



PM inspects emergency shelter, digital resilience amid tensions Page 2



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KUWAIT FORCES STAY VIGILANT AFTER DEADLY IRANIAN STRIKE

Grief as Kuwait buries young Elna



Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah
Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

The world doesn't want Iran to possess nuclear weapons

"FOR every ailment there is a cure, except for folly, which defies all remedies." – This verse by Abu al-Tayyib al-Mutanabbi aptly describes the Iranian regime.

For 47 years, it has been shooting itself in the foot, and deluding itself that it can change the world through reckless practices, but the reality was clear to all.

The Iranian regime is dragging a great nation with a rich history of civilizational contributions back into the Middle Ages through the daily follies it commits.

This regime is not only accurately described as Hitlerian, as mentioned previously, but it also deliberately causes suffering for its own people, as if taking revenge on them and on the peoples of the region, which is its natural sphere for neighborly relations and economic exchange.

Before 1979, trade was a source of strength for Iran, providing a decent life for tens of millions of citizens who today live below the poverty line.

Since February 1979, the ruling clique in Iran has pursued policies that have alarmed its neighbors and the world, after enshrining the slogan "exporting the revolution" in the constitution of the Islamic Republic.

At that time, the regime focused on inciting sectarian strife, a phenomenon previously unknown in the region.

It established sectarian groups that carried out massacres against innocent civilians in all Gulf states and other Arab countries in pursuit of an unattainable goal.

Despite these criminal acts committed by the Tehran regime against the Gulf states, the latter did not hesitate to extend a hand of assistance and cooperation to Iran.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have repeatedly sought to guide the Iranian regime away from its reckless course.

Saudi Arabia overlooked the terrorist attacks it suffered, and worked on signing an agreement with Iran under Chinese mediation.

The United Arab Emirates spared no effort in assisting the Iranian people to overcome economic hardships through various means.

Qatar made tireless efforts to bridge the gap between the international community and Iran through extensive mediation, as did the Sultanate of Oman.

Despite the terrorist attacks it has suffered at the hands of its Persian neighbor, Kuwait has continued to pursue building bridges of cooperation with Iran.

Bahrain has suffered attacks for the past five decades from this reckless neighbor, yet it has seized every opportunity to establish a normal relationship. However, Iranian expansionist ambitions have always been present and have consistently been stirred within Bahrain.

Therefore, when we study recent political history, it becomes clear that the Iranian regime of the mullahs has built its policies on a fragile and misguided idea.

The regime has never realized that it cannot change cultural beliefs, nor can it act as a regional policeman, a role that ended with the conclusion of World War II.

It has failed to understand that nations are increasingly capable of exercising their sovereign rights and formulating their own policies free from external dictates and pressures.

Thus, when we ask what the Iranian regime seeks from the countries of the region after all this, the answer is evident - it is a sterile regime, incapable of producing any civilized or constructive action.

With the Iranian regime continuing to pursue the policies it has followed since 1979, is there not a single rational person within that regime who can correct this destructive course that brought immense suffering to Iran and the region?

One undeniable truth remains - the world will never accept, under any circumstances, that a reckless regime possesses weapons of mass destruction.

A regime of this barbaric nature, filled with extremists, would not hesitate to use nuclear weapons at any time.

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Mourners pay their final respects as 11-year-old Elna Abdullah is laid to rest at Sulaibikhat Cemetery in Kuwait following her death from shrapnel in the Wednesday Iranian attack.

Photo by Rezk Tawfiq

- Public rallies to strengthen blood reserves
- KNG Chief chairs meeting on readiness, emergency plans
- Kuwait rejects false port incident reports
- Crackdown on rumors during security crisis
- Grid restored after drone interceptions
- Shuwaikh port ensures steady flow of goods

By Munif Naif and Mohammad Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: Kuwait laid to rest 11-year-old Elna Abdullah in Sulaibikhat Cemetery on Wednesday after she was killed by shrapnel from the Iranian attack on a residential area in the Capital Governorate.

A large number of mourners gathered to offer condolences to the girl's father and share in his profound grief.

Elna succumbed to her injuries despite the efforts of emergency medical teams to save her. Her father revealed that his daughter was sleeping with her sister when she was struck by shrapnel from a missile. He confirmed that her sister and mother are in good health.

He expressed his gratitude to Kuwait and its government, and also thanked the Kuwaiti people for their support, saying, "The people of Kuwait are my family."

Among the mourners was the former National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim, who offered his condolences.

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An expatriate contributes to Kuwait's emergency blood reserves, donating to support hospitals and save lives amid the ongoing regional tensions.

KUNA photo

Attack on Kuwait condemned

Philippine Embassy in Kuwait urges Filipinos to stay vigilant

By Marlon Aquino Malinao
Managing Editor

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: The Philippine Embassy in Kuwait has urged all Filipinos in the country to remain vigilant and to follow official advisories issued by Kuwaiti authorities amid escalating tensions in the Middle East.

In a statement sent to Arab Times, the Embassy called on nationals to strictly comply with instructions from the Government of Kuwait, particularly the Ministry of Interior and the General Department of Civil Defense. It also advised Filipinos to stay home or in secure locations, avoid unnecessary travel, keep mobile devices fully charged, and refrain from spreading misinformation.

The Embassy expressed appreciation to the Kuwaiti government for its measures to ensure public safety and security. "The Philippines condemns the attacks against Kuwait and conveys



Embassy of the Philippines in Kuwait

its solidarity and support as Kuwait confronts this serious assault on its sovereignty and territory," the statement said.

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India backs Kuwait sovereignty strongly: Ambassador Tripathi

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: The Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Paramita Tripathi affirms India's unwavering support for Kuwait's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and expressed solidarity during the current exceptional regional security situation, which has rapidly evolved since February 28, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a message sent to the Indian community in Kuwait, Ambassador Tripathi explained that India firmly condemns any violation of Kuwait's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The safety and security of Indian citizens in Kuwait is the Indian government's top priority.

She assured that the embassy is monitoring the community's situation around the clock and continues to provide support and assistance via a dedicated hotline and email, with all consular services operating normally.

The ambassador expressed pride in the calm, positive spirit and resilience shown by the Indian community and thanked Kuwaiti authorities for their professional efforts in protecting all residents.

She revealed that recent high-level discussions have taken place, including a phone conversation between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, as well as a meeting on February 28 between Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Al-Jaber to discuss regional developments.



Tripathi

During these contacts, India reaffirmed its condemnation of any infringement on Kuwait's sovereignty.

It is worth highlighting that the four Indian consular assistance centers are operating during Ramadan from 9:00am to 3:00pm, excluding Fridays.

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Day by Day

GIVE people their rights! You live in a country governed by the rule of law. Respect those rights and put an end to deceit, malice, and plunder.

The Saturday mouse, the source from which you once drew, has exposed your tricks. Enough is enough. You no longer control that facility, as your victims have revealed you.

... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

Kuwait protests Iraq cross-border attacks

KUWAIT CITY, March 5, (KUNA): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, represented by Acting Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Aziz Al-Daihani, handed on Wednesday the Charge d' Affaires of the Embassy of Iraq to Kuwait, Zaid Shanshul, a note of protest following attacks launched by Iraqi armed factions targeting Kuwaiti territory.

This came in a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs saying that Ambassador Al-Daihani renewed Kuwait's strongest condemnation of

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Ramadan Timings

Imsak	Friday	04:50
Iftar	Friday	17:50
Imsak	Saturday	04:48
Iftar	Saturday	17:51
Imsak	Sunday	04:48

British Embassy guides citizens amid tensions

By Fares Ghaleb
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: British Ambassador to Kuwait Qudsi Rasheed confirmed that the past few days have been difficult and worrying for many British citizens residing in Kuwait due to the security developments in the region, stressing that the British authorities are closely monitoring the situation.

In a message to British citizens in Kuwait, Rasheed said they are currently experiencing the sixth day of the conflict, explaining that the anxiety felt by many is understandable given the ongoing tension and uncertain conditions.

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Rasheed

Canada, Azerbaijan, Peru call for calm amid tensions

Embassies urge citizens to follow Kuwait safety guidelines

By Fares Ghaleb
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: In light of the ongoing security developments in the region, some embassies issued statements and guidelines for their citizens, urging them to adhere to the instructions of the Kuwaiti authorities and to follow all recommended safety and precautionary measures.

These embassies expressed their appreciation for the efforts exerted by the Kuwaiti government to maintain security and stability in the country.

The Canadian Embassy issued guidelines for Canadian citizens wishing to leave the country due to the unstable security situation, ongoing military

activities, and the possibility of a sudden deterioration in the regional situation. It added that if they choose to leave Kuwait and are certain that it is safe to do so, the following land borders with Saudi Arabia are currently open: Nuwaiseeb-Al-Ruqai and Al-Salmi-Al-Khafji.

It stressed the importance of ensuring that all required documents are in order before traveling, including a valid passport, visa (Canadians can obtain a visa upon arrival), and civil identification card for residents.

It urged its citizens to comply with the instructions of the Kuwaiti authorities and to remain in safe locations.

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2 Unity first, accountability later

8 KFH: High-efficiency operations & 24/7 availability of digital services

Prayer Timings

Fajr	04:51	Asr	15:20
Sunrise ..	06:10	Maghrib ..	17:50
Zohr	12:00	Isha	19:06

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Warm and partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate northwesterly wind to northerly

Weather

wind, with speed of 08-32 km/h.

By Night: RATHER cold to cold and partly cloudy to cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate northeasterly wind,

with speed of 08-28 kmph..

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait Airport	22	05
Abdaly	22	07
Jahra	23	08

Crown Prince gets Al-Azhar Imam, leaders calls

Repeated Iran attacks on Kuwait condemned

KUWAIT CITY, March 5, (KUNA): His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received a phone call from the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Dr. Ahmad Al-Tayeb.

During the call, Dr. Al-Tayeb expressed his rejection and condemnation of the blatant Iranian assaults on the State of Kuwait.

He stressed that these actions constitute a clear violation of the sovereignty of peaceful nations and their innocent citizens, as well as a breach of international law and the principles of good neighborliness.

For his part, His Highness the Crown Prince conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Dr. Al-Tayeb. He also expressed his sincere gratitude for this noble gesture and the steadfast position of Al-Azhar in support of the security and stability of the State of Kuwait.

Ukraine President

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received



HH the Crown Prince

Wednesday a phone call from President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky.

During the communication, President Zelensky affirmed his country's condemnation of the repeated Iranian attacks on Kuwaiti territory, considering them a violation of sovereignty and international law.

He also emphasized Kuwait's full right to take all necessary measures to protect its security and sovereignty.

For his part, His Highness the Crown Prince conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to President Zelensky.

He also expressed his sincere gratitude for the Ukrainian leader's gesture and the sup-

portive stance towards Kuwait's security and stability.

Djibouti President

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received a telephone call from President of the sisterly Republic of Djibouti Ismail Omar Guelleh.

During the call, President Guelleh affirmed his country's condemnation of the repeated Iranian attacks on Kuwait, considering them a violation of sovereignty and international law.

He also emphasized the State of Kuwait's full right to take all necessary measures to preserve its security and sovereignty.

His Highness the Crown Prince conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to President Guelleh.

He expressed his sincere gratitude for this fraternal gesture and the unwavering brotherly stance supporting the security and stability of the State of Kuwait.



HH the PM conducts an inspection visit to the emergency shelter in Jahra Hospital, accompanied by the Minister of Health.



PM Diwan photos

HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah during his visit to the Liberation Tower.

Pledge to tackle hurdles

Ministry seeks better co-ops services

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry and its Social Affairs counterpart have agreed to address the obstacles that cooperative societies are currently facing, with the aim of developing their supply branches and expediting their operations.

This initiative is part of a broader effort to increase the efficiency of the food distribution system and ease consumer access to essential goods.

Director of the Commercial Control and Consumer Protection Department at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry Faisal Al-Ansari had a meeting with Assistant Undersecretary for Financial, Administrative and Cooperation Affairs at the Ministry of Social Affairs Dr. Sayed Issa recently. The two sides agreed on the measures that must be taken to expand the services offered by the supply branches of various cooperative societies.

Al-Ansari enumerated the agreed measures as follows:

■ Allocate some of the event halls of the cooperatives as additional sup-

ply centers.

■ Increase the number of handling staff and cashiers in these supply centers.

■ Designate waiting areas for citizens, particularly in crowded locations.

■ Allow the cooperative societies to purchase trucks for transporting goods to the supply centers and other cooperatives.

■ Address other operational needs to expedite supply processes and prevent congestion or shortage of goods.

■ Provide flexible means for transporting food supplies when needed. This can be done through coordination with Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company and preordering or utilizing the existing vegetable and goods transport vehicles of the cooperatives to receive and deliver the required materials.

■ Purchase more vehicles and allow coordination between cooperative societies in transporting supplies using shared vehicles.

He also affirmed the continuous monitoring of the strategic reserves in cooperative societies and supply centers through the specialized control room.

He pointed out that cooperative societies are key partners for government agencies in boosting consumer confidence, raising public awareness, ensuring the availability of goods, supporting market stability, and providing the best services to the public.

White Palace welcomes Ramadan well-wishers



Left: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled and Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah. Center: Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah receives well-wishers. Right: Sheikh Mubarak receives well-wishers.



Photos by Rizk Taufiq

Editor-in-Chief Ahmed Al-Jarallah among well-wishers at the diwaniya.



Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled, Sheikh Khaled Al-Mohammed, Sheikh Mohammed Al-Abdullah, and Sheikh Mubarak Al-Abdullah



Editor-in-Chief of Al-Seyassah and Arab Times Ahmed Al-Jarallah, Fahaad Al-Moajel and Mohammad Al-Moajel

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: The sons and grandsons of the late Sheikh Abdullah Mubarak Al-Sabah received well-wishers at the White Palace in Surra on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Among those who came to offer their congratulations on this blessed occasion in the midst of the warm and welcoming Ramadan atmosphere were His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, several members of the Al-Sabah family, public figures, ambassadors, representatives of diplomatic missions in Kuwait, and citizens.

Sheikh Mubarak Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak welcomed the well-wishers, and expressed his appreciation for their presence and participation.

He emphasized that such Ramadan gatherings reflect the strong bonds, compassion, and unity that characterize Kuwaiti society.

Those present exchanged greetings and blessings for the holy month, praying to God Almighty that this blessed occasion returns to Kuwait, its leadership, and its people with goodness, prosperity, and blessings, and that He grants the country continued security and stability.

PM inspects emergency shelter, digital resilience amid tensions

KUWAIT CITY, March 5, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah conducted on Thursday an inspection visit to the emergency shelter in Jahra Hospital, accompanied by the Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Abdulwahab Al-Awadhi.

During the visit, His Highness the Prime Minister was briefed by officials about the procedures for operating the shelter and the available capabilities to host citizens and residents in emergency situations.

His Highness also reviewed the safety system and the logistical and service preparations that ensure the provision of a safe environment in exceptional circumstances.

His Highness expressed his appreciation to those in charge of preparing and equipping the emergency shelter of Jahra Hospital, appreciating their sincere efforts that reflect a spirit of responsibility and keenness to preserve the security and safety of citizens and residents in various circumstances.

On Wednesday, His Highness the Prime

Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah conducted an inspection visit to the Liberation Tower to evaluate the resilience of the nation's digital infrastructure amidst current regional developments.

Accompanied by Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology and Acting Minister of Information and Culture Omar Saud Al-Omar and Chairman of the Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) Dr. Khaled Al-Zamil, His Highness was briefed on the operational status of vital communications facilities and information systems.

During the visit, His Highness convened a meeting with senior officials and executives from local private telecommunications companies.

The discussions focused on technical and operational readiness, with a specific emphasis on "approved emergency plans" designed to ensure service continuity and avoid any potential disruption.

Other Voices

Unity first, accountability later

By Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri

What Kuwait is facing today is not regional tension. It is a direct assault that tests state capacity and social cohesion. The most telling story is the instinct that surfaced, Kuwaitis stranded abroad looking for a route home. In a crisis, belonging is measured less by slogans than by where people choose to be.

That instinct sharpened after the deaths of Sergeants Waleed Majeed Sulaiman and Abdulaziz Abdulmohsen Dakhel Nasser, killed on duty



Al-Anjeri

defending Kuwait. The country rallied around their names, and a simple truth became unmistakable. Paper categories cannot govern the heart. Laws may classify and policies may draw lines, but they cannot command loyalty or ration compassion. Society knows whom to honor and respect.

In danger, national responsibility changes shape. Trust is part of resilience. That is why discipline in what we post and share on phones and social media matters. Verify before forwarding, avoid rumours, and do not circulate details that fuel panic or help an adversary.

This is not a call for silence, nor for whitewashing failure. It is a call for timing, restraint during danger, then rigorous, honest accountability and reform once the immediate threat has passed.

Sudan, Libya & Montenegro slam Iran attacks on Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, March 5, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received Wednesday a phone call from the Sudanese Prime Minister Kamel Idriss who condemned Iran's blatant attacks on the State of Kuwait.

Idriss said Sudan supported Kuwait in all measures to protect its security and sovereignty.

His Highness the Prime Minister thanked Prime Minister Idriss for his support of the state of Kuwait, government and people as well as in whatever it would take to preserve its security and sovereignty.

Libyan PM

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received Wednesday a phone call from Prime Minister the Libyan national unity government Abdulhameed Dabayba who strongly condemned Iran's blatant attacks against Kuwait.

Dabayba expressed solidarity with the

State of Kuwait and to all measures to preserve its security and territorial integrity.

His Highness the Prime Minister thanked Prime Minister Dabayba's support for the State of Kuwait, government and people as well as with whatever it would take to safeguard its security and sovereignty.

Montenegro PM

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received Wednesday a phone call from Prime Minister of Montenegro Milo Djokovic who condemned Iran's blatant attacks against Kuwait.

Spajic expressed Montenegro's support to all measures carried out by the State of Kuwait to preserve its security and sovereignty.

His Highness the Prime Minister thanked Prime Minister Spajic's support for the State of Kuwait, government and people as well as with whatever it would take to safeguard its security and sovereignty.

diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Army comes out in flying colors

Bravo, people of Kuwait!

"IN these critical circumstances, a citizen can only stand by their country, putting aside all other considerations and acting in accordance with the demands of the situation, showing self-restraint and adhering to the instructions of the relevant authorities," columnist Eng. Adel Al-Jarallah Al-Kharafi wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"In times of war, no stances or statements that could weaken the state's position are acceptable.



Adel Al-Kharafi

"Meanwhile, many Kuwaitis are stranded abroad, and Kuwaiti embassies have begun working to facilitate their return. This is not unusual for Kuwait. Everyone remembers the efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the government actively ensured the return of Kuwaitis to the country.

"There are always positive aspects. While the world was preoccupied with war, Kuwaitis were reassured to find that supplies were readily available and could be obtained from their usual distribution centers.

"The significant efforts exerted by the Kuwaiti army in confronting Iranian aggression are among the positive developments that instill reassurance in the hearts of citizens.

"Kuwait, throughout its history, has experienced many events. It has always been protected, thanks to God, the prayers of its people, their sincere faith, their unity, and the capability of their leadership.

"We are a people who believe that nothing will befall us except what is destined for us by God Almighty.

"Nevertheless, Kuwait shows great tolerance and listens attentively to all feedback. When we see positive aspects, we commend them, and when there are negative ones, we highlight them."

Also:

"The recent Iranian attack against the GCC states represents a blatant violation of international treaties and international law. It threatens regional security and challenges the entire international community," Kuwait writer Emad Khamis Al-Aqab wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"It is essential to discuss the legal and political dimensions of this aggression and its impact on peace and stability in the Gulf region.

"Iranian airstrikes against Gulf states constitute a clear violation of numerous international treaties and agreements, most notably the UN Charter. Article 2 of the Charter stipulates that the use of force or the threat of force by any member of the United Nations against the territorial integrity or political independence of any other state is prohibited.

"Furthermore, these attacks violate the 1944 Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation, which guarantees the complete sovereignty of states over their airspace. Any violation of this airspace therefore represents a blatant infringement on the sovereignty of the affected state.

"From a political and strategic perspective, Iranian aggression cannot be separated from the broader political and strategic context in the region. These attacks come at a time of escalating tensions in the Gulf region between Iran and the United States and its regional allies. The Iranian claim that these attacks target American sites cannot serve as a legal or moral justification for violating the sovereignty of other states.

"The continuation of these aggressive acts by Iran poses a direct threat to peace and stability in the Gulf region. These attacks increase the likelihood of armed conflict with serious consequences for regional and international security. Military escalation in this volatile region could lead to a humanitarian and economic catastrophe, not only for the Gulf states but for the entire world, given the region's importance to global energy supplies.

"In conclusion, the international community must take a firm stance against these blatant Iranian violations of international law and treaties. Supporting the people of the Gulf in the face of this aggression is an urgent necessity, not only to maintain peace and stability in the region but also to protect the rules-based international order.

"Any leniency in this regard will only encourage further aggressive actions that threaten global peace and security."

"At this stage, many duties are incumbent upon everyone, each according to their position.

"During the current war, it became clear that Kuwait and the Gulf states adhered to a unified stance. Kuwait also witnessed cohesion and national unity.

"People need solidarity, not division.

"The relevant government authorities must consider the circumstances, take human nature into account, and work to clarify matters through transparent statements from official

sources. People naturally fear the unknown.

"In these situations, personal anxieties, amplified by social media, can turn into rumors. Simply spreading these rumors online makes them widely accessible, and some may even accept them as facts.

"It has long been said that rumors are easy to spread but difficult to refute. According to psychology, however, rumors can be scientifically debunked.

"There is no doubt that Kuwaitis trust their state, government, army, and all security agencies. Still, this trust is insufficient if it is not accompanied by awareness among citizens and residents of the dangers of spreading rumors."



"Kuwaitis describe someone who does not adhere to morals, etiquette, or religious teachings as having no religion or sect. Unfortunately, in my opinion, this applies to Iran, which lacks a clear strategy or a defined political ideology," Mohammad Ali Al-Naqi wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"Iranian officials visit our country to express affection and good neighborliness. Yet, suddenly and without reason, storms erupt, and our land and vital infrastructure are targeted by Iranian missiles.

"Thus, instead of observing the days of Ramadan with fasting and its nights with worship and prayer, we are preoccupied with receiving attacks from a neighbor who seized power in his own country nearly half a century ago.

"Indeed, since this group took power and consolidated control, they have publicly promoted their revolutionary principles, foremost among them their main slogan - to guide the people of the entire region toward the Twelfth Ja'fari school of thought.

"A few months after coming to power, discord began to spread among the members of the ruling entity. Some were executed, while the president fled abroad.

"This article is not meant to recount the events, clashes, and crimes committed by those who wear the mask of religion. I simply wish to recall the saying of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), 'Gabriel kept urging me to treat my neighbor well until I thought he would make him an heir.'

"Where have the rights of neighbors gone for the Iranians, who have spared no one from their attacks?"

"Unfortunately, Iran has succeeded in sowing discord among the inhabitants of the same region. Several Arab countries are now suffering the evils of sectarian strife.

"Iran is pursuing a reckless policy that has no connection whatsoever to Islam or any of its schools of thought. This policy is unrelated to any of the Abrahamic religions, let alone Islam, which spread to many countries, such as Indonesia, solely through the good treatment of Muslim traders.

"Iran's launching of missiles and drones against the Gulf Cooperation Council countries is a strategic and military mistake that will worsen the crisis and undermine trust between Iran and its Arab neighbors. The GCC countries are not parties to the war between the United States and Israel on one side and Iran on the other.

"The Iranian regime is losing neighbors who extended a hand of cooperation and who, during the 12-day war waged against it by Israel, clearly rejected Tel Aviv's aggression and condemned the Israeli strikes on Iranian territory.

"The Arabian Gulf states have repeatedly declared their opposition to war with Iran and have publicly affirmed that they will not participate, nor will they allow any of their military bases to be used for such purposes.

"Therefore, Iran's claim that the presence of American bases in the Gulf justifies its attacks is a deliberate deception, ignoring political and historical contexts that cannot be separated.

"When the Gulf states strengthen their stability and security through defense contracts with a superpower like the United States, they are following the same approach as half the nations in the world.

"Around eighty countries do the same, even though some have larger populations, economies, and military capabilities than most GCC states.

"We ask God Almighty to protect Kuwait from all harm and evil, and to preserve its people and citizens in safety, security, and stability under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah."

— Compiled by Simi K. Kutty

Rota system implemented

30% workforce until further notice: PAFN

By Marwa Al-Bahravi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: The Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN) issued Administrative Circular No. 5/2026 on the regulation of work procedures under the current regional circumstances, based on Circular No. 4/2026 issued by the Civil Service Commission (CSC).

The circular stipulate that work should proceed with 30 percent of the total workforce until further notice, in order to ensure employee safety and the continuity of regulatory and service responsibilities.

According to the circular, the Authority is implementing a rotation system for employees working flexible hours, dividing them into three

groups, with each group working one day followed by two days off.

The attendance rate for each group must not exceed 30 percent, and departments are granted the authority to organize their schedule in a manner that workflow remains uninterrupted.

It stated that department directors are required to be present daily, while supervisors and section heads are on a rotating schedule.

Working hours for employees under a shift system are in accordance with the approved schedule.

The circular confirmed that attendance is recorded through the approved fingerprint system, that the exemption period from physical attendance is treated as actual working period, and that Circular No. 4/2026 issued at the beginning of this month is cancelled.



KUNA photo Undersecretary of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) visits the Guards deployed at sensitive installations throughout Kuwait.

New date later: Al-Fajjam

PAAET postpones fees limit for new students

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: The Director General of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), Dr. Hassan Al-Fajjam, has instructed the Deanship of Admissions and Registration to postpone the deadline for the first payment for newly enrolled fee-paying students, effective immediately and until further notice.

The new payment date will be announced later through the official channels approved by PAAET.

In a related matter, and as part of PAAET's commitment to ensuring the quality and efficiency of its digital services and the continuity of the educational process, Dr. Al-Fajjam visited the Information Systems Center to review the readiness of electronic systems, monitor the performance of digital platforms, particularly Microsoft Teams, and confirm their effectiveness in supporting the educational and training process.

This visit is part of PAAET's ongoing monitoring of the readiness of its digital infrastructure, which enhances the ability of its educational institutions to provide services efficiently and effectively under all circumstances and supports PAAET's digital transformation initiatives.

PAAET explained that these efforts align with current regional circumstances, which require enhanced technological readiness and increased reliance on digital solutions to ensure the stability and continuity of the educational and training process without interruption.

It continuously monitors the technical and operational performance of its online platforms and evaluates the level of academic interaction among faculty, trainers, and students. These measures help assess platform efficiency and enhance the overall user experience.

This monitoring includes assessing the readiness of the digital infrastructure, the speed of technical response, and the efficiency of delivering academic content and educational activities through the approved platforms.

In this context, relevant departments collect feedback and suggestions from users and analyze data related to access, participation, and achievement rates. The aim is to develop and enhance the efficiency of digital services, support blended learning models, and integrate in-person education with modern educational technologies.

PAAET affirmed its commitment to the continuous improvement of the digital education system and the enhancement of the learning environment's flexibility, stressing that these efforts improve the quality of educational outcomes and align with the objectives of institutional development and digital transformation.

It highlighted that it fully complies with approved regulations and systems, ensuring stability and confidence for all members of PAAET.

Flights offered for Kuwaitis returning via Saudi Arabia

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: Kuwait Airways announced that it will operate several flights for Kuwaiti citizens wishing to return to Kuwait via Saudi Arabia by land, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

It affirmed that the destinations will be announced on the airline's official social media accounts.

The airline explained that these flights are available to both passengers with existing bookings and those wishing to purchase new tickets. Registration is open until March 6, 2026. Those interested are encouraged to contact the call center at 171 or via WhatsApp at +965 1802050.

Minister inspects shelter at 'Sports Club for Deaf'

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: The Minister of State for Youth and Sports Affairs, Dr. Tariq Al-Jalalma, inspected the shelter at the Kuwait Sports Club for the Deaf in Granada, designated for use by the Ministry of Interior, to assess its readiness to receive cases according to the approved emergency plan, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement, the Public Authority for Sports (PAS) explained that Minister Al-Jalalma, who was accompanied by senior officials from PAS during the visit, reviewed the technical and administrative facilities, the coordination mechanisms between relevant entities, and the availability of basic services and logistical supplies, ensuring a safe and comprehensive environment should the shelter plan be activated.

Minister Al-Jalalma highlighted the importance of integrated efforts among various state institutions, and praised the rapid response of the working teams and the readiness of supervising personnel. This reflects the level of preparedness and responsibility in handling emerging situations and embodies the state's approach to strengthening the public security and safety system.

Lockdown rumors 'unfounded' – Mol

Strict eye on misleading videos

By Munif Naif
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: Director of the Security Relations and Media Department at the Ministry of Interior Brigadier General Nasser Abu Slaib disclosed that the ministry has observed the spread of rumors and circulation of video clips showing the recent developments over the past few days.

In an interview with Kuwait TV, Abu Salib warned that anyone who publishes videos or content expressing sympathy for terrorist organizations will be held legally accountable. He said nine cases have already been recorded, and others are being monitored and will be announced soon. He added that penalties are imposed on anyone who publishes illegal reports or videos.

He stressed that unauthorized filming

can negatively affect security, citing a video circulating online about a vehicle fire found to have been caused by an electrical short circuit, not shrapnel.

He said rumors are monitored in real time, like the rumor about the Aliyah and Ghaliyah Complex. He revealed



Brig Gen Abu Slaib

that after investigation, it was found the site was not damaged and the Cybercrime Unit took legal action to apprehend the person who started the rumor.

He asserted that persistent rumors, such as imposing partial or total lockdown, are unfounded, indicating a decision on this matter requires a Cabinet meeting.

He added the Cybercrime Unit and the State Security Service are closely monitoring all matters related to publishing news or content expressing sympathy for terrorist organizations.

Kuwait slams Iranian attacks targeting Turkiye, Azerbaijan

KUWAIT CITY, March 5, (KUNA): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed the State of Kuwait's strong condemnation and denunciation of the attempted attacks by the Islamic Republic of Iran on both the Republic of Turkiye and the Republic of Azerbaijan, in flagrant violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs affirmed in a statement Kuwait's full solidarity with Turkiye and Azerbaijan and its support for all measures they take to preserve their sovereignty, security and stability.

Meanwhile, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Nader Al-Jallal conducted an inspection visit on Thursday to Kuwait Univer-

sity, Abdullah Al-Salem University, the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), and the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), to assess the readiness of facilities in light of the current circumstances.

The visit included emergency shelters, where the minister reviewed work mechanisms and procedures followed to enhance safety system and ensure the readiness of facilities in order to preserve the safety of members of educational institutions and continuity of work, said the ministry in a statement.

It added that this visit comes within the framework of field follow-up and ensuring the readiness of the facilities of higher education and scientific research institutions.

Kuwait reaffirms right to self-defense against Iran

'Iranian aggression violates int'l law'

KUWAIT CITY, March 5, (KUNA): Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on Thursday reiterated Kuwait's condemnation of the Iranian attacks targeting Kuwait and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, considering them a blatant violation of their sovereignty and a flagrant breach of international law, international humanitarian law, and the UN Charter.

This came in a speech delivered by the minister, as he headed Kuwait's delegation participating in the joint ministerial meeting between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the European Union (EU) to discuss developments and repercussions of the situation in the region, which was held via video conference.

He affirmed Kuwait's commitment to its right to defend itself, based on Article (51) of the Charter of the United Nations, and taking all necessary measures to preserve its sovereignty, protect its territory, and ensure the security of its citizens and residents.

He added that the Iranian threat to maritime security extends to global energy security, the stability of the international economy, and the sustainability of supply chains.

The minister praised supporting countries that stand in solidarity with Kuwait and the GCC countries regarding the blatant Iranian aggression, stressing that the security of the GCC countries is indivisible and that any infringement on the sovereignty of any member state is a direct infringement on collective GCC countries' security.

Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council



Ministry of Foreign Affairs photo Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, during his leadership of the State of Kuwait's delegation participating in the joint Gulf-European ministerial meeting.

(GCC) Jasem Al-Budaiwi said on Wednesday that foreign ministers of GCC and EU states will convene Thursday to discuss the repercussions of Iran's heinous attacks on the region.

The meeting will be held through videoconferencing with the participation of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas.

Al-Budaiwi added that the GCC seeks to galvanize regional and international condemnation of the Iranian attacks that targeted civilians, infrastructure facilities, and diplomatic headquarters in the GCC countries.

He urged the international community to fulfil its responsibility to stop the war, enhance regional and international stability.

ASEAN, global partners condemn attacks

Kuwait holds talks on regional tensions

KUWAIT CITY, March 5, (KUNA): Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, received separate telephone calls on Wednesday from his counterparts in the Czech Republic, Sri Lanka, Cuba, and Turkey to discuss the recent regional military escalation and security developments.

In the first call, Czech Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Petr Mateska condemned the "Iranian aggression" targeting Kuwait and other regional states, reaffirming the sovereign right of affected countries to take measures to protect their territorial integrity, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During talks with Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Vijitha Herat, both sides highlighted the serious impact of the escalating tensions on regional security and stability. Similarly, Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad held discussions with Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla, emphasizing the broader implications for peace and stability in the region.

In a separate conversation with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, the officials exchanged views on the latest developments, focusing on the risks posed by the ongoing military escalation to regional security.

ASEAN Foreign Ministers

Foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) voiced deep concern on Wednesday over escalating tensions in the Middle East following US-Israeli occupation attacks against Iran and subsequent retaliatory strikes by Iran on several countries in the region.

In a statement issued by the Philippines, current chair of the regional bloc, the ministers said they were closely monitoring developments and warned that the escalation poses a serious threat to civilian lives as well as regional and global stability.

They described the military escalation as particularly regrettable as it occurred amid ongoing diplomatic efforts, including mediation initiatives led by Oman, aimed at reaching a negotiated and peaceful settlement through dialogue.

The ministers stressed the importance of an immediate cessation of hostilities and urged all parties to exercise maximum restraint, avoid further escalation and resolve differences through diplomacy in a manner that preserves peace and stability.



Jeyhun Bayramov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan FM affirms solidarity with Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah recently received a telephone call from his counterpart in the Republic of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov, reports Arab Times.

In a statement posted on its website, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs disclosed that during the telephone call, Bayramov affirmed the solidarity of the Republic of Azerbaijan with the State of Kuwait regarding the Iranian attack on the latter. He also stressed the importance of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the State of Kuwait.

They stressed that all states must commit to settle disputes by peaceful means, respect sovereignty and territorial integrity in accordance with international law and the UN Charter, and ensure the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure in line with relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

Parking project amended; Diwaniya expansion scrapped

Capital Committee OKs mosque site in Shuwaikh

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: The Capital Governorate Committee at the Municipal Council held its seventh meeting Wednesday under the chairmanship of Dr. Hassan Kamal.

During the meeting, the committee approved the items on its agenda, including an amendment to the condition related to the implementation and handover of the parking garage project to the Ministry of Finance.

It also approved the request of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs to allocate a site for the construction of a mosque in Shuwaikh Industrial Area next to the automated bakery and the old Shuwaikh slaughterhouse.

In addition, the committee approved the request of the Ministry of Social Affairs to cancel the expansion of the Elderly Diwaniya in Shamiya, Block Eight.



KUNA photo A scene from the meeting between the Minister of Youth and Sports and the leaders of the General Authority for Sports and Youth.

Al-Jalahma affirms sports facilities readiness to support state plans

KUWAIT CITY, March 5, (KUNA): Minister of State for Youth and Sports Affairs Dr. Tareq Al-Jalahma on Wednesday affirmed full readiness and heightened preparedness across all sports and youth facilities, mobilizing available resources to support state plans in light of current regional developments.

In a press statement after a coordination meeting with officials of the Public Authority for Youth, Al-Jalahma said talks addressed unified coordination mechanisms for the upcoming shelter and emergency plan amid prevailing regional circumstances.

He noted that concerned entities are ready to activate approved emergency plans, with

data and procedures continuously updated, while enhancing communication and field coordination to ensure swift response and efficient handling of any developments arising from the current situation.

Al-Jalahma added that the current phase requires the highest levels of preparedness and joint coordination among various state institutions, particularly the youth and sports sectors.

He said sports and youth facilities across the governorates are a key asset in shelter plans due to their infrastructure and capacity to accommodate evacuees safely, with field teams assigned to review technical and safety requirements and ensure essential logistical needs.

Other Voices

The story behind my resignation from the Kuwait Friendship Society

By Ahmad alsarraf

I spent eight fulfilling years managing the Kuwait Friendship Society along with a distinguished group of board members and senior administrators. I was among the first to contribute to it, without overlooking the contributions of the other founding members who devoted both their time and money. I felt immense pride participating in the society's charitable work through its donation committees. It brought me great satisfaction to witness the remarkable results I had always hoped for, which included delivering donations to those most in need, regardless of race, religion, color, sect, or nationality.



alsarraf

The society's goals were truly unique and admirable. The Kuwait Friendship Society was never affiliated with any political or other movement, nor was it involved in any wrongdoing. What set it apart was that its board of directors never personally benefited from its funds. Even the society's expenses and staff salaries were maintained at minimal levels. The society was not involved in residency permit trafficking and did not employ a large workforce.

The hiring of relatives of board members was strictly prohibited. We were always fortunate to have a wonderful group of citizens and residents who were major donors and who continued to give generously. Most preferred that their names remain undisclosed.

The time had to come, sooner or later, for me to step down from managing the society. I made this decision two months ago, and the reasons behind it are as follows:

1. My advancing age and my desire to devote myself to writing with greater freedom, especially after relinquishing all my business ventures.

2. My increased travel and extended absences from the society's operations. My frequent and prolonged absences placed a burden on the society's management, as certain administrative tasks became complicated. Operations, particularly the signing of donation cheques, had to be suspended during my travels until the Ministry of Social Affairs was notified and approved the transfer of signature authority to another board member. The matter was further complicated by my sudden trips.

3. My continuous and extended absences were not compatible with the responsibility of managing the society's funds. Therefore, it was necessary for those with greater availability and capacity to assume responsibility for managing the society's finances.

All that has been written about other reasons, and the rumors spread by individuals, including "S.N.," as well as the claim that the resignation was at the request of a government entity or official, are completely false and reprehensible. The truth is far clearer.

My colleagues on the board of directors made considerable efforts over several weeks to persuade me to withdraw my resignation or at least remain a member. However, I insisted on stepping down entirely, and they can attest to this. I truly appreciate their trust.

Thanks to the efforts of the previous board members, I leave behind a charitable organization of which I am proud, as it is distinguished by its exceptional credibility and humanitarian values, making it a worthy example. Its current board of directors, unchanged except for my departure, deserves commendation from the Minister of Social Affairs and His Highness the Prime Minister.

□ □ □

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Left: Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber, Mohammed Al-Barjas, and Faisal Al-Barjas. Right: Sheikhs Abdullah, Sabah, and Fahad Nasser Al-Sabah with Mohammed, Faisal, and Waleed Al-Barjas.



Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali, the Italian Ambassador, Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Sabah, Mohammed Al-Barjas, and Faisal Al-Barjas

Al-Barjas Diwaniya welcomes Ramadan well-wishers

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: The Al-Barjas Diwaniya in Khalidiya welcomed well-wishers for the holy month of Ramadan in a spiritual and social atmosphere that reflected the spirit of camaraderie and communication characteristic of Kuwaiti society during this blessed month, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Several sheikhs and prominent social figures, along with family and friends, visited the diwaniya to exchange greetings and blessings on this auspicious occasion.

Attendees prayed to God to perpetuate the blessings of security, peace, and stability upon Kuwait and to bring the month of Ramadan again with goodness and blessings.

The gathering, marked by a warm and friendly atmosphere, highlighted the important role of diwanis in Kuwaiti social life and their contribution to strengthening community bonds and upholding traditions of communication among the nation's people.



Sheikh Khalid Al-Bader and Nasser Al-Roudhan



Editor-in-Chief Ahmed Al-Jarallah, Lieutenant General (Ret.) Mahmoud Al-Dousari, and Saud Al-Farhan



Sheikh Dr. Ahmed Al-Nasser and Sheikh Sabah Al-Nasser



Faisal Al-Barjas and Sheikh Mubarak Al-Fahad

Photos by Samer Shaqair

Continued from Page 1

The world

The world cannot trust a fatwa issued by the Iranian Supreme Leader prohibiting the use of nuclear weapons, for someone who has committed atrocities against his own people lacks all credibility. A war criminal takes pleasure in the taste of blood.

Kuwait protests

these dangerous practices, which violate its sovereignty, constitute a blatant breach of international law, and resulted in casualties among civilians and military personnel, in addition to significant material losses and damage.

He affirmed that launching attacks against the State of Kuwait using Iraqi territory or the territory of any neighboring state amounts to a crime of aggression criminalized under international law and contradicts the principles of territorial integrity, stressing the importance of the Republic of Iraq taking practical and tangible steps to address and halt such attacks, it said.

He also underscored Kuwait's sovereign right, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, to defend its territory and vital facilities against any aggression or threat to its security, in a manner that guarantees the exercise of its inherent right of self-defense in line with international law, it added.

India backs

The embassy urged community members to rely exclusively on official statements from the embassy and Kuwaiti authorities and to avoid circulating rumors or unverified information.

The embassy affirmed that it is closely coordinating with airlines and Kuwaiti authorities to provide solutions for travelers affected by temporary airspace closures and transit restrictions.

Philippine Embassy

Filipinos needing information or assistance may contact the Embassy through its hotline at +965 6500 2612. For emergency police, fire, or medical services, Kuwait's national emergency number 112 remains available.

For Migrant Workers Office (MWO) and OWWA ATN concerns, assistance lines may be reached at +965 9403 9063, +965 6040 3858, and +965 6558 5355. Official updates are posted on the Embassy's verified Facebook page, the MWO in Kuwait page, the OWWA-OWO Kuwait page, and on X (formerly Twitter) via @PHinKUWAIT.

Meanwhile, in Manila, the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) said they have intensified efforts to ensure the safety and protection of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) affected by the regional situation.

Migrant Workers Secretary Hans Leo J. Cacadac said the DMW and OWWA are working closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the Department of National Defense (DND), and host-country governments to continuously assess security conditions and facilitate the repatriation of Filipinos who wish to return home. He emphasized that the safety of OFWs remains the government's foremost priority, in line with the directive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.

OWWA Administrator Patricia Yvonne Caunan assured OFWs that immediate assistance, including onsite sup-

port and repatriation services, remains available. She said additional manpower and logistical resources are being deployed to ensure accessibility of services as needed.

As of the latest data, the DMW and OWWA have provided onsite assistance to 1,824 OFWs and received 1,189 requests for repatriation, including 62 from Kuwait, 278 from Bahrain, 246 from Abu Dhabi, 231 from Dubai, 173 from Qatar, 46 from Israel, and 5 from Lebanon.

British Embassy

He reiterated his advice to British citizens: remain where you are, take shelter in your homes, and strictly adhere to the guidelines and instructions issued by the Kuwaiti authorities.

He commended the Kuwaiti Armed Forces for their efforts in maintaining the security of the country and responding to the attacks witnessed in the region over the past few days.

He clarified that Kuwaiti airspace remains closed and flights are not expected to resume in the coming days.

He pointed out that if any British citizen wishes to leave Kuwait and it is possible and safe for them to do so, two land routes to Saudi Arabia remain open: one in the South and the other in the West of the country.

He revealed that several British citizens and others have already crossed the border and continued their journeys to other destinations. He urged those planning to travel to plan ahead and ensure they have sufficient fuel, food, water and necessary medications for their trip.

He also stressed the importance of ensuring all required documents, including exit permits and visas, are complete before heading to the border. He said visas can be obtained electronically before travel or upon arrival at the border, warning that incomplete documents could prevent travelers from crossing the border.

He said those traveling in their own vehicles must fully own and have the vehicle registered under their name. He indicated that tourist transport companies, taxis or buses can be used to assist in crossing the border, emphasizing that crossing on foot is not permitted.

He urged all British citizens in Kuwait to register their presence online and subscribe to travel advisories in order to receive the latest updates directly, assuring them that the embassy team is working round the clock to provide guidance and support.

Embassies urge

The Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan asked its citizens to fully comply with the safety instructions and guidelines issued by Kuwaiti authorities.

In a statement, the embassy affirmed that it is closely monitoring the security situation in Kuwait and the whole region, indicating that Kuwaiti airspace has been closed since Feb 28 due to the regional developments.

It emphasized the importance of following official statements issued by the Kuwaiti authorities and the embassy announcements, as well as abiding by the instructions and guidelines issued by the relevant authorities. It stressed the need to refrain from circulating or believing rumors and unofficial information.

It advised its citizens to remain in their homes and not to leave except when absolutely necessary, and to immediately seek shelter in enclosed and safe spaces upon hearing air raid sirens or explosions. It warned about the dangers posed by unexploded ordnance or shrapnel resulting from air defense operations.

It urged Azerbaijani citizens in Kuwait to contact it through the hotline in case of emergency.

Meanwhile, Ambassador of the Republic of Peru to the State of Kuwait Carlos Jiménez called on members of the Peruvian community in the country to remain calm and not be swayed by anxiety or rumors, stressing that the situation in Kuwait remains stable despite the recent regional developments.

In a statement addressed to his fellow citizens, the ambassador said that it is natural for concerns to increase due to the recent events, but the situation does not warrant excessive worry or succumbing to panic.

He stressed the importance of following official instructions and paying attention to warning signs.

He said the citizens should take basic precautions, such as following alerts issued through official channels and social media, verifying circulating information, and avoiding being influenced by unconfirmed reports.

He urged citizens to immediately seek shelter indoors if they hear sirens or notice flying objects.

He also advised citizens to carry their mobile phones at all times, ensure that all family members have a means of communication, and contact their relatives once they reach a safe location.

He affirmed that the embassy and its consular section continue to operate and are closely monitoring the situation, emphasizing that the safety of Peruvian citizens in Kuwait remains the top priority of the embassy.

Grief as

Al-Ghanim described the incident as tragic, emphasizing that the victim was an innocent child, regardless of her nationality.

He highlighted that Kuwait had been drawn into a war that was not its own, and expressed hope that the situation would be temporary.

Al-Ghanim prayed God would lift the affliction from Kuwait and its people.

On Thursday, Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Chief Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah chaired a meeting at the operations center and other senior leaders to follow up on readiness and coordination between various units.

In a statement, the National Guard mentioned that the meeting took place in attendance of KNG undersecretary Lieutenant General Hamad Al-Barjas, where the KNG Chief was briefed on emergency plans.

He praised KNG efforts and their cooperation with state bodies to ensure state safety and stability.

Meanwhile, Dr. Reem Al-Radwan, Director of Central Administration of Blood and Cellular Therapy at Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MoH), confirmed Thursday that strategic blood reserves and derivatives are available at safe, reassuring levels.

Speaking to KUNA, she explained that blood bank teams operate 24/7 to efficiently manage stocks, including boosting reserves and continuously supplying hospitals, and that the department activated its approved emergency plan from the outset of events.

This includes extending donation center hours, raising operational readiness in blood banks, and providing hospitals with additional emergency stocks to ensure quick response to urgent cases without delays, she said.

She noted widespread participation from citizens and residents at donation centers, reflecting Kuwaiti society's solidarity and cohesion.

This led to collecting over 2,000 blood bags in a short period, highlighting high

community awareness of blood donation's vital role in supporting healthcare and saving lives.

The department sustains reserves through flexible donation management, such as adjusting hours and available centers based on needs, to respond swiftly to hospital demands and emergencies, she mentioned.

She emphasized that blood and components have limited shelf lives, requiring precise management to maintain balance, minimize waste, and optimize donations for patient benefit and system efficiency.

Medical, technical, and administrative teams at donation centers and blood banks follow an integrated operational system to organize donations, receive donors smoothly, and adhere to top quality and safety standards in collection, testing, and storage, she stated.

Dr. Al-Radwan expressed deep gratitude to donors for responding promptly, embodying high humanitarian values and national responsibility that underpin Kuwait's healthcare system.

She urged the public to follow the ministry's official social media pages for updates on operating hours or receiving centers to access accurate information promptly.

The department continues receiving donors in an organized manner to ensure sustained blood availability, supporting medical services across all state hospitals and enhancing the healthcare system's readiness for emergencies, she pointed out.

Mubarak Al-Kabir port incident inaccurate

The Ministry of Interior rejected as inaccurate reports circulated by some mass media and networking websites that an incident took place near Mubarak Al-Kabir port.

The alleged incident occurred at least 60 km away from the port, which is outside the territorial waters of Kuwait, the Ministry said in a statement on Thursday.

The statement advised refraining from inaccurate information and relying on official sources.

In related news, the concerned authorities in the Ministry of Interior arrested two individuals after they were observed posting videos containing statements and scenes that mocked and belittled the Kuwait Armed Forces and attempted to downplay the efforts of the air defense system in fulfilling its national duty.

In an official statement, the ministry explained that such behavior is unacceptable and undermines the prestige of the military institution. The relevant authorities took immediate action, and upon questioning and confronting the individuals with the findings of the investigation, they confessed to filming and posting the content. They were subsequently detained, and the necessary legal procedures were initiated to refer them to the appropriate authorities.

The authorities also apprehended another individual after monitoring his social media account, which was used to post offensive and abusive content, including material that could harm international relations. The account also featured images of leaders of designated terrorist organizations in its profile.

The Ministry of Interior reiterated that it has consistently emphasized the importance of adhering to laws and regulations governing the use of social media and refraining from publishing or sharing any content that could harm military institutions or damage the state's interests and international relations.

It urged everyone to uphold their national responsibilities, stressing that the law will be strictly enforced against anyone who violates it, especially given the current circumstances facing the country and the region.

Media law violators referred to prosecution

The Ministry of Information announced on Wednesday the referral of several media law violators to the Public Prosecution, underlining the necessity for professional accountability and the prioritization of national interests.

In a press statement, the Ministry noted that it has intensified monitoring of media outlets and digital platforms following the circulation of "false news and rumors".

These activities, the Ministry stated, constitute a breach of regulations governing media operations and serve to mislead public opinion during sensitive developments.

"The necessary legal measures have been initiated against the violators, who have been referred to the competent authority for further action in accordance with the law," the statement reads.

The Ministry further emphasized that while freedom of opinion and expression is a "guaranteed right," it must be coupled with professional diligence, credibility, and the verification of information through official sources.

The Ministry concluded by urging all media practitioners and social media users to exercise heightened responsibility and objectivity to safeguard the security and stability of the nation.

MEW completes repairs

The official spokesperson for the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, Fatima Hayat, announced the completion of repairs to several power transmission lines damaged by falling debris.

In a press statement issued on Wednesday, Hayat explained that most of the damaged overhead lines have been repaired, with five out of nine lines now back in service, in accordance with the highest technical standards and safety procedures. All repair and safety measures were carried out efficiently and effectively according to the approved emergency plan. On-site monitoring and necessary technical inspections continue to ensure the integrity of the electrical grid and enhance its readiness.

She affirmed that the electrical system is stable and operating efficiently, and that the ministry is fully committed to maintaining the highest standards of quality and safety to ensure energy security and sustainability.

Also on Wednesday, Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr. Subaih Al-Mukhaizeem chaired a coordination meeting with ministry officials and the Emergency Plan Implementation Committee. The objectives of the meeting include following up the repercussions of recent local events, assessing the readiness of the ministry, and guaranteeing the stability of the electricity and water systems.

During the meeting, Al-Mukhaizeem praised the staff—including the engineers, technicians and administrators—for their deep sense of patriotism under the exceptional circumstances. He considers their dedication the "cornerstone" of system stability. He then stressed the importance of continuously monitoring all developments.

The meeting focused on the latest developments, review of measures to maintain stability and reliability of electricity and water services, and operational scenarios and rapid response plans to guarantee high-efficiency service continuity.

All those present at the meeting agreed that the major aspect of follow up is the assessment of damages to some overhead power transmission lines struck by shrapnel from drone interception operations. They also reviewed technical reports detailing the damages and repair mechanisms. The minister emphasized the need for immediate repairs as per the highest technical standards and safety

and security protocols.

Readiness of communications providers

Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology and Acting Minister of Information and Culture Omar Al-Omar stressed the importance of the readiness of the communications providers to respond to any developments that could affect the stability of service.

In statements to KUNA on Thursday, he noted that he met with heads of the communications companies and internet providers to review commitment to the emergency plans.

The meeting gathered Chairman of the Comprehensive Adult Intelligence Test (CAIT) Khaled Al-Zamel and Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Communications Meshal Al-Zaid.

It focused on the preparedness of the networks and digital infrastructure in the country and plans for ensuring continuity of quality service, the minister pointed out.

Al-Omar appreciate the efforts of the communication service providers and technical cadres of the sector, notably their initiative to provide roaming services for citizens trapped abroad in the current challenging conditions.

Shuwaikh port inspected

Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan conducted on Thursday an inspection visit to Shuwaikh Port to review the workflow and operational mechanisms at the port and monitored the movement of goods and commodities, to ensure readiness of operational facilities and efficiency of procedures during in import and unloading operations.

In a statement, the Ministry of Public Works said that the visit aims to ensure the regularity of supply movements and the smooth flow of goods into the country, as well as to enhance coordination between the concerned authorities to ensure the continued provision of basic goods and the stability of local markets, which supports the food security system in light of the current situations.

In latest development, Iran launched a new wave of attacks against Israel, American bases and countries around the region Thursday, while warning the U.S. would "bitterly regret" torpedoing an Iranian warship and calling for "Trump's blood." Tehran's expanding retaliatory strikes and increasing shows of defiance came even Israel hammered it for a sixth day.

The war has escalated each day, expanding well beyond the Gulf. On Thursday, Azerbaijan accused Iran of attacking it with drones - though Tehran denied launching them. A day earlier, the U.S. said it sank an Iranian frigate in the waters off Sri Lanka.

Israel announced multiple incoming missile attacks and air sirens sounded in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and Gulf countries also reported coming under fire.

In Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, a drone was shot down near the Al Dhafra Air Base, which hosts U.S. forces, and shrapnel fell to the ground, authorities said. Six people were wounded.

Qatar evacuated residents near the U.S. Embassy in Doha as a temporary precaution and later reported a missile attack on the city. Saudi Arabia said it destroyed a drone in its province bordering Jordan. The Israeli military said it launched attacks in Lebanon on the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant group - which attacked Israel in the opening days of the war - and that a wave of strikes on Iran had hit long-range ballistic missile launch sites and other targets.

A drone crashed Thursday near the airport in Nakhchivan, a region of Azerbaijan bordering the north of Iran that is separated from the rest of the country by Armenia. Another drone fell near a school and two civilians were injured, Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry said.

INTERNATIONAL

WH immigration crackdown hampered Minnesota's fraud fight, says Gov Walz

WASHINGTON, March 5, (AP) — Minnesota's governor and attorney general on Wednesday defended their efforts to combat fraud and told a US House committee that their efforts have been hampered by President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown in the state.

Republicans on the House Oversight Committee accused Gov Tim Walz and Attorney General Keith Ellison of stalling to fight fraud in government programs, saying they put politics ahead of rooting out abuse instead of pausing payments.

"You have not been good stewards of the taxpayer dollars," said Republican Rep James Comer of Kentucky, chair of the committee. "And the Democratic position is keep the money flowing. The American taxpayers have had enough."

Walz said he wanted to work with the federal government to help with fraud investigations, but the immigration surge was making that more difficult.

"The people of Minnesota have been singled out and targeted for political retribution at an unparalleled scale," Walz said. "We're going to prosecute,



Governor Tim Walz speaks during a House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform hearing on oversight of fraud and misuse of Federal funds in Minnesota on March 4, 2026, on Capitol Hill in Washington. (AP)

as we have, every single person that's involved in fraud, but we can't do it alone."

Walz and Ellison defended their ef-

orts on fraud, while also trying to turn the focus of the hearing to the surge of 3,000 federal agents in Minnesota that began in December. The Trump administration cited fraud as one justification for its enforcement action. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem testified Tuesday that about 650 investigators remain in Minnesota as part of a broader fraud probe.

"Operation Metro Surge did nothing to address fraud in our state," Ellison said. "It harmed our economy and it scared our people and it dealt a devastating blow to fraud enforcement in Minnesota." Ellison noted the series of resignation of lawyers in the US Attorney's Office in Minnesota, leaving those who remain "drowning in immigration-related petitions" instead of prosecuting fraud. On Tuesday, the US attorney for Minnesota appeared before a judge for a contempt hearing related to Immigration and Customs Enforcement not returning personal property of detainees.

Ellison said his office has "punched above our weight" in winning 300 Medicaid fraud convictions and recovering more than \$80 million for taxpayers.



Students relax on the front steps of Low Memorial Library on the Columbia University campus, in New York City on Feb 10, 2023. (AP)

Now is our opportunity to bring an end to the decades of chaos: Ernst

Senate GOP votes down legislation to halt Iran war in Congress' first vote on conflict

WASHINGTON, March 5, (AP) — US Senate Republicans voted down an effort Wednesday to halt President Donald Trump's war against Iran, demonstrating early support for a conflict that has rapidly spread across the Middle East with no clear US exit strategy.

The legislation, known as a war powers resolution, failed on a 47-53 vote tally. The vote fell mostly along party lines, though Republican Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky voted in favor and Democratic Sen John Fetterman of Pennsylvania voted against.

The war powers resolution gave lawmakers an opportunity to demand congressional approval before any further attacks are carried out. The vote forced them to take a stand on a war shaping the fate of US military members, countless other lives and the future of the region.

Underscoring the gravity of the moment, Democratic senators filled the Senate chamber and sat at their desks as the voting got underway. Typically, senators step into the chamber to cast their vote, then leave.

"Today every senator - every single one - will pick a side," Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said before the vote. "Do you stand with the American people who are exhausted with forever wars in the Middle East or stand with Donald Trump and Pete Hegseth as they bumble us headfirst into another war?"

Sen John Barrasso, second in Senate Republican leadership, said during the debate that GOP senators were sending a message that Democrats are wrong for forcing a vote on the war powers resolution.

"Democrats would rather obstruct Donald Trump than obliterate Iran's national nuclear program," he added.

After launching a surprise attack against Iran on Saturday, Trump has scrambled to win support for a conflict that Americans of all political persuasions were already wary of entering. Trump administration officials have been a frequent presence on Capitol Hill this week as they try to reassure lawmakers that they have the situation under control.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Wednesday that the war could extend eight weeks, a longer time frame than has previously been floated by the Trump administration. He also acknowledged that Iran is still able to carry out missile attacks even as the US tries to control the country's airspace.

US service members "remain in harm's way, and we must be clear-eyed that the risk is still high," Gen Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said at the same press conference.

Six US military members were killed over the weekend in a drone strike in Kuwait.



US Speaker of the House Mike Johnson gestures as he and the GOP leadership talk about the war against Iran, during a news conference at the Capitol in Washington on March 4. (AP)

Republican Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa acknowledged the human costs of the war in her floor speech. Two of the soldiers killed Sunday were from Iowa and a National Guard unit from her state was also attacked in Syria in December, resulting in the deaths of two other soldiers.

"But now is our opportunity to bring an end to the decades of chaos," said Ernst, who herself served as an officer in the Iowa National Guard for two

decades.

"The sooner the better," she added. Trump has also not ruled out deploying US ground troops. He has said he is hoping to end the bombing campaign within a few weeks, but his goals for the war have shifted from regime change to stopping Iran from developing nuclear capabilities to crippling its navy and missile programs.

"We should be careful about open-

ing a door into chaos in the Middle East when we cannot see the other side of it," Democratic Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware said in a solemn floor speech after the vote concluded.

He said he was praying for "grace to find a path forward together where more do not needlessly join those who have already fallen in this new war in the Middle East."

The votes in Congress this week represented potentially consequential markers of just where lawmakers stand on the war as they look ahead to mid-term elections and the consequences of the conflict.

"Nobody gets to hide and give the president an easy pass or an end-run around the Constitution," said Sen. Tim Kaine, the Virginia Democrat leading the war powers resolution.

Republican leaders have successfully, though narrowly, defeated a series of war powers resolutions pertaining to several other conflicts that Trump has entered or threatened to enter. This one, however, was different.

Unlike Trump's military campaigns against alleged drug boats or even Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro, the attack on Iran represents an open-ended conflict that is already ricocheting across the region. Several senators who have voted for previous war powers resolutions noted that they opposed this one because it applied to a conflict that is already raging.

"Passing this resolution now would send the wrong message to Iran and to our troops," said GOP Sen. Susan Collins of Maine. "At this juncture, providing unequivocal support to our service members is critically important, as is ongoing consultation by the administration with Congress."

On the other side of the Capitol, an intense debate over the war unfolded before a vote Thursday. The House first debated a resolution presented by GOP leadership affirming that Iran is the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism.

Rep. Brian Mast, the GOP chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, publicly thanked Trump for taking action against Iran, saying the president is using his own constitutional authority to defend the U.S. against the "imminent threat" of Iran.

Mast, an Army veteran who worked as a bomb disposal expert in Afghanistan, said the Democratic resolution was effectively asking "that the president do nothing."

Rep. Gregory Meeks, the top Democrat on the Foreign Affairs panel, said before the debate that the hardest votes he has taken in Congress have been to decide whether to send U.S. troops to war. "Our young men and women's lives are on the line," he said, his voice showing emotion as he emerged from a closed-door briefing late Tuesday with Trump officials.

US and Mideast countries seek Kyiv's drone expertise as Russia-Ukraine talks put on ice

KYIV, Ukraine, March 5, (Agencies) — The United States and its allies in the Middle East are seeking Ukraine's expertise in countering Iran's Shahed drones, according to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Various countries, including the United States, have approached Ukraine for help in defending against the Iranian drones, Zelenskyy said late Wednesday. He said he has spoken in recent days with the leaders of the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan and Kuwait about possible cooperation.

Russia has fired tens of thousands of Shaheds at Ukraine since it invaded its neighbor just over four years ago. Iran has responded with the same type of drones to joint U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iranian targets.

Ukrainian assistance in countering Iranian drones will be provided only if it does not weaken Ukraine's own defenses, and if it adds leverage to Kyiv's diplomatic efforts to stop the Russian invasion, according to the Ukrainian leader. "We help to defend from war those who help us, Ukraine, bring a just end to the war" with Russia, Zelenskyy said.

The Iran war, now in its sixth day,



A Ukrainian soldier of the 48th separate brigade launches a reconnaissance drone in Kharkiv region, Ukraine on March 4. (AP)

has drawn international attention away from Europe's biggest conflict since World War II, and forced the postponement of a new round of U.S.-brokered talks between Russia and Ukraine planned for this week, Zelenskyy said.

Western governments and analysts say the Russia-Ukraine war has killed hundreds of thousands of people, while there is no sign that yearlong U.S.-led

peace efforts will stop the fighting any time soon.

"Right now, because of the situation around Iran, there are not yet the necessary signals for a trilateral meeting," Zelenskyy said. "But as soon as the security situation and the overall political context allow us to resume that trilateral diplomatic work, it will be done."

United States dismantles one of world's largest hacker forums

WASHINGTON, March 5, (KUNA) — The US Department of Justice announced the seizure of the LeakBase database, one of the world's largest online forums for cybercriminals to buy and sell stolen data and cybercrime tools.

According to an affidavit unsealed on March 3, the LeakBase forum had over 142,000 members and more than 215,000 messages between members, a DOJ statement said on Wednesday.

Available on the open web and in English, the forum had an enormous and continuously updated archive of hacked databases including many from high profile attacks, including hundreds of millions of account credentials.

LeakBase allowed forum users to sell the information from stolen databases, including data illegally obtained from US corporations and individuals, and offered credit and debit card numbers, banking

account and routing information, usernames and associated passwords which could facilitate additional account takeovers, as well as other sensitive business and personally identifiable information.

On March 3-4, law enforcement agents and officers in 14 countries including the United States took synchronized actions against LeakBase and its users in a coordinated effort hosted by Europol in The Hague, according to the statement.

Specifically, the United States and other countries shut down LeakBase, seized its data and two of the domains used by the forum, posted seizure banners on the LeakBase sites, sent prevention messages to LeakBase members, and collected additional evidence.

"The takedown of this cyber forum disrupts a major international platform that cybercriminals use to obtain and profit from the theft of sensitive personal, banking and account credentials," said Assistant Attorney General A. Tysen Duva of the Justice Department's Criminal Division.

"This operation illustrates the strength of the United States and our international partners working across the globe to dismantle a critical cybercriminal forum."



Duva

Europe

Greek court upholds party's verdict: An appeals court in Athens on Wednesday upheld a 2020 ruling that the far-right, now-defunct party Golden Dawn (Chryssi Avghi) operated as a criminal organization.

The court found all 42 defendants guilty in the long-running case, which examined the party's activities, including extortion, illegal weapons possession, murder, and dozens of violent assaults against migrants and political opponents.

Seven defendants were convicted of directing the criminal organization, while the remaining defendants -- including 11 former members of parliament -- were found guilty of membership.

The court also upheld convictions related to the 2013 murder of anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas, who was killed in a suburb near the port of Piraeus. His murder triggered a sweeping crackdown on Golden Dawn, which had entered the Greek parliament during the country's financial crisis. The perpetrator, Georgios Roupakias, was sentenced to life imprisonment, while 14 other defendants were found guilty as accomplices to homicide.

Following the original verdict, senior party figures received lengthy prison sentences. Some defendants have



Michaloliakos

remained in prison since the initial ruling, while others, including party leader Nikos Michaloliakos, have been released under restrictive conditions. Golden Dawn was founded in the 1980s and formally registered as a political party in 1993. It rose rapidly during Greece's sovereign debt crisis and, in the May and June 2012 general elections, secured nearly 7 percent of the vote, becoming the third-largest party in the Greek parliament. (Xinhua)

Man convicted of stabbing in Germany: A court convicted a Syrian man on Thursday of stabbing and seriously wounding a Spanish tourist at Berlin's Memorial just over a year ago, and sentenced him to 13 years on prison.

The 20-year-old defendant, whom authorities have identified only as Wassim Al M. in line with German privacy laws, was convicted on charges including attempted murder and attempted membership in a foreign terrorist organization, German news agency dpa reported.

The Berlin district court found that he traveled from Leipzig to Berlin on Feb. 21, 2025 to carry out an attack in the name of the Islamic State group.

He chose the Memorial because "he believed he would find people of faith there," presiding judge Doris Husch said, and he stabbed the Spanish tourist in the throat. The 31-year-old victim survived but is still unable to work and receiving psychological treatment. The defendant said during his trial that he had regretted the attack immediately, and asserted that he had traveled to Berlin under pressure from an online acquaintance he had gotten to know as he watched IS videos. (AP)

Czech lawmakers to vote on lifting immunity for PM over EU fraud case

PRAGUE, March 5, (AP) — Lawmakers in the lower house of the Czech Parliament were set to decide on Thursday whether to lift Prime Minister Andrej Babiš' immunity from prosecution in a \$2 million fraud case involving European Union subsidies.

The approval would allow Prague's Municipal Court to deal with the case and issue a verdict. The court had acquitted Babiš twice before but an appeals court canceled those rulings, saying they did not properly assess evidence and requested the lower court issue a guilty verdict in a retrial.

Babiš had pleaded not guilty and said the case "is clearly politically motivated." The prosecution had originally requested a suspended sentence and a fine to be paid by the populist billionaire, who began his third term as prime minister in December. The case centered around a farm known as the Stork's Nest, which received EU subsidies after its ownership was transferred from the Babiš-owned Agrofert conglomerate to Babiš' family members. Later, Agrofert again took ownership of the farm.

The subsidies were meant for small and medium enterprises, meaning that Agrofert wouldn't have been eligible. The conglomerate later returned the subsidy.



Czech Republic's Prime Minister Andrej Babiš speaks during a meeting of the lower house of the Czech Parliament that is to decide whether to lift the populist's immunity from prosecution in a fraud case involving European Union subsidies, in Prague, Czech Republic on March 5. (AP)

Babiš' former associate Jana Nagyová, who signed the subsidy request, will face retrial. She is currently a member of European Parliament, which has already lifted her immunity.

'Choe Hyon designed to handle various weapons systems'

N.Korea's Kim inspects new warship, claims progress toward nuclear-armed navy

SEOUL, South Korea, March 5, (AP): North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inspected his new destroyer for two straight days ahead of its commissioning and observed a test of cruise missiles fired from the warship, vowing to accelerate the nuclear-armament of his navy, state media said Thursday.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency said Kim, during his visits to the western shipyard of Nampo on Tuesday and Wednesday, also inspected the construction of a third destroyer of the same class as his 5,000-ton warship, the Choe Hyon, first unveiled in April 2025.

Kim has hailed the development of Choe Hyon as a significant advancement toward his goal of expanding the operational range and preemptive strike capabilities of his nuclear-armed military. State media says the ship is designed to handle various weapons systems, including anti-air and anti-naval weapons, as well as nuclear-capable ballistic and cruise missiles. South Korean military officials and ex-

perts say Choe Hyon was likely built with Russian assistance amid deepening military ties, but some have raised doubts about whether it's ready for active service.

North Korea unveiled a second destroyer of the same class in May last year, but it was damaged during a botched launching ceremony at the northeastern port of Chongjin, triggering a furious reaction from Kim, who called the failure "criminal." North Korea has said the new destroyer, named Kang Kon, was relaunched in June after repair, but outside experts have questioned whether the ship is fully operational.

After observing Choe Hyon's sea trials on Tuesday, Kim said the ship met operational requirements and called it a symbol of the country's expanding naval capabilities. He called for building two warships a year over the next five years of the same or higher class as the Choe Hyon.

Kim came back Wednesday to observe a test launch of cruise missiles



In this photo provided by the North Korean government, its leader Kim Jong Un, foreground, attends a sea trial of new destroyer, Choe Hyon ahead of its commissioning on March 3. (AP)

from the Choe Hyon. State media published photos of him watching from shore as several projectiles rose from

systems.

After years of spurring ballistic missile development, Kim has shifted his focus more toward naval capabilities, including an ongoing construction of a nuclear-powered submarine. KCNA said the third destroyer under construction at the Nampo shipyard is expected to be completed by the ruling Workers' Party's founding anniversary in October.

Naval capabilities were also a key focus when Kim outlined his five-year military goals at last month's Workers' Party congress, which included calls for intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of being launched from underwater.

Kim on Tuesday claimed that his efforts to arm his navy with nuclear weapons were "making satisfactory" progress. He said those purported advancements would "constitute a radical change in defending our maritime sovereignty, something that we have not achieved for half a century."

KCNA did not elaborate on what

Kim meant. Some analysts say North Korea may be preparing to formally declare a maritime boundary that could encroach on waters controlled by rival South Korea.

As inter-Korean tensions worsen, Kim has repeatedly said he does not recognize the Northern Limit Line, drawn by the US-led UN Command at the end of the 1950-53 Korean War. The poorly drawn western sea boundary has been the site of several deadly naval clashes in past years.

At the party congress, Kim doubled down on plans to expand North Korea's nuclear arsenal, which already is equipped with various weapons systems threatening the United States and U.S. allies in Asia, and confirmed his hard-line view of rival South Korea.

But he left the door open for dialogue with the Trump administration, reiterating Pyongyang's demand that Washington drop its insistence on denuclearization as a precondition for resuming long-stalled talks.

Election campaign kicks off

200 killed in Congo mine collapse

GOMA, Congo, March 5, (Agencies): A mine collapse on Tuesday at a major coltan mining site in eastern Congo left at least 200 dead, according to Congolese authorities, a number disputed by the rebel group that controls the mine.

The collapse took place Tuesday at the Rubaya mines, which are controlled by the M23 rebels, Congo's Ministry of Mines said in a statement on Wednesday, the latest such accident in the country's mineral-rich and rebel-controlled territories.

Fanny Kaj, a senior official in the M23 rebel group, which controls the mines, disputed the figure and said that the collapse was caused by "bombings" and only five people had been killed.

"I can confirm that what people are publishing is not true. There was no landslide; there were bombings, and the death toll isn't what people are saying. It's simply about five people who died," Kaj said.

Ibrahim Taluseke, a miner at the site, said that he had helped to recover over 200 bodies from the area.

"We are afraid, but these are lives that are in danger," said Taluseke. "The owners of the pits do not accept that the exact number of deaths be revealed."

Rubaya lies in the heart of eastern Congo, a mineral-rich part of the Central African nation which for decades

has been ripped apart by violence from government forces and different armed groups, including the Rwanda-backed M23, whose recent resurgence has escalated the conflict, worsening an already acute humanitarian crisis.

Congo is a major supplier of coltan, a black metallic ore that contains the rare metal tantalum, a key component in the production of smartphones, computers and aircraft engines.

The country produced about 40% of the world's coltan in 2023, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, with Australia, Canada and Brazil being other big suppliers. Over 15% of the world's supply of tantalum comes from Rubaya's mines.

In May 2024, M23 seized the town and took control of its mines. According to a U.N. report, since seizing Rubaya, the rebels have imposed taxes on the trade and transport of coltan, generating at least \$800,000 a month.

Eastern Congo has been in and out of crisis for decades. Various conflicts have created one of the world's largest humanitarian crises with more than 7 million people displaced, including more than 300,000 who have fled their homes since December.

In June, the Congolese and Rwandan government signed a peace deal brokered by the US and negotiations continue between rebels and Congo. However, fighting continues on several

fronts in eastern Congo, continuing to claim numerous civilian and military casualties.

The deal between Congo and Rwanda also opens up access to critical minerals for the US government and American companies.

A similar collapse last month killed over 200.

Also:

BRAZZAVILLE: The campaign for the presidential election in the Republic of the Congo, scheduled for March 15, officially began last Saturday, with seven candidates competing for the country's top office for the next five years.

Portraits and posters bearing messages of support for the various candidates already line the main roads and public squares of Brazzaville, the country's capital.

Incumbent President Denis Sassou Nguesso will run under the banner of the Presidential Majority, a coalition comprising nearly 20 political parties.

Other candidates include Joseph Kignombi Kia Mboungou, a member of parliament and the leader of "The Chain" party, who is running for the fifth time since 2002. Anguios Nguanguia Engambe, president of the Party for Action of the Republic, is competing for the fourth consecutive time since 2009.



Miners work at the D4 Gakombe coltan mining quarry in Rubaya, Democratic Republic of Congo on May 9, 2025. (AP)

Major blackout in Cuba's western region leaves millions without power

HAVANA, March 5, (AP): A blackout left millions of people without power in Havana and the rest of western Cuba on Wednesday in the latest outage on an island struggling with dwindling oil reserves and a crumbling electric grid.

Government radio station Radio Rebelde quoted an energy official as saying that it could take at least 72 hours to restore operations at one of Cuba's largest thermoelectric power plants, where a shutdown sparked the outage.

The government's electric utility said on social platform X that the outage affected people from the western town of Pinar del Rio to the central town of Camaguey.

Energy and Mines Minister Vicente de la O Levy wrote on X late Wednesday that the government was powering critical infrastructure in the affected region as two power plants came online. Such infrastructure includes hospitals and medical clinics.

"We are working to restore the National Electric System amid a complex energy situation," he wrote earlier on X.

The U.S. Embassy warned people to "prepare for significant disruptions" and conserve fuel, water, food and mobile phone batteries. "Cuba's national power grid is increasingly unreliable, and scheduled and unscheduled power outages are



A man crosses a street during a blackout in Havana on March 4. (AP)

prolonged and a daily occurrence across the country, including Havana," it said on X.

By late afternoon, the government said crews had restored power to 2.5% of Havana, or some 21,100 customers, noting that efforts were gradual and tied to what the system's conditions would allow. It did not provide updated numbers by late Wednesday night.

"We trust in the experience and effort of the electrical workers to overcome this situation in the shortest possible time," Prime Minister Manuel Marrero Cruz

wrote on X.

As night fell, people across Havana lingered on doorsteps and used wood or charcoal to prepare "caldos," a popular soup shared among neighbors who contribute items including vegetables, chicken and meat. A group of musicians along the city's famed seawall played into the night.

Others played dominoes by a rechargeable lightbulb.

"With the power outages, this is the only thing we young people have to distract ourselves," Jefferson Silvera said.

Voting peaceful in first Nepal election since September youth-led protests

KATHMANDU, Nepal, March 5, (AP): Voting was peaceful Thursday in Nepal's first nationwide election since a violent, youth-led uprising forced the government from power in September.

Security forces patrolled streets and guarded polling stations across the Himalayan nation of about 30 million people as voters lined up to cast their ballots. Vote counting is set to begin later Thursday, with results expected over the weekend.

Campaigning and voting through Thursday had not been disrupted by any incidents of violence, officials said.

"There is huge excitement about this election among the people, and we anticipate the voter turnout to be at least 65%," Nepal's acting chief election commissioner Ram Prasad Bhandari said.

Authorities banned vehicles from the streets and prohibited political rallies and public gatherings. All forms of campaigning are barred on election day.

People crowded polling stations from the mountains in the north to the southern plains districts. At the main square in capital city Kathmandu, men and women stood in separate lines under the warm spring sun while police officers and soldiers maintained a tight security presence around the area.

"I came to vote mainly because of the protest and so many people gave their lives in the hope of a change, in hope of seeing better Nepal," said Luniva, a first-time voter. "Hopefully, I want to see my country become better by all the sacrifices that have been made."

Others shared similar hopes that the election could usher in positive change for the Himalayan nation after months



Nepalese people stand in a queue to cast their vote at a polling station for the parliamentary election in Kathmandu, Nepal on March 5. (AP)

of political unrest.

"I felt someone I am able to fulfill and responsibility as a person and a citizen because each of our votes matters," said Sanjija Shrestha, who walked to the polling station despite being visually impaired.

Young voters joined older generations at polling stations across the country, with many lining up even before voting began at 7 a.m.

There are about 19 million registered voters among the country's nearly 30 million people, according to the Election Commission of Nepal.

Millions of Nepalis living overseas are unable to take part in the vote. An estimated 3 million citizens work abroad - largely in the Middle East, Southeast Asia and neighboring India - and cannot cast ballots because the country does not yet have a system al-

lowing voting from abroad.

Voters are directly electing 165 members to the House of Representatives, the lower chamber of Parliament. The remaining 110 seats in the 275-member body will be allocated through a proportional representation system, under which political parties nominate lawmakers based on their share of the vote.

The election is widely seen as a three-way contest, shaped by voter frustration over widespread corruption and demands for greater government accountability.

The National Independent Party, founded in 2022, is considered the front-runner, posing a strong challenge to two long-dominant parties: the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist).

2 more candidates nominated for next UN secretary-general

UNITED NATIONS, March 5, (Xinhua): Two more candidates have been nominated for the position of the next UN secretary-general, according to documents published on the official website of the president of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on Wednesday.

Burundi, the current chair of the African Union, has nominated Macky Sall, former president of Senegal, while Costa Rica has put forward Rebeca Grynspan, economist and former vice president of Costa Rica, for the post.

With the new nominations, there are currently four candidates vying for the position. The other two candidates are former Chilean president Michelle Bachelet, nominated by Chile, Brazil and Mexico, and Rafael Grossi, the current director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, nominated by Argentina.

In a letter to UN member states on Wednesday, UNGA President Annalena Baerbock revealed the modalities of the interactive dialogues with the candidates, scheduled for the week of April 20.



Senegal's President Macky Sall speaks during a plenary session at the COP28 UN Climate Summit on Dec 1, 2023, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. (AP)

US and Ecuador launch joint military op against organized crime groups

QUITO, Ecuador, March 5, (AP): Ecuador and the United States have begun joint military operations against organized crime groups in the South American country, the US military said, but neither government has given details of the location and scope of the operation.

US Southern Command said in a statement late Tuesday that Ecuadorian and US military forces had launched operations in a "powerful example of the commitment of partners in Latin America and the Caribbean to combat the scourge of narco-terrorism."

A 30-second video accompanying a post on X showed a helicopter flying over a group of men walking on the ground, but the footage stops without revealing more about the location.

"We are taking decisive action to confront narco-terrorists who have long inflicted terror, violence, and corruption on citizens throughout the hemisphere," the post added, without providing other details of the operation.

Gen. Henry Delgado, head of Ecuador's Joint Command, said Wednesday during a Quito security forum that "certain operations" took place on Tuesday, but didn't provide details of any operations on Ecuadorian soil.



Ecuador's President Daniel Noboa attends an economic forum organized by the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean (CAF) in Panama City on Jan 28. (AP)

"We are certain that our actions are for the benefit of our beloved Ecuador, especially with the backing of international organizations and other nations," he said.

Ecuador's foreign and defense ministries did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press. The operation was not mentioned Wednesday at the US

defense secretary briefing, which was focused on Iran.

Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa had said earlier this week that his government was beginning joint actions with other countries as part of a new phase in the fight against organized crime, as Ecuador faces a sustained wave of violence linked to drug trafficking and illegal mining.

Kuwait oil price rises to \$84.24 pb

KUWAIT CITY, March 5, (KUNA): The price of Kuwaiti oil went up USD 3.92 to reach USD 84.24 per barrel on Wednesday, compared to USD 80.32 the previous day, reported the Kuwait Petroleum Corpora-

tion (KPC) on Thursday.

In global markets, the price of Brent crude went up USD 1.11 to reach USD 82.51 per barrel, and West Texas Intermediate increased 10 cents to USD 74.66 pb.

Business

New app offers 24/7 personal assistance for cardholders

Gulf Bank launches new Concierge App in collaboration with Peacock Concierge to elevate customer lifestyle experience

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: As part of its ongoing commitment to delivering innovative digital solutions that enhance customers' lifestyles, Gulf Bank has launched its new Concierge App in strategic collaboration with Peacock Concierge, a globally renowned provider of premium lifestyle management and personal assistance services.

This initiative reflects Gulf Bank's vision to offer an integrated digital ecosystem that extends beyond traditional services and supports customers in managing their everyday needs with greater ease, comfort, and efficiency.

The Concierge App serves as a personalized lifestyle companion, designed for Gulf Bank credit cardholders to provide customers with seamless, on-demand assistance through a single, intuitive digital platform. Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the service ensures continuous support regardless of time or location, empowering customers with immediate access to expert assistance whenever needed.

The concierge concept is centered on simplifying daily life while delivering a highly personalized and refined experience. Through the application, customers can access a comprehensive range of services that support both routine tasks and special occasions.

These include travel planning and coordination, flight and hotel bookings, restaurant reservations, event access, limousine arrangements, airport meet-and-greet services, visa and travel documentation assistance, messenger and delivery coordination, appointment scheduling, reminders, roadside assistance, and a wide range of bespoke



personal services tailored to individual preferences. The platform also provides access to exclusive offers and privileges, supported by a dedicated team that ensures prompt, discreet, and professional service delivery at all times.

The collaboration with Peacock Concierge brings world-class expertise and global service capabilities, enabling Gulf Bank to provide customers with access to an extensive international network of service providers. This ensures consistent, high-quality support whether customers are at

home or traveling abroad, reinforcing peace of mind and delivering an elevated level of convenience.

At the core of the Concierge App is Gulf Bank's unwavering focus on customer experience. The platform has been carefully designed to deliver a seamless and intuitive user journey that combines advanced digital functionality with personalized human support. By integrating lifestyle services into a secure and accessible mobile application, Gulf Bank enables customers to save time, reduce complexity, and focus on what matters most to them, while enjoying a sense of confidence and ease in managing their personal arrangements.

The launch of the Concierge App forms part of Gulf Bank's broader digital transformation strategy, which aims to continuously enhance its digital infrastructure and deliver meaningful, customer-centric solutions. This strategy has already been reflected in the ongoing development of the Bank's mobile banking platforms for both individual and corporate customers, offering secure, efficient, and user-friendly tools to manage financial activities anytime and anywhere.

Together, these digital platforms contribute to a comprehensive ecosystem designed to strengthen customer engagement, improve accessibility, and deliver a more holistic experience that aligns with the evolving expectations of modern customers. By combining advanced technology with personalized service excellence, Gulf Bank continues to reinforce its position as a forward-thinking Bank committed to innovation, service quality, and long-term customer value.

Index up 1.33%

Boursa Kuwait closes higher

KUWAIT CITY, March 5, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait ended Thursday's session on a strong note, with its general market index climbing 111.96 points, or 1.33 percent, to close at 8,549.77 points.

Total trading reached 218.16 million shares across 16,580 cash transactions, with a combined value of KD 70.4 million (approximately USD 215.4 million).

The Main Market Index advanced 106.42 points, or 1.37 percent, to settle at 7,887.10 points. Trading volume stood at 74.3 million shares through 6,362 transactions worth KD 9 million (around USD 27.5

million).

Meanwhile, the Premier Market Index also posted gains, adding 118.94 points, or 1.32 percent, to close at 9,134.21 points. It saw 143.8 million shares exchanged through 10,218 deals, valued at KD 61.3 million (about USD 187.5 million).

The Main 50 Index recorded the strongest performance of the day, surging 232.53 points, or 2.91 percent, to reach 8,234.94 points. A total of 65.9 million shares were traded across 5,444 transactions, with a total value of KD 7.9 million (approximately USD 24 million).

Reinforcing crisis preparedness

KPC declares robust contingency plans amid regional developments

KUWAIT CITY, March 5, (KUNA): Chief Executive Officer of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah affirmed on Wednesday that the corporation has implemented rigorous, well-studied contingency plans to effectively navigate various crises and potential regional scenarios.

In a statement to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Sheikh Nawaf Al-Sabah underscored that a comprehensive strategy is operational to ensure the seamless fulfillment of local market requirements amidst the current regional situation.

He emphasized that the occupational safety of the oil sector workforce and the integrity of upstream and downstream operations remain the corporation's paramount priorities.

The CEO noted that KPC's emergency protocols undergo systematic review and periodic updates, complemented by regular drills and training pro-

grams designed to bolster institutional preparedness and ensure an agile response to any developments.

Sheikh Nawaf further clarified that the corporation's procedural framework is predicated on safeguarding its personnel while simultaneously guaranteeing the uninterrupted supply of essential petroleum derivatives—primarily gasoline, diesel, and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders—to the domestic market.

Significantly, the CEO revealed that KPC maintains an extensive, long-term strategic reserve of these essential products. He confirmed that this stockpile remains untouched, as crude oil production and refining operations continue at normal levels, fully meeting local demand.

He concluded by commending the dedication of oil sector personnel stationed at vital installations, whose efforts safeguard the stability of the Kuwaiti economy's "lifeline" by ensuring the efficient and continuous delivery of energy supplies.

KFH: High-efficiency operations & 24/7 availability of digital services

KUWAIT CITY, March 5: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has affirmed its full operational readiness and the high-efficiency continuity of its business across the Group. By integrating proactive business continuity plans with regular stress testing of its infrastructure and trained personnel, the Bank ensures comprehensive operational resilience. This framework secures the stable and uninterrupted provision of all banking services under various scenarios.

KFH explained that its business continuity strategy is built on precise, round-the-clock reviews of operational plans.

The Bank added that its operations undergo continuous evaluation to ensure compliance with governmental and regulatory guidelines, while maintaining the highest quality standards under all circumstances.

KFH also confirmed that its technical infrastructure supports the uninterrupted delivery of services on a 24/7 basis. This capability is reinforced by a contact center operating around the clock to meet customer needs and ensure smooth operations. In addition, the Bank utilizes a distributed contact center network across three separate locations to enable effective task allocation and sustain full business continuity.

Regarding digital solutions and self-service options, KFH emphasized that its digital ecosystem allows customers to conduct transactions seamlessly from anywhere at any time. Through the KFHOnline app, users can manage a wide range of banking and financing transactions without visiting a branch. The Bank also provides alternative channels, including e-payment solutions and instant transfers, all in line with the highest standards of security and speed.

KFH reaffirmed the resilience of its banking network, placing customer safety and interests at the forefront of its priorities. The Bank remains committed to providing regular updates through its official social media channels and contact center. By employing real-time monitoring of performance indicators, KFH maintains consistent service quality and demonstrates its institutional capability to sustain uninterrupted business operations.

KFH concluded by reaffirming its commitment to



its approved operational plans. These strategies ensure KFH head office

the Bank's ability to maintain business continuity, deliver services seamlessly, and coordinate operational efforts to navigate developments with stability and efficiency.

The Bank also confirmed that its operations are currently proceeding as normal, with all banking services, including branches, digital channels, and ATMs, maintaining a high level of readiness to ensure uninterrupted services under all circumstances.

Japan, South Korea and Taiwan rely on stockpiles as reserves tested

Global energy trade in turmoil as Gulf war chokes oil and gas flows

BANGKOK, March 5, (AP): Global energy trade is in turmoil as war around the Arabian Gulf chokes off oil and natural gas shipments, causing prices to soar.

Asia is the most exposed since it relies heavily on imported fuel, much of it shipped through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow passageway that carries a fifth of global trade in crude oil and liquefied natural gas, or LNG.

About 13 million barrels of oil per day moved through the corridor in 2025, according to energy consultancy Kpler. That's about a third of all seaborne crude, the unrefined petroleum that is processed into fuels such as gasoline and diesel.

Roughly a fifth of the world's LNG, natural gas cooled into liquid form for easier storage and transport, also flows through the straits. More than 80% of the LNG shipped through the strait in 2024 went to Asia, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Since the Iran war began, the price of Brent crude, the international standard, has jumped 15% to about \$84 per barrel, the highest level since July 2024.

U.S. President Donald Trump said Tuesday the U.S. will offer risk insurance to shippers and may deploy its navy to protect vessels if needed. But the disruptions are cascading beyond the region. When supply tightens, richer nations outbid poorer ones for scarce cargoes, leaving more vulnerable economies short of fuel. This was seen during past energy shocks caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

"The crisis, with the closure of the Hormuz Strait as the latest development, would not only raise oil and gas prices but also grind global economic activity to a halt," said Zulfikar Yurnaidi, with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' Centre for Energy.

For Asia's two most populous countries, their huge scale magnifies the risks.

China is the world's largest crude oil importer and India comes in third. Sustained spikes in oil prices would ripple through their broader economies, straining transport, industry and households.

China is the biggest buyer of Iranian oil, but Beijing has prioritized energy security and has alternatives, including major use of renewables. It imported about 1.4 million barrels per day from Iran last year, roughly 13% of its total seaborne crude imports, according to Kpler.

Most of those shipments are already at sea and will cover another four to five months of demand, Kpler estimates. China also has substantial strategic petroleum reserves, though the exact amount is a state secret.

It can buy more from Russia: China's independent refiners - also known in the industry as 'teapots' - have been the key buyers for Iranian, Russian and Venezuelan oil, often at big discounts due to risks associated



People line up to fill fuel in their motorcycles at a gas station in Jakarta, Indonesia, Tuesday, March 3, 2026. (AP)

with Western sanctions. Despite war-related disruptions, global supplies are sufficient overall.

"It is therefore unlikely that China would struggle to source enough crude to power its economy or meet domestic demand," said Muyu Xu, a senior crude oil analyst at Kpler. "The real question is at what price."

India might resume purchases of Russian crude oil, despite pressure from Trump not to.

It has enough crude reserves to last less than a month. The next two weeks will be critical and the situation could deteriorate quickly, driving up fuel costs and broader inflation if the conflict drags on, according to energy analyst Vibhuti Garg with the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, or IEEFA, in Delhi.

"It is a very, very volatile situation," Garg said.

The main risk is higher prices for perishable foods vulnerable to supply shocks. At the same time, a weaker rupee and higher borrowing costs could slow the economy, she said.

Few regions are as exposed to Middle East energy flow disruptions as East Asia.

Japan imported 2.34 million barrels of crude per day in January, about 95% of its total imports that month, according to its Ministry of Economy,

Trade and Industry. Japan is often ranked as the world's second-largest LNG importer.

South Korea relies nearly entirely on energy imports. The Korea International Trade Association says it gets around 70% of its crude oil and 20% of its LNG from the Middle East.

Taiwan also imports nearly all of its LNG. It has been trying to reduce its reliance on the Middle East but still sources about one-third from Qatar, which halted LNG production after attacks on its facilities.

Japan and South Korea have large energy supply stockpiles. While Taiwan announced that it has enough supplies for March and contingency plans for the future.

But analysts say reserves are temporary buffers and energy-intensive industries, like Taiwan's semiconductor industry, remain vulnerable.

Governments are in "hope for the best, prepare for the worst" mode, said Grant Hauber, with IEEFA, warning some may regret not diversifying sooner into renewables, a "natural hedge" against disruption.

Fossil fuels dominate the energy mix in all three East Asian economies. Renewables provide under 10% of power in South Korea and Taiwan and about 22% in Japan, according to the International Energy Agency.

Developing, energy-hungry countries in Southeast Asia face the risk of being outbid by richer nations as supplies tighten.

In Singapore, officials have warned businesses and households to brace for higher energy bills.

In Manila, authorities banned non-essential travel and personal use of government cars to cut fuel use.

In Thailand, officials have urged the public to save energy, as motorists lined up at filling stations as prices climbed.

Full-time delivery riders and drivers - essential to keeping goods and people moving through Thailand's congested urban centers - depend on fuel to earn a living. In the northern city of Chiang Rai, 64-year-old taxi driver Sommit Sutar said he can't see how to conserve fuel and still work.

"Gasoline was already expensive. This war will make the problem even worse," Sutar said.

The government has suspended petroleum exports to shore up domestic reserves, which it says can last up to 61 days while ramping up natural gas production from the Gulf of Thailand and Myanmar.

Thailand relies heavily on spot-market LNG, leaving it "highly exposed to price and geopolitical volatility," said Amy Kong, with the Brussels-registered research group Zero Carbon Analytics. That makes it vulnerable to bidding wars with wealthier nations.

Rising oil and gas prices strengthen Kremlin's war chest

Iran war energy shock hands Russia major oil revenue boost

FRANKFURT, March 5, (AP) — The Iran war's disruption of Middle East oil and gas supplies and soaring prices are strengthening Russia's ability to profit from its energy exports, a pillar of the Kremlin's budget and a key to paying for its own war in Ukraine.

Prices for Russia's oil exports have risen from under \$40 per barrel as recently as December to about \$62 per barrel — first on fears of war and then due to interruption of almost all tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, the conduit for some 20% of the world's oil consumption.

Russian oil still trades at a considerable discount to international benchmark Brent crude, which has risen above \$82 from the closing price of \$72.87 on Friday, the eve of the attack on Iran by the U.S. and Israel. However, Russian crude is now above the benchmark of \$59 per barrel that was assumed in the Russian Finance Ministry's budget plan for 2026. Oil and gas tax revenues account for up to 30% of the Russian federal budget.

Additionally, the halt in production of ship-borne liquefied natural gas, or LNG, by major supplier Qatar will sharply increase global competition for available cargoes — including those from Russia.

Russia had seen state oil and gas revenue fall to a four-year low of 393 billion rubles (\$5 billion) in January and the budget shortfall of 1.7 trillion rubles (\$21.8 billion) for that month was the biggest on record, according to Finance Ministry figures.

The lower revenue was due to weaker global prices and to deep discounts fueled by U.S. and European Union hindrance of Russia's "shadow fleet" of tankers with obscure ownership used to sell oil to its biggest customers, China and India, in defiance of a Western-imposed price cap and sanctions on Russia's two biggest oil companies, Lukoil and Rosneft.

Economic growth has stagnated as massive military spending has leveled off. President Vladimir Putin has resorted to tax increases and increased borrowing from compliant domestic banks to keep state finances on an even keel in the fifth year of the war.

"Russia is a big winner from the war-related energy turmoil," said Simone Tagliapietra, energy expert at the Bruegel think tank in Brussels. "Higher oil prices mean higher revenues for the government and therefore stronger capability to finance the war



An oil tanker is moored at the Sheskhari complex in Novorossiysk, Russia, Tuesday, Oct. 11, 2022. (AP)

in Ukraine."

Amena Bakr, head of Middle East and OPEC+ insights at data and analytics firm Kpler, writes: "With Middle East barrels facing logistical disruption, both India and China face strong incentives to deepen reliance on Russian supply."

Additionally, the price of future delivery of natural gas has skyrocketed in Europe, raising questions about EU plans to put an end to imports of Russian LNG by 2027 — reviving bad memories of a 2022 energy crunch after Moscow cut off most supplies of pipeline gas due to the war.

Much depends on how long the Strait of Hormuz remains closed to most ship traffic, said Alexandra Prokopenko, an expert on the Russian economy at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center in Berlin.

A quick exit from the conflict would return Brent prices to roughly \$65 per barrel and "a short-lived spike would not fundamentally change" Russia's budget picture, she said. A middle scenario in which some shipping resumes and oil stabilizes at around \$80 per barrel would give Russia "some fiscal relief," depending on how long the higher prices last.

A long-term closure with Iranian strikes damaging refineries and pipelines could send oil to \$108 per barrel, accelerate inflation and push Europe to the edge of recession. "This scenario would bring the largest windfall to Russia," she said.

Even several weeks of interruption in Gulf LNG could lead to calls in Europe to suspend plans to ban new Russian supply contracts after April 25, said Chris Weafer, CEO of Macro-Advisory Ltd consul-

tancy.

"The EU is under even more pressure to work with the U.S. to find a solution to the Ukraine conflict and, very likely, to consider easing the plan for a total block for Russian oil and gas imports," he said. "Countries such as Hungary and Slovakia and those who have been big buyers of Russian LNG, will press for that review."

In any case "the Russian federal budget will have a much better result in March," Weafer said, due to lower discounts on Russian oil and "because there are eager buyers of Russian oil and oil products."

Putin said European governments were to blame for their energy predicament.

"What is happening today on the European markets, is, of course, above all the result of the mistaken policies of European governments in the energy sphere," Putin said Wednesday on state TV.

He said that "maybe it would be more beneficial for us to halt (gas) supplies now to the European market, and leave for the markets that are opening and get established there," adding that "it's not a decision, but in this case what's called 'thinking out loud.'"

Putin said he would have the government to look into the issue.

Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said Wednesday that Russian oil was "in demand" and that Russia was ready to increase supplies to China and India, the Tass news agency reported.

The head of Russia's sovereign wealth fund, Kirill Dmitriev, took a dig at European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas, writing on X that "surely the wise Ursula and Kaja have a backup LNG plan. Or maybe not."

Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Spain have continued to import around 2 billion cubic meters of Russian LNG per month, and on top of that Hungary imports 2 billion cubic meters a month through the Turkstream pipeline across the Black Sea, Tagliapietra said. That would amount to 45 billion cubic meters in 2026, 15% of total gas demand for this year.

It's "not easy to replace this in case the LNG market gets tighter with continued shutdowns in Qatar," he said.

US moves to counter China

Interior Secretary Burgum meets Venezuela's Rodríguez in Caracas

CARACAS, March 5, (AP) — U.S. Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum on Wednesday met in Venezuela with acting President Delcy Rodríguez in the latest sign of the Trump administration's intent to exercise control over the South American country's natural resources.

Burgum, who leads U.S. President Donald Trump's National Energy Dominance Council, and Rodríguez met with representatives of more than two dozen U.S. mining and minerals companies, many of which had previously operated in Venezuela. The two-day visit comes as the administration seeks to defend against China's hold on critical minerals — some of which are abundant in Venezuela — and advances its phased plan to turn around the long-troubled country.

"When we are working together in an only mean two things, which is prosperity for the people of Venezuela and for the citizens of the United States, and it also brings peace and stability for the world," Burgum told reporters standing next to Rodríguez, whom he praised for her efforts "to cut the red tape and allow capital investment to flow."

The companies, he said, "represent billions of dollars in investment and thousands of dollars in high-paying jobs."

Burgum became the latest U.S. official to travel to Caracas to meet with Rodríguez, who was sworn in following the capture by U.S. forces of then-President Nicolás Maduro two months ago. His trip follows a February visit by Energy Secretary Chris Wright, which was focused on the country's oil potential.

The Republican administration is making bold moves to shore up supplies of critical minerals needed for electric vehicles, missiles and



Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodríguez, behind, and U.S. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum meet at Miraflores presidential palace in Caracas, Venezuela, Wednesday, March 4, 2026. (AP)

other high-tech products after China choked off their flow in response to Trump's sweeping tariffs last year. While the two global powers reached a truce to pull back on the high import taxes and stepped-up rare earth restrictions, China's limits remain tighter than they were before Trump took office.

In addition to oil, Venezuela is rich in gold, copper, coltan, bauxite, diamonds and other precious mined resources, while unsafe working conditions are common in the poorly regulated industry. The elements niobium and tantalum, both considered critical minerals and crucial for smartphones and the batteries of electric vehicles, are extracted from coltan. Bauxite is processed into aluminum, which the U.S. also lists as a critical mineral.

Rodríguez on Wednesday announced she will introduce a bill to overhaul the country's mining law.

The change, expected to attract foreign investments, will be "a win for the social well-being of our people."

"May the Venezuelan people also see the good aspects of having good relations with the world and with the United States of America," she told reporters.

Trump, who stunned Venezuelans in and outside their home country for his decision to work with Rodríguez, a Maduro loyalist, following his Jan. 3 ouster, praised the acting president for her cooperation with the U.S.

"Delcy Rodríguez, who is the President of Venezuela, is doing a great job, and working with U.S. Representatives very well," Trump said on his social media platform Truth Social while Rodríguez and Burgum were meeting.

Before his capture, Maduro and his allies claimed U.S. hostility was motivated by lust for Venezuela's rich oil and mineral resources.

Trump admin faces \$175 bln tariff refund liability

Judge orders refunds for Trump-era tariffs

WASHINGTON, March 5, (AP) — In a defeat for the Trump administration, a federal judge in New York ruled Wednesday that companies that paid tariffs struck down last month by Supreme Court are due refunds.

Judge Richard Eaton of the U.S. Court of International Trade wrote that "all importers of record" were "entitled to benefit" from the Supreme Court ruling that struck down sweeping double-digit import taxes President Donald Trump imposed last year under the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).

The Supreme Court found those tariffs to be unconstitutional under the emergency powers law, including the sweeping "reciprocal" tariffs he levied on nearly every other country. The majority ruled that the president could not unilaterally set and change tariffs because taxation power clearly belongs to Congress.

In his ruling, Eaton wrote that he alone "will hear cases pertaining to the refund of IEEPA duties." The ruling offers some clarity about the tariff refund process, something the Supreme Court did not even mention in its Feb. 20 decision. Trade lawyer Ryan Majerus, a partner at King & Spalding and a former U.S. trade official, said he expects the government to appeal or "seek a stay to buy more time for U.S. Customs to comply."

The federal government collected more than \$130 billion in the now-defunct tariffs through mid-December and could ultimately be on the hook for refunds worth \$175 billion, according to calculations by the Penn Wharton Budget Model. Eaton was ruling specifically on a case brought by Atmos Filtration, a Nashville, Tennessee, company that makes fil-

ters and other filtration products, claiming a right to a tariff refund.

All goods that go through U.S. Customs and Border Protection enter a process called "liquidation," when the agency issues its final accounting of what is owed. Once liquidated, importers have 180 days to formally contest the duties. After that window closes, the liquidation is legally final.

The judge ordered customs to stop collecting the IEEPA tariffs the Supreme Court struck down last month on goods going through the liquidation process. And if the goods were past that part of the process, the agency would have to recalculate them without the tariffs.

"This is a great decision for importers and consumers who paid," said Barry Appleton, a law professor and co-director of New York Law School's Center for International Law. "It will make customs brokers busy. It should make things easier for the courts — and get a process underway for those importers who paid within the last 180 days."

On Monday, another federal court rejected the Trump administration's attempt to slow the refund process. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit started the next phase in the refund process by sending it to New York trade court to sort out.

Now the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency must come up with a way to process the refunds. Customs routinely refunds tariffs when there's been some kind of error, but its system was "not designed for a mass refund," said trade lawyer Alexis Early, a partner at Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner. "The devil will be in the details of the administrative process."

Global stocks rise as Gulf war rages, US futures edge lower

Kospi rebounds 9.6% after record plunge

BANGKOK, March 5, (AP) — World shares advanced Thursday, while U.S. futures slipped as Iran launched more missiles at Israel on the sixth day of the war in the Middle East.

The future for the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.2%. The S&P 500 future was down 0.1%.

Uncertainty about the war in the Middle East has been rattling financial markets, with most taking their cues from what the price of oil is doing.

"Yesterday's bounce in risk assets already looks less like a turning point and more like a classic relief rally in a market that briefly inhaled before realizing the room was still on fire," Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a commentary.

Crude prices climbed early Thursday, with Brent, the international standard, gaining 1.8% to \$82.87 per barrel. U.S. benchmark crude jumped 2.1% to \$76.31 per barrel.

The war brought a fresh wave of attacks by Iran on Israeli and American bases. Iran warned the United States would "bitterly regret" torpedoing an Iranian warship in the Indian Ocean and a religious leader called for "Trump's blood," while Israel said it had begun a "large-scale" attack on Tehran.

In Germany, the DAX regained lost ground, rising 0.2% to 24,253.24, while the CAC 40 in Paris was up 0.3% to 8,194.80. Britain's FTSE 100 added 0.4% to 10,609.63.

In Asian trading, South Korea's Kospi took back much of its historic losses from a day earlier, jumping 9.6% to 5,583.90. It had gained as much as 12% earlier in the day as investors hunted bargains, triggering temporary trading halts.

The government announced emergency measures for the economy after the benchmark fell by the most ever in a single day on Wednesday. President Lee Jae Myung urged officials to activate an emergency financial package worth 100 trillion won (\$68.5 billion) aimed at calming market volatility.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index gave back some early gains, closing 1.9% higher at 55,278.06.



Financial information is displayed on the floor at the New York Stock Exchange in New York, Wednesday, March 4, 2026. (AP)

In Hong Kong, the Hang Seng climbed 0.3% to 25,321.34 after Chinese Premier Li Qiang opened the annual session of the National People's Congress with a report that set the annual target for economic growth this year at 4.5% to 5%. A draft budget put the increase in military spending at 7%, down from 7.2% in recent years.

The government pledged to support the sluggish domestic economy and spur more consumer spending, but did not announce any major new stimulus.

The Shanghai Composite index gained 0.6% to 4,108.57.

In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 rose 0.4% to 8,940.30, while New Zealand's benchmark rose 0.6%.

Taiwan's main share index gained 2.6%.

On Wednesday, U.S. stocks got a boost as oil prices steadied, albeit temporarily. A report that said growth for U.S. businesses in the real estate, finance and other services industries accelerated last month at the fastest pace since the summer of 2022 also helped.

The S&P 500 rose 0.8%, erasing much of its losses since the war with Iran began. The Dow industrials added 0.5% and the Nasdaq composite climbed 1.3%.

Another report suggested U.S. private sector employers stepped up hiring last month, a potentially hopeful signal for a more comprehensive

U.S. government Friday about the overall job market.

Investors are worried over how long the war with Iran could last, how high inflation may go because of more expensive oil and how much damage that might do to corporate profits.

Wall Street also got a lift from Big Tech stocks as Amazon rose 3.9% and Nvidia added 1.7%. Because they're among the biggest stocks in the U.S. market in terms of total value, their movements carry more weight on the S&P 500.

Wednesday's strong reports on the economy were welcome news for the Federal Reserve, whose job it is to keep the U.S. job market healthy and inflation low. The Fed's job has become more difficult because of the jump in oil prices, which is pushing upward on already high inflation.

In other dealings early Thursday, the U.S. dollar rose to 157.16 Japanese yen from 157.07 yen. The euro fell to \$1.1623 from \$1.1636.

The dollar has advanced against other currencies partly because the U.S. is viewed as facing less risk from the war than other countries, analysts said.

"When the world becomes less certain, capital gravitates toward the deepest pool of liquidity available," Innes said, adding that the dollar "remains the market's preferred storm shelter."

Warsh nominated for 4-year term as Fed Chair, 14-year board seat

NEW YORK, March 5, (Xinhua) — The White House has sent the U.S. Senate the nomination of Kevin Warsh to be the next chairman of the board of governors of the Federal Reserve System for a term of four years, according to a release from the White House on Wednesday.

The nomination of Warsh as the member of the Fed's board of governors for a term of 14 years from Feb. 1, 2026 was also sent to the Senate, according to the White House.

U.S. President Donald Trump announced Warsh's nomination on Jan. 30.

Warsh, 55, served as a member of the board of governors

of the Federal Reserve System from 2006 to 2011.

He currently serves as the Shepard Family Distinguished Visiting Fellow in Economics at the Hoover Institution and a lecturer at the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell was nominated by Trump in November 2017. His second four-year term will end in May 2026.

The approval of the nomination faces uncertainties in the Senate as the Trump administration's attempts to implement a criminal investigation of Powell and to fire Fed Governor Lisa Cook backfire.

New MacBook Pro and Air models debut with faster M5 chips

Apple's 'big week' launches a pair of \$599 devices aimed at budget buyers

NEW YORK, March 5, (AP): Apple CEO Tim Cook promised a "big week" of product announcements has seen the introduction of a new budget-friendly iPhone trim, an entry-level MacBook tier, updated iPad Air models, refreshed monitors and higher-end chip-sets. All of which was on display at hands-on media events held Wednesday in New York, London and Shanghai.

The tech titan recently saw its quarterly earnings rise to a new record, thanks to strong sales of its iPhone 17 models, even though the company still hasn't delivered on its 2024 promise to smarten up its Siri assistance with AI.

Perhaps looking to capitalize on this sales momentum, Apple started the week off announcing the latest model in its more budget-friendly phone lineup, the iPhone 17e, and the MacBook Neo, an entry-level laptop that represents the company's most aggressive attempt at moving into the affordable laptop market.

Everything announced will be available for preorder starting Wednesday. So if you need more information before you start shopping, here's the skinny:

This updated version of iPhone targeting budget-conscious shoppers will include the same A19 chip as the one powering the base iPhone 17 and offers double the standard storage space (256GB) as the previous 16e model (128GB).

The camera has been updated to a 48 megapixel system and its C1X modem promises faster cellular speeds.

As for display, the 17e clocks in with a slightly smaller screen compared with the base 17 model, has a slightly lower refresh rate and may be a little dimmer to the human eye, but you're still getting the super retina display used in the rest of the lineup and Apple's Ceramic Shield 2 system to guard against scratches.

Apple also put included MagSafe with Qi2 support for those looking for a more convenient wireless charging experience.

Starting at \$599, the iPhone 17e comes in \$200 cheaper than the base iPhone 17. Colors include black, white and light pink.

The midrange iPad refresh runs the slightly older M4 chip - for reference, the top-end iPad Pro model uses the newer M5 chip. But it's still powerful enough to handle your streaming habits, web browsing, email and video editing. Cellular versions of the Air also include the updated C1X modem for faster connections.



Members of the media view MacBook Neo laptop computers on display during an Apple unveil event, Wednesday, March 4, 2026, in New York (AP)

You wouldn't think there's a RAM shortage in the world with what Apple has announced this week. The company bumped the Air's RAM up from 8GB to 12GB without a price increase.

The 11-inch iPad Air starts at \$599 while the 13-inch version starts at \$799, each with 128GB of storage.

Apple's high-end Pro lineup of laptops received newly announced chip upgrades (the M5 Pro and M5 Max), which claim higher performance for intensive usage and battery efficiency. But the new upgrades come with a higher price tag too.

The 14-inch MacBook Pro with the M5 Pro chip set comes with 24GB of RAM and 1TB of storage. It's priced at \$2,199, a \$200 increase compared with 2024 base M4 Pro. For an extra cost, you have the option to upgrade to a higher tier of the M5 Pro or jump to the M5 Max chip. You can also bump the system's RAM up to 48GB.

The 16-inch MacBook Pro already comes standard with the highest tier M5 Pro chip set, and starts with 24GB of RAM and 1TB of storage. It's priced at \$2,699, a \$200 increase from previous model.

You do have the option to upgrade to the M5 Max chip set and bump up the RAM.

For both models, the display hasn't changed, nor has the front-facing camera. But Apple has upgraded their networking capabilities to support Wi-Fi 7 and Bluetooth 6.

The brand new entry-level MacBook Neo made its debut at the in-person event on Wednesday. This new a 13-inch laptop comes packed with Apple's A18 Pro chip (also found in the iPhone 16 Pro), 256GB of storage, two USB-C ports but only 8GB of RAM. The upgraded the 512GB model includes a TouchID sensor.

With the Neo, it's apparent Apple is trying to gain a foothold in the budget laptop field, which is currently flooded with Google Chromebooks and economy Microsoft Windows machines.

The 256GB model is available for \$599, while the upgraded model is available for \$699. Students and other educators can preorder either model with a \$100 discount.

A refreshed MacBook Air was also announced. This more budget friendly machine has been upgraded to the company's base M5 chip. Base storage has also been doubled from 256GB to a 512GB. It still 16GB RAM but now sports the same connectivity upgrades as the Pro models.

Because of the updates, the price of the 13-inch Air is priced at \$1,099, \$100 more than the M4 Air model. The 15-inch Air starts at \$1,299.

Apple's deep cut for the week is the announcement of its two 5K display monitors, the 27-inch Studio Display and Studio Display XDR.

Both 27-inch monitors have 5,120 x 2,880 resolutions, embedded 12MP Center Stage cameras, six-speaker audio systems, two Thunderbolt 5 ports and two USB-C ports.

The new, and more expensive, XDR model goes a bit further with mini-LED backlighting, better contrasting and dimming zones, and an improved 120Hz refresh rate (the standard edition is capped at 60Hz) - an update Apple gamers and HDR lovers should be pleased by.

The base Studio display is priced at \$1,599, while its XDR variant comes in at a whopping \$3,299. Upgrade options are available for both monitors.

China sets lowest growth target since 1991 at 4.5-5%

No major stimulus despite property slump

BEIJING, March 5, (AP): China has signaled continuity rather than change for its economy, setting a slightly lower target for growth this year in the midst of a property slump and other headwinds at home and growing uncertainty abroad.

Premier Li Qiang announced a target of 4.5% to 5% annual growth in his report presented to the opening session of this year's meeting of the National People's Congress. That compares to actual 5% growth last year and a target of about 5% in the three years before. It's the lowest growth target since 1991.

"While recognizing our achievements, we are also clear-eyed about the difficulties and challenges we face," Li said, reading much of the 35-page report in a more than hourlong address.

Experts say the lower target is in line with longer-term goals that are less focused on high growth rates.

"GDP targets in recent years have become less important than before because the overarching, and most important political priority has shifted from promoting economic development to so-called 'high-quality development,'" said Xin Sun, a senior lecturer in Chinese and East Asian business at King's College London.

The government is striving to balance two goals: reviving the flagging economy by boosting domestic spending, while also furthering leader Xi Jinping's ambitions to build China into a global power in AI, robotics and other advanced technologies - and one that is not dependent on the U.S. or others for high-end semiconductors and other components.

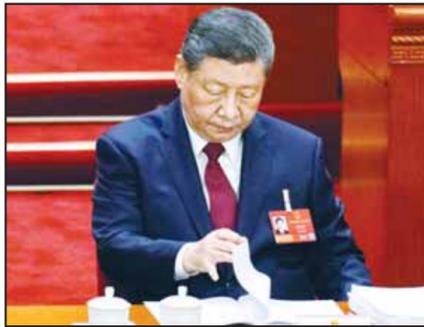
In its draft budget for 2026, the government also trimmed China's annual increase in defense spending to 7%, down from 7.2% in recent years. The nearly 3,000-member Congress, a largely ceremonial body that endorses policies set by Communist Party leaders, is due to approve the annual report and budget at its closing session next week, along with a five-year plan setting policy priorities until 2030.

China is grappling with tariff wars and actual wars. Like much of Asia, it depends heavily on oil and natural gas from the Middle East, and the war in that region has driven up prices and threatened supplies.

The report said that free trade is under severe threat, noting rising geopolitical risks. At home, it highlighted an "acute" imbalance between strong manufacturing supply and weak demand and the challenge of shifting to new drivers of growth.

"Rarely in many years have we encountered such a grave and complex landscape, where external shocks and challenges were intertwined with numerous domestic difficulties and tough choices," Li said in his report.

With the domestic economy in the doldrums, China has maintained growth by exporting. Its trade surplus surged to a record of nearly \$1.2 trillion last year, though exports to the U.S. fell after President Donald Trump sharply raised tariffs. But the growth in exports to other countries has met pushback from governments worried about their own industries and workers.



Chinese President Xi Jinping turns a page during the opening session of the National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing, Thursday, March 5, 2026. (AP)

Li pledged to improve living standards and boost consumer spending, which has lagged as Chinese have tightened their belts, feeling the pinch from a property slump weighing on home prices that has wiped out hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Nonetheless, in line with the government's approach in recent years, the annual report Thursday indicated it would continue to support domestic demand but not unleash any major new stimulus to boost growth. "Beijing continues to prioritize strengthening industrial self-reliance over boosting household consumption," said Neil Thomas, a China politics expert at the Asia Society Policy Institute.

The report said the government would issue 250 billion yuan (\$36 billion) in bonds for rebates to consumers who trade-in cars, appliances and other products for new ones. City-specific policies to control new housing supply and reduce unsold properties will be used to stabilize the property market, Li said.

He Meiru, a real estate agent in southern China, said he's lucky if he completes one deal every two months. His monthly income is hovering around 10,000 yuan (\$1,400) - less than a third of five years ago. "It's been a tough period for many - jobs are hard to find, people don't have money," he said.

Apart from a property market recovery, social welfare spending and improved job security are needed to get families to spend more of their savings, said Ecaterina Bigos of AXA Investment Managers.

"Reviving domestic demand is key for sustained long-term growth," she said. "However, redirecting China toward higher levels of domestic consumption will take time."

The increase in defense spending to 1.9 trillion yuan (\$270 billion) comes against the backdrop of a widespread purge of military officials over corruption charges.

Analysts believe the dismissals are meant both to reform and modernize the military and to ensure Communist Party control over the People's Liberation Army. Nine military officers were among 19 delegates dismissed from the National People's Congress ahead of this year's meeting.

This year's report to the Congress repeated the government's commitment to "the Party's absolute leadership over the people's armed forces." Then it added a new line: "Guided by the principle of ensuring political loyalty in the military, we will continue to improve military political conduct."

Industry warns IAA adds red tape

EU unveils controversial 'Made in EU' industrial accelerator act

BRUSSELS, March 5, (Xinhua): The European Commission on Wednesday proposed the controversial Industrial Accelerator Act (IAA) to prioritize "Made in EU" goods in public support and procurement, although member states remain split and industry voices warn it may fall short of triggering a real manufacturing rebound.

Long-delayed proposal
The proposed IAA was an initiative under the EU's Clean Industrial Deal unveiled last year. Politico Europe noted that it has been delayed three times and undergone repeated revisions amid broad-based opposition.

In the draft proposal, the Commission said the IAA would target "strategic sectors" including energy-intensive industries, net-zero technology manufacturing and the automotive supply chain, aiming to embed "Made in EU" criteria into public procurement and state support schemes to boost demand for EU-made and low-carbon products.

The proposal would also tighten conditions on foreign direct investment in what the Commission describes as strategic industries, including batteries, electric vehicles, solar photovoltaics, and the extraction, processing and recycling of critical raw materials.

For major investments in those sectors exceeding 100 million euros (116 million U.S. dollars), the draft sets eligibility requirements including capping foreign ownership at 49 percent and imposing mandatory technology-transfer obligations.

While some countries argue the act amounts to protectionism and warn that strict local-content requirements could distort supply chains, add bureaucracy and invite retaliation, Stéphane Sejourne, the executive vice president and European Commissioner for Industrial Strategy, insisted that the measures were meant to strengthen EU strategic sectors.

"Our objective is clear: to raise

the share of industry in Europe's GDP to 20 percent by 2035. Today, it stands at 14 percent."

"Yet repeated delays surrounding the proposal and its content illustrate a lack of a common vision and strategic resolve," said Stefan Sipka, head of sustainable prosperity for Europe and senior policy analyst at European Policy Centre.

Concerns over protectionism
Since the IAA began to take shape, several non-EU partners, including Britain, Japan and the United States, have voiced concerns over "Made in EU" and "Buy European" moves, while free-trade-leaning member states such as Ireland and Nordic countries warn that strict local-content thresholds could jar with the bloc's open-market principles.

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson told the Financial Times in February that he was "very sceptical" of Buy European if its purpose was "to protect European business" by avoiding trade or partnerships with other countries. "We need to be able to compete because of quality and because of innovation, not because we try to protect the European markets," he added.

Markus Ferber, a member of the European Parliament, criticized the act as a misguided and protectionist approach. He said Europe's industry is burdened by high energy costs, excessive regulation and weak innovation momentum. "Europe's strength lies in technological excellence and openness to markets—not in isolation," he said.

Wolfgang Grosse Entrup, head of the German Chemical Industry Association, described elements of the act as protectionist experiments and overly detailed industrial planning, from "Buy European" requirements to new obligations for "low-carbon products." "Both are likely to raise costs and create even more red tape, and thus further weaken Europe as a business location," he said.

The China Chamber of Commerce to the EU also said it regretted that the EU was reshaping market access through "Made in EU" rules, forced technology transfer and tighter scrutiny of foreign investment.

"Although we understand the EU's intention to strengthen supply chain resilience, the current design of the bill may shift from a rules-based open market to an exclusive protectionist system," the business group said, adding that it could send "an uncertain signal" to global investors, including Chinese enterprises.

Industry warns of burdens
Not only did some countries criticize the IAA as protectionist, but industry insiders and experts also voiced doubts that it would deliver its promised boost to manufacturing and business growth.

In an article, Ignacio Garcia Bercego, a senior fellow at Bruegel, warned that "Made in Europe" requirements could push up costs for export-oriented industries, slowing industrial transformation at home and, in turn, the clean-energy transition.

Although the IAA is billed as a business-simplification drive, "there is still no tangible relief for the broader economy," German business magazine WirtschaftsWoche reported on Wednesday, citing the German Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DIHK).

The chamber noted that extra requirements, extensive rules-of-origin documentation and high standards for so-called lead markets would weigh especially heavily on small and medium-sized enterprises.

Similar concerns were also raised by Javier Villamor, an analyst at the news and opinion site The European Conservative, who said multinational manufacturers view global supply chains as highly complex, making it difficult to calculate how much of a product is "European."

Brazil ratifies EU-Mercosur deal

SAO PAULO, March 5, (AP): Brazil's Senate unanimously ratified on Wednesday the free-trade deal between trade bloc Mercosur and the European Union, following the same move by the country's lower house and bringing the deal one step closer to implementation. The agreement seeks to integrate a total market of more than 700 million people.

Argentina and Uruguay, two other members of the bloc, have already ratified the deal, which was under negotiation for more than 25 years. Paraguay is expected to do the same. Bolivia, the newest Mercosur member, was not involved in negotiations but can join the agreement in the coming years.

Brazil is by far the largest economy of Mercosur, with a GDP es-

timated at more than \$2.3 trillion in 2025. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was one of the key backers of the deal, which is yet to be validated by the EU's top court.

The European Commission's president Ursula von der Leyen repeatedly paid tribute to Lula for his efforts in making the deal happen despite opposition in Europe. Leaders say the all the economies involved put together add up to a GDP of \$22 trillion.

Brazilian diplomats and Vice President Geraldo Alckmin have said the deal could come into force partially within months despite the legal case in Europe, which von der Leyen agrees with.

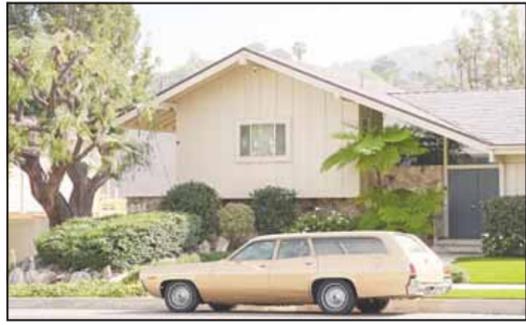
"Brazil's Congress once more is showing its institutional maturity and a move like this shows that it

is siding with our society," Sen. Davi Alcolumbre, the president of Brazil's Senate, said after the deal was ratified.

The trans-Atlantic trade deal was signed on Jan. 17, marking the end of a 25-year deadlock by European agricultural concerns over unfair competition.

But in recent months European farmers in tractors blocked roads and set off fireworks in Brussels to protest the trade deal.

French President Emmanuel Macron, one of the critics of the deal, has demanded safeguards to monitor and stop large economic disruption in the EU, increased regulations in the Mercosur nations like pesticide restrictions, and more inspections of imports at EU ports.



The Brady Bunch House, the two-story single-family home that served as the main setting for the television series 'The Brady Bunch' in the Studio City neighborhood of Los Angeles, Wednesday, March 4, is now designated as a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument. (AP)

A photo spot for fans

TV's 'Brady Bunch' house gets LA landmark status

LOS ANGELES, March 5, (AP): Here's the story ... of how a modest mid-century home became a Los Angeles landmark.

The LA city council voted unanimously on Wednesday to designate the so-called "Brady Bunch" house in the San Fernando Valley as a historic-cultural monument.

The vote grants landmark protections to the house on Dilling Avenue that was used for exterior shots of the TV sitcom that ran from 1969 to 1974. Interior scenes were shot on a soundstage, with sets that bore no resemblance to the property that become a photo-op magnet for "Brady Bunch" fans.

The show, which lived on for decades in syndication, featured the comic travails of a family of six blended-family siblings - "the youngest one in curls," as the theme song explained.

The shingle-and-stone home with a peaked roof also appeared in the 1995 big screen film "The Brady Bunch Movie" and its sequel.

The landmark status protects the home, built in 1959, from demolition or major renovations - but doesn't prohibit them. If owners ever decide to make big changes, they would be subject to a design review and the Cultural Heritage Commission can delay the process to find preservation solutions.

The nonprofit LA Conservancy pushed for the landmark status and CEO Adrian Scott Fine said he was thrilled it was approved. He said fans of the show have a personal connection to the property.

"If you watched the 'Brady Bunch,' you knew this house. People make a pilgrimage to see it," Fine said Wednesday. "To have it designated like this, it makes it all the sweeter."

When the house went on the market in 2018, the cable network HGTV won a bidding war that drove the price up to \$3.5 million - or \$1.6 million over the listing price for the then-2,400-square-foot (223-square-meter) residence.

Television

From theaters to TVs

Apple eyes F1 film buzz to drive Apple TV views

NEW YORK, March 5, (AP): Apple succeeded when it brought Formula 1 to the big screen last year.

It hopes many of those viewers will watch on their televisions and mobile devices when the season begins this weekend with the Australian Grand Prix, as Apple TV begin its stint as F1's US broadcast partner.

Apple reached a five-year deal with the global motorsports series last fall, averaging \$150 million per year. ESPN, which had carried F1 races since 2018, paid nearly \$90 million during a three-year extension signed in 2022.

"We certainly think that over the next five years, we have a great opportunity for Formula One and Apple TV to grow the sport significantly. In the US, it's grown quite a bit, but at the same time it's still relatively small to the size of the fan base," Eddy Cue, Apple's senior vice president of services, said during a briefing last week. "We would go into theaters when we were testing the (F1) movie, and we would ask people to raise their hand if they'd ever watched a race, and very few hands went up. But after they watched the movie, if you ask them, do you want to go see a race or you want to see a race, basically, all the hands went up."

"F1: The Movie" grossed \$189.6 million in the U.S. and \$633.3 million worldwide, making it the highest-grossing sports film of all time. It received four nominations for the March 15 Academy Awards, including best picture.

Ian Holmes, Formula 1's chief media rights and broadcast officer, said the potential Apple brings beyond just showing the races was another important factor.

"I'd say we are probably the only sport in the world whose audience is getting younger and more female-skewed, and that couldn't be more represented than currently in the U.S.," he said. "The way that Apple is able to offer its content as the most forward-looking approach that we could pursue. We felt that this was incredibly important about being relevant and always available to our audience and to potential new fans."

Apple will show races in 4K Dolby Vision with immersive 5.1 surround sound. This is available to Apple TV subscribers, with some races for non-subscribers.

Viewers can watch up to four live feeds at once during practices, qualifying and races via multi-view displays. In addition to in-car cameras, there will be timing and scoring channels.

Viewers can also choose either the commentary team from F1 TV or Sky Sports. ESPN used the Sky Sports feed when it aired the races.

In addition to content in its sports app, Apple will also offer detailed circuit layouts in its Maps app, driver-curated playlists in Apple Music, and content in Apple News and podcasts.

"We're excited about the relationship that we built with Formula One, and we got a lot closer together and appreciated each other and our abilities to innovate together, come up with new ideas," Cue said.

Apple TV is also showing the latest season of "Drive to Survive" as part of a collaboration with Netflix. The series, in its eighth season, has also been credited with increasing F1's popularity.

Netflix will also carry Apple TV's feed of the Canadian Grand Prix for U.S. viewers from May 22-24.

The biggest question is whether viewers will follow F1 to Apple TV. That did not happen immediately when Major League Soccer moved to Apple in 2023.

F1 went from averaging 550,000 viewers in its first year in 2018 on ESPN to 1.3 million last season.

Variety

LONDON: British rapper Ghetts has been sentenced to 12 years in prison for killing a 20-year-old Nepali student in a London hit-and-run last year.

Ghetts, whose real name is Justin Clarke-Samuel, was speeding and under the influence of alcohol as he drove erratically before the incident in October 2025, according to prosecutors.

Clarke-Samuel, 41, was also barred from driving for 17 years on Tuesday by Judge Mark Lucraft, who said CCTV footage showed "a quite appalling litany of incidents" leading to a "simply shocking" fatal collision with student Yubin Tamang, who suffered catastrophic injuries and died two

days later.

Clarke-Samuel pleaded guilty in London's Central Criminal Court in December to causing death by dangerous driving.

The judge noted that the rapper had expressed remorse, in a letter to the court.

"As you set out, you have done much to help others over the last 10 years and all that good work is marred by driving in drink and taking the life of another young man," the judge said.

Prosecutors said Clarke-Samuel had been drinking alcohol at a bar in central London, and drove his BMW erratically at around 70 mph (112 kil-



Ghetts

Actor says US career shaped his success

Oscar nominee Lindo eyes Othello and a memoir

LONDON, March 5, (AP): Delroy Lindo is feeling the love and planning for the future.

The actor says that his Oscar nomination for "Sinners" has shown him how many people are thrilled for him.

"That's been truly monumental," says the supporting actor nominee. "And I can't help but be impacted by that because it's a lot of positive, really positive energy and it comes from all over and it is very, very, very genuine. It feels wonderful."

And this appreciation hasn't just come in the happy times. After a person with Tourette syndrome shouted a racial slur as Lindo and Michael B. Jordan presented during the British Academy Film Awards ceremony, more support came his way, including a standing ovation while presenting an award at the NAACP Image Awards six days later.

"It is a honor to be here amongst our people this evening, amongst so many people who have shown us such incredible support," Lindo said on-stage Saturday at the event. "And it's a classic case of something that could be very negative becoming very positive."

Lindo took home the supporting actor trophy that night, ahead of the Academy Awards on March 15.

He's in the running for an Oscar his "Sinners" performance as Blas-

man Delta Slim, in a category also populated by Jacob Elordi for "Frankenstein," Sean Penn and Benicio Del Toro in "One Battle After Another," plus Stellan Skarsgård for "Sentimental Value."

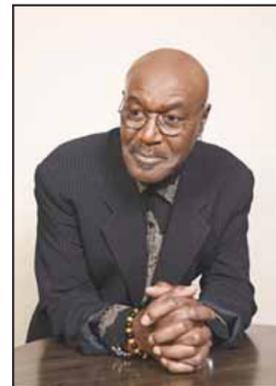
While the UK has been keen to claim him as a British Oscar nominee, the London-born actor sees his years growing up in America as the making of him.

"The reality is my career has been in the United States and the irony is, had I not had my career in the US, you and I would not be talking right now," he says during an interview with The Associated Press in London, before the BAFTAs.

His film CV boasts "Malcolm X," "Get Shorty," "Clockers," "The Cider House Rules" and "Da Five Bloods." On TV, he's been an FBI agent on "Kidnapped," a sheriff on "Blood & Oil," a lawyer on "The Good Fight" and an estranged father on "UnPrisoned." His theater work is equally impressive, with a Tony nomination for portraying Herald Loomis in "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" on Broadway.

And despite the awards season circuit dominating his time at the moment, Lindo shared his wish list of future projects with the AP.

Lindo is set to wear three hats - of director, co-producer and actor - for a film set in Jamaica, where his mother



Delroy Lindo poses for a portrait on Sunday, Feb. 15, 2026, in Los Angeles. (AP)

was born.

He says he plans to show a different side of the Caribbean island.

"They think about sea, sand, and sun, and that's wonderful. But I am interested - in this particular story - in showing, sharing with audiences the spirituality that's in the land and in the people," explains Lindo.

"I'd like to play Othello on film, I really would," says Lindo.

He's portrayed Shakespeare's trag-

ic hero twice onstage in the 1990s and still feels inspired to revisit the role.

"I remember, cumulatively, the second time playing it, I developed such an appreciation for the material, for that man, and to be able to delve into that again on film intrigues the hell out of me," he said.

Black nationalist Marcus Garvey influenced Malcolm X and Civil Rights Movement leaders. Lindo's been linked to playing Garvey before but says he was never actually approached about it.

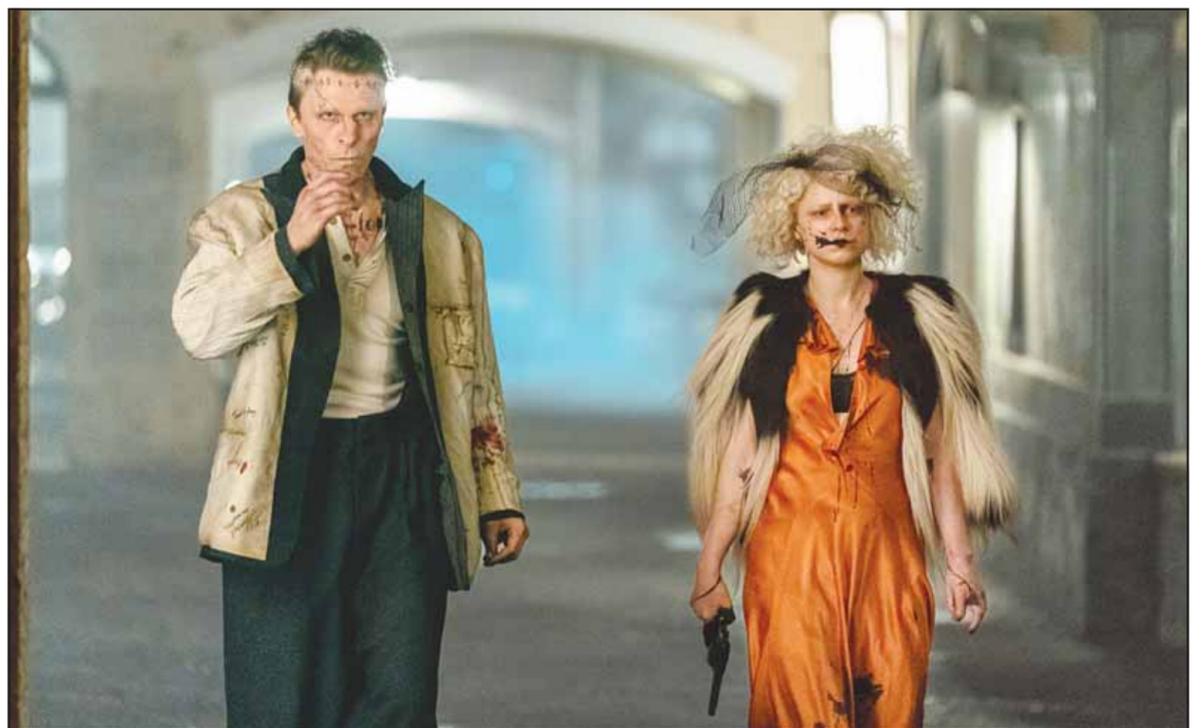
"I think that Marcus Garvey, obviously an incredibly important person historically, and the organization that he started, the UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association), was also very, very important," says Lindo. "I'd like to play something kind of Garvey-esque."

In 1948, a ship named the Empire Windrush arrived near London, carrying 800 passengers from the Caribbean to new lives in Britain.

Lindo's mother was one of them. Her journey is something he's writing about in a memoir about how he came to be born in the UK and how they are both "representative of Windrush."

"I feel that I haven't seen a lot of stories that, in cinema, in film, that depict ... wide enough aspects of that extraordinary experience. I'd like to do something that reflects that," he says.

Film



This image released by Warner Bros Entertainment shows Christian Bale, (left), and Jessie Buckley in a scene from 'The Bride!' (AP)

Gyllenhaal gives feminist twist to classic monster story

'The Bride!' is a Frankenstein riff with a pulse

LOS ANGELES, March 5, (AP): Maggie Gyllenhaal's "The Bride!" is a big, brash swing at a new "The Bride of Frankenstein" that struggles to cohere its many parts. But I'll say this for it: It's alive.

Just months after Guillermo del Toro presented his lavish "Frankenstein," Gyllenhaal, in her follow-up to her excellent 2021 directorial debut, "The Lost Daughter," has set her sights on reimagining 1935's "The Bride of Frankenstein." The sequel starred Boris Karloff and, in the dual role of the Bride and Mary Shelley, Elsa Lanchester.

But in "The Bride of Frankenstein," the shock-haired Bride is only on screen for a handful of minutes at the end of the film. Gyllenhaal, who also wrote her film, has corrected the imbalance, refashioning the story from the Bride's perspective and concocting a protagonist of unfiltered feminist fury. As played by Jessie Buckley, she is both a victim of male control and a reanimated avenging angel.

Buckley is also, like Lanchester was, Shelley. In the movie's opening moments, Shelley speaks from the beyond directly to us. She has a story, she says, that's been stuck inside her, like a dream or a tumor. "What I wanted to say, I couldn't," she says. "I couldn't even think it."

So Gyllenhaal has placed her story not in the early 19th century, when "Frankenstein" was written, or in the present day, but in the 1930s, around when "The Bride of Frankenstein" came out. When Frankenstein's monster, here simply "Frank" (Christian Bale), stumbles along, he's been lonely for not just a few years but a century.

But first we meet Ida, a Chicago party girl who, out one night with a table full of gangsters, experiences a sudden eruption of raw honesty - the

words spurt out of her uncontrollably - that quickly gets her killed.

When Frank turns up at the office of Dr. Euphronios (Annette Bening), his request of a companion is at first poorly received. "Give me a break, Frank," she retorts. "Everyone's lonely." But Dr. Euphronios, too tempted to push scientific (and ethical) boundaries, decides to do it, and quickly enough they've dug up a corpse (Ida's) and electrified her back to life. Easy peasy.

But as soon as she comes to, it's clear Ida - with platinum blond hair and an ink-blot stain on her cheek from the IV drip - isn't so keen on the plan. Informed that she's to be his bride, she spits up blood and laughs. Get married? "Frankly, no," she says.

In her new life, Ida is reinvigorated as much by Shelley's spirit as Dr. Euphronios' lab. She speaks full of puns and quips and literary references. Coming off her award-winning performance in "Hamnet," Buckley clearly relishes the role, turning Ida into an unruly and raw vessel of female emancipation.

But while "The Bride!" very definitely has gender politics on its mind, Gyllenhaal is as set on having fun as much as she is prodding dated notions. This is a movie with an exclamation point in its title, after all. And Gyllenhaal delights in sending Ida and Frank on a fantastical adventure that pays as much homage to "Bonnie and Clyde" as it does "Frankenstein."

As much as they get off on the wrong foot, Ida and Frank are drawn together out of outcast necessity. And after a night at a dance club that turns darkly sinister, Ida realizes that sexual assault is more of a threat from other men than it is from her presumptive groom. Frank, played with endearing

earnestness by Bale, is more of a big softie than a monster. His favorite things in the world are musicals.

Frank and Ida frequently stop in at movie theaters on their journey, which takes them to New York. (A lightbulb-festooned Times Square is vividly rendered in Karen Murphy's lush production design.) The movie star Frank is most fond of, Ronnie Reed, is played by Maggie's brother Jake Gyllenhaal, whose frequent on-screen appearances add another dose of levity to "The Bride!"

So do the detectives on the pair's trail (Peter Sarsgaard, Penélope Cruz), whose dynamic is another, more real-world commentary on gender roles. The whole group comes together around the time Frank leads a song-and-dance routine to "Puttin' on the Ritz," a nod to Mel Brooks' "Young Frankenstein" (1974).

Led by a careening, foot-stomping Bale, the scene could well be about when the feeling takes hold of "The Bride!" being just a little too much. The tonal extremes and multilayered theatricality of Maggie Gyllenhaal's movie-mad movie are, by any measure, a lot. But I would argue such ambitious gambits are exactly the kind that a filmmaker in their sophomore outing ought to be taking. "The Bride!" feels constantly like an act of plate-spinning that's about to collapse. That it doesn't is a fever-dream feat, one that makes me eager to see what Gyllenhaal does next.

"The Bride!," a Warner Bros. release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for strong/bloody violent content, sexual content/nudity and language. Running time: 127 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four.

ometers per hour) before the crash, running six red lights and driving on the wrong side of the road. The victim was struck as he crossed the street, sustaining catastrophic injuries. (AP)

BEIJING: A Chinese mainland spokesperson on Wednesday responded to a media inquiry about the epic historical television series "Swords Into Plowshares," which has attracted widespread viewership and discussion across the Taiwan Strait, at a regular press conference.

The series -- whose Chinese title literally translates as "Peaceful Years" -- is set during the tumultuous Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907-979). At the heart of the story is the King of Wuyue, whose peaceful surrender to the Song Dynasty (960-1279) was a pivotal act that helped reunify China at that time.

The drama underscores the enduring conviction of the Chinese nation to oppose division and strive for unity, said Zhang Han, a spokesperson for the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office. (Xinhua)

PHNOM PENH: Son Meymea, a sixth-grade student at Prek Leap Primary School here in the capital of Cambodia, has always spent her break time reading books at the Lancang-Mekong Book House, which stores thousands of books in various subjects.

Founded in June 2025 at the school, the library has offered free educational resources in Khmer, Chinese, and English to more than 1,000 students. The 12-year-old student said she has learned Chinese for more than two years, so she is also able to read some Chinese books. (Xinhua)

Unreleased songs from top artists power 'Help(2)'

War Child UK looks to 'Help' again with a new benefit album

LONDON, March 5, (AP) - War Child UK's first benefit compilation album was a stunning success when it debuted in 1995. Reaching No. 1 on the British charts, "Help" raised more than 1.25 million pounds (about \$1.938 million) for the nonprofit's support to children and their families in war-torn Bosnia.

Packed with unreleased songs from Britpop's elite artists - including Oasis, Blur and Radiohead - as well as a supergroup that included Paul McCartney and Paul Weller, it's no wonder that Rich Clarke, War Child UK's head of music, says the charity has been looking to recreate ever since.

For a variety of reasons, an all-star follow-up to "Help" never materialized - until now. On Friday, "Help(2)" will hit stores and streaming platforms, powered by unreleased songs from Arctic Monkeys, Olivia Rodrigo, Wet Leg and others, to raise funds and awareness for children suffering in numerous war zones, including Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan.

"I think it's a situation now where musicians feel not that they want to do something, but that they need to do something," Clarke said. "That's a powerful driver. And sometimes, things happen when they're meant to happen."

Jarvis Cocker's connection to War Child UK stretches



Olivia Rodrigo arrives at the 67th annual Grammy Awards on Feb. 2, 2025, in Los Angeles. (AP)

back to 1996, when his band Pulp donated the financial windfall from winning the prestigious Mercury Prize to the charity.

So when James Ford - who produced Pulp's first new

album in 24 years, "More," last year - approached Cocker about contributing a song to a War Child UK compilation, he jumped at the chance.

"When the last one happened, it was something like 10% of the world's kids were living in poor areas, and now it's more like 20%," Cocker told The Associated Press. "And it's a strange thing, you know, childhood sets you up for the rest of your life or it doesn't."

Pulp's contribution ended up being "Begging for Change," a song Cocker said he started 14 years ago, but had trouble finishing. "Somehow, with it having the focus of trying to help some people and change their situation, I did manage to finish it," he said. "And I'm quite pleased with the result."

Part of that success on the energetic track came from the unusual recording process at Abbey Road Studios in London, Cocker said.

"I've never allowed people to film me singing in the studio because that's the time when I try and become unselfconscious," he said, adding he soon learned the session would be filmed by numerous children working on a documentary of the process with director Jonathan Glazer.

"I thought it was a good idea," Cocker said. "I mean, if

you're going to do a thing for a charity that is supposed to help children in war zones, then it makes sense to capture it from a child's point of view."

Cocker even had some of the children form a choir that appears on the song. Having the children as part of the process served as a good reminder of what Pulp and War Child UK were trying to accomplish.

"Charity shouldn't have to exist if governments did what they were supposed to, if they looked after people and looked after the world," Cocker said. "But they do need to exist. They need to exist even more now."

Benefit compilations are part of a long tradition in indie music and a natural way for artists to get involved with charities and issues they want to support, said John Nolan, guitarist and singer in the rock bands Taking Back Sunday and Straylight Run.

"It's something that we can be a lot more hands-on with," said Nolan, who released the compilation "Music for Everyone, Vol. 2" in November as a fundraiser for the American Civil Liberties Union. "I think that's also why a lot of more underground bands take on compilations for causes too, because it's something you can be kind of DIY with."

Fashion

Fashion with a conscience

Stella McCartney lets horses steal the spotlight at Paris show

PARIS, March 5, (AP) - Ten horses - five black, five white - entered the sand ring first. The models came second.

That told you everything you needed to know about designer Stella McCartney's priorities at Paris Fashion Week.

The British-American designer staged her Winter 2026 show Wednesday inside a riding hall in the Bois de Boulogne, marking the Lunar New Year of the Horse with what amounted to a quiet manifesto: fashion can celebrate animals rather than consume them.

No leather. No fur. No feathers. No compromise.

The horses, guided by equestrian artist Jean-François Pignon, moved in choreographed patterns around the oval ring as models walked its perimeter.

Several were visibly moved during rehearsals, McCartney said.

It was that kind of show - emotional in the way only live animals among humans can be.

The collection itself traced her life in clothes.

It opened with floor-length faux fur coats so convincing they de-

manded a double take - the kind of material innovation McCartney has championed for over two decades using everything from lab-grown yeast to recycled denim.

The house says 93% of the collection's materials are sustainable.

From there, the autobiographical arc unfolded.

Chunky fisherman rib knits and hand-crocheted scarves nodded to a childhood on the Mull of Kintyre with parents Paul and Linda McCartney.

Jewel-toned stirrup leggings and silky bow-adorned dresses recalled her teenage internships at Lacroix and Yves Saint Laurent - formative Parisian years that she says sealed her fate as a designer.

The core of the collection delivered what McCartney does best: soft tailoring with defined shoulders, corporate suiting that breathes, satin evening pieces that shimmer without shouting.

Plastic-free sequined dresses came detailed with bustles and pleats.

The balance between masculine and feminine, precision and play, ran through every look.

The final model walked out in

a tank top reading "My Dad Is A Rockstar." In the front row, Paul McCartney - former Beatle, eternal rock star, proud father - applauded.

"It was beautiful," he said afterward.

"He's my dad, he would say that," Stella shot back.

Among the crowd jostling to congratulate her: Oprah Winfrey, Gayle King and Hannah Waddingham.

LVMH heir Antoine Arnauld attended with his wife, Natalia Vodianova - a notable presence given that McCartney bought back the conglomerate's minority stake in her brand in January 2025.

The label, founded 25 years ago, has not turned a profit since 2017, yet McCartney chose full independence.

"I forget that I'm one of the few women designing for women," McCartney said, nonchalantly mentioning that she'll be receiving the most prestigious French honor, the Légion d'honneur, on Thursday.

"I want to feel like I'm actually really embracing women through these collections, and I don't want the planet to suffer because of it."

A model wears a creation from the Stella McCartney Fall/Winter 2026-2027 Women's collection presented in Paris, Wednesday, March 4. (AP)



A model wears a creation from the Stella McCartney Fall/Winter 2026-2027 Women's collection. (AP)



From left: Nina Dobrev, Maude Apatow and Aimee Lou Wood arrive for the Chloe Fall/Winter 2026-2027 Women's collection presented in Paris, Thursday, March 5. (AP)



Variety

PHNOM PENH: Cambodia on Tuesday marked the 28th National Culture Day with a series of traditional songs, dances and performances.

The event was presided over by Deputy Prime Minister and Civil Service Minister Hun Many and attended by more than 700 people.

Hun Many said the celebration aimed at inspiring youth to actively participate in safeguarding, preserving and developing cultural properties.

"Culture is the nation's soul and identity, so it's essential to educate and encourage people to join in protecting, promoting and developing our cultural heritage, customs and traditions for younger generations," he said.

The Southeast Asian country was proud of its culture and traditions as a number of its cultural properties had gained international recognition, he said.

To date, the kingdom has five tangible cultural properties and seven intangible cultural heritages inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. (Xinhua)

BEIJING: China's box office revenue has topped 10 billion yuan (about 1.44 billion US dollars) so far this year, according to data from Maoyan, one of the country's major online movie ticket platforms.

The box office revenue broke the 10 billion yuan mark at nearly 7:00 p.m. Sunday, according to Maoyan.

Meanwhile, some 225 million film tickets were sold, with the total number of screenings topping 26.1 million, the data showed.

The number was largely driven by the Chinese New Year holiday, which ran from Feb. 15 to 23 and saw box office sales of over 5.75 billion yuan, according to previously released data from the China Film Administration. (Xinhua)

NEW YORK: A Lantern Festival parade was held on Saturday by the Chinese American community in the New York City borough of Brooklyn as part of Lunar New Year celebrations.

Fireworks and firecrackers added the festive vibe to Chinatown on 8th Avenue, with red lanterns and colorful confetti transforming the entire neighborhood.

The parade featured dragon and lion dances, stilt walking, a Hanfu show, a parade of cartoon characters, lantern riddles, paper cutting, and live performances and drew thousands of spectators.

"Chinese culture is vibrant, resilient and full of life," said Susan Nickel, a student of Pace University. "It has become the indispensable part of New York's multicultural tapestry."

The annual parade was held for a third year, according to the organizer.

"The Lantern Festival is a cultural tradition of our Chinese community that has lasted for more than three thousand years," said John Chan, president of the Asian American Community Empowerment and organizer of the event. (Xinhua)

Chinese firms use tech and speed to capture global market

China's beauty brands expanding, winning over global consumers

BEIJING, March 5, (Xinhua) - Amid the sleek displays of Florasis' Ginza counter in Tokyo, Japanese social media influencer Kaho Ishii greeted her fans with a smile, handing them the cosmetic products she had long recommended.

"Compared with domestic cosmetics, these products really stand out," she said, praising their long-lasting wear and bold colors that "don't smudge or fade easily," as well as the Chinese-inspired aesthetics and "natural ingredients within."

"Using them really opens up more possibilities for makeup looks," Ishii shared, reflecting a growing enthusiasm among overseas consumers for Chinese beauty brands.

Chinese beauty brands are no longer niche players overseas. According to China's General Administration of Customs, cosmetics exports rose 11.7 percent year on year to 36.68 billion yuan (about 5.2 billion US dollars) in the first eight months of 2025, marking a third consecutive year of double-digit growth. More than 50 domestic brands have expanded overseas. They are no longer confined to cross-border platforms; many have moved into brick-and-mortar channels, underscoring the sector's accelerating international push.

Brands such as Florasis and Flower Knows have entered mainstream chains, including Ulta Beauty in the United States, while others have expanded into overseas Watsons outlets. In 2025, several labels, including Judydoll, Joocyee and Florasis, opened their standalone stores abroad.

"In global competition, China's supply-chain depth, speed and cost efficiency give it a structural advantage. The question now is not whether Chinese cosmetics have a place overseas, but how large that place will be," Zhang Yan, president of

Zhejiang Health Products and Cosmetics Industry Association, told Xinhua.

Platform data highlight the shift. According to data from Alibaba.com, the cross-border B2B platform of China's e-commerce giant Alibaba, North America remains the largest destination, with the United States accounting for nearly a quarter of orders, growing 30 percent annually.

Demand is also rising rapidly in Europe and the Middle East, while Southeast Asia remains the fastest-growing region. "With products now reaching more than 180 countries and regions, the sector is no longer reliant on any single market," said Duan Yuwan, deputy dean of the School of International Economics and Trade at the Central University of Finance and Economics.

Even amid global market caution, Chinese brands are gaining traction. The question, then, is what underpins this momentum?

The answer lies not in marketing alone, but in a complete industrial system honed at home. China's cosmetics market surpassed 1.1 trillion yuan (about 159 billion dollars) in 2025, solidifying its position as the world's largest, with domestic brands capturing 57.37 percent of sales. Fierce domestic competition has acted as a filter. Of brands founded between 2016 and 2020, only about 12 percent survive five years, according to industry reports.

As Professor Zhuang Rui of the University of International Business and Economics notes, "this competition mechanism has a distinct Chinese character - market-driven, shaped by a broader institutional framework. It creates the conditions for



A staff member livestreams in the studio of a company in Luyi County, central China's Henan Province, June 18, 2025. (Xinhua)

brands to strengthen quality and competitiveness before shifting overseas."

Several structural strengths have emerged in China's cosmetics industry, shaping how its brands compete abroad. As domestic capabilities advance, firms are seeking growth abroad through localized production, distribution and branding strategies.

Perhaps the most striking feature is the speed of iteration. A Chinese brand can move from spotting a trend to launching

a product in less than three months, a cycle that often stretches to six to 12 months elsewhere, according to Alibaba.com. Real-time sales data flow straight back to development teams, informing adjustments to formulas, colors, and packaging. As efficiency improves, rapid change becomes a competitive advantage.

Technical innovation is another pillar. By mid-2025, Chinese companies had filed 80 new cosmetic ingredient patents, 70 percent of them domestically sourced, a year-on-year leap of around 80 percent. Hyaluronic acid alone, a staple in moisturizers and serums, sees 80 percent of its global production coming from China, giving brands both quality and cost leverage. R&D investment has been robust. Proya Cosmetics' relevant spending nearly tripled in four years, rising from 77 million yuan (about 11 million dollars) in 2020 to 210 million yuan (about 30 million dollars) in 2024. In 2024, it opened the Proya Europe Innovation Center in Paris, recruiting veteran scientists from global beauty firms.

Another Chinese beauty company Yatsen Group has invested more than 700 million yuan (about 101 million dollars) in research and built R&D centers in Guangzhou and the French city of Toulouse, anchoring growth in science rather than marketing.

"The real export is not just products, but technology and brand power," said Huang Jinfeng, founder of Yatsen Group.

Digital channels complete the picture. Cosmetics brand Colorkey's expansion abroad began with e-commerce platforms such as Shopee and Lazada, testing demand before committing significant capital.

Weight-loss medications lower overdose, death risk: study

What to know about how GLP-1 drugs might fight addiction

NEW YORK, March 5, (AP) — The blockbuster GLP-1 drugs that have reshaped the treatment of diabetes and obesity may help prevent multiple substance use disorders — and reduce the tragic outcomes they cause, a large new study finds. An analysis published Wednesday in a medical journal looked at electronic health records from more than 600,000 US Veterans Affairs patients with diabetes. It found that those treated with medications such as Ozempic and Mounjaro were less likely to develop addictions to alcohol, nicotine, cocaine, opioids and other substances than those treated with a different class of drugs.

In those already addicted, the GLP-1 drugs were linked to lower risks of hospitalization, overdose and death, according to the study.

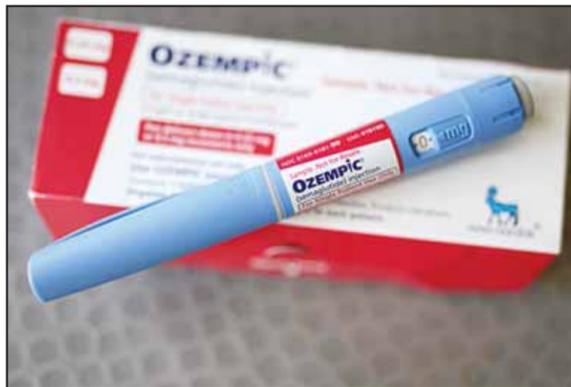
The new results suggest — but don't prove — that the weight-loss medications may be able to target the underlying source of cravings that affect the more than 48 million Americans with substance use disorders.

"They're actually working against the root cause of all these different addictions," said Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly, the study's lead author and a chief researcher at the VA St. Louis Health Care System.

Here's what you need to know about the new research published by The BMJ: Previous studies have suggested that the drugs known as GLP-1s, or glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists, could reduce addictions by targeting the brain's reward pathways. But those studies have been small and often limited to one substance.

For this study, one of the largest to date, Al-Aly and his colleagues analyzed data from the electronic records of more than 600,000 Veterans Affairs patients with diabetes over three years. They compared people who received GLP-1 drugs with those treated with medications that lower blood sugar.

The patients were divided into seven parallel trials that analyzed the risk of developing addictions to multiple substances including alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, nicotine and opioids. Another trial looked at the risk of specific harms among people with existing addictions when they took the different types of medication. Al-Aly and his colleagues found that people starting the GLP-1 drugs had lower risks



The injectable drug Ozempic in Houston on July 1, 2023. (AP)

of developing addiction to multiple substances. Compared with the other medications, people taking the GLP-1 drugs had a reduced risk for addiction: 18% for alcohol, 14% for cannabis, 20% for both cocaine and nicotine, and 25% for opioids.

In patients who already had substance use disorders, starting the GLP-1s was linked with a 31% lower risk of emergency department visits, 26% lower risk of hospitalizations, 25% lower risk of suicidal thoughts or attempts, 39% lower risk

of overdose — and 50% lower risk of death.

Overall, the study found that using GLP-1 drugs likely prevented about seven cases of substance use disorder and 12 incidents involving serious harm for every 1,000 users over three years, Al-Aly said.

Among the study's limitations: It was conducted within the VA health system, which serves a population that is mostly older, white and male, although Al-Aly said the results were consistent in more than 35,000 women. It also includes data only from people with diabetes, not the general population.

The researchers also couldn't account for some factors, such as socioeconomic status or lifestyle choices, that could affect the results. And the analysis focuses on the effects of using GLP-1s compared with another drug, not compared with no treatment.

As an observational study, the new analysis showed that the GLP-1s are associated with reduced risk of substance use disorders and harms, not that the drugs themselves caused the reduction.

The new findings are striking, said Dr. Lorenzo Leggio, a National Institute on Drug Abuse clinical director who wasn't involved in the study.

"Even though we don't fully understand the mechanism, somehow the GLP-1 system is tackling addiction biology and the foundational system that underlies all these disorders," he said.

Diabetes and weight-loss trials have shown that the GLP-1 drugs target hormones in the gut and the brain that control appetite and feelings of fullness, cutting down on what's described as "food noise," or intrusive thoughts of food. In the same way, this study indicates the drugs may tamp down "alcohol or drug noise," Leggio said.

Growing evidence that GLP-1s might prevent substance use disorders is exciting, said Dr. Anna Lembke, a Stanford University addiction medicine specialist.

"We haven't really had a new tool in our toolbox from a pharmacotherapy perspective to treat addiction in a long time," said Lembke, noting that some addiction specialists are already prescribing GLP-1s off-label, especially when other treatments have failed.

SSRI pregnancy label proposal sparks debate

Top FDA drug official works to hire ally seeking new antidepressant warning

WASHINGTON, March 5, (AP) — The Food and Drug Administration's top drug regulator, Dr. Tracy Beth Hoeg, is working to hire a researcher and friend who wants the agency to add new warnings to antidepressants about unproven pregnancy risks, The Associated Press has learned.

Dr. Adam Urato, a maternal-fetal medicine specialist and critic of antidepressant safety, is pressing the FDA to add a boxed warning to SSRIs, the drugs most commonly prescribed for depression. Urato's petition says the medications can cause pregnancy complications, including miscarriages and fetal brain abnormalities that may lead to autism and other disorders in children.

That proposed labeling change has become a top priority for Hoeg, who regularly consults with Urato and is working to bring him on as a full-time FDA employee, according to people familiar with the situation. They spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity to discuss confidential FDA matters.

Within the agency, Hoeg's close relationship with Urato is viewed as a clear conflict of interest that, under normal FDA standards, would result in her recusing herself from any work on the petition. But Hoeg is actively working to speed up the agency's review of her friend's proposal, according to the people familiar with the situation.

Outside experts say the petition relies on flimsy data, including animal studies and small trials in people. They fear a new FDA warning could cause pregnant women to stop medica-



Dr. Tracy Beth Hoeg, with the FDA, listens during a meeting of the Advisory Committee in Immunization Practices at the CDC, June 25, 2025, in Atlanta. (AP)

tion unnecessarily, leading to serious health risks from untreated depression.

"A black box warning is a big red flag with both practitioners and patients," said Dr. Jennifer Payne, a University of Virginia reproductive psychiatrist. "What's missing in this petition is an understanding of the risks of maternal mental illness during pregnancy, not just to the woman, but to the pregnancy and ultimately the infant."

The FDA is legally required to respond in writing to each citizen petition and explain its reasons for granting or denying the request.

SSRIs include most of the best-selling depression medications, including Prozac, Paxil, Zoloft and their generic equivalents.

More than 15% of US women, or about 26 million people, take medi-

cation for depression, according to the latest federal figures. Professional guidelines state that antidepressants are generally safe during pregnancy and should be discontinued only after careful consultation with a doctor.

Last fall, Hoeg gave a talk on the SSRI petition to top FDA drug officials, presenting the work as her own. Staffers who reviewed her slides found they were created by Urato, according to the people who spoke to the AP. The incident was first reported by Stat News.

Urato said in an email Wednesday that Hoeg is "an excellent scientist," and that they have known each other for several years.

"I am friendly with her, as I am with many colleagues, but we do not have a longstanding personal friendship that would in any way prevent her from reviewing the citizen petition," Urato said.

A spokesman for the Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees the FDA, said that the agency would respond directly to Urato about his petition.

In January, Urato was named to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's panel on vaccine recommendations, which has been completely reshaped by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to include a number of anti-vaccine voices.

The antidepressant review is the latest in a series of controversial topics taken up by Hoeg, a sports medicine physician with no previous government or management experience.

Dietary fats shape immunity against disease

Gut bacteria, diet can reprogram fat to burn more energy: study

LOS ANGELES, March 5, (Agencies) — Scientists at City of Hope, one of the largest and most advanced cancer research and treatment organizations in the US and a leading research center for diabetes, the Broad Institute and Keio University have discovered how specific gut bacteria work together with diet to flip a metabolic switch — transforming energy-storing white fat into calorie-burning beige fat in mice.

The study, published in Nature, shows that a low-protein diet activates a precise set of gut microbes that send chemical signals throughout the body, prompting fat tissue to burn energy instead of storing it. The findings uncover a previously unknown biological pathway linking diet, the gut microbiome and metabolic health — one that could eventually inform new treatments for obesity, diabetes and related diseases.

"Fat tissue is not fixed — it's surprisingly adaptable," said Kenya Honda, M.D., Ph.D., co-senior author of the study and adjunct professor at City of Hope. "We found that certain gut bacteria can sense what the host is eating and translate that information into signals that tell fat cells to burn energy."

Most adult body fat consists of white fat, which stores excess calories. In contrast, beige and brown fat burn energy to generate heat and help regulate metabolism. Babies are born with significant amounts of brown fat, but those stores decline with age. For years scientists have searched for safe ways to convert white fat into beige fat — a process known as "beiging" — as a potential strategy to improve metabolic health.

In this study, researchers from City of Hope, Keio University and the Broad Institute found that mice fed a low-protein diet developed large amounts of beige fat only if they had the right gut bacteria. When the same diet was given to germ-free mice with no microbiome, the fat-burning effect disappeared.

"This told us the diet alone wasn't enough," Honda said. "The gut microbiome was essential."

The researchers identified four specific bacterial strains that were required to trigger fat browning. When these microbes were introduced into mice alongside a low-protein diet, the animals converted white fat into beige fat, gained less weight, showed im-



A subject's waist is measured during an obesity prevention study in Chicago on Jan 20, 2010. (AP)

proved glucose control and had lower cholesterol levels.

Rather than flipping a single switch in fat tissue, the gut bacteria acted more like a relay team. They sent one signal that changed bile acids and nudged fat cells toward a calorie burning state and a second signal that caused the liver to release a metabolism boosting hormone called FGF21. When scientists interrupted either signal, the fat burning effect disappeared — revealing that the two signals must work together for the process to succeed.

"This work underscores how the gut microbiome is actively interpreting what we eat and translating that information into signals the body responds to," said co-senior author Rannik Xavier, M.D., Ph.D., a core member at the Broad Institute and professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. "This opens up an opportunity to think about the interactions between microbes, metabolites and metabolic disease, understand the mechanisms, and potentially translate that into interventions for metabolic health."

The researchers emphasize that the findings should not be directly applied to people. The low-protein diet used in the study is lower than what is recommended for humans, and previous attempts to improve metabolism by giving people probiotics alone have largely failed.

Instead, the work points to new drug targets — the biological pathways ac-

tivated by microbes — rather than extreme diets or bacterial supplements.

Also:

SYDNEY: The types of dietary fats consumed directly impact the survival and strength of the body's immune cells and ability to fight disease, researchers have found.

An international collaboration led by Australia's University of Queensland (UQ) found that diet can alter the fat composition inside T cells — the immune cells that help protect a person from infections and cancer, according to a UQ statement released on Thursday.

The team found that diets lower in polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) relative to monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs) enhance T-cell resistance to oxidation-induced cell death, according to Professor Yu Di of UQ's Frazer Institute, corresponding author of the study published in Nature.

"The kinds of fats you eat change the fat composition inside your T cells, and those changes can make T cells either weaker or stronger in terms of immune protection," Yu said, adding that how bodies and cells process dietary fats, or lipid metabolism, is critical to immune function.

"This discovery shows that dietary changes could potentially boost the effectiveness of vaccines and cancer therapies," he said.

When knitting becomes medicine for the mind

Breast cancer survivor crafts knitted prostheses as silicone ones are costly

THIKA, Kenya, March 5, (AP) — When Mary Mwangi got her cancer diagnosis, she imagined death would follow shortly. She did not expect that her hobby of knitting, which she took up while recovering, would affect the lives of thousands of breast cancer survivors.

She now makes knitted prostheses for other breast cancer survivors in Kenya who have had an entire breast removed, known as a mastectomy, without the reconstructive surgery common in higher-income countries.

Women say the affordable prostheses are a relief in Kenya where, as in most countries, breast cancer is the most diagnosed cancer among women. On average, 6,000 cases are diagnosed annually in Kenya, where 40% of the population lives below the poverty line.

Mwangi began in 2017 by knitting hats and scarves, then met a woman who was knitting a prosthesis.

Now, in her shared tailor shop in Thika, outside the capital of Nairobi, Mwangi shares her knowledge with other women, calling her group the New Dawn Cancer Warriors. Some make money from the art, while others use it as an outlet whenever they are overwhelmed by the grief of losing a breast.

"Knitting takes you through a process of healing. Once you are not thinking about your disease, you are positive and that positive mind helps you, because healing starts from your mind," she said.

For Nancy Waitheira, a high school science teacher, meeting Mwangi be-



Mary Mwangi, 52, a breast cancer survivor, knits breast prostheses at her shop in Thika, Kiambu County, Kenya, Jan. 30, 2026. (AP)

fore her surgery aided her recovery as she bought the prosthesis and started to picture life without one breast.

When she was diagnosed with breast cancer, "everything turned dark." Her husband had recently died, and the diagnosis crushed her further.

But her meeting with Mwangi restored hope, and after surgery she looked forward to her incision healing so she could try on the knitted prosthesis.

On the first day of wearing it, when she was going to church, "I felt like Nancy had come back," she said. "My ego was restored. My dignity was restored."

Cancer remains a huge burden in developing countries like Kenya due

to the high cost of treatment. Just over 50% of breast cancer patients in Kenya present with an advanced stage of the disease at diagnosis, according to the health ministry, which is working on standardizing early detection.

Mwangi's knitted prostheses cost \$10 per breast, or one-sixth of the price of silicone ones in Kenya. Her group of women knit and sell them to organizations that donate to cancer survivors who cannot afford to buy them. Together, they have sold more than 600 pieces in the last three years.

The yarn-knitted prostheses are filled with the kind of fiber used in pillows. Women said it feels gentle on their skin.

AI tool used to boost heart risk screening

Rising CO2 levels detected in human blood

SYDNEY, March 5, (Xinhua) — Rising carbon dioxide (CO2) levels are being detected in human blood, with an Australian study warning a key blood marker could reach its healthy limit within decades.

The findings are especially relevant for children and adolescents, whose developing bodies will experience the longest cumulative exposure to rising atmospheric CO2, said a statement from the Kids Research Institute Australia (The Kids) on Wednesday.

Researchers from the institute, in collaboration with Australia's Curtin University and the Australian National University, analyzed more than two decades of U.S. population data and found steady shifts in blood chemistry in 7,000 people between 1999 and 2020, closely tracking the rise in atmospheric CO2.

The study, published in Air Quality, Atmosphere and Health, found that serum bicarbonate levels, a CO2-linked blood marker, rose by about 7 percent since 1999, mirroring atmospheric CO2 increases, with concurrent drops in calcium and phosphorus.

The findings suggest the human body may already be compensating for a changing atmosphere, potentially with long-term physiological consequences, said the study's lead author, Associate Professor Alexander Larcombe at The Kids.

"If current trends continue, modelling indicates average

bicarbonate levels could approach the upper limit of today's accepted healthy range within 50 years," Larcombe said.

The study urges tracking atmospheric composition and population biomarkers alongside traditional climate indicators to assess long-term human biological impacts.



Singapore will introduce an artificial intelligence (AI) assessment tool in early 2027 to help identify individuals at high risk for cardiovascular disease, the Ministry of Health said Thursday.

Developed by the national health technology agency Synapse, the Assisted Chronic Disease Explanation using AI tool analyzes factors such as age and medical history to predict the likelihood of developing diabetes or hyperlipidemia.

Once deployed to primary care providers, those flagged as high risk will receive annual cardiovascular disease risk screenings, increased from the previous schedule of every three years. The screenings will be subsidized.

According to the ministry, individuals identified as high risk by the tool have more than a 75 percent chance of being diagnosed with diabetes, hyperlipidemia, or both within the next three years.

The ministry said the rollout represents "a shift towards digitally enabled preventive care," enabling targeted screenings based on individual risk profiles.

Sudan officially declares end of cholera epidemic after 18-month outbreak

KHARTOUM, March 5, (Xinhua) — Sudan's Ministry of Health officially declared the country free of the cholera epidemic Wednesday, meeting scientific standards and the International Health Regulations following an 18-month outbreak.

"Since January 14, no cases have been recorded in any state. Based on scientific data and the International Health Regulations, Sudan is free of the cholera epidemic," Monstari Mohamed Osman, head of the health emergencies and epidemics control directorate at the ministry, told Xinhua.

Osman explained that strict criteria for declaring the end of a cholera outbreak include two full incubation periods

without new cases, confirmed cessation to local transmission, no active infection chains, and no new community hotspots or geographic spread.

"We can confirm that Sudan is free of the epidemic, unless cases come from abroad," he added.

The Ministry of Health conducted extensive containment efforts, administering 20 million vaccine doses, carrying out about 100 medical campaigns and holding 130 central emergency room meetings to monitor the epidemiological situation, said Osman.

Sudan first announced the outbreak of cholera in August

2024. According to earlier statistics, the country recorded over 100,000 cases nationwide, including about 2,408 deaths, between July 2024 and Dec. 21, 2025.

Cholera is a serious diarrheal infection caused by ingestion of food or water contaminated with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*, with potentially fatal consequences if not treated promptly.

Meanwhile, Zambia's cumulative cholera cases have reached 1,110 since the latest outbreak began in August 2025, according to figures released by the Zambia National Public Health Institute on Tuesday.

The update followed the reporting of nine new cases, while confirmed cholera-related deaths have risen to 18.

The figures showed that nine patients were discharged during the same period, bringing the cumulative number of discharges to 1,083, while nine patients remain hospitalized.

A total of 376,573 people in cholera-affected districts have been vaccinated so far. The current outbreak has affected 20 of the country's 116 districts, including Lusaka, the capital.

Zambia experienced its worst cholera outbreak between October 2023 and July 2024, recording more than 23,000 cases and over 700 deaths.

SPORTS

Bucks struggle continues as Hawks surge past .500



Los Angeles Clippers guard Jordan Miller, right, shoots as Indiana Pacers center Micah Potter, left, and guard Quenton Jackson defend during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Inglewood, Calif. (AP)



Chicago Bulls guard Josh Giddey, right, passes a ball as Oklahoma City Thunder forward Chet Holmgren guards during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Chicago. (AP)

Clippers sink Pacers for third straight win

MILWAUKEE, March 5, (AP): Nickeil Alexander-Walker scored 23 points and the Atlanta Hawks defeated the slumping Milwaukee Bucks 131-113 to win their fifth straight game and move above .500 for the first time since December.

Atlanta (32-31) was 15-12 after a Dec. 14 victory over Philadelphia, but the Hawks lost their next seven games and hadn't owned a winning record since.

Onyeka Okongwu had 21 points and Jalen Johnson added 20 points and nine assists as the Hawks erased an early 16-point deficit. CJ McCollum scored 18 points, while Dyon Daniels had 14 points and 10 rebounds.

The Hawks outscored the Bucks 65-42 in the second half. Atlanta didn't have Jonathan Kuminga available due to inflammation in his left knee, while Milwaukee was missing Kevin Porter Jr. because of swelling in his right knee.

Milwaukee (26-35) fell five games behind Atlanta and Charlotte, who are tied for ninth in the Eastern Conference standings. The Bucks have lost their last four games by a combined 97 points.

Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 24 points for the Bucks in his second game since returning from a right calf strain that caused him to miss five weeks.

Clippers 130, Pacers 107

In Inglewood, Kawhi Leonard scored 29 points, Benne-

dict Mathurin scored 23 on 8-for-11 shooting, and the Los Angeles Clippers beat Indiana Pacers for their third in a row. Brook Lopez had 17 points for the Clippers while Darius Garland had 12 in his first home game since being acquired in a trade from the Cleveland Cavaliers last month.

Pascal Siakam had 29 points in his return after sitting out three games with a left wrist sprain to lead Indiana, but the Pacers lost their seventh in a row and fell to the bottom of the Eastern Conference standings with a 15-47 record.

Jay Huff had 18 and was 4 of 8 on 3-pointers, and Jarace Walker finished with 17.

The Clippers led 42-25 after one quarter and 63-51 at halftime, with Leonard racking up 20 points. The Clippers pulled away with a 16-2 run in the third quarter to extend a seven-point lead to 21 points.

Thunder 103, Knicks 100

In New York, Chet Holmgren had 28 points and eight rebounds, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 26 points and the Oklahoma City Thunder edged the New York Knicks.

Holmgren tied a career high with six 3-pointers and Lu Dort added 16 points for the Thunder, who recovered after the Knicks took the lead with a 40-point third quarter, going back ahead early in the fourth and nursing a small advantage the rest of the way.

Jalen Brunson and OG Anunoby missed tying 3-point attempts on the final possession as Oklahoma City won its fourth straight and snapped New York's three-game winning streak.

Karl-Anthony Towns had 17 points and 17 rebounds for

the Knicks. Brunson had 16 points and a season-high 15 assists, but shot just 5 for 18. Anunoby also had 16 points.

Hornets 118, Celtics 89

In Boston, Kon Knueppel scored 20 points and the Charlotte Hornets extended their win streak to six games with a win over the Boston Celtics.

Brandon Miller and LaMelo Ball each added 18 points. Coby White finished with 17 points and six assists to help Charlotte (32-31) move above .500 for the first time since Oct. 26.

The Hornets never trailed and led by as many as 29 points while committing only five turnovers.

Derrick White led the Celtics with 29 points. Jaylen Brown added 20 points and 11 rebounds as Boston's win streak was stopped at three games.

The Celtics (41-21) came out sluggish playing in their sixth game in nine days, shooting just 38% (30 of 79) from the field and committing 16 turnovers that led to 21 Charlotte points. Boston also was mostly cold from the 3-point line, connecting on only 10 of 36 attempts.

76ers 106, Jazz 102

In Philadelphia, Quentin Grimes hit two tiebreaking free throws with 16.4 seconds remaining. Tyrese Maxey scored 25 points and the short-handed Philadelphia 76ers beat the Utah Jazz.

Grimes finished with 16 points and Jabari Walker had 22 points for the 76ers, who were without Joel Embiid, VJ Edgecombe and suspended Paul George.

Keyonte George scored 30 points for the Jazz, who have lost seven in a row.

Philadelphia, which entered in sixth place in the Eastern Conference playoff race, trailed 100-94 with 4:51 left after George hit a 3. But Utah missed its next six field goals, and Philadelphia tied it at 100 on Adem Bona's follow dunk with 1:50 left.

Isaiah Collier's layup 46 seconds later put the Jazz ahead by two points, but Grimes tied it on a drive with 46.8 seconds remaining. After George misfired on a long-range shot for Utah, Grimes converted both free throws after being fouled. Utah coach Will Hardy did not call timeout, and a wide-open look from long distance by Kyle Filipowski was off.

Trail Blazers 122, Grizzlies 114

In Memphis, Jrue Holiday had 35 points and 11 assists, and Jerami Grant added 30 points as the Portland Trail Blazers downed Memphis Grizzlies to snap a two-game skid.

Portland (30-33), making a push to qualify for the postseason, used a 24-19 scoring edge over the final nine minutes to seal the win. The Trail Blazers had lost three of their last four and four of their last six games entering Wednesday.

Robert Williams III had 20 points and 11 rebounds for Portland. Matisse Thybulle contributed three rebounds, an assist and a steal on his 29th birthday.

The Grizzlies got double-figure scoring from seven players, but it wasn't enough against Portland as they lost their second straight and for the ninth time in 12 games. Memphis was playing the second game of a back to back after falling to Minnesota 117-110 on Tuesday.

Kofane scores lone goal

Young players impress as Leverkusen gets much-needed victory at Hamburg

HAMBURG, Germany, March 5, (AP): Two of Bayer Leverkusen's young players combined for a breakthrough goal to beat Hamburger SV 1-0 in the Bundesliga and boost the team's fading challenge for Champions League qualification.

Leverkusen was having a frustrating game, with a goal ruled out for handball and a penalty decision overturned on video review, before 20-year-old midfielder Ibrahim Maza and 19-year-old forward Christian Kofane combined for the only goal in the 73rd minute.

Maza drew in Hamburg players before flicking the ball on for Kofane, who lashed it into the top-left corner.

Hamburg's own young star Luka Vušković threw his boots against the bench in frustration at the end. The 19-year-old defender, on loan from Tottenham, had a shot blocked by Leverkusen goalkeeper Janis Blaswich in the final seconds and headed the rebound onto the crossbar. Hamburg is 11th and winless in three games.

Leverkusen remained sixth in the Bundesliga but cut the gap to fourth-place Stuttgart, the last team in the Champions League places, to three points.

Leverkusen coach Kasper Hjulmand made five changes to his lineup, partly due to injuries, and handed a first senior start to 18-year-old German-



Leverkusen's Ibrahim Maza, left, and Hamburger's Otto Stange fight for the ball during the Bundesliga soccer match between Hamburger SV and Bayer Leverkusen, in Hamburg, Germany. (AP)

American winger Montrell Culbreath, who played 80 minutes.

The game was originally meant to be played in January but it was rescheduled when Hamburg's stadium roof suffered structural damage following heavy snow and required urgent repairs.

The win over Hamburg is part of a crucial run of games for Leverkusen, which faces Arsenal in the Champions League round of 16 next week and is struggling to qualify for next season's Champions League after winning one of its previous four Bundesliga games prior to Wednesday.

Everyone starts somewhere

As Cadillac makes F1 debut, history shows new teams can win big or fail

MELBOURNE, March 5, (AP): Cadillac might just be the best-prepared new team in Formula 1 history.

The General Motors and TWG Motorsports co-owned team racked up the virtual miles in detailed race simulations last year and was reliable in pre-season testing with its new car, named for Mario Andretti, even if it's likely to be fighting with struggling Aston Martin not to be last.

The rubber hits the road for real as the 11th team at the Australian Grand Prix on Sunday.

From a one-season wonder to a notorious disgrace, here is a look at some other debut seasons from F1 history for Cadillac to aspire to, or avoid:

Everyone starts somewhere. In the first world championship season, Ferrari was an emerging manufacturer in the shadow of Italian giants Alfa Romeo and Maserati. Alberto Ascari's second-place finish at the Monaco Grand Prix made a statement that Ferrari was serious. José Froilán González brought Ferrari its first win a year later and Ascari became the team's first champion in 1952. Ferrari is the only team to participate in every F1 season.

When F1 had so many teams that pre-qualifying was needed to trim the field, you needed something special to stand out. Team boss Eddie Jordan, who died last year at the age of 76, was a cult



Cadillac driver Valtteri Bottas of Finland poses for a portrait ahead of the Australian Formula One Grand Prix at Albert Park, in Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

figure in F1 for his strong opinions and loud shirts, and handed future seven-time champion Michael Schumacher a debut after his regular driver was arrested. Schumacher qualified seventh, putting himself and Jordan on the map. The popular Irish team stayed on the grid, winning four races, until a 2005 sale.

F1 had slow teams like Life, which never got past pre-qualifying. It had short-lived teams like Mastercard Lola, which lasted one qualifying session. Andrea Moda still stands out. Its car, a

years-old design, broke down regularly - once before leaving the pit lane - and was hopelessly slow. The team missed a race because its engines didn't arrive and another when its trucks were stuck in traffic, was accused by one driver of knowingly fitting damaged steering to his car and was eventually excluded from F1 mid-season.

F1's ultimate Cinderella story began when Honda wanted to shut down its team to save money as the global economy plummeted. Team principal Ross Brawn persuaded Honda to accept a management buyout for one pound. In a plain white car with almost no sponsors but with a game-changing "double diffuser" innovation that left other teams scrambling to copy it, Jenson Button won Brawn's first race in Australia. He held off Red Bull's Sebastian Vettel to take the championship in the team's first and only season. Brawn then sold his team to Mercedes and it has won eight more constructors' titles since.

American teams have a patchy history in F1. The last to win a race was Penske in 1976, while USF1 never even made the grid before running out of cash in 2010. That made it all the more surprising when the next U.S. entry, Haas, didn't just survive in F1, it celebrated sixth- and fifth-place finishes in its first two races with Romain Grosjean at the wheel.

Winter Paralympics celebrate 50 years

Chinese dominance expected amid boycotts over Russian flag

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy, March 5, (AP): The Winter Paralympics come to Milan Cortina to celebrate their 50th anniversary, with China looking to extend its dominance as a Paralympic powerhouse and Ukraine and other nations boycotting the opening ceremony over the return of the Russian flag and anthem.

The Games will officially kick off on Friday amid the tensions of the war in the Middle East, which prompted travel difficulties for some of the nations coming to Italy because of a widespread flight disruptions.

Iran was due to have one skier at Milan Cortina. Wheelchair curling kickstarted the competition schedule.

The Paralympic Games are back in Italy 20 years after Torino 2006. It will be the 14th edition of the Winter Paralympics since the inaugural edition in Örnsköldsvik, Sweden, in 1976. Nearly 200 athletes competed in two sports at the time. Some 660 athletes will participate across the six sports in Italy from Friday through March 15.

The U.S. is sending a 72-member squad to Italy, compared to the 67-member roster it took to Beijing 2022. This year's delegation includes Oksana Masters, the most decorated American Winter Paralympian, and 16-year-old Para alpine skier Meg Gustafson.

Russian athletes will compete under their own flag at the Paralympics for the first time in more than a decade, and the country's national anthem could be played for gold medalists for the first time on the stage of a major global sporting event since the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The Russian flag hasn't been flown at the Paralympics since the 2014 Winter Games in Sochi, while the national anthem has not been heard at any Olympics or Paralympics since the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Games.

It could be the first time the anthem is played on the stage of any major global sporting event in four years.

Ukraine was the first to announce that it was planning to boycott the opening ceremony because of Russia, and seven other nations were planning not to attend because of political reasons: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Poland, Lithuania and the Netherlands.

Some other nations are not attending the opening ceremony to rest their athletes ahead of their competitions, not as a boycott.

Russian athletes were initially banned because of a state-sponsored doping pro-

gram, and the sanctions had continued since the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Ukraine's sports minister Matvii Bidnyi had said in a social media post the nation will "not take part in any other official Paralympic events."

Russian athletes and athletes from Russia's close ally, Belarus, were awarded slots by the International Paralympic Committee on Feb. 17.

Russian and Belarusian athletes had been competing as individual neutral ath-



Russian President Vladimir Putin, second left, poses for a photo with Russian Paralympic athletes Aleksei Churkin, front left, who won a silver medal in shot put, and Evgenia Galaktionova, front right, who won a bronze medal in javelin throw, after an awarding ceremony for the Russian Paralympic Committee's medalists of the Paris 2024 Paralympics in Moscow, Russia. (AP)

letes without their flag, anthem or team colors.

The IPC said most teams were already in Europe for training, but it was helping out others with travel amid the war in the Middle East.

The Milan Cortina Games will give China the chance to establish itself as the nation to beat in both the Summer Paralympics and Winter Paralympics.

The Chinese topped the medal count in the Summer Paralympics every time since 2004, and four years ago won the Winter Games for the first time with a record-setting performance that included 18 gold medals, 20 silver and 23 bronze.

China had more than 90 Para athletes competing at its home Games in 2022, the most ever by any nation, and is sending another large delegation to Italy this time. It will have 70 athletes competing in Italy, making its largest ever overseas delegation.

Norway is the most successful nation in Winter Paralympics, ahead of the United States and Austria. China is 14th in the all-time medal table but competed in less than half of the Games in which Norway, the U.S. and Austria participated since the first Winter Paralympics in Örnsköldsvik.

China's push to dominate in the Winter Paralympics got a boost when it was picked to host the Beijing Games, where it won 60 more medals than the single one it had won in PyeongChang in 2018.

The push continued after the home Games, with government funds still being made available for Paralympic programs and changes being promoted on several fronts, including new laws for people with disabilities to encourage their access to sports.

"China developed hundreds of disability sport instructors and coaches with government funding since they started the investment in Paralympic sports. They trained coaches for mass participation and they've been training coaches for the elite sports," said NaRi Shin, an assistant professor of sport management at the University of Michigan.

"They have national Para games and regional games within the nation's boundary, but also had the Olympic Games in 2008 and the Winter Games in 2022, so they do have maintained the series of competitions so that these athletes who they trained have the experience of competing at the higher level," said Shin, who is an expert in sport development and on how East Asian countries have invested in the Olympics and Paralympics.

SPORTS

Arsenal capitalizes on Man City slip to move 7 clear in title race



Chelsea's Reece James, left, tackles Aston Villa's Morgan Rogers during their English Premier League soccer match between Aston Villa and Chelsea in Birmingham, England. (AP)

Newcastle ends Man United's unbeaten run under Carrick

LONDON, March 5, (AP): Arsenal moved seven points ahead of Manchester City at the top of the Premier League after scraping a 1-0 win at Brighton while its title rival drew 2-2 at home to struggling Nottingham Forest.

City almost won it eight minutes into stoppage time when substitute Savinho had a shot cleared near the line.

Right winger Bukayo Saka's ninth-minute goal was enough for Arsenal, which has played one game more than City. Saka broke down the right and his scuffed strike over a cross which Antoine Semenyo expertly volleyed in at waist height with his left foot.

But Forest hit the home side in the 52nd with a classic counter-attack which went almost the length of the field. It culminated in a brilliant back-heeled finish from midfielder Morgan Gibbs-White after Brazil forward Igor Jesus had nodded down a right-wing cross. Forest's joy was short-lived when former Ballon d'Or winner Rodri rose to head home from a corner six minutes later.

Forest stunned City again, however, when midfielder Elliot Anderson curled in a superb shot from just outside the penalty area into the bottom right corner with 13 minutes left.

Newcastle fans had to endure 10 minutes of stoppage time before erupting with joy at St. James' Park.

Osula scored a brilliant break-away goal, starting the move deep



Manchester City's Erling Haaland, right, challenges Nottingham Forest's Neco Williams during the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester City and Nottingham Forest in Manchester, England. (AP)

inside his own half and galloping down the right before curling a fine shot past goalkeeper Senne Lammens.

Ramsey was sent off after collecting a second yellow card for diving in the area. Newcastle took the lead moments later when Anthony Gordon was fouled by Bruno Fernandes and converted the resulting spot kick.

But nine minutes into first-half stoppage time, Fernandes set up Casemiro's equalizing header from a free kick.

Carrick, who grew up a few miles from Newcastle, watched glum-faced as Newcastle goalie Aaron Ramsdale made two excellent saves before Osula's stunning winner.

Harry Maguire was in the United

defense on the day he was given a 15-month suspended sentence over a nightclub scuffle involving police officers on the Greek island of Mykonos in August 2020.

Striker João Pedro grabbed a hat trick as Chelsea moved above Liverpool into fifth place with a 4-1 win at Aston Villa. Chelsea is only three points behind fourth-place Villa in the race for Champions League places next season.

Villa scored after two minutes when Ollie Watkins let Leon Bailey's cross from right go through his legs and midfielder Douglas Luiz deftly flicked the ball in from close range.

Chelsea equalized in the 35th when Pedro turned in Malo Gusto's right-wing cross. After Watkins had a goal ruled out for a narrow offside, Pedro clipped the ball in from close range during first-half stoppage time from Enzo Fernández's pass.

Midfielder Cole Palmer drove in the third goal in the 55th and Pedro tapped in Alejandro Garnacho's cross to complete his hat trick in the 64th.

Forward Crysencio Summerville's strike was enough to give West Ham a vital 1-0 win at Fulham in its relegation fight.

After Fulham had a penalty decision overturned by VAR early in the second half, West Ham scored midway through the second half when Summerville curled in from just inside the area.

United States left back Antonee Robinson made his first Premier League start for Fulham since Feb. 1.

Forest is 17th and West Ham is 18th with only goal difference separating the sides.

Marseille faces another trophyless season

Lazio and Atalanta draw 2-2 in 1st leg of Italian Cup semifinals

ROME, March 5, (AP): Lazio and Atalanta traded four second-half goals in a 2-2 draw in the first leg of the Italian Cup semifinals.

Fisayo Dele-Bashiru took advantage of a through pass from former Atalanta midfielder Daniel Maldini to put Lazio ahead two minutes after the break. Mario Pasalic equalized four minutes later for Atalanta by knocking in a rebound.

Boulaye Dia took advantage of a defensive error by Pasalic and quickly found the target from the center of the area in the 87th. Then United States international Yunus Musah equalized again for Atalanta in the 90th.

Como and Inter Milan drew 0-0 in the other semifinal on Tuesday.

The second legs are scheduled for April 21-22 and the final is May 13.

Atalanta has reached the final three times in the last seven seasons but has won the trophy only once - back in 1963. Lazio is a seven-time champion, having beat Atalanta for its most recent title in 2019.

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Marseille's long wait for a trophy continues after it twice threw away the lead against Toulouse before losing on penalties in the French Cup quarterfinals.

Following a 2-2 draw Marseille lost the shootout 4-3 with 18-year-old loan signing Ethan Nwaneri in tears after missing the decisive kick.

Some fans threw flares onto the field at the final whistle as Marseille's players went off to a chorus of boos. The club has not won any silverware since the League Cup in 2012 and last won the French Cup in 1989. In Wednesday's other quarterfinal, Nice won 6-5 on penalties following a 0-0 draw with **Lorient**. Nice won the last of its three French Cups in 1997.

Marseille has not been past the quarterfinals since 2016, when it lost to bitter rival Paris **Saint-Germain** in the final.

Boosted by a dramatic win over Ligue 1 rival **Lyon** on Sunday, Marseille opened the scoring in the second minute through **Mason Greenwood**'s penalty after being fouled by defender **Rasmus Nicolaisen**.

Toulouse, which crushed Nantes 5-1 in the 2023 final, leveled 10 minutes later through striker **Yann Gboho** after a corner.

Brazilian winger **Igor Paixão** followed up his brilliant strike against Lyon with another fine goal from the left as he cut inside and delightfully curled the ball over the goalkeeper's head in the 56th.

But poor defending has dogged Marseille for several seasons and Toulouse hit back again within minutes through **Charlie Cresswell**'s header following another corner, with goalkeeper **Geronimo Rulli** and error-prone defender **Leonardo Balerdi** nowhere near the ball. **Balerdi** also missed his kick during the penalty shootout.



Lazio's Mattia Zaccagni and Atalanta's Odilon Kossounou fight for the ball during the Frecciarossa Italian Cup soccer match between Lazio and Atalanta in Rome, Italy. (AP)

Brazil's Flamengo hires Leonardo Jardim

Merentiel double lifts Boca past Lanus

BUENOS AIRES, March 5, (Agencies): Forward Miguel Merentiel from Uruguay scored twice to help Boca Juniors arrest a recent form slump with a 3-0 away win over Lanus in Argentina's Apertura tournament.

Santiago Ascacibar gave the visitors the lead by controlling a loose ball with his chest before volleying a 20-yard drive into the top-right corner.

Boca doubled its lead on the half hour when Lanus goalkeeper Nahuel Losada palmed away Tomas Aranda's cross only for Merentiel to head in the rebound.

Merentiel put the result beyond doubt in the 64th minute, running onto Leandro Paredes' through ball and lifting a shot over Losada.

Boca, which had failed to win in four league outings dating back to February 1, is now sixth in Group A with 12 points from eight games, three ahead of 10th-placed Lanus.

□ □ □

Defending Brazilian and South American champion Flamengo hired Portuguese coach Leonardo Jardim on Wednesday after shocking fans by firing Filipe Luís the day before.

The 51-year-old former Monaco coach signed a deal until the end of 2027, the Rio de Janeiro club said.

Luís was fired hours after Flamengo beat tiny Madureira 8-0 in a Rio state league semifinal. This year his team lost the trophies of the Brazilian Supercup to local rival Corinthians and the South American Recopa to Argentina's Lanus, triggering the supporters' anger. Many fans, pundits and former Flamengo players expressed support for Luís after his firing and expressed disbelief with the decision of club chairman Luiz Eduardo Baptista.

Only two months ago, Luís extended his contract at Flamengo through 2027. He had 101 matches as Flamengo's coach with 63 victories, 23 draws and 15 defeats. Five of those losses took place this year.

Jardim coached Cruzeiro last year and took the team from Minas Gerais state to a third-place finish in the Brazilian league. He left the club after the end of his contract in December, pledging never to coach another Brazilian team.

Best of the Rest

Donald to return as captain: Luke Donald has decided to return as Ryder Cup captain for Europe with a shot at making history as the only captain to win three straight times.

Not since Bernhard Gallacher from 1991 through 1995 has someone been captain at three straight Ryder Cups. Donald led Team Europe to victory outside Rome in 2023, and then at Bethpage Black in New York last September. European players already consider him one of the best captains in Ryder Cup history.

Now it's up to the Americans to decide who will face off against Donald. Tiger Woods is the top choice, as he was going into the last Ryder Cup. Woods has not determined whether he has the time. The Associated Press reported last week Woods is being encouraged to decide by the end of the month. (AP)

Workers race for March 28 reopening ahead of WC

Mexican authorities meet FIFA to review World Cup security protocols

MEXICO CITY, March 5, (AP): FIFA representatives met with Mexican authorities to assess security for the World Cup matches to be played in Mexico.

Concerns arose following violent incidents last week in several Mexican states after a military operation led to the capture and death of drug lord Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, alias "El Mencho," leader of the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel.

"We reviewed the intelligence, prevention, and operational deployment protocols that will be implemented during this international event," Federal Security Secretary Omar García Harfuch said on his social media accounts.

Mexico, the United States and Canada are co-hosting the World Cup. Mexico is scheduled to host 13 matches, distributed among three cities: Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey.

The tournament's opening match - Mexico vs. South Africa - will be played June 11 at Azteca Stadium in Mexico City.

In addition to the FIFA representatives and García Harfuch, Wednesday's meeting also included members of the Security Cabinet and authorities from Mexico City and the states of Jalisco and Nuevo León.

Earlier, President Claudia Sheinbaum stated that thanks to the efforts of federal and state forces, security will be guaranteed for all those visiting the country during the tournament.

"Security is guaranteed, and there is sufficient surveillance and inspection to ensure that absolutely no problems occur, (so that) it will be a great, peaceful World Cup where visitors come to have fun," Sheinbaum said in her daily briefing.

The Mexican president held a telephone conversation last Thursday with FIFA President Gianni Infantino, who expressed his "full confidence" that Mexico will be able to co-host the World Cup, despite the violence that erupted in Guadalajara, Jalisco and another 19 states, where dozens of stores, bank branches, and vehicles were burned and looted, and roads were blocked.

Jalisco, the central hub of Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion, was the epicenter of the violence on Feb. 22 after the capture and death of Oseguera Cervantes in the town of Tapalpa, in the southern part of the state.

Three giant cranes stand a few meters from the main entrance of Azteca Stadium. Around them, construction vehicles move rubble generated by hundreds of workers racing to get the stadium ready for its reopening ahead of the 2026 World Cup.

The iconic venue will become the first to host three World Cup opening matches when Mexico faces South Africa on June 11, but the reopening is scheduled for March 28, when Mexico will play Portugal in a friendly game.

The stadium located south of Mexico City will host five World Cup games. Mexico previously hosted the 1970 and 1986 tour-



Workers load a truck with debris outside of the Azteca Stadium, 100 days before the opening ceremony of the 2026 FIFA soccer World Cup, in Mexico City. (AP)

naments. Opened in 1966, Azteca has undergone several renovations - the last one to accommodate NFL games in 2016.

It closed its doors in May 2024 to get a much-needed facelift.

The project is adding new seats in all sections, more video screens, new lighting and locker rooms, a new entrance to the new hybrid pitch, a new wi-fi system, two new big screens, and a new sound system with 250 speakers.

The new locker rooms and the new entrance to the pitch were, according to stadium director Felix Aguirre and stadium owner Emilio Azcarraga Jean, the most difficult parts, delaying the overall renovations.

"The contractors say that yes (it will be ready), I'm not a construction expert, they set dates, there's a meeting every week, I told them I'm not a specialist, but I don't see their dates going accordingly as the (planned) dates," Azcarraga said last month. "There was a lot of difficulty at the beginning."

Aerial images taken Tuesday by The Associated Press show that all the new seats, 82,000 of them according to the stadium owners, are in place, as well as the new hybrid pitch, but there are still crews working on hospitality areas and new luxury boxes.

A similar hybrid surface was installed in 2018 but poor field conditions forced a last-minute change of venue for an NFL game between the Kansas City Chiefs and the Los Angeles Rams. Natural grass was installed the following year. The new pitch has ventilation and drainage to resist heavy downpours common in Mexico City.

Malaysia loses appeal against FIFA

GENEVA, March 5, (AP): The Malaysian Football Association lost its appeal on Thursday against a FIFA ruling it cheated by using false documents to naturalize foreign-born players for the men's national team.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport said its judges confirmed a 350,000 Swiss francs (\$450,000) fine for the FA and one-year bans for the seven players "given their complicit responsibility in this fraud." The players were given Malaysian passports and selected for the team's 4-0 win over Vietnam last June in a qualifying game for the 2027 Asian Cup. That win should be overturned by the Asian Football Confederation.

"The CAS panel found that the infraction of falsifying eligibility documents was established and that the 12-month ban from playing matches was a reasonable and proportionate sanction for the players," the court said.

However, the court relaxed the FIFA punishments by ruling the players should be allowed to train and take part in soccer activities outside of games until their bans expire.

The Malaysia FA acknowledged its "institutional shortcomings," the court said, "and did not dispute that it may bear responsibility in violating" FIFA disciplinary rules.

"It also stated that the players had a limited role in providing documents requested by (the federation) and did not prepare, nor alter them," CAS said.

The banned players were Gabriel Felipe Arrocha, Jon Irazábal Iraurgi, Facundo Tomás Garcés, Rodrigo Julián Holgado, Imanol Javier Machuca, João Vitor Brandão Figueiredo and Hector Alejandro Hevel Serrano.

They were chosen to help a Malaysia team currently No. 121 in the FIFA ranking of 211 men's national teams. Malaysia has never qualified for a World Cup and at the 2023 Asian Cup placed last in its group without a win in three games.

FIFA originally processed applications for the players to change their national eligibility to Malaysia, by accepting documents claiming grandparents of the seven players were born there. That detail, if true, would have complied with FIFA's nationality rules.

FIFA's own investigation later showed the family members were born in the same countries as the players: Argentina, Brazil, the Netherlands and Spain.

It is the latest case of false registrations in international soccer - often involving players from Brazil - seeking to exploit FIFA rules which do allow some foreign-born players to change their eligibility.

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Atlanta Hawks guard Nickeil Alexander-Walker (7) drives against Milwaukee Bucks guard Cam Thomas (24) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Milwaukee. (AP)
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Sports

New Zealand storms into final as South Africa crumbles

Allen smashes record 33-ball century

KOLKATA, India, March 5, (AP): New Zealand opener Finn Allen smashed the fastest-ever century in a T20 World Cup match to help the Kiwis defeat favorites South Africa by nine wickets in the first semifinal.

Allen's blistering unbeaten 100 off just 33 balls featured 10 fours and eight sixes, powering New Zealand to 173-1 in only 12.5 overs and ending South Africa's hopes of reaching a second successive final.

The right-hander's ruthless power-hitting included a brutal assault on Marco Jansen — 4, 4, 6, 6, 4 — as he raced to one of the most memorable hundreds in tournament history and guided New Zealand to just their second T20 World Cup final.

West Indies great Chris Gayle previously held the record with his 47-ball century against England in the 2016 tournament.

South Africa, who entered the playoffs on the back of seven consecutive wins — including a seven-wicket victory over New Zealand in the group stage — posted 169-8 after Mitchell Santner won the toss and elected to field at Eden Gardens. Jansen top-scored with an unbeaten 55 off 30 balls.

"Just tried to get into good positions and perform for the team," Allen said. "We wanted to start well and put them on the back foot early. It's easy for me when Timmy is going like that. Training is really important to get a feel for the wicket. We knew it would be black soil — we had that intel."

The chase was effectively sealed inside the first six overs as Allen and Tim Seifert (58) powered New Zealand to 84-0. Both batters punished Jansen with two sixes and three boundaries in his opening two overs before Allen capped the powerplay by smashing Corbin Bosch for 22 runs in the sixth over.

The return of Kagiso Rabada and left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj failed to stem the flow of runs, as the opening stand swelled to 117 in just nine overs. Rabada claimed the consolation wicket of Seifert, knocking over his leg stump, but Allen contin-



New Zealand's Finn Allen hits a six during the first T20 World Cup cricket semifinal match between New Zealand and South Africa in Kolkata, India. (AP)

ued his onslaught with relentless power-hitting.

Jansen endured a tough outing, conceding 53 runs in 2.5 overs. Bosch leaked 35 runs in two overs, while Maharaj (0-33) and Lungi Ngidi (0-22) were taken for 55 runs across five overs combined.

"Massive credit to Finn Allen and Seifert for killing the game as early as they did," South Africa captain Aiden Markram said. "We expected the wicket to play really well — it looked good. Maybe we needed to scrape our way to 190 to stay in the game."

Earlier, left-hander Jansen led South Africa's recovery after the top order collapsed to 77-5 in the 11th over against the off-spin of Cole McConchie (2-9) and the left-arm spin of Rachin Ravindra (2-29).

Santner's tactical move to hand McConchie the new ball paid immediate

dividends, with Quinton de Kock (10) caught at mid-on and Ryan Rickelton slicing his first delivery to point.

Markram (18) and David Miller (6) failed to capitalize on a dropped chance and both fell to Ravindra, with Daryl Mitchell taking sharp catches in the outfield.

Jansen and Tristan Stubbs (29) revived the innings with a 73-run partnership. Jansen brought up his half-century with back-to-back sixes off Lockie Ferguson as South Africa accelerated late, scoring 68 runs in the final six overs. "When you see how good South Africa are, to put on a performance like that in a crunch game is really pleasing," Santner said. "It was about keeping pressure on throughout, and when you take wickets consistently it makes it tough for the opposition."



South Africa's Keshav Maharaj bowls a delivery during the first T20 World Cup cricket semifinal match between New Zealand and South Africa in Kolkata, India. (AP)

South Korea hits three past Philippines

Iran suffers heavy defeat to Australia at Women's Asian Cup

GOLD COAST, Australia, March 5, (AP): After the anthems were sung and the pre-game formalities it was another difficult night for Iran in a 4-0 loss to Australia at the Women's Asian Cup.

The silence during the anthem from players and management before Monday's 3-0 loss to South Korea generated headlines two days after the war in the Middle East started with strikes by the U.S. and Israel on Iran.

After back-to-back losses, Iran needs a big win over the Philippines (0-2) on Sunday to have any chance of advancing to the quarterfinals and maintaining a chance of qualifying for next year's Women's World Cup in Brazil.

The World Cup is the target for Iran and head coach Marziyeh Jafari has been working to keep her squad thinking of that as they cope with concerns for their families and friends at home.

Australia and South Korea, which beat the Philippines 3-0 in a day game, will meet in Sydney on Sunday to determine top spot in Group A.

The Matildas opened with a 1-0 win over the Philippines but showed more attacking intent against Iran, starting with Sam Kerr and Mary Fowler in tandem. Amy Sayer opened the scoring in the eighth minute and Fowler doubled the lead in her return to the



Iran's goalkeeper Raha Yazdani punches the ball clear of Australia's Alanna Kennedy during the Women's Asia Cup soccer match between Australia and Iran in Robina, Australia. (AP)

starting XI following almost a year out with injury. Alanna Kennedy finished it off with goals in the 35th and 58th minutes.

South Korea scored two quick goals to take a commanding lead after 15 minutes before finishing off a 3-0 win over the Philippines, making it back-

to-back Group A victories for the 2022 runner-up.

Jeon Yu-yeong scored in the 12th minute and Park Soo-jeong in the 15th. Mun Eun-Ju put the result beyond doubt in the 56th with a close-range volley.

Mun scored moments after Olivia

McDaniel made an impressive fingertip save to deny Son Hwa-yeon's curling left-foot shot.

The South Koreans scored from the resulting corner when Mun pounced after McDaniel punched away the curling incoming kick but not getting it clear of the box.

South Korea leads Group A with six goals from two wins following its opening 3-0 result against Iran on Monday. The Philippines' bid for a quarterfinal spot is precarious after losses to South Korea and Australia.

On Sunday, the South Koreans are hoping for a repeat of the quarterfinal victory over the Matildas four years ago. "The first match and the second match was according to plan and this match (against Philippines) it was important to have a good performance from our younger players and that worked really well," South Korea coach Shin Sang-woo said. "I am confident about the upcoming match with Australia."

In Group B openers on Tuesday, Myong Yu Jong had a first-half hat trick in North Korea's 3-0 win over Uzbekistan and defending champion China beat Bangladesh 2-0.

In Group C, Japan beat Taiwan 2-0 and Vietnam edged India 2-1 with a goal in stoppage time on Wednesday.

Qatar still plans to host Finalissima

NYON, Switzerland, March 5, (AP): UEFA still plans for Qatar to stage the Argentina vs. Spain game known as Finalissima this month even as the emirate is targeted by Iranian missiles in the widening Middle East war started by Israel and the United States.

"At present, there are no alternative venues being considered," UEFA said on Thursday about the scheduled March 27 game in Doha between the reigning champions of South America and Europe in a likely matchup of Lionel Messi and Lamine Yamal.

"A final decision is anticipated towards the end of next week," said the European soccer body which organizes the game with South American counterpart CONMEBOL.

Argentina and Spain are due to play at Lusail Stadium that staged the epic 2022 World Cup final. Argentina won a penalty shootout against France after Messi scored twice and Kylian Mbappé got a hat track in a thrilling 3-3 draw.

Qatar has close relations with UEFA. Its top soccer official Nasser Al-Khelaifi, the president of Qatar-owned Paris Saint-Germain, is a member of the UEFA executive committee.

"Discussions are ongoing with the local organizers who have made a huge



In this file photo, Argentina's Lionel Messi hoists the winning team replica of the FIFA World Cup trophy during a celebration ceremony for local fans after an international friendly soccer match against Panama at the Monumental Stadium in Buenos Aires, Argentina. (AP)

effort to make the match a success," UEFA said.

If Doha is too much of a security risk to host the game, it could be moved to Spain or elsewhere in Europe where nearly all the players in the two squads are based.

The first Finalissima was at Wembley Stadium in London in June 2022. Argentina and Messi beat Italy 3-0.

Battle for top four intensifies

Runaway leader Bayern hosts Gladbach as it targets treble

BERLIN, March 5, (AP): With another German title almost certain, Bayern Munich is targeting a Bundesliga, German Cup and Champions League treble — along with a few records.

Bayern defeated closest rival Borussia Dortmund 3-2 in the Bundesliga last weekend and can go 14 points clear before the rest of the 25th round with a win at home over Borussia Mönchengladbach on Friday.

The Bavarian powerhouse then faces Italian team Atalanta away in the first leg of their Champions League quarterfinal on Tuesday. The return game in Munich is the following week.

Bayern plays Bayer Leverkusen away in the semifinals of the German Cup in April.

Fans are dreaming of a three-peat of the league, cup and Champions League treble that Bayern won under Jupp Heynckes in 2013.

Under Vincent Kompany this season, the team has played 37 games, winning 32, losing two — to Arsenal and Augsburg — while drawing three.

The front three of Harry Kane, Michael Olise and Luis Diaz have chipped in 53 goals in the Bundesliga so far and could overtake Geri Müller, Uli Hoenes and Franz Roth (65 for Bayern in 1971-72) as the most prolific trio in Bundesliga history.

Bayern is also on target — with 88 goals so far — to break the record for goals in a season, Bayern's 101 in

1971-72. Nine rounds remain after this weekend.

The battle for Champions League qualification is intensifying with four teams — Hoffenheim, Stuttgart, Leipzig and Bayer Leverkusen — fighting for the last two places to qualify for Europe's premier competition.

Hoffenheim and Stuttgart currently have those places with 46 points, third and fourth respectively on goal difference, while Leipzig follows on 44, and Leverkusen is a further point behind in sixth.

All four are playing on Saturday, with Hoffenheim visiting last-placed Heidenheim, Leipzig hosting Augsburg, Leverkusen visiting Freiburg and Stuttgart traveling to Mainz.

Relegation is also heating up after Wolfsburg dropped into an automatic relegation place last weekend. The Volkswagen-backed club, which hasn't won any of its last seven games, hosts Hamburger SV on Saturday.

Fellow strugglers St. Pauli and Werder Bremen play Eintracht Frankfurt (at home) and Union Berlin (away), respectively, on Sunday.

If Leipzig does clinch a Champions League place, it will likely be thanks to Yan Diomande. The Ivory Coast teenager has nine goals this season and scored the winner against Hamburg last weekend.

Iraq facing World Cup playoff difficulties as war closes embassies and airspace

BAGHDAD, March 5, (AP): Iraq's hopes of World Cup qualification are being impacted by the Iran war because players cannot secure visas for the playoff tournament in Mexico and the team's coach is stranded in the United Arab Emirates.

"Because of airspace closures, our head coach, Graham Arnold, is unable to leave the United Arab Emirates," the Iraqi soccer federation said in a statement on Instagram. "In addition, several embassies remain closed at the present time, preventing several professional players, technical and medical staff members from obtaining entry visas to Mexico."

Mexico's foreign affairs ministry said late Wednesday in a statement that the visa complications arose because Mexico does not have an embassy in Iraq, but the Mexican embassy in the United Arab Emirates has been in contact with the Iraqi federation.

The statement added that the visas could be granted in any European country and that they have asked



In this file photo, Iraqi's head coach Graham Arnold sits on the bench at the start of the 2026 World Cup play off first leg soccer match between UAE and Iraq in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. (AP)

Iraq's federation for the names of the people traveling to Mexico to expedite visa issuance procedures. Iraq is scheduled to play either Bolivia or Suriname in Monterrey, Mexico

on March 31 for one of the last two qualification places for the World Cup in the United States, Mexico and Canada.

The federation said it is in "con-

stant communication with FIFA regarding the arrangements for our national team's participation" in the match. It said the Asian Football Confederation is also "fully aware of every development regarding our team's situation."

If Iraq fails to qualify through the playoff, it could take another path if Iran is unable to take part in the tournament because of the U.S. and Israeli attacks on the country.

"We cannot be expected to look forward to the World Cup with hope," Iran's top soccer official Mehdi Taj said.

Should Iran pull out — still hugely speculative — Iraq or the United Arab Emirates would be likely replacements as the ninth and 10th-ranked Asian teams in qualifying.

But FIFA's legal regulations are vague and appear to give FIFA president Gianni Infantino wide powers to shape any decision.

Iraq's most certain hope of qualifying remains winning the playoff later this month.