



Worshippers flock to mosques on 23rd night of holy Ramadan Page 2



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AIR DEFENSES THWART IRANIAN DRONE THREAT OVER KUWAIT

Kuwait airport targeted anew; Mangaf building hit, 2 injured



Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

Iran wants the Gulf States as tools for sectarian terrorism

THE Security Council's resolution against Iran, adopted with the support of the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and 135 other countries, was a much-needed development.

The Gulf region has been facing great harm due to the Iranian regime's destructive actions since the successful 1979 coup that overthrew the Shah. For 47 years, Iranian terrorist operations have been a continuous threat to all Gulf states.

Despite the persistent bitterness and suffering caused by such terrorist acts, the Gulf states have repeatedly attempted reconciliation, hoping for a change of heart and a move toward common ground from the leadership of Tehran.

However, these malevolent actors have consistently shown arrogance and unyielding intransigence, frustrating every effort at rapprochement. The region is burdened by an intricate geography that has amplified these calamities.

It is crucial to understand that the Gulf leaders' commitment to wisdom and good neighborliness has been wrongly perceived as weakness, a perception far removed from the truth.

A genuinely wise leader secures favorable conditions for the future, a practice entirely absent in the

conduct of the reckless.

For five decades, the Iranian regime has demonstrated this recklessness through sustained efforts to destabilize the entire Arab world, extending its reach from Iraq, Yemen, Syria and Lebanon all the way to the Maghreb countries. The sheer scale of the latest aggression stripped away any pretense regarding its true nature. Our countries, subjected to the relentless aggressions daily, must transcend from mere diplomatic posturing to adopt a resolute and decisive stance.

Strategic patience, though demonstrated by our governments, has reached its limit. Restraint is indefensible when the enemy is vigorously killing you. This aggression now imperils our very existence, evidenced by the bombing of civilian infrastructure and innocent people and the grave threat to maritime navigation -- the vital economic artery of the region.

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PM Diwan photo

HH the PM, accompanied by the Minister of Education, conducts an inspection tour of the Ministry of Education headquarters on Wednesday.

Iran drone debris disrupts power lines

By Munif Naif and Marwa Al-Bahrawi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: Firefighters responded early Thursday morning to a minor fire that broke out in a residential building in Mangaf, which is located in the southern part of the country, following a drone attack by Iran, resulting in two injuries.

Official spokesperson of Kuwait Fire Department (KFF) Brigadier General Mohammad Bader Al-Gharib affirmed that firefighters extinguished the fire in record time and the two injured individuals have undergone treatment.

Al-Gharib emphasized the importance of obtaining information from official sources and not being misled by rumors or false news, stressing that KFF is keen on announcing updates through official channels.

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Kuwait's MoI bans Eid events to ensure safety

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: The Ministry of Interior has taken a decision to ensure the security and safety of everyone in view of the current security situation in the country and the entire region, and as part of its commitment to continue security monitoring and proactive preventative measures, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement, the ministry announced that in order to effectively manage emergencies and prevent large gatherings under these circumstances, it decided to prohibit plays, concerts and weddings during the Eid Al-Fitr holiday until further notice. It stressed that this is a necessary precautionary step in line with the security and safety regulations.

It called for full compliance to this directive and cooperation with all relevant authorities. It warned that violations will result in legal accountability, urging everyone to have a strong sense of national responsibility and prioritize the interest of the public to guarantee national security and stability.



Photo by Rezk Tawfik

A stormy Thursday blurs Kuwait City through a raindrop-streaked car windshield.

MPW assesses readiness as rain forecast continues

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

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan inspected the Operations Unit at the ministry to review the work progress and field preparations for dealing with rainfall.

During the inspection tour, Al-Mashaan met with ministry officials and relevant authorities to assess the readiness of field teams and mechanisms for managing water accumulation and ensuring quick response to any reports.

She affirmed the intensification of efforts and strengthening coordination among the concerned sectors to monitor rainfall developments. She added that work continues as per the approved plans to maintain road and infrastructure safety, and to respond quickly to emerging issues.

In related news, the Meteorological Department has forecast continued cloud buildup and scattered occasional thunderstorms throughout the country, with weather expected to be moderate to warm over the weekend, partly cloudy to cloudy during the day, turning cooler and partly to mostly cloudy at night, with chances of fog in some areas.

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Justice Ministry moves to regulate real estate

KUWAIT CITY, March 12, (KUNA): Kuwait's Minister of Justice, Counselor Nasser Al-Sumait, issued a decision on Thursday to form a committee tasked with establishing regulations and standards governing real estate experts.

The committee will work in cooperation with the private sector and relevant entities to serve the public interest and support the development of Kuwait's real estate system.

The Ministry of Justice said in a statement to KUNA that the decision reflects the ministry's commitment to strengthening cooperation with the private sector and involving relevant stakeholders in committees responsible for regulating strategic partnerships.

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Spanish Embassy helps citizens leaving Kuwait

By Fares Ghaleb
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: The Spanish Embassy in Kuwait affirmed that it has been closely monitoring developments in the Gulf region since Feb 28, in coordination with the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union (EU), EU embassies in the country and other members of the diplomatic corps.

The embassy disclosed that it has updated its list of Spanish residents in Kuwait and its contact numbers, and expanded its emergency hotlines.

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Social Affairs Minister inspects PADA services

KUWAIT CITY, March 12, (KUNA): Kuwait's Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila conducted an inspection tour on Thursday at the Public Authority for Disability Affairs (PADA) to review workflow and the level of services provided to visitors.

In a press statement, Al-Huwaila said the authority continues to operate normally, stressing that serving people with disabilities and facilitating their procedures remains a key priority. She emphasized the need to accelerate the completion of transactions and ensure that beneficiaries' interests are not disrupted.

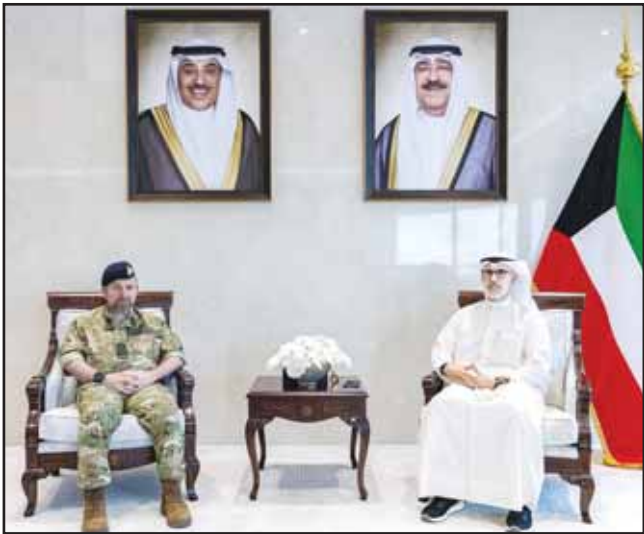
She also highlighted the importance of further developing work mechanisms, improving service quality and simplifying procedures to enhance efficiency and ensure a quick response to the needs of people with disabilities and their families.

During the tour, the minister visited the service hall, where she met with several beneficiaries and listened to their requests and remarks, as part of efforts to assess their needs directly and review the services provided by the authority.



KUNA photo

Kuwait's Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila conducts an inspection tour on Thursday at the Public Authority for Disability Affairs (PADA).



MoFA photo

Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs receives UK's Defense Senior Advisor.

Kuwait, UK discuss Iran threat to region

KUWAIT CITY, March 12, (KUNA): Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Thursday United Kingdom's Defense Senior Advisor to the Middle East and North Africa Vice Admiral Edward Ahlgren.

During the meeting, both sides tackled the latest developments of the Iranian aggression on the Middle East and its dangerous repercussions on regional stability and security, said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a press release.

Ramadan Timings

Imsak	.....	Friday	.....	04:41
Iftar	.....	Friday	.....	17:55
Imsak	.....	Saturday	.....	04:41
Iftar	.....	Saturday	.....	17:55
Imsak	.....	Sunday	.....	04:40



KUNA photo

Dr. Zubidullo Zubidzoda, Tajikistan's Ambassador to Kuwait and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps

Tajik envoy applauds Kuwait's leadership amid regional strife

KUWAIT CITY, March 12, (KUNA): Tajikistan's Ambassador to Kuwait and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps Dr. Zubidullo Zubidzoda praised Kuwait's measures under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to safeguard sovereignty and security.

In a statement to KUNA Thursday, Zubidzoda commended Kuwait's efforts to restore calm and stability across the region and prevent further escalation amid ongoing military tensions and growing security and humanitarian risks.

manitarian risks.

He said the current crisis has once again highlighted Kuwait's balanced approach in addressing developments by prioritizing peace, dialogue and understanding while promoting reason and wisdom to ensure security and stability.

Zubidzoda also expressed condolences over the martyrdom of Kuwaiti armed forces personnel, praising their sacrifices defending the nation and thanking Kuwait's leadership and authorities for ensuring the safety of diplomatic missions.

Prayer Timings			
Fajr	04:41	Asr	15:22
Sunrise ..	06:02	Maghrib ..	17:53
Zohr	11:58	Isha	19:11

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:		Weather		
By Day:		By Night:		
Warm with light to northwesterly wind to light wind, with speed of 08-32 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.		Rather cold to cold with light variable wind to light to moderate southeasterly wind, with speed of 08-32 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.		
Station	Max Exp	Min Rec		
Kuwait Airport	22	05		
Abdaly	22	07		
Jahra	23	08		

German, Netherlands leaders rap Iranian attacks on Kuwait



Sheikh Sabah Khaled



Frank-Walter Steinmeier

KUWAIT CITY, March 12, (KUNA): His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on Wednesday received a telephone call from German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

During the phone call, the German President condemned the ongoing Iranian aggression on Kuwait, considering them a blatant violation of international law, and affirmed his country’s full support towards Kuwait and its rights to preserve its sovereignty and security.

His Highness the Crown Prince conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir of the Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the German President, expressing his appreciation for the kind gesture and his stance towards Kuwait’s safety and security.

Netherlands

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received on Wednesday a telephone call from King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, who strongly condemned the blatant Iranian attacks on Kuwait’s territory.

During the call, King Willem-Alexander affirmed that these assaults are a flagrant violation of sovereignty and international law, stressing his country’s full support for Kuwait in all measures it takes to maintain its security and sovereignty.

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

His Highness the Crown Prince also voiced sincere appreciation to the King for this kind initiative and the supportive positions for Kuwait’s security and stability.

‘Amir’s speech depicts wisdom, instills confidence in Kuwaitis’

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: The Kuwait Journalists Association (KJA) praised the content of the speech delivered by His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, on the occasion of the last ten days of Ramadan, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a statement issued on Tuesday, KJA explained that the people of Kuwait followed His Highness the Amir’s speech with great satisfaction and reassurance. The speech addressed all events Kuwait has experienced since the beginning of the Iranian aggression against the security of Kuwait and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. His Highness the Amir addressed those issues firmly, calling things by their precise names with complete clarity at the national, Gulf, regional, Islamic, and international levels.

ity at the national, Gulf, regional, Islamic, and international levels.

The speech, delivered in his capacity as a father and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, instills confidence that the State of Kuwait has a wise and resolute leadership, confident in its armed forces, all official sectors, and all segments of Kuwaiti society and residents on its safe land.

The association expressed deep pride in the resolute and benevolent political leadership of Kuwait, which is reciprocated with love and respect by the people.

KJA also commended Kuwaiti media institutions for their dedication and responsibility in covering events while safeguarding the security and interests of Kuwait.

Kuwaitis united in crisis, join hands to face attacks

Gov’t fully alert to fast-changing regional developments

KUWAIT CITY, March 12, (KUNA): The afternoon of Saturday, February 28, 2026, was not an ordinary day in Kuwait’s memory. The calm was shattered by the sound of sirens unlike the ones people were accustomed to hear during routine drills.

This time, they signaled a phase of confronting a flagrant Iranian aggression targeting its security, stability and territorial integrity.

Minutes were filled with tension, ranging from sirens to echoes of explosions from air defense systems intercepting hostile missiles and drones.

Kuwait did not awaken in shock. Instead, it rose with the full authority. Every second of anticipation became a vivid scene of control and containment, marking the beginning of a national saga of resilience managed with collective wisdom of the state and the firm resolve of its leaders in the field.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, gave his instructions to raise the level of preparedness, strengthen preventive measures, and deploy forces at vital sites to ensure rapid response to any emergency and maintain public reassurance.

In a speech marking the last 10 days of the holy month of Ramadhan, His Highness the Amir stated that the situation in the country was closely monitored, and that the state’s military, security, and civil institutions are operating with full integration and high readiness.

He emphasized that the armed forces are performing their duties with steadfastness and capability while confronting all threats and challenges efficiently.

Assessment

His Highness the Amir affirmed that every step taken was based on comprehensive strategic assessment, carefully analyzing the situation, and a full commitment to protecting the nation, its citizens and residents.

As part of the comprehensive government response, the Council of Ministers was in an open-ended session to keep pace with rapidly evolving local and regional developments, and to ensure real-time monitoring of all security situation and logistical services.

The cabinet reviewed detailed reports from ministers and relevant authorities on implementation of emergency plans and raising readiness to the highest levels to ensure uninterrupted essential services.

State officials intensified visits to vital and strategic facilities and various ministries, as well as the Civil Defense operations room, to closely monitor operations, security deployment, and protection plans for critical infrastructure.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah conducted multiple field visits, including the Joint Operations Center at the Ministry of Defense, Kuwait National Guard (KNG) headquarters, Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) command, the Air Force operations center, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the decision-making room at Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Building.

These visits included briefings on strategies

to confront the Iranian attack, nationwide deployment of police forces, firefighting teams’ response mechanisms, and updates on regional developments and intensive diplomatic efforts led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Militarily, Kuwait’s air defense systems and combat aircraft are operating at peak efficiency, closely monitoring hostile movements. The General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army announced the interception of hundreds of ballistic missiles and drones attempting to breach Kuwaiti airspace.

The statements reflected full readiness to deal with all threats and ensure the safety of citizens, residents and the country’s land and skies.

KNG is securing vital facilities and supporting the Ministries of Defense and Interior, and KFF. Security measures at critical sites and camps have been intensified, and task forces have been formed to cover at least 27 locations.

Monitoring

Meanwhile, specialized teams at the Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Center for Chemical Defense and Radiation Monitoring continue monitoring the situation in coordination with state authorities. KNG confirmed that radiation readings in air and territorial waters remain within normal levels.

The Ministry of Interior declared a state of full alert, intensifying monitoring of the security situation within an integrated security system based on high readiness and precise surveillance.

The Civil Defense operations room quickly became a central coordination hub where representatives from all civil and military agencies worked side by side to monitor roads and vital areas and respond immediately to reports.

The government also prioritized civil protection systems, including shelters and evacuation centers.

High-level inspections ensured operational readiness, advanced safety systems and logistical equipment to provide safe havens meeting the highest international standards.

While defense systems protect the country’s land and skies, state ministries are maintaining economic stability through regulatory measures, including: Freezing prices of all food commodities and banning their export with the aim of protecting consumer purchasing power and maintain food security.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Social Affairs worked with co-operative societies to expand supply branches and convert some event halls into additional distribution centers.

The Public Authority for Food and Nutrition formed an emergency team and activated legal measures to speed up the release of food shipments and maintain smooth supply flows.

The Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy demonstrated high flexibility in managing incidents caused by falling shrapnel. Damaged power lines were restored quickly, and a small fire at the West Doha power plant was contained without significant power outages.

Firefighting teams also controlled several fires resulting from attacks, including incidents at: The Public Institution for Social Security headquarters, Two fuel tanks at Kuwait International Airport, Two temporary fire stations were established and a media center was created to provide accurate information to the public.

On the digital front, the National Cybersecu-

rity Center thwarted multiple hostile cyber activities targeting government systems, preventing disruption of government services or digital infrastructure.

The Ministry of Health activated emergency plans, raised readiness across medical facilities and intensified environmental monitoring.

The ministry also designated 75 mental health clinics in primary healthcare centers across Kuwait to provide psychological care.

The government shifted quickly to online learning from home to ensure safety while maintaining educational continuity.

The Civil Service Council also reduced on-site government staffing to no more than 30 percent to minimize gatherings while maintaining public services.

The government services application “Sahel” continued operating at full capacity, ensuring secure digital access to services.

It also introduced instant alerts for people with hearing disabilities when warning sirens are activated.

The Supreme Council for Family Affairs launched an emergency telephone psychological consultation service to support families experiencing stress due to ongoing events.

The Public Authority of Civil Aviation implemented a plan for citizens wishing to return to Kuwait by transporting them via airports in Saudi Arabia and then bringing them back by land.

Fifty Kuwaiti charitable organizations issued a joint statement affirming support for the political leadership and readiness to assist state institutions.

The government intensified communication with the public, reassuring citizens about the stability of food, medicine and blood reserves.

Guidance

Regular press briefings by the Government Communication Center provide updates, statistics and guidance related to the crisis.

The Cybercrime Department also worked to combat rumors and misleading social media accounts.

Authorities warned against sharing photos that could reveal sensitive locations and instructed the public on how to handle suspicious objects or missile debris.

On the diplomatic front, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched an intensive campaign exposing the aggression. It sent letters to UN Secretary-General and the President of the UN Security Council, condemning the attacks and affirming Kuwait’s right to self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

Kuwait also coordinated closely with Gulf Cooperation Council partners and international allies, stressing that the security of GCC states is indivisible.

A joint statement with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States strongly condemned the Iranian attacks on sovereign territories in the region.

Integration between Kuwait’s civil and military institutions reflects a high level of national unity and exceptional readiness in confronting this aggression, supported by strong public solidarity behind the political leadership.

Since February 28, Kuwait has been facing Iranian attacks targeting several civilian facilities. The attacks resulted in the martyrdom of four members of the armed forces and border security personnel, as well as a child, in addition to dozens of injured.



Photo by Samer Shaqair

‘Qiyam,’ or late night prayer underway at one of the mosques in Kuwait.

Worshippers flock to mosques on 23rd night of holy Ramadan

By Mohammad Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: Mosques throughout the country witnessed a large turnout of worshippers during the 23rd night of Ramadan, gathering in a spiritually uplifting atmosphere filled with reverence and tranquility.

Citizens and residents are keen on seizing the opportunity to worship during the last 10 nights of Ramadan, hoping to attain Laylat al-Qadr (Night of Decree). All segments of society, including youths, the elderly and families, flocked to the mosques in various governorates.

The worshippers performed the Qiyam prayer, a scene manifesting the commitment of the Kuwaiti community to observe these blessed nights through recitation, remembrance and supplication.

They gathered in the houses of Allah to spend the night in prayer and supplication, asking Almighty Allah to accept their good deeds during these virtuous days of the holy month.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior intensified its field efforts around the mosques and the roads leading to them.

Security patrols were deployed to regulate traffic and facilitate the entry and exit of worshippers, in addition to monitoring the security situation to ensure public safety.

On the other hand, the regulatory authorities issued guidelines to ensure smooth traffic flow during prayer times.

These are the fruits of the concerted efforts of all relevant authorities to secure mosques during the last 10 nights of Ramadan, allowing worshippers to perform their religious duties in an atmosphere of safety and tranquility.

Strict eye on supplier, co-ops to maintain freeze on prices

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: The Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) affirmed its continuous coordination with its Commerce and Industry counterpart to monitor prices in cooperative societies, maintain price stability and guarantee the availability of various goods.

In a press statement, the ministry disclosed that it is continuously monitoring the cooperatives and their suppliers, considering that some individual suppliers might attempt to exploit the current circumstances.

It warned that the necessary measures will be taken against any entity found to be raising prices or exploiting the situation,

whether it is a supplier or a cooperative society.

It stressed the importance of the role that cooperative societies play during this period, indicating that any cooperative proven to have inflated prices under the pretext of the current situation will be dealt with accordingly.

It added that it is working with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, which issued a decision to stabilize prices and monitor the market.

It emphasized that the current phase requires everyone’s cooperation and responsible action to ensure market stability and the availability of goods without any exploitation, given the impact of the situation on consumers.

Other Voices

America’s upcoming moral catastrophe

By Ahmad alsarraf

ON Friday, President Trump ordered the government to cease using artificial intelligence technology developed by Anthropic AI Company. This directive is expected to significantly complicate government intelligence analysis and defense operations.

The Secretary of Defense labeled the company a “national security supply chain threat,” a matter of serious concern.

This is perhaps the first time a company has adhered to its ethical principles, only to face government refusal and threats of sanctions for not complying with demands that are unconstitutional, unethical, and inhumane.

In a statement, the company, which has suffered considerable losses due to its ethical stance, explained that it maintained its refusal to allow government agencies to use its AI software in order to uphold legal and ethical restrictions in its contracts, particularly prohibiting unrestricted use of its models. The Pentagon, however, rejected all of the company’s conditions.

The company’s CEO, Dario Amodei, stated that Anthropic supports all legitimate uses of its systems, with two exceptions - the use of fully autonomous weapons without human oversight, and mass surveillance of citizens.

He added that accepting the Pentagon’s demands would force the company to abandon the principles of responsible AI on which it

was founded. Therefore, the company chose to forfeit contracts rather than compromise this policy.

The company’s losses are estimated at hundreds of millions of US dollars directly, with billions more in potential future contracts.

Trump’s associates described the company as a group of left-wing extremists and said it had made a mistake.

Democratic lawmakers quickly came to the company’s defense. Dean Paul, a former Trump advisor on AI, described the situation as a dark day in the history of American business.

Clearly, the issue is not a contractual dispute between the Pentagon and the company, but, as Trump’s statements revealed, a moral and political one, because the Pentagon expects all its contractors to follow a single standard - the military has the right to use the products it purchases as it sees fit.

But that is not the case. The company’s employees welcomed their CEO’s firm stance. In a rare show of solidarity among Silicon Valley AI companies, employees of Anthropic’s competitors, including OpenAI and Google, signed letters supporting the company’s position and criticizing the Pentagon’s negotiating tactics. Company leaders called for setting aside differences and uniting to reject the Defense Department’s current demands.

Amodei wrote, “In limited cases, we believe AI could undermine democratic values rather than protect them. Some applications also go beyond what current technology can do safely and reliably.”

The Pentagon, meanwhile, announced

it would continue using a less efficient system produced by a company owned by Elon Musk. Switching to new AI software would take time and inevitably disrupt operations.

Anthropic is the only company working on classified military systems, so a ban could complicate CIA analysis and defense operations.

The current acceleration toward near-total reliance on AI carries serious implications. While the company’s ethical stance is commendable, other companies are likely to follow suit.

In the same context, OpenAI announced an additional \$110 billion in investment in the field, raising the company’s valuation to \$730 billion.

Meanwhile, many countries will continue to scrutinize every cent allocated to their education budgets in an effort to reduce spending. They will persist in narrowing the concept of morality to the length of a skirt or the covering of a woman’s hair.

In a notable development, Kaitlyn Kalinowski, head of robotics at OpenAI, announced her resignation after her company signed an agreement with the Pentagon to replace Anthropic, which had terminated its contract.

Kalinowski explained her resignation by citing her refusal to grant the Pentagon the right to monitor citizens or to allow its robotic systems the ability to operate lethal functions without human oversight. These are the same ethical reasons that led Anthropic to refuse cooperation with the Pentagon.

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A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Benevolent Kuwait wins praise of all class, creed

“MOHAMMAD Al-Faqir heard a knock at his door on a dark night. He opened the door to find a man who was wearing a black cloak. This man offered him a purse containing money, and then quickly turned and ran away,” columnist **Ahmad Al-Dawas** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“This happened several times. Wanting to know who it was, Mohammad grabbed the purse and the man’s hand. The stranger tried to escape but could not.

“M o h a m - mad then recognized him. It was the Amir of the country at that time, Sheikh Salem bin Mubarak bin Sabah. Mohammad was deeply moved that such a respected Amir would show such kindness and concern for him, and he was certain that the Amir also checked on others like him.

“The people of Kuwait have been bound by a social contract with the ruling family for more than four hundred years, and it continues to this day. We have always possessed, and still possess, a strong sense of harmony and unity as one people, Sunni and Shia, urban and Bedouin.

“Our history is marked by many events and natural disasters, from heavy rains and storms to diseases and famines. In times of hardship and crisis, Kuwaitis suffered greatly, but they overcame these challenges through compassion and mutual support. They even shared the simplest necessities, such as a matchstick, with a neighbor asking another for one to light a fire.

“Many people consider Kuwait as a safe and stable country, a refuge for strangers seeking refuge. This encouraged them to come and earn a living. For example, some fled Al-Ahsa and sought refuge there to escape the oppression of the Ottomans. Others came from Oman and Persia. One Omani said, “If my blood could speak, it would say: I am Kuwaiti-Omani.” One Iranian said, “Kuwait has enriched everyone. I worked there and benefited greatly. We built houses in Iran, educated our children, and married them off with resources earned in Kuwait.”

“Another man, who dreamed of establishing a printing press in Gaza, came to Kuwait to secure the necessary funds. He was astonished and impressed by the intellectual and political openness there, despite the diversity of religious sects and different social circumstances. They lived in peace and harmony.

“Similarly, the Armenian Jacob Bardakjian came to Kuwait because of the bloody situation in his country. He flew to Kuwait and landed at Al-Nuzha Airport, which was just a dirt lot with a small, modest building. He said, “I came to build my future and fulfill my hopes. We had heard that Kuwait was stable and safe, and that anyone who worked diligently there could secure their future and the future of their children.”

“There was also the German Georg Dzerzen, an employee of Volkswagen, who was seconded to Kuwait by his company about 70 years ago. He traveled by plane for more than two days and lived like the Kuwaitis in a house. He lived simply and slept on the roof of his house during the summer. Some Kuwaitis took him to their diwanis, which made him feel at ease. He admired many qualities in the Kuwaitis, including their contentment. He said, “I used to hear the Kuwaiti praise God profusely and be satisfied with what he had, never asking for more.” Half a century later, this German wished to live out his days in Kuwait and be buried there.

“There is a manuscript in the Berlin Library in Germany indicating that Kuwait existed more than 300 years ago. In 1708, the Arab traveler Hajji Murtada ibn Alwan passed through it after leaving Damascus to perform the Hajj pilgrimage. On his return journey, he passed through Al-Ahsa and recorded his observations, writing, “We entered a country called Kuwait.” He noted that grains and all food items were cheaper there than in Al-Ahsa. He also mentioned that it was sometimes called Al-Qurain, and his notebook was metaphorically named after it (Ibn Alwan’s Manuscript).

“Throughout the years, Kuwait has never wronged any nation, nor has it interfered in the affairs of others. On the contrary, it can be likened to a good neighbor who treats others well through a policy of good neighborliness, supports the needy through the Kuwait Fund for Development, and promotes peace through a policy of peaceful coexistence.

“Kuwait does not have rivers or extensive agricultural lands, as people usually settle near rivers. However, it has always enjoyed, and continues to enjoy, security, stability, and mutual trust and affection between the ruler and the ruled. When Kuwait gained its independence, it was generous to Arabs and others alike.

“But unfortunately, half of the Arab world did not stand by Kuwait during the Iraqi occupation, and some even betrayed it with treachery. Yet, just yesterday, Kuwait gave them a billion

dollars to rebuild Gaza. What injustice!”

Also:

“It seems that all of Iran’s ambassadors accredited to the GCC countries come from the elite. For this reason, no Gulf state has taken the necessary steps to sever relations with this aggressor state, despite its continued unjustified attacks on us as peaceful nations and peoples since the start of its latest war,” Kuwaiti writer **Abdullah Khaled Al-Hamoud** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“So why don’t the GCC countries take the initiative to withdraw their diplomatic missions accredited to Iran, which does not respect its pledges or promises to cease its aggression, even after the apology offered by its president and his pledge to stop targeting GCC countries?”

“The questions we ask are - Why do we cling to our relationship with Iran to such an extent despite its blatant aggression against us? Do we import from Iran a commodity that sustains our lives? Has Iran misunderstood our position when we overlooked its continuous interference in the stability of most GCC countries?”

“For example, the Iranian Embassy in Kuwait oversaw the establishment of the “Abdali cell” terrorist group instead of fulfilling its primary role. Iran paid money to some deviant individuals willing to sell out their homeland for money.

“Iran carried out bombings more than once in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which houses the holiest sites in Islam.

“Iran exploited Bahraini citizens loyal to it to incite riots, chaos, and violence, despite the Bahraini people’s adherence to their national unity.

“Iran inflicted a bleeding wound on the UAE since the Shah’s occupation of the three Emirati islands. Even the names of these islands are in Arabic, indicating that they are Emirati islands occupied by Iran.

“Finally, I want to say that we, as peace-loving peoples, may feel nostalgia for the era of the Iranian Shah compared to the current regime, because a wise enemy is better than a foolish friend.”



“All the flaws that had been introduced into Nationality Law No. 15/1959 have been removed, and the tampering has ended after amendments were adopted to preserve the sovereignty of the National Identity Law,” Kuwaiti writer **Tariq Idris** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“All articles and modifications that violated the law, whether through forgery, addition, or manipulation of official documents and records, were deleted for imposing a firm reality on the legislature.

“Ultimately, the National Identity Law has constitutionally and legally reasserted itself as the original law, its sovereignty restored after an attempted forced hijacking sought to impose an unconstitutional order on the political, social, and sovereign framework of Nationality Law No. 15/1959.

“The era of decisiveness halted such actions, revised the Nationality Law, and restored it to its original, unblemished form. The amendments even criminalized those extraneous actions that compromised the law by canceling, deleting, or modifying them to safeguard the law’s significance and the Kuwaiti national identity.

“In 2026, coinciding with the Independence and Liberation Day celebrations, the sovereignty law was restored, and national identity was freed from the constraints of past flaws. The Kuwaiti sovereignty law, with its constitutional foundation governing democratic life, returned to political and social life after 63 years since the election of the National Assembly in 1963. We await the remaining procedures for approving the decrees regulating the upcoming parliamentary elections, which will restore the new Kuwaiti National Assembly to its pristine state, free from any blemishes.

“We are hoping for the decisive moment that will usher in a new era before the end of 2026, God willing, restoring confidence in democratic life with its pure and unblemished principles and genuine patriotism, as promised by our wise political leadership in its historic address of resolve.

“We are committed to our pledge and promise, renewing our hope for the return of confidence and longing for stability, security, and safety for this beloved nation. We remember with the utmost appreciation and reverence the souls of our righteous martyrs, who watered the land of Kuwait with their pure blood, preserving its national sovereignty and its eternal flag. May God have mercy on them all.

“May God protect our country, our wise leadership, and our dear people from all harm and evil. Praise be to God!”

— Compiled by Simi K. Kutty



Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah offers condolences to families of two martyrs.



Farwaniya Governorate photos

Governor offers condolences to martyrs families

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah offered his condolences to the families of Lieutenant Colonel Abdullah Emad Al-Sharrah and Major Fahad Abdulaziz Al-Mujammad (May God have mercy on them), who were martyred while performing their national duty.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, Governor Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser expressed his deepest sympathies

to the families, praying that God Almighty show mercy on the martyrs, admit them to His spacious Paradise, and grant their families patience and solace.

He affirmed that the sacrifices of the nation’s sons will always be appreciated and cherished, and will serve as a testament to the dedication and devotion of Kuwait’s men in protecting the homeland and preserving its security and stability.

Check on readiness

Customs DG tours Northern Ports and Failaka Island ops

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: Director General of the General Administration of Customs (GAC), Yousef Al-Nuwaif, inspected the Northern Ports and Failaka Island Customs Department (Container Inspection Center) on Wednesday evening to assess operational readiness and ensure quick processing of transactions and smooth flow of goods , reports Al-Seyassah daily.

During his tour, Al-Nuwaif received a briefing on the workflow and the procedures followed in customs inspection and clearance operations.

The tour highlights the commitment of GAC to enhancing field operations and improving performance efficiency at customs sites, as well as streamlining customs procedures, and maintaining the department’s oversight and security role.

Al-Nuwaif commended the efforts of the staff at the Northern Ports and Failaka Island Customs Department, and praised their dedication and commitment to their duties.

He was accompanied on the tour by the Deputy Director General for Ports, Research, and Customs Investigation, Saleh Al-Omar.



Al-Nuwaif

Frozen meat sold as fresh, rotten eggs seized in raids

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: The Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN), represented by the Capital Inspection Department, conducted inspection tours that resulted in 14 violation reports against several food establishments, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

PAFN explained in a statement that the violations included handling spoiled and adulterated food, thawing frozen meat to sell it as fresh, as well as violations related to general hygiene, expired health licenses, employing workers without health certificates, and transporting food in unlicensed vehicles. About 1,350 eggs unfit for human consumption, which were being used in the preparation of cakes and sweets, were also seized.

Wheelchairs and hearing aids for disabled – MoSA

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah confirmed the distribution of 181 wheelchairs and 335 hearing aids to beneficiaries with disabilities.

In a statement to the newspaper, Al-Huwailah revealed that the distribution process will continue as additional wheelchairs and hearing aids are supplied by approved vendors.

She reaffirmed her commitment to meet the needs of persons with disabilities, guarantee their access to all essential resources, remove obstacles they may face, and facilitate the services provided by the Public Authority for Disability Affairs (PADA).

She said the total number of registered disability files reached 68,935 by the end of 2025 – 11,830 cases of physical disabilities, 5,441 visual impairments, 19,232 intellectual disabilities, 14,776 mobility impairments, 7,901 learning disabilities, 1,672 developmental disabilities, 5,524 hearing impairments and 2,559 psychological disabilities.

She added that the number of students with disabilities enrolled in educational institutions has reached 2,151. She disclosed that PADA issued educational decisions to facilitate their enrollment in schools affiliated with or operating under its umbrella, ensuring that they receive appropriate education tailored to their educational and developmental needs.

Regarding the updating of data for women caring for persons with disabilities and the required review procedures, she stated that the Authority has started sending text messages to women who care for individuals with severe disabilities and are not employed, requesting them to update their information.

She indicated that those concerned must visit the main headquarters of the Authority in Hawally within 30 days of receiving the message, bring their civil identification card and a certificate of entry and exit issued by Kuwait Ports Authority (KPA).

She stressed that failure to comply with the review process or submission of inaccurate information will result in legal accountability and the recovery of disbursed funds in accordance with the law.

She affirmed the commitment of the Authority to raise legal awareness and ease the beneficiaries’ access to services.

She also disclosed the establishment of a legal consultation counter in Hall Two at the headquarters of PADA in Hawally, aimed at responding to legal inquiries, as well as providing guidance, support and assistance to beneficiaries on matters related to legal aspects.

Jail, fine upheld for GTD swindler

Worker loses job in forgery

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: The Court of Cassation upheld the seven-year imprisonment sentence with hard labor imposed on a General Traffic Department (GTD) employee, in addition to a fine of KD7,918 and dismissal from his post, as he was convicted of embezzling public funds and forging official documents.

cial documents.

The investigation revealed that the defendant abused his position to embezzle KD3,959 in fees from 511 traffic transactions within one year.

He also forged official documents by using the computer credentials of colleagues who were traveling abroad, entering transactions under their names and illegally affixing the department head’s stamp to some of the documents.

The Audit Division at GTD discovered the financial and administrative irregularities, and referred the case to the appropriate authorities.

Violation of Kuwait’s territory will not be tolerated : Society

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: The Social Reform Society (SRS) strongly condemned the blatant aggression targeting the territory of the State of Kuwait, affirming its categorical rejection of any violation of the country’s sovereignty or threat to its security and stability, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The society’s Secretary-General, Hamad Al-Ali, explained that the Social Reform Society is fully committed to standing united behind the political leadership and dedicating all its human and material resources to supporting national efforts under the current circumstances, thereby strengthening the cohesion of the home front and safeguarding the security of society . The society’s actions stem from a religious and national duty to actively contribute to enhancing social stability and to work in partnership and coordination with various state institutions . The current phase requires the highest levels

of responsibility and social discipline.

The society has extensive experience in managing community and charitable initiatives, enabling it to contribute effectively to any support or assistance efforts required by current developments, whether in relief, awareness, or organizational roles.

Al-Ali emphasized that the exceptional circumstances call for solidarity and unity, noting that civil society organizations play a major role in consolidating the values of compassion and cooperation, and in strengthening the spirit of shared responsibility in facing challenges.

He concluded by stressing that the society will continue to carry out its mission with steadfastness and responsibility, placing the nation’s interest above all else, and reaffirming its commitment to working diligently to serve Kuwait and preserve its security and stability.

Minister Al-Omar reviews KUNA coverage, operational readiness

Calls for verified sources amid regional tensions

KUWAIT CITY, March 12, (KUNA): Acting Minister of Information and Culture Omar Al-Omar conducted an extensive inspection of the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) operations on

Wednesday to oversee the agency's monitoring and reportage of accelerating regional developments. Al-Omar, also serves as minister of state for communications and information technology, was briefed by KUNA's leadership, led by Act-

ing Director General Mohammad Al-Mannai, on the sophisticated mechanisms employed to track, verify, and disseminate news to local and international audiences. In a statement to KUNA, the Minister underscored the Agency's pivotal role as the official state news apparatus. He stressed the imperative for editorial



Acting Minister of Information and Culture Omar Al-Omar is briefed on the progress of work at the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA).



Acting Minister of Information and Culture Omar Al-Omar during a visit to the broadcasting station. Ministry of Information photos

staff to uphold the highest benchmarks of accuracy and professional integrity, particularly given the current regional situation.

Furthermore, Al-Omar issued a directive to all media practitioners to exercise rigorous due diligence by sourcing information exclusively from official and verified channels, thereby ensuring an objective and factual portrayal of events.

Minister Al-Omar praised the efforts of the agency's staff and their commitment to performing their media mission professionally and responsibly, commending their dedication to following events and covering various issues in line with the aspirations of the political leadership and the public.

During his inspection visit, Minister Al-Omar was received by the Deputy Director General for the Editorial Sector, Essam Al-Ghanem, the Acting Editor-in-Chief, Mohammad Al-Bahr, and a number of directors of various departments within the agency.

Minister Al-Omar also visited one of the broadcasting stations.

He reviewed the technical and technological readiness of the stations, noting that the integration of qualified national cadres and advanced infrastructure ensures operational continuity and high-efficiency broadcasting under all circumstances.

Minister Al-Omar affirmed that the current climate necessitates heightened cooperation and institutional synergy to guarantee the timely delivery of factual information, reinforcing the image of Kuwaiti media as a professional and reliable institution.

Right to protect sovereignty

South Africa voices support for Kuwait over Iranian aggression

KUWAIT CITY, March 12, (KUNA): Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received a phone call Wednesday from Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa Ronald Lamola. During the call, Lamola con-

demned the Iranian aggression targeting the State of Kuwait and other countries in the region, according to a statement by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He also affirmed the right of the targeted countries to take all necessary measures to protect their sovereignty and territories.

Ministry solidifies safety nets

MoSA ensures full support for welfare home residents

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: Director of the Juvenile and Elderly Care Department in the Ministry of Social Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Enezi affirmed that all necessary food, medicine, and medical equipment are being provided for residents of welfare homes, including the elderly, orphans, and juvenile youth, reports Al-Anba daily.



In a statement to Kuwait TV, Dr. Al-Huwaila he stressed that this is part of a comprehensive plan implemented under the directives of the Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah.

Al-Enezi highlighted that round-the-clock inspection tours are being conducted to monitor the residents' conditions, ensure their well-being, identify their most pressing needs, and work to meet them, especially given the current

circumstances. He affirmed that the department has been preparing for years to handle various crises and exceptional situations, such as fires, floods, and critical health emergencies.

Al-Enezi explained that the department conducted mock evacuation drills according to approved protocols and has qualified, experienced staff fully trained to handle such cases, maintaining the highest levels of readiness and preparedness.

The Ministry, through the Social Welfare Homes Sector, has formed emergency teams that coordinate with the concerned authorities, including the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Electricity and Wealth, as well as the General Authority for Civil Defense, to monitor observations, address issues immediately, and ensure the maintenance and protection of ministry buildings and facilities. This ensures the continuous provision of services and care to residents of social welfare homes around the clock.

5 safety warnings issued in Hawally

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: The Public Relations Department of Kuwait Municipality stated that the safety inspection teams of Kuwait Municipality issued five warnings

for non-compliance with safety and security requirements during construction and renovation work on buildings in Hawally Governorate, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

MoJ, banks push digital credit

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: During a coordination meeting on Tuesday with officials from the Ministry of Justice, the Kuwait Banking Association, and representatives of legal departments in banks, the acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice, Awatif Al-Sanad, discussed the mechanism for establishing an electronic linkage between



Al-Sanad

banks and the ministry in mortgage and real estate credit transactions, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press release, the Ministry of Justice explained that the meeting is part of efforts to strengthen institutional integration, facilitate and expedite transactions, and improve the efficiency of procedures related to financing and mortgages. The initiative aims to enhance the investment environment and stimulate economic activity in line with the state's drive toward digital transformation and the development of government services.



Kuwait University photo The administration of Kuwait University held a coordination meeting to follow up on the organizational procedures and the progress of the educational process in light of the current circumstances.

Leadership plans for academic continuity

KU President convenes meeting to review university operations

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

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: Kuwait University President Dr. Dina Al-Maillem chaired an extensive meeting with officials at Sabah Al-Salem University City to discuss several issues related to its operations in view of the current circumstances in the country.

This move aims to make sure the continuation of the academic process in the best interest of the students.

The university administration expressed its deep gratitude to His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah for visiting Kuwait University. It also commended the support and close monitoring of Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Nader Al-Jalal.

During the meeting, the university officials assessed the readiness of shelters in the university. They emphasized the importance of monitoring the students' situation in university housing, ensuring their safety and providing them with all necessary amenities. A number of guidelines and procedures

implemented by the university were also discussed, as well as the progress of the educational process in various colleges to ascertain the continuity of studies and the achievement of the educational and research goals.

The officials stressed the need to monitor the implementation of study plans and strengthen coordination between the university administration, colleges and relevant sectors to maintain the quality of academic performance during this period.

They talked about the current work mechanism at the university in accordance with the directive of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) that physical attendance should not exceed 30 percent of the total workforce and others should work remotely as needed.

They deliberated on the mechanism for protecting the data of various departments and establishing a database of the students, faculty and administrative staff stranded abroad.

They expressed appreciation for the efforts of the university staff—academic, support and administrative—during this period, and for the students' commitment to continue their studies.

News in Brief

PADA moves to online appointments: The Public Authority for Disability Affairs (PADA) announced that, due to current circumstances in the country, visitors must book appointments online in advance to ensure they are received and their transactions are processed efficiently, reports Al-Anba daily. In an official statement, PADA said appointments for the visitor reception areas at the main branch in Hawally can be booked through the Sahel application or the Meta platform.



Weekdays (Saturday - Wednesday)	Price
One night stay in a Queen Bed Cabana for 2 persons with inclusive of Breakfast	BHD 46.000
One night stay in a Two Bedroom Chalet for 4 persons inclusive of Breakfast	BHD 102.148 / Net
Weekends (Thursday & Friday)	Price
One night stay in a Queen Bed Cabana for 2 persons with inclusive of Breakfast	BHD 53.361 / Net
One night stay in a Two Bedroom Chalet for 4 persons inclusive of Breakfast	BHD 119.173 / Net

Terms & conditions apply

Crown Prince, PM extend condolences

Kuwait's Amir offers sympathy to Oman over Fahad Al-Said's death

KUWAIT CITY, March 12, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Thursday sent a cable to Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, expressing condolences over the demise of Sayyid Fahad bin Mahmoud Al-Said.

In his cable, His Highness the Amir recalled the virtues of the deceased and his contributions in serving his country and prayed Almighty Allah to bestow mercy and peace upon him and wished solace and patience for his family.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on Thursday sent a cable to Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, expressing condolences over the demise of Sayyid Fahad bin Mahmoud Al-Said.

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Slaughterhouses operating normally

Al-Faleej verifies food safety

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: Minister of State for Development and Sustainability, Dr. Reem Al-Faleej, visited a livestock slaughterhouse accompanied by a team from the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN), reports Al-Anba daily.

Dr. Al-Faleej affirmed that livestock slaughterhouses are operating as usual and continue to provide services to citizens and residents, especially during these exceptional circumstances.

The visit was part of an inspection tour to monitor conditions on the ground, ensure the smooth operation of services, and verify the proper implementation of procedures during these exceptional circumstances.



Dr. Al-Faleej

Minister Al-Faleej reassured the public that slaughterhouses are under continuous monitoring by PAFN, with systems operating around the clock to ensure food safety and quality.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Al-Salem, Director of the Slaughterhouses Department at PAFN's Control and Inspection Sector, confirmed that veterinary and technical inspection teams are present at their posts for performing their duties normally and regularly.

He affirmed that pre-slaughter and post-slaughter inspections are conducted according to established procedures to ensure the highest level of food safety.

In addition, Dr. Saud Al-Jalal, Acting Deputy Director General for Inspection and Control at PAFN, stated that inspection and control teams are implementing all health and operational requirements, including monitoring site cleanliness, supervising staff, regulating customer flow, and ensuring the quality of carcasses and the safety of delivery procedures.

MoE reviews education continuity plans amid current developments

Al-Tabtabaie praises PM support in crisis readiness

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: Minister of Education Eng. Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaie chaired an expanded meeting with senior ministry officials to review the latest developments in the educational process under the current circumstances.

According to a press release issued by the Ministry of Education, the meeting discussed the organizational procedures for the upcoming period for ensuring the continuity of educational work according to the highest standards of safety and stability.

Attendees included the acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education and Assistant Undersecretary for Administrative and Technical Affairs Engineer Mohammed Al-Khaldi, Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Affairs Engineer Hamad Al-Hamad, Director General of Educational Zones Mohammed Al-Wazzan, Director General of Guidance, Research, and Curricula Mohammed Al-Otaibi, Director General of Educational Support Services Maryam Al-Anzi, and Director of Public Relations and Educational Media Department Arwa Al-Ayyar.

The meeting reviewed several organizational and procedural files related to the work mechanism during the current period.

It discussed mechanisms for organizing educational and administrative work in light of current developments. The importance of continuous coordination between the ministry's sectors and the educational field to ensure smooth performance and maintain educational stability was emphasized.

During the meeting, Minister Al-Tabtabaie stressed that the safety of students and teaching and administrative staff is a top priority for the Ministry of Education.

He noted that the ministry is closely monitoring developments in coordination with relevant state authorities and making decisions in accordance with the directives of the political leadership and the resolutions of state institutions.

The minister stressed that next week coincides with the holiday for teaching and administrative staff in schools, as well as subject matter supervisors, in addition to the students' holiday for the last week of Ramadan.

He affirmed that the ministry will continue to monitor the situation and assess developments during this period



Ministry of Education photo

Minister Al-Tabtabaie chairs a high-level meeting with senior Ministry of Education officials to review emergency preparedness and ensure continuity of the educational process.

Minister Al-Tabtabaie chairs a high-level meeting with senior Ministry of Education officials to review emergency preparedness and ensure continuity of the educational process.

in order to make appropriate decisions based on prevailing circumstances and available data.

Al-Tabtabaie emphasized that the Ministry of Education is managing the current phase with a high level of awareness and responsibility by taking the necessary organizational measures to balance the safety of all members of the educational system with the efficient and regular continuation of the educational process.

He stressed the importance of ongoing coordination between educational leaders and relevant departments to monitor the implementation of approved plans and ensure that schools and various sectors are prepared for

any developments.

At the end of the meeting, Al-Tabtabaie expressed his appreciation for the significant support provided by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to the Ministry of Education, highlighting that this support was seen during His Highness's inspection visit to the ministry building and its emergency shelter, where he was briefed on all procedures and preparations undertaken to ensure the continuity of the educational process and the safety of students, faculty, and administrative staff under all circumstances.

Kuwait welcomes UN resolution condemning Iranian attacks

KUWAIT CITY, March 12, (KUNA): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday expressed the State of Kuwait's welcoming of UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2817, which condemns Iranian assaults on Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

In an official statement, the Ministry affirmed that the resolution reinforces the principles of state sovereignty and territorial integrity while categorically rejecting the targeting of civilians and vital infrastructure.

The Ministry emphasized that the UNSC's adoption of this resolution constitutes a pivotal step toward

bolstering regional stability. It further called for rigorous adherence to the resolution's provisions to de-escalate tensions and consolidate international peace and security.

Kuwait expressed its profound appreciation for the diplomatic efforts exerted within the Security Council, specifically lauding the sisterly Kingdom of Bahrain for its leadership in submitting the draft on behalf of the GCC and Jordan.

This move, the Ministry noted, reflects the Council's commitment to its mandate under the United Nations Charter and international law.

The statement concluded by extending Kuwait's gratitude to the UN member states that co-spon-

sored Resolution 2817, viewing their support as a significant gesture of international solidarity with the GCC and Jordan.

Kuwait Permanent Mission to the UN in Geneva condemned the attacks carried out by Iran on it, along with some Arab and Muslim countries, mainly the Gulf states.

Warning of the attacks' ramifications on societies' safety and basic rights, Third Secretary Abdurrahman Al-Hashim told a UN human rights' discussion panel that targeting non-party countries in the current conflict is a breach of international charters and laws, through the repeated targeting of civilians and civil facilities.

International law stipulates that the self-defense right is used only in response to an armed attack against a state, thus targeting countries which did not take part in such acts is not in line with this law.

Al-Hashim reiterated that these attacks are a dangerous violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries and they run counter to international law, including the UN Charter and the principles of good neighborliness. He also renewed Kuwait's deep-seated commitment to preserving human rights and dignity, as well as the principles of equality and rule of law.

Kuwait Permanent Representa-

tive to the United Nations Tareq Al-Banai welcomed the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution vehemently deploring Iranian assaults on Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states and Jordan.

The UNSC Resolution 2817, passed on Wednesday night, represents a clear message from the international community stating unequivocal rejection of any breach of sovereign state or targeting of civilian facilities in the region, Ambassador Al-Banai told reporters following the UNSC session.

It states firm support to the sovereignty and territorial safety of the GCC member states and the Kingdom of Jordan in the face of the Ira-

nian missile and drone attacks on civilian infrastructure.

The Resolution demands immediate cessation of hostilities and full respect for the rules of the international law.

It reaffirms the right of all countries to defense themselves individually or collectively against external threats under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

Since February 28, the State of Kuwait has come under 237 missile attacks and 467 drone attacks, Al-Banai added. The draft resolution, tabled to the UNSC by Bahrain on behalf of the GCC states, was passed by 13 votes, with two abstentions - Russia and China.

Continued from Page 1

Iran wants

The brutality and desire of the regime to impose its divisive vision throughout the Arab region make it inherently untrustworthy. Its aggression is well-documented, from the terrorist attacks our nations have suffered to the recent war.

Trust is impossible with a state that views others as perpetual enemies due to sectarian differences, regardless of its diplomatic facade. Their true intentions were revealed during the recent conflict. Their leaders offered hollow apologies to the Gulf states, while their Revolutionary Guard escalated attacks and issued threats against our peaceful nations.

Perhaps, this aggressive regime underestimates our region, mistaking it for a mere desert and oil. They fail to understand that while our people are peaceful, we are fiercely committed to defending our security, borders and sovereignty.

Today, we are facing a crucial challenge -- ending this aggression. The path forward begins with our unity and strength, because the post-war world demands a new and resolute approach.

The current Iranian regime, often characterized as a rogue state, demonstrates a failure to draw constructive lessons from its rich, ancient history.

The ruling authorities appear rooted in an outdated, even prehistoric, mindset. This reality necessitates a cautious and deliberate approach to any future engagement with this hostile neighbor.

Trust is not warranted. It is imperative that those who have endured repeated suffering remain highly vigilant. Our future strategy must be built upon this foundation, in solidarity with our Gulf partners. We have the capacity to emerge from this challenge, stronger than ever.

For the past 47 years since the Iranian revolution, this terrorist regime has consistently sought to manipulate the Gulf states into serving its narrow sectarian agenda.

Kuwait airport

In a related development, Defense Ministry spokesman Colonel Saud Al-Atwan revealed that the Kuwait Armed Forces intercepted hostile aerial targets into the airspace of the country over the

past 24 hours.

During the sixth media briefing broadcasted on Kuwait TV, Al-Atwan confirmed that the air defense systems detected eight hostile drones, seven of which were destroyed, while one crashed outside the threat zone.

He added that a National Guard task force shot down eight drones in the southern part of the country as a result of the coordinated efforts of the military agencies.

He disclosed that the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team in the Land Forces Engineering Corps has responded to 172 reports since the start of the aggression.

He asserted that the Kuwait Armed Forces remains at a high level of vigilance and preparedness, working continuously in close coordination with various military sectors. He emphasized that maintaining national security and stability is the most important goal of everyone.

The official spokesperson for the Ministry of Health, Dr. Abdullah Al-Sanad, disclosed that Adan Hospital received two cases of minor injuries early Thursday morning, coinciding with the latest regional developments.

Dr. Al-Sanad explained that the emergency medical teams immediately attended to both individuals upon their arrival at the hospital. Necessary medical assessments were conducted, and appropriate care was provided according to established procedures for such cases.

Medical examinations revealed that both injuries were minor. One patient was discharged after his condition was confirmed stable, while the other remains under medical observation for further evaluation and to ensure continued well-being.

Dr. Al-Sanad affirmed that healthcare facilities are fully prepared to monitor any developments, and he wished everyone safety and well-being.

In latest development, Kuwait's General Authority for Civil Aviation said Kuwait International Airport was targeted Thursday morning by several drones, causing material damage without any human injuries.

The Authority's spokesperson Abdullah Al-Rajhi told KUNA the incident was handled according to the emergency plan in place since the start of the crisis, in full coordination with relevant authorities.

Al-Rajhi affirmed the authority's commitment to taking all necessary measures to safeguard Civil aviation security and safety in Kuwait.

Also on Thursday, Kuwait's Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy said that six overhead power transmission lines went out of service after debris fell during the interception of several drones.

Official spokesperson Fatima Abbas Jawhar Hayat said the incident caused a temporary disturbance in the electricity network and limited, partial outages in several areas across the country.

Emergency teams immediately began work, in coordination with security authorities, to assess damage and carry out repairs, restoring electricity to affected areas quickly under approved safety and technical procedures.

Hayat affirmed that electricity and water systems remain under control, with power generation, water desalination and transmission operating efficiently under continuous monitoring.

The ministry urged citizens and residents to rely only on official sources for information, affirming it will provide updates as developments arise.

Meanwhile, Director of the Public Relations and Security Media General Department at the Ministry of Interior Brigadier General Nasser Bousalib stressed the need for home surveillance camera users to adhere to cybersecurity measures, such as changing the password regularly, using strong PINs and numbers, connecting cameras to secure internet networks, and disabling remote access when not needed.

Bousalib stated that in the past 24 hours, the EOD teams responded to 18 reports about shrapnel resulting from defensive interception operations, bringing the total number of reports since the beginning of the aggression to 347. He also reviewed several reports on shrapnel or objects falling outside the threat zone.

He said the Ministry of Interior confirmed that strengthening national unity is a vital aspect of ongoing efforts to maintain the security and stability of the country, and that preserving the social fabric is a shared responsibility among all members of society.

PM inspects shelter

On Wednesday, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah conducted an inspection tour of the Ministry of Education headquarters on Wednesday to oversee institutional readiness and the continuity of the educational process amidst current regional developments.

Accompanied by the Minister of

Education, Sayed Jalal Abdulmohsen Al-Tabtabai, His Highness convened a meeting with senior ministry officials to review strategic measures aimed at safeguarding the educational sector.

The discussions focused on enhancing inter-agency coordination to guarantee the safety of students, faculty, and administrative staff, while exploring the integration of modern technologies to bolster the resilience and stability of the educational system.

During the visit, His Highness inspected the ministry's emergency shelter facilities, where he was briefed by officials on operational protocols, resource allocation, and logistical preparations designed to maintain functionality and safety during exceptional circumstances.

His Highness the Prime Minister lauded the dedication of the ministry's teaching and administrative cadres, expressing his profound appreciation for their commitment to their national duties.

He reaffirmed the government's unwavering support for all initiatives directed at developing the educational sector and ensuring its vital role in serving the nation's future.

Border readiness reviewed

First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah described on Wednesday that the Ministry of Interior's personnel as the nation's "impenetrable shield" and a formidable bulwark against any threats to its stability.

The Minister's remarks followed an extensive inspection tour of northern border outposts, including the Al-Abdali and Al-Salmi crossings.

The visit was part of a comprehensive field assessment to monitor security readiness and evaluate the operational workflow of the border security apparatus.

According to a Ministry statement, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef emphasized the imperative of maintaining constant vigilance and a heightened sense of responsibility in safeguarding the nation's frontiers.

He commended the tireless dedication of the security forces, noting that such field visits serve to bolster morale and underscore the leadership's appreciation for their sacrifices.

During the tour, the First Deputy Prime Minister was briefed by the Head of the Border Security and Coast Guard Affairs Sector, Major General Majbel bin Shawq, on the latest technical equipment and integrated field mechanisms.

Discussions also covered strategic

coordination between various security units and contingency plans designed to address diverse emergency scenarios.

In a gesture reflecting the "spirit of one family," Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef shared an Iftar meal with the stationed border forces, reaffirming that the nation's security is a collective responsibility.

He concluded by stating that the Ministry's personnel will remain "vigilant guardians," working with unwavering determination to preserve Kuwait's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

MPW assesses

The acting Director of the Meteorological Department, Dhirar Al-Ali, explained to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that weather maps and numerical models indicate the country will be affected by an extended surface high-pressure system. This system is expected to gradually recede, allowing a low-pressure system carrying a humid air mass to advance, Light to moderate southeast winds, occasionally active, are forecast, which may cause an increase in sea waves. Low and medium cloud buildup, interspersed with cumulus clouds, will continue, but cloud cover and chances of rain are expected to gradually decrease by Friday afternoon.

Friday is expected to be warm during the day, with clouds and chances of rain gradually decreasing. Winds will be variable to southeast, light to moderate, ranging from 8 to 35 km/h, with a chance of fog in the evening. The expected maximum temperatures are between 23°C and 25°C, and the sea state will be light to moderate, with waves ranging from one to five feet.

Friday night will be slightly cool, with variable to southeast winds, light to moderate, ranging from 6 to 28 km/h. Scattered clouds and fog are expected in some areas. The minimum temperatures are forecast between 12°C and 14°C, and the sea will remain light to moderate, with waves from one to three feet.

On Saturday, the weather is expected to be warm, with gradually increasing cloud cover. Winds will be southeast to variable, light to moderate, ranging from 8 to 32 km/h, with chances of scattered rain later in the day. Maximum temperatures are expected between 26°C and 28°C, and the sea state will remain light to moderate, with waves from one to three feet.

Spanish Embassy

It organized trips from Kuwait to Riyadh International Airport using four buses on March 6-9 to transport Spanish citizens wishing to travel to Riyadh, in addition to other citizens from within and outside the EU.

It stressed that the safety and well-being of Spanish citizens in Kuwait are its top priority, expressing its deepest condolences to the families of the Kuwaiti military and security personnel martyred in the line of duty.

It also expressed its gratitude to the Kuwaiti authorities for their efforts in protecting the citizens and residents in Kuwait.

It added that it continues to operate in the country and will gradually restore the full range of its consular services as conditions permit.

It is worth mentioning that the Spanish government strongly condemned the indiscriminate and unjustified attacks on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations and other countries in the region. It also supports the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2817, which condemns these attacks.

Justice Ministry

The initiative aims to enhance institutional integration and benefit from the specialized scientific and professional expertise available in the private sector, ultimately contributing to the advancement of the country's real estate sector.

According to the ministry, the committee will conduct a comprehensive analysis of the current situation and prepare an in-depth study on real estate expertise professionals. The objective is to establish clear and organized foundations and standards that regulate the profession, improve efficiency, and contribute to achieving balance in Kuwait's real estate market.

The committee will be chaired by Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice Awatif Al-Sanad. Its members include Qais Al-Faraj, representing the Kuwait Real Estate Valuers Association; Ahmad Al-Laheeb, representing the Real Estate Union; Emad Haidar, representing the Kuwait Union of Real Estate Brokers; in addition to a number of specialized supervisory officials from the ministry.

America

Tornadoes kill 2 in northwestern Indiana: Major storms whipped up tornadoes that killed at least two people in northwest Indiana and leveled buildings in Kankakee, Illinois, authorities said Wednesday, as another round of rain, hail and strong winds made its way through the region.

Several intense supercell thunderstorms moved across northern Illinois and northwestern Indiana the previous day, including one responsible for at least four tornadoes, according to the National Weather Service office in Chicago.

The Newton County Coroner's office said Edward L. Kozlowski, 89, and his wife Arlene Kozlowski, 84, were killed when a tornado struck their home in Lake Village, in northwestern Indiana. The couple appeared to have been killed by blunt force trauma, the coroner's office said, and an autopsy was scheduled for Friday.

"They were wonderful, just really wonderful human beings," son-in-law Steve Rehfeldt told CBS News in Chicago. "You know, tough old guy and sweet old lady."

They left behind four children, seven grandchildren and great-grandchildren. (AP)

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Girl dies in Georgia fistfight: A 12-year-old girl was taken to a hospital and died days after she collapsed in the street following a fistfight near a school bus stop in her Georgia neighborhood, according to police.

The death of sixth grader Jada West is being investigated by police in suburban Villa Rica, about 30 miles (48 kilometers) west of Atlanta.

Sgt. Spencer Crawford, a police spokesman, said Wednesday that investigators are reviewing evidence, including cellphone video of the fight, and are awaiting autopsy results. He said police plan to meet later this week with prosecutors, who will ultimately decide whether to bring charges.

The fight between Jada and another student from Mason Creek Middle School broke out at an intersection



Debris from destroyed homes and property along South Sandbar Road following last night's tornado on March 11, in Aroma Park, Ill. (AP)

near the girl's home on Thursday afternoon, Crawford said.

Cellphone video posted by Jada's aunt on social media shows a school bus leaving the scene more than 90 seconds before any punches get thrown. The video shows Jada and another girl yelling and taunting each other while standing a good distance apart. A group of classmates stands watching them. (AP)

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Epstein's longtime accountant testifies: US House lawmakers were digging into Jeffrey Epstein's sprawling financial portfolio on Wednesday as a committee deposed his former accountant and tried to understand his connections to some of the world's wealthiest men.

Richard Kahn, who worked closely with Epstein for years and now serves as an executor of his estate, appeared for the closed-door deposition on Capitol Hill. He told lawmakers that he had not personally seen evidence of Epstein's abuse, but provided a fuller picture of how Epstein acquired his wealth. The wealthy financier made hundreds of millions of dollars over two decades, during which he struck up friendships with some of the world's most powerful men. (AP)

Trump visa changes squeeze rural schools relying on int'l teachers

WASHINGTON, March 12, (AP): Like many school systems facing teacher shortages, South Carolina's Allendale County has looked overseas for help. A quarter of the teachers in the rural, high-poverty district come from other countries.

The superintendent praises the international educators - mostly from Jamaica and the Philippines - for their skill and dedication, but she is preparing to lose some of them as the Trump administration reshapes visa programs.

Facing higher visa sponsorship costs and uncertain immigration policies, Superintendent Valerie Cave said it feels too risky to extend some international teachers whose contracts are up or bring on others.

"Some of my very best teachers are having to return to their countries," Cave said.

For rural schools especially, President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown is pinching a pipeline used widely to fill staffing shortages that worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rural districts can struggle to attract American teachers to remote areas that lack plentiful housing, shopping and services such as health care, especially for lower salaries than some bigger districts offer.

Cave is hoping to hire local teachers



A student prepares to leave school on Aug 13, 2014, southeast of Brookhaven, Miss. (AP)

to fill the gaps left by several teachers' impending departures. If she can't, she may expand the district's use of online teachers. Elsewhere, districts are considering hiring uncertified instructors, combining classes or dropping course offerings.

In September, the White House announced a \$100,000 fee on H-1B visas, which allow highly skilled foreign workers to be employed in the

U.S. The Trump administration argued American employees were being replaced, particularly in highly paid roles at tech companies. Critics have argued the fee will worsen labor shortages outside of tech.

More than 2,300 people with H-1B visas work as educators across 500 school districts, according to an analysis by the National Education Association teachers union.

Democrats seek several changes

Lawmakers vent frustration over DHS shutdown as lines grow at US airports

WASHINGTON, March 12, (AP): US Republican and Democratic senators vented their frustrations with the lack of progress in funding the Department of Homeland Security, which is resulting in more Americans enduring long lines at airports around the country. It's a problem that is expected to intensify as the impasse enters its fourth week.

Democrats stressed they were willing to fund some of DHS, but not Immigration and Customs Enforcement as well as Customs and Border Protection, without changes in their operations. Republicans made clear that some of the Democratic demands were a non-starter. The result was that each party blocked the other's proposal for temporarily resolving the standoff during an hourslong debate on the Senate floor.

The stark divide over a shutdown that began on Feb 14 was acknowledged by members on both sides of the political aisle.

"We are in a negotiation. However, we are not close," Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii, said at one point. "You may think this is some issue that we think we're going to turn to our political advantage, but I promise you, when we saw Renee Good and Alex Pretti killed, this became an issue that was

beyond politics."

"And there are a lot of us who are not going to provide resources to this agency that is acting in such a way that makes citizens of the United States so unsafe."

Some Republicans were just as adamant that they oppose some of the changes Democrats are seeking to make.

"Let me be clear, we are going to do nothing - nothing - that kneecaps ICE's ability to enforce our immigrations laws," said Sen. Eric Schmitt, R-Mo.

Following the longest federal shutdown in the country's history last year, Congress completed work on 11 of this year's 12 appropriations bills. Only the bill for Homeland Security remains outstanding.

Democrats are seeking several changes at the department that include prohibiting ICE enforcement operations at sensitive locations like schools and churches, allowing independent investigations into alleged wrongdoing, requiring warrants to be signed by judges before federal agents can forcibly enter private homes or other nonpublic spaces without consent, and requiring agents to wear identification and remove their masks.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune,



Covenant Aviation Security Private Security Services agents check in passengers at a security gate at San Francisco International Airport in San Francisco on Feb 27. (AP)

R-S.D., said his side has made repeated overtures to Democrats on a funding bill. He said the last offer on Homeland Security funding came from the White House nearly two weeks ago and there has been no response from the Democrats.

"Usually, around here, in order to get a deal, there has to be a negotiation

where the two sides sit down together," Thune said. "And my understanding is that has been completely rebuffed by the senator from Washington."

The senator Thune was referring to, Sen. Patty Murray, the lead Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, said she's continued to talk with Republican colleagues, but those

aren't "real negotiations." The White House needs to be at the table for that to occur. She said she needed assurance that Stephen Miller, the influential White House deputy chief of staff, would not upend any agreements that senators reach.

"I am willing to talk to people, but I'm not willing to sit in a room, have coffee, give away a few things and have Stephen Miller override whatever we all agree to," Murray said. "... We need to know the White House is serious."

DHS has been central to President Donald Trump's sweeping changes in immigration enforcement. Under Trump, the number of people ICE arrests and detains each month has climbed dramatically. The tactics that ICE has employed have generated alarm among Democrats, and some Republicans have also called for a more "strategic" approach.

During bipartisan negotiations earlier this year, appropriators agreed to a DHS funding bill that did include more resources for de-escalation training and \$20 million to outfit immigration enforcement agents with body-worn cameras. But that deal unraveled after the Pretti shooting in Minneapolis.

"My side was not going to stand

down and say, 'oh well, nothing happened,'" Murray said.

For the second time in two weeks, Murray offered a proposal to fund all of DHS except for ICE and Customs and Border Protection, but Republicans objected.

Similarly, Sen. Katie Britt, R-Ala., offered a proposal to fund all of DHS for two weeks so that federal workers could get paid and government operations could continue while the two sides negotiate their differences on immigration enforcement. This time, Democrats objected.

The result was the standoff continues, but lawmakers were at least talking to each other, perhaps one small sign of progress.

The large majority of the more than 260,000 employees at DHS continue to work but are going unpaid. It's the second time in recent months they've had to work without pay after last fall's record, 43-day shutdown. The most visible sign of the shutdown has been a shortage of Transportation Security Administration screeners at airports.

Houston's secondary airport weathered the worst problems, with lines consistently lasting over three hours for much of Sunday and Monday.



Czech Republic's Prime Minister Andrej Babis, right, is welcomed by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz in Berlin, Germany on March 10. (AP)

Czechs won't meet NATO defense spending target under PM Babis

PRAGUE, March 12, (AP): Czech Republic lawmakers on Wednesday approved a 2026 budget that falls short of a NATO target for defense spending, despite pressure from the United States and the country's own president.

The legislators loyal to the new government of populist Prime Minister Andrej Babis, voted 104-87 in Parliament's 200-seat lower house to allocate almost 155 billion koruna (\$7.4 billion) for the Defense Ministry, or just over 1.7% of gross domestic product.

The NATO target is 2% of GDP. The Czech spending would inch above 2% only if funding for defense-related

projects at other ministries is factored in. It was not clear if that would be acceptable to the alliance, which the Czech Republic has been a member of since 1999.

Babis argued that his government had other priorities, such as "the health of our citizens," and said it was "the maximum possible" budget due to a poor state of public finances inherited from the previous government.

NATO members in 2014 committed their defense spending to at least 2% of GDP and the alliance expected all members, including the Czechs, to meet that target last year.

At the 2025 Hague summit, under

pressure from the Trump administration, the alliance agreed to go further and invest 3.5% of GDP on core defense requirements and another 1.5% on defense- and security-related spending by 2035.

President Petr Pavel, a retired army general, urged lawmakers to increase the budget and noted the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine: "Today, there is not a single justifiable reason for defense and security spending to stagnate."

The president still must sign the budget and has said that he will do it because the budget is the government's business, not his.

He also noted that Azerbaijan and Armenia have begun trade, including Azerbaijan's supply of critical oil products to Armenia, adding that Baku has lifted all the restrictions on the transit of cargo from other countries to Armenia through Azerbaijani territory. (Xinhua)

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Romania considers hosting US military: Romania may temporarily host US military forces and equipment if the country's parliament approves a request discussed during a meeting of the Supreme Council for National Defence (CSAT), Romanian President Nicusor Dan said on Wednesday.

Dan said the discussions focused on the possibility of allowing US assets to use Romanian bases amid the ongoing Middle East conflict involving Iran. The US equipment under consideration includes aerial refueling aircraft and satellite communications systems that could be stationed at Mihail Kogalniceanu air base near the Black Sea coast. (Xinhua)

Ukraine awaits White House sign-off on US drone production deal: Zelenskyy

KYIV, Ukraine, March 12, (AP): Ukraine is awaiting White House approval for a major drone production agreement proposed by Kyiv last year, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Thursday, as countries scramble to modernize their air defenses after the Iran war exposed shortcomings.

The proposed US-Ukraine deal would cover various types of drones and air defenses that operate as a single system capable of protecting against swarms of hundreds or even thousands of Iranian-designed Shahed drones and missiles, Zelenskyy said in a message on social media.

"We have not yet had the opportunity to sign this document," he said.

Russia has fired tens of thousands of Iranian-designed Shahed drones at Ukraine since it invaded its neighbor just over four years ago. It launched a swarm of more than 800 drones and decoys in its biggest nighttime barrage. Iran has responded to joint US-Israeli strikes by firing the same type of drones at targets in the Middle East.

Ukraine has pioneered the development of cut-price drone killers, some of which cost a few thousand dollars, that have rewritten the air defense rule book.

The conflict unfolding in the Middle East might prompt American officials to sign the drone production proposal, Zelenskyy said.

Ukraine is keen to lock in future



An instructor from the Ukrainian company General Cherry demonstrates the operation of an anti-air interceptor drone designed to destroy Russian attack drones in Kyiv region on March 11. (AP)

foreign support for its ongoing effort to thwart Russia's invasion, and drone production agreements could bring Kyiv some diplomatic leverage in negotiations with Moscow.

US-mediated talks seeking to stop Europe's biggest conflict since World War II are on hold due to the Iran war.

Zelenskyy arrived in NATO member Romania on Thursday, a day before he visits French President Emmanuel Ma-

cron in Paris, as new research indicated Russian oil revenue that helps drive its invasion of Ukraine has risen since the Iran war began.

Russia's daily revenue from oil sales during the Middle East conflict, which has brought a sharp increase in the price of crude, has been on average 14% higher than in February, according to the nonprofit Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. Oil revenue is crucial for Moscow's war effort.

Russian court convicts 19 over '24 concert hall attack

MOSCOW, March 12, (AP): A court in Moscow in Thursday convicted 19 people of involvement in the 2024 shooting rampage in a Moscow concert hall that killed 149 people and wounded over 600 in one of the deadliest attacks in the capital in years.

A faction of the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the March 22, 2024, massacre at the Crocus City Hall concert venue in which four gunmen shot people who were waiting for a show by a popular rock band and then set the building on fire. All 19 defendants were handed lengthy prison terms: 15 were sentenced to life in prison, one was handed 22 1/2 years in prison, and three others were given 19 years and 11 months each.

The trial began in August 2025 in a military court, as is customary for terrorism charges, and took place behind closed doors, with the authorities citing security concerns.

President Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials have claimed, without presenting evidence, that Ukraine had a role in the attack. Kyiv has strongly denied any involvement.

The Investigative Committee, Russia's top criminal investigation agency, has said that the attack had been "planned and carried out in the interests of the current leadership of Ukraine in order to destabilize the political situation in our country."



Men tried on the charges of involvement in a terror attack at the Crocus City Hall in March 2024, (background), listen to the verdict from behind a glass cage at the Second Western District Military Court in Moscow, Russia on March 12. (AP)

Europe

'Peace with Armenia exists in practice': Azerbaijan has achieved peace with Armenia in practice, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said Wednesday.

"We not only achieved peace on paper ... but we have peace on the ground also," Aliyev said at a press conference, referring to the peace agreement initiated by Azerbaijan and Armenia.

"There can be nothing better than peace. Believe me, we know what it is like to live in a situation of war or to be at war. So countries like ours value peace maybe more than any other," he said.

Aliyev added that after the peace agreement was reached, connectivity is an important part of their bilateral portfolio. "The new opportunities for the extension of the Middle Corridor obviously are increasing our optimism."

Indonesia, Australia to further strengthen security cooperation

Cambodia aims to shut down all notorious online scam centers within weeks

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, March 12, (Agencies): Cambodia hopes to shut down all of the country’s notorious online scam centers by the end of next month, the head of the Southeast Asian nation’s effort to combat the cybercrime said Wednesday.

Senior Minister Chhay Sinarith, in charge of the Commission for Combating Online Scams, told The Associated Press in an interview that the government since July had targeted 250 locations believed to be carrying out the lucrative criminal activity, and has shut down about 80%, or 200, of them.

He said police would carry out suppression activities after April in an attempt to keep the scam centers from reemerging.

Cambodia has launched previous crackdowns against online scam centers but without major effect.

“The real question is whether this effort targets the system that enables the industry, not just the buildings where scams happen,” commented Jacob Sims, an expert on transnational crime.

“Past crackdowns in Cambodia have often left the financial and protection networks intact, allowing operations to quickly reconstitute.”

“So far there are few signs the current round of enforcement is reaching the key perpetrators among the Cambodian ruling elite,” said Sims, a Visiting Fellow at Harvard University’s Asia Center. “Moreover, continued restrictions on independent reporting and civil society actors make the government’s claims difficult to verify.”

Cybercrime has flourished in Southeast Asia, particularly in Cambodia and Myanmar, with scam victims around the world being bilked out of tens of billions of dollars annually, according to United Nations experts and other analysts.

The industry is closely involved in human trafficking, as foreign nationals are employed to run romance and cryptocurrency scams, often after being recruited with false job offers and then forced to work in conditions of near-slavery.



Bun Sosekha, Deputy Commissioner in charge of Security Unit, Phnom Penh Municipal Police, gives a tour of a scam center to journalists in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on March 11. (AP)

Chhay Sinarith said that in the latest crackdown the government launched 79 legal cases involving 697 alleged scam ringleaders and their associates.

At the same time, it has repatriated almost 10,000 scam center workers

from 23 countries, he said, with fewer than 1,000 awaiting official repatriation. Others who have escaped or been released from raided centers have gone home on their own.

Cambodia works closely with countries, especially China and the United States, to combat the problem, he said.

Cambodian police on Tuesday raided a suspected scam center in a high-rise building in the capital, Phnom Penh, arresting about 60 Cambodians and Chinese nationals at their desks.

“They did chat to convince people in Europe to invest the money with them, but their investment is fake and fraudulent. It is not real,” said Bun Sosekha, a deputy commissioner of the Phnom Penh Municipal Police.

Earlier Wednesday, journalists were shown equipment confiscated in raids elsewhere, including uniforms and fake identification cards used by scammers to pose online as Japanese police officers to trick and intimidate victims.

Cambodia has been plagued by the illicit activity since it began on a much smaller scale around 2012, when it was primarily carried out using voice-over-internet-protocol - VOIP - phones, with the callers disguising their location and identities, Chhay Sinarith said.

Also:

JAKARTA: Indonesia and Australia are planning to expand their security cooperation to include Japan and Papua New Guinea, Indonesia’s Defence Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeuddin said here on Thursday.

Trilateral security arrangements would be developed among Indonesia, Australia, and Japan, and among Indonesia, Australia, and Papua New Guinea, Sjafrie told reporters after meeting his Australian counterpart **Richard Marles**.

He said the two sides have explored the possibility of developing a defence training facility in Indonesia’s eastern province of **North Maluku** and upgrading its existing infrastructure.

Asia

N.Korea’s Kim, daughter try out new pistols: North Korean leader **Kim Jong Un** and his teenage daughter fired pistols during an inspection of a light munitions factory, state media photos showed Thursday, as he pushes to modernize conventional forces after years of focus on nuclear weapons.

North Korea’s official Korean Central News Agency said Kim visited a factory producing pistols and other light arms a day earlier and reviewed a new pistol that recently entered production.

After testing the weapon at a shooting range, Kim rated it “excellent,” the agency said. The agency did not mention the presence of Kim’s daughter in its text report but its photos showed her firing a pistol along with senior military officials.



Kim

Kim said the factory was crucial for supplying pistols and other light arms to the military and security forces, and urged expanded capacity and more modern production lines, KCNA said.

Since first appearing in public at a long-range missile test in November 2022, Kim’s daughter - believed to be named Kim Ju Ae and about 13 - has accompanied her father to a growing number of events, including military displays, factory openings and a September trip to Beijing, where Kim Jong Un held his first summit with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in six years. (AP)

Vietnam traffic accident kills 1: One person was killed in a traffic accident in central Vietnam’s Quang Ngai province early Thursday, the Voice of Vietnam (VOV) reported.

The incident occurred at around 0:11 a.m., when a truck rear-ended a tractor-trailer parked on the roadside, leaving a passenger in the truck dead at the scene and damaging both vehicles, the report said.

Local authorities are investigating the cause of the accident. (Xinhua)

1 dead after vessel capsizes in Philippines: A dock worker was killed as a cargo vessel capsized at a port in Cebu province in the central Philippines, the country’s Coast Guard District Central Visayas said Thursday.

The vessel was conducting loading operations when it developed a list, which shifted during de-ballasting procedures and eventually led to its capsizing on Wednesday, the agency said on social media.

During the incident, one cement handler was struck by a mooring line that snapped and collapsed amid the vessel’s capsizing. The victim was brought to a local hospital but was declared dead on arrival. (Xinhua)

Woman, child found dead in Australia home: Police in the Australian state of Queensland have commenced an investigation into the deaths of a woman and a child whose bodies were located after an injured man was found nearby.

Emergency services were called to reports of an injured man being spotted at a supermarket south of Brisbane around 7:30 a.m. local time on Thursday.

Police said initial investigations indicated the man had run to the supermarket from a nearby property. Officers attended the home and found the bodies of a woman and a child. Crime scenes were established at the property and the supermarket. (Xinhua)

“The man is receiving medical treatment and will be assisting police with their investigations,” a police statement said.

It said that police do not believe there is any ongoing threat to the community. (Xinhua)



An aerial drone photo taken on March 11, 2026, shows cherry blossoms in Gui'an New Area, southwest China's Guizhou Province. (Xinhua)

Ecuador readies major offensive on criminal organizations with US logistical support

QUITO, Ecuador, March 12, (Agencies): Ecuador will launch a major offensive against criminal organizations in three western provinces this week-end with logistical support from the United States, the interior minister said Wednesday.

Speaking to a local radio station, Interior Minister John Reimberg urged citizens to observe an 11 pm to 5 am curfew from March 15-30 in the provinces of Guayas, Los Ríos and Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas - three of the most violent in the South American country.

Residents under curfew need to stay in their homes and keep the roads clear to facilitate the movement of troops and equipment, he said.

“We do not want collateral victims from the attacks we are about to launch,” Reimberg said. “We have significant support from US forces for the operations we are about to carry out.”

The US Embassy in Ecuador didn’t immediately respond to an emailed request for comment from The Associated Press.

Asked for a comment Wednesday afternoon, the US Southern Command only reiterated the comments offered by Marine Gen Francis L. Donovan following the March 3 strikes: “We commend the men and women of the Ecuadorian armed forces for their unwavering commitment to this fight, demonstrating courage and resolve



US President Donald Trump greets President of Ecuador Daniel Noboa at the Shield of the Americas Summit on March 7 at Trump National Doral Miami in Doral, Fla. (AP)

through continued actions against narco-terrorists in their country.”

The announcement came days after Ecuador and the US began joint military operations against organized crime groups in the South American country, although at the time neither government gave details of the location and scope of the operation.

The attacks against violent criminal groups are aimed at “destroying what they have built in various parts of the

country,” Reimberg said, although he declined to provide specific details, citing security concerns.

Later Wednesday, Ecuador and the US announced an agreement to establish the first-ever FBI office in Ecuador, a move described by US Embassy Chargé d’Affaires Lawrence Petroni as “a very important milestone” in strengthening the operational bond between the FBI and Ecuadorian police.

The FBI office will start operations

inside the US Embassy in Quito, according to the police. Vice President María José Pinto praised the initiative as essential for “better investigating and understanding criminal threats.”

Since early 2021, Ecuador has faced a relentless offensive by organized crime groups which, according to police, maintain close ties with drug trafficking cartels in Colombia and Mexico.

Also:

QUITO: Ecuador’s armed forces announced Wednesday the dismantling of infrastructure and equipment used for illegal mineral extraction in the northern border province of **Carchi**.

The operation took place in the **El Pablo** sector of Tulcan canton, delivering what the military described as a “forceful blow” against illegal mining activities that damage local natural resources, the armed forces said in a release posted on social media.

“This operation represents an approximate weakening of 95,000 US dollars to the financial structures linked to illegal mining in this sector of Carchi province,” ecuador’s military said.

The armed forces added that they maintain permanent coordination with the National Police and the Mining Regulation and Control Agency to strengthen control operations and ensure the protection of the country’s natural resources.

UN aid worker dead in Congo

Sudan drone attacks kill at least 69

KHARTOUM, March 12, (Agencies): Drone attacks struck a transport truck and a school-health center complex in two separate Sudanese states this week, killing at least 69 people, medical sources and volunteers said Wednesday.

In the deadliest of the two strikes, a drone hit a civilian transport truck Tuesday in Abu Zabad, in West Kordofan state in southern Sudan, killing 52 people. Eyewitnesses said the truck was carrying roughly 90 passengers; the dead were mostly women, along with several men and children.

Survivors were taken to Abu Zabad’s only functioning hospital and nearby facilities, where medical staff treated the injured under overcrowded conditions with limited supplies.

A second attack on Wednesday killed 17 people in Shukairi village, near Kosti in White Nile state in central Sudan. The dead included nine students, three teachers, four patients, and a health worker.

The Sudanese Doctors Network said the strike hit a school and a health center, calling it a deliberate attack on unarmed civilians and a violation of international law.

No group claimed responsibility for either strike. The Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces did not immediately comment.



Army and firefighters work at a house damaged by a drone strike in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo on March 11. (AP)

Also:

GOMA, Congo: A series of explosions attributed to drones killed at least one person, a U.N. aid worker, as the attack on the Wednesday rocked downtown Goma in eastern Congo, according to the M23 rebel group and local residents.

The drone strikes hit **Lake Kivu** and a private residence located about 50 meters (164 feet) from the home of former Congo President **Joseph Kabila Kabange**.

‘Closest mission to Afghanistan’

US to permanently close consulate in Peshawar

WASHINGTON, March 12, (AP): The State Department will permanently close the US consulate in Peshawar, Pakistan, which has been America’s closest diplomatic mission to the Afghan border and was a primary operations and logistics point before, during and after the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan.

The department notified Congress this week of its intent to close the consulate and said it would save \$7.5 million per year, while not adversely affecting its ability to advance US national interests in Pakistan, according to a copy of the notification obtained by The Associated Press on Wednesday.

The move has been under consideration for more than a year since the Trump administration began downsizing nearly all federal agencies and is not related to the Iran war, which has sparked protests in various Pakistani cities, including Karachi and Peshawar, where the US consulates temporarily suspended operations.

The administration’s cuts to the State Department last year included the dismissal of several thousand diplomatic personnel and the near wholesale firing of staffers with the US Agency for International Development, which it entirely dismantled. The Peshawar consulate, however, is the first overseas diplomatic mission to be closed down entirely because of the State Department’s reorganization.



Muslim worshippers arrive to observe 'Itikaf,' during the last ten days of the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan, at a mosque, in Peshawar, Pakistan on March 10. (AP)

The Peshawar consulate employs 18 American diplomats and other government personnel and 89 local staff, according to the notice, which is dated Tuesday and said the department would spend \$3 million to close it down. More than half of that amount, \$1.8 million, would pay for the relocation of armored trailers that had served as temporary office space, it said.

The rest will go toward moving the consulate’s motor pool fleet, electronic

and telecommunications equipment and office furniture to the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad and the remaining consulates in Karachi and Lahore, the notice said.

Because of its proximity to the Afghan border and Kabul, the Peshawar consulate had been a key jumping-off facility for overland travel into Afghanistan as well as a point of contact for American citizens in northwestern Pakistan and Afghan nationals seeking US assistance.

S.Africa deploys soldiers to streets to tackle organized, violent crime

JOHANNESBURG, March 12, (AP): Soldiers were deployed to the streets of South Africa’s biggest city Wednesday in an effort to help police fight gang violence and illegal mining.

It was the first major deployment since President Cyril Ramaphosa said in his annual speech to the nation last month that he would use the army against organized crime, which he called the greatest threat to democracy and the country’s economic development.

Soldiers jumped from vehicles and entered apartment blocks as military vehicles moved through the Riverlea and Westbury suburbs of Johannesburg.

Many residents of Riverlea expressed relief to see soldiers deployed to stem the violence.

One resident, Pearl Hilma, told The Associated Press that she supports the crackdown “because there’s lots of gangsterism as well as gunshots every night” in the neighborhood.

Some of the buildings in the area have graffiti signs denouncing the scourge of crime, with one near a school reading “No to Guns, Pray for our Community.”

South Africa’s police and the Department of Defense, which oversees the military, did not immediately provide details on the deployment.



South African National Defense Force officers patrol the street in the Westbury township of Johannesburg, South Africa on March 11. (AP)

Authorities had previously said the military deployment in different parts of the country would start March 1, but it was delayed while soldiers received training. The army will operate under police command during the deployment.

Another resident, Yasin Botha, said the presence of both police and military reassured him that there would be a quick reaction now when shootings

occur.

“Currently, I feel unsafe because we don’t know when the next shooting is going to happen and we don’t know who it is targeted at,” Botha said.

Ramaphosa said in a notice to the Speaker of Parliament that 550 soldiers would be involved in an initial deployment in the Gauteng province, which includes Johannesburg, due to last until the end of April.

Kuwait oil price surges to \$117.24 pb

KUWAIT CITY, March 12, (KUNA): The price of Kuwaiti oil edged up by USD 4.11 to hit USD 117.24 per barrel (pb) Wednesday, compared to USD 113.13 the previous day, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on

Thursday.

In global markets, the price of Brent crude went up by USD 4.18 to reach USD 91.98 per barrel, as West Texas Intermediate rose by USD 3.80 to USD 87.25 pb.

General index falls 32.56 points to 8,609.12

Boursa Kuwait ends Thursday trading lower

KUWAIT CITY, March 12, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait closed trading on Thursday with its general index declining by 32.56 points, or 0.38 percent, to reach 8,609.12 points, with 168.6 million shares traded through 15,786 cash deals, valued at KD 56 million (about USD 171.3 million).

The Main Market Index inclined by 7.92

points, or 0.10 percent, to reach 7,998.28 points, through trading of 72.8 million shares across 6,992 cash deals, valued at KD 11.4 million (about USD 34.8 million).

The Premier Market Index declined by 42.99 points, or 0.47 percent, to reach 9,185.42 points, through trading of 95.8 million shares across 8,794 deals, valued

at KD 44.5 million (about USD 136.7 million).

Meanwhile, the Main 50 Index decreased by 46.95 points, or 0.57 percent, to reach 8,257.02 points, through trading of 64.3 million shares across 5,858 cash deals, valued at KD 10.2 million (about USD 31.2 million).

Vision 2035 projects backed by solid financial strength

Kuwait tops 10 global indicators in GCC 2025 report

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: The 2025 report issued by the Statistical Center of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) affirmed the leadership of Kuwait in 10 global indicators, underscoring the pioneering role of the country and its promising prospects for the future.

The newspaper obtained a copy of the report, indicating that Kuwait successfully balanced a high average per capita income of \$32,913 with a relatively low inflation rate of 2.3 percent during the same year. It stated that Kuwait has established itself as a distinctive economic model built upon three key pillars.

The first pillar is absolute security, achieved through sovereign financial strength, low public debt, and solid financial indicators that ensure independent decision-making and protection against economic crises.

The second pillar is genuine prosperity, reflected in the combination of high income levels and low inflation.

The third pillar is attainable ambition, rooted in the financial capability of the country to fund the major projects included in its Vision 2035 development plan without the need to rely on external

borrowing.

Regarding its top global rankings, the report stated that Kuwait secured first place worldwide in the current account balance index.

It ranked second globally in advanced computer skills, third in low unemployment rates, fourth in tax policy efficiency, fifth in electricity production, sixth among the safest countries and seventh among the strongest Islamic economies, reinforcing its position as a leading Islamic financial and commercial hub.

The country also demonstrated strong digital readiness through its high ranking in 4G and 5G network coverage. It secured ninth place globally in public finance efficiency and 10th place in the index measuring the lowest government debt-to-GDP ratio.

The report concluded that Kuwait's 2025 indicators reflect a strong and resilient economic performance heading into 2026. This confirms that the country is more than just a resource-rich nation, as it is rather a developed nation that provides a high quality of life, maintains financial and social stability, and is well-positioned to achieve greater ambitions while strengthening its standing as an influential global player.

Global oil reserves tapped amid Iran war supply shock

GCC oil output slumps by 10 million barrels per day

PARIS, March 12, (Agencies): The International Energy Agency (IEA) announced on Thursday that the war in the Middle East has caused “the biggest disruption to oil supplies in the history of the global market,” prompting oil producers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to drastically reduce their production.

The agency stated in its latest report that crude oil production has decreased by at least 8 million barrels per day, in addition to another 2 million barrels related to the cessation of production of petroleum products, including condensates.

It added that total oil production in the Arab Gulf states has decreased by at least 10 million barrels per day.

Oil tankers were attacked while passing through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital oil trade route, leading to tankers avoiding the passage and significantly reducing supplies.

Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most important strategic shipping lanes for oil and gas, which means that any regional disturbances could directly affect the stability of global energy markets.

Also:

NEW YORK: A widening war in Iran has halted oil tankers, made targets of refineries and spooked investors worried about the cascading impact of spiking energy prices.

In response, the International Energy Agency agreed on Wednesday to release the largest volume of emergency oil reserves in its history, with the Paris-based organization pledging to make 400 million barrels of oil available from its member nations' stockpiles. The announcement marked a shift in momentum in government response to the war upending the flow of oil, with other global leaders previously indicating reluctance to tap into stockpiles.

Here is a look at the energy supplies that countries hold and when they tap them:

Since war erupted in the Middle East on Feb. 28 with the U.S. and Israel's joint attacks on Iran, the flow of oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz has all but stopped, cutting off a vital passageway where roughly one-fifth of the world's oil sails through on a typical day. Major producers in the region like Iraq, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates have also cut production because they are running out of storage space. And Iran, Israel and the U.S. have all struck oil and gas facilities,



Gas prices are displayed at a station Wednesday, March 11, 2026, in Evanston Ill. (AP)

worsening supply concerns.

That has sent prices soaring with dramatic swings almost every day. On Monday, Brent crude oil - the international standard - surged to as high as nearly \$120 a barrel, before falling to under \$90 after President Donald Trump suggested the war could be near an end. But attacks have continued to escalate since, pushing prices back to about \$100 a barrel.

Countries around the world hold vast quantities of oil that they can use in the event of a crisis.

Because oil is a global commodity and flooding the market with a sudden stream of new supply has international implications, countries often talk to one another before tapping reserves. That includes coordinating with the IEA, an organization created in the aftermath of the 1973 oil crisis. It has 32 members - including Germany, Austria and Japan, all of whom confirmed Wednesday that they would be tapping parts of their reserves. The U.S., Mexico, Australia and other major countries are also part of the IEA.

IEA members currently hold over 1.2 billion barrels of public emergency oil stocks, with a further 600 million barrels of industry stocks held under government obligation. The largest-ever previous collective release of emergency stocks by IEA member countries was 182.7 million barrels following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Each of the IEA member countries promises to have a reserve at least equivalent to what they import in a 90-day period. The U.S. exports more than it imports, maintaining

its own reserve - known as the Strategic Petroleum Reserve - despite there being no requirement. But for other countries, tapping their reserves means that they will eventually need to replenish what was removed.

“Because of that, countries tend to keep reserves for a last-resort scenario, should the disruption be prolonged,” said Maksim Sonin, an energy executive who works with Stanford University's Hydrogen Initiative.

Opting to use oil reserves is never a simple calculation, particularly when linked to a war with constantly shifting parameters and no clear timeline.

When nations tap into strategic reserves in situations like the war in Iran, the oil is sold into the global marketplace, theoretically increasing supply and thus, lowering prices.

“The key question on drawing down these reserves remains one of, ‘How long will this conflict last?’” said Tom Seng, an energy finance professor at Texas Christian University. “And, more importantly, ‘How long will the Strait of Hormuz remain blocked?’”

Oil reserves have been tapped when the market has faced major disruption in the past, including wars in Iraq, Libya, and, most recently, in Ukraine.

Kenneth Medlock, senior director of the Center for Energy Studies at Rice University, said it's not a matter of whether the current conflict is serious enough to merit intervention, but whether the precise moment has arrived.

“The price is up but it could get

worse,” Medlock said. “What happens if this drags on for two, three months? Then you run into a situation where you lose your buffer.”

Before Wednesday, countries were reticent to tap reserves. Over the weekend, Trump downplayed the idea of turning to the U.S. reserve, maintaining that supplies were ample and prices would soon fall.

But that's changed. On Wednesday, the president told WKRC Local 12 in Cincinnati his administration would tap into the SPR “a little bit” to bring down prices. Secretary of Energy Chris Wright later confirmed the U.S. would release 172 million barrels as part of the IEA's effort.

Representatives from the Group of Seven major industrialized powers previously held off on using strategic reserves earlier this week, too. But G7 nations also joined the IEA effort. French President Emmanuel Macron praised Wednesday's decision - and noted the amount pledged by the G7 nations alone comprises 70% of the total, including 14.5 million barrels from France.

Talk of tapping into national reserves helped ease energy markets earlier this week. But crude prices actually ticked up after the withdrawal was confirmed Wednesday, with Brent rising 4.8% to settle at \$91.98. That is far higher than the roughly \$70 it was selling for before the war started less than two weeks ago.

Analysts maintain the IEA's release of 400 million barrels is a short-term bridge, making up for just a few weeks of lost supply. (AP)

Business

Operating profits rise 5.5%

CBK reports strong results with KD 121.2 mln net profit

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 12: Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) Sheikh Ahmad Al-Duaij Al-Sabah confirmed the outstanding results achieved by the bank for the year ending Dec 31, 2025.

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Duaij Al-Sabah made the announcement at the General Assembly of the bank on Wednesday, with shareholder attendance reaching 89.6 percent.

He attributed the outstanding performance to the strength of core operations, disciplined execution of the strategic plan, and prudent management of the balance sheet.

He pointed out that 2025 marked a return to normal performance levels, following the exceptional results recorded in 2024, which benefited from extraordinary and non-recurring recoveries that positively influenced the overall profitability of the bank during that year.

On the achievements of the bank in 2025, he confirmed that the operating profits before provisions increased to KD123.6 million, a growth of 5.5 percent compared with the previous year.

“This improvement is an affirmation of the sustainability of the profit base of the bank and highlights the effectiveness of its customer-centric business model.

“Net profit for the year reached KD121.2 million, with the 2025 earnings driven by recurring income streams.

“The strong performance of the bank is supported by long-standing customer relationships, a diversified business mix, and consistent execution of activities in all operational sectors.

“These strengths enabled the bank to deliver outstanding results, while maintaining a high level of operational efficiency within a dynamic and evolving operating environment.

“The disciplined and conservative approach to risk management remains a cornerstone of its success.

“The adoption of prudent credit standards, proactive portfolio monitoring, and early warning mechanisms to detect potential loan portfolio issues has enabled the bank to maintain strong asset quality,” he elaborated.

He added that despite the earlier decision to stop the ‘zero’ non-performing loan policy, the bank continued to demonstrate strong credit quality, concluding 2025 with a low non-performing loan ratio of just 0.6 percent.

“During the year, both Moody's and Fitch Ratings reaffirmed the bank's credit ratings with a stable outlook, reflecting confidence in its financial strength, capital adequacy, liquidity buffers, and strong operational performance.

These affirmations by global rating agencies reinforce the soundness and credibility of the strategy of the bank and highlight the resilience of its business model,” he explained.

He stated that in all business segments, the bank continued to pursue measured and sustainable growth in line with its strategic priorities.

“The Treasury and Investment segment continued to strengthen the funding structure and balance sheet of the bank, while supporting capital efficiency and enhancing the bank's capacity to participate in major financing opportunities as they emerge.

“The Retail Banking segment focused on delivering a secure, efficient and convenient banking experience for customers.

The growing reliance on digital and self-service channels reflects the bank's continued investment in technology aimed at improving customer experience, strengthening banking security, and meeting the evolving demand for digital banking services for all types of customers.

“The corporate banking sector maintained strong performance, achieving growth in both traditional and emerging industries, including technology-driven and environmentally focused businesses,” he revealed.

He said “this selective expansion supports portfolio diversification, reduces concentration risks, and aligns with the objective of the bank to increase sustainable financing.

“The international banking sector strengthened its relationship with multinational corporations

and Kuwaiti companies with international operations, as well as businesses with an overseas presence.

“Through proactive engagement and coordinated coverage, the sector enhanced its ability to capitalize on cross-border opportunities and further solidified the international business footprint.

“The bank expanded its self-service network by installing new self-service kiosks in several strategic locations in the country.

“This initiative is in line with the commitment to of the bank to improve customer experience by facilitating access to essential banking services anytime and anywhere.

“The bank also opened a new branch in Khaitan and equipped its branches with state-of-the-art technologies that support the concept of digital excellence.

“The bank further highlighted its ongoing efforts to engage with the public and promote its banking offerings and digital products through a range of activities and events.

“These initiatives aimed to familiarize customers with the newly introduced services and packages -- a new dimension of advanced digital banking solutions that the bank is committed to provide to all segments of society.

“These events not only served as a platform to introduce customers to the bank's products and services, but also contributed to raising awareness about the importance of protecting financial information, while promoting financial literacy among various segments of society as part of the ‘Let's Be Aware’ campaign.”

He stressed that sustainability remains an integral component of the long-term strategy of the bank and its approach to creating added value.

He went on to disclose that in 2025, the bank continued to advance its sustainability agenda in line with its ‘Shaping the Future 2022-2026’ strategy and Kuwait Vision 2035, while strengthening governance frameworks and expanding partnerships with both international and local stakeholders.

He added the bank's initiatives also focused on raising environmental awareness, promoting the responsible use of natural resources, safeguarding employee health and safety, and strengthening community engagement.

“Through a variety of campaigns, educational workshops and social initiatives, the bank continued to integrate sustainability principles in all sectors and departments, while actively engaging with the wider community,” he stated.

He pointed out that after celebrating its 65th anniversary as the second-oldest bank in Kuwait—an occasion that showed its distinguished standing in the banking sector as a pioneer in introducing innovative banking services, as well as its strong commitment to sustainability and social responsibility—the bank looks toward the future with optimism.

He said the bank remains confident that its journey of excellence and innovation will continue, while maintaining the highest levels of caution and prudence in light of the uncertain global and regional political and economic environment.

He affirmed that the bank will continue to focus on sustainable growth, operational efficiency, and prudent capital allocation in order to generate rewarding returns and long-term value for its shareholders, while fulfilling its responsibilities toward customers, employees and the community.

He added that the bank maintained a strong financial position in terms of capital and liquidity throughout 2025. He indicated that this provided a solid foundation to support the growth of the business activities of the bank and helped shield it from potential market fluctuations.

He revealed the key financial indicators as follows:

Total Assets: KD5.3 billion, an increase of 14.9 percent

Loans and Advances: KD2.9 billion, an increase of 6.0 percent

Total Provisions for Loan Losses: KD246.1 million

Non-Performing Loan Coverage Ratio: 1,043.2 percent

Capital Adequacy Ratio: 18.3 percent

Liquidity Coverage Ratio: 211.0 percent

Net Stable Funding Ratio: 109.5 percent

Leverage Ratio: 10.8 percent



Electric vehicles charge at a station Wednesday, March 11, 2026, in Lincolnwood, Ill. (AP)

‘Electricity rates stable’

Gas price spike from war boosts EV appeal

NEW YORK, March 12, (AP): When Kevin Ketels bought an electric 2026 Chevrolet Blazer last year, he wasn’t thinking about the cost of gas. He just thought EVs were better and “wanted to be part of the future.” Now that the Iran war is spiking prices at the pump, the Detroit man is happy he is no longer filling up his 11-year-old gas-powered SUV.

“Electricity can go up, but it won’t go up nearly as much as gas will and it won’t go up nearly as fast, either,” said Ketels, 55, an assistant professor of global supply chain management at Wayne State University.

Experts say prolonged high gas prices may drive some EV interest and sales, especially if drivers assume their electricity prices won’t be affected by the crises.

But many factors influence consumer EV purchases - and electricity rates.

Drivers of gas-powered vehicles are much more vulnerable to fluctuating prices that result from global conflict than those who charge their cars. The national average for a gallon of regular gas this week was \$3.57, up from \$2.94 a month ago, according to AAA.

Meanwhile, “residential electricity prices are regulated and are much less volatile than gasoline prices,” said University of California, Davis economics professor Erich Muehlegger. “As a result, EV owners are largely unaffected by oil price shocks.”

But experts say electricity prices have been increasing nationally for a variety of reasons, including surging power demand from new data centers.

“This is an inflationary event,” Holt Edwards, principal in Bracewell’s Policy Resolution Group, said of the war. “Is this the driver in electricity prices? I think probably not. But it’s certainly a contributing factor.”

To what extent oil and gas conflicts could translate to the electricity sector is yet to be seen.

When it comes to the electricity an EV owner is tapping, much of the cost depends on which sources of electricity are in a local grid’s power mix, experts say.

Because regulators set residential electricity prices annually, most households are sheltered from month-to-month changes in natural gas costs. Though experts say higher natural gas prices can increase the cost of generating electricity, natural gas prices haven’t risen as quickly or as much as oil prices have recently.

Those are just two of many energy sources - including coal, nuclear and renewables - that power the electric grid.

“The energy component varies depending on the energy you’re using and the price of the energy that you’re using to generate electricity,” said Pierpaolo Cazzola, an energy expert at Columbia University’s Center on Global Energy Policy. “What happens is that in the U.S., the variation of the price of the energy component is smaller than it is elsewhere.”

The experts said persistent war could affect electricity bills in the future. And that is all the more reason for countries to transition to clean power, they said.

“Clean power and electrification combined is what provides the most security,” said

Euan Graham, an analyst at energy think tank Ember.

Michael B. Klein, a 56-year-old software developer in Evanston, Illinois, has driven EVs for the past eight years to save on fuel costs and because of environmental concerns.

Every time electrical grid efficiency improves - especially as renewables are added - “I get that benefit no matter what,” said Klein, who drives a Chevy Bolt. “They can improve the efficiency of gas engines, but you have to get a new car in order to reap the benefit of that.”

Several experts say high gasoline prices are a strong driver of EV sales, particularly if high prices persist. Drivers also consider more gasoline-efficient hybrid vehicles during these times.

Car-shopping resource Edmunds analyzed consumer shopping data for the week starting March 2, after the Iran war had begun. They found that interest in hybrids, plug-in hybrids and battery EVs accounted for 22.4% of all vehicle research activity on their site that week, up from 20.7% the previous week. Analysts also looked back at the last major nationwide fuel price surges in 2022, and they saw that consideration of electrified vehicles rose sharply then, too.

But whether this means more EV purchases depends on whether buyers expect to save not just now but in the future, experts say.

Adding to the complexity: A sudden increase in EV demand could drive up prices, Graham said.

“I think the real step change would be in whether this causes governments to shift tax, tariff policies around EVs,” Graham said. Doing so would help reduce fossil fuel dependence, he said.

Pretty much.

People who buy EVs have a “really substantial” gas savings over the life of their vehicles even without government tax credits, said Peter Zalzal, an attorney with Environmental Defense Fund.

“We’re talking about thousands and thousands of dollars” in savings, Zalzal said. “And as gas prices increase, those savings are only greater. Fuel costs are a big piece of overall vehicle costs, and increases in fuel prices have significant impacts on people.”

However, the upfront cost of a new EV is still more than that of a gasoline-powered vehicle; new EVs sold for an average of \$55,300 last month, while new vehicles overall sold for an average \$49,353, according to auto-buying resource Kelley Blue Book. Some experts also expressed national security concerns with EVs because China dominates significant parts of the EV supply chain.

Ketels, the EV owner and professor, said he believes EVs and renewable energy should be a strategic priority for individuals and the U.S. because they could be produced domestically “and we don’t have those fluctuations and those worries.”

But because the federal government has withdrawn many incentives for both, “it puts us at a disadvantage globally,” Ketels said. “I think it’s been a terrible mistake to withdraw these incentives and to attack the sustainable energy industry,” and the war “is just making it that much more obvious.”

Global markets jolt as oil prices jump

S&P futures drop 0.4% as stagflation worries grow

BANGKOK, March 12, (AP): The price of a barrel of Brent crude oil briefly topped \$100 a barrel early Thursday, just days after it spiked near \$120 in the latest jolts to financial markets and the global economy as a whole.

Oil prices initially shot more than 9% higher as supply concerns worsened with Iranian attacks on commercial shipping around the Strait of Hormuz. The U.S. campaign of airstrikes in Iran is now in its 13th day.

U.S. benchmark crude oil jumped 4.5% to about \$91 a barrel. Brent, the international standard, was trading 5.3% higher at about \$97 per barrel.

Iran has escalated its attacks aimed at generating enough global economic pain to pressure the United States and Israel to end the war. But there was no sign the conflict was subsiding.

Iran has targeted oil fields and refineries in Gulf Arab nations and effectively stopped cargo traffic through the narrow Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of all traded oil passes.

In response, the International Energy Agency agreed Wednesday to release 400 million barrels of oil, the largest volume of emergency oil reserves in its history, in a bid to counter the war’s effects on energy markets. The U.S. planned to release 172 million barrels of oil next week from its Strategic Petroleum Reserve to combat steep prices.

The IEA’s announcement came a day after energy ministers from the Group of Seven - the leading industrialized nations of Canada, the United States, France, Italy, Japan, Germany and Britain - met in Paris to look at ways to bring down prices.

But the continued strife and uncertainty have fueled speculation prices could push still higher, and that pulled shares lower.

The future for the S&P 500 lost 0.4% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was 0.5% lower.



Screens display financial information on the floor at the New York Stock Exchange in New York, Tuesday, March 10, 2026. (AP)

Germany’s DAX lost 0.4% to 23,533.60, while the CAC 40 in Paris lost 0.7% to 7,982.64. Britain’s FTSE 100 sank 0.7% to 10,285.91.

During Asian trading, Tokyo’s Nikkei 225 fell 1% to 54,452.96. In South Korea, the Kospi lost 0.5% to 5,583.25, while Hong Kong’s Hang Seng gave up 0.7% to 25,716.76.

The Shanghai Composite index shed 0.1% to 4,129.10 and in Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 dropped 1.3% to 8,629.00. On Wednesday, U.S. stocks were little changed as the S&P 500 edged 0.1% lower for a second day of modest moves following a wild stretch caused by the war with Iran. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 0.6%, to its lowest level this year, and the Nasdaq composite rose 0.1%.

Since the start of the war, sharp moves for oil prices have triggered

swings up and down for financial markets worldwide, sometimes by the hour. Oil prices briefly spiked to their highest levels since 2022 this week because of the possibility that production in the Middle East could be blocked for a long time, which in turn raised worries about a surge of debilitating inflation for the global economy.

In a report, Oxford Economics said “the swings in Brent crude oil prices over the past several days are eye-catching and odds are volatility will remain because of the absence of a timeline for when the conflict will de-escalate and when the Strait of Hormuz, which is effectively closed, will see traffic begin to recover.”

The level of volatility suggests that depending on news developments, oil prices could spike as high as \$140 per barrel, it said.

A report released Wednesday showed U.S. consumers paid prices for groceries, gasoline and other costs of living that were 2.4% higher in February than a year earlier.

That’s the same level as the month before and better than the 2.5% that economists expected, but it remains above the Federal Reserve’s 2% target and doesn’t include the spike in gasoline prices this month due to the war.

High inflation combined with a stagnating economy would create a worst-case scenario called “stagflation” that the Federal Reserve has no good tools to fix. Stagflation fears are rising not just because of higher oil prices but also because of weakness in hiring by U.S. employers. In other dealings early Thursday, the dollar fell to 158.84 Japanese yen from 158.95 yen. The euro fell to \$1.1553 from \$1.1566.

USTR targets China, EU, 16 nations in Section 301 cases

Trump launches new tariff probes after Supreme Court loss

WASHINGTON, March 12, (AP): The Trump administration opened a new trade investigation into manufacturing in foreign countries - an effort that comes after the Supreme Court struck down President Donald Trump’s previous use of tariffs by declaring an economic emergency.

Trump and his team have made clear that they’re seeking to replace the hundreds of billions of dollars in lost revenues after the Supreme Court’s February ruling by using different laws to establish new tariffs.

In this case, the administration is starting investigations under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, which could eventually lead to new import taxes. But U.S. Trade Representative Jamieesson Greer, in a Wednesday call with reporters, said he didn’t want to prejudice the outcome of the process.

“The policy remains the same - the tools may change depending on, you know, the vagaries of courts and other things,” said Greer, stressing that the goal was to protect American jobs.

The start of the process to fully replace Trump’s prior tariffs could invite a return of much of the drama that rattled the global economy last year. The since-overturned tariffs led to new frameworks with U.S. trade partners - and it’s unclear what impact a new set of import taxes could have on those agreements. Greer described the trade

frameworks as standing on their own and suggested they were separate from the new investigation.

This new set of tariffs could play out against the backdrop of a war in Iran and midterm elections in which Democrats are running against Trump’s Republican allies by emphasizing that the public is owed tariff refunds following the Supreme Court decision.

Greer said that the investigation would examine excess industrial capacity and government backing that could give foreign companies an unfair advantage over U.S. companies.

The entities subject to the investigation include China, the European Union, Singapore, Switzerland, Norway, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, South Korea, Vietnam, the self-governing island of Taiwan, Bangladesh, Mexico, Japan and India. The government is looking for what it deems to be persistent trade surpluses with the U.S. and policies such as subsidies and the suppression of workers’ wages, among other factors.

The administration is also rolling out a Section 301 investigation to ban the importing of goods made by forced labor.

Greer indicated that there could be additional Section 301 investigations over issues such as digital service taxes, pharmaceutical drug pricing and ocean pollution, among other possibilities. The Commerce Department has separate trade in-

vestigations under Section 232 of the 1962 Trade Expansion Act.

There are timeline pressures for the administration to complete its investigations. The administration has imposed 10% tariffs on foreign-made goods under section 122 of the 1974 Trade Act, but those expire after 150 days on July 24. Trump said he planned to raise that import tax to 15%, but he has yet to do so.

Greer said the administration is “keying off” the new investigation based on the 150-day deadline, saying that the goal is to bring “potential options” to Trump as soon as possible.

Greer said the investigations would be separate from the trade frameworks announced last year by Trump that set baseline tariff rates, which led to 15% rates charged on goods from the European Union, Japan and South Korea, among other places, that have since been overturned by the Supreme Court. Still, he suggested that the frameworks could play a factor.

“My sense is that these countries continue to want to deal, and President Trump continues to want the deal,” Greer said, adding that since tariffs are in play the commitments that the countries have made and the implementation of the frameworks would be considered as they “bump” against the demands of the Section 301 process.

\$200 bln semiconductor deal now law after 226-8 vote

South Korean lawmakers pass law to manage Seoul’s pledge of \$350 billion in US investments

SEOUL, March 12, (AP): South Korean lawmakers on Thursday passed a law to implement a pledge of \$350 billion in U.S. investments Seoul made last year to avoid the Trump administration’s highest tariffs.

Government officials had urged lawmakers to quickly pass the contested bill, submitted in November, as uncertainty mounts for the country’s trade-dependent economy, already rattled by President Donald Trump’s protectionist swing and now fearing the fallout from his war on Iran.

The bill’s passage came hours after the Trump administration increased pressure on trade partners by opening a new investigation into manufacturing in foreign countries, including China and U.S. allies South Korea and Japan, which could result in new import taxes if U.S. officials see their practices as unfair.

Trump and his team have made clear they’re seeking to use new tariffs to recoup lost revenue after the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated his sweeping tariffs issued with emergency powers.

China expressed opposition to the move and called for negotiations to resolve any differences. “China opposes any form of unilateral tariff measures,” Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said in Beijing. “Tariff wars and trade wars serve no one’s interests.”

The South Korean law, which passed 226 to 8, calls for establishing a public corporation to manage the promised U.S. investments, including reviewing and selecting projects based on input from South Korean and U.S. trade authorities.

Some lawmakers spoke against the bill ahead of the vote, expressing frustration over Trump’s new trade investigations and the potential impact of the war in the Middle East, which has exposed the vulnerability of South Korea’s export-dependent economy and reliance on imported fuel.

“We cannot be the money machine Trump wants us to be,” said Son Sol, a member of the minor op-



The National Assembly passes a law to implement hundreds of billions of dollars in U.S. investments at the National Assembly in Seoul, South Korea, Thursday, March 12 2026. (AP)

position Progressive Party. She said the bill does not give the legislature sufficient power to review and reject investments that could go against South Korean business or public interests.

Following months of tense negotiations, South Korea finalized an agreement with the United States in November to invest \$200 billion in U.S. semiconductor and other high-tech industries and another \$150 billion in shipbuilding in exchange for Washington lowering reciprocal tariffs on Seoul from 25% to 15%.

The agreement, which followed a breakthrough

at an October summit between Trump and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung, also caps South Korean investments at \$20 billion a year to protect the country’s foreign currency reserves.

Lee’s liberal Democratic Party introduced the legislation in November but faced resistance from opposition lawmakers worried about the economic impact. The legislative holdup frustrated Trump, who in January threatened to raise tariffs on South Korean autos, pharmaceuticals and other goods back to 25%, increasing pressure on the opposition to move the bill forward.

Labor market stuck in ‘low-hire, low-fire’ stagnation

US applications for unemployment benefits inch down to 213K as layoffs remain stable

WASHINGTON, March 12, (AP): U.S. applications for unemployment benefits inched down modestly last week as layoffs remain at historically healthy levels despite a weakening job market.

The number of Americans filing for jobless aid for the week ending March 7 fell by 1,000 to 213,000 the previous week, the Labor Department reported Thursday. Analysts surveyed by the data firm FactSet forecast 215,000 new benefit applications.

Filings for unemployment benefits are viewed as a proxy for U.S. layoffs and are close to a real-time indicator of the health of the job market.

While weekly layoffs have remained in a historically low range mostly between 200,000 and 250,000 for the past few years, a number of high-profile companies have announced job cuts recently, including Morgan Stanley, Block, UPS and Amazon in recent weeks.

Last week, the Labor Department reported that U.S. employers unexpectedly cut 92,000 jobs in February, a sign that the labor market remains under strain. Economists had expected

60,000 new jobs in February.

Revisions also slashed 69,000 jobs from December and January payrolls, nudging the unemployment rate up to 4.4%.

The Labor Department also recently reported that job openings fell in December to the lowest level in more than five years. Its January report comes next week.

For now, the U.S. job market appears stuck in what economists call a “low-hire, low-fire” state that has kept the unemployment rate historically low, but has left those out of work struggling to find a new job.

Data over the past year has broadly revealed a labor market in which hiring has clearly slowed, hobbled by uncertainty stoked by President Donald Trump’s tariffs and the lingering effects of the high interest rates the Federal Reserve engineered in 2022 and 2023 to tamp down a spike of pandemic-induced inflation.

Adding to the uncertainty is the war in Iran, which has sent oil prices 25% higher in less than two weeks.

This comes at a time when inflation was al-

ready relatively high in the U.S. A report released Wednesday showed that U.S. consumers paid prices for groceries, gasoline and other costs of living that were 2.4% higher in February than a year earlier.

That inflation rate was the same as the prior month’s and better than the 2.5% that economists expected, but it remains above the 2% target the Federal Reserve has set for the economy. It also doesn’t include the spike in gasoline prices that’s happened this month because of the war.

The Fed’s preferred inflation gauge, personal consumption expenditures or PCE, comes out Friday, just days before the Fed meets to decide on interest rates.

The Labor Department’s report Thursday showed that the four-week moving average of jobless claims, which tempers some of the week-to-week volatility, dropped by 4,000 to 212,000.

The total number of Americans filing for unemployment benefits for the previous week ending Feb. 28 declined by 21,000 to 1.85 million, the government said.

AI boom strains power grid

The Virginia Senate terminates \$1.6 bln data center tax break

RICHMOND, March 12, (AP): Nearly two decades ago, Virginia gave tech companies a tax break on equipment and software, and they began to build. The state became a data center hub, and they kept building. Residents bemoaned the noise while they built some more. Artificial intelligence boomed, and the power grid strained - still, more building.

Now, amid a growing national pushback on data centers, Virginia senators have voted to end a projected \$1.6 billion annual tax break, requiring the industry to resume paying a minimum 5.3% sales tax. The proposal has left some opponents warning that it would bring construction of data centers in Virginia to a screeching halt.

“We have now left the ‘NIMBY’ phase: Not In My Backyard,” Republican state Sen. Mark Obenshain said last month. “And we’ve entered the ‘banana’ phase: Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything.”

Over the past 18 years, Virginia became the world’s largest data hub. The debate taking place there comes as dozens of communities nationwide are fighting data centers in local zoning meetings, politicians are growing anxious about AI’s effect on household electricity bills and lawmakers are considering reducing tax breaks - or scrapping them altogether.

The state tax department says the industry has invested more than \$80 billion in Virginia and created thousands of jobs over the past two years. Obenshain is not the only one concerned about taxing it. The Data Center Coalition, which represents tech giants, said the tax would “effectively halt investment” from the industry. Just this month, Amazon Data Services bought land from George Washington University in northern Virginia for a data center, officials said.

It’s far from guaranteed that the state Senate’s proposal will pass the House. But it’s already causing infighting among Democrats, fueled by a looming budget deadline.

Gov. Abigail Spanberger’s office said she was wary of “going back on Virginia’s commitments to businesses that have invested in the Commonwealth.”

Democratic Sen. L. Louise Lucas, who chairs the finance committee and supports the tax proposal, retorted on X: “Gov. Spanberger thinks our chicken isn’t cooked - then what is the Senate supposed to pluck out of our budget? Raises for teachers, health insurance assistance, transit support, a tax rebate, or childcare slots?”

Lucas’ proposal reflects growing pushback nationwide as the aisles of server racks in data centers have gotten increasingly large and seemingly endless, with campuses of server warehouses, electrical substations and backup diesel generators dwarfing the footprints of factories and stadiums. Some need

Beijing prioritizes ‘new quality productive forces’

China’s 15th plan targets AI, brain interfaces, 6G

BEIJING, March 12, (Xinhua): With embodied artificial intelligence (AI), brain-computer interfaces and 6G mobile communications featuring prominently in documents released during the “two sessions,” innovation is set to drive China’s high-quality development in the new stage.

Experts around the world highlighted that, driven by quality improvement, technological upgrading and structural optimization, the country’s 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) is expected to continue boosting domestic development and channel its innovations into global cooperation.

INNOVATION FOR PEOPLE’S WELL-BEING

The outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) for national economic and social development signals a clear shift toward higher-quality, innovation-led growth, while placing the improvement of people’s social well-being at the forefront, said Gerald Mbanda, a Rwandan publisher and researcher.

“It is an important indicator that the government leadership puts first the interest of the people,” he said.

China’s 15th Five-Year Plan highlighted “new quality productive forces,” with a focus on scientific advancement, industrial upgrading, and long-term development, said Richard A. Black, a senior scholar with the Schiller Institute.

Black said the plan reflects a view that long-term prosperity depends on a commitment to “the real economy” -- manufacturing, infrastructure and energy systems.

Marcela Vera, an economist at Chile’s University of Santiago, said that while innovation in the West tends to be confined to big firms using tech barriers to protect profits, it is widely applied to advance social development and enhance people’s well-being in China.

Citing his experience in China, Dennis Munene Mwaniki, executive director of the China-Africa Center at the Africa Policy Institute in Kenya, said that China has become a leading nation in AI development and integration.

He recalled visiting a hotel where a robot served him, noting that such machines can also handle jobs far too risky for humans, like welding.

He added that China has developed AI capable of detecting some health conditions early, improving the healthcare system and saving lives. It has also been “instrumental” in agriculture, he said, helping cultivate crops resistant to harsh conditions, delivering people from hunger and starvation.

INNOVATION FOR SHARING

Experts pointed out that the policy priorities unveiled at the “two sessions” further cemented China’s role as a global innovation hub while creating major opportunities for global cooperation.

Mwaniki said that China’s AI has been effectively applied through international cooperation and partnerships, noting that the country has worked with African countries to breed climate-resilient crops in regions where people are dying from hunger.

Ismael Buchanan, a senior lecturer at the College of Arts and Social Sciences of the University of Rwanda, expressed a similar view.

“I believe African countries could greatly benefit from learning from Five-Year Plans launched by the Chinese government,” he said, suggesting that they strengthen trade and partnerships with China, a path many are already actively pursuing.

European countries are also closely following the “two sessions,” looking forward to sealing some deals.

“For the outside world, especially for Europe, it is important to see where the new space for China’s further growth lies,” said Marina Ragus, deputy speaker of the National Assembly of Serbia.

Ragus said that China’s “sustained investment in innovation, advanced production lines and automation” has driven structural transformation, generated employment and improved living standards.

Clemens Schuette, chairman of the board of the German-Chinese Business Association, said China has evolved from “a low-cost manufacturing base into a major market and an important innovation hub,” citing BMW, Volkswagen, Siemens and BASF as examples of companies expanding local research and engineering capacities in China.

German firms are increasingly recognizing China’s role as a global innovation leader, he noted. “Many companies are expanding cooperation with Chinese partners not only to remain competitive in China but also to benefit globally,” he said.

Satyajit Bose, professor of Practice at Columbia University, praised China’s role in expanding the global reach of clean energy. The 15th Five-Year Plan’s emphasis on “high-quality development” demonstrates a commitment to ensuring that growth must incorporate environmental sustainability and structural upgrading, Bose said.

Describing renewable energy as a “promising part of Chinese development,” he noted that falling solar production costs have made clean power more accessible to lower-income countries and created opportunities for longer-term cooperation.

The Conversation

Instagram algorithms homogenize local coffee culture

Indie coffee shops defy chains – So why do they look alike?

The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts.

By Conrad Kickert
University at Buffalo

Like many young, urban professionals, we run on coffee. We especially enjoy frequenting independently owned cafes that pride themselves on ethically sourced beverages, strong local ties and a hip aesthetic.

They’re the kinds of places that sneer at the homogenization and predictability of Tim Hortons, Second Cup, Dunkin and Starbucks.

But as public space and consumer culture researchers, we began noticing a pattern: While the invention of new, nondairy milks to mix into lattes continues to amaze us, many U.S. coffee shops seemed to share a similar aesthetic.

What was up with all the exposed brick? Why did so many of the baristas look cooler than us, but also so similar to one another? And why did most menus appear on a chalkboard, as if we were still in kindergarten?

Weren’t we supposed to be in one-of-a-kind, authentic settings that make us feel unique and, let’s admit it, slightly elevated?

As it turns out, the visual patterns we noticed had never been backed up by research. So after a quick cortado, we set out to test our hunch that local coffee shops had adopted a uniform aesthetic.

We asked over 100 American and Canadian young professionals living in cities to share an interior image of their favorite independent coffee shop, describe why they liked the shop’s appearance, and document aspects of its interior design.

They could select these interior design features from a list of 23 common elements that we had identified in a pilot study - brick walls, marble counters, indoor plants, local art, vintage furniture and even the look of the baristas. Respondents could also write down other details they noticed.

The elements that they selected and wrote down showed a fascinating overlap.

Baristas led the pack: Two-thirds of the participants’ favorite local coffee shops had staff with tattoos or piercings. Over half had baristas with beards. Well over half of the respondents noted that their favorite shop had chalkboards, reclaimed wood features, local art, milk foam

designs on beverages, local event posters and exposed brick. A large share of the shops had vintage furniture, community message boards and free books available to patrons to read. One-third of the images had indoor plants, trees or greenery.

Next up, we challenged the participants to identify the city where these coffee shops were located.

Using the images provided by the respondents from the initial survey, we asked 158 new and prior participants if they could match the location of the shops depicted in six photographs to Cincinnati, St. Louis or Toronto - cities chosen for their different architectural and aesthetic qualities.

Not a single participant was able to correctly identify the correct city for all the photos.

We gave respondents another chance by showing two pictures of coffee shops, one at a time. This time, the two shops were located in Chicago and San Francisco - again, places that pride themselves on their unique and recognizable design culture. They were now given the choice of these key cities to select from, as well as three wrong cities. Only 6% successfully located both coffee shops, and nearly 20% immediately gave up.

As one participant conceded: “Honestly, these aesthetics are very transferable now ... they were random guesses and they could have been in any of the cities mentioned.”

In other words, independent coffee shops in North America have become so similar aesthetically that their location cannot be picked from a lineup. The purportedly unique and local feel of coffee shops has instead been homogenized into a singular, palatable, North American aesthetic.

Ironically, these shops have narrowed their aesthetics like a de facto brand franchise - exactly like the chain stores that their patrons ostensibly reject.

So why is this happening?

New Yorker cultural critic Kyle Chayka has attributed aesthetic homogenization to popular social media platforms like Instagram. He calls it the “tyranny of the algorithm”: Social media algorithms promote the visuals that users are most likely to engage with.

This, in turn, causes the same types of visuals to be liked and shared, since users encounter them more often.

Because the algorithm sees they’re popular, it continues to promote them, in a self-reinforcing cycle. In turn, coffee shop owners also see these online images and try to replicate them in their own establish-

ments.

Artificial intelligence will likely accelerate the digital homogenization of visual culture, since AI models are trained on massive datasets that feature widely circulated images.

“Whether it’s popular fashion, architecture or interior design, idiosyncrasies are collapsing into a generic, hegemonic aesthetic - what scholars Roland Meyer and Jacob Birken call “platform realism.”

Finance plays a role as well. With the average cost of starting a new coffee shop between US\$80,000 and \$300,000, and with only a small share of coffee shops expected to stay open beyond five years, banks are keen to reduce their risk.

Many of them will therefore ask aspiring coffee shop owners to opt for cheaper interior design choices that appeal to the broadest customer base.

But patrons of hip coffee shops may also be to blame.

Decades before the rise of social media, AI and financial risk management, scholars such as Sharon Zukin revealed how young urban professionals paradoxically embrace the homogenization of their environment in their quest for authenticity.

Those exposed brick walls? Zukin already described how Manhattan real estate brokers had marketed them to gentrifying SoHo yuppies in the early 1980s.

Like their predecessors, today’s hipsters, creative professionals and knowledge workers are essentially cultural and aesthetic consumers. Many of them crave visuals - from fashion to architecture - that are different enough to feel cool and authentic, yet safe enough to match their lifestyle and their social status.

They want a tasty latte as much as a palatable interior to drink it in.

Businesses and developers are eager to appeal to these upwardly mobile consumers. At the same time, they want to reach the biggest number of customers. So they tend to create repeatable, homogenized environments in what Zukin describes as a “symbolic economy.”

In coffee shops, patrons want more than a good espresso. They want to immerse themselves in a “scene” that matches their lifestyle and aspirations. And the exposed brick and the vintage furniture do just that - even if they’ve been copy-and-pasted in cities, small and large, across the nation.

As we chase authenticity, we may just be finding comfort in carefully curated conformity. (AP)

Oscars to spotlight two unique stories and craft

Producers tease 'KPop Demon Hunters,' 'Sinners' celebrations

LOS ANGELES, March 12, (AP): The "KPop Demon Hunters" hit "Golden" has been performed quite a few times over the past few months. Singers EJAE, Audrey Nuna and Rei Ami have made stops at Jimmy Kimmel and Jimmy Fallon's shows, the Brit Awards and even the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade. But when they take the stage at the Oscars on Sunday, it won't just be their, well, usual song and dance.

The producers behind the 98th Academy Awards have set out to celebrate not just the song, but the cultural phenomenon of the film itself. That logic is why the only other nominated song that will get a moment on the broadcast is "I Lied to You," from "Sinners," a blockbuster hit and the most-nominated film of all time.

"We have two really unique stories that are going to be celebrated on the stage," said Oscars executive producer and showrunner Raj Kapoor. "They're bigger than just the songs. They're re-

ally about filmmaking and craft."

Miles Caton and Raphael Saadiq will be on hand for the "Sinners" moment, which aims to explore the role music plays in the film with the help of Misty Copeland, blues musicians Eric Gales, Buddy Guy and Christone "Kingfish" Ingram, actors Jayme Lawson and Li Jun Li as well as Brittany Howard, Bobby Rush, Shaboozey and Alice Smith. Kapoor said filmmaker Ryan Coogler has also been involved in putting it together.

Kapoor and executive producer Katy Mullan, who won Emmys for their work on the 96th Oscars, have been toiling for months putting together Sunday's show, which will see the return of host Conan O'Brien.

"His humor, his tone, his reverence to the art form? He really cares about making this a true celebration," Mullan said. "We've been in tears of laughter ... There are so many great moments that he's going to bring to the show."

One of the themes of the show this year is the human touch, Kapoor said, from the set design to the packages.

"It's really the story of how we feel this connection and how this heartbeat of cinema is unmistakably human," Kapoor said. "Hopefully the entire show and how Conan makes you feel and all of it is like it's all touched by human hands and human creativity."

The show is bringing back its "fab five" treatment, first used to spotlight the acting nominees in 2024, then costume and cinematography in 2025. This year, it'll be for the new casting award.

"Because it's a new award, we are going to celebrate that with a moment where we not only have incredible stars talking about the nominees, but also giving us context and some insight into what casting directors do," Mullan said. "We're going to see a lot of stars that people love on that stage talking about the fabulous nominees this year."



This image released by Netflix shows characters Zoey, (from left), Rumi and Mira in a scene from 'KPop Demon Hunters.' (AP)

The people who produce the Oscars know firsthand how live broadcasts can lead to unexpected moments, good and bad. Just a few weeks ago, the global discourse turned to the British Academy Film Awards, not because of any big speeches or performances but because of a racial slur shouted by a Tourette syndrome campaigner while "Sinners" stars Michael B. Jordan

and Delroy Lindo were presenting an award.

While the Oscars producers didn't go into specific details about how they would have handled that situation, after incidents from the slap to the best picture envelope mistake, they stressed that they feel prepared to address any manner of issues on the show.

"We have really strong protocols in

place to address issues on our show, any kind of issues," Mullan said. "We do a lot planning to make sure that those are in place. We work with the network and with the academy to make sure that we are as prepped as we can be to go into the show and have those protocols and that everybody understands them."

As always, the producers want to keep an element of surprise. There have been lots of starry presenters announced, including Gwyneth Paltrow, Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, Javier Bardem, Maya Rudolph, Anne Hathaway, Will Arnett and Priyanka Chopra Jonas, but they hope to keep even more under wraps until the show.

"If you saw the list of people that are going to be on the stage, it is literally jaw-dropping. And there's people that have not been on the stage in an extremely long time," Kapoor said. "I think our show is going to constantly, throughout the entire evening, have those moments that absolutely surprise and delight."

Film

Starry presenters

Oscars promise big night of stars, music

LOS ANGELES, March 12, (AP): It'll be big year for Pullmans at the Oscars. The show's producers said Wednesday that **Bill Pullman** and his son Lew-is Pullman have joined the starry roster of presenters for Sunday's live broadcast of the 98th annual Academy Awards.

Also included in this batch are nominees Rose Byrne, Wagner Moura and Delroy Lindo, former Oscars host Jimmy Kimmel, as well as Pedro Pascal, Channing Tatum and Sigourney Weaver.

Oscars producers told The Associated Press that audiences should expect even more stars than have been announced, though. Showrunner and executive producer Raj Kapoor said the list is "jaw-dropping" and there will be plenty of surprises throughout the evening, including reunions and some appearances by people who haven't been on the stage in a long time.

Here's everything else you need to know.

The Academy Awards will be held on Sunday, March 15, at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles. The show, to be broadcast live by ABC, is scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. Eastern/4 p.m. Pacific.

After successfully presiding over the 97th Oscars, Conan O'Brien is hosting for the second year straight. His return to the Oscars stage was announced almost a year ago. In a statement last March, he said, "The only reason I'm hosting the Oscars next year is that I want to hear Adrien Brody finish his speech."

Like last year, the Oscars will be streamed live on Hulu. You can also watch via Hulu Live TV, YouTube TV, AT&T TV and FuboTV. With authentication from your provider, you can watch on ABC.com and the ABC app.

This year's nominees for best actress are Jessie Buckley for "Hamnet," Rose Byrne for "If I Had Legs I'd Kick You," Renate Reinsve for "Sentimental Value," Emma Stone for "Bugonia" and Kate Hudson for "Song Sung Blue."

The best actor nominees are Timothée Chalamet for "Marty Supreme," Leonardo DiCaprio for "One Battle After Another," Ethan Hawke for "Blue Moon," Michael B. Jordan for "Sinners" and Wagner Moura for "The Secret Agent."

In the supporting actor categories, the nominees are Jacob Elordi for "Frankenstein," Sean Penn and Benicio Del Toro for "One Battle After Another," Stellan Skarsgård for "Sentimental Value" and Delroy Lindo for "Sinners."

The supporting actress nominees are Elle Fanning and Inga Lissdotter Lilleaas for "Sentimental Value," Amy Madigan for "Weapons," Wunmi Mosaku for "Sinners" and Teyana Taylor for "One Battle After Another."

For months, "One Battle After Another" has been the clear front-runner for best picture and best director but, in the past week, it's looking like it might be in for a closer race in a showdown with "Sinners." "Sinners" is this year's leading nominee, breaking the record for most nominations by a single film with 16. Associated Press Film Writers Jake Coyle and Lindsey Bahr predict that "One Battle After Another" will still take best picture and best director. They also think Buckley will win best actress, Jordan will get best actor and Taylor supporting actress, but they're split on supporting actor: Coyle thinks it will go to Penn; Bahr is staking her bet on Lindo.

The show will feature live performances of best song nominees "Golden," from "KPop Demon Hunters," and "I Lied to You," from "Sinners."

Miles Caton and Raphael Saadiq will be on hand for the "Sinners" moment, which aims to explore the role music plays in the film with the help of ballet dancer Misty Copeland, blues musicians Eric Gales, Buddy Guy and Christone "Kingfish" Ingram, actors Jayme Lawson and Li Jun Li as well as Brittany Howard, Bobby Rush, Shaboozey and Alice Smith.

Film



This image released by Universal Pictures shows Maika Monroe, (left), and Tyriq Withers in a scene from 'Reminders of Him.' (AP)

Monroe stretches her dramatic range in new film

'Reminders of Him' mixes grief and romance

LOS ANGELES, March 12, (AP): The hunky, sweet hero in the new romantic drama "Reminders of Him" at one point turns to the movie's heroine and tells her: "I'm starting to wonder if you're the saddest girl I've never met." It's hard to argue.

First, she's a penniless former prison inmate who has returned to her small town of Laramie, Wisconsin, where she's hooking up with her former boyfriend's best friend. Second, that boyfriend is dead and she's been blamed, hence the prison sentence. Plus, she's hoping to connect with her estranged daughter, born of tragedy.

There's a lot going on with Kenna Rowan, who can't afford a phone or a car and so walks everywhere around the town, lives in a run-down motel and can't initially get a job because she's a felon. She hates listening to the radio because all the songs are sad. Pot calling the kettle, right?

"Reminders of Him" is very faithful to Colleen Hoover's 2022 novel of the same name, right down to slices of the same dialogue and even the Mountain Dew T-shirt, jean shorts and boots our heroine is first introduced in. She finally gets a job as a grocery bagger and starts building a life, biding her time until she figures out how to reconnect with her daughter.

Maika Monroe - a one-time scream queen - stretches out her dramatic muscles to play Kenna and nails the assignment, a woman with a hard shell who is looking for a little grace, a tricky role that's both flirty and maternal.

After seven years in prison, Kenna walks into a fraught situation. Her 5-year-old daughter - yeah, the math is a bit hazy here - is being raised by her dead boyfriend's parents, with an assist from his best friend, Ledger, played with real soul by Tyriq Withers. Kenna's mere presence threatens to blow up this cozy arrangement.

What's remarkable about "Reminders of Him" is that there are no villains. The grandparents - played by Lauren Graham and Bradley Whitford, both perfect - are naturally aghast at the notion that the woman who was driving the car when their son died might swoop in and take their grandchild. But any parent can sympathize with Kenna, who gave birth in handcuffs and never got to even hold her baby.

Ledger is caught in the middle, attracted to this sad Kenna but also a fierce defender and surrogate father of her daughter, Diem. Falling in love with the lady accused of killing your best friend may not be the wisest thing to do, but there you go.

The movie veers dangerously close to overwrought melodrama - like a line about Kenna "heading back to the place it all went wrong hoping to make something right" - and it flirts with twee: Not many grocery store baggers spend their off-time dancing at dusk with sparklers.

But that's what happens when you add romance to a redemption story and the actors pull it off, with perhaps the best performance by little Zoe Kosovic, who plays Diem

with freshness, adorableness and directness. Also kudos to actor Monika Myers, who plays a motel neighbor with the timing and dry wit of Bob Newhart.

There are men here, of course, but this is a very female-driven work, from the executive producers and producers to the screenplay writers - Hoover and Lauren Levine - to the director, Vanessa Caswill, who shows a very assured hand.

Everywhere on screen, women stand up for women. A female assistant manager at the grocery store reaches out to offer Kenna employment when her male boss won't, a female motel owner offers a discount and it is the grandmother who provides a breakthrough to this familial standoff.

It is a thoughtful production where details matter. At one point we learn the dead boyfriend's favorite color is yellow and later we hear not one but two versions of Coldplay's "Yellow." There may be a few too many shots of an orange Ford F-150 and heavy use of a strummy acoustic guitar whenever a tender moment is coming, but "Reminders of Him" is a well-crafted, well-acted sad-happy Hoover adaptation.

"Reminders of Him," a Universal Pictures release that opens in theaters Friday, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for sexual content, strong language, drug content, some violent content and brief partial nudity. Running time: 114 minutes. Three stars out of four.

Variety

LAS VEGAS: The sentencing for Nathan Chasing Horse following his conviction for sexual assault of Indigenous women and girls has been delayed by a week.

The sentencing was scheduled to take place Wednesday, but Judge Jessica Peterson agreed to move the hearing to March 18. It will bring to a close a case that sent shock waves through Indian Country.

The sentencing of the "Dances With Wolves" actor comes about a month after a Nevada jury convicted him on 13 of the 21 charges he faced. Most related to his conduct with a victim who was 14 when he began assaulting her. Chasing Horse was acquitted of some sexual assault charges.

He faces a minimum of 25 years in prison.

Following the trial, Chasing Horse's attorney Craig Mueller filed a motion for a new trial, arguing a witness was not qualified to talk about grooming and that the statute of limitations had expired. That motion was denied.

The sentencing wraps a yearslong effort to prosecute the former actor after he was first arrested and indicted in 2023.

That initial arrest reverberated around Indian Country, with law enforcement in other states and Canada following up

with more criminal charges.

The British Columbia Prosecution Service said Chasing Horse was charged with sexual assault in February 2023, though the date of the alleged offense took place in September 2018 near Keremeos, a village about four hours east of Vancouver. In November 2023, the case paused due to Chasing Horse's charges in the United States, but resumed the following year.

After all of Chasing Horse's appeals have been exhausted, British Columbia prosecutors will assess next steps, Damien Darby, communications counsel for the British Columbia Prosecution Service, said in an email Tuesday.

The Tsut'ina Nation Police Service in Alberta said in a statement following Chasing Horse's conviction that a warrant remains outstanding against him and said that it is in contact with the Alberta Crown Prosecutors Office regarding the warrant.

Nevada prosecutors said Chasing Horse used his reputation as a Lakota medicine man to prey on Indigenous women and girls.

Deputy District Attorney Bianca Pucci told the jury that for almost 20 years, Chasing Horse "spun a web of abuse" that ensnared many women.

Jurors heard from three women who said Chasing Horse

sexually assaulted them. The jury returned guilty verdicts on some charges related to all three. (AP)

□ □ □

NEW YORK: Ken Follett's next historical epic is a story of forbidden romance set during a time of official propriety, the Victorian age.

Follett's "The Deep and Secret Things" will be published Sept. 21, 2027, Hachette Book Group and Hachette UK announced Wednesday. His novel follows the life of a noblewoman from South Wales, Helena Bowen, and her attraction to a charming, but disreputable acquaintance, Johnnie.

"I love stories set in the Victorian era because of the shocking contrasts," Follett said in a statement. "Britain was richer than any country had ever been, but the London slums were places of grim poverty. Moral rules were strict, but rich men had mistresses and destitute women turned, in desperation, to prostitution. Dresses were gorgeous and parties were lavish, but the children of the poor started work at the age of seven."

The 76-year-old Follett is one of the world's most popular authors, with sales nearing 200 million copies, according to his publishers. His novels, which have spanned from the Dark Ages to modern times, include "The Pillars of the Earth," "Eye of the Needle" and "World Without End." (AP)



American director and screenwriter Wes Anderson reacts as he receives the 'Chaplin Trophy' at the 'Les Rencontres 7e Art' film festival, in Lausanne, Switzerland, Tuesday, March 10. (AP)



Left: Damage caused by US and Israeli strikes is seen on the facade of the Qajar-era Golestan Palace in Tehran, Iran, March 3. Center & right: Damage caused by US and Israeli strikes on Iran is seen at the Qajar-era Golestan Palace in Tehran, Iran, March 3. (AP)

Iran seeks UNESCO protection for historic landmarks

Damage to historical sites in Iran raises alarm over war’s toll

UNITED NATIONS, March 12, (AP): US and Israeli strikes on Iran have damaged at least four cultural and historical sites, including palaces and an ancient mosque, raising alarms about the impact of the widening war on protected landmarks that are important to Iranian identity and world history.

The speed and extent of the damage have so concerned Iran and Lebanon that they sent a request to the United Nations’ cultural agency, UNESCO, this week to add more sites to its enhanced protection list.

UNESCO confirmed that it has verified damage to the lavish Qajar-era Golestan Palace in Tehran as well as the 17th century Chehel Sotoun palace and the Masjed-e Jâme, the country’s oldest Friday mosque, both in Isfahan. There also was verified damage at buildings close to the Khorramabad Valley, which includes five prehistoric caves and one rock shelter providing evidence of human occupation dating to 63,000 B.C.

At Golestan Palace, shattered glass from the mirrored

ceilings blanketed the floors alongside broken archways, blown-out windows and damaged molding scattered below its glass-mosaic walls, according to Associated Press video taken March 3.

UNESCO said it provided all parties to the conflict with the geographical coordinates of the heritage sites ahead of time, “to take all feasible precautions to avoid damage.”

The impact to cultural sites has not been isolated to Iran but has been felt across the Middle East and beyond, with UNESCO tracking damage to the White City in Israel, Tyre in Lebanon and elsewhere.

Collateral damage to such places has been part of the fabric of war for decades, including in conflicts between Russia and Ukraine as well as Israel and Hamas, in which dozens of sites have been damaged or destroyed.

“What is happening is clear to all: In these increasingly modern conflicts, it’s civilians who pay the price, it’s civilian infrastructure that pays the price, and we’ve all seen the destruction of priceless historical heritage,” U.N.

spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said this week.

Human rights advocates are echoing that sentiment, warning that the Iran war not only has killed more than 1,000 people but upended the institutions and historical places that communities rely on.

“It causes harm to civilians because it damages or destroys a piece of their history that can be significant both to the world and also to a specific region or community,” said Bonnie Docherty, senior researcher in the arms division at Human Rights Watch.

“It undermines the sort of shared identity of a local community, which can often be important for bringing people together.”

Arash Azizi, who grew up in Iran before moving to the U.S. as an adult, said that because his family couldn’t afford to travel abroad when he was a child, they visited historical sites across the country. This, he says, is how he learned about his cultural identity and history.

“At times where school kids are killed, when human life

is at stake, when the stakes are very high, people might think, ‘What are a couple of broken tiles or broken glasses?’” the 38-year-old New York resident said.

“I think this is the wrong attitude,” he added. “We need a cultural context. We need to know who we are, and where we come from, and what does it all mean?”

For Shabnam Emdadi, a 35-year-old Iranian American also in New York, the damage to the Safavid-era Chehel Sotoun Palace in Isfahan is deeply personal. She traveled there with her dad a few years before he died.

“Those Iran trips with him were my most fond memories of him at his happiest, where he felt most at home and alive, and I’ll never forget them,” Emdadi said. “Which is why every day when I see the damage of these sites that are the core of my memories, I feel like I am also losing a piece of him.” It was unclear if it was US or Israeli strikes that caused the damage. The Pentagon did not provide comment. The Israeli Defense Forces said it was “unfamiliar” with claims of damage to UNESCO sites.

Music



Shakira performs during the Global Citizen Festival in New York on Sept. 27, 2025. (AP)

Queen of Latin music reflects on career milestones

Shakira says she feels like she’s just starting

NEW YORK, March 12, (AP): Shakira is on her way to drop her son off at flag football practice. It’s an ordinary experience for a mother who, in the not-so-recent past, has been at the center of some pretty extraordinary circumstances.

The boundary-breaking Colombian performer has spent the last year on her first global tour since 2018, where she has made history: Nearly 20 years after her first concert in Mexico City’s Zócalo, the capital’s main square, Shakira returned earlier this month to break the plaza’s attendance record with about 400,000 fans showing up to see her.

It’s impressive for any artist and one that certainly backs up her reputation as the Queen of Latin Music. Across her three-decade-plus career, Shakira has set records and challenged genre lines: from 1991, when she signed a deal with Sony Music Colombia at just 13 years old and released her debut album “Magia” - to breakthrough albums like 1998’s “Dónde Están los Ladrones?” and 2001’s “Laundry Service” - all the way to her most recent, 2024’s “Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran.”

But this year is different.

“I’m being able to make so many of my dreams, as an artist, come true on this tour,” she told The Associated Press over the phone on Tuesday. “It’s everything I ever dreamt about.”

That’s not all: In February, it was announced that she is a 2026 nominee for induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame - a logical selection for an artist lauded for her ability to bridge Latin music with rock and pop.

If she were to be inducted, she would join a small class of Latinos who have done so. She would become the first artist from Colombia, as well as the first Latina born and raised in Latin America, to enter the Rock Hall.

In an interview with the AP, Shakira discusses her history-making Mexico City show, her Rock & Roll Hall of Fame nomination, her next big goal and more.

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: Your Zócalo concert was massive. What was going through your mind?

Shakira: That’s such a unique moment in time. After playing 13 stadium concerts in Mexico City, I never thought I was gonna have so many people gathering at Zócalo to watch my show one more time. It was just absolutely incredible. And one of those experiences that are unforgettable and that I wish my parents could have seen. That was just really, really, truly magical.

The love and friendship story that I have with Mexico is just uncanny, you know? Nothing compares to it, and it’s given me so much. My Mexican fans have given me so much of love and support since the beginning of my career. It was quite incredible also to be able to perform “Dónde Estás Corazón,” which was (my) first song that ever played on Mexican radio, like outside my country, you know? And so that was like a full circle moment.

AP: You’re also headed to the Pyramids of Giza for the first time in nearly 20 years.

Shakira: It was just one of the most unforgettable performances of my life, and I just wanted it to happen again with this show, with this tour, which to me is the tour of my life. ... I actually feel like I’m just starting my career. It’s a weird feeling because it’s been 30 years, but I feel at the threshold of a new beginning and that is all because my audience has been so emotive and so loyal as well. I’ve had a blast really performing in every country, every city where we’ve been. And the next thing is going to be Copacabana (Beach in Rio de Janeiro) as well.

We’re gonna have probably two million people on the beach, so that’s gonna be pretty crazy, I’m sure.

AP: When I think of the beginning of your career, I think of your rock records. And this year, it was announced that you’re a nominee for Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction.

Shakira: I feel really humbled and excited at the same time. It’s incredible to be nominated for the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and a little bit surreal as well. You know, I’ve experimented with different genres in my career, but I started out as a rock artist and continued to make rock. My last album, “Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran,” there are rock tunes like “Tiempo Sin Verte” or “Cómo Dónde y Cuándo” and every album there are rock tunes because that’s an

intricate part of my artistic persona. And everything that I listen to is rock music. So, to be nominated, for the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, knowing that there are so many incredible icons of rock music that I adore, that inspired me, like The Rolling Stones (are in there) ... to me, it is just a privilege and really an amazing moment in my career.

I don’t know what’s going on. But this year, like, all my wishes are coming true and I think this nomination is one of those things that you probably fantasize about sometime in your career but try not to get too fixated on it. Being nominated is a huge deal for me and my fans who followed my rock career.

AP: What does it mean for your community – for Latinos, for Colombians?

Shakira: I feel very proud as a Latina. I feel like, “Oh damn, I don’t know how many Latinos are there, or Latinas, or at least Colombians.” I think it might be the first time for a Latino woman, someone born and raised in Latin America, you now, but who is loved and has been devoted to rock ‘n’ roll since I was, I don’t know, 15. Yeah.

I’ve been listening to rock music and that’s how I started my career as well. So yeah, it’s just pretty surreal, I gotta say. But I’m very happy for my community as well. I’m happy to feel that I’m representing a part of my community there.

AP: You’ve said your dreams have come true this year. What’s left on the list?

Shakira: I don’t know what’s going on! But this year, all of those dreams I had way, way back, now they’re coming true. So, I’m going to just ask for more. I’ve always thought it would be pretty crazy to sing at the Eiffel Tower or the Champs-Élysées in Paris. That would be like the ultimate concert as well. But you know, I can’t complain. Being in Copacabana this year and the (Giza) Pyramids in Egypt and in Zócalo, that fills my heart. I feel so accomplished as an artist this year, but I’m also so pumped. I really am in love with making music and performing that music, and it’s brought so much joy to my life again, after the difficulties that I’ve been through and bitter moments that I had to endure - like every human being who goes through hardship.

Technology

A guide for beginners

Film cameras are back in style in age of digital

NEW YORK, March 12, (AP): Film photography has been undergoing a renaissance, especially with younger people who love its unique look and analog vibe.

But while Gen-Zers and younger Millennials embrace film, analog cameras are not as easy to use as the digital cameras they grew up with. What does ISO mean? What is an f/stop anyway? How do I figure out the right aperture?

George Walker IV, an Associated Press photojournalist based in Nashville, helped outline the basics of film-based photography for this week’s One Tech Tip.

Walker, who joined the AP in 2023 after 30 years as a photographer at The Tennessean newspaper, said shooting on film is a good way to learn the basics of photography because it “forces me to be patient and concentrate to make the pictures that matter.”

“You have a finite number of frames on a roll of 35 mm film, usually 24 or 36. And you should make those pictures count.”

Before the advent of digital cameras in the early 2000s, photography relied on physical film instead of electronic files stored on memory chips.

Photographic film is a light-sensitive cellulose material used for making images, by exposing the silver-halide coating through the camera lens to create a latent image on the film that’s then used for making photographic prints.

This results in pictures with a distinctive grainy or unfiltered feel that attracts analog fans turned off by digital photos that seem too perfect. Enthusiasts are also drawn to film as an antidote to digital fatigue and the instant gratification of their smartphones. It’s part of a broader revival of old-school hobbies and content that includes vinyl records, knitting and writing letters.

There are multiple formats but the type used in most consumer cameras is 35 mm, which comes in little canisters. Buy it at a photo shop or online. Some drugstores also sell film but the selection is often limited.

When buying film, pay attention to the ISO rating, also known as the film speed. The higher the number, the more sensitive the film is to light.

For making photographs in a low-light situation, like a basketball gym or a night football game, photographers might use a film rated at ISO 1600 or higher. To capture a scene in full sun, ISO 400 or less is best.

Beginners should consider black and white film, which is more forgiving than color for exposures and forces you to focus on a shot’s composition and lighting.

Nowadays, new film cameras are limited to a handful of point-and-shoot, niche or high-end models.

However, there are plenty of secondhand vintage models for sale on eBay and at camera shops. Or try asking around to see if anyone you know has an old camera sitting forgotten in a drawer.

Look for a model from one of the big five camera makers that dominated the pre-digital photo era: Canon, Nikon, Pentax, Olympus and Minolta.

Point and shoot cameras are small, cheap, and easy to carry around and use. They typically don’t have any controls, except for a button to turn the flash on.

Single-lens reflex, or SLR, cameras, let you go fully manual. They have lots of dials and adjustments, and the ability to swap lenses, so you can make great pictures. If you do want to learn and experiment, a fully manual camera is best. But they’re also bigger and bulkier and can be intimidating for novices.

If you can’t decide, a good rule of thumb is that the best camera is always the one you have with you.

Now that you’ve got film and a camera, it’s time to put them together.

With a manual camera, open the back and feed the film leader, or tip, into a slot on the spool on the right. Use the winding lever to advance the film to make sure it’s latched on properly. Close the camera back. When you wind the film, the rewind knob on the left will turn if the film is loaded correctly.

The process is a little easier with point and shoot cameras, which usually have automatic winding. There should be a label inside indicating where to position the film leader. If not done correctly, you’ll either get an error message or the film counter won’t advance.

Now that the film is loaded, be sure to keep the camera back closed until you’re finished making exposures and the film is fully rewound into the canister, otherwise you’ll ruin the whole roll.



A journalist takes a picture with an analogue camera as film photography is making a comeback, and an AP photojournalist explains the basics for beginners in London, Wednesday, March 11. (AP)

‘Not every filter is good for everything’

Do you really need a water filter? Here’s what experts say

NEW YORK, March 12, (AP): US tap water is generally safe and high quality. But that doesn’t mean every glass tastes the same, or that every building’s plumbing delivers identical water to the faucet.

That uncertainty has fueled a booming market for water filters, from simple pitcher models to multi-thousand-dollar reverse osmosis systems. Yet experts say most American households don’t need extensive treatment. The challenge is knowing how to decide whether you need a filter.

Under the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Environmental Protection Agency sets health standards for more than 90 contaminants in public water systems, including chemicals and microbes. Utilities treat water with disinfectants like chlorine to kill harmful germs before it reaches homes. Most public utilities meet those standards and most Americans can safely drink from the tap.

“Unless you’re experiencing health impacts, you’ve got a notice from your water system or there’s a credible media story saying your water is unsafe, you shouldn’t feel the need to get a filter,” said Gregory Pierce, director of the University of California Los Angeles’ Human Right to Water Solutions



An under sink water filter operates Monday, March 9, in Cincinnati. (AP)

Lab. “You’re still welcome to because it might make your water taste a little bit better, but it shouldn’t be considered necessary to have a water filter in 90-plus percent of the United States.”

Here’s how to check your local water quality, when water testing makes sense and how to choose a filter that addresses your concerns without wasting money.

Start with your utility’s annual Consumer Confidence Report, which details detected contaminants and whether the system meets federal standards. These reports are typically available on a city or utility website. You can also contact your provider directly with questions. Water systems are generally only responsible for the water until it reaches private property, meaning water quality can vary by building.

For many, those reports may be enough reassurance. Still, some consumers want more certainty, especially in older buildings.

“You should probably test your water to identify if you have a risk that you need to treat,” said Jess Goddard, chief science officer at the environmental testing company SimpleLab.

Private wells have different maintenance and safety needs because they are not regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act and monitoring them is the responsibility of the homeowners. The EPA is among the agencies offering resources for people with private wells.

Testing kits can cost a couple hundred dollars or more, depending on what contaminants they screen.

Here’s how testing typically works: You order a kit, collect a water sample following the instructions and mail it to a certified lab. The lab analyzes it for specific contaminants, including a group of chemicals known as PFAS, microplastics, metals and disinfection byproducts, and provides a report.

If testing reveals a serious issue, Pierce recommends contacting your water utility or state environmental agency for guidance. If testing reveals high levels of contaminants, the solution may go beyond installing a household filter. Officials may recommend temporary alternative water sources, like bottled water, or infrastructure upgrades, like pipe replacement.

If there’s not a problem serious enough to require those measures, a filter may help.

People should consider what their filtration goals are and what different filters can do. The EPA advises that many household activities like flushing toilets and washing clothes don’t require treatment, so cooking and drinking are typical uses to consider.

Most filters carry ratings by the non-profit organizations NSF and American National Standards Institute. Common NSF/ANSI ratings include 42 for taste or smell concerns, 53 for health effects and 401 for emerging compounds. An NSF database allows people to search by product name or what compound they want to reduce.

“Not every filter is good for everything,” said Sydney Evans, a science analyst who led a water filter testing project at the Environmental Working Group. “And even if there’s a filter out there that does absolutely everything, maybe you don’t need it.”

Many households use filters not because of safety concerns, but because of taste or odor, “which really do impact people’s enjoyment or sense of confidence in their drinking water,” Goddard said.

In those cases, a basic carbon filter, like many common pitcher models, can be effective. Activated carbon reduces chlorine and byproducts that form when chlorine reacts with natural organic matter in the water.

Those byproducts are expected in treated water, said Samantha Bear, a senior research analyst at SimpleLab. Even when levels are below federal limits, she said she and her colleagues filter their tap water - not because the water is unsafe, but to reduce long-term exposure.

Even people who live outside of areas with high levels of PFAS contamination may be concerned about their presence. PFAS is an abbreviation for perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances. The Environmental Protection Agency says that filters can reduce PFAS levels, but urges people to contact their local water service provider as an initial step if they have concerns.

Lead is another contaminant that can often be beyond the capabilities of filtration systems. But the EPA notes that no level of lead is safe, so people may want to use filters even where alternative water sources or pipe replacements aren’t recommended.

Test detects heart emergencies with 94% accuracy

Innovative AI-powered blood test distinguishes deadly cardiac events

URUMQI, March 12, (Xinhua): A research team in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in northwest China has developed a novel diagnostic technique that combines spectral analysis with artificial intelligence to rapidly and accurately distinguish between two lethal and easily confused cardiac emergencies, namely aortic dissection and myocardial infarction.

Their method requires only five to 10 minutes of blood sample analysis and achieves a diagnostic accuracy of 94.06 percent in differentiating acute myocardial infarction from aortic dissection, according to a study published in the journal Engineering Applications of Artificial Intelligence.

The research was conducted by a team from the People’s Hospital of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region led by Professor Yang Yining, in collaboration with a team from Xinjiang University led by Professor Lyu Xiaoyi.

Both myocardial infarction and aortic dissection present with sudden, severe chest pain, and yet their treatments are fundamentally opposed. A myocardial infarction results from a blocked coronary artery and requires immediate clot-busting therapy to restore blood flow. In contrast, an aortic dissection involves a tear in the aorta, and such drugs are strictly contraindicated as they can trigger catastrophic bleeding. Misdiagnosis can, therefore, be fatal.

Traditional diagnosis depends heavily on imaging techniques such as contrast-enhanced CT scans. These methods require expensive equipment and significant time, and are difficult to deploy in ambulances or primary care facilities, said Yan Lei, a member of the research team. With mortality rates for both conditions escalating the longer it takes to receive effective treatment, a fast and portable diagnostic tool is clearly an urgent priority.

The team’s breakthrough lies in capturing the distinct molecular fingerprints these diseases leave in the blood. The researchers employed two complementary techniques, Raman spectroscopy and infrared spectroscopy, to detect biochemical information from patient serum samples.

For further improvements in diagnostic efficiency, the team developed a deep learning model that integrates data from both spectroscopy methods to enable rapid classification of the two diseases.

A diagnostic prototype based on this technology is currently undergoing multi-center clinical validation. According to the research team, the portable device applying this technology could one day become standard equipment in ambulances and community clinics, enabling earlier intervention and buying precious time for patients facing these life-threatening conditions.

Separately, the 13th batch of the Chinese medical team in South Sudan on Wednesday conducted a day-long lecture for medical students at Upper Nile University, focusing on the treatment of joint diseases as well as infectious and inflammatory conditions.

Peter Taban, a 26-year-old intern doctor at the main referral facility of the Juba Teaching Hospital, was among the five university students who attended the lecture conducted by Chinese orthopedics doctor Fang Yong and ear nose and throat specialist Wang Yatang.

“We want to learn more about osteoarthritis and tonsillitis. This is the first training, and we appreciate it because we have learnt a lot,” Taban told Xinhua in Juba, the capital of South Sudan.

Tonsillitis is the inflammation of the tonsils, usually caused by viruses or bacteria, leading to symptoms such as a sore throat, fever, swollen red tonsils, and difficulty swallowing. Osteoarthritis is a degenerative joint condition, which causes pain, swelling and stiffness, affecting a person’s ability to move freely.

Wuyang satellite

China plans 2026 pioneer sat launch

BEIJING, March 12, (Xinhua): The Wuyang Constellation project, China’s first low-latitude remote sensing and communication integrated satellite network, is scheduled to complete the launch of three pioneer satellites around 2026, with the first such launch planned to take place this year to validate key technologies and application models, its developer has said.

Additionally, the developer will build 25 application satellites between 2026 and 2028 to achieve daily full coverage of low-latitude areas, featuring a 30-minute emergency response capability. This step will be followed by the establishment of a 1,008-satellite commercial network by about 2035, to create a real-time remote sensing system for global low-latitude regions, Science and Technology Daily on Tuesday quoted the Institute of Aerospace Remote Sensing Innovations at Guangzhou University in south China as saying.

The project, jointly launched by Guangzhou University in Guangdong Province, the Guangzhou Municipal People’s Government, and the State Information Center, aims to construct a space-based information service system covering areas between 35 degrees north and south latitude. It is based on the strategic layout of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, targeting low-latitude regions such as Southeast Asia, Africa and South America, according to the Science and Technology Daily report.



Minor bleaching is seen to a Acropora colony at Lagoon Reef at the northern Great Barrier Reef in far North Queensland, Australia, Dec. 18, 2024. (AP)



This image provided by NASA shows an illustration of the identical Van Allen Probes. (AP)

Old NASA science satellite plunges back to Earth

An old NASA science satellite plunged uncontrolled from orbit and re-entered over the Pacific on Wednesday.

The U.S. Space Force said the Van Allen Probe A came in west of the Galapagos Islands.

NASA expected some of the 1,323-pound (600-kilogram) spacecraft to survive entry, with most of it burning up in the atmosphere. The space agency put the risk of bodily harm at 1-in-4,200.

Its twin, the Van Allen Probe B, is still orbiting Earth, but no longer functioning.

Launched in 2012, the two spacecraft flew through the Van Allen radiation belts that surround Earth, studying them for seven years before ceasing operation.

When the satellites ran out of fuel in 2019, NASA anticipated them remaining in orbit until 2034. But the intense solar activity over the past several years has hastened the A probe’s demise, the space agency said. The B probe is not expected to reenter before 2030.

Dutch scientist Marco Langbroek said all re-entries are difficult to predict, but this one was especially challenging given its eccentric, lopsided orbit. (AP)

Australian hospitals under severe strain

Measles surge in NSW tied to SE Asia

SYDNEY, March 12, (Xinhua): A recent surge in measles cases in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW) has predominantly been driven by infections acquired in Southeast Asia, health authorities said on Thursday.

The NSW Department of Health said in a report that authorities were notified of 60 confirmed measles cases in the state between Jan. 1, 2025, and March 7, 2026. Of those cases, 34 contracted measles overseas, including 32 people who traveled to countries in Southeast Asia.

Another 18 of the cases reported in NSW were linked to a person known to have acquired measles overseas, with the remaining eight cases having no known source of infection.

According to the latest data from the National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System maintained by the Australian Center for Disease Control, there had been 25 confirmed cases of measles in NSW in 2026 as of Thursday, compared to 37 cases reported for all of 2025 and 18 in 2024.

The neighboring state of Victoria has reported 21 measles cases in 2026 compared to 36 in 2025 and 17 in 2024.

Vicky Sheppard, executive director of Health Protection NSW, said on Thursday that the report should serve as a timely reminder for why vaccination is so important.

Australia’s measles vaccination rate for two-year-olds is at 91.2 percent, according to federal government data, below the 92-94 percent national coverage target to achieve herd immunity.

community.

Meanwhile, Australia’s hospitals remain under severe strain, the nation’s peak doctors’ body has warned, with patients facing long waits for emergency care and essential surgery.

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) on Thursday published its annual report on the performance of public hospitals, revealing that the proportion of emergency department patients who complete their visit within the recommended four hours has fallen to a record-low.

According to the report, 53 percent of emergency department patients completed their visits within four hours in 2024-25, down from 55 percent in 2023-24 and 73 percent in 2015-16.

The median wait time for planned surgeries fell for the second straight year from 46 days in 2023-24 to 45 days in 2024-25, but remained significantly higher than the 35 days reported in 2014-15.

The AMA report noted modest improvements in some areas, including an increase in the total number of public hospital beds, but said that overall performance remains significantly worse than it was a decade ago.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in January announced an extra 25 billion Australian dollars (17.8 billion U.S. dollars) in federal government funding for hospitals over the next five years.

However, AMA President Danielle McMullen said in a statement on Thursday that modeling showed that additional funding of at least 34 billion AUD (24.2 billion dollars) would

be required over the same period.

“Our costings suggest it may not be enough to get our public hospitals out of the cycle of crisis they’ve been in,” she said of the government funding commitment.

The report said that hospital bed availability per person has stagnated, and capacity for older Australians has fallen to the lowest level on record.

Also:

TOKYO: One teenage leukemia patient died and two others have fallen unconscious after undergoing chemotherapy injections at a children’s hospital near Tokyo, local media reported on Thursday.

The Saitama Prefectural Children’s Medical Center in **Saitama City** reported the cases to police on Tuesday after discovering that the patients’ spinal fluid contained a cancer drug that should not have been administered around the spinal cord, according to Kyodo News.

The drug in question was not part of the cancer medication originally prescribed, and no records of its administration were found. The hospital, therefore, notified police, NHK reported.

After receiving the injections between January and October last year, all three patients developed neurological symptoms such as difficulty walking. One male patient in his teens died this February.

The hospital has launched a full investigation into the cases. It has not ruled out the possibility of either a criminal act or a serious medical accident.

Winter warming hidden driver of Great Barrier Reef bleaching

SYDNEY, March 12, (Xinhua): Scientists in Australia have found that coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef is influenced not only by extreme summer heat, but also by winter conditions months earlier.

The study, published in Coral Reefs, shows sustained high winter temperatures worsen bleaching the following summer. In contrast, moderate levels of winter heat may actually reduce bleaching impacts, said a statement from Australia’s James Cook University (JCU) on Wednesday.

“It’s a Goldilocks range -- it’s not too hot, not too cold, it’s just right,”

said JCU Professor Scott Heron, who supervised the study.

“We think that corals living in these conditions might be better prepared for a stressful summer because they are exposed to a little bit of prior heat,” Heron said.

Researchers explained that moderate winter heat can stimulate corals to produce heat-shock proteins, boosting cellular repair, metabolic activity, and shifting symbiotic algae to heat-tolerant types, while sustained high winter temperatures deplete energy reserves, damage tissues, and weaken symbiosis, increasing summer bleaching vulnerability.



A doctor checks on a malnourished child at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health in Kabul, Afghanistan, March 4. (Xinhua)

Kabul wards stretched

Afghan docs battle severe malnutrition among children

KABUL, March 12, (Xinhua): In a pediatric ward in Afghanistan’s Kabul, the room is quiet except for the soft cries of infants. Mothers sit beside narrow metal beds, gently rocking babies whose bodies are far smaller than they should be.

Some children are so thin that their arms seem almost weightless beneath the hospital sheets. Others look unusually swollen, their fragile bodies holding fluid where strength should be.

For more than three decades, Dr. Amir Ahmad Jalali has treated young patients in Kabul’s main pediatric hospital. Over the years, he has witnessed countless children arrive in similar conditions, their bodies weakened not by a sudden illness, but by a slow and silent lack of nutrition.

He explained that severe child malnutrition often appears in three different forms.

“Some children arrive extremely thin and weak, their bodies reduced to skin and bone. Others appear swollen because their bodies retain fluid, a condition that can hide the seriousness of their illness. A third group shows a mixture of both signs, thin limbs combined with swelling in other parts of the body.”

These forms of malnutrition can all be seen in the ward today, where doctors move from bed to bed, monitoring the fragile condition of their youngest

patients.

Yet the hospital cannot accept every child who arrives.

“Only those in critical condition are admitted, while others receive medicine and advice before being sent home,” Jalali said.

For the families here, these beds tell the story of children growing up in the shadow of hunger.

Sima, a 40-year-old woman from Baghlan province, sat quietly beside her grandchild, who lay weakly on a hospital bed.

Sima works as a cleaner and earns just enough to help support her family. She said the problem began long before the baby was born.

“I did not have money to provide proper food for the mother, and because of this lack of food and weakness, the child became very weak,” she said.

The mother’s poor nutrition eventually affected the baby. When the child first became sick, the family could not afford to seek treatment. For nearly two months, the infant remained at home without medical care.

By the time they finally reached the hospital, the baby’s condition had worsened significantly. To pay for the first expenses, Sima borrowed 6,000 afghanis (about 95.33 U.S. dollars) from her employer.

Not far from her bed, another father kept watch over his child.

Red Bull not yet ready to fight leading cars

Verstappen sees ‘a jungle’ in F1 but still hopes for ‘simple solutions’

SHANGHAI, March 12, (AP): Max Verstappen’s blunt assessment: “It’s a jungle” in Formula 1.

The four-time F1 world champion isn’t a fan of the new 2026 technical regulations, despite working his way up from No. 20 on the grid to place sixth at the season-opening Australian Grand Prix last weekend.

Verstappen predicted his Red Bull probably couldn’t go any higher than fifth place this weekend in the Chinese Grand Prix - even if he starts much closer to the front in Sunday’s race in Shanghai - because of the big gap between Mercedes and Ferrari and all the other teams.

“Honestly, it’s such a jungle out there at the moment,” Verstappen said Thursday at the driver news conferences in Shanghai. “I mean, I would hope that it gets a bit closer ... but it’s clear that at the moment we cannot fight with those cars.”

It’s not the first time Verstappen has taken a swipe at the sport’s new regulations, which he thinks are anti-fun, anti-racing and could potentially be dangerous.

F1’s new cars are complex, with unprecedented changes across the chassis and power unit, which now feature an almost 50:50 output split between the turbo 1.6-liter V6 engine and electrical energy harvested from the brakes - one that requires a new, often counterintuitive driving style.

One of Verstappen’s concerns is starting the race with empty batteries in the hybrid cars. Franco Colapinto only very narrowly avoided Liam Lawson at the start of the Australian Grand Prix, with the Racing Bulls car was slow off the line with minimal battery power - many drivers started with depleted batteries among the teething issues with the new rules.



Red Bull driver Max Verstappen, left, of the Netherlands and teammate Isack Hadjar of France wave during the drivers parade ahead of the Australian Formula One Grand Prix at Albert Park, in Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

“There are a few simple solutions, but they need to be allowed by the FIA, with the battery related stuff, because, yeah, starting with the 0% battery - not

a lot of fun and also quite dangerous,” Verstappen said. “You can see, I mean, we almost had a massive shunt in Melbourne in the start.

“This is something that I think can be easily fixed.”

As for speculation he may quit if reforms aren’t made quickly, Verstappen said: “I don’t want to leave, but I also hope, of course, that it gets better.

“I’ve had discussions with F1 and FIA and, I think, we are working toward something, hopefully, and, hopefully that will improve everything,” he said, without elaborating on what the changes might be. “I hope already for next year we can already make a decent improvement.”

In the meantime, in the search of more “fun,” he has confirmed this week he’ll be driving his first 24-hour sportscar race at the historic Nürburgring Nordschleife circuit in May. F1 hasn’t used it since 1976, when then-reigning champion Niki Lauda suffered severe burns in a crash.

“It’s one of the best races in the world, it’s one of the best tracks. I mean, honestly, in a GT car for me that’s like the perfect speed round there,” Verstappen said. “I think if you go anything faster it can be a bit dangerous in places.”

“I mean, I’ve been watching it, of course, for a long time. I know a lot of my friends, of course, that have been racing in it already. They say it’s one of the best things ever, and I like racing other cars as well.”

The 28-year Verstappen says he still has career ambitions.

“I don’t need to be only a Formula 1 driver, I can also do other things,” he said. “I’ve done this for a while and I’ve achieved everything that I wanted to achieve, so that’s why I want to explore other things, and I don’t want to do them when I’m 40 years old. So now I think this is the perfect age to do it.”

Dortmund plays Augsburg

Bayern faces a tough Leverkusen test after big win, injury concerns

DUESSELDORF, Germany, March 12, (Agencies): Bayern Munich is heading to Bayern Leverkusen in the Bundesliga after contrasting Champions League games in midweek for the two clubs.

Bayern was in rampant form in a 6-1 win at Atalanta overshadowed by injuries in the first leg of their round-of-16 matchup, while Leverkusen had to settle for a 1-1 draw against Premier League leader Arsenal which kept its hopes alive. Bayern leads the Bundesliga by 11 points with nine games remaining.

There aren’t many tricky away trips for Bayern in the Bundesliga these days, but Leverkusen is one of them. Bayern hasn’t won there in the league since October 2021, though Vincent Kompany’s team did get a victory in a Champions League playoff last year.

Hoffenheim is flying high in third, which would be its best finish since Julian Nagelsmann coached the team in 2017-18. Saturday’s opponent Wolfsburg is having a nightmarish campaign in the relegation zone as Dieter Hecking becomes the team’s third coach of the season.

In a tight Champions League qualification fight, fourth-placed Stuttgart is unbeaten in four Bundesliga games as it takes on fifth-place Leipzig, which is unbeaten in five, on Sunday.

Deniz Undav has scored in his last four Bundesliga games to take him to 15 goals for the season. Even if he’s got half of Harry Kane’s tally of Bundesliga goals for Bayern, it’s enough for second in the standings. Undav’s run of form could help him make his case for a return to the Germany squad in time for the World Cup.

Nico Schlotterbeck could be one of the most in-demand defenders on the transfer market this off-season, with no obvious progress on renewing a Borussia Dortmund contract which expires next year, though a decision to let midfielder Julian Brandt leave might free up some funds. Dortmund plays Augsburg on Sunday.

Manuel Neuer’s return from a calf injury lasted just 45 minutes last week before the Bayern goalkeeper great picked up another calf injury which kept him out of Tuesday’s Champions League win at Atalanta. Jonas

Urbig stepped in but was hurt in a heavy collision with an opponent, so third-choice Sven Ulreich may start.

Kane has missed two games with a calf issue but is set to return, though Alphonso Davies has pulled a hamstring and Bayern said Jamal Musiala was experiencing pain related to an ankle injury from last year. It wasn’t immediately clear how seriously that would affect Musiala.

Two bizarre disciplinary cases are getting German fans talking. The national soccer federation is investigating Cologne for its announcer making comments over the PA system loudly condemning refereeing decisions that went against the team.

Second-division Preussen Muenster faces a disciplinary case over a masked fan who unplugged the referee’s video monitor during a penalty review against the team.

Borussia Dortmund has secured the long-term future of midfielder Felix Nmecha after the Germany international signed a new contract that will keep him at the Bundesliga club until June 2030, the club announced on Wednesday.

The 25-year-old joined Dortmund from Wolfsburg in 2023 and has since developed into a key figure in midfield. Across all competitions, he has made 108 appearances for the club, scoring 13 goals and providing eight assists while establishing himself as an increasingly influential presence in the center of the pitch.

Nmecha, who spent two seasons at Wolfsburg after beginning his professional career with Manchester City in 2019, has also featured regularly for Dortmund this season. He appeared in each of the team’s first 25 matches of the 2025-26 campaign and has scored five goals in all competitions.

“I have had many great experiences with this club and its supporters over the past few years and am very grateful for the club’s trust,” Nmecha said. “I want to repay that trust by giving my best for Borussia Dortmund.”

Sporting director Sebastian Kehl praised the midfielder’s development, saying he had become an essential part of the team despite early injury setbacks.



Bayern players applaud to fans after the Champions League round of 16 soccer match between Atalanta and FC Bayern Munich in Bergamo, Italy. (AP)

Bolivia targets first World Cup since 1994

LA PAZ, March 12, (Xinhua): Bolivia midfielder Moises Villarroel said his team sees the upcoming World Cup playoffs in Mexico as a defining moment in their careers as they chase a place at the 2026 finals.

The South American team is vying for its first appearance in the tournament since 1994 after finishing seventh in the CONMEBOL qualifying group.

“Expectations are very high,” Villarroel told reporters on Wednesday. “We are playing the most important match of our careers because we are playing for a place at the World Cup.” Bolivia’s first playoff match will be against Suriname in Monterrey on March 26, with the winner to face Iraq five days later.

The team will finalize its preparations with a friendly against Trinidad and Tobago in the eastern Bolivian city of Santa Cruz on Sunday (March 15).

“We know there’s no time to relax,” said Villarroel, who plays his club football with Bolivian top-flight side Blooming.

“We have to be switched on and every player’s focus must be on our goal of qualifying,” the 27-year-old added.

The World Cup finals will be played in the United States, Mexico and Canada from June 11 to July 19.

Jokic records 25th triple-double of season, Nuggets Rout Rockets



Los Angeles Clippers guard Jordan Miller (22) dribbles against Minnesota Timberwolves guard Bones Hyland, left, during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Inglewood, Calif. (AP)

Leonard scores 45 points in Clippers’ romp over Timberwolves

DENVER, March 12, (AP): Nikola Jokic had 16 points, 13 assists and 12 rebounds for his 25th triple-double of the season, and the Denver Nuggets beat the Houston Rockets 129-93 in a Western Conference showdown.

Jamal Murray scored 30 points for Denver, which holds the tie-breaker over the Rockets after winning the season series 3-1. The Nuggets moved within a half-game of Houston in the bunched-up Western Conference standings.

It was the first time since mid-November Denver has won with its opening-night lineup together. The Nuggets had lost six of 10 out of the All-Star break as head coach David Adelman practices caution with workloads as players return to the lineup.

Jokic completed his 187th career triple-double with his 10th rebound with 4:14 left in the third. It is the 15th time this season he has secured a triple-double before the fourth quarter.

Clippers 153, Timberwolves 128

In Inglewood, Kawhi Leonard scored 45 points and the Los Angeles Clippers routed the Minnesota Timberwolves, moving above .500 with their third straight victory and sixth in seven games.

Eighth in the Western Conference at 33-32 after opening 6-21, the Clippers had their highest points total of the season. They blew out Minnesota after beating New York on Monday night to open a five-game homestand.

Leonard was 15 of 20 from the field, 6 of 9 on 3s and made 9 of 10 free throws. Los Angeles made 19 of 37 3s.

Bennedict Mathurin scored 22 points for Los Angeles. Clippers newcomer Darius Garland had 21, hitting five 3-pointers.

Anthony Edwards led Minnesota with 36 points and Naz Reid had

18.

Minnesota dropped to sixth in the tight Western Conference, but only a half-game behind the third-place Lakers. The Timberwolves have lost three in a row after winning five straight. They lost to the Lakers on Tuesday night to open four-game trip.

Knicks 134, Jazz 117

In Salt Lake City, Jalen Brunson scored 28 points, Jordan Clarkson had 27 and the New York Knicks rallied to beat the Utah Jazz to snap a two-game losing streak.

Brunson also had eight assists and three steals in a game the Knicks trailed 49-31 early in the second quarter. OG Anunoby added 22 points, and Karl-Anthony Towns had 21 points, seven rebounds and seven assists. New York made 17 3-pointers and shot 52% from the field.

Brice Sensabaugh led Utah with 29 points. Ace Bailey added 21, and Keyonte George had 14 points and five assists before leaving midway through the third quarter with a right hamstring injury.

Utah made 11 of its first 13 3-pointers to take the early lead. Sensabaugh, Bailey, and Kevin Love teamed for seven 3s in the

first 14 minutes. The Jazz finished 18 of 36 from 3-point range.

Magic 128, Cavaliers122

In Orlando, Desmond Bane had a 3-pointer and two free throws in the final 17.4 seconds to cap a 35-point night and help the Orlando Magic hold off the Cleveland Cavaliers for their fifth straight victory.

Paolo Banchero added 25 points, eight rebounds and seven assists for the Magic. Tristan da Silva scored nine of his 23 points in the fourth quarter.

James Harden had 30 points and eights assists for Cleveland. Donovan Mitchell added 25 points, hitting a 3-pointer that brought the Cavaliers within two after Orlando led by 13 midway through the fourth quarter.

Bane countered with a 3-pointer as he was falling out of bounds with 17.4 seconds left, then added two free throws with eight seconds remaining.

Three 3-pointers by Keon Ellis, who finished with 20 points, keyed the late comeback of the Cavaliers.

Pelicans to 122, Raptors 111

In New Orleans, Trey Murphy III scored 28 points, Dejeunte Murray added 27 and the New Orleans

Pelicans beat the Toronto Raptors , spoiling Brandon Ingram’s return to the city where he played for six seasons.

Murray had his highest-scoring game since his return from a torn right Achilles tendon that sidelined him for more than a year. Zion Williamson added 19 points for the Pelicans, who have won seven of 10.

In his first game at New Orleans since he was traded to Toronto in February of last year, Ingram finished with 22 points. The 10-year veteran also surpassed 11,000 points for his career.

Immanuel Quickley scored 25 points for Toronto, which has lost six of eight. This defeat dropped the Raptors from fifth to seventh in the Eastern Conference, one-half game behind Orlando and Miami.

Hornets 117, Kings 109

In Sacramento ,LaMelo Ball scored 20 of his 30 points in the first half and the Charlotte Hornets beat the Sacramento Kings.

Miles Bridges had 26 points as Charlotte won at Sacramento for the first time in more than two years. Standout rookie Kon Knueppel added 24 points and Brandon Miller scored 20.

DeMar DeRozan scored 39 points for the Kings and moved past Hall of Famer Tim Duncan into 18th place on the NBA’s career scoring list with 26,505 points. Duncan, a 15-time All-Star, had 26,496 points in 19 seasons.

Ball shot 10 of 22 and made six 3-pointers. He had six rebounds and five assists.

The Hornets trailed much of the first half but began taking control in the third quarter. Bridges’ alley-oop pass to Miller gave Charlotte an 88-83 lead, and White’s three-point play early in the fourth made it 99-88.

After the Kings got within 108-100 with three minutes remaining, Bridges made a floater. Ball then hit his sixth 3-pointer of the night and added a pair of free throws to help Charlotte close it out.



Toronto Raptors guard Gradey Dick (1) shoots against New Orleans Pelicans guard Jeremiah Fears (0) during the first half of an NBA basketball game in New Orleans. (AP)

Marseille needs strong performance against Auxerre to appease fans

Lens transformed from surprise package to genuine title threat in Ligue 1

PARIS, March 12, (AP): With nine rounds remaining in Ligue 1, Paris Saint-Germain still has not managed to shake off Lens in the title race.

Lens has gone from surprise frontrunner to genuine challenger and, with PSG not playing this weekend, coach Pierre Sage's side can move two points ahead at the top with a win at mid-table Lorient on Saturday.

PSG is off duty because Nantes agreed to postpone their scheduled game on Sunday in order to give PSG better preparation for the Champions League second leg against Chelsea next week.

It seems PSG hardly needs it, leading 5-2 from the last-16 first leg on Wednesday.

The decision hardly pleased Nantes fans, who are facing yet another relegation scrap with a third coach this season. Ahmed Kantari was sacked this week and replaced by Vahid Halilhodzic.

Kantari was in charge for just three months. He was hired in mid-December after Nantes fired Luis Castro, who lasted 15 games.

After scraping a narrow win at Toulouse last weekend, Marseille moved

back into third place on goal difference from Lyon.

But Marseille's fans are still angry at facing another trophyless season and coach Habib Beye's players need a strong performance at home against Auxerre on Friday to appease them.

Monaco is at home to Brest on Saturday and the players are on a roll under attack-minded Belgian coach Sébastien Pocognoli. Monaco has won its past four league games, including impressive away wins against PSG and Lens.

Lyon looks to snap a four-game winless streak when it travels to lowly Le Havre and fifth-placed Rennes seeks a fifth straight win when it hosts Lille, with both of those games on Sunday.

Monaco's turnaround in fortunes has coincided with American forward Folarin Balogun finding form. He looked at his best last Friday against PSG, where his movement and hold-up play stood out, and he has 13 goals overall this season.

Lens winger Florian Thauvin is in fine form after scoring in Ligue 1 and the French Cup last week.

Rémi Humbert has caught the eye on the left side of Lyon's attack and

the 18-year-old forward's form has earned him a first professional contract until 2028.

Rennes striker Esteban Lepaul looks to add to his 13 league goals this season.

Lyon's goalscoring midfielder Pavel Šulc remains sidelined with a hamstring injury.

Marseille central defender Nayef Aguerd requires an operation to treat pubalgia - a chronic groin injury problem - which has been troubling the Morocco international for months.

Nice midfielder Everton is expected to miss the rest of the season. The 18-year-old broke into the team this year but suffered a serious ankle injury in training this week.

PSG's Qatari president Nasser Al-Khelaifi was grounded in Qatar this week amid the intensifying Iran war.

Flights in and out of the Middle East have been impacted by the Iran war, started by the U.S. and Israel on Feb. 28.

PSG has been bankrolled by Qatari backer QSI since the club's takeover 15 years ago.

China captures historic mixed doubles wheelchair curling gold



Gold medalists Yang Jinqiao (left) and Wang Meng of China pose during the awarding ceremony for the wheelchair curling mixed doubles event at the Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. (Xinhua)

South Korea beaten in final at Paralympic Winter Games

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy, March 12, (Xinhua): Eyes filled with tears, the Chinese curlers and coaching staff could no longer contain their emotions after winning the first-ever wheelchair curling mixed doubles title at the Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games.

In the mixed doubles final, China's Wang Meng and Yang Jinqiao edged South Korea's Baek Hye-jin and Lee Yong-suk 9-7 to claim the historic gold medal.

"A pair can also form a team. Together with our coaches, we unite as one to top the podium," said Yang.

The mixed doubles event made its Winter Paralympic debut at Milan-Cortina 2026 with eight teams in the field. China topped the round-robin standings with six wins and one loss to reach the last four. After beating Latvia 8-3 in the semifinals, China stood one step away from the title.

In the final, China once led 7-3, but South Korea rallied to tie the match at 7-7 and force an extra end.

China seized its chance in the decisive end, scoring two points to secure victory.

"The pressure made us compete even better. We adjusted our strategies and mentality during the match. I am satisfied with our performance," said Wang.

At PyeongChang 2018 and Beijing 2022, China won back-to-back titles in the Winter Paralympic wheelchair curling mixed team event.

The 37-year-old Wang was a member of China's gold-winning team at PyeongChang 2018 and later teamed up with Yang for the mixed doubles event at Milan-Cortina 2026.

"I started my curling career in 2018. When I saw China won the gold of wheelchair curling in PyeongChang, I was so excited and proud of them," Yang recalled.

"So you were inspired by me? Taking me as a role model?" Wang joked. Yang smiled, nodded and said, "Yes. For sure." The Chinese pair, separated by a 13-year age gap, began their partnership in 2023 and won silver in mixed doubles at the 2024 World Championships.

In Wang's eyes, Yang is a resourceful curler who is always full of energy and competes with composure on the ice.

"We communicate a lot both on and off the ice. Milan-Cortina 2026 marks my first Winter Paralympic journey. I gradually accumulated experi-

ence during this process," said Yang.

The 24-year-old added, "Young athletes should have vitality. I told myself to be brave and take on challenges. Whether leading or lagging behind, I tried to stay calm and not to rush." In wheelchair curling mixed doubles, each team has only five shots in each end and sweeping is not allowed. That means every shot must be carefully calculated to place the stone as close as possible to the center of the target and score points.

"The requirement for precision is even higher in the mixed doubles, bringing more pressure to curlers. Wang and Yang complement each other. At a fast pace in competition, they made quick tactical decisions with a strong team work," said Ru Xia, coach of China's wheelchair curling team.

"I'm very pleased with our team fighting all the way to win the gold. We performed what we practiced in training. They handled pressure to make decisive shots and showed resilience on the Winter Paralympic stage," Ru remarked.

"Always trust teammates and coaches. We encourage each other all the time and never give up in the face of difficulties. We strive to throw stones to the best position as we could and then just wait," Wang noted. "Fortunately, we made our wishes fulfilled." Enditem

'Super impressive'

Fixing dreams: technicians power Paralympic athletes behind scenes

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy, March 12, (Xinhua): Next to the dining hall of the Cortina Paralympic Village, technicians are busy repairing wheels, orthotics and prosthetics.

The technicians are from German company Ottobock. Peter Franzel, head of exhibitions, sports and events, told Xinhua that the company has served as an official partner of the Paralympic Games and Paralympic Winter Games since 1988. He himself has worked at the Paralympics since 2008.

At the Beijing 2022 Paralympic Winter Games, Franzel worked in Yanqing and, together with his colleagues, carried out nearly 400 repairs during the Games.

"Yanqing is a very beautiful place and China organized really amazing games," Franzel said.

Before the opening ceremony of the ongoing Milan-Cortina Paralympic Winter Games, the team had already completed more than 150 repairs.

Many para athletes use wheelchairs, so Franzel and his colleagues deal with a wide range of wheelchair-related issues in their daily work.



An Ottobock technician works on the workbench in the Cortina Paralympic Village. (Xinhua)

British wheelchair curler Austin McKenzie sought help from Franzel twice within a few days of arriving in Cortina.

"Few days ago I got two brand new wheels because they were damaged in the flight here. As they give me two brand new wheels and they are cracking the brakes just now to match the new wheels," McKenzie said.

"It is super impressive. It is a bit like a doctor surgery, you come in

with your chair and it leaves sorted," the British athlete added.

In addition to routine repairs, the Ottobock repair station also customizes protective gear for athletes with disabilities. Franzel showed Xinhua a plaster cast of a female para alpine skier, explaining that technicians would heat a sheet of plastic and mold it into a special brace for the athlete.

"So her arm will be stabilized and

she can ski without having pain on her wrist," Franzel said.

In Franzel's view, it is difficult to say how long repairs usually take because the team handles many different kinds of problems every day. Some can be fixed quickly, while others are more complex.

It took them around 10 minutes to solve McKenzie's problem, but more than six hours were needed to produce a suitable wrist brace for the female para skier.

To meet the needs of all para athletes, Ottobock technicians brought about nine tons of equipment, machinery and thousands of spare parts to the three Paralympic Villages.

In addition to smaller routine jobs such as repairing damaged wheelchair tires or adjusting sit-ski seats, they also repair entire prosthetic components, often under extreme time pressure and with nervous athletes watching hopefully from beside the workbench.

"We fix something and then the athletes go to competition, they are successful and they come back," Franzel said.

"They always come and say 'thank you', so this is really nice," he added.

'Rightful place in the tournament'

Iran's World Cup status uncertain after mixed statements from officials

TEHRAN, March 12, (Agencies): Iran has confirmed that its men's national football team will participate in the 2026 FIFA World Cup in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, despite ongoing political and military tensions and recent controversies involving the women's national team in Australia.

Following intensive consultations between the Iranian Football Federation, the Ministry of Sports, and security authorities, federation president Mehdi Taj, in agreement with Sports Minister Ahmad Donyamali, emphasized that Iran is committed to taking its rightful place in the tournament.

Taj stressed that the team earned its qualification on merit, saying it was not granted a spot as a favor.

In response to what Tehran described as "political interference" affecting the women's team, Iran has demanded that FIFA and the U.S. government, as host of their group, provide full, documented security guarantees. These assurances must ensure the safety of all delegation members and protect them from political pressure or harassment during training and official matches.

Earlier, Iran's sports and youth minister said it's "not possible" for the country to take part in the World Cup after the United

States.

Iran was expected to take part in the World Cup that will be held across North America in June, but Iranian Sports and Youth Minister told state television that his country's soccer team players are not safe in the U.S., according to a video of the interview posted.

They have imposed two wars on us over just eight or nine months and have killed and martyred thousands of our people - definitely it's not possible for us to take part in the World Cup," he said.

Iran is scheduled to play in Inglewood, California, against New Zealand on June 15 and Belgium on June 21 before finishing group play against Egypt in Seattle on June 26. The U.S. is hosting the tournament with Canada and Mexico from June 11 to July 19.

FIFA said Tuesday night that it anticipates Iran's national team will be allowed to come to the United States.

Last week, U.S. President Donald Trump said "I really don't care" if Iran takes part in the 48-nation tournament.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino said he met with Trump on Tuesday night "to discuss the status of preparations" for the tournament and received assurances that Iran would be permitted to come to the U.S.



A file photo of the Iranian players celebrating.

Best of the Rest

Mexico goalkeeper tears Achilles: Mexico goalkeeper Luis Angel Malagon ruptured his Achilles tendon while playing for Club America and will miss the World Cup.

America confirmed the injury Wednesday and said the 29-year-old Malagon needs surgery, meaning he'll be sidelined when Mexico, the United States and Canada co-host the World Cup starting June 11.

Malagon was injured Tuesday in the first half of a CONCACAF round-of-16 Champions Cup victory over the Philadelphia Union of the MLS.

Malagon started for Mexico last year when El Tri won the Nations League and the Gold Cup, but he recently was battling for the position with Raúl Rangel, who has started in five of the last eight national team matches.

"Hurt and sad, my soul shattered," Malagon posted on his Instagram account. "Trying to understand the situation and asking why? The dream seems to be fading away, but I know that God will one day give me an answer." Malagon's injury could also open the door for the return of 40-year-old Guillermo Ochoa, who is hoping to participate in his sixth World Cup. (AP)

Mexico's other injury setbacks include right back Rodrigo Huescas (torn ACL), and midfielder Edson Alvarez (ankle surgery). (AP)

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Bangladesh's Litton Das, centre, appeals successfully for the wicket of Pakistan's Hussain Talat during the first one day international cricket match between Bangladesh and Pakistan in Mirpur, Bangladesh. Bangladesh claimed a dominant eight-wicket win in the first ODI. (AP)

Sports

Madrid masterclass leaves Man City reeling



Real Madrid's Federico Valverde, right, and Manchester City's Ruben Dias fight for the ball during a first leg round of 16 Champions League soccer match between Real Madrid and Manchester City in Madrid, Spain. (AP)



Leverkusen's Janis Blaswich, right, makes a save during the Champions League round of 16 first leg soccer match between Bayer Leverkusen and Arsenal FC in Leverkusen, Germany. (AP)

PSG runs riot; Bodø/Glimt's fairytale run keeps on going as Arsenal salvages draw

MADRID, March 12, (AP): Even without a host of Galacticos, Real Madrid was far too strong for Manchester City in the latest Champions League clash of these titans. A 3-0 win at the Bernabeu on Wednesday put Madrid in control of this round-of-16 tie at the halfway mark after a stunning first-half hat trick by Federico Valverde.

The Uruguay international took on the responsibility of inspiring the record 15-time champion in the absence of injured stars Kylian Mbappe, Jude Bellingham, and Rodrygo. "We are Real Madrid, and you should never consider us dead," Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa told broadcaster Movistar.

The victory could have been even more commanding, but Vinicius Junior's casually taken second-half penalty was saved by Gianluigi Donnarumma. Defending champion Paris Saint-Germain beat Chelsea 5-2, and tiny Bodø/Glimt is also in sight of the quarterfinals after a 3-0 win over Sporting Lisbon. Arsenal drew 1-1 with Bayer Leverkusen.

By full-time at a rocking Bernabeu, the only comfort City could cling to was the fact that it could have been so much worse. When Vinicius stood over the ball on the penalty spot shortly before the hour mark, he looked certain to add to the lead. But the Brazil forward skipped in his run-up and hit a weak side-footed effort that Donnarumma pushed away.

It will still take a massive turnaround to see City advance after being outclassed

by Madrid. Valverde's hat trick featured three outstanding goals. The pick of the lot was his third when he flicked the ball over the head of City defender Marc Guehi before volleying home. TV cameras caught Bellingham watching in the stadium with his mouth wide open in awe of the move. City manager Pep Guardiola will likely be worrying that history is set to repeat itself after his team was eliminated at the hands of Madrid in each of the last two seasons. "Our game was not as bad as this result," Guardiola said. "I'm not someone to say we are going to turn it around, but we will try." After losing to Chelsea in the final of the Club World Cup last year, PSG got some revenge. A three-goal advantage after the first leg saw Luis Enrique's team take a big step toward the last eight. Chelsea had twice leveled the game, but a mistake by goalkeeper Filip Jorgensen, who gave the ball away on the edge of his box in the 74th minute, allowed Vitorinha to lift a shot into the open net.

PSG substitute Khvicha Kvaratskhelia scored twice more to leave Chelsea with a mountain to climb back at Stamford Bridge. "This is our most important moment in the competition," Luis Enrique said. "We'll try to play the second leg in the same way as we did today. We'll try to win the game. That's the best mentality as if we're thinking about defending our lead, it could be a big mistake."

Bodø/Glimt's fairytale run just keeps on going. Manchester City, Atletico Madrid, and Inter Milan have been left in the tiny Norwegian club's wake. Now Sporting Lisbon's Champions League hopes are hanging by a thread. Bodø/Glimt - located north of the Arctic Circle and farther north than any team in Champions League history - took full advantage of playing the first leg at

home and led 2-0 at halftime through Sondre Fet's penalty and Ole Blomberg's goal just before the break. Kasper Høgh scored in the 71st to put his team on the brink of the next round. Bodø/Glimt was already the first Norwegian team to advance to the knockout rounds of the Champions League and could now go even further. Kai Havertz returned to haunt Bayer Leverkusen and seal a late draw for Arsenal.

The German international struck an 89th-minute penalty against the team where he started his career and leveled the round-of-16 first leg tie at BayArena. "I know the stadium well and have taken many penalties from this spot," said Havertz, who left Leverkusen for Chelsea in a \$95 million deal in 2020. Premier League leading Arsenal fell behind on Robert Andrich's goal just after halftime. But Malik Tillman fouled Noni Madueke in the box, and Havertz fired low past Janis Blaswich from the spot.

"The time between the penalty whistle and the penalty kick felt like an eternity," Havertz said. "But in the end, you have to be mentally present in those moments." After dominating the league phase of this year's tournament, Premier League teams were brought down to Earth in the round of 16. Man City, Chelsea, and Tottenham all fell to heavy defeats, while Liverpool also lost to Galatasaray.

In all, none of England's six teams in the knockouts won their first leg, with Arsenal and Newcastle both picking up draws. Arsenal will be the favorite to overcome Leverkusen at home, and Liverpool only has to overturn a 1-0 deficit in its second leg at Anfield. But City, Chelsea, and Tottenham face big deficits, while Newcastle travels to Camp Nou to play Barcelona.

Vissel Kobe becomes 2nd Japanese team in quarterfinals

SEOUL, March 12, (AP): Japan's Vissel Kobe claimed a place in the quarterfinals of the AFC Champions League Elite with a 2-1 win over FC Seoul of South Korea.

Yuya Osako and Yosuke Ideguchi scored late at home as Kobe advanced 3-1 over two legs in the round of 16. Patryk Klimala scored in the first half for Seoul.

Kobe becomes the second Japanese team to

reach the quarterfinals after Machida Zelvia qualified on Tuesday.

Johor Darul Tazim of Malaysia also advanced despite a 1-0 loss at Sanfrecce Hiroshima, thanks to its 3-1 win in the first leg, to prevent a third Japanese reaching the last eight.

Buriram United of Thailand rounds out the eastern zone quarterfinalists.

The tournament is divided into two geographic zones until the quarterfinals. Games in the western zone have been postponed because of the Iran war.

All matches from the quarterfinal stage onward are scheduled to take place in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, from April 16-25 but it's unclear when games in the western zone can resume.

Squad ripped apart

Spurs' Premier League position is damning and so are the numbers



Tottenham's Pedro Porro, left, and Atletico Madrid's Ademola Lookman challenge for the ball during the first leg of the Champions League round of 16 soccer match between Atletico Madrid and Tottenham in Madrid, Spain. (AP)

LONDON, March 12, (AP): Tottenham's position in the Premier League is increasingly concerning. So are the numbers.

- Check out these stats:
- Six straight losses in all competitions. That's never happened in the club's nearly 144-year history.
 - Eleven matches without a win in the Premier League. That's a first at Tottenham, too.
 - Four losses in Igor Tudor's first four games in interim control. This has never happened to a Tottenham manager.

It feels like things can hardly get any worse at Spurs, who - let's not forget - won the Europa League last season and were one of the 12 founding members of the ambitious but flawed Super League project that was quickly aborted in 2021.

But, rest assured, it can get worse. Still reeling from a calamitous 5-2 loss in the Champions League at Atletico Madrid on Tuesday, Tottenham must travel to Anfield for a league match against Liverpool on Sunday with its squad ripped apart because of a mixture of injuries, suspensions, potential concussion issues and a general lack of belief.

The 30th round begins with Spurs - an ever-present in the top flight since the 1970s - two places and one point above the relegation zone with nine games left. By kickoff at Anfield, they could be in it.

Third-to-last West Ham and fourth-to-last Nottingham Forest are both a point behind Tottenham going into home games against Manchester City on Saturday and Fulham on Sunday, respectively. Liverpool-Tottenham is the last game on Sunday.

Key players like James Maddison, Dejan Kulusevski, Mohammed Kudus, Rodrigo Bentancur and Destiny Udogie remain on the injured list, while captain Cristian Romero and midfielder Joao Palhinha might miss this weekend after being shaken following a clash of heads late in the game against Atletico. Key defender Micky van de Ven is suspended.

Then there's the goalkeeper situation. Guglielmo Vicario's form was so poor that Tudor felt it necessary to drop him against Atletico and hand a first start since October to Antonin Kinsky. The 22-year-old Czech didn't even last 17 minutes before being hauled off because of an error-strewn display.

It means Vicario is likely to regain his starting place but his confidence can't be high, either. Despite coming under heavy pressure, Tudor appears likely to be in charge this weekend. Tottenham confirmed midweek that the Croatian will conduct a news conference on Friday ahead of the Liverpool game. Then the second leg against Atletico is on Wednesday.

Club América pips Union

Messi streak ends as Inter Miami draws Nashville in Champions Cup

NASHVILLE, Tenn., March 12, (AP): Lionel Messi was held scoreless, and Inter Miami and Nashville SC played to a scoreless draw in their first CONCACAF Champions Cup round-of-16 game.

The teams will meet again on March 18 at Chase Stadium in Fort Lauderdale to decide which squad advances to the quarterfinal round.

Entering the contest, Messi had scored in six straight games against Nashville, dating to April 20, 2024, posting 12 goals and five assists in that stretch. Messi was held without a point for the second time in four games after being held off the scoresheet in a 3-0 loss to Los Angeles FC on Feb. 21.

Messi had a chance, finishing with a shot and completing 79% of his passes. His scoring opportunity came in the 55th minute as he came streaking down the left side and got off a shot that was saved by Nashville goalkeeper Bruan Schwake.

Messi's one shot on target was his lowest single-game shot total since Nov. 29, in the MLS Cup Eastern Conference final against New York City FC. In that game, he had no shots on net, but did have an assist in Inter Miami's 5-1 win.

Inter Miami dominated possession, controlling the ball for 59% of the game. Nashville pushed the play, recording 15 total shots to Miami's eight, four of which were on target.

Nashville's best chance came off a corner from Cristian Espinoza in the 65th minute. His throw-in found Reed Baker-Whiting in the box. However, Baker-Whiting sent a header just over the crossbar.

Inter Miami's Maximiliano Falcón was injured in the seventh minute and left the game. He was replaced by Gonzalo Luján.

The winner of the Nashville-Miami series will face either Club América or the Philadelphia Union in the quarterfinals. Club América defeated Philadelphia 1-0 on Wednesday in Chester, Pennsylvania. The elimination game will be held on March 18 at Estadio Azteca in Mexico City.



Inter Miami forward Lionel Messi falls as he tries to stop the charge of Nashville SC midfielder Edvard Tagseth, left, in the second half of a CONCACAF Champions Cup Round of 16 soccer match in Nashville, Tenn. (AP)