dollars from each exported barrel priced above \$40. A new stepped scale passed in 2025 took effect on 1 January 2026.

The report also gave a fuller picture of where the fund's mon-

ey was placed. Cash and near-cash holdings made up 43.3pc of the portfolio, equities 31.5pc, alternative investments 12.4pc, strategic investments 7.9pc and a multi-asset fund 4.9pc. More than half of investments were held for more than five years. By currency, the portfolio was heavily weighted towards the US dollar at 87pc, with sterling at 5.4pc and the euro at 3.6pc. By region, North America accounted for 51.4pc of investments, developed European markets 21.9pc and Bahrain 10.9pc. The reserve also put \$145.6 million into new investments across public and private equities, fixed income and alternative funds.

## Future Generations Reserve

The Future Generations Reserve was created under Law No. 28 of 2006 as a special reserve funded by deductions from oil revenues and by investment income. The law bars any cut or rise in those deductions, or any use of the reserve's money outside investment activity, unless a law allows it. The committee report also recalled that deductions were halted for a time in 2020 and \$450 million was taken from the account in a one-off move to help the state budget during the Covid-19 emergency, with the sum to be restored once the financial effects had passed.

## Mideast war leaves 6,000 tonnes of tea stuck at Kenya port

AFP | Nairobi, Kenya

Between 6,000 and 8,000 tonnes of tea, worth around \$24 million, is stuck at Kenya's port of Mombasa because of the war in the Middle East, trade officials said yesterday.

The East African Tea Trade Association (EATTA) manages auctions at the port city, which serves as a global marketplace where hundreds of thousands of tonnes of tea from the region are sold every year.

Around 65 percent of the east African tea market has been affected by the war that began on February 28 when the United States and Israel launched strikes on Iran, EATTA director George Omuga said.

As a result, "six to eight million kilos" are stuck in Mombasa, he told AFP.

"So that's an average of \$24 million worth of tea at the port," he added.

The tea has been sold to customers but cannot be shipped, mainly to the Middle East, which accounts for about 20 percent of the market, he estimates.

## Oil climbs, stocks fall as markets see no end to war

AFP | London, United Kingdom

### Key figures at around 1630 GMT

Brent North Sea Crude:	▲ 2.6% at \$104.49 a barrel
West Texas Intermediate:	▲ 4.1% at \$98.39 a barrel
New York - Dow:	▼ 1.1% at 45,474.90 points
New York - S&P 500:	▼ 1.0% at 6,414.18
Nasdaq Composite:	▼ 1.4 % at 21,110.59
London - FTSE 100:	▼ less than 0.1% at 9,701.95 (close)
Paris - CAC 40:	▼ 0.9% at 7,701.95 (close)
Frankfurt - DAX:	▼ 1.4% at 22,300.75 (close)
Tokyo - Nikkei 225:	▼ 0.4% at 53,373.07 (close)
Hang Seng Index:	▲ 0.4% at 24,951.88 (close)
Shanghai - Composite:	▲ 0.6% at 3,913.72 (close)
Euro/dollar:	▲ at \$1.1524 from \$1.1523 on Thursday
Pound/dollar:	▼ at \$1.3291 from \$1.3313
Dollar/yen:	▲ at 160.10 yen from 159.83 yen
Euro/pound:	▲ at 86.72 pence from 86.55 pence

WTI, jumped 4.1% to \$98.39.

Wall Street stocks were down by 1% or more in early afternoon trading. European stocks fell and Asian markets ended the day mostly lower.

Friday's market reaction contrasted with the sharp plunge in oil prices and gains for stocks after Trump first delayed the deadline earlier this week.

"Trump appears to be losing his grip on the markets," said FOREX.com analyst Fawad Razaqzada.

"Investors no longer seem to take his statements at face value -- if anything, they're beginning to trade against them, waiting for tangible proof before reacting," he added.

## 2024 budget and final accounts under review

**Hasan Barakat**  
TDT | Manama

The Kingdom's final accounts and budget performance for 2024 are set for review in Parliament on Tuesday, putting public spending and fiscal outcomes under the spotlight.

Prepared by the Ministry of Finance and National Economy, the report includes the final account for the year ending 31 December 2024, along with detailed assessments of budget execution and transfers between government allocations. It has been referred to the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee for scrutiny as part of parliamentary oversight.

The session is expected to evaluate how effectively the budget was implemented and how government spending aligns with national priorities and public needs.

## Rubio attacks Zelensky, ready to divert Ukraine arms to Iran

AFP | Paris, France

Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Friday accused Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky of lying over US demands and voiced openness to diverting weapons to Kyiv to support the US attack on Iran.

Zelensky had said in an interview that the United States was pressing Ukraine to give up the eastern Donbas region to Russia, which invaded four years ago, before finalising any post-war security guarantees to Kyiv.

"That's a lie," Rubio told reporters when asked about Zelensky's remarks.

"I saw him say that, and it's unfortunate he would say that, because he knows that's not true," Rubio said in Paris after talks of the Group of Seven industrialised democracies.

"What he was told is the obvious: security guarantees are not going to kick in until there's an end to a war, because otherwise you're getting yourself involved in the war," Rubio said.

"That was not attached to,

unless he gives up territory," Rubio said.

"I don't know why he says these things. It's not true," Rubio said.

The attack on Zelensky was especially striking coming from Rubio, a former hawkish senator who has largely been seen as more supportive of the Ukrainian cause than some others in President Donald Trump's circles.

Rubio said that the United States was open to shifting assistance to Ukraine after the Unit-

ed States and Israel attacked Iran. "Nothing yet has been diverted, but it could," Rubio said.

"If we need something for America and it's American, we're going to keep it for America first."

But he said there had not yet been any change to the so-called Prioritised Ukraine Requirements List, a NATO initiative established after Trump's return, in which European allies fund weapons requested by Ukraine that are purchased from the United States.

## US-Israeli airstrikes target two steel plants in Iran: agencies

AFP | Washington

US-Israeli airstrikes yesterday damaged two major steel plants in Iran, Iranian media reports said.

"Minutes ago, the American-Zionist enemy targeted the Khuzestan Steel (in southwest Iran) and Mobarakeh Steel factories in Isfahan (central Iran) in two separate attacks," the Fars news agency said, with state broadcaster IRIB also reporting the strikes.

"Rescue forces have immediately arrived at the scene of the incident," Fars wrote.

The news agency added that initial information suggested an "electrical substation and an alloy steel production line" were targeted at Mobarakeh Steel complex, while a warehouse was hit at the Khuzestan Steel Factory.

Steel is a strategically important material essential for industrial and military production, including of missiles, drones and ships.

## Iran turns back ships

AFP | Washington

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they had turned back three ships trying to transit the Strait of Hormuz, adding the route was closed to vessels travelling to and from ports linked to its "enemies".

"The movement of any vessel 'to and from' ports of origin belonging to allies and supporters of the Zionist-American enemies, to any destination and through any corridor, is prohibited," they said.

The Guards also urged civilians across the Middle East to stay away from areas near US forces.



Rocket trails are seen in the sky amid a fresh barrage of Iranian missile attacks above the Israeli coastal city of Netanya, Israel

# G7 allies press Rubio on Iran plans

European ministers warned that Middle East escalation must not divert vital support away from Ukraine

AFP | Cernay-la-Ville

G7 allies were yesterday pressing US Secretary of State Marco Rubio for clarity on American plans for Iran almost one month into the war in the Middle East, as concern intensifies over the damage to the global economy from the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

Having skipped the first day of the meeting at the historic monastery turned luxury hotel complex outside Paris, Rubio arrived at the Vaux-de-Cernay Abbey for a full day of talks with counterparts from leading industrialised democracies.

German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepful said the international community needed to collaborate even more closely now it was dealing with two wars -- including the conflict sparked by Moscow's invasion of Ukraine -- in which Russia and Iran were cooperating.

"We need to strengthen our unity. Given that Iran and Russia are working together in the closest way, we must stand even closer together," Wadepful told reporters.

He told German radio earlier ahead of the talks that allies



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio attends a G7 meeting with other leaders

needed to know "how the US will proceed" in Iran. Rubio, he said, would "perhaps explain this more precisely".

In contrast to usual protocol, and in a sign of the distance between the United States and its allies, there is to be no joint communique at the end of the meeting.

Instead, the G7 presidency, which France holds this year, will issue a statement, said a diplomatic source who asked not to be named.

**'For the world'**

The UK's foreign minister

launched the war with the air strikes on February 28 that killed supreme leader Ali Khamenei.

Before leaving for France, Rubio said Thursday that it was in the "interest" of all G7 nations to push for the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz.

Defending the war, he said: "The president is not just doing a favour to the United States and to our people. This is for the world."

**'Play into Putin's hands'**

With Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha in attendance, European ministers are keen to emphasise support for Kyiv must not be forgotten over four years after Russia's full-scale invasion.

"Putin is cynically hoping that the escalation in the Middle East will divert our attention from his crimes in Ukraine," Wadepful said.

"This calculation must not succeed," he said, warning that any compromising on Ukraine's defence capabilities would "play into Putin's hands".

Writing on X, in his first comment on the meeting, Rubio said he had reiterated at the G7 "that President Trump is committed to reaching a ceasefire and negotiated settlement to the

since the United States and Israel



In a significant break from diplomatic tradition, the meeting will conclude without a joint communique, signaling a growing divide between the United States and its closest allies over the handling of the conflict

Russia-Ukraine war as soon as possible".

France is eager to broaden the scope of the elite G7 club -- whose origins go back to the first G6 summit held in the nearby Chateau de Rambouillet in 1975 -- and which now comprises Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Japan, UK and United States.

It has invited foreign ministers from key emerging markets Brazil and India, as well as Saudi Arabia and South Korea.

## German foreign minister says expects direct US-Iran talks in Pakistan

AFP | Berlin

The United States and Iran are preparing for direct talks "very soon", German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepful said yesterday, as diplomatic efforts to end the Middle East war continue.

"According to my informa-

tion, there have been indirect contacts. And they have also prepared for a direct meeting," Wadepful told public broadcaster Deutschlandfunk.

He added that such a meeting was "expected to take place in Pakistan very soon", without revealing the source of the information.

On Thursday US envoy Steve Witkoff confirmed that Pakistan had passed a 15-point American peace plan to Iran.

Germany's top diplomat said he hoped Rubio would tell his counterparts more about "the approach and the interests of the US" in relation to the conflict.

## Kuwait says main port damaged in drone attack

AFP | Kuwait City

Kuwait's main commercial port was damaged in a drone attack yesterday, authorities said, as Iran pressed its campaign in the Gulf in retaliation for US-Israeli strikes.

The Shuwaikh port was targeted at dawn "by enemy drones; preliminary reports revealed material damage but no human casualties", the Kuwait port authority said in a statement on X.

A second port still under con-

struction in the north of the country was also targeted yesterday, according to the ministry of public works.

The missile and drone attack on the Mubarak al-Kabeer port similarly caused damage but no casualties, the ministry said.

1854

Great Britain and France declare war on Russia, expanding the Crimean War

1910

First seaplane takes off from water under its own power, piloted by Henri Fabre from the Étang de Berre lagoon in Martigues, France



1964

First true pirate radio station, England's Radio Caroline begins regular transmission at noon from the MV Caroline off the coast of Suffolk

1979

A partial meltdown at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in the US results in the release of radioactive gas and iodine into the atmosphere, but no deaths



People gather as workers remove the wreckage of a car outside a residential building that was targeted in southern Tehran

### US-Israeli strikes hit uranium and heavy water sites in Iran: officials

AFP | Washington

Iran's atomic energy organisation said yesterday that US-Israeli strikes targeted a uranium processing facility in central Iran, while local media reported a separate attack on a heavy water reactor.

"The plant in Ardakan, located in Yazd Province, was targeted minutes ago in an attack by the American-Zionist enemy," the organisation said on its Telegram channel, adding that the strike "did not result in the release of any radioactive material."

Separately, the semi-official Fars news agency reported that the Khondab Heavy Water Complex in Markazi province was struck "in two stages by aggression from the American and Zionist enemy," citing provincial official Hassan Ghamari.



TOP  
4  
TWEETS

01



Developing countries face a serious barrier to progress: debt. The Borrower's Platform – a new mechanism supported by the @UN – will offer debt-distressed countries a way to coordinate action, share knowledge & amplify their voice in the global financial system.

@antoniogetterres

02



Engaging with, listening to, and encouraging Europe's next generation. In Stockholm, I was inspired by these students' ideas and their vision for a better Europe. My message to them: your voice matters, you have the power to shape the future

@EP\_President

03



Trump's Mail Tax has arrived. He has already taxed the goods you bought – now he wants you to pay more in shipping as well.

@GavinNewsom

04



Thanks to the Netherlands for stepping up early. This is helping people in Sudan – and in crises around the world – to receive lifesaving aid when every hour counts.

@UNReliefChief

# US weighs sending up to 10,000 troops to Middle East: reports

Defence minister Israel Katz said that Israel would step up strikes against Iran as a result of its continued missile fire, warning the Islamic republic would pay a "heavy price". "Despite the warnings, the firing continues -- consequently, IDF strikes in Iran will intensify and expand to other targets in sectors that help the regime develop and use military means against Israeli civilians. They will pay a heavy price, an increasingly heavy one, for this war crime," Katz said in a video released by his office.

AFP | Washington

The United States is weighing sending up to 10,000 extra troops to the Middle East, US media reported yesterday, as speculation grows that Washington may be preparing a ground operation in Iran.

The deployment would mark a significant boost to Washington's military presence in the region, despite US President Donald Trump insisting that Tehran was taking part in peace talks with Washington to end the war.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the move would aim to provide Trump with "more military options" in the Middle East, engulfed by war since US-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28.

The troops would join thousands of paratroopers and Marines who have already been ordered to the region.

An Iranian official said



Iraqi soldiers inspect the site of a destroyed healthcare center in the Habbaniyah military base, which was targeted by an airstrike killing seven security personnel and wounding 13 others, in Habbaniyah, west of Baghdad

Wednesday that Tehran would retaliate to a ground invasion of its territory by Washington by activating its Houthi rebels in Yemen to attack shipping in the Red Sea.

That would open up a new front in a war of spiralling economic, political and military repercussions.

Trump has repeatedly said he does not plan to send ground troops into combat with Iran.

"It is unclear where precisely forces will go in the Middle East, but they will likely be within striking distance of Iran and Kharg Island, a crucial oil export hub off Iran's coast," the Journal said.

The Pentagon did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment.

Trump has pushed back his deadline for strikes on Iran's energy assets, assuring that talks on ending the war were "going very well."

Israel's military, meanwhile, said early yesterday that it carried out "a wide-scale wave of strikes targeting infrastructure of the Iranian terror regime in the heart of Tehran".

### US not arming Iranian Kurd opposition in Iraqi Kurdistan: official

AFP | Washington

Senior Iraqi Kurdistan official said the United States is not arming Iranian Kurdish opposition groups exiled in his autonomous region, reiterating his government opposes any involvement by these groups in

the Middle East war.

"We have not seen any attempts by the United States, any branch of the United States, to arm Iranian opposition groups in Kurdistan," deputy prime minister of the autonomous northern region, Qubad

Talabani, said.

Regional authorities told the groups it would be "very unwise" for them to take part from Iraqi Kurdistan, he said, adding: "We would not allow that to happen from here".

### More than 300 US troops injured since start of Iran war

AFP | Washington

More than 300 US troops have been wounded since the start of the Iran war on February 28, US Central Command said yesterday.

"Since the start of Operation Epic Fury, approximately 303 US service members have been

wounded. The vast majority of these injuries have been minor, and 273 troops have returned to duty," US Navy Captain Tim Hawkins said.

A US official who asked not to be identified said that 10 troops remain seriously wounded.

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

# Hezbollah says clashed with Israeli forces in two south Lebanon villages

Israel pushes deeper as Hezbollah battles intensify and civilian toll rises sharply

● Hezbollah reports direct ground clashes

● Fighting in Bayada and Shamaa villages

● Fighting in Bayada and Shamaa villages

AFP | Beirut

Hezbollah said yesterday its fighters had clashed directly with Israeli forces in two south Lebanon villages, as Israeli airstrikes on several areas killed at least six people, according to the health ministry.

Lebanon was pulled into the Middle East war when Tehran-backed armed group Hezbollah fired rockets towards Israel on March 2 to avenge the US-Israeli killing of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Israel has responded with large-scale airstrikes on Lebanon and a ground offensive in the south.

In a statement, Hezbollah said its fighters had clashed with "Israeli enemy army forces in the villages of Bayada and Shamaa at point-blank range with light and medium weapons," while



United Nations peacekeepers with the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) drive past firefighters clearing the road at the site of an overnight Israeli airstrike in the area of Naqura in southern Lebanon

also claiming responsibility for attacks on Israeli border towns and positions.

The coastal village of Bayada, adjacent to Shamaa, lies eight kilometres from the border with Israel.

Israeli forces are pushing into numerous towns in southern

Lebanon, with officials saying they aim to create a security zone reaching the Litani River, some 30 kilometres from the border, to push Hezbollah back and protect northern Israeli communities.

Yesterday, Israel launched a series of airstrikes on several

areas, particularly in southern Lebanon, according to Lebanese state media.

One of the strikes, on the town of Saksakiyeh in the Sidon district, killed "four civilians and wounded eight others," in an initial toll reported by the health ministry.



Israeli army soldiers stand next to a self-propelled Howitzer artillery gun positioned in the upper Galilee in northern Israel near the border with southern Lebanon

At dawn, Israel had targeted the Tahouit al-Ghadir area in Beirut's southern suburbs without prior warning, killing two people, according to the health ministry.

Israeli army spokesperson Efi Defrin said yesterday that "Contrary to the declaration by the Lebanese government earlier this year - Hezbollah is still operating and conducting attacks from southern Lebanon."

"If the Lebanese government will not disarm Hezbollah, the IDF (army) will," he said.

After nearly four weeks of war between Hezbollah and Israel, Nicolas Von Arx, region-

al director of the International Committee of the Red Cross, warned yesterday that "the humanitarian situation is worsening and civilians, as usual, are paying the highest price" in Lebanon.

After meeting Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, he said, "Civilians must be protected wherever they are, whether they remain in their homes or are forced to flee".

According to the authorities, the war has forced more than one million people to flee their homes, and more than a thousand people have been killed since the conflict began.

## US Senate moves to end airport chaos



A TSA agent looks on as people wait in line to go through security at LaGuardia airport

AFP | Washington

The US Senate moved yesterday to end a budget standoff that has forced thousands of airport security staff to work without pay and caused long delays at airports.

A lapse in government funding has left Transportation Security Administration (TSA) staff -- who screen passengers, baggage and cargo -- working without pay since mid-February.

Airports in several cities have warned travelers to arrive hours earlier than usual because of long security lines.

The funding dispute centered on demands by opposition Democrats for reforms of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) authority, which has faced nationwide

criticism of its aggressive tactics against undocumented immigrants and for the killings of two US citizens this year.

Senators voted in favor of a bill shortly after 2:00 am (0600GMT) to fund all of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) -- which is the TSA's parent agency -- except ICE and Border Patrol, for 2026.

The bill would provide funding for the TSA, the Coast Guard and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, among other agencies.

It must now be passed by the House.

More than 300 TSA staff have quit and unscheduled absences have surged since the shutdown began, leading to extended travel delays and airports struggling to screen travelers.

## Nepali rapper Shah sworn in as prime minister

AFP | Kathmandu

Nepal's rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah was sworn in as prime minister yesterday after sweeping the first election since deadly anti-corruption protests toppled the government last year.

The 35-year-old reformist and his Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) dominated polls this month on a platform of youth-driven political change.

"I, Balendra Shah, in the name of the country and people, pledge that I will be loyal to the constitution," Shah said, dressed all in black, including his trademark dark



Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) leader Balendra Shah (2nd R) takes oath as prime minister during a swearing-in ceremony in Kathmandu

sunglasses.

Crowds at the ceremony cheered and chanted his name after he formally took office, where he named key cabinet posts, including former youth activist Sudan Gurung as interior minister.

At least 77 people were killed in the anti-corruption youth uprising, which began over a brief social media ban but tapped into longstanding fury over economic hardship in the nation of 30 million people.

Shah, better known as Balen, was sworn in a day after he released his first public statement since winning the March 5 elections, via a rap song posted on social media.

## Mexico searches for missing boats ferrying aid to Cuba

AFP | Mexico City

The Mexican Navy was searching yesterday for two boats that went missing while transporting humanitarian aid to crisis-hit Cuba, authorities and the convoy organizers said.

The vessels set sail last Friday from Isla Mujeres in Mexico's southeastern state of Quintana Roo, with nine crew of different nationalities on board, Mexico's navy said Thursday in a statement.

But communication with the crew was lost, it added.

The Nuestra America Convoy said earlier that it would use



Mexican Navy ARM Papaloapan prepares to assist the boat Maguro, part of the Convoy with 30 tons of humanitarian aid bound for Cuba

air, land and sea to deliver food, medicine and supplies to the communist island which has risked being plunged into darkness since US President Donald Trump vowed in January to starve it of oil.

"Mexican authorities have activated their search and rescue protocol for two sailboats en route to Havana as part of the Convoy, which have not yet arrived," a spokesperson for the convoy told AFP.

"The captains and crews are experienced sailors, and both vessels are equipped with appropriate safety systems and signalling equipment," the spokesperson said.

# Classifieds

## VACANCIES AVAILABLE

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# CAMPUS

## American University of Bahrain Celebrates the Impact of Youth on Bahraini Youth Day

Manama

The American University of Bahrain (AUBH) marked Bahraini Youth Day, observed annually on 25 March, by spotlighting the vital contribution of young Bahrainis to the Kingdom's progress and innovation landscape.

The University emphasized that youth continue to play a defining role in shaping the nation's future, driving forward economic and social development, and contributing to a more prosperous and forward-looking society, particularly in a challenging regional landscape that calls for resilience and renewed determination.

Furthermore, AUBH expressed pride in its students for the caliber of achievements they have demonstrated across academic, professional and competitive platforms, both in Bahrain and internationally. These accomplishments reflect the strength of the University's educational approach, which goes beyond traditional learning by combining academic excellence with practical, real-world



Dr. Wafa Al Mansoori

experience.

The American University of Bahrain continues to invest in young talent as a key driver

of sustainable development, equipping the next generation to contribute to the Kingdom's progress and future growth.

On this occasion, Dr. Wafa Al Mansoori, Acting President and Chief Academic Officer of the American University of Bahrain, said: "Bahraini Youth Day offers an important occasion to acknowledge the potential of our young people and the meaningful role they play in shaping the Kingdom's future. Amid challenging circumstances that call for unity and collective responsibility, Bahraini youth have shown remarkable awareness, resilience, and sound judgement in responding to a rapidly evolving landscape, while continuing to contribute across a wide range of fields in ways that reinforce the Kingdom's progress and prosperity."

Dr. Al Mansoori added: "We remain focused on equipping our students with the knowledge, mindset, and capabilities needed to lead with purpose and create meaningful impact. By nurturing capable and forward-looking individuals, we aspire to develop a new generation of leaders driven by a deep sense of responsibility towards society and the nation's continued progress."

## President of RCSI Medical University of Bahrain: Ensuring Continuity of Education and Safeguarding Our Community Remain Top Priorities

Manama

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) – Medical University of Bahrain has reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to sustaining academic continuity while safeguarding the wellbeing of its community. In response to the current circumstances, the University has implemented a comprehensive set of operational measures to ensure uninterrupted learning, while upholding the highest standards of academic excellence.

On this occasion, Professor Sameer Ootom, President of RCSI Medical University of Bahrain, emphasised that the continuity achieved across the different sectors is a testament to the Kingdom's enduring commitment to national security and stability under the wise leadership of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, King of the Kingdom of Bahrain, with the close oversight of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister, who has affirmed that the safety of the nation and its people remains paramount. Professor Ootom also expressed his appreciation for



Professor Sameer Ootom

the Ministry of Education and the Higher Education Council, commending their efforts and leadership in navigating the current phase and in introducing effective measures and guidance to support the continuity and stability of the higher education sector.

In line with national guidance, the University acted swiftly to activate its operational plans, ensuring the continued delivery of its academ-

ic programmes online to the highest standards. The safety of students, alongside academic and administrative staff, was placed at the forefront of all measures, while teaching progressed seamlessly through a comprehensive distance-learning model, enabling continuity of study and sustained academic support.

Professor Ootom further highlighted that academic and administrative teams, in

coordination with colleagues in Dublin, continue to work in a highly coordinated and sustained manner to support students and ensure the uninterrupted delivery of teaching, alongside providing health and wellbeing support. He added that the University remains in close engagement with its partners and stakeholders, working collaboratively towards shared goals, while maintaining clear and timely communication with students through official channels, including regular programme-specific updates to support clarity and academic assurance during this period.

The President of RCSI Medical University of Bahrain concluded by reaffirming that, as a leading institution in medical and health sciences, we express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Kingdom of Bahrain's leadership for the swift and exemplary management of this situation. The University remains firmly committed to advancing its mission to "educate, nurture and discover for the benefit of human health", in service of the people of Bahrain and in support of the Kingdom's continued progress.

# Sabalenka, Sinner keep 'Sunshine Double' in sight with Miami wins

Sinner cruises into semis as Sabalenka-Gauff final headlines Miami Open

● Sabalenka beats Rybakina in straight sets

● Gauff crushes Muchova

● Sinner cruises past Tiafoe easily

● Zverev sets up Sinner clash

AFP | Miami

World number one and defending champion Aryna Sabalenka subdued second-ranked rival Elena Rybakina 6-4, 6-3 on Thursday to book a Miami Open title clash with American Coco Gauff.

Sabalenka, who fell to Rybakina in the Australian Open final before turning the tables on the Kazakh in the Indian Wells title match this earlier this month, broke the big-serving Rybakina twice in each set to come out on top in the blockbuster semi-final and keep her bid for the "Sunshine Double" of Indian Wells and Miami on track.

Men's world number two Jannik Sinner, who like Sabalenka lifted his first Indian Wells title two weeks ago, also advanced, dominating American Frances Tiafoe 6-2, 6-2 to reach the men's semi-finals.

Their victories mean both the ATP and WTA could see a "Sunshine Double" in the same year for the first time since Novak Djokovic and Victoria Azarenka swept the two prestigious hardcourt tournaments back in 2016.

Sabalenka, who had to save a match point in overcoming Rybakina in the Indian Wells final, applied ruthless pressure on Rybakina's serve while delivering a sterling service performance



Aryna Sabalenka returns serves to Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan



Jannik Sinner of Italy returns a shot against Frances Tiafoe of the United States

that featured nine aces -- including four in a row across the seventh and ninth games of the opening set.

"I think I did everything right," the Belarusian said. Sabalenka seized the first break for a 3-1 lead in the opening. Rybakina broke back, but Sabalenka broke again to pocket the set and too control in the second with a break for 2-0 in a game which Rybakina led 40-0.

Trailing 0-4, Rybakina clawed back a break for 4-1 but Sabalenka wouldn't flinch again. Rybakina saved one match point on her own serve before Sabalenka served it out with a love game punctuated by a fierce forehand winner.

It was just one of the com-

**30**  
consecutive sets at ATP Masters 1000 level have now gone Sinner's way, as he has not dropped a set in the category since last October in Shanghai

manding victories at Hard Rock Stadium, home of the NFL's Miami Dolphins, on Thursday.

Four-time Grand Slam champion Sinner needed just 71 minutes to dispatch Tiafoe and set up a semi-final meeting with fourth-ranked German Alexander Zverev -- who swept past 19th-ranked Argentinian Fran-

cisco Cerundolo 6-1, 6-2 in just 65 minutes.

Fourth-ranked Gauff, who had needed three sets in each of her prior four matches, overwhelmed Czech Karolina Muchova 6-1, 6-1 to secure her place in Saturday's women's final.

'Good serving day'

Gauff surrendered a break on a double fault in the opening game against Muchova then won the next 10 games.

She broke Muchova again to finish the match after 89 minutes, booking her final berth less than three weeks after she retired from her third-round match at Indian Wells with a nerve issue affecting her left arm.

"I think I feel the improve-

**YOU KNOW WHAT**  
Gauff rebounded from an early break to win 10 straight games in a stunning semi-final display

ments are happening -- especially with my forehand -- I was happy with how it's been this whole tournament," Gauff said.

Sinner stretched his ATP Masters 1000 set win streak to 30, having not dropped a set at the level since last October in Shang-

hai.

He broke Tiafoe to open the match, and was off and running, dropping just nine points on his serve in the match.

Sinner, the 2024 Miami champion, fired 14 aces and 33 winners in all against 15 unforced errors.

"It was a good serving day for sure," said Sinner, who is vying to become the first man to win both Indian Wells and Miami in the same year since Roger Federer in 2017.

He'll face a familiar semi-final foe in Zverev, having beaten the German in straight sets in the same round at Indian Wells.

"Tomorrow will be the toughest test," Zverev acknowledged. "I'm looking forward to it."

## China give World Cup-bound Curacao wake-up call with 2-0 defeat

AFP | Beijing

Physical China beat World Cup-bound Curacao 2-0 yesterday in the Caribbean island nation's first match under new Dutch coach Fred Rutten after the abrupt departure of veteran Dick Advocaat.

Wei Shihao and Zhang Yuning scored either side of the break at Sydney's Stadium Australia in a wake-up call for the tiny country ahead of its debut appearance at the global showpiece in North America in June-July.

Curacao, with a population of just 156,000, is the smallest nation ever to make a World Cup.

Despite this they came through CONCACAF qualifying unbeaten under Dutchman Advocaat with three wins and three draws and the experi-



China's Wei Shihao (C) celebrates after scoring against Curacao

enced 78-year-old was expected to be at the helm when they create football history.

But he unexpectedly left last month to care for his ill daughter and was replaced by Rutten.

It proved to be a losing start for the former FC Twente, PSV Eindhoven, Feyenoord and Schalke coach, whose side are in a challenging Group E at the World Cup alongside Germany, Ivory Coast and Ecuador.

China, who failed to qualify for the World Cup, dominated the early exchanges in the friendly match that is part of the FIFA Series 2026.

But it was Curacao who had the first sniff of goal with former Birmingham City midfielder Juninho Bacuna's long-range strike narrowly missing the upright.

China, ranked 93 to Curacao's 81, had to wait until the 40th minute for their first clear chance when Wang Shangyuan blazed over the bar.

## Ex-England manager Hodgson, 78, returns as Bristol City boss

AFP | London

Former England manager Roy Hodgson will take charge of Championship side Bristol City until the end of the season, 44 years after he last managed the Robins.

Hodgson, 78, replaces Gerhard Struber, who left the club yesterday after a six-game winless run realistically ended hopes of making the play-offs for promotion to the Premier League.

"I have had great conversations with the board and I am really excited by the opportunity to help until the end of the season," said Hodgson, who will face Sheffield United in his first game on Friday.

With City 16th in the table



Roy Hodgson

and unlikely to be dragged into a relegation battle, chief executive Charlie Boss said Hodgson's appointment was designed to set "standards and values" going forward.

"Roy's appointment is about more than the results of the next seven games," said Boss.

# Back-to-back World Cup titles a 'dream' for Argentina, says Tagliafico

Argentina seek to become first nation since Brazil 1962 to retain World Cup

● Argentina last won back-to-back World Cups in 1962

● Brazil (1958, 1962) and Italy (1934, 1938) only repeat champions

● Messi says this will be his sixth and final World Cup

AFP | Lyon

Argentina full-back Nicolas Tagliafico says becoming the first team to successfully defend the World Cup title in 64 years would be a "dream" for the three-time world champions.

The South American giants are among the favourites for this year's tournament in the United States, Mexico and Canada, after winning the title in Qatar four years ago, inspired by Lionel Messi.

The 38-year-old Messi has said this will be his sixth and final World Cup but Argentina have been in strong form heading into the finals, finishing top of the South American qualifying standings.

The last nation to win back-to-back World Cups was Pele's Brazil in 1958 and 1962, following in the footsteps of Italy who won the second and third editions of the global showpiece in 1934 and 1938.



Nicolas Tagliafico, Nicolas Otamendi and Lionel Messi of Argentina walk out the pitch after a match (file photo)

"Only Brazil and Italy have won two consecutive World Cups, but that was a long time ago," Tagliafico told AFP.

"It's a dream, like our dream of winning one, but we have to focus on the day-to-day, one match at a time, without getting carried away, because in the end, it's the daily work that will pay off."

## 'Enthusiasm'

Argentina still have largely the same squad which won the title in Qatar four years ago, although

**64**  
years have passed since any team successfully defended the World Cup title

some younger players have recently broken into the side.

Como rising star Nicolas Paz, Bournemouth defender Marcos Senesi and Strasbourg's Valentin Barco are among the new faces hoping to feature at the World Cup.

Barco's club teammate Joaquin Panichelli, the leading scorer in France's Ligue 1 this season, was also expected to play a part at the World Cup but that now looks doubtful after he suffered a knee injury in training Thursday.

Media reports suggest he has



Lyon defender Tagliafico highlighted the tournament's massive expansion to 48 teams across three countries, warning even champions could exit in the round of 32



It's a dream, like our dream of winning one, but we have to focus on the day-to-day, one match at a time, without getting carried away, because in the end, it's the daily work that will pay off

NICOLAS TAGLIAFICO

nothing has been discussed regarding the overall organisation," he added.

"We know we'll be in Kansas City (base camp), but apart from that, we know nothing..."

"Furthermore, there's another crucial match, and we could have the misfortune, in the round of 32, for some unfortunate detail to eliminate us.

"It's a different World Cup, with many more teams, and I think it will be even more competitive."

Argentina face Mauritius in a friendly later yesterday, before continuing their World Cup preparations against Zambia on Tuesday.

They were originally due to face European champions Spain in the Finalissima in Doha, but that game was cancelled due to the United States' and Israel's war on Iran.

Their title defence starts on June 16 against Algeria in Kansas City before moving on to Arlington where they will face Austria and Jordan.

torn his ACL and, with only three months to go before the start of the World Cup, is now likely to miss the tournament.

"I think there's a mix of young players, perhaps less experienced, but with a lot of enthusiasm and a strong desire to wear the national jersey," said Tagliafico.

"I have a good feeling about this team, even if sometimes it seems like they're relaxing.

"But in competitions like this, the team rediscovers its best form, it gets its motivation back"

Lyon's Tagliafico is also aware that this year's expanded 48-team tournament across an entire continent will be a different beast to the World Cup Argentina won in Qatar, where every match was played within or near Doha.

"From travel to training and match venues, the truth is that

# Klopp hails Salah as one of Liverpool's 'all-time greats'

AFP | London

Jurgen Klopp believes Mohamed Salah will leave Liverpool as one of the "all-time greats", with his "unmatched numbers" likely to prove tough to top for future generations at Anfield.

Egypt forward Salah announced on Tuesday he would bring the curtain down on a brilliant nine years with Liverpool at the end of the season.

The 33-year-old arrived from Roma in 2017 and has made 435 appearances for Liverpool to date, scoring 255 goals to be third on the club's list of all-time goalscorers behind Ian Rush and Roger Hunt.

"In the moment when you work with him, it is the same as every other player: 'You can't lose the ball here, you have to defend here', all these kind of things," Klopp told the Anfield Wrap on Thursday.

"But with the bigger view, it is just ridiculous. Unmatched numbers -- will we be talking in 10 years and someone else has them? (Hugo) Ekitike or whoever. I think it will be really



Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah (L) and manager Jurgen Klopp (R) speak ahead of a match (file photo)

difficult (to surpass Salah).

"I think he is one of the all-time greats."

Under Klopp, Salah won the Champions League, Premier League, three domestic cups, the UEFA Super Cup, and the Club World Cup.

The bulk of those trophies came with Salah on the right

of a front three also featuring Brazilian Roberto Firmino and Senegal's Sadio Mane.

Together, the trio scored 338 goals in five seasons.

Salah led the way with 156 of those goals -- 49 more than Mane and 81 ahead of Firmino.

"He (Salah) was part of the best front three in world football

for a long time -- the one with the most numbers. That says something," said Klopp.

"It is not easy to be slightly above the other two guys. They all had their specific skills, but Mo was the one for the final moment. He wanted it more than anybody."

Klopp stunned Liverpool fans two years ago by announcing he would resign at the end of the 2023/24 season after "running out of energy".

He went on to receive an emotional farewell from the Anfield faithful following his last game in charge, at home to Wolves.

Klopp now hopes Salah gets a similar reception come his last game for Liverpool.

"We (Salah and Klopp) texted last night," said the former Reds boss. "I really hope he enjoys the rest of the season. I know Mo will only enjoy it if he is winning football games and scoring.

"I hope on this last matchday you (Liverpoolfans) all will have a smile on your face and just be happy and thankful that you were part of one of the most incredible careers we will ever be part of."

# Bolivia beat Suriname 2-1 to advance in World Cup playoffs

AFP | Monterrey

Bolivia produced a second-half fightback to shatter Suriname's unlikely dream of World Cup qualification with a 2-1 victory in their FIFA playoff game in Mexico on Thursday.

A 79th-minute penalty from Santos striker Miguel Terceros following an equalizer from teenage substitute Moises Paniagua fired Bolivia into a winner-take-all final playoff against Iraq next Tuesday.

Suriname, who had been bidding to become the lowest ranked team in history to qualify for the World Cup, had taken the lead in the 48th minute when Liam van Gelderen bundled home a close-range finish at the BBVA Stadium in Monterrey.

That goal looked like being enough to secure victory for the former Dutch colony, who are ranked 123rd in the world and are made up mostly of players from the Netherlands of Surinamese descent.

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# Piastri outshines Mercedes duo to go fastest in Japan practice

McLaren shows pace at Suzuka as rivals struggle for rhythm and consistency

● Piastri tops second practice session

● Antonelli and Russell follow closely

● McLaren shows unexpected strong pace

● Norris recovers after disrupted sessions

AFP | Suzuka

McLaren's Oscar Piastri powered to the fastest time in yesterday's second practice for the Japanese Grand Prix, usurping the dominant Mercedes of Kimi Antonelli and George Russell.

Piastri is yet to even start a grand prix this season but the Australian gave a reminder of his talent with a lap of 1min 30.133sec in dry, sunny conditions at Suzuka.

The 19-year-old Italian Antonelli, who won the first grand prix of his career in China two weeks ago, was second, 0.092sec behind Piastri.

Early championship leader Russell, who was fastest in the morning practice ahead of Antonelli, was third.

Piastri has endured a nightmare start to the season, crashing on his way to the grid at

**”** We felt like we made some good progress, particularly in the second practice session, which was encouraging. The feeling is positive and we've gathered some valuable data that puts us in a solid position

OSCAR PIASTRİ

the opener in Australia and failing to start the grand prix in China because of a technical problem.

He hailed a “decent day” in Japan, with McLaren team-mate and world champion Lando Norris clocking the fourth-fastest time.

“We felt like we made some good progress, particularly in the second practice session, which was encouraging,” said Piastri.

“The feeling is positive and we've gathered some valuable data that puts us in a solid position.”

Mercedes have established themselves as the team to beat so far this season, claiming a one-two finish in both grands prix to date.

They were again out in front in the morning practice session when Russell led Antonelli to



McLaren's Australian driver Oscar Piastri drives into the pit lane during the second practice session

top the timesheets ahead of Norris and Piastri.

Piastri got the better of both Silver Arrows in the afternoon and Russell admitted the McLaren's pace was “a little bit of a surprise”.

“I don't see why it wouldn't be genuine, to be honest,” said Russell, who was 0.205sec slower than Piastri.

“I think Lando's had a disruptive day but Oscar has been pretty on it from the first lap out of

the box this morning.”

## ‘Tricky day’

Norris ended the practice session strongly after sitting out the first half because of a hydraulic leak.

The British driver, who did not start the Chinese Grand Prix because of a separate technical issue to Piastri, also missed half of the morning practice.

Norris called it “a tricky day”. “Around a track like this you

just want laps to build confidence and refine the set-up, and right now we're two or three steps behind with no long runs and very limited consecutive running,” he said.

Charles Leclerc was fifth ahead of Ferrari team-mate Lewis Hamilton.

Hamilton, who finished third in China for his first podium since joining Ferrari, said over his team radio that he was “very slow because I have no confi-



Piastri hasn't even started a race this season but still topped practice, underlining McLaren's sudden turnaround in pace

dence in the car”.

Red Bull's four-time world champion Max Verstappen was 10th, 1.376sec slower than Piastri.

Alex Albon had an eventful morning and he was again in the thick of it in the second practice.

The Williams driver almost shunted into Alpine's Pierre Gasly in the pits and later came to a standstill for several seconds on the track before regaining power.

Albon crashed into Cadillac's Sergio Perez in the morning and also skidded deep into the gravel before clipping a barrier.

Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso took part in the afternoon practice after being replaced by reserve driver Jak Crawford for the morning session.

Alonso arrived in Japan late following the birth of his first child.

## Alexander-Arnold must accept ‘unfair’ England snub, says Tuchel

AFP | London

England manager Thomas Tuchel says he has been “a degree unfair” on Trent Alexander-Arnold after excluding the Real Madrid right-back despite naming a 35-man squad for friendlies against Uruguay and Japan.

The matches at Wembley yesterday and Tuesday are the final opportunities for players to impress in an England shirt before Tuchel names his squad for the World Cup.

However, Alexander-Arnold's chances of selection for the tournament in north America appear slim as he not only missed out on the initial squad, but was also overlooked in favour of Arsenal's Ben White after Jarrell Quansah dropped out due to injury.

White has not played for England since leaving the 2022 World Cup early and then making himself unavailable for selection under Tuchel's predecessor, Gareth Southgate.



Trent Alexander-Arnold

“A sportive choice. Maybe a hard choice and maybe to a degree unfair,” said Tuchel on Thursday when asked to explain the omission of former Liverpool defender Alexander-Arnold.

“I know it creates noise when you leave a player like Trent out. We had a call, I tried to explain the situation. He just has to accept it.”

## World Cup boost as late goal earns Australia 1-0 win over Cameroon

AFP | Sydney

Jordan Bos snatched a late winner as a lacklustre Australia edged Cameroon 1-0 for a confidence-boosting victory as they fine-tune preparations ahead of the World Cup.

There were few opportunities in the four friendly at Sydney's Stadium Australia until the Feyenoord midfielder pounced with five minutes left.

Ajdin Hrustic missed a penalty in the much-needed win for a side that suffered two losses in the previous international window, falling 1-0 to Venezuela and 3-0 to Colombia.

The clash was part of the FIFA Series 2026, a mini-tournament that also features fellow World Cup qualifier Curacao, who were beaten 2-0 by China in an earlier match at the same venue.

“First half we couldn't really break through, and then second half we kept on coming,” Bos said.

“We had some chances and it was coming down to the last



Australia's Jordan Bos (C) celebrates after scoring

10 minutes, and I got the goal in and we got the win. So that's important.”

The Socceroos will be at a sixth straight World Cup and coach Tony Popovic used the match to run his eye over some inexperienced players.

With a host of places in his World Cup squad still up for grabs, he handed debuts to 18-year-old Colorado Rapids defender Lucas Herrington and Poland-based striker Deni Juric. Neither player showed nerves in a lively opening as the hosts

pressed for an early breakthrough.

But they struggled to keep control against a young Cameroon side rebuilding after failing to qualify for the World Cup.

Chances in the first half were few and far between on a slippery pitch, with both sides missing a creative spark.

Popovic replaced Juric and Martin Boyle with Awer Mabil and Nestory Irankunda up front for the second half and the intensity lifted.

It culminated with Cameroon debutant Oliver Kamdem conceding a penalty with 20 minutes left, but goalkeeper Devis Epassy went the right way to deny Hrustic.

Irankunda twice went close as the clock ticked down before Bos's late heroics, beating a defender after being fed the ball by Paul Okon.

Australia are in World Cup Group D with co-hosts the United States, Paraguay and a yet-to-be-determined European nation.