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THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2026 / RAMADAN 30, 1447 AH

emergency number 112

NO. 19157

16 PAGES

150 FILS

## Amir congratulates Kuwaitis, expats on Eid Al-Fitr

**Opinion**

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

### Iran's rulers will 'drink poison' for the second time

WHEN Tehran faced defeat in the Iran-Iraq War, Khomeini said, while signing the ceasefire agreement, "I am drinking poison by signing this agreement."

This declaration did not come as a surprise to the people in the region, given the historical stubbornness and imperial arrogance often associated with Persian political culture.

Despite Iran's repeated slogan throughout that war - "War, war to eliminate sedition from the world" - reality proved otherwise, as the winds of reality blew in the opposite direction.

On the other hand, the world was surprised and did not heed the opinions of the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, who understand the cultural nature of the Persians.

Today, there is much talk in Western media, and some Arab media, about the wounded Iranian regime becoming even more arrogant than before.

The truth is that Persian stubbornness always ends in defeat, which the country's leaders eventually acknowledge. However, they, particularly the current regime, transform battlefield losses into claims of divine victory.

This mindset has also influenced Tehran's proxies in the region. In 2006, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah declared a divine victory, despite admitting that had he known the true scale of the war that year, he would not have kidnapped the two Israeli soldiers.

### KLS zeroes in on expat legal fraud

By Jaber Al-Hamoud  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Dr. Khaled Al-Suwaifan, Secretary of the Kuwait Lawyers Society (KLS), announced that the society has filed official complaints against individuals, including several expatriates, who are falsely claiming to be lawyers and spreading misleading or inaccurate legal information on social media.

Dr. Al-Suwaifan urged citizens not to rely on legal consultations from unlicensed individuals or from sources outside Kuwait.

He emphasized that the law that regulates the legal profession in Kuwait provides a clear framework, allowing only registered and practicing lawyers to offer legal services, thereby preserving the profession's integrity and ensuring the proper administration of justice.

Dr. Al-Suwaifan highlighted the society's pivotal role in regulating professional practice through law firms and professional companies in compliance with legal regulations, thus contributing to service quality and protecting litigants' rights.

He warned that practicing law without proper registration is a clear legal violation and may harm litigants due to inaccurate legal advice.

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### Turkiye backs Kuwait, prays for safety and stability: envoy

By Fares Ghaleb  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Turkish Ambassador Tuba Nur Sönmez confirmed that Türkiye stands alongside the State of Kuwait during this difficult period, stressing that her country is exerting tremendous efforts to help end the conflict as soon as possible.



Sönmez

In a statement on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, Sönmez pointed out that Ramadan this year concluded under exceptional circumstances, overshadowed by painful developments since Feb 28 that led to loss of life and multiple injuries.

She extended her deepest condolences to the families of the victims, particularly

the four Kuwaiti soldiers, and wished swift recovery for the injured.

She added that these conditions impacted many aspects of the holy month, as several Ramadan traditions were not observed in their usual form, including Taraweeh prayers and social gatherings.

She expressed hope that this difficult period will end soon, with peace and stability prevailing.

She also conveyed her congratulations to the political leadership, the government and the people of Kuwait on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, wishing His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah continuous good health and well-being.

Moreover, the Turkish Embassy in Kuwait reaffirmed its commitment to strengthen the ties of friendship and cooperation between the two countries, wishing a blessed Eid filled with peace, good health and prosperity, as well as safety and stability for the Turkish community in Kuwait.

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### 30% workforce cap to continue

KUWAIT CITY, March 18, (KUNA): Kuwait's Civil Service Commission (CSC) announced Wednesday that government institutions will continue operating with no more than 30 percent of employees present at workplaces after the end of Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr's holiday, until further notice, due to the ongoing conditions facing the country and the region.

In a press statement, the CSC said it had issued a decision to all government bodies limiting on-site workforce presence to a maximum of 30 percent, with mandatory staff rotation.

It added that each institution may determine the rotation system on a daily or weekly basis depending on the nature and requirements of its work, with the option of remote work where feasible.

It also included a reduction of official working hours by one hour from the regular morning schedule until further notice, bringing total working hours to six, while maintaining the approved grace periods under the standard system.

The statement noted that the flexible working system will continue in line with the relevant regulations, including grace periods, permissions, attendance and departure fingerprint requirements, and adherence to official working hours.

It affirmed the continued suspension of evening shifts until further notice.

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### Calls unify stance

KUWAIT CITY, March 18, (KUNA): The Amiri Diwan on Wednesday relayed the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to citizens and residents on occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, wishing all good health and blissfulness.

The Amiri Diwan congratulated His Highness the Amir, 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 on this occasion.

It also extended its sincere congratulations to citizens and residents on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, expressing its best wishes for continued health and well-being for all.

The Diwan wished prosperity and blessings for Kuwait, as well as for the Arab and Islamic nations, and peace and stability for the international community, and wished continued security, stability, and prosperity for Kuwait under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

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His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



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

## National Guard keeps Kuwait's skies secure

### Iran's intel chief reportedly killed in strike



PM Diwan photo

HH the PM chairs the weekly Cabinet meeting on Tuesday.

### Cabinet issues stark warning as Kuwait foils major Hezbollah-linked terror plot

KUWAIT CITY, March 18, (KUNA): Kuwait's Cabinet stressed the country's security is a "red line", affirming zero tolerance for any attempts to undermine national stability or collaborate with terrorist organizations.

This came during the Cabinet meeting chaired by His Highness Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to touch on the latest security, political and humanitarian developments amid ongoing regional tensions.

In a statement following the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sher-eeda Al-Maousherji said the Cabinet extended Eid Al-Fitr greetings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and the Kuwaiti people.

The Cabinet was briefed on international solidarity with Kuwait following recent attacks, including a call between His Highness the Amir and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, who reaffirmed Egypt's support for Kuwait's sovereignty and security.

Similar messages of support were conveyed to the

Crown Prince by leaders of the Netherlands, Germany, and Zambia.

In turn, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah informed the Cabinet of the dismantling of a terrorist cell linked to Hezbollah.

The group, comprising 16 individuals, was allegedly plotting to destabilize the country. Authorities seized weapons, ammunition, drones, encrypted communication devices, and funds. The suspects are being referred to the Public Prosecution.

The Cabinet strongly condemned the plot, stressing that Kuwait's security is a "red line" and affirming zero tolerance for any attempts to undermine national stability or collaborate with terrorist organizations.

The meeting also reviewed military readiness, with Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah outlining ongoing efforts to enhance preparedness across armed forces amid escalating regional tensions.

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### Vigilant security forces uncover Hezb network

By Munif Naif  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Director of the Security Media Department at the Ministry of Interior Colonel Othman Gharib Al-Mansouri confirmed that security forces thwarted a terrorist plot through precise pre-emptive strikes.

Al-Mansouri disclosed these strikes resulted in the discovery and arrest of a cell linked to the Hezbollah, indicating that the operation revealed a well-organized network with dangerous dimensions, not an isolated incident, and that some of its members are citizens.

He clarified that the vigilance of security personnel and the high level of security awareness among ministry members were decisive factors in uncovering the plot.

He affirmed that the relevant authorities continue their work with utmost resolve to confront attempts to target national security and stability.

He added that security agencies monitor round the clock all social media posts expressing sympathy or support for terrorist organizations or hostile entities. He pointed out that the Cyber-crime Department monitors these violations and takes legal action against the perpetrators in accordance with the law.

Continued on Page 5

### Kuwait adds 16 to national terror list

By Fares Ghaleb  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: In a development related to the announcement of the Ministry of Interior a few days ago regarding the arrest of a terrorist cell affiliated with the Hezbollah, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a circular to all companies and financial institutions in Kuwait about the inclusion of 16 individuals - 13 Kuwaiti citizens, two Lebanese nationals and one non-Kuwaiti - on the national list of persons, organizations and entities linked to terrorist crimes.

The circular is based on a ministerial decision on the executive regulations of the committee responsible for implementing the United Nations Security Council resolutions issued under Chapter VII, which are related to combating terrorism and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The committee confirmed that it approved the listing of the 16 individuals on the national counter-terrorism register. The concerned authorities called on all financial institutions and entities subject to these regulations to fully comply with the issued directives and to take the necessary measures in accordance with the applicable laws, ensure compliance with the relevant resolutions, and support State efforts to combat terrorism and its financing.

Continued on Page 5

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

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Task Force intercepted and destroyed seven hostile drones in its area of responsibility early morning on Wednesday.

In a press statement, KNG spokesman Brigadier Jadaan Fadhel Jadaan asserted that this measure is in line with the ongoing efforts of the Kuwait Armed Forces to maintain national security and protect vital sites against threats.

He said the KNG, in collaboration with the Armed Forces, police and Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), maintain the highest level of preparedness to guarantee national security and stability of the country.

He advised the public to abide by the safety instructions of the competent authorities and cooperate with the military and police forces in maintaining the sovereignty, security and stability of the country.

Kuwait National Guard (KNG) said Wednesday morning that the readings of Kuwait's air and territorial waters samples are within the normal levels.

Specialized teams of His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Center for Chemical Defense and Radiological Observation constantly follow up the situation in collaboration with competent government bodies.

They work around the clock, in the framework of radiological surveillance system, to make sure of the safety of everybody, KNG spokesman Brigadier Jadaan told KUNA.

Brigadier Jadaan advised the public to rely on official sources for news and keep away from misinformation and rumors.

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### Ramadan Timings

Imsak	Thursday	04:34
Iftar	Thursday	17:59
Eid prayers	Friday	06:08

Zain Kuwait offers all 8 customers free internet daily for one month



Jazeera Airways maintains flights to Egypt amid regional disruptions

## Prayer Timings

Fajr .....	04:34	Asr .....	15:23
Sunrise ..	05:53	Maghrib ..	17:59
Zohr .....	11:56	Isha .....	19:15

# Local

## Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

**By Day:** Warm with light to northwesterly wind to light wind, with speed of 08-32 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

## Weather

**By Night:** 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

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



HH the Crown Prince



Asif Ali Zardari



Droupadi Murmu

## India, Pakistan convey Eid greetings

KUWAIT CITY, March 18, (KUNA): His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received a phone call on Wednesday from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who conveyed greetings from President Droupadi Murmu to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Crown Prince on the advent of Eid Al-Fitr, wishing Kuwait further progress, prosperity, and lasting security and stability.

During the call, Modi reiterated India's condemnation of Iranian attacks on Kuwait, calling them a violation of sovereignty and international law, and affirmed full solidarity and support for Kuwait's security and stability.

His Highness the Crown Prince conveyed the Amir's greetings to President Murmu, expressing appreciation for India's supportive stance and wishing the country and its people continued progress and prosperity.

### Pakistan

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled

Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received a phone call from Pakistan Prime Minister Mohammad Shehbaz Sharif, conveying greetings from President Asif Ali Zardari to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and to His Highness on Eid Al-Fitr.

Sharif extended his best wishes, praying for many returns and blessings upon both countries and the Islamic nation.

He reiterated Pakistan's condemnation of Iranian attacks on Kuwait, describing them as a flagrant violation of sovereignty and international law, and affirmed full support for Kuwait's measures to safeguard its security and territorial integrity.

His Highness the Crown Prince conveyed His Highness the Amir's greetings to President Zardari, expressing appreciation for the Prime Minister's gesture and sincere sentiments, and commending Pakistan's firm and supportive stance toward Kuwait's security and stability.

His Highness also wished Pakistan and its friendly people continued progress and prosperity.

## Kuwait eyes 1,200MW costing KD15m

# Gulf grid purchase to suffice April

### By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy has referred a contract to the State Audit Bureau (SAB) for the purchase of 1,200 megawatts of electricity from the Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) for the month of April, at a total cost of KD15.381 million.

The contract was submitted to SAB for review, study, audit and approval.

It is worth noting that through this contract, the ministry intends to secure adequate electricity supply for April

in anticipation of rising temperatures, which are expected to lead to higher consumption. SAB previously approved the contract to import electricity from GCCIA for the period from the beginning of January until the end of March, at a total value of KD43.5 million.

In another development, the ministry has submitted a tender for the construction, completion, maintenance and development of Shuwaikh Water Distribution Complex and the associated works at a total cost of KD74.703 million to the State Audit Bureau (SAB) for review.

The project aims to increase freshwater storage capacity by 66 million

gallons per day, raise pumping rates to 54.5 million gallons per day, and increase brackish water pumping to 23.5 million gallons per day.

Also, the ministry is waiting for SAB to approve the contract for the construction, completion, maintenance and development of the existing and new Doha Water Distribution Complex and a water pipeline from the complex to the United Nations Roundabout, along with associated works, at a cost of KD97.188.

The ministry submitted the tender to SAB on Feb 10 for review, study and audit, after obtaining approval from the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT).

## Lebanon slams anti-Kuwait terror plot

KUWAIT CITY, March 18, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received a telephone call Tuesday from Lebanese Prime Minister Dr. Nawaf Salam, who expressed his vehement condemnation of a terrorist plot targeting the State of Kuwait.

During the conversation, Premier Salam affirmed Lebanon's unwavering solidarity with Kuwait, backing all measures taken to thwart plots aimed at undermining the country's security and stability.

For his part, His Highness the Prime Minister expressed the State of Kuwait's categorical denunciation of the ongoing violations and attacks by the Israeli occupation forces against Lebanese territories.

His Highness emphasized that the Israeli occupa-



HH the PM

tion's aggression constitutes a flagrant breach of international law, international humanitarian law, and relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

He further reaffirmed Kuwait's steadfast support for Lebanon in safeguarding its security, stability, and territorial sovereignty.

His Highness the Prime Minister extended his profound appreciation to his Lebanese counterpart for his principled stance and for Lebanon's continued support of Kuwait's security and territorial integrity.

# Kuwait sovereignty red line: GCC chief

## Zero tolerance for terrorism: UAE

RIYADH, March 18, (KUNA): Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi commended Tuesday the prominent and professional efforts undertaken by Kuwait's security authorities, which led to the arrest of a Hezbollah-linked terrorist cell.

In a press statement, Al-Budaiwi strongly condemned this terrorist group's plans and targeting of Kuwait's security and stability.

He affirmed that this security achievement reflects the high level of vigilance and efficiency of the competent authorities in the State of Kuwait, and their ability to deal decisively and proactively with terrorist threats in a manner that protects lives, safeguards state capabilities and preserves societal security.

Furthermore, he stressed the GCC's firm and unwavering stance rejecting all forms of terrorism and extremism, affirming the full support of the GCC member states for all measures taken by the State of Kuwait to maintain its security and stability, safe-

guard its sovereignty, and confront anyone who may seek to undermine its security or threaten the safety of its citizens and residents.

The GCC chief underlined that the GCC member states will remain united in confronting terrorism, continuing to strengthen the collective security system and consolidate stability in the region, in a manner that serves the interests of their peoples and preserves their achievements.

### UAE condemns terror plot

The United Arab Emirates expressed its strong condemnation of the terrorist plot targeting Kuwait, praising the efficiency and vigilance of its security services, which succeeded in apprehending the Hezbollah-linked terrorist cell that that planned to destabilize its security and stability.

According to the Emirati News Agency (WAM), Khalifa Shaheen Al-Marar, Minister of State, affirmed that the United Arab Emirates categorically rejects all forms of violence, extremism, and terrorism aimed at undermining the security and stability of states.

He reaffirmed the UAE's full solidarity with Kuwait and its unwavering support for all measures taken to safeguard its security and stability, and to ensure the safety of its citizens and residents.



Jassem Al-Budaiwi





حفظ الله الكويت من كل مكروه

## Eid Mubarak

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# Feed dearth to push up meat prices

Livestock breeders divided on lifting subsidies

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The escalating conflict between America, Israel and Iran, and the economic repercussions of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, cast a shadow over the livestock and poultry sector in Kuwait, causing prices to rise by about 30 percent and an acute shortage of animal feed.**

In an interview with the newspaper, several livestock breeders and experts called for removing subsidies on animal feed.

However, the majority prefer maintaining the subsidies to prevent a 'price war' in the country. They also called for more efficient distribution mechanism and the establishment of multiple distribution points to alleviate congestion at the only existing outlet.

Head of the Kuwaiti Association for Livestock and Food Security **Jamal Al-Wusaidi** asserted that it is impor-

tant to ensure an adequate supply of subsidized feed to reduce the crowd at the only distribution point. He explained that the current congestion is a manifestation of the high demand among breeders.

On the other reasons behind the crowd at the distribution point, Al-Wusaidi clarified that distributing feed at close intervals causes hardship for livestock breeders, taking into consideration the long waiting period, hence, the need for a more efficient distribution mechanism.

He pointed out that implementing an online booking system for feed collection is insufficient, stressing the importance of increasing distribution outlets to alleviate pressure on the existing center, with the possibility of extending working hours during peak periods.

He wondered why the milling company's centers are not utilized to open outlets for distributing subsidized feed upon its arrival. He stated this will prevent feed hoarding, while urging the milling company to issue clear statements to reassure livestock breeders about the availability and continuous distribution of subsidized feed.

He objected to the proposal to eliminate subsidies, asserting that this step could lead to a remarkable increase in



Animal feed distribution encounters crisis.

feed prices at the black market. He emphasized that making subsidies available to everyone will curb the high feed prices.

He also stressed the importance of establishing feed mills, which the private sector could implement, to ensure continuous supply of feed during normal times and geopolitical crises. He added that this will eliminate the black feed market.

Meanwhile, Bandar Al-Muwais, a board member of the Kuwaiti Association for Livestock and Food Security, stated that the crowd at the subsidized

feed distribution outlet requires immediate solution.

He pointed out that the current online appointment system for receiving subsidized feed has not fully resolved the issue, as heirs are unable to book an appointment through the Kuwait Mobile application, and many invoices are nearing expiration. He appealed to the relevant authorities to find a solution for such cases by granting exceptions for loading or specifying a day each week.

He warned that failure to resolve the feed crisis will drive meat prices to

astronomical levels and this will negatively affect the consumers.

On the effects of the current war between the United States and Israel against Iran, Al-Muwais confirmed the impact of the war, especially since some countries like Australia halted meat exports due to the war, while others reduced their livestock imports.

Hamdan Abdullah, an official at a livestock feed distribution center, supported the idea of lifting government subsidies on animal feed, particularly since imported feed is available in Kuwait. He explained that lifting the subsidies will level the playing field for all livestock and poultry farmers.

He added that the implementation of



Al-Furaih



Al-Wusaidi

this proposal will open many outlets in Wafra, Kabad, Sulaibiya and Abdally cooperative societies, thus, preventing those who illegally obtain subsidies from doing so, while others buy subsidized feed and resell them in the black market at exorbitant prices.

Hussein Al-Wawan, owner of a feed trading company, stated that there is no shortage of feed despite the current crisis. He pointed out that trucks transport feed from Saudi Arabia continuously, and there are no issues with the availability of feed, which is sold at fixed prices.

Food security consultant **Mohammad Al-Furaih** warned that the proposed increase in feed subsidies will harm the livestock and poultry farmers. He suggested allowing the private sector to establish one or more feed mills with a production capacity of at least 100 tons per hour, preferably located in the new ports to facilitate the import of raw materials, with the feed delivered directly to production sites throughout the country.

He added that the current war led to the increase in the price of a tray of organic eggs to more than KD5 compared to KD2,500 before the war. He predicted a significant increase in poultry prices if the war continues.

## Army, KFF seek to upgrade preparedness, response



Kuwait Armed Forces and Kuwait Fire Force delegations during the meeting.



Kuwait Armed Forces photos  
Kuwaiti Armed Forces Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Khaled Al-Shuraiaan with Director General of the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) Major General Talal Al-Roumi.

KUWAIT CITY, March 18, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Armed Forces Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Khaled Al-Shuraiaan and Director General of the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) Major General Talal Al-Roumi discussed Tuesday ways to enhance cooperation and readiness to manage emergencies and strengthen the country's security and stability.

This came during General Khaled Al-Shuraiaan visit to KFF as part of joint coordination with all military and security sectors in

the country, KFF said in a statement.

Both sides reaffirmed collaboration and expertise exchange to support national efforts aiming to protect people, properties, and achieved highest preparatory levels to protect social security.

## Buy what you need, foodstuff sufficient for 6 months to year

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Maryam Al-Awad, the newly appointed director of the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies (UCCS), emphasized the importance of purchasing only what is needed, whether under current circumstances or any other, reports Al-Anba daily.

In an interview with Kuwait Radio, Al-Awad stressed the need to avoid excessive stockpiling, especially since most products have expiration dates. She urged consumers to buy only what they need, noting that the situation is stable, all goods are available in cooperative societies, there is no overcrowding, and all products are readily accessible.

She expressed her gratitude to the boards of directors and staff of the co-

operative societies for their efforts in serving citizens and residents.

Al-Awad explained that one of the goals of establishing UCCS is to curb artificial price increases in coordination with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

She indicated that price differences between some cooperative societies are often due to temporary promotional offers in certain cooperative societies but not others.

Al-Awad reiterated that food and consumer goods are available in sufficient quantities, with continuous supplies around the clock.

She also confirmed that the strategic stock in cooperative societies is sufficient for six months to a year.

## MPW, MoIA conduct mock exercises to quit premises

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The Ministry of Public Works, in collaboration with the Civil Defense, recently conducted a mock evacuation drill, as per the directive of Public Works Minister Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan in view of the current circumstances in the country.

This drill is a vital component of the preparedness plan of the ministry, aimed at ensuring full readiness for any regional emergency.

The drill included an evaluation of several critical aspects of the ministry's readiness mechanism, such as the efficient movement of personnel to the designated shelter and the availability of essential provisions like medical supplies and food.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs (MoIA) also conducted a mock evacuation drill for its employees in cooperation with the General Directorate of Civil Defense, as part of its efforts to enhance safety awareness and improve preparedness for emergencies, reports Al-Rai daily.

## Other Voices

## Troubles of the troubleshooting profession

By Ahmad alsarraf

After careful deliberation, the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Lawyers Society (KLS) decided to remove 11 lawyers from the society's register for failing to meet one of the requirements stipulated in the Law Regulating the Legal Profession, following the completion of the necessary legal procedures.

The KLS Board also decided to suspend three law firms after it was proven that they were being managed by individuals not authorized to practice law and had committed serious violations of professional standards and legal provisions.

In the same context, the Board approved filing several reports against expatriates who posted videos on social media offering legal advice in violation of the Law Regulating the Legal Profession. The Board emphasized that these measures are part of its ongoing efforts to protect the legal profession, preserve its prestige, and address violations that undermine its regu-



alsarraf

lation or harm legal practice in Kuwait.

For over half a century, I have dealt with numerous law firms, and some of my experiences have been extremely frustrating, either due to a lawyer's inefficiency or lack of integrity.

Dealing with lawyers is often similar to dealing with doctors, as clients typically do not require them to verify the source or validity of their academic credentials. Instead, clients rely on official bodies to handle these oversight responsibilities on their behalf.

Therefore, there is nothing preventing individuals or companies from requesting the CV of a law firm before signing any contract, especially in a market as saturated as Kuwait's, which likely has one of the highest ratios of lawyers relative to its population.

This situation arose during a dark era, when graduates of Islamic law (Sharia) institutes were allowed to practice as lawyers and later assume judicial positions. This decision overlooked the fact that these graduates had not studied procedural law, the Penal Code, international law, or other essential legal fields. The Ministry of Justice eventually intervened and suspended this system after its shortcomings became clear.

Some lawyers use social media to promote themselves or their firms, but they should uphold the dignity of the profession rather than reduce it to commercial publicity. A lawyer appearing in a video to announce a lawsuit victory without providing context is highly problematic.

The ruling he obtained may have been issued by the Court of First Instance and could later be overturned by a higher court. Will that attorney then post another video to announce his defeat?

I hope the Board of Directors of KLS continues reviewing the status of law firms. We are going through a phase - perhaps one that may not recur - where all doors are open for a comprehensive revision of mistakes committed over the past two to three decades.

KLS should actively encourage citizens harmed by the actions of certain law firms to come forward and submit their complaints. Such a measure would provide a sufficient degree of deterrence, even if the society's ability to take direct action is limited.

**Note:** What is the truth behind the rumors of holding by-elections in KLS?

□ □ □

email: a.alsarraf@alqabas.com.kw

## Salary pocketed without work

### Bank staff, aide jailed 7 years in fraudulent acquiring of loan

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The Criminal Court sentenced an expatriate bank employee and his accomplice to seven years in prison and ordered them to jointly pay a fine of KD 144,000.

The two defendants were convicted of fraudulently obtaining a KD 36,000 loan using the name of the second defendant's sister, despite the loan having been repaid later.

According to case details, the second defendant initially asked his colleague at the bank to act as a guarantor for a KD

6,000 loan. However, the two manipulated the documents to inflate the loan amount to KD 36,000 under the second defendant's sister's name and unlawfully secured the loan.

The court also ordered the dismissal of the bank employee. The sentence may be suspended if the defendant posts bail of KD 1,000 pending a final ruling.

In a separate case, the Criminal Court fined a female employee KD 1,000 after convicting her of misappropriating KD 14,000 in unearned wages while absent from work. The penalty was issued after she returned the funds.

## Ban on outdoors: MoIA

### Mosques to host 6:08 am Eid prayer

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The Ministry of Islamic Affairs announced that an administrative circular had been issued by the ministry's Undersecretary, Eng. Suleiman Al-Suwailem, instructing mosque administration directors in all governorates to hold Eid prayers in all mosques where Friday prayers are held at 6:08 am, taking into account the time differences, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The ministry emphasized that Eid prayers should not be held in outdoor areas.

It affirmed that a special supplication will be dedicated for His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for the country, for mercy upon the righteous martyrs, and for the protection and steadfastness of soldiers.

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**Kuwait calls for education and awareness to strengthen coexistence**

# Confronting 'Islamophobia' key to combating hatred: Al-Banai

NEW YORK, March 18, (KUNA): Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Tareq Al-Banai affirmed Tuesday confronting Islamophobia is an integral part of combating hatred, intolerance and discrimination, calling for enhanced international and cultural cooperation as well as interfaith dialogue.

This came in Al-Banai's statement at a meeting held Monday by the UN General Assembly to observe the International Day

to Combat Islamophobia.

Ambassador Al-Banai pointed out that the real challenge in combating religious intolerance and hate speech is taking practical steps to address it through education and awareness that promote dialogue and understanding between cultures and religions.

He warned that the world is still witnessing a worrying rise for hate speech and discrimination in some regions against Muslims,

adding that this phenomenon undermines the value of coexistence and threatens the foundations upon which diverse and open societies are built.

Al-Banai added that the continuation of these practices contradicts the basic principles the international order is based on, foremost being the respect for human dignity and protection of human rights without discrimination.

He highlighted that the Constitution

of Kuwait enshrines values of tolerance, equality, and respect for religious and cultural diversity, as Article (29) stipulates that 'all people are equal in human dignity and are equal before the law in public rights and duties; no discrimination shall be made among them on the basis of sex, origin, language, or religion.'

He explained that confronting these phenomena requires consolidating values of compassion and understanding, promoting a

culture of tolerance and acceptance, alongside taking a firm stance globally, nationally and institutionally to reject all forms of hatred, especially Islamophobia.

The Ambassador concluded his speech by emphasizing Kuwait's commitment to continuing working with its partners in the international community to promote the values of tolerance and dialogue, contributing to building more just and humane societies.



KUNA photo  
A humanitarian project dedicated to orphans and the most vulnerable groups in the Gaza Strip.

## Kuwait's Ataa Association launches 'Winter Warmth' aid project in Gaza

KUWAIT CITY, March 18, (KUNA): The Ataa Humanitarian Association announced the implementation of the "Winter Warmth" project in the Gaza Strip, with generous support from Issa Abdullah Al-Othman endowment.

The project benefits more than 400 orphans and the most vulnerable groups, amid the difficult humanitarian conditions in Gaza, the association's Director General, Omar Al-Shaqra, told KUNA.

He added that these efforts are a continuation of Kuwait's leading humanitarian role and that of its charitable institutions in providing relief to those affected around the world, especially in the Gaza Strip, which faces complex living and humanitarian conditions that require intensified support and assistance.

tance.

Al-Shaqra explained that the project included the distribution of winter clothing and blankets, helping to ease the suffering of families and provide them with warmth during the winter season. He noted that the initiative reflects the commitment of Kuwaiti charitable work to supporting their brothers in Gaza.

He also stated that the project was implemented in coordination with the relevant official authorities and in cooperation with accredited associations within the framework of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ensuring that the aid reaches those who deserve it according to the highest standards of transparency and reliability.

# Kuwait's national debt relief drive raises KD 16.5mn: MoJ

IICO and Al-Najat donate KD 130,000

**KUWAIT CITY, March 18, (KUNA): The total bagged sum from the donation campaign launched by the Ministry of Justice nationwide for indebted Kuwaitis has climbed to KD 16.5 million (about USD 54 million), said Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait said on Tuesday.**

Speaking to KUNA, Al-Sumait added that the campaign, concluded today, was successful and witnessed high interaction from different groups of society in a scene that showed unity and rapid responses to humanitarian initiatives, noting that the number of donors hit 138,326.

The ministry's General Directorate of Implementation will immediately pay the due debts in line with the approved regulations in a manner that ensures the delivery of these donations to those who deserve them in an efficient and transparent manner, he affirmed.

The minister commended big contributions of agencies, institutions, banks, companies and individuals who contributed to alleviating the sufferings of the indebted.

He prayed to Allah the Almighty to preserve Kuwait, under the leadership of His Highness the Amir

Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and to maintain its security and stability.

The Ministry of Justice launched on Monday the campaign to pay back the debts of citizens who are facing judicial law cases that aimed to financially back this group.

A total of KD 130,000 (about USD 423,964) has been collected from the International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) and Al-Najat Charity contributions for indebted citizens as part of a nationwide donation campaign launched by the Ministry of Justice.

Speaking to KUNA, Ibrahim Al-Bader, a senior IICO official, said the KD-100,000 contribution of the organization shows eagerness to back the state's institutions and partaking in national initiatives aiming to alleviate this group's burdens and restore the stability of their lives.

Al-Bader affirmed that supporting the indebted is a type of humanitarian action to which the IICO pays much attention, noting that this initiative shows the spirit of cooperation between government agencies and charities to serve society.

Meanwhile, Al-Najat director general Jaber Al-Wanda told KUNA that the step mirrors the national duty of the charity and its keenness on mitigating the financial burdens of the indebted in a manner that boosts

solidarity and mercy among individuals in society.

Minister of Social Affairs and Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthah Al-Huwaila and Minister of Justice, Counselor Nasser Al-Sumait held a meeting on Wednesday to discuss updates on the debt relief campaign and enhance mechanisms for joint cooperation between authorities.

In a press statement, the Ministry of Social Affairs said the meeting, held at its headquarters, began with expressions of appreciation to all those who contributed to supporting the campaign, including cooperative societies and charitable organizations, recognizing their active role in ensuring the campaign's success and alleviating the hardship of those in need.

The statement quoted Minister Al-Huwaila saying that such cooperation reflects effective government integration and reinforces the success of national initiatives aimed at supporting and assisting citizens.

On his part, Minister Al-Sumait emphasized that work is proceeding in a spirit of teamwork and common approach, highlighting ongoing readiness to ensure support reaches its rightful beneficiaries accurately and smoothly.

The meeting included an exchange of expertise between the Ministries of Social Affairs and Justice and explored ways to develop joint work to expedite procedures, organize priorities, and achieve the campaign's humanitarian objectives.



## Tunisia, GCC talk security and co-op

### Algeria, Thailand voice support in calls with Kuwait Foreign Minister

KUWAIT CITY, March 18, (KUNA): Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Tuesday two phone calls from Algeria's Minister of State, Minister of Foreign Affairs, National Community Abroad, and African Affairs Ahmed Attaf, and Thailand's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sihanak Phuangketkeow.

In a statement, Kuwait Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that during the phone call, Minister Attaf expressed Algeria's solidarity with Kuwait regarding the Iranian aggression, affirming the importance of respecting Kuwait's sovereignty and territorial integrity.



Sheikh Jarrah

In a separate statement, the Ministry said that Minister Phuangketkeow discussed during the phone call the ongoing military escalation in the region as a result of the Iranian aggression against countries in the region, and the serious repercussions and concerning implications this carries for security and stability at both regional and international levels.

Meanwhile, Tunisia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Migration and Tunisians Abroad, Mohamed Ali Nafti, discussed on Tuesday with ambassadors of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries accredited to Tunisia the Iranian attacks targeting GCC states.

According to a statement by the Embassy of Kuwait in Tunisia, the ambassadors briefed the Tunisian minister on the nature of the Iranian attacks against GCC countries.

The meeting also reviewed relations between Tunisia and GCC states and ways to enhance cooperation across various fields.

## Kuwaiti envoy presents credentials to Lebanese FM, affirms strong ties

BEIRUT, March 18, (KUNA): Kuwait Ambassador to Lebanon Mohammad Al-Sharji on Tuesday presented his credentials to Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants Youssef Raggi.

The Kuwaiti Embassy in Lebanon said in a statement that Ambassador Al-Sharji conveyed the greetings of Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to his Lebanese counterpart, affirming the deep-rooted fraternal ties between Kuwait and Lebanon.

He stressed Kuwait's support for Lebanon during this delicate stage, reiterating its support for the efforts and decisions undertaken by the Lebanese government to reinforce the country's sovereignty, preserve its independence and safeguard its territorial integrity.

Al-Sharji expressed pride in joining the "Kuwaiti-Lebanese diplomatic framework" working to advance bilateral relations across all fields, highlighting the prominent role of the Lebanese community in Kuwait.

During the meeting, he also discussed regional developments, voicing strong condemnation of the ongoing Israeli occupation's aggression against Lebanon, and underscoring the importance of adhering to the ceasefire and relevant international resolutions.



KUNA photo  
Kuwait's Ambassador to Lebanon, Mohammad Sultan Al-Sharji, presenting a copy of his credentials to Lebanese Foreign Minister Youssef Raggi.

lutions, particularly UN Security Council Resolution 1701.

The Kuwaiti Ambassador further highlighted the "blatant Iranian attacks on Kuwait in particular and on the GCC countries in general," and their far-reaching negative impact on international peace and security.

## KU hosts online exam workshop

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Kuwait University organized an online training workshop titled "Enhancing the Quality of Online Exams Using the Moodle System and Best Practices for Conducting Remote Exams" on Tuesday afternoon.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait University, the workshop was delivered by Dr. Abdullah Mohammed Al-Mutawa, Vice President for Academic Support Services at the university, as part of the university's ongoing efforts to support digital transformation, strengthen the academic assessment system, and enhance faculty readiness.

These workshops aim to improve faculty members' ability to manage online exams

effectively for ensuring high-quality assessment and the continuity of the educational process, particularly in light of the current circumstances in Kuwait and the continued reliance on distance learning.

The university is building on the institutional experience it developed during the COVID-19 pandemic and is now working to further refine and expand this expertise, including the responsible use of artificial intelligence tools to support education and assessment.

The university also provides faculty members, support staff, and students with a range of support resources, including the Moodle platform, training workshops, user guides, and technical assistance.

<b>Book for One-night</b> (Inclusive of breakfast)	Queen Cabana (2 persons). 2 Bedroom Chalet (4 persons).	<b>BHD 76.230 net</b> <b>BHD 170.247 net</b>
<b>Book for Two nights</b> (Inclusive of breakfast) (Non-refundable/Non-Cancellable)	Queen Cabana (2 persons) per night. 2 Bedroom Chalet (4 persons) per night.	<b>BHD 65.000 net</b> <b>BHD 145.000 net</b>
<b>Book for Three nights</b> (Inclusive of breakfast) (Non-refundable/Non-Cancellable)	Queen Cabana (2 persons) per night. 2 Bedroom Chalet (4 persons) per night.	<b>BHD 57.173 net</b> <b>BHD 128.000 net</b>

Lunch Buffet will be served at **Café Marisol Restaurant** with price of **BD6.600/net** per person. Starts from 12:30 Noon to 15:30 hrs.

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## Prayers for peace and stability

## Father Bigoul extends wishes to Kuwaiti leadership on Eid al-Fitr

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Father Bigoul Anba Bishoy, a senior priest of St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Kuwait, extended his congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, the government of Kuwait led by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah, the generous Kuwaiti people, and all residents of Kuwait on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr.

In a press release, Father Bigoul prayed that God grant the country greater security, stability, and prosperity.

Father Bigoul conveyed the greetings of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark in Egypt and the diaspora, as well as His Grace Bishop Antonios, Metropolitan of Jerusalem, Kuwait, and the Near East, along with their prayers and best wishes for Kuwait's continued success, safety, and progress along its blessed path of development.

He affirmed that Eid al-Fitr is a significant occasion that renews the values of mercy, love, and tolerance, bringing hearts together in a spirit of purity and loyalty. He emphasized that holidays in Kuwait consistently carry a distinctive humanitarian character, reflecting the unity and solidarity of Kuwaiti society.

Father Bigoul highlighted that the region is going through a delicate period and facing significant challenges due to the ongoing war and tragic events.

He emphasized the importance of upholding the values of wisdom and stability for which the State of Kuwait is renowned.

Father Bigoul expressed his hope that peace and security will prevail throughout the region, that life will return to normal, and

that dialogue and wisdom will triumph over the causes of conflict and tension.

He affirmed that, under its wise leadership headed by His Highness the Amir, and with its balanced approach to regional issues, the State of Kuwait will continue to be an oasis of security, peace, and stability.

Father Bigoul praised the Kuwaiti leadership for its prudence in navigating the current challenges while safeguarding the nation's security and strengthening its stability.

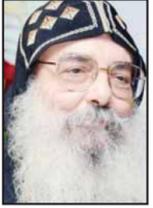
He also paid tribute to the souls of Kuwait's martyrs, honoring their invaluable sacrifices in defending the homeland and safeguarding its security.

Father Bigoul commended the Kuwait Armed Forces for their efforts in protecting the nation and its borders, as well as the personnel of the Ministry of Interior for their ongoing efforts to maintain security and stability.

In addition, he praised the vital contributions of various state institutions, including the Ministry of Health, the Kuwait Fire Force, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, all media outlets, and other vital sectors that continually strive to serve the community and meet its needs.

Father Bigoul said, "What sets the State of Kuwait apart in such circumstances is the unity of its internal front and the solidarity among its leadership, people, and institutions. This reflects a deep sense of responsibility and attachment to the beloved homeland. As a result, Kuwait remains, in times of both celebration and challenge, a model of human solidarity and national unity."

He concluded his greetings by saying, "We pray that God protects Kuwait, its leadership, and its people, grants the country continued security, stability, and prosperity, and allows everyone to celebrate Eid al-Fitr with goodness and happiness. We also pray for peace and tranquility throughout the region and the entire world."



Father Bigoul



His Highness Sheikh Ahmed Abdullah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, Prime Minister, paid an inspection visit Wednesday to the new maternity hospital in the Sabah Specialized Medical Area, accompanied by the Minister of Health, Dr. Ahmed Abdulwahab Al-Awadhi.



PM Diwan photos

## Kuwait PM inspects new maternity hospital

KUWAIT CITY, March 18, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah conducted an inspection visit on Wednesday to the new maternity hospital in Al-Sabah medical zone, accompanied by Minister of Health Dr. Ahmed Abdulwahab Al-Awadhi.

His Highness the Prime Minister reviewed the hospital's shelter center, which houses a strategic stock of food, medicines, medical supplies, and logistical and service equipment, ensuring a safe environment in emergency situations.

He was later briefed from officials on the hospital's operational mechanisms

and the medical services provided, in addition to the preparations taken to ensure the continuity of healthcare delivery according to the highest standards, safeguarding both patients and medical staff.

His Highness the Prime Minister expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the efforts of medical, technical, and administrative staff across all hospitals in the country, commending their sense of responsibility and dedication to their duty, and emphasizing the importance of continued coordination among authorities to maintain health and safety of all.

## Kuwait adopts tougher laws on terrorism and military security

## Measures strengthen national security

By Jaber Al-Hamoud  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Fahd Nayef Al-Mutairi, a member of the Technical Office at the Public Prosecution, confirmed the issuance of Decree-Law No. 47/2026 on combating terrorism and Decree-Law No. 13/2026 on securing and protecting the supreme interests of military entities as part of efforts to develop the legal system of the country in light of the current security threats.**

According to Al-Mutairi, this was achieved through the intensification of preventive and pre-emptive measures, tightening penalties, and reinforcing institutional integration among the relevant authorities.

While reviewing the main features of the two laws, Al-Mutairi explained in his presentation of selected provisions of the new laws that the legislation is in response to the evolving nature of security threats, which are no longer confined to traditional forms but have become more organized, complex and transnational in scope.

He disclosed that the framework was prepared through coordinated institutional efforts among the concerned authorities, with the participation of the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Public Prosecution, reflecting unified national efforts and integrated roles in addressing these challenges.

He stated that the decree-law on combating terrorism provides a precise definition of terrorism, encom-

passing acts targeting individuals, national resources, properties, public facilities, land, sea or air transport, as well as cybersecurity, when the intent is to spread fear, disrupt public order or influence State authorities.

He added that given the gravity of such crimes, the law imposes stricter penalties, reaching in some cases the death penalty or life imprisonment. He also pointed out that attempted terrorist acts are treated like completed crimes, and that failure to report such offenses, as well as providing assistance to perpetrators, are criminalized.

He said the law criminalizes a broad range of terrorism-related activities, including attacks on transportation and vital facilities, targeting diplomatic or international missions, undergoing or providing terrorist training, establishing or managing terrorist organizations, inciting others to join or participate in such groups, communicating with terrorist entities, coercing individuals to join them, and entering or attempting to enter the country with the intent to carry out a terrorist act.

He revealed that the law introduces the concept of "terrorist threat", enabling preventive action to be taken before a crime occurs in accordance with judicial controls, including measures related to rehabilitation, monitoring and restrictions on communication.

He pointed out that the law stipulates the formation of the National Counter-Terrorism Committee tasked to formulate the national strategy, coordinate efforts among relevant entities, and oversee compliance with international obligations.

About Decree-Law No. 13/2026 on securing and protecting the supreme interests of military entities, Al-Mutairi affirmed that it provides a comprehensive

legal framework for safeguarding these interests. He explained that the law aims to enable military entities to perform their duties efficiently within a work environment defined by speed, decisiveness and discipline.

He said the law strictly prohibits unauthorized entry into military sites and mandates the confidentiality of all military information, banning their disclosure or circulation.

He added that the legislation regulates security and protection procedures for military zones and installations, granting competent authorities clearly defined field powers exercised under specific legal controls.

He also stated that the law governs military movements and deployments, requiring cooperation with the concerned authorities and ensuring that roads are cleared for military convoys to guarantee rapid mission execution and guarantee safety.

He cited one of the key provisions of the law -- the criminalization of publishing or disseminating false news, statements or rumors related to military entities when such actions could harm their reputation or affect the morale of their personnel.

He emphasized that the Public Prosecution holds exclusive jurisdiction over the investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of crimes stipulated under these laws, thereby, enhancing procedural efficiency and unity of jurisdiction.

He considers these new laws a significant advancement in the development of the legal framework of Kuwait, in line with its commitment to maintain national security and stability, align with international best practices, and maintain the balance between security requirements and the guarantees of legitimacy.

## MEW confirms stable utility ops

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy has reassured the public that all operational processes in the ministry are running smoothly, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a video message shared on its social media channels, the ministry explained that technical teams are working around the clock to provide electricity and water services to all consumers.

Emergency teams are fully prepared to respond to any unexpected situations.

The ministry called on customers to help conserve electricity and water by following guidelines to prevent waste and ensure optimal usage.

It expressed gratitude to all ministry employees who continue to face challenges but exert tremendous efforts to perform their duties diligently.

## Iran's rulers

Since the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, the current regime has focused on internal affairs, intensifying repression and killings to prevent a revolution against it.

In recent months, as Iranians have risen up against dire living conditions and the economic crisis, the regime has used excessive force, killing more than 35,000 unarmed protesters. This reveals the Iranian regime's fear of the consequences of a successful revolution against it.

Since 1979, the regime has killed at least 500,000 of its own citizens.

This staggering number explains why the regime now hides behind slogans in an attempt to avert its downfall.

The facts, however, show that the Iranian regime has become nothing more than a paper tiger, both in the eyes of the region and its own people.

The declaration of defeat, despite persistent stubbornness, will come as a result of a popular revolution against the regime, because the end of arrogance and defiance has always been bitter.

This is what happened to Nazi Germany under Hitler, to Japan in World War II, and to Bashar al-Assad and other rulers who defied their people after becoming detached from reality and relying on empty slogans.

If a single rational person remains in the current Iranian regime, perhaps they will echo Khomeini's famous words, "I am drinking poison by signing the ceasefire agreement."

## National Guard

Earlier, Defense Ministry spokesman Colonel Saud Al-Atwan stated that the Kuwait Armed Forces intercepted two hostile ballistic missiles and 13 hostile drones in the airspace of the country over the past 24 hours.

In a media briefing, Al-Atwan revealed that two individuals sustained minor injuries due to falling debris, confirming that both individuals are in stable condition. He added that no material damage was recorded.

He said the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Unit handled eight reports within the 24-hour period in accordance with established protocols.

Meanwhile, Interior Ministry spokesman Brigadier General Nasser

Bouslaib disclosed that EOD teams dealt with six incidents of falling debris from defensive interceptions of Iranian attacks, raising the overall number of such reports to 403 since the onset of the aggression.

Bouslaib also affirmed that sirens were activated twice, increasing the total number of activations since the beginning of the aggression to 91.

On Tuesday, Kuwait's Minister of Health, Ahmad Al-Awadhi, visited on Tuesday two emergency medical personnel injured after shrapnel fell on an ambulance center.

In a statement, the Kuwait Ministry of Health said the incident resulted in injuries to two members of the Emergency Medical Services, who were immediately treated and transferred to the hospital to receive necessary medical care.

During the visit, Minister Al-Awadhi reviewed the condition of the injured, noting that both cases are stable and receiving appropriate care under the supervision of specialized medical teams.

The minister also wished the injured a speedy recovery, praising their sense of responsibility and dedication to their humanitarian mission.

In latest development, Israel said Wednesday it killed another top Iranian official, the third in two days, while Iran lashed out with attacks on its Arabian Gulf neighbors and Israel, using some of its latest missiles to evade air defenses and killing two people near Tel Aviv as the war in the Middle East showed no signs of slowing.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said Iranian Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib had been killed in an overnight strike and promised that "significant surprises are expected throughout this day on all fronts," without elaborating.

Iran did not immediately confirm Khatib's death. Israel killed top Iranian security official Ali Larjani and the head of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard's Basij force on Tuesday.

In Lebanon, Israel kept up its intense pressure with strikes it said targeted Iran-backed Hezbollah militants, hitting multiple apartment buildings in Beirut and killing at least a dozen people.

In Iran, the Bushehr nuclear power plant complex was hit by a projectile the night before but there were no injuries and the plant suffered no damage, the International

Atomic Energy Agency said after receiving a report from Tehran. The IAEA chief Rafael Grossi reiterated his call "for maximum restraint during the conflict to prevent risk of a nuclear accident."

Since the United States and Israel attacked Iran to start the war on Feb. 28, Iran has been targeting the energy infrastructure of its Gulf Arab neighbors, as well as military bases, as part of a strategy to drive up oil prices and put pressure on Washington to back down.

On Wednesday, Iranian state-run media also reported an attack on facilities associated with its offshore South Pars natural gas field. It didn't elaborate and it wasn't clear if Israel or the United States had carried out the attack, though the U.S. has been operating primarily in southern Iran.

Tehran also is keeping up its stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz, the shipping lane through which a fifth of the world's oil transits, giving rise to growing concerns of a global energy crisis.

The price of Brent crude oil, the international standard, remained stubbornly over \$100 per barrel in early trading Wednesday, up more than 40% from the start of the war.

Iran attacked Saudi Arabia's vast Eastern Province, home to many of its oil fields, as well as Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates on Wednesday.

Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said a projectile caused a small fire at its base in the UAE near Dubai but caused no injuries. Explosions were heard near Al Minhad Air Base, used by Western nations as a transit hub for the wider Mideast.

Missile alerts sounded again later in Dubai as interceptors exploded overhead across the city-state.

Saudi Arabia shot down a ballistic missile targeting the area of the Prince Sultan Air Base, which hosts American forces and aircraft, and two drones targeting Riyadh's diplomatic quarter, which houses the U.S. Embassy and other foreign missions.

Iran has vowed to continue to throttle shipping traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, which leads from the Arabian Gulf to the open ocean. Since the war started, a few ships have gotten through — some Iranian, but also vessels from India, Turkey and elsewhere. Iran insists the waterway is open, just not to the U.S. or many of its allies.

## Amir congratulates

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Wednesday a telephone call from Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq congratulating him on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr.

During the call, the Omani Sultan expressed his sincere congratulations and best wishes, praying to Allah Almighty to return the blessed occasion to both countries, as well as the Arab and Islamic nations, with goodness, prosperity and blessings, and to bestow continued health and wellbeing upon His Highness the Amir.

Both sides also exchanged reassurances over the conditions of their two brotherly countries and peoples following the recent Iranian attacks that targeted Kuwaiti and Omani territories, reiterating their strong condemnation and denunciation of this blatant aggression, which constitutes a flagrant violation of the sovereignty of both countries, international law, and the Charter of the United Nations.

They affirmed their commitment to mobilizing all efforts to safeguard regional security and stability, stressing the need for an immediate halt to escalation and a return to dialogue and diplomatic solutions.

His Highness the Amir expressed his appreciation to the Omani Sultan for his kind gesture, which reflects the deep-rooted relations between the two countries and peoples, reciprocating Eid greetings and wishing him continued health and wellbeing, and the Omani people further progress, growth and prosperity under his wise leadership.

Also on Wednesday, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah a call from King of Jordan Abdullah II.

During the call, King Abdullah conveyed his sincere congratulations and best wishes on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, wishing continued health and well-being to His Highness the Amir and expressing hopes for prosperity and blessings for both countries, as well as for the Arab and Islamic nations.

The two sides also discussed the situation in their respective countries following the Iranian attacks that targeted the territories of Kuwait and Jordan. They reaffirmed their strong condemnation of this aggression, describing it as a clear violation of the sovereignty of both states and of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, and emphasized their commit-

ment to safeguarding regional security and stability, underscoring the need for an immediate de-escalation and a return to dialogue and diplomatic solutions.

His Highness expressed his appreciation to King Abdullah for the call, noting that it reflects the close relations between the two countries. He also reciprocated the Eid greetings, wishing the King of Jordan continued health and well-being, and the people of Jordan further progress and prosperity under his leadership.

## Vigilant security

He stressed that there is zero tolerance for anyone seeking to sow chaos or incite sedition, affirming that technical and human resources are dedicated to monitoring and tracking anything that could harm the security of society. He indicated that the seized items, including weapons and dangerous materials, reflect the seriousness of this network and its objectives.

He said this operation received widespread praise both locally and regionally, proving public confidence in the role of the security services and reaffirming national unity in confronting terrorism.

He urged parents to educate their children about the dangers of joining such organizations.

He emphasized that the leadership of the Ministry of Interior, at all levels, is working efficiently and meticulously to ensure the security of the country, and that efforts continue in pursuing anyone who dares to threaten the security and stability of Kuwait.

## Kuwait adds

The committee confirmed that it approved the listing of the 16 individuals on the national counter-terrorism register.

The concerned authorities called on all financial institutions and entities subject to these regulations to fully comply with the issued directives and to take the necessary measures in accordance with the applicable laws, ensure compliance with the relevant resolutions, and support State efforts to combat terrorism and its financing.

Last Monday, the Ministry of Interior announced the arrest of a cell affiliated with the terrorist group Hezbollah, which was found in possession of firearms, ammunition, an assassination weapon, encrypted communication devices and drones.

## Cabinet issues

Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah briefed the cabinet on diplomatic efforts, including participation in joint ministerial meetings between the GCC and partner countries, as well as ongoing international coordination to contain escalation and uphold regional stability.

The Cabinet further condemned attacks targeting Gulf states, including strikes in the United Arab Emirates and an assault on its consulate in Iraq's Kurdistan region, as well as damage to a port in Oman, describing them as violations of international law.

Minister of Health Ahmad Al-Awadhi reported that two emergency personnel injured by falling shrapnel are in stable condition, reaffirming the healthcare system's readiness.

The cabinet also reviewed a donation campaign led by Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait to support indebted citizens, praising strong public participation as a reflection of national solidarity.

In addition, the Cabinet approved a draft decree to appoint a new board for the Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority and welcomed a KD 1 million donation from Al Mulla Holding to repair damage to the Public Institution for Social Security building.

The Cabinet affirmed it remains in continuous session to monitor developments and ensure the safety, security, and well-being of citizens and residents amid rapidly evolving conditions.

## 30% workforce

Regarding cases eligible for reduced working hours under existing regulations, the CSC said institutions must apply a four-hour work schedule for such categories.

The decision will take effect immediately after the Eid al-Fitr holiday, the statement added.

## KLS zeroes

Dr. Al-Suwaifan stressed that the society recently identified social media content designed to mislead the public regarding legal services and has taken action in accordance with the law.

Mills, Platner spar over attack ad in intensification of Maine primary to face Collins

## Illinois Lieutenant Governor Stratton wins Democratic primary for US Senate

CHICAGO, March 18, (AP): Illinois Lt Gov Juliana Stratton won Tuesday's Democratic primary for US Senate, edging out two sitting members of the US House to advance to a November general election against Republican nominee Don Tracy, the former state party chair.

The retirement of U.S. Sen Dick Durbin, the Senate's longtime No. 2 Democrat, triggered a competitive campaign on the Democratic side, drawing as candidates Stratton and US Reps Raja Krishnamoorthi and Robin Kelly, among others. Furious fundraising and sharp elbows marked the race, which tested the influence of Democratic Gov JB Pritzker. The governor, whose name has been floated as a 2028 presidential contender, backed Stratton.

The races were testing grounds for some of the biggest issues facing the Democratic Party, from support for Israel to immigration enforcement and the cryptocurrency and AI industries, as super PACs poured millions of dollars into the hotly contested primaries.

Most primary winners in the Democratic stronghold are expected to win in November, shaping a new generation of leadership in the state's congressional delegation.

Stratton lagged in fundraising but had the powerful backing of Pritzker, who campaigned with her around the state.

He introduced her Tuesday night before her victory speech, in which she pledged to push for Medicare for all and higher wages, abolish US Immigration and Customs Enforcement

and "bring this fight straight to Donald Trump's door."

"We are ready to take our democracy back into our own hands," Stratton told supporters gathered in Chicago.

The race featuring 10 Democrats was expensive. Krishnamoorthi dominated fundraising and was the first on television with ads in July. He started 2026 with over \$15 million on hand compared with Stratton's \$1 million, according to campaign finance records. Late last year, Pritzker put \$5 million into a super PAC aimed at electing her.

Stratton lit into Krishnamoorthi at debates, particularly on the five-term Democrat's voting record and donations from an ICE contractor.

Krishnamoorthi, who has called to dismantle the agency, said he donated the money to immigrant rights groups. In a concession speech Tuesday, he brought up his roots as an immigrant who born in India and raised in central Illinois.

"Only in this country can a kid like me serve in the halls of Congress," he said. "And now we must come together as Democrats and as Americans to make sure that we return to the principles that made us a beacon of freedom and opportunity for the world."

Rochelle Brockenborough, 64, said she voted for Stratton at the Dr. Martin Luther King Community Service Center in Chicago.

"I wanted to make sure there was no AIPAC money. That's important to me," she said, adding that U.S. tax dollars shouldn't be used to support Israel.

Candidates touted ties to iconic Chicagoans including former Presi-



Illinois Lt Gov Juliana Stratton, speaks during a primary election night watch party after winning the Democratic primary for U.S. Senate, Tuesday, March 17, 2026, in Chicago. (AP)

dent Barack Obama and the late Rev. Jesse Jackson, who died last month. However, an endorsement touted posthumously by Stratton caused a snag as Jackson's family withdrew it Monday, saying the draft was not meant for public release.

In the GOP primary, Tracy, an attorney who led the Illinois Republican Party from 2021 to 2024, bested five other candidates. The state last had a Republican in the Senate a decade ago, when Mark Kirk was defeated by current Democratic Sen. Tammy Duckworth.

Election officials hoped to see busy

polls after statewide turnout in the 2024 primary was 19%, the lowest in more than five decades. Initial turnout estimates in Chicago were around 25%, according to the Chicago Board of Elections.

Dozens of candidates ran for five open seats in the Chicago area.

In Kelly's 2nd district, which spans parts of the South Side and suburbs and dips into the central Illinois farmlands, Cook County Commissioner Donna Miller emerged as the winner of a crowded Democratic field that included former U.S. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., son of the late civil rights leader.

Miller will face off in November against Republican Michael Noack, who was unopposed.

Miller was backed by AIPAC, and that support prompted retiring U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, of the 9th District, to withdraw her endorsement of Miller.

The open seat in Krishnamoorthi's suburban 8th District attracted eight Democrats and four Republicans. Former U.S. Rep. Melissa Bean won the Democratic nomination and advances to face Republican Jennifer Davis.

"People are ready for change, they want to see a functional Congress," Bean told The Associated Press. "We haven't had one in quite some time."

Two other House members are retiring after long careers.

The 7th District of Rep. Danny Davis, who was first elected in 1996, covers parts of downtown, the West Side and suburbs. The candidate he endorsed, state Rep. La Shawn Ford won the nomination over a pool of candidates that included Chicago City Treasurer Melissa Conyers-Ervin. Chad Koppie won for the GOP.

### Also:

**PORTLAND, Maine:** The campaign of US Senate hopeful Gov Janet Mills released an advertisement Tuesday criticizing comments posted online by her rival Graham Platner, in an intensification of their Maine Democratic primary battle.

Mills and Platner are competing for the Democratic nomination to take on Republican Sen Susan Collins, whose seat is key for Democrats' plans to take

back the Senate.

The Mills campaign released a video in which women read some of Platner's old social media posts that were dismissive of assault.

Platner, an oyster farmer and US Marine veteran from rural Maine, apologized for his deleted comments months ago when they first resurfaced, and said he posted them while struggling with mental health issues after leaving the military. The comments showed him endorsing political violence, dismissing rape in the military and criticizing police officers and rural America.

Ben Chin, Platner's campaign manager, described Mills' ad as a "desperate attempt for relevance."

"It's why people hate politics and why not enough real people run for office: DC insiders who are so obsessed with their own power and threatened by someone who is building an actual movement of working people, that they launch a barrage of attacks to try to tear Graham down," Chin said in a statement.

The Mills campaign said in a statement that Platner's comments show him "minimizing assault and blaming survivors." The campaign also sent out a statement with comments from several Maine women criticizing Platner.

"Graham Platner's comments aren't just disgusting or disturbing, they are disqualifying," said Peggy Schaffer of Vassalboro, a former vice chair of the Maine Democratic Party, in a statement distributed by the Mills campaign. "These comments make him unelectable in any general election."

## Roberts says personal criticism of judges dangerous and 'it's got to stop'

WASHINGTON, March 18, (AP): US Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts warned Tuesday that personal criticism of federal judges is dangerous and "it's got to stop," two days after President Donald Trump called a federal judge who ruled against the administration "wacky, nasty, crooked and totally out of control."

As he has done before, Roberts was careful not to single out Trump or anyone else, insisting that the attacks on judges are not from "just any one political perspective."

Criticism of judicial opinions "comes with the territory" and can be healthy, Roberts said in remarks at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy in Houston.

But it's different when the criticism moves away from legal analysis. "Personally directed hostility is dangerous and it's got to stop," Roberts said.

US District Judge Lee Rosenthal, who shared the stage with the chief justice, thanked Roberts because "we always know that you have our backs and that means a great deal."

The US Marshals Service, responsible for protecting judges, reported 564 threats in the government fiscal year that ended in September, up from the year before. Roberts acknowledged the "serious threats" by noting Congress



From left: US Chief Justice John Roberts, Justice Elena Kagan, Justice Brett Kavanaugh and Justice Amy Coney Barrett stand before President Donald Trump delivers the State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress in the House chamber at the U.S. Capitol in Washington on Feb 24. (AP)

has responded by increasing funding for judges' security.

Trump's most recent comments about judges came Sunday in a post on his Truth Social following a ruling by US District Judge James Boasberg quashing subpoenas the Justice Department had issued to the Federal

Reserve.

Boasberg, Trump wrote, is "a Wacky, Nasty, Crooked, and totally Out of Control Judge" who "suffers from the highest level of Trump Derangement Syndrome (TDS), and has been 'after' my people, and me, for years."

### America

**NYC wants to pull legal support for Adams:** New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani's administration wants to stop representing Eric Adams in a lawsuit that alleges the former mayor assaulted a woman more than three decades ago, according to a court filing Tuesday.

The move comes just a few months after Mamdani took office, following a bitter campaign season last year that had the two Democrats taking turns bashing each other in often caustic and personal terms.

The suit, filed while Adams was still in office, accuses the former mayor of assaulting a woman, Lorna Beach-Mathura, in 1993 when he was a police officer, alleging that he demanded a favor in exchange for his help in advancing her career in the police department. Adams has vehemently denied the allegation and said he does not remember meeting her.

The Associated Press does not typically identify alleged victims of assault in stories unless they consent to being named, as Beach-Mathura has done through her attorney. (AP)



Mamdani

**1 dead in shooting at US Air Force base:** A shooting at a US Air Force base in New Mexico on Tuesday left one person dead and another wounded, according to military officials.

The Holloman Air Force Base near Alamogordo, in southern New Mexico, was put on lockdown at about 5:30 p.m. because of reports of an active shooter near the base convenience store, according to a statement released by the 49th Wing.

The person wounded has been taken for medical treatment, according to the statement. Security officials confirmed the base is safe and the lockdown was lifted.

"Emergency personnel are responding to the situation and there is no threat at this time," the statement said.

The base convenience store was closed until further notice, the base said in a post on Facebook.

Neither the names of the people shot nor additional details on the shooting have been released.

The roughly 93-square-mile (240-square-kilometer) base houses the 49th Wing, which supports national security work and includes combat-ready airmen and guardians, according to its website. (AP)



### Gunman killed in Georgia VA clinic shooting:

There was a shooting Tuesday at a Department of Veterans Affairs clinic in a small town at the foot of the Blue Ridge mountains in Georgia, and the gunman was shot and killed, police said.

A Veterans Affairs employee was taken by helicopter to a hospital after the gunfire Tuesday afternoon, VA spokesman Peter Kasperowicz said.

Jasper police responded to the scene around 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, the city said in a statement. Outside the VA clinic, the officers confronted the gunman, who was shot and killed, authorities said.

The gunman was from the Jasper area, Jasper Police Chief Matt Dawkins told reporters at the scene. But details about him were not immediately released.

"We don't know what led up to it," Dawkins said.

Jimmy Mooney was shopping at a nearby Goodwill store when he heard gunfire.

"We heard the gunshots going off," he said. "There was probably 17 of us inside the Goodwill that was shopping, and they had come and told us to get in the back of the store and during that time we could see the officers running down the hill. Gunshots started going off."

The Jasper police chief said the Federal Bureau of Investigation will be investigating the shooting along with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

When asked about the suspect's background, a Pickens County sheriff's spokesman said he did not know whether he had a military background.

The clinic will remain closed for the rest of the week, Kasperowicz said. (AP)

### Europe

**Norway OK's inquiry commission:** Norway's parliament, the Storting, on Tuesday unanimously approved the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry to examine issues arising from the publication of the Epstein files.

Under the decision, parliament requested its presidium to submit a proposal outlining the commission's mandate, name, and composition, as well as draft legislation governing its work, procedures, and access to information, according to Norwegian broadcaster NRK.

Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store said during a parliamentary debate that lawmakers are united in their strong reaction to the revelations in the Epstein files, stressing that an independent review is essential to maintaining public trust and ensuring that the full facts are brought to light.

Store added that the case is being pursued on multiple fronts, including a police investigation. He said Norway's National Authority for Investigation and Prosecution of Economic and Environmental Crime (Okokrim) has opened investigations into three individuals on sus-



Store

picion of aggravated corruption and complicity in aggravated corruption, with the Foreign Ministry assisting the probe. (Xinhua)



**Explosive-laden drone neutralized near Moldova:** Moldovan police said on Tuesday that an explosive-laden drone discovered near the country's southeastern border was safely neutralized through a controlled detonation.

According to a police statement, the drone, carrying about 50 kilograms of explosive material, was found in the village of Tudora in the Stefan Voda district, approximately 500 meters from the border.

Bomb disposal experts from the police technical-explosive unit removed the drone's warhead and destroyed it in a controlled explosion at the scene, in a joint operation with military engineers from the National Army. (Xinhua)



**Vienna scaffolding collapse kills 4:** Four people were killed and another seriously injured after scaffolding collapsed on Tuesday afternoon in Vienna's Alsergrund district, Austrian broadcaster ORF reported.

According to the fire brigade, parts of the scaffolding and formwork broke off at around 2:30 p.m. (1330 GMT) during concreting work in an old building and fell into the building's inner courtyard, burying the workers beneath the debris.

A 45-year-old worker was seriously injured and rushed to hospital for treatment, the report said. (Xinhua)

Libyan campaign financing case

## Ex-French prez Sarkozy appeals conviction

PARIS, March 18, (AP): Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy returned to court on Monday for an appeal hearing in Paris over his conviction linked to the alleged illegal campaign financing of his 2007 presidential campaign by Libya, a case that led him to spend 20 days in prison last year.

Sarkozy, 71, is challenging a September ruling by a Paris court that found him guilty of "criminal conspiracy." He was sentenced to five years in prison for his alleged part in a scheme to obtain funds from the government of late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in exchange for political and diplomatic favors.

The verdict marked the first time that a former president of modern France had been sentenced to actual prison time. Sarkozy - who led France from 2007 to 2012 - began serving his sentence before a Paris appeals court ordered his release under judicial supervision pending the new trial.

The appeal hearing, which is scheduled to last until June 3, will re-examine all of the evidence and testimony



Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy, (center left), arrives at the appeals courthouse in Paris, France on March 16, for his trial over alleged illegal financing of his 2007 presidential campaign by the government of late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. (AP)

related to Sarkozy and nine co-defendants - including three former ministers.

In September, the judges found that Sarkozy and his associates had formed a criminal association between 2005

and 2007 to secure money from Libya to support his successful presidential bid.

Sarkozy has denied wrongdoing and suggested the accusations were politically motivated.

## Zelensky and Starmer urge continuing support for Ukraine against Russia

LONDON, March 18, (AP): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called Russia and Iran "brothers in hatred" on Tuesday as he sought support from UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer at a time when the Iran war has robbed momentum from US-brokered talks to end Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Zelensky urged Ukraine's allies not to forget about his country, and suggested the US and others should make use of Ukraine's anti-drone technology during a Middle East war that has also revived Russia's ailing economy through increased oil revenue and could soon limit Kyiv's access to vital Western air defense systems, which are needed in the Middle East.

"The regimes in Russia and Iran are brothers in hatred and that is why they are brothers in weapons," Zelensky told lawmakers in Britain's Parliament. "And we want regimes built on hatred to never, never win in anything."

Holding talks with Zelensky at 10 Downing Street, Starmer said "(Rus-

sian President Vladimir) Putin can't be the one who benefits from the conflict in Iran, whether that's oil prices or the dropping of sanctions."

The meeting came days after the US temporarily waived some Russian oil sanctions in a bid to ease pressure on global supplies triggered by the war in the Middle East, which was sparked by the joint U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran starting Feb 28.

Zelensky and some other European leaders criticized Washington's move to ease sanctions, saying it would provide a windfall for Moscow to keep up its attacks on Ukraine.

Zelensky also met with King Charles III at Buckingham Palace before addressing dozens of members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords in Parliament. He told them that other countries could learn from Ukraine's agile adoption of technology, including drones and AI, for defense.

"The fact we got through this winter,

which Russia tried to make deadly for all our families, shows that our solutions work," Zelensky said.

Zelensky said the London talks, also attended by NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte, would assess energy security, after Russia hammered Ukraine's power grid over the winter, and the battlefield situation.

In Brussels, the European Union's chief diplomat Kaja Kallas noted Tuesday that Russia stands to gain from higher energy prices and the rerouting of advanced Western air defense systems from Ukraine to the Middle East.

But, she said, Ukraine "remains Europe's top security priority and attention for Ukraine will not be allowed to fizzle out."

Finland's President Alexander Stubb said the Iran war is bad for Ukraine, "mainly because of the oil price which feeds the Russian war machinery. The Russian economy was actually doing extremely badly a couple of weeks back. Now it's bouncing back."



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky delivers a speech to Members of Parliament, Prime Minister Keir Starmer and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte in Committee Room 14 at the House of Commons, central London on March 17. (AP)

## Asia

**Queensland warned to prepare for possible Category 5 storm:** Residents in northern Australia have been warned to brace for one of the most severe cyclones in "living memory" after authorities said on Wednesday that Tropical Cyclone Narelle could make landfall as a Category 5 storm.

The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) said that Tropical Cyclone Narelle was expected to make landfall in the far north of the state of Queensland as a Category 4 or 5 storm on Friday morning local time, bringing very destructive wind gusts exceeding 250 km per hour and intense rainfall.

Premier of Queensland David Crisafulli told reporters that the cyclone was a serious situation. "This may be the biggest system that many people have seen in living memory," he said.

Crisafulli said that more than 100 emergency personnel from southern Queensland have been deployed north and that residents in the region should consider evacuating.

Chris Stream, deputy commissioner of the Queensland Police Service and the state's disaster coordinator, said that people should not underestimate the potential for the loss of life.

"A piece of debris being propelled at 100 km or more per hour will likely kill you," he said.

The BoM has warned that the cyclone could continue on its path and impact the Northern Territory after clearing Queensland. (Xinhua)

**Thai court takes up case seeking to invalidate Feb election:** Thailand's Constitutional Court issued an official announcement on Wednesday stating it has accepted a petition filed by the Thai Ombudsman seeking to declare the House of Representatives election invalid.

The Election Commission has been ordered to submit its explanation within 15



U Khin Yi (left), chairman of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), attends the first session of the third Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on March 16. (Xinhua)

days.

The ombudsman asked the Constitutional Court to rule against the Election Commission, its secretary-general, and officials, who are accused of designing and printing ballot papers with barcodes and QR codes for the House of Representatives election held on Feb. 8, according to the announcement.

The petition argues that such ballot papers could allow voter identities and voting choices to be traced and verified, violating the secrecy of the ballot.

The Constitutional Court voted 6 to 3 to accept the petition. Under legal require-

ments, all relevant parties must submit their defenses and supporting evidence within 15 days.

Thailand's House of Representatives had been scheduled to convene on Thursday for a vote to select the prime minister. Under Thailand's constitution, the process of forming the government on Thursday will be carried out by the House of Representatives alone.

The results of the Feb. 8 general election have already been confirmed, with the Bhumjaithai Party led by incumbent caretaker Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul winning the largest number of seats in the House. (Xinhua)

**Lin Dwe elected new speaker of Myanmar upper house:** U Aung Lin Dwe, a member of parliament from the Union Solidarity and Development Party, was elected as the new Speaker of Myanmar's Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) in a parliament session held on Wednesday, according to state-owned Myanmar Radio and Television. (Xinhua)

**Cambodia launches project to combat fake news:** Cambodia's Ministry of Information launched a project of "Zero Fake News" campaign with support from the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) Special Fund.

Speaking at the launching ceremony in Phnom Penh, Information Minister Neth Pheaktra said stakeholders from Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar, and China would be invited to participate in this campaign, aiming at eliminating fake news in Cambodia and other LMC countries.

The minister said that eliminating fake news was crucial to contribute to maintaining peace, political stability, security, and social order.

"The media is playing a more important role than ever in providing accurate information to the public and should be used as a bridge between people in the region and in the world for common peace and shared prosperity," Pheaktra said.

He added that the campaign was expected to raise awareness among people in Cambodia and in the region about the danger and impact of fake news, encouraging them to join in preventing fake news both inside their countries and across the border. (Xinhua)

## China and Turkmenistan should carry forward friendly tradition, deepen cooperation: FM

BEIJING, March 18, (Xinhua) — China and Turkmenistan should carry forward friendly tradition, firmly support each other, and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Tuesday.

Wang made the remarks during a meeting with Turkmenistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov, who is accompanying National Leader of the Turkmen People and Chairman of the Halk Maslahaty of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov on his visit to China.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, noted that Berdimuhamedov is an old friend of the Chinese people.

The top leaders of the two countries share strong mutual trust and profound friendship, which provides important strategic guidance for the steady growth of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries, Wang said, calling on both sides to advance China-Turkmenistan relations steadily along the correct path charac-

terized by the two heads of state.

Meredov extended congratulations on the successful convening of China's "two sessions." He expressed Turkmenistan's support for the four global initiatives proposed by China and its willingness to work with the Chinese side to jointly prepare for the third China-Central Asia Summit.

The two sides also exchanged views on the situation in Iran and other international and regional issues of mutual concern.

Also:

**HANOI:** Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Tuesday said that power politics and unilateral bullying win no heart and have no future, calling for strengthened cooperation within multilateral frameworks to safeguard peace and stability in Asia.

Concluding his visit to Vietnam, Wang, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, talked in an interview with Chinese media that long-term peace and stability in Asia have not come easily and deserve to be

cherished by all countries.

At present, the international landscape is undergoing profound changes and regional conflicts are spreading and spilling over, said Wang, adding that certain major powers resort to force willfully, posing a serious threat to world peace and stability.

Noting that this year marks the fifth anniversary of the China-ASEAN comprehensive strategic partnership, this year and next, China and Vietnam will successively host the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, and Vietnam will take over as a co-chair of Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, Wang said that China, as an important force for peace, stability, and justice in the world, is willing to work with Vietnam and other countries to strengthen coordination and cooperation within multilateral mechanisms such as APEC, ASEAN, and Lancang-Mekong Cooperation to safeguard their shared home of Asia, to jointly advance the building of an Asia-Pacific community, and to set an example for promoting the building of a community with a shared future for humanity.



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, co-chairs the 17th meeting of the China-Vietnam Steering Committee for Bilateral Cooperation with Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Bui Thanh Son in Hanoi, Vietnam on March 17. Officials from various ministries and provincial governments of both sides participated in the meeting online and offline. (Xinhua)

### 42-year rule extended

## N'Guesso reelected president of Congo

BRAZZAVILLE, Republic of Congo, March 18, (AP) — The Republic of Congo's President Denis Sassou N'Guesso, who has ruled for 42 years, was reelected for a fifth consecutive term, according to provisional results announced Tuesday by authorities.

Sassou N'Guesso won 94.82% of the vote, Interior Minister Raymond Zephirin Mboulou said on state television.

Six other candidates challenged the 82-year-old for the top job in the Central African country that boasts one of the largest oil reserves in sub-Saharan Africa.

The internet was shut down across the country as usual during the presidential election and traffic was restricted across the capital.

The election is the latest in a trend of octogenarian African leaders clinging to power. Sassou N'Guesso is the third-longest-serving African president, only behind Cameroon's Paul Biya and Equatorial Guinea's Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo.

The interior minister reported a turnout of 84.65% and 2.6 million ballots cast. But many polling stations in the capital Brazzaville saw short or non-existent lines, as locals said they did not believe the election would result in a change in leadership from Sassou N'Guesso, who has ruled for 42 years.

Mabio Mavoungou Zinga of the Alliance party came in second with 1.48% of votes, closely followed by independent candidate Uphrem Dave Mafoula who received 1.03% of the vote, according to the provisional results. The other four candidates got less than 1% of the vote.

The provisional results still have to be approved by the constitutional court.

"By reelecting me by a landslide, the people have kept their word. Now it is up to us to keep ours. We promise to commit ourselves fully to doing everything possible," Sassou N'Guesso told reporters at his party's headquarters. He said the high turnout reflected the population's "civic-mindedness" and "patriotism."

Sassou N'Guesso, running for the Congolese Party of



President of the Republic of Congo, Denis Sassou N'Guesso casts his ballot at a polling station in Brazzaville, the Republic of Congo on March 15. (AP)

Labor, first came to power in 1979 and ruled until 1992 when he organized the country's first multi-party elections. He returned to power as a militia leader following a four-month civil war in 1997.

The campaign period showed a vast mismatch between Sassou N'Guesso and his opponents, with the incumbent being the only candidate to travel around the country to canvass for votes. Roads in the capital city, Brazzaville, were paved with Sassou N'Guesso's effigies.

Two other major parties boycotted the elections over allegations of unfair electoral practices.

A constitutional referendum in 2015 removed presidential age and term limits, allowing him to run again.

The country is struggling with high international debt, which stands at 94.5% of its gross domestic product, according to the World Bank, and skyrocketing unemployment rates for young people. More than half the country's 5.7 million population lives in poverty and 47% of the country's population is under 18.

In Brazzaville, the president's reelection did not surprise most residents.

## 17 dead in fighting on Sudan's border with Chad – aid group

CAIRO, March 18, (AP) — The latest heavy fighting between warring parties along Sudan's border with Chad has killed 17 people and many wounded, a medical group said.

The attacks on Monday in Tina left 66 people in serious condition, Doctors Without Borders, also known as Médecins Sans Frontières, or MSF, said in a post on X late Tuesday.

The army said in an update that the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, or RSF, had expanded its attacks on military areas in Tina, but that troops were able to repel them and forced them to withdraw.

The attacks were part of intensified fighting near the border between the army and the RSF, who have been at war since April 2023. The conflict has killed more than 40,000 people, according to U.N. figures, but aid groups say the true number could be much higher.

Tina is one of the last areas still being held by the Sudanese military in the sprawling Darfur region, which has been under RSF control since October 2025. The nearby Tine crossing was also used as the sole route for cross-border humanitarian aid and delivery from Chad when Adre border crossing was temporarily closed in recent years.

Chad said last month it had closed its border with Sudan "until further notice" in an attempt to limit the spread of conflict into its territory. Those injured in Monday's attacks were treated by MSF teams and Chadian health services at a new hospital in Tina, Chad.

A MSF staffer at the hospital said doctors are treating patients without water or electricity and are relying on generators and solar panels. Stockpiles of medicine are also said to be running low because of the influx of new patients.

Chad closed its border for a period shortly after Sudan plunged into chaos in April 2023, when a power struggle between the military and the RSF exploded into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum, and elsewhere in the country.

### Blackout underscores deepening economic crisis

## Trump and Rubio call for new Cuban leaders

HAVANA, March 18, (AP) — US President Donald Trump on Tuesday pledged imminent action against Cuba's socialist government as his moves against the island bring the US' longtime opponent deeper into crisis.

A day after Trump's sanctions on Venezuela, including a stop to vital oil exports to Cuba, contributed to Cuba's latest nationwide blackout, Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio both said that the administration sees the island nation as the next country where the US can expand its influence.

"Cuba right now is in very bad shape," Trump said. "And we'll be doing something with Cuba very soon," he added.

Until recently, Trump's comments on change in Cuba might have been considered remarkable. But they come after his administration's military raid that captured then-President Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela and the launch of US military strikes against Iran.

The Trump administration is looking for President Miguel Díaz-Canel to leave as the US continues negotiating with the Cuban government, according to a US official and a source with knowledge of talks between Washington and Havana. No detail has been offered about who the administration might like to see come to power.

Many Cubans do not believe that Díaz-Canel holds much power in Cuba, anyway, as opposed to revolutionary founding father Raúl Castro and his family.

With little reliable information trickling out of Havana or Washington, experts are watching closely for clues about what's in the works.



People hang out on the sidewalk during a blackout in Havana on March 17. (AP)

"Some pieces of this story as they're trickling out, don't add up to me," said Michael Bustamante, a Cuba expert and associate professor of history at the University of Miami. "I can't quite figure out what the end game is here for either side."

Electricity was slowly being restored to hospitals and some homes Tuesday afternoon, but officials warned that the crumbling power network could fail again.

The government blames its woes on a US energy blockade after Trump in January warned of tariffs on any country that sells or provides oil to Cuba.

Rubio, who is of Cuban heritage, said the island "has an economy that doesn't work in a political and governmental system. They can't fix it."

A Cuban official said Monday that Cuba is open to trading with US companies, but such promises have been made before.

"So they have to change dramatically," Rubio said. "What they announced yesterday is not dramatic enough. It's not going to fix it."

The Trump administration is also demanding that Cuba release political prisoners and move toward political and economic liberalization in return for a lifting of sanctions. Trump has also raised the possibility of a "friendly takeover of Cuba."

While Cuba produces 40% of its petroleum and has been generating its own power, it hasn't been sufficient to meet demand as its aging electric grid continues to crumble.

## Peru's prime minister resigns ahead of congressional confirmation vote

LIMA, Peru, March 18, (AP) — Peru's prime minister resigned Tuesday ahead of a mandatory vote in the nation's Congress, where she needed a majority of legislators to confirm her recent appointment.

Denisse Miralles was appointed as prime minister in late February, after Interim President José Jerí was removed from his post following corruption allegations and replaced by congressman Jose María Balcázar.

In Peru, prime ministers coordinate the implementation of government policies, but they are not elected into office and do not lead the executive branch, which is headed by the president.

Miralles, the former economy minister under Jerí, did not say why she resigned. However, she informed journalists that she was uncertain she could secure the congressional majority required for her confirmation on Wednesday.

The Fiscal Council, an independent body monitoring public finances, noted recently that the ministry under



Peru's President Jose Jeri (left) and Economy Minister Denisse Miralles pose during a swearing-in ceremony for cabinet members at the government palace in Lima, Peru, Oct 14, 2025. (AP)

Miralles allowed 26 laws from Congress to pass without challenge, result-

ing in significantly higher government spending.

### Subcontinent

#### Sri Lanka launches contingency measures:

Sri Lanka has launched sector-by-sector contingency measures to protect health, food and transport services while maintaining a neutral foreign policy stance amid the economic fallout from the ongoing Middle East conflict, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has said.

Speaking at a media briefing on Tuesday, Dissanayake said Sri Lanka would not allow its neutrality to be compromised despite growing global tensions and would focus on shielding the country's economy and daily life from external shocks.

He said the government had introduced a multi-pronged plan to maintain fuel and essential services, including emergency fuel tenders, diplomatic engagement with friendly countries, fuel conservation measures, and special arrangements for key sectors such as health, agriculture, fisheries and food distribution. (Xinhua)

#### Border skirmishes kill 7 Pakistan soldiers:

Skirmishes between Afghan and Pakistani troops left seven dead on the Pakistani side along the border in the eastern Khost province of Afghanistan on Monday night, provincial government spokesman Mustaghfar Gurbaz said.

"Afghan defensive forces attacked a Pakistani military post along the border in Ali Shir District last night, killing seven soldiers," the official Radio and Television of Afghanistan quoted Gurbaz on Tuesday as saying. (Xinhua)



Dissanayake

## Kuwait oil price surges to \$153.22 pb

KUWAIT CITY, March 18, (KUNA): The price of Kuwaiti oil edged up by USD 4.6 to hit USD 153.22 per barrel (pb) Tuesday, compared to USD 143.04 Monday, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on

Wednesday.

In global markets, the price of Brent crude went up by USD 1.33 to reach USD 103.14 per barrel, as West Texas Intermediate rose by USD 0.79 to USD 97.63 pb.

# Business

From 9 AM to 4 PM to support remote learning and work during the current situation

## Zain Kuwait offers all customers free internet daily for one month

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Zain Kuwait is offering free internet daily for one month to all customers with active prepaid and postpaid internet plans, in support of remote work and home-based learning during the current situation. Through this initiative, the company reaffirms its commitment to supporting families and students and enabling them to carry on with their daily responsibilities through stable and dependable connectivity.

Through Zain's "Hearts Connected" initiative, the free internet service will be activated automatically every day from 9 AM to 4 PM for 30 days, starting March 17 and continuing through April 15, providing stable and reliable connectivity that helps individuals and families carry out their daily responsibilities smoothly during remote work and study hours.

This step comes as part of Zain's national and social responsibility, and its ongoing efforts to leverage its services and technological capabilities to meet the community's needs during times that call for greater support and flexibility. It also helps ensure continuity in connectivity, productivity, and learning from home.

The initiative further reflects Zain's commitment to contributing positively to the community through direct, meaningful digital solutions that underline its responsibility toward customers in Kuwait and align with its purpose of delivering 'Better Lives. Lasting Connections'.

Through this initiative, Zain reaffirms its dedication to standing by the community and introducing tangible measures that respond to evolving circumstances and address customers' real needs, driven by its belief that connectivity has become an essential part of everyday life in all its forms.



Zain headquarters

Since the beginning of the current crisis, Zain has worked to strengthen national coordination efforts with the relevant government entities, foremost among them the Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA), to ensure the alignment of emergency plans with the national readiness framework, enhance network preparedness, and activate teams around the clock to safeguard service stability and efficiency under all circumstances.

The company's technical and administrative teams are fully prepared to deal with various scenarios through a flexible operating model based on multiple routes and technical



alternatives, while continuously updating internal response plans in line with developments and maintaining the highest

levels of communication and coordination with the relevant authorities.

Zain also places particular importance on safeguarding its systems and strengthening cybersecurity in parallel with operational readiness, in order to ensure the network's safety and the stability of services at all times.

The company views its responsibility during this phase through a comprehensive national lens, based on its commitment to placing all of its technical and human capabilities at the service of Kuwait and working in full harmony with the relevant entities to ensure integrated efforts, swift response, and effective execution.

As part of its proactive measures during the current crisis, Zain has activated remote work for most of its employees in a way that ensures their safety and the continuity of its operational and administrative functions with high efficiency. The company has also provided psychological support services through free counseling and therapy sessions in collaboration with Kuwait Counseling Center (KCC).

Zain has also offered free roaming internet, local and international calls, and SMS benefits to its customers outside Kuwait through Thursday, helping them stay connected with their loved ones during this period and enabling them to remain in touch with their families and follow developments with ease and peace of mind.

In addition, Zain organized a special visit to the Central Blood Bank with the participation of its employees to help strengthen the national blood supply during this stage, while also supporting the bank's awareness campaign on the importance of blood donation through its social media platforms and SMS channels.

### Al Khiran branch to remain open

## ABK extends Eid Al-Fitr greetings and announces holiday schedule

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) extends its greetings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, as well as the government, people, and residents of Kuwait on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, hoping it bestows an abundance of blessings.

ABK discloses that its branches will be closed from Thursday, 19 March 2026 till Sunday, 22 March 2026 to resume operations on Monday, 23 March 2026 2025, if Eid begins on Thursday, 19 March 2026.

If the Eid begins on Friday, March 20 2026, the bank will be closed from Thursday, March 19, 2026, until Monday March 23 2026 to resume operations on Tuesday, March 24 2026.

During this time, ABK's branch in Al Khiran Mall will be open to serve customers from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

The Bank has also confirmed its full operational readiness to serve customers 24/7 via its various digital platforms throughout the holiday. This includes Online Banking via eahli.com, Mobile Banking through the ABK app, as well as the Bank's call center Ahlan Ahli 1 899 899 and its ATM network.



## ABK launches digital Eidiya service via WAMD on its mobile application

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) has announced the launch of its digital Eidiya service through the WAMD service on its mobile banking application, enabling customers to conveniently send Eid gifts in celebration of Eid Al-Fitr starting Thursday, 19 March 2026.

Through the WAMD service, customers can instantly send and receive money electronically around the clock using their mobile numbers. The service operates through the shared electronic banking services network, KNET, under the supervision of the Central Bank of Kuwait.

The launch of this new service reflects ABK's ongoing commitment to meeting customer needs and delivering a comprehensive banking experience during various occasions, while maintaining the highest standards of security and safeguarding the privacy of customers' data and personal information.

To benefit from the service features, customers must register for WAMD through the ABK mobile application, enter their mobile number, link one bank account to the service, select the amount they wish to send or receive, and accept the applicable terms and conditions to complete transactions instantly.

Customers can also personalise a greeting card or add a special message when sending their digital Eidiya through the application, further demonstrating the Bank's commitment to offering customers worthwhile benefits.

The launch of the digital Eidiya service via the ABK mobile application reflects the Bank's continuous efforts to



provide fast, secure banking solutions that save customers time and effort while meeting their needs at any time.

This service launch also comes as part of ABK's ongoing digital transformation strategy aimed at further developing its banking solutions and products, with a primary focus on encouraging customers to utilise its digital channels, including its website and mobile banking platforms.

ABK continues to adopt the latest digital banking services to strengthen its leading position in Kuwait's banking sector, offering advanced technologies in payments, transfers, and other banking solutions to remain the preferred banking partner for customers.

The Bank will continue to introduce new solutions in the coming period to further strengthen customer confidence in conducting their financial and banking transactions through its diverse digital services.

## Boursa Kuwait closes lower as general index falls 0.57%

KUWAIT CITY, March 18, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait wrapped up Wednesday's trading session with its general index falling by 48.22 points, or 0.57 percent, to close at 8,477.92 points. Trading activity saw 208 million shares exchanged through 12,832 cash transactions, with a total value of KD 74.8 million (approximately USD 228.8 million).

The main market index also recorded a decline, dropping 73.92 points, or 0.93 percent, to settle at 7,890.08 points. The segment witnessed the trading of 60.16 million shares in 4,642 cash transactions, valued at KD

8.4 million (around USD 25.7 million).

Similarly, the premier market index slipped 45.16 points, or 0.50 percent, to close at 9,042.48 points. A total of 147.9 million shares changed hands through 8,190 transactions, generating a value of KD 66.3 million (approximately USD 202.8 million).

In contrast, the Main 50 Index ended on a positive note, rising by 10.09 points, or 0.12 percent, to reach 8,239.60 points. About 53.8 million shares were traded across 3,531 cash deals, with a value of KD 7.2 million (roughly USD 22 million).

## ACICO Group reports financial results for the year ended 31 December 2025

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: ACICO Group announced its financial results for the year ended 31 December 2025, reporting net profit of 2.9 million Kuwaiti dinars, compared with net loss of 11.2 million Kuwaiti dinars in 2024. These results reflect continued progress in executing the Group's restructuring and transformation plan launched three years ago, aimed at restoring profitability, strengthening financial sustainability, and improving operational efficiency across its business sectors.

In 2025 following partial implementation of a debt settlement agreement with one of its creditor banks and divestment of certain non-strategic assets contributed to a partial reduction in the Company's total on-balance-sheet debt by 69.4 million Kuwaiti dinars, directly strengthening the Group's financial resilience and improving its capital structure.

Total equity increased to 29.7 million Kuwaiti dinars, while total liabilities declined from 287.3 million Kuwaiti dinars to 211.4 million Kuwaiti dinars, an improvement of 26%. Financing costs decreased from 15.5 million Kuwaiti dinars to 7.3 million Kuwaiti dinars, reflecting a tangible improvement in funding efficiency and a reduction in financial burdens. Total Group assets stood at 240.9 million Kuwaiti dinars at year-end, compared with 315.1 million Kuwaiti dinars as of 31 December 2024.

The decline in total assets was primarily attributable to the settlement of part of the Group's



Emad Al Issa

debt, the strategic reorganization of assets, and the divestment of certain assets as part of the ongoing restructuring program.

Commenting on the results, Mr. Emad Abdullah Al Issa, Chairman of ACICO Group, said that the 2025 performance reflects the outcomes of the disciplined approach adopted by the Group to financial restructuring, strengthening operational efficiency, and building a more sustainable business model aligned with market requirements. He emphasized that the Group's strengthened financial position is a core foundation to support operational growth and enhance the confidence of shareholders and partners.

During 2025, ACICO Group continued executing supply, installation, and construction works for vital development projects in Kuwait and abroad,

underpinned by an integrated business model that combines the manufacture of high-quality national building materials with the delivery of comprehensive engineering and execution solutions. The Group also continued to strengthen its position as a trusted national partner for housing development and infrastructure projects, in line with the State's development plans.

To enhance customer experience and support homeowners, ACICO expanded its network of partnerships in 2025 with most national banks to offer financing solutions and value-added benefits that facilitate the home-building journey from planning through execution and handover.

At the end of 2025, the Group elected a new Board of Directors, marking the start of a new phase built on stronger foundations for growth and development. The new Board has commenced its mandate under a vision focused on strengthening operational efficiency, developing production capacity, and increasing market share through new projects, alongside reviewing the strategic plan for the coming years to ensure alignment with the State's development agenda and effectiveness in delivering sustainable value to shareholders.

ACICO Group affirmed that the priorities for the next phase will focus on continuing the restructuring initiatives, reinforcing financial discipline, and improving operational efficiency to support sustainable and balanced growth and maximize long-term shareholder value.

### Turkish Bank sale signals cross-regional expansion

## Freedom Holding to acquire Turkish Bank stake

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: The Freedom Holding Group in Kazakhstan announced an agreement with Özyol Holding and National Bank of Kuwait to acquire 99.32 percent of Turkish Bank.

In a press statement, the Freedom Holding Group clarified that the deal is subject to the approval of Turkish regulatory authorities, indicating the acquisition includes only Turkish Bank A.S., not the United Kingdom and Cyprus subsidiaries of the Turkish Bank Group.

The major institutional shareholders of Freedom Holding Group include BlackRock, Millennium Management, Goldman Sachs Group and Morgan Stanley.

It is listed on NASDAQ, Kazakhstan Stock Exchange and Astana International Exchange under the ticker symbol FRHC.

According to a report published by Türkiye Today, the two main shareholders on the Turkish side, Özyol Holding and the National Bank of Kuwait, agreed to transfer their stakes -- 99.31 percent of the bank's capital, to Freedom Finansal Hizmetler AS, the Turkish arm of Freedom Holding, after obtaining the regulatory approvals.

Through this transaction, Freedom Holding

aims to strengthen its regional presence and enter the Turkish banking market, one of the largest and most important financial markets in the Middle East and Eurasia.

While the financial value of the deal was not disclosed, the group issued \$600 million in bonds in 2025 to finance its expansion plans into new financial sectors.

CEO of the group Timur Turlov confirmed that acquiring a bank in Türkiye is part of the group's regional expansion strategy. He described entering the Turkish market as a "logical next step" aimed at providing Freedom with a broader corporate client base.

The company, which currently operates in 22 countries worldwide, was founded in 2008 and has total assets valued at about \$10.35 billion.

The Turkish Bank Group was founded in 1901 as Nicosia Savings Box in Northern Cyprus. It began its banking operations in Türkiye in 1982.

The operations of the bank in Türkiye comprise four branches with total assets valued at \$223 million, according to the latest available data.

The group also manages a diverse range of financial and technological activities, including brokerage and investment services, insurance and insurance technologies, digital banking and fintech, international banking activities in the United King-

dom and Northern Cyprus, and investment advisory services.

This diversification makes the bank a suitable platform for international investors seeking to expand their presence in the financial services sector.

These transactions offer several strategic benefits to banks, particularly rapid expansion into international markets, enhanced capital and funding capacity, support for digital transformation and financial technology, diversification of income sources, and risk reduction.

In the Gulf region, this strategy contributes to strengthening the international presence of Gulf banks and transforming them into transnational financial institutions.

Freedom Holding's acquisition of Turkish Bank signals a new phase of financial integration between Asian and Middle Eastern markets, where capital and banking expertise converge as financial institutions expand beyond their traditional boundaries.

The deal also highlights the growing role of Gulf banks, particularly the National Bank of Kuwait, in the international financial landscape.

This reinforces the position of Kuwait as an influential financial center in the region and underscores the ability of its banking institutions to actively participate in reshaping the global banking map.

### Investors calm as Iran strikes, Fed decision looms

## Global stocks rise as oil prices ease

HONG KONG, March 18, (AP): Shares advanced Wednesday in Europe and Asia as oil prices fell back slightly despite a barrage of attacks by Iran on its Gulf neighbors.

U.S. futures rose 0.5% after a session of moderate gains on Wall Street ahead of the Federal Reserve's decision on interest rates later in the day. With higher oil prices feeding into other inflation, the Fed is widely expected to keep rates on hold.

Worries over global oil and gas supplies and rising prices are still clouding global markets, though Brent crude, the international standard, fell slightly to \$103.14 per barrel, down from above \$106 on Monday.

U.S. benchmark crude fell 1.6% to \$94.67 per barrel.

Iran lashed out Wednesday with multiple attacks on its Gulf neighbors and Israel following the killing of one of its top leaders in an airstrike, using some

of its latest missiles to evade air defenses and killing two near Tel Aviv.

But markets seem to have taken the latest escalations in stride.

Germany's DAX rose 0.7% to 23,899.71 and the CAC 40 in Paris picked up 0.9% to 8,045.19. Britain's FTSE 100 edged 0.2% higher to 10,427.12.

During Asian trading, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 gained 2.9% to 55,239.40 after the government reported exports were higher than expected in February.

In South Korea, the Kospi jumped 5% to 5,925.03.

Lower oil prices are a boon for big oil importers like Japan and South Korea. Hong Kong's Hang Seng reversed early losses, surging 0.6% to 26,025.42, while the Shanghai Composite index also rebounded, gaining 0.3% to 4,062.98.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 climbed 0.3% to 8,640.60.

Taiwan's Taix added 1.5% and India's Sensex advanced 1%.

Global oil flows remain largely constrained, ING Bank analysts Warren Patterson and Ewa Manthey wrote in a research note on Wednesday, even as hopes were growing that Iran might be allowing more vessels through the Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway for global oil and gas transport.

Roughly a fifth of the world's crude oil passes through the strait, which has been largely closed as Iran blocks ships linked to the U.S., Israel and their allies.

On Tuesday, U.S. stocks held steadier as the S&P 500 rose 0.3% and the Dow Jones Industrial Average edged 0.1% higher. The Nasdaq composite added 0.5%.

In other dealings early Wednesday, the U.S. dollar fell to 158.96 Japanese yen from 159.01 yen. The euro fell to \$1.1536 from \$1.1542.

Community contributions reaffirm leadership and social commitment

## KFH contributes KD 2 million to defaulting debtors relief campaign



KFH head office

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has announced a KD 2 million contribution to a debt-relief campaign organized by the Ministry of Justice. This initiative underscores the bank's commitment to supporting government efforts, fulfilling its social responsibility, serving the interests of citizens, and fostering community solidarity.

KFH's latest contribution further reinforces its track record in supporting debt relief initiatives. Since 2019, the bank's total contributions toward settling the debts of defaulting individuals have exceeded KD 61 million.

One of the bank's most prominent social responsibility initiatives was launched in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice. This first-of-its-kind commitment provided KD 20 million to assist ten thousand debtors facing judicial rulings.

Following the positive community response to the program's 2019 launch, KFH continued to expand its scope to reach a broader segment of

beneficiaries. Building on this success, the bank also implemented the initiative in the Kingdom of Bahrain, in coordination with the Bahraini Ministry of Justice.

KFH has consistently supported national efforts during various crises. Driven by its commitment to Kuwait and its people, the bank was the largest contributor to the KD 10 million fund established by the Central Bank of Kuwait to support government initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The bank also made an additional standalone contribution to the fund, which was overseen by the Council of Ministers to support national priorities and emergency interventions during the pandemic.

Moreover, KFH allocated KD 8 million to reconstruct and rehabilitate the damaged area in Al-Mubarakiya, ensuring that the landmark reflects its cultural and heritage significance.

KFH contributed to the establishment and equip-

ping of the tenth ward at the Addiction Treatment Center, completing its long-standing initiative to develop the facility since 2005. Additionally, the bank allocated KD 20 million to build 15 ambulance centers, reinforcing the national healthcare system as part of its broader commitment to social responsibility.

KFH further strengthens its leadership in social responsibility by consistently supporting key national entities, including KFAS, the National Employment Support Program, and the Institute of Banking Studies.

The bank plays a pivotal role in sustainable development by supporting a wide range of social initiatives across healthcare, education, youth, sports, and innovation, in addition to environmental conservation and the promotion of social solidarity. It also remains a dedicated supporter of people with special needs, as well as various national programs, campaigns, and events.

### Highlighting digital readiness for Eid

## Warba continues to provide banking services during the Eid Al-Fitr Holiday

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: On the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, Warba Bank continues to provide its banking services to valued customers through its digital platforms during the official holiday. Regular working hours will resume on Monday or Tuesday, depending on the official announcement of Eid, in accordance with the Kuwait Banking Association's circular.

In this context, Mr. Abdullah Nasser Al-Shuail, Senior Director of Branches and Private Banking Services at Warba Bank, stated: "We extend our warmest congratulations and best wishes to our customers on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr. We wish everyone a blessed and joyful Eid. On this occasion, Warba Bank remains close to its customers even during the official holidays, by ensuring its banking services are available in its digital platforms, in-



Abdullah Al-Shuail

cluding the mobile app and website, while the customer center is available on 1825555 and by WhatsApp on 51625555."

Al-Shuail highlighted that the Bank's mobile app offers most of the

services customers may need at any time of day. He emphasized the importance of utilizing the Warba Bank app to manage accounts, transfer funds, pay bills and complete transactions easily and securely, as part of the Bank's commitment to providing innovative, Sharia-compliant banking services that meet customers' needs and expectations.

Warba Bank is among the banks that have achieved significant success in a relatively short period, securing a leading position in Islamic digital banking. With one of the largest shareholder bases among local banks, the Bank remains close to all segments of society. This sponsorship further reinforces Warba Bank's position as a trusted banking partner that combines innovation with social responsibility in delivering high-quality financial services and products.

## Jazeera Airways maintains flights to Egypt amid regional disruptions

KUWAIT CITY, March 18: Jazeera Airways has strengthened connectivity between Kuwait and Egypt, with flights operating to four Egyptian cities - Alexandria, Cairo, Assiut, and Luxor - supporting essential travel during the current regional situation and local airport closures.

The airline currently operates 31 flights per week between Kuwait and Egypt, offering more than 4,000 seats weekly. These services are helping reunite families and loved ones, support business and employment travel, and facilitate emergency movement at a time when travel options remain limited.

Barathan Pasupathi, Chief Executive Officer of Jazeera Airways, said:

"Maintaining connectivity during challenging circumstances is a responsibility we take very seriously which is demonstrated by the fact that Jazeera Airways is the only airline operating from Kuwait currently. Egypt remains one of the most important travel corridors for Kuwait, with strong passenger demand. Through alternative connectivity arrangements, we have enabled people to reunite with their families while also supporting their return to work and livelihoods. Our teams continue to work around the clock with authorities and partners across Kuwait, KSA, and Egypt to ensure safe, coordinated, and reliable operations."

Following the temporary suspension of operations at Kuwait International Airport, Jazeera Airways has implemented this alternative solution to maintain passenger mobility. Through coordinated operations involving overland transport between Kuwait and Qaisumah Airport (AQI) in Hafar Al Batin, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, passengers can travel safely to outbound flights to Egypt and return to Kuwait via the same route.



Jazeera flies to 4 cities in Egypt.



These operations have been made possible through close coordination with authorities and operational partners in Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, enabling Jazeera Airways to maintain vital air connectivity while upholding the highest standards of safety and operational reliability.

Jazeera Airways is cooperating

flights to an expanding network of destinations, including Al Ain, Amman, Istanbul, and Colombo, with additional routes and frequencies being introduced progressively in line with demand.

Passengers are encouraged to book their journeys through the Jazeera Airways website, jazeeraairways.com, or via the Jazeera App.

## China declines US request to help reopen Strait of Hormuz

### Beijing gains leverage

WASHINGTON, March 18, (AP): China won't help the United States reopen the Strait of Hormuz as requested by President Donald Trump, but it is probably welcoming the delay in Trump's highly anticipated trip to Beijing as the U.S. risks getting bogged down in the Middle East, analysts say.

The latest developments are unfolding as Trump's Iran war, in its third week, is faced with mounting pressure as oil has stopped moving through the strait and U.S. allies have refused to step up to secure the strait. That has produced concerns that China, the United States' biggest geopolitical rival, could stand to benefit from a war that some say was ill-considered.

"President Trump's request to delay his long-awaited summit with President Xi Jinping underscores how significantly he underestimated the fallout from Operation Epic Fury," said Ali Wyne, senior research and advocacy adviser for U.S.-China relations at the International Crisis Group. "A show of U.S. force that was meant to intimidate Beijing has instead served to puncture the illusion of U.S. omnipotence: Unable to reopen the Strait of Hormuz alone, Washington now needs its principal strategic competitor to help it manage a crisis of its own making."

The Chinese Foreign Ministry gave a nonanswer when asked if it would help reopen the strait but repeated its call for "parties to immediately stop military operations, avoid further escalation of the tense situation and prevent regional turmoil from further impacting the global economy."

Beijing, which had never officially confirmed Trump's state visit, originally scheduled for March 31, has signaled willingness to work with the U.S. to reschedule the visit by stating that the two sides "remain in communication." It even helped clarify that the postponement had nothing to do with Trump's request for China to help reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

On Tuesday, Trump said the Chinese "were fine" with the delay and claimed "a very good working relationship with China."

Sun Yun, director of the China program at the Stimson Center, said, "I think the Iran request is now going to be less pressing for China to fulfill." At the same time, Chinese diplomats have been engaging with countries in the Middle East, pledging a constructive role in easing tensions and restoring peace.

On Sunday, through the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, Beijing delivered to Iran an emergency humanitarian aid package of \$200,000, earmarked for families of children and teachers killed in the bombing of the Shajarah Tayebbeh elementary school building in Minab, Iran, with the Chinese ambassador to Iran condemning the school attack.

A delay in the state visit is welcome by both the Trump administration and China, said Brett Fetterly, a managing principal in the China practice at The Asia Group, a Washington-based consultancy.

"I think the political environment is difficult for the United States to have the commander in chief travel abroad while managing military operations," Fetterly said. "On the Chinese side, it doesn't hurt to play for more time, to better understand what exactly President Trump might want."

A recent trade talk in Paris between the two governments appears to have yielded little agreement and suggested difficulties remain in addressing structural differences in trade, technology and economic security, Fetterly said. "At the end of the day, both sides really needed some time to define what the range of deliverables are," he said.

The U.S. business community has also expressed concern that preparations for the summit might not have been sufficient to produce substantive agreements.

Transfers of military assets from the Indo-Pacific region to the Middle East, including a sizable portion of Marines deployed there as part of a rapid-response unit and an anti-missile defense system, have raised concerns that the U.S. could get distracted from its own stated priority to refocus on Asia.

"The longer this war continues, and the more forces that are shifted out of Asia, the more it will feed Asian allies' concerns about U.S. distraction and resource constraints," said Zack Cooper, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, where he studies U.S. strategy in Asia.

A delay in the state visit could also mean a delay in any arms sales to the self-governing island of Taiwan to deter attacks from Beijing, he said. China has vowed to take Taiwan by force if necessary, but the United States is obligated by its own law to give the island sufficient hardware to defend itself. The issue remains the thorniest in U.S.-China relations.

"I believe that China is happy to delay the visit and reap the benefits as the United States once again gets bogged down in the Middle East," Cooper said.

And Beijing probably doesn't need to do much, he added: "I think most Chinese experts and officials believe that the United States is undermining itself, so they just need to get out of the way."

### US gas prices hit two-year high

## Iran conflict sparks global energy shock

NEW YORK, March 18, (AP): The Iran war has rattled the global flow of oil, with steeper fuel costs already straining households worldwide. And in the U.S., drivers are now facing the highest prices they've seen at the pump in nearly two and a half years.

According to motor club AAA, the national average for a gallon of regular gasoline jumped to \$3.79 on Tuesday, up from \$2.98 consumers were paying before the U.S. and Israel launched the war with joint attacks against Iran on Feb. 28. The last time gas prices were as expensive as they are now was in October 2023.

"It's pretty hard. I mean, times are tough for everybody right now," Amanda Acosta, a Louisiana resident, told The Associated Press while filling up her car's tank this week. "I'm getting way less gas and paying way more money."

She isn't alone. Pain at the pump has been one of the most immediate economic impacts of the conflict, because the price of crude oil - the main ingredient in gasoline - has soared and swung rapidly in recent weeks, due to supply chain disruptions and cuts from major producers across the Middle East. Brent crude, the international standard, settled at over \$103 a barrel on Tuesday, up from roughly \$70 just weeks ago. And benchmark U.S. crude topped \$96 a barrel.

Many eyes are on the White House. Before the war, President Donald Trump once bragged about keeping gas prices low. But he's since pivoted to try and paint high oil prices as a positive outcome for the U.S. Last week, Trump said that because the U.S. is now largest crude producer in the world, "when oil prices go up, we make a lot of money." Companies that supply oil benefit

from higher prices. But steeper costs always pinch consumers' wallets - and today's rising prices arrive as many households continue to face wider cost of living strains. It could also push up already stubborn inflation, at least in the short run, and potentially hammer the economy more significantly if steep costs drag on. Experts say that that could apply more pressure on the Trump administration, particularly as affordability continues to stay at the top of voters' minds.

"I just want all of it to end. I just want to get out of there, out of Iran," said Meghan Adamoli, a New Jersey resident who was among customers filling up at a Multani station on Tuesday. While Adamoli said she can personally "roll with the punches" when it comes to gas prices, she knows that a lot of others can't.

About 90 ships cross Strait of Hormuz amid war

## Iranian oil still flowing as Hormuz remains partially shut

HONG KONG, March 18, (AP): About 90 ships including oil tankers have crossed the Strait of Hormuz since the outset of the war with Iran and it is still exporting millions of barrels of oil at a time when the waterway has been effectively closed, according to maritime and trade data platforms.

Many of the vessels that passed through the strait were so-called "dark" transits evading Western government sanctions and oversight that likely have ties to Iran, maritime data firm Lloyd's List Intelligence said. More recently, vessels with ties to India and Pakistan have also successfully crossed the strait as governments stepped up negotiations.

As crude prices spiked above \$100 a barrel, U.S. President Donald Trump pressured allies and trade partners to send warships and reopen the strait, hoping to bring oil prices lower.

Most shipping traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway for global oil and gas transport that supplies roughly one-fifth of the world's crude oil, has been halted since early March, after the war started. About 20 vessels have been at-

tacked in the area.

However, Iran has still managed to export well above 16 million barrels of oil since the beginning of March, trade data and analytics platform Kpler estimated. Due to Western sanctions and associated risks, China has been the biggest buyer of Iranian oil. There has been "continued resilience" in Iran's oil export volumes, said Kpler trade risk analyst Ana Subasic.

Iran has managed to profit from oil sales and also "preserve its own export artery" by using control over the chokepoint, said Kun Cao, client director at consulting firm Reddall.

Iran's oil export data estimates are largely aligned with maritime traffic data. At least 89 ships crossed the Strait of Hormuz between March 1 and 15 - including 16 oil tankers, according to Lloyd's List Intelligence, down from roughly 100 to 135 vessel passages per day before the war. More than one-fifth of the 89 vessels were believed to be Iran-affiliated, while Chinese and Greece affiliated ships are among the rest, it said.

Other vessels also have been getting through.

The Pakistan-flagged crude oil tanker Karachi, controlled by the Pakistan National Shipping Corp., passed through the strait on Sunday, Lloyd's List Intelligence said.

Shariq Amin, a spokesman at the Pakistan Port Trust, refused to confirm or deny which route the MT Karachi had used but he said the ship would soon safely reach Pakistan.

The India-flagged liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) carriers Shivalik and Nanda Devi, both owned by state-owned Shipping Corp. of India, also traveled through the strait around March 13 or 14, according to Lloyd's List Intelligence. LPG is used as a primary cooking fuel by millions of Indian households.

India's foreign minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, told the Financial Times the two vessels' were able to pass following talks with Iran. Iraq was also in talks with Iran to allow Iraqi oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz, its state-run news agency reported.

## BUSINESS

# Trump tariffs hit US manufacturers hard

Policy uncertainty chills factory investment

**WASHINGTON, March 18, (AP): Jay Allen is a fan of President Donald Trump, and voted for him on the belief that the Republican would cut taxes and trim regulations, helping his manufacturing business in north-east Arkansas.**

But the tariffs at the core of Trump's economic agenda have wreaked havoc on his company, Allen Engineering Corp., which makes industrial equipment used to install, finish and pave concrete. The import taxes have raised the costs of engines, steel, gearboxes and clutches made abroad that Allen needs to build power trowels that can sell for up to \$100,000 each.

Allen's experience embodies a growing body of evidence that the tariffs that Trump said would help American factories are, in fact, squashing many of them. The problem could get worse as the administration scrambles to craft new tariffs to replace the emergency import taxes that the Supreme Court ruled illegal in February.

Allen said he ran his company at a loss in 2025 because of tariffs. His payroll has fallen to 140 workers from a peak of 205. To get by this year, he has hiked prices by 8% to 10%, even though that might mean fewer sales.

"What's really sad is the unintended consequences of his tariffs are hurting manufacturing in our country," said Allen. "Unfortunately, the working-class people are getting squeezed."

Trump's core rationale for tariffs has been that they would force more factories to open in the U.S. and would generate enough revenue to close federal budget deficits. But that hasn't materialized.

Factories continue to shed workers, with 98,000 manufacturing jobs lost during Trump's first full 12 months back in the White House. American companies that foot the bill for tariffs are now suing the Trump administration for more than \$130 billion in tariff refunds. Meanwhile, the federal deficit is projected to climb over the next decade.

The White House maintains that construction spending is high, more workers are being hired to build factories, new investments are being made and labor productivity in manufacturing is increasing - which could eventually fuel a factory revival.

"It takes time to get production online, and therefore it will be some more time before we fully materialize the benefits of the president's policies," Pierre Yared, the acting chairman of the White House Council of Economic Advisers, said in an email.

Some of the bright spots in construction cited by

the White House appear to be the result of programs launched by then-President Joe Biden, a Democrat.

Factory construction spending began to accelerate in 2022 with the anticipation of government support from Biden's CHIPS and Science Act, which included big subsidies for computer chip plants. The law was a primary contributor to a historic surge in the annualized rate of construction spending on manufacturing facilities, said Skanda Amarnath, executive director of the economic policy group Employ America.

Construction spending on factories has slipped during Trump's presidency, but the pace remains relatively high largely because of continuing work on Biden-era projects in Arizona, Texas and Idaho, Amarnath said.

Amarnath has also gone through the interviews regional Federal Reserve banks have held with businesses. Those comments show some companies might expand by taking advantage of Trump's tax breaks on investments in equipment and new buildings.

But while the pharmaceutical drug sector might be expanding, the comments show no overall uptick in manufacturing because of Trump's tariffs.

"You don't get the sense that there is this new manufacturing renaissance underway," Amarnath said.

Based on orders, proclamations and other statements, Trump has taken more than 50 actions on tariffs so far - and that tally doesn't include the tariff threats he regularly makes on social media or in conversations with reporters but hasn't formally put in place.

The flurry of announcements, reversals, exemptions and legal challenges - as well as Trump's decision to bypass Congress to impose tariffs - has made it difficult for smaller manufacturing companies to plan.

For example, Allen Engineering imports its 75-horsepower diesel engines from Germany. Building them in the United States would require a \$20 million investment - a huge risk if the status of the tariffs is unclear.

Are engine-makers "going to spend that kind of money to move production from Germany to the U.S. when they don't know what the landscape is going to be in three years?" Allen said. "I don't know who is going to be in the White House, and what the stance is going to be on these tariffs."

Joseph Steinberg, an economist at the University of Toronto, said research shows that under the best-case scenario "it would take a decade for manufacturing employment to rise above where it was before tariffs were enacted."

But Steinberg said "the current situation is nothing

like the 'best case,'" since U.S. trade policy is unsettled and that leaves companies reluctant to expand.

About 98% of U.S. manufacturing establishments have fewer than 200 workers, according to Census Bureau data, and don't have the kind of name-brand recognition or lobbying heft to minimize the damage from tariffs that big players like Apple, General Motors and Ford possess.

The Association of Equipment Manufacturers in February reported that America's share of global manufacturing severely lags China's. The group has urged tax credits to offset the expense of tariffs, and specifically called for tariff relief on raw materials, parts and components that cannot be acquired domestically at scale.

Steel tariffs have been a particular concern. Trump imposed them last March and hiked them to 50% in June. They were not affected by the Supreme Court decision.

Trump has credited the tariffs with restoring profits at American steel mills. But they have hurt companies that use that steel, like Calder Brothers in South Carolina, which makes equipment to pave asphalt.

"The steel tariffs were the first thing that got my attention," said Glen Calder, the company's president. "My steel pricing jumped 25% two weeks before the tariffs went into effect for domestic steel. The market price just jumped. It has stayed elevated."

Part of Trump's push to expand manufacturing was to help American companies compete against China - a country he plans to visit this spring for talks with its leader, Xi Jinping.

But the U.S. manufacturing trade imbalance rose last year under Trump instead of narrowing. Meanwhile, China's trade surplus with the world climbed to a record \$1.2 trillion.

This trend exposes one of the big problems with Trump's tariff strategy, said Lori Wallach, director of the Rethink Trade program at American Economic Liberties Project. She noted that he largely bypassed Congress and failed to address gaps in the World Trade Organization's rules for the trade frameworks that he negotiated with other countries.

Instead of working with partners to ensure there were penalties for foreign manufacturers with abusive labor practices and unfair subsidies, Trump chose against rallying partners to counter China as a unified group. American manufacturers are at a disadvantage, Wallach argued, because there is not a coalition of nations that can impose penalties for currency manipulation, subsidies and schemes to evade tariffs.

"The general revulsion of this administration to international cooperation means they're trying to do it alone," Wallach said.



Barges fully loaded with coal are anchored on Mahakam river in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, Indonesia, on Dec. 19, 2022. (AP)

## New Indonesia-US pact links minerals, energy, & markets

**HANOI, March 18, (AP):** A new trade pact between Indonesia and the United States has recast their economic ties, binding Jakarta's resource wealth and energy future more closely to Washington's strategic needs.

Indonesia agreed to widen access for U.S. investors in critical minerals, boost its purchases of U.S. crude and liquefied petroleum gas, back the development of an American coal export corridor and cooperate on small modular nuclear reactors.

In turn, the U.S. trimmed a threatened 32% tariff on Indonesian goods to 19% and granted broader access to the American market, including a zero-tariff entry policy for major products such as palm oil, coffee, cocoa, spices and rubber.

Through the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling against President Donald Trump's tariffs may impact how it is implemented. The deal fits with longer term U.S. efforts to secure critical mineral supply chains, beef up its oil and gas exports and reduce dependence on China.

Meanwhile other export-reliant Southeast Asian economies negotiating with the United States, including Vietnam, are closely watching the Indonesia-U.S. trade deal for clues about the tariff levels and concessions Washington may demand across the region.

Indonesia, the world's largest nickel producer, has vast mineral reserves needed for electric vehicles and clean energy systems. It's caught between the conflicting aims of the U.S. and China, a key source of foreign investment and market for Indonesian coal and nickel, analysts say.

China is concentrating on electrification, renewables and dominance of battery supply chains, while the U.S. is pairing its push for mineral access with more fossil fuel exports.

Haryo Limanseto of Indonesia's Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs, said the deal's energy provisions "balance foreign trade and meet domestic energy needs."

"The leadership of Indonesia is trying to lead a fine line between the West and China," said Putra Adhiguna of the Jakarta-based Energy Shift Institute, adding that Chinese influence is "inescapable" since it is Indonesia's largest trading partner.

Indonesia has pledged to promote U.S. investment across its mineral industry, from exploration and mining to refining, transport and export. In some cases, American investors will receive treatment "no less favorable" than domestic firms.

Restrictions on exports of critical minerals to the U.S. will be relaxed to expedite development of Indonesia's rare earths and critical minerals sector with U.S. partners, promising "greater certainty" for companies involved in extraction to help boost production, the agreement says.

Major policy shifts have altered Indonesia's mining sector in the past six months and the trade deal's new restrictions on existing foreign-owned entities in Indonesia will curb excess output from processing plants. Foreign businesses must follow the same tax, environmental, labor and quota rules as other companies.

Indonesia's critical mineral processing sector is currently dominated by China, which has firms operating or financing multiple nickel smelters and industrial parks.

"Indonesia is absolutely central to this competition because it combines resource endowment with political ambition," said Kevin Zongzhe Li, with the Center for China Analysis within the Asia Society Policy Institute, a New York-based think tank.

Competition over critical minerals is

heating up and the agreement "opens the door for U.S. firms to have a real shot" at "modestly leveling a sector where Chinese industries established first mover advantage," he said.

Indonesia has agreed to cut red tape so that its companies can more easily purchase U.S. energy products.

It plans to buy \$15 billion worth of American energy commodities over an unspecified period, mainly fossil fuels such as liquefied petroleum gas, crude oil and gasoline.

Trump's efforts to persuade Asian countries to buy more American LNG has gained momentum during trade talks, with energy purchases emerging as a way to narrow trade gaps. It's unclear if the turmoil in oil trading due to the war with Iran might impact that effort.

Indonesia, one of the world's top coal exporters, will also invest in developing an export corridor from the U.S. West Coast to help make American coal more competitive in global markets, the agreement says.

Indonesia also pledged to work with the U.S. and Japan to deploy small modular nuclear reactors, starting with a potential project in West Kalimantan.

The deal reflects changed U.S. energy priorities under the Trump administration, away from cooperation on reducing Indonesia's climate change-causing emissions.

In 2022, Indonesia joined the Just Energy Transition Partnership, a multi-billion deal where the U.S. and other wealthy nations pledged support for reducing coal use and expanding clean energy. The program was faltering even before Trump withdrew from it last year.

Despite the U.S. withdrawal, Indonesian officials said the \$21.4 billion partnership will continue. As of January, at least \$3.4 billion, around 15%, of the funds had been received, according to Airlangga Hartarto, Indonesia's minister for economic affairs.

Adhiguna said the deal's biggest impact may be political, with Jakarta emulating the U.S. emphasis on fossil fuel use.

"There is the risk that the political leadership of Indonesia is going to fall back into that hole," Adhiguna said.

That will mean still slower progress in areas like solar energy.

Over the past five years, tropical, sunny Indonesia has installed less than 1 gigawatt of solar energy - compared with roughly 2 GW in Vietnam and nearly 60 GW in India. The International Energy Agency found that fossil fuels, like coal, oil and natural gas, made up nearly 78% of Indonesia's energy mix in 2023.

Indonesia should prioritize building 100 GW of solar and storage capacity and expand interconnection grids to enable renewable energy sharing, said Dinita Setyawati, with the United Kingdom-registered energy think tank Ember.

The deal's future has been clouded by the U.S. Supreme Court's recent ruling against Trump's sweeping global tariffs, just after the agreement was reached - casting doubt on the durability of his trade strategy. The agreement requires ratification by Indonesia's parliament before it can take effect.

"That adds another 'layer of uncertainty,'" said Meha Sitepu, with the Washington-based strategic advisory firm The Asia Group.

Some provisions of the agreement are drawing criticism, including those that are seen as diluting Indonesia's halal certification requirements in the mostly Muslim country of nearly 288 million, Southeast Asia's most populous nation.

"Parliamentary approval could be an uphill battle and added uncertainty from the U.S. side may complicate things further," Sitepu said.

### Exports grow, offsetting higher import costs

## Japan returns to trade surplus in February

**TOKYO, March 18, (AP):** Japan recorded a trade surplus of 57.3 billion yen (\$360 million) in February, according to government data released Wednesday, reversing from a deficit a month earlier.

Exports grew at a better-than-expected 4.2% in February to 9.57 trillion yen, the Finance Ministry's seasonally adjusted preliminary data show.

Imports grew 10.2% on-year to 9.51 trillion yen following a 2.5% contraction in January.

Japan posted a 1.15 trillion trade deficit that month. Import costs are likely to rise as the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz due to the war against Iran drives up oil and other energy prices.

Japan imports almost all its oil, and Brent crude - the international standard - has jumped in recent

weeks to about \$100 a barrel.

Geopolitical uncertainty, especially the war in Iran, loom large for Japan's export-reliant economy, but a weak yen is likely to work as a plus. The U.S. dollar has been trading at about 159 yen, when it was below 150 yen a year ago.

Shipments to China declined 10.9% from the same month a year ago, although demand was likely unusually weak due to this year's Lunar New Year holidays falling in February.

Those to the U.S. dropped 8%, as auto exports fell. President Donald Trump's tariffs on Japanese autos, now at 15%, continue to weigh on Japan's automakers and auto supply manufacturers.

Exports to Europe held up, growing 17% in Febru-

ary from the same month a year ago. Exports to the rest of Asia also grew, by 2.8%.

Investors are eyeing what the Bank of Japan might do on interest rates as the central bank's policy board concludes its two-day meeting Thursday.

"Central banks are waiting to see if these elevated oil prices are a temporary blip or a running theme for 2026, in which case we may see more global peers pivot from a dovish to a hawkish stance," said Tim Waterer, chief market analyst at KCM Trade.

Investors are also closely watching what deals, if any, could come from the summit later this week between Trump and Sanae Takaichi, Japan's first woman prime minister.

## Paraguay becomes final South American country to approve Mercosur-European Union trade deal

**SANTIAGO, March 18, (AP):** Paraguay on Tuesday became the latest and final South American country to ratify the landmark free trade agreement between Mercosur and the European Union, which will establish one of the world's largest free trade zones.

The European Commission, the EU's executive branch, has said it will provisionally ratify the deal, meaning the agreement could take effect even as a legal challenge by European lawmakers winds its way through the European Court of Justice.

The deal has been negotiated for a quarter century among countries that are now home to more than 700 million people and account for 25% of global gross domestic product. It was unanimously approved by the 58 Paraguayan deputies present in the session, nearly two weeks after the Senate gave its green light. After the endorsement, it now awaits President Santiago Peña's signature.

With today's vote, Paraguay became the fourth and final of the Mercosur founding members to ratify the agreement, following Uruguay, Argentina and, most recently, Brazil.

Bolivia, the newest Mercosur member, didn't participate in the negotiations, but will be able to join the deal in the coming years.

"This is a historic agreement for Paraguay, for

the region, and for the world. We are creating what is possibly the largest market in the world," said Deputy Rodrigo Gamarra, from the ruling Colorado Party and current president of the Mercosur Parliament (Parlasur).

During the session, which lasted more than nine hours, deputies praised the opportunities that the agreement will open up for both blocs.

"This provisional agreement is the bridge to full integration," said Deputy Juanma Añazco, also from the Colorado Party.

"It was years and years of negotiations and reluctance ... achieving this is truly historic," added Deputy Alejandro Aguilera, also from the ruling coalition.

Sectors of the opposition also expressed support for the agreement, with independent Deputy Raúl Benítez noting that "where there is isolation, we respond with multilateralism."

The vote in Paraguay concludes the process of accession and validation of the agreement on the South American side.

Uruguay was the first South American nation to ratify the agreement in late February. The same day, Argentina also completed the ratification process with a large majority in both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies.

Brazil, Mercosur's largest economy, didn't wait to follow its neighbors. The Senate unanimously ratified the alliance in early March after receiving approval from the lower house.

Legislative bodies across the EU's 27 nations don't need to individually ratify the major trade deal, but the European Parliament will again vote on ratifying it if and when the court case concludes that the agreement doesn't break EU treaties.

France, left-wing groups and farmers' unions led opposition to the free trade agreement, arguing that it would destabilize the European agricultural sector.

The treaty comes at a time when political fragmentation and economic shifts challenge the international landscape. Several European nations are facing security challenges and are strained by ongoing tensions with the United States.

Alongside Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen was one of the main driving forces behind the agreement. In a statement, she has praised it as "one of the most significant trade agreements of the first half of this century."

"Mercosur embodies the spirit with which Europe operates on the global stage. Europe is strengthening itself and gaining independence," she said.

'Don't click links'

## AI-driven tax scams surge this filing season, FTC warns

**NEW YORK, March 18, (AP):** Robocalls, texts, and phishing emails from scammers are up this tax season compared to previous years, with artificial intelligence likely increasing fraud attempts, according to the consumer protection bureau of the Federal Trade Commission. Consumer advocates and government officials urge the public to stay wary, to stop and think before engaging with phone or text messages, and to remember the IRS will not contact you directly by text or phone.

Here's what to know.

Each year, the IRS releases its "Dirty Dozen" of tax scams that target taxpayers. At the top of the list is impersonation of the agency by email, text, and phone. The IRS reported over 600 social media impersonators during fiscal year 2025, and urges people not to "click links or open attachments from unexpected messages."

The IRS also reminds taxpayers it "does not leave urgent, threatening pre-recorded messages, call to demand immediate payment, or threaten arrest."

Scammers often use alarming language and QR codes to send people to fake websites where they ask the taxpayer to "verify" accounts or enter personal information, according to the IRS. Links may also install malware or malicious software, such as ransomware, which could prevent access to files and private information. "AI-enabled IRS impersonation by phone (robocalls, voice mimicry, and spoofed caller ID)," is also increasing, according to the agency. As phone scams evolve, AI provides new computer-generated tactics and spoofed

caller identification to look legitimate.

In this vein, identity theft is one of the most common forms of fraud around tax season, according to Rosario Mendez, an attorney for the bureau of consumer protection at the FTC. Mendez defines this type of theft as the misuse of one's social security number or other personal information, often to collect a tax refund.

"People usually discover this when they go to file their tax returns and discover someone else has already filed," she said. "For the records of the IRS, that is, it's already happened. But it's not the person - it's an identity thief."

Eva Velasquez, CEO of the Identity Theft Resource Center, said the ITRC has also tracked an increase in scams and identity theft attempts over the past several years, likely aided by AI-generated messages.

"We're seeing an uptick in phishing emails, fake texts, and even phone calls," Velasquez said. "Scammers are trying to get you to engage in any manner - talk to them, click the link, share your personal data, or share access to your devices or accounts."

The "sheer volume and level of sophistication" suggests AI is being leveraged, according to Velasquez.

"Deluge" is the best word I can think of, because it's relentless," she said. Whenever possible, according to Velasquez, the best practice when receiving any of these messages is, "Type, don't tap." That is, rather than tapping on any link sent in any kind of message, type in the URL of the official website for the

IRS (IRS.gov), or whichever agency is supposedly contacting you.

"Go to the source. Don't click any of those links," she said. "If you didn't initiate the contact, don't engage."

According to Kathy Stokes, director of fraud prevention programs for the AARP, younger people more frequently file reports stating they've been scammed, but older individuals report losing more money than younger consumers.

"That's because they have more money to lose," she said.

If you suspect fraud, or a message seems suspicious, Stokes emphasized the importance of slowing down and talking to someone. When someone receives a notification that sounds strange, scary or urgent, if they stop to talk to a friend or family member or someone they trust, they can typically figure out it's a scam.

"That's also going to inoculate the people you share it with from falling for the scam," she said.

If someone has already used your social security number to file a tax return before you, it's important to let the IRS know.

You should also go to IdentityTheft.gov to report the theft, according to Mendez. At the end of that reporting process, the government will give you a personal recovery plan.

"If a scammer has used your social security number to file a tax return, it's possible the same thief could use it to open bank accounts, credit cards, or file for unemployment," she said. "Another worthwhile step is to monitor your credit report and freeze credit accounts so they can't be misused."

## Actress declines to confirm wedding

# Zendaya's new ring fuels marriage rumors with Holland

LOS ANGELES, March 18, (AP): Zendaya's new ring has led many to believe she's married to actor Tom Holland, but the star isn't confirming it and shared why she's intentional about keeping her personal life private.

"I think there's a balance between hiding and then also just like living your life and enjoying your life and protecting things that are special to yourself and I think everyone kind of has to do that in some way," the actor told The Associated Press at the premiere of

her new film, "The Drama."  
She arrived for Tuesday's premiere with what appeared to be a wedding band next to a large ring that started speculation at January's Golden Globes that she was engaged to Holland. Her representatives have declined to confirm the couple are married, even after Zendaya's longtime stylist Law Roach teased journalists recently that the wedding had already happened.  
Zendaya stars opposite Robert Pattinson in "The Drama," which has them playing an engaged couple

whose relationship is thrown off course during their wedding week because of secret Zendaya's character is keeping.

"Whatever kind of job that you have, whatever kind of field that you're in. Or if you're dealing with, you know, social media, whatever have you, like we all in some ways have to learn how to keep things for ourselves and pour into ourselves just as much as we pour into the world or our work," Zendaya told AP.  
She declined to elaborate on who designed her rings.



Zendaya arrives at the premiere of 'The Drama' on Tuesday, March 17, 2026, at DGA Theater Complex in Los Angeles. (AP)

## Film

Tuason crafts horror meant to be heard, not seen

# 'Undertone' turns sound into fear

LOS ANGELES, March 18, (AP): Alfred Hitchcock famously claimed he didn't watch his films in theaters. When asked if he missed out on hearing the audience scream, he said, "No. I can hear them scream when I'm making the picture."

While Ian Tuason, the mind behind the buzzy new auditory horror "Undertone," reveres and references Hitchcock as much as the next horror filmmaker, he has to disagree with him on this one. For Tuason, the real screams are the point.

"My favorite thing about this whole process is just watching it with audiences. I think that's probably why I wanted to make a horror film ... just to kind of witness the reactions," Tuason said in a recent interview with The Associated Press. "The same way as when you tell a ghost story at a campfire, it doesn't feel that great unless you see your friend scared."

His debut film "Undertone" is already doing just that. After playing at the Sundance Film Festival, it had some calling it the "scariest movie you'll ever hear."

"Undertone" is a minimalist horror, set in one location, with essentially one character. Evy (Nina Kiri) is a paranormal podcaster who is taking care of her dying, comatose mother upstairs. She's the skeptic of the podcast, which she does with a remote co-host (Adam DiMarco) in the middle of the night. Nothing can scare her, but this new investigation, in which they try to decode a series of unnerving audio files sent anonymously, has rattled her.

Tuason always dreamed of being a filmmaker, but he began his career in virtual reality and made a name for himself as an early proponent of immersive 3D sound for his cinematic horror shorts, which have been viewed millions of times. Soundscapes became his calling card. So, when he sat down to write "Undertone," he included every audio cue, resulting in a 250-page script.

"Sound in movies, it makes space for the audience to imagine what they're not seeing," Tuason said. "Whatever you imagine that's scary is going to be way scarier than what



Director Ian Tuason poses for a portrait to promote the film 'Undertone' on Wednesday, March 4, in West Hollywood, Calif. (AP)

I can show you. There's going to be millions of different versions of this movie in millions of minds and that's all because of the power of suggestion driven by sound and a lot of negative space."

In the process of shooting, he even found himself taking out a lot of the visuals he thought he'd need, stripping it down to its barest form: A woman listening to audio clips through her noise canceling headphones and freaking herself, and the audience, out. They figured it out with the help of a local Toronto post-production studio, REDLAB. When A24 came on board to distribute the film, they were able to do the mix again in Dolby.

"It's definitely meant to be seen in the theater in Dolby, because that is the exact vision that I had," said producer Cody Calahan. "But at home, on headphones, alone, it is a different experience ... You can kind of watch it twice."

Behind the film is a deeply personal story of demons, loss and grief. In 2020, during the pandemic, both his parents received terminal cancer diagnoses, and he moved back home to their Toronto suburbs to care for them. His mom died a few months later, followed by his father two and a half years later. During that time, Tuason was drinking a lot too, but also writing, melding together an audio play he'd created with the story of a lone caregiver.

He wrote it figuring that he'd just have to make it himself with whatever resources he had. It could be set in his childhood home (not-

ing to rent) and feature one actor ("I could afford that," he said). And he didn't hold back: Even he was surprised by his own capacity for honesty about some of his darkest moments.

"I didn't really have to write in a way where I'm trying to pitch it," Tuason said. "I think that's what gave it its honesty. Because I was going to make it either way."

His main character, Evy, is him, he said. But he wrote Evy as a woman and not a man because, Tuason said, he needed the character to face a choice that would change their life; He couldn't think of anything bigger than the question of whether to have a child.

Throughout it all Tuason worked on himself as a person too, leaving the skeptic behind and turning into a believer, he said. He knows the Evys of the world will doubt it, but he sees meaningful connections everywhere now; Even in the film's release date that he had nothing to do with.

"It's a miracle that I made this thing and then A24 bought it, and then Sundance and then the release on Friday the 13th," Tuason said. "My dad passed on Friday, the 13th, And March was the last month I had with my mom."

Though moviegoers might just be discovering Tuason, Hollywood has already taken notice. In December, he was tapped to direct a new "Paranormal Activity" film. He knows that horror is what people want from him, and as a self-proclaimed people pleaser he wants to do that too. But he does have dreams of delving into other genres as well, like science fiction and, eventually, Kung-Fu.

"It's going to be modern day Kung-Fu," he said.

But now, he's focused on getting "Undertone" out to the world. And he's grateful that he's starting to see it as a film and a character, separate from himself.

"It's starting to feel less and less like me," he said. "There wasn't any separation for the longest time, but now I watch it in the theater and I'm a little bit more distanced ... now I can look at it and kind of just focus on the technique, the art and have it live as a thing separate from me."

## Music



Lainey Wilson performs during the South by Southwest Music Festival on Tuesday, March 17, in Austin, Texas. (AP)

## Media

### FCC threatens broadcast licenses over 'fake news'

# Trump team pushes media to report war their way

WASHINGTON, March 18, (AP): Through lectures, scoldings and outright threats, President Donald Trump and his aides are ratcheting up the pressure on journalists to cover the war in the Middle East the way the administration wants.

The Republican president has fumed on social media about stories he doesn't like and berated a reporter on Air Force One. The government's top media regulator has warned that broadcasters risk losing their licenses if they don't stay away from "fake news." Trump and his defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, have questioned the patriotism of news outlets because of their reporting.

Trump has complained about war coverage in both specific and general ways. In a social media post, he said news reports exaggerated the damage to planes that were attacked by Iran at an airport in Saudi Arabia. He attacked "Corrupt Media Outlets" for falling for AI-generated false reports created by Iran and said the media "hates to report" how well the US military has performed.

All presidential administrations tangle with the press; it's the natural byproduct of journalists' watchdog roles in a democratic society. But the incidents of the past few days speak to a hostility toward the very idea of being questioned - in a way that, some say, scratches up against the First Amendment itself.

Meeting with reporters on Air Force One while returning to the White House from Florida late Sunday, the president objected to a question from ABC News' Mariam Khan about a fundraising message that used a photo taken at last week's dignified transfer ceremony of the remains of US service members.

Khan was working as the pool reporter on the plane, but when she told Trump she was with ABC, he said: "I think it's maybe the most corrupt news organization on the planet. I think they're terrible."

Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr cited Trump's Truth Social message about the planes struck in Saudi Arabia in warning news outlets to be careful about what they report.

"Broadcasters that are running hoaxes and news distortions - also known as fake news - have a chance now to correct course before their license renewals come up," Carr wrote on X over the weekend. "The law is clear. Broadcasters must operate in the public interest, and they will lose their license if they do not."

Decades of court decisions have generally sided



President Donald Trump speaks to reporters before he boards Air Force One, Friday, March 13, at Joint Base Andrews, Md., for a trip to Florida. (AP)

with the press over government attempts to regulate the content it produces. But Carr said making changes is in the best interest of legacy media outlets because so many people don't trust them.

His ability to make changes, however, is limited. The FCC does not regulate networks like CBS, NBC and ABC - although it does have the authority to reject the licenses of individual affiliates of those networks when they come up for renewal. Cable news networks CNN, Fox News Channel and MS NOW are not under the FCC's purview. The Trump message that Carr retweeted mentioned only The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal specifically, and the FCC has no authority over newspapers.

Punishing a television affiliate for war coverage that Carr objects to is likely to run afoul of the law, noted First Amendment attorney Floyd Abrams in an interview Monday.

"The broadcast media is always at risk of a sort that newspapers are not. But at its core, they are protected by the First Amendment," Abrams said, "and these statements by the chairman seem to me are directly threatening First Amendment interests and First Amendment principles."

Abrams said he'd argue that robust war reporting is

just the sort of public interest work that television stations should be doing to justify their licenses.

Intimidation may be Carr's motive. And that doesn't have to mean intimidating a news outlet to pull its punches, said Barbara Starr, a former CNN Pentagon correspondent. "The risk is the climate they create," she said. "Are people going to be afraid to talk to reporters? Some of them will be, and that's a serious matter."

Trump said on social media that he was thrilled to see Carr looking at the licenses of the "highly corrupt and highly unpatriotic 'News' organizations." Their efforts were endorsed Monday by hosts of the influential "Fox & Friends" morning show on Fox News Channel.

"The president has said enough with this coverage, from other networks that are not telling you the truth, that are so negative about what is going on," said Fox's Ainsley Earhardt, without specifying the outlets she was referring to. "This is a pro-America fight, and every network needs to get on board with that."

Hegseth, in his most recent Pentagon war briefing, specifically attacked CNN. Under his administration, most legacy news outlets have been thrown out of their regular spaces in the Pentagon press room because they would not agree to his new rules that he said restricted their work. Some reporters from exiled outlets are allowed back for briefings, although Hegseth seldom takes their questions. Without an explanation, still photographers have been banned from briefings.

Hegseth said a CNN story about the administration being unprepared for Iranian attacks on the world's oil supply was ridiculous. He offered his own edits of headlines that a "patriotic press" should use onscreen.

"The sooner that David Ellison takes over that network, the better," Hegseth said, in reference to the Paramount Global chief, whose company is expected to take over ownership of CNN. The administration is hoping that will result in more Trump-friendly coverage.

Mark Thompson, CNN's chief executive, said the network stands behind its work. "Politicians have an obvious motive for claiming that journalism which raises questions about their decisions is false," he said. "At CNN, our only interest is telling the truth to our audiences in the US and around the world, and no amount of political insults and threats is going to change that."

## Variety

LOS ANGELES: The 98th Oscars hosted by Conan O'Brien saw a dip in ratings after several years of gains. The Walt Disney Co. on Tuesday said that just under 17.9 million viewers tuned into Sunday's show, which aired live on ABC and was streamed on Hulu.

The ratings are down 9% from last year's post-pandemic high of 19.7 million viewers who tuned in for O'Brien's inaugural year as host, when "Anora" swept the awards. The show also yielded a more significant 14% decline from last year in viewership from adults aged 18-49.

Sunday's Oscars saw a showdown between two Warner Bros. films, "One Battle After Another" and "Sinners," with the former winning best picture and director. Michael B. Jordan won best actor for "Sinners," the most nominated film in history, with 16, that also broke the record for the most losses by a single film, with 12.

And yet despite the dip in audience, the Oscars are still the No. 1 primetime entertainment telecast of the 2025-2026 season. The Golden Globes, which aired on CBS in January, drew an audience of 8.7 million viewers which was itself down 7% from the year prior. (AP)

ZURICH: YouTube made a World Cup deal with FIFA on Tuesday that lets rights-holding broadcasters stream game action live on the video platform that offers global access to young viewers.

FIFA announced a "game-changing partnership" that encourages World Cup rights holders to broadcast the first 10 minutes of games during the June 11-July 19 tournament - in effect an appetizer encouraging young fans then to watch on traditional channels such as network TV.

In addition, broadcasters "will be able to stream a select number of

matches in full on their YouTube channel, engaging global audiences and promoting where to watch more of the competition," FIFA said.

The value of the deal for FIFA was not disclosed.

FIFA also pledged to share some of its World Cup archive on YouTube "including full length past matches and many more iconic moments in the sport's history." (AP)

XI'AN: Archaeologists have made new discoveries dating back to the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046 BC-771 BC) at the Jiangliu Site in Jingyuan County, northwest China's Shaanxi Province, according to the Shaanxi Academy of Archaeology on Tuesday.

The Jiangliu Site, a large settlement moat site from the late Yangshao culture period, is located northeast of Jiangliu Village. The excavations, carried out in 2022 in the western part of the site, unearthed multiple ash pits and tombs from the Western Zhou Dynasty.

In ten ash pits, archaeologists discovered pottery wares like tripod jars, pots and basins. The 13 excavated tombs, mostly simple single-wooden-coffin burials, typically contained one tripod and one jar as funerary objects, with some also yielding small bronze items, including knives and daggers. (Xinhua)

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN: Brunei remains focused on optimizing its existing resources to strengthen the competitiveness of tourism products based on culture, nature, and adventure, a government minister said on Monday.

Speaking during a session of the Legislative Council, Haji Abdul Manaf Metussin, minister of primary resources and tourism, said the strategy will include a wide-impact advertising campaign using various promotional methods aimed at increasing global awareness of the country's tourism attractions.

Under the plan, Brunei's Tourism Development Department will appoint overseas marketing representatives to improve the effectiveness of both traditional and digital promotions. These representatives will focus particularly on dynamic tourism markets. (Xinhua)

O'Brien

## From war ruins to Budapest's iconic mukis

## Budapest's vintage freight trams celebrate 100 years in service

BUDAPEST, Hungary, March 18, (AP) — With the toot of a horn, the ring of a bell and the hiss of air brakes, an unusual rail vehicle pulls out of a depot in Budapest to serve the Hungarian capital's public transit system, a job it has done for a century.

The so-called freight trams, known as mukis, run on electricity provided by overhead wires and travel on Budapest's vast tram rail network, one of the busiest in the world. But unlike the hundreds of iconic yellow trams in the passenger fleet, they don't carry commuters.

Acquired by the city in 1926, the wood-sided trams were initially products of necessity: They brought goods and raw materials to and from Budapest's factories after much of the local freight infrastructure had been destroyed during World War I.



A century-old freight tram leaves the Ferencvaros tram depot in Budapest, Hungary on Wednesday, March 11. (AP)

“Engineers at the time designed an electric drive system mainly using parts from vehicles damaged in the war, as well as parts from

vehicles that had already been designated for scrapping,” said Ádám Zadravec, the head of tram vehicle development and technology at Budapest's public transit company BKV.

“Their primary purpose was freight transport, but after World War II, these vehicles were also used for removal of the war ruins,” he said.

Over time, the mukis' function changed as Hungary recovered. In the 1960s, some of the original 40 trams were equipped with a snowplow, enabling them to clear the city's tram tracks in winter, as they do today.

They also perform nighttime maintenance runs, and transport broken-down trams into depots for repairs.

Various parts on the trams were gradually replaced, resulting in a

mishmash of components. By 2018, the mukis were due for a more comprehensive refurbishment.

“When they were manufactured in the 1920s, they were extremely simple, extremely puritanical devices,” said Nándor Meixner, head of vehicle maintenance at Budapest's Ferencvárosi depot. “During the refurbishment, we strove to make our colleagues' work easier. That is why, for example, a seat was added to the vehicle, so that the driver can at least sit down.”

Another addition: The trams were equipped with heating in the cabin. Despite the changes over the last 100 years, Zadravec said the trams' overall nature remained the same.

“Their maintenance costs is almost zero because these trams are very easy to maintain. Compared to the complex electronics of today's

vehicles, there is very little in them that can break down,” he said. “People say that it can be repaired with a hammer and a file, and that's absolutely true.”

Driving them requires special training, however, as well as what Meixner called a certain “feel” for the vehicle.

“It is not enough to just drive, to know the signs and instructions, you also need to know the vehicle itself. We used to say that the driver has to drive this vehicle with his butt,” he said.

Of the original fleet of 40 mukis, only six have survived the last 100 years in Budapest, with three in active use.

“The value of these vehicles lies precisely in their simplicity, in the pure fact that they exist and are available to us,” Zadravec said.

## Variety

**NEW YORK:** Books on homelessness, the US Census and ancient India are among this year's winners of prizes handed out by the J. Anthony Lukas Project, named for the late author and investigative journalist.

The winners were announced Tuesday by the project's administrators, the Columbia Journalism School and the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University.

Jeff Hobbs' “Seeking Shelter: A Working Mother, Her Children, and a Story of Homelessness in America” won the Lukas Book Prize, a \$10,000 honor given for exemplifying “literary



grace, commitment to serious research and social concern.” The Mark Lynton Prize for history, a \$10,000 award for combining “literary grace, commitment to serious research and social concern,” was given to William Dalrymple's “The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World.”

The Lukas Work-in-Progress Awards, for which each winner receives \$25,000, went to danah boyd, for “Data Are Made, Not Found: A Story of Politics, Power, and the Civil Servants Who Saved the US Census” and Karim Zidan for “In the Shadow of the Cage.”

The Lukas prizes were established in 1998. Previous winners include Robert Caro, (AP)

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**SYDNEY:** Researchers in Australia have created a new artificial intelligence (AI) system that learns and makes decisions from fully encrypted data without ever “seeing” the sensitive data it processes.

Researchers at Australia's University of Technology Sydney (UTS) have developed what they describe as the world's first privacy-preserving framework for deep reinforcement learning (DRL), using fully homomorphic encryption (FHE), “a groundbreaking advancement in preserving users' privacy in the AI era,” a UTS statement said Wednesday.

Published in Nature Machine Intelligence, the breakthrough allows AI to operate securely on encrypted information, potentially transforming data privacy in sectors ranging from self-driving cars to the decision-making behind Generative AI, it said. (Xinhua)

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**LANZHOU:** After two decades of collaborative efforts, the content of Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang in northwest China, currently held in Britain and France, has been fully compiled and published, Northwest Minzu University announced on Tuesday.

A total of 61 volumes of Dunhuang manuscripts written in the Tibetan language, kept in collections in the British Library and the National Library of France, were taken abroad from the Library Cave of the millennium-old Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang in the early 20th century, according to Tsering, director of the institute of overseas ethnic documents at the university, a key project participant based in Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu Province in northwest China. (Xinhua)

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**PARK CITY, Utah:** A Utah woman who wrote a children's book about coping with grief after her husband's death was convicted of aggravated murder in his death by poisoning him with fentanyl.

Jurors on Monday also found Kouri Richins guilty of fraudulently claiming insurance benefits after the death of Eric Richins in March 2022 at their home outside the ski town of Park City.

Prosecutors say Kouri Richins slipped five times the lethal dose of the synthetic opioid into a cocktail that he drank. They say Richins was \$4.5 million in debt and falsely believed that if her husband died, she would inherit his estate worth more than \$4 million. They also say she was planning a future with another man she was seeing on the side.

After her husband's death, Richins self-published a children's book about grief to help her sons and other kids cope with the loss of a parent. (AP)

## Fashion



Models present creations at an opening fashion show of AW2026 Beijing Fashion Week in Beijing, capital of China, on March 17. AW2026 Beijing Fashion Week kicked off here on Tuesday and will last till March 23. More than 120 events are scheduled to be held during the fashion week. (Xinhua)

## Yuanqiao Village becomes hub for filming

## Micro dramas create and deliver success stories in China village

ZHENGZHOU, March 18, (Xinhua) — When a Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) scholar steps into his courtyard, he might find that a Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) wedding is unfolding next door. Both scenes can be spotted simultaneously in Yuanqiao Village, where visitors could be forgiven for feeling that they were in parallel universes.

Indeed, this village, nestled in the city of Dengfeng, central China's Henan Province, has gained prominence as a filming location for micro dramas. It has been dubbed as a “Shudian,” and is somewhat akin to China's Hollywood, Hengdian Township, located in east China's Zhejiang Province. The Chinese characters “Shu” and “Heng” literally mean vertical and horizontal, respectively. Micro dramas, notably, tend to be shot using a vertical format.

“Thanks to micro dramas, we saw a surge in visitors during the Spring Festival,” said 75-year-old villager Yuan Tiefang, who is in his sixth year working as a caretaker for these old buildings.

The village, boasting a history of over 600 years and housing over 420 families, preserves a vast expanse of Ming and Qing courtyards. In 2018, a renovation project was initiated to restore the buildings.

“The well-preserved ancient architecture in this village is a rarity in central China,” said Lyu Hongjun, president of the Songshan culture research association of Dengfeng.

Liu Wantao, Party chief of the village, told Xinhua that they had previously considered developing tourism, only to discover that tourists showed scant interest in the village.

The turning point came in 2023, when the filming crew of a micro drama arrived in the village. “They had planned a five-day schedule but completed all their work in just three days,” he recalled. Before departing, they kept praising the village for its



People visit Yuanqiao Village in Dengfeng City, central China's Henan Province, Feb. 10, 2026. (Xinhua)

abundant ancient architectural resources, which eliminated the need for cumbersome scene changes.

The village gained further attention when a drama filmed there went viral, amassing over 30 million views and attracting more production teams. On some days, the village could see the filming of up to three micro dramas simultaneously.

Officially recognized as a genre in 2020, micro dramas have exploded in China. In 2024, the total revenue exceeded 50 billion yuan (about 7.2 billion U.S. dollars), up 34.9 percent year on year.

Villager An Qing'e, 63, occasionally works as an extra in these micro dramas. “The first time I had to recite lines, I was so nervous that I stumbled several times. Growing up in the village, it was tough to shake off my accent,” she recalled.

An has since developed into a confident and eloquent storyteller, regaling tourists with details of the history of

the ancient buildings. Many other villagers have had their turns in front of the cameras, while some have worked behind the scenes, moving props and setting up scenes. By doing such work, they have earned 200 yuan a day.

To date, more than 50 micro dramas have been filmed in Yuanqiao.

The village's newfound fame has been accompanied by an influx of tourists. According to Liu, the village can now accommodate over 200 guests and serve dinner to 1,200 people, all at once. In the year of 2025 alone, it received approximately 150,000 tourists, generating total tourism revenue of about 4 million yuan.

China unveiled its “No. 1 central document” for 2026 last month, outlining plans to advance agricultural and rural modernization and promote all-around rural revitalization. The newly-released 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) also calls for increasing investment in rural revitalization.

## Technology

## Human creativity at risk

## AI helps write, but what about your unique voice?

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

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By Gayle Rogers

University of Pittsburgh

It's a familiar feeling: You start a text message, and your phone's auto-complete function suggests several choices for the next word, ranging from banal to hilarious. “I love...” you, or coffee? Or you're finishing an email, and merely typing the word “Let” prompts your app to suggest “Let me know if you have any questions” in light gray text.

Predictive language technologies have become so routine - baked into smartphones, email services and chatbots - that we barely notice them anymore. But they raise a difficult question: What happens to a writer's unique voice when AI routinely completes their thoughts - or generates them altogether from scratch?

As the chair of a large English department - and as a scholar who researches the effects of predictive writing - I've witnessed firsthand the challenges that generative AI systems such as ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude pose for individual expression.

This technology has been incorporated into the writing process so fully that it's almost impossible to imagine encountering a scene from the not-so-distant past: a writer, alone, with a pen and a piece of paper, wrestling with how to best translate their ideas, arguments and stories into something legible and interesting.

As many scholars have noted, though, this vision of writing was never fully accurate.

Essays have always incorporated guidance from teachers, professors or writing tutors. A friend might give feedback, or your favorite novelist's turn of phrase might offer inspiration. The language we use is never fully “ours,” but draws on millions of sources absorbed over the course of our lives.

Just as it's a myth to imagine that writers compose in a vacuum, there has never been a clear line between genuine human expression versus machine-generated text. As scholars have pointed out, we have been using machines to communicate for a long time. Every technological development - from the quill pen and the typewriter to the word processor - has brought with it changes in how humans express themselves.

However, the ubiquity of predictive language technologies directly threatens human creativity - or, as one study put it, “Predictive Text Encourages Predictive Writing.”

Because generative AI composes and suggests text in highly standardized, predictable patterns, its outputs can read as if they're dressed-up versions of what linguists call “phatic expression.” These are the overly common phrases that function as social glue more than as conveyors of sentiment: “How are you?”, “Have a good day” or “See you soon.”

But this glue can lose its hold if the technology is used in the wrong situations. Using artificial intelligence to compose a social media post in the wake of a tragedy, or using it to write a fan letter to an Olympic athlete, comes off as insincere.

People are starting to catch on to generative AI's prose, not because it's clunky or poorly written, but because it all sounds the same. That's because large language models are trained on gigantic masses of examples of human writing, and they predict text

based on probabilities and commonalities.

Those predictive outputs often end up producing a singular, recognizable voice. Or, as Sam Kriss explained in a recent essay for The New York Times Magazine, “Once, there were many writers, and many different styles. Now, increasingly, one uncredited author turns out essentially everything.”

Generative AI is accelerating the types of cultural convergence and uniform expression that were already happening.

For example, linguists have shown that regional accents in the US are fading and becoming homogenized due to a mix of migration, urbanization, mass media and social media. Meanwhile, American English continues supplanting many other forms internationally due to the global predominance of US-based media, TV, film and more.

Are we all destined to write and speak alike? Generative AI doesn't know in advance whether you call soft drinks “soda,” “pop” or “coke.” If you let it choose, it will simply select “soda” for you, since that's the most common term in its training data.

By contrast, what people typically value in a personal essay, novel, poem or message to a grieving friend is the ability of the human author to demonstrate - clearly and distinctly - something powerful and singular.

So how can teachers compel students to craft their own voices? How is that task different today than it was even a decade ago?

It helps to think here about where generative AI struggles, and why.

Chatbots are great at creating relatively bland, highly readable prose, since that's what is omnipresent in their training data. But they struggle to create the kinds of radically unexpected shifts that appear in novels like James Joyce's “Ulysses” or songs like Queen's “Bohemian Rhapsody.”

Several techniques exist to encourage these types of stylistic leaps among student writers.

Teachers can bake unpredictability into the assignment. Creative writing instructors have used techniques for decades to encourage out-of-the-box thinking. They might ask students to draft a poem and then rewrite it while avoiding the letter “E,” or limit themselves to two adjectives at most.

Another tactic involves having students draw from distinctly personal experiences. Teaching students how to explore connections between characters and conflicts in a novel to people and situations in their own lives makes resorting to chatbots less appealing, if not altogether useless. By contrast, impersonal assignments - “Discuss the symbolism of the color green in ‘The Great Gatsby’” - will likely produce generic, predictable results.

Teachers can also ensure the work of their students has a range of readers. If it's just the professor, students may be less likely to invest time into cultivating their own voice. But if they have to write an essay or story for, say, their friends or their grandparents, they might have more of an incentive to sound like themselves.

Many other strategies exist, from being forced to reverse the argument of an essay to favor the other side, to interviewing strangers for an assignment and including their quotes.

The bottom line: Writers have access to sources - and language - that machines cannot access or generate. Having students wrestle with unconventional modes of composition and revision lies at the heart of ensuring that the technology is more of a helpful thought partner, but not a substitute for their voice. (AP)

## Researchers develop smart bandage for wound monitoring, healing

# Frequent bad dreams raise dementia risk in adults aged 60s: study

SYDNEY, March 18, (Xinhua) - Older adults who experience frequent disturbing dreams may have a higher risk of developing dementia, particularly men and those in their 60s, an international study has revealed.

The research, led by the Center for Healthy Brain Ageing (CHeBA) at Australia's University of New South Wales (UNSW), found that adults aged 60-69 who reported disturbing dreams were nearly four times more likely to develop dementia than those who did not, a UNSW statement said Wednesday.

Among men, weekly disturbing dreams were linked to a more than threefold increased risk of Alzheimer's disease, according to the study published in *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, which analyzed data from more

than 10,000 adults aged 60 to 89 years across Asia, Europe, and South America.

"We found the strongest association in people in their 60s, which may suggest that disturbing dreams could be an early marker of dementia risk for some individuals," said Darren Lipnicki, lead author and research fellow at CHeBA.

"It's important to emphasize that not everyone who experiences disturbing dreams will go on to develop dementia," Lipnicki said, adding that they may instead be an early warning sign of underlying brain changes.

The study controlled for a wide range of factors, including sleep problems, medications, physical and mental health, cognitive performance, and genetic risk.

Several possible explanations for the association are being explored, including early brain changes, overactive threat-detection networks, or changes in the body's stress system that are associated with dementia risk.

### Also:

**MELBOURNE:** Researchers in Australia have developed a "smart" wound dressing capable of both monitoring and treating injuries in real time, potentially transforming chronic wound care.

Researchers at Australia's Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) created a method of embedding tiny, multi-functional nanomaterials, known as carbon dots, into a hydrogel dressing that serves the dual func-

tions of monitoring and treating the wound, a RMIT statement said Tuesday.

This new type of smart wound patch will change color when there is a pH change in the wound caused by infection, triggering the release of therapeutic nanozymes that help reduce inflammation and promote healing, researchers said, adding that clinicians or patients can also manually activate the treatment by applying gentle pressure to the dressing.

The dual nature of this smart wound patch would support more timely and effective intervention from clinicians, said Nan Nan, RMIT PhD candidate and the first author of the study published in *Chemical Engineering Science*.



This image taken from video shows a suspected meteor falling through the sky in the greater Pittsburgh, Pa., area on Tuesday, March 17. (AP)

## Cleveland 7-ton meteor could be seen across several US states

A 7-ton meteor that sped across the Cleveland sky at 45,000 miles (72,420 kilometers) per hour on Tuesday before breaking apart in a thunderous boom startled residents who feared an explosion.

People several states away reported seeing the bright fireball even though it was 9 a.m. The American Meteor Society said it received reports from Wisconsin to Maryland. NASA later confirmed that it was a meteor nearly 6 feet (1.83 meters) in diameter.

"This one really does look like it's a fireball, which means it's a meteorite -- a small asteroid," said astron-

omer Carl Hergenrother, the group's executive director. "So much stuff is being launched that a lot of times what you see burning up is just reentering satellites. But usually those don't get especially bright," he said.

The meteor was first seen about 50 miles above Lake Erie, near Lorain. It traveled more than 34 miles (55 kilometers) through the upper atmosphere before fragmenting over Valley City, north of Medina, NASA said in a statement from Bill Cooke, who leads the agency's Meteoroid Environments Office in Huntsville, Alabama. (AP)

## Scientific innovation alone not enough to improve health

# Cancer vaccines offer hope, but false mRNA claims could hinder adoption

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



By Dannel D. Boatman  
West Virginia University

Scientists are making rapid progress toward a long-awaited goal that could help to reshape cancer care: mRNA cancer vaccines with the potential to significantly boost the immune system's ability to fight and eliminate tumors.

Since the early 2000s, there have been over 120 promising clinical trials testing the use of mRNA vaccines to treat multiple cancer types, such as melanoma, brain, breast, lung and prostate cancer.

At the same time, misinformation about so-called turbo cancer began spreading widely on social media, with mainstream media outlets first reporting on it in late 2022. Turbo cancer refers to the false claim that COVID-19 mRNA vaccines cause unusually aggressive cancers.

As a researcher in health communication who monitors cancer-related conversations online, I have seen how quickly new misinformation can spread and the impact it can have on people's health decisions. In the case of mRNA cancer vaccines, this false narrative could undermine public confidence in an important tool that may help prevent or treat cancer in the future.

Most people likely first heard about mRNA technology through COVID-19 vaccines, but scientists have been studying it for decades.

How mRNA vaccines work is by delivering instructions that prompt the body's cells to make specific proteins. This process teaches the immune system how to recognize and attack those proteins. In cancer research, scientists can design highly targeted vaccines that train the immune system to find tumor cells and more effectively kill them without harming healthy cells.

One example of this potential comes from studies on glioblastoma, an aggressive brain tumor with few effective treatments. Researchers have found

that a personalized mRNA vaccine can rapidly activate people's immune systems against this type of brain cancer and improve survival.

The body of evidence that mRNA vaccines can transform how researchers harness the immune system to treat cancer is growing. However, even the most promising medical advances can only improve health if people are willing to use them.

"Turbo cancer" is a term often used by anti-vaccine advocates who claim - without credible evidence - that COVID-19 mRNA vaccines are causing unusually aggressive cancers.

This inaccurate narrative has trickled into the mainstream news. In September 2025, a controversial UK cardiologist claimed that the COVID-19 vaccine contributed to the royal family's recent cancer diagnoses, spurring immediate backlash from the medical community. Although uncommon, some public figures and health professionals have claimed that the vaccines could cause cancer despite ample contradictory evidence, often by misinterpreting or misrepresenting studies.

### Misinformation

Health misinformation can be described as false or misleading health-related claims shared with the public that are not supported by scientific evidence, are based on unverified personal stories or are opinions presented as facts. For example, while tracking discussions about the HPV vaccine across social media platforms, my team and I found that safety fears, mistrust of authority and conspiracy claims were widespread online.

Vaccine misinformation accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, causing what researchers call an infodemic: the rapid spread of both accurate and false health information during a public health crisis. The COVID-19 infodemic made it harder for people to find trustworthy guidance and shaped public attitudes toward vaccines.

"Turbo cancer" reflects many of the same patterns and narratives as the COVID-19 infodemic.

In a social listening study, which involves systematically monitoring online conversations about different top-

ics, my team and I observed countless posts about turbo cancer beginning in July 2023 and continuing through early 2026. Many posts rely on emotionally compelling anecdotes, misinterpretations of animal studies, misuse of adverse events reporting and recycled myths that vaccines alter human DNA. Some posts also link rising cancer rates in younger adults to the COVID-19 vaccine. However, large population studies have found no increased cancer risk following vaccination.

None of these turbo cancer claims are supported by credible evidence. But on social media, repetition, personal stories and scientific-sounding language can make misinformation appear legitimate and help it spread quickly.

At first glance, fringe claims such as turbo cancer may seem easy to dismiss. But research shows that they can have real-world consequences, and cancer-related misinformation can be particularly consequential.

Inaccurate information about cancer treatment is common online, and researchers have shown that it influences patient decisions. When patients rely on unproven approaches instead of recommended therapies, their risk of death can increase substantially.

Clinicians are already seeing the effects of misinformation in routine care. Oncologists report having to address myths or misleading information that patients have encountered, though researchers do not yet know how common these conversations are across cancer care.

mRNA technology is entering a pivotal phase in its development. Scientific progress is accelerating, but public understanding has not kept pace. Repeated exposure to misleading claims can erode trust in mRNA technology over time, increasing the likelihood that some patients will decline mRNA therapies in the future.

Scientific innovation alone is not enough to improve health. Ensuring that the public can evaluate medical innovations like mRNA cancer vaccines based on evidence, rather than viral misinformation, is part of the scientific challenge.

The future of cancer care depends not just on scientific discovery, but on public understanding and trust. (AP)

## 'Scream therapy' is a fantastic stress reliever

# Scream to happiness? Maybe not, but scream clubs promise relief

NEW YORK, March 18, (AP) - With a gut-wrenching wail that rippled from her body, Amber Walcker joined about a dozen screaming people in West Seattle who let their frustrations float away over the Puget Sound.

It was just the start. The two group screams that followed, each one longer and more intense, released the pain from Walcker's recent job loss. Her added stress from raising two young children dissolved as it blended with the sound of lapping water, and a deep sense of calm descended upon her.

"I had such a sense of feeling grounded. In that same moment, all your senses are heightened," Walcker said. "From then on out, I was hooked."

That day in September was the first meeting of Seattle's chapter of Scream Club, one of 17 chapters that have popped up in less than a year around the United States, including in Austin, Texas; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Atlanta; Detroit; and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

The first chapter, in Chicago, began as a result of a couple's rough patch.

Co-founders Manny Hernandez and Elena Soboleva had recently moved in together after dating long-distance for a year and a half. They were walking along Lake Michigan when Hernandez, a breathwork practitioner and men's coach, suggested they let out all their frustrations with a scream at the end of a pier.

When they asked permission of the few people around, everyone decided to scream together, their raw emotion echoing over the water.

"After we did it, some people were crying, including Elena," Hernandez said. "That's when we looked at each other and said, 'This is probably something that we should start.'"

Depending on the chapter, Scream Club meetings can be weekly or monthly, but they always take place in a park or near a body of water to minimize disturbance. Sessions typically begin with participants writing down the thing they want to release on biodegradable paper.

That's followed by a series of collective deep breaths and vocal warm-



Sarah Woolcker participates in a Scream Club meeting at Piedmont Park, Sunday, March 8, in Atlanta. (AP)

ups, such as humming while breathing in and out.

"You can really strain your throat if you just do it," said Soboleva, a personal brand and business mentor. "So it's gradual, breathing from your diaphragm and carefully starting off slow and warming up to louder and louder."

Everyone screams together three times, taking several deep breaths in between, and throws their paper into the water.

"That third scream, you have to feel it in your body," said Walcker, who shorted the club's Seattle chapter. "Get down, be in a primal stance, whatever it feels like to you in that moment."

The Scream Club's techniques are descendant of primal scream therapy, a theory that Los Angeles psychoanalyst Arthur Janov devised in the 1960s. Janov believed childhood trauma created neuroses in adults, which could be treated by tapping into the pain and releasing it with screaming and crying under a therapist's supervision.

Research in the decades since, however, has not found scream therapy to be an effective treatment for mental health conditions, said Ashwini Nadkarni, a psychiatry professor at Harvard Medical School.

Still, it's a fantastic stress reliever.

Nadkarni said the scream itself engages circuits in the amygdala and the hippocampus - "the oldest part of our brain" that is responsible for processing stress and emotion. Screaming also activates the sympathetic nervous system, or fight-or-flight stress response. Once the screaming stops, the parasympathetic system kicks in, which signals the body to rest.

"It's the same cycle of regulation that happens when you exercise," she said. "Your heart's racing, you get short of breath, and then you relax and you feel that calm."

Besides the physical release, the simple act of getting together to do something with others provides benefits.

"The idea of people getting together to enhance community in ways that help them blow off some steam is incredible," she said.

Hernandez said it's not standard practice to publicly share the reasons for coming, but many people linger afterward and talk about their problems. Some at the Chicago chapter recently lost a loved one, one person was battling cancer for a second time and many were struggling with relationships.

## Stem cell islets used to treat type 1 diabetes

# Chinese scientists develop magnetic fluids for heart disease treatment

BEIJING, March 18, (Xinhua) - A Chinese research team has developed a novel magnetic fluid material and proposed a liquid-based technical system for left atrial appendage occlusion of the heart.

They address the core challenges in left atrial appendage thrombus therapy for the first time, marking a transition of left atrial appendage occlusion technology from "solid adaptation" to a new stage of "complete fluidic sealing."

Left atrial appendage thrombus is a common complication in patients with atrial fibrillation. Once a thrombus occurs, the risk of stroke in patients will increase.

This study, published in *Nature* recently, was led by a team from the Shenzhen Institutes of Advanced Technology (SIAT) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and Fuwai Hospital under the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences. It achieved long-term thrombus-free occlusion of the left atrial appendage.

According to the research team, this new occlusion technology integrates magnetic particles and in-situ curable carrier fluids into a new con-

trollable robotic form: magnetofluids, which are deformable robots that can be remotely controlled by external magnetic fields.

After entering the body, the magnetofluids with a volume of approximately 2.5 ml can flow into complex and narrow spaces like liquids and adaptively fill irregular cavities. Meanwhile, they can be guided and stably controlled by external magnetic fields.

"The application of magnetofluids skillfully makes use of external magnetic fields and its own adaptive shaping capabilities," said Xu Tianfeng from SIAT, one of the corresponding authors.

Pan Xiangbin, another corresponding author from Fuwai Hospital, said that the study provides a safer and longer-lasting stroke prevention strategy for patients with atrial fibrillation, reducing the risk of secondary surgery and medical costs.

The research team will further explore the formation mechanism and its longer-term safety, and promote the translation of this new magnetic fluid into clinical applications.

Separately, Chinese researchers have achieved a medical breakthrough

by using endoderm stem cell-derived islet-like tissues (E-islet) to restore pancreatic islet function in patients with diabetes, potentially offering a new therapeutic option for millions worldwide.

A study published in *The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology* shows that a Shanghai-based team has successfully treated three patients with type 1 diabetes using E-islet. This innovative therapy showcases the potential efficacy of such approaches in addressing this severe chronic condition, which traditionally necessitates lifelong insulin injections.

"Our approach is like replacing a 'part' for the patient," said Cheng Xin, co-corresponding author of the paper from the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Center for Excellence in Molecular Cell Science.

Conventional methods use pluripotent stem cells, which are the developmental "root" capable of becoming any cell type. However, the process of deriving pancreatic islets involves an in vitro "branching" process that is lengthy and often inefficient, frequently leading to the generation of non-target cells.



Flowers bloom in front of the US Supreme Court, March 10. (AP)

## Is spring really here? Equinox marks balance of day and night

NEW YORK, March 18, (AP) - It's far from clear if the weather is planning to cooperate, but spring arrives - technically, at least - Friday.

The vernal equinox arrives on Friday, marking the start of the spring season for the Northern Hemisphere and the fall in the Southern Hemisphere. On the equator, the sun will be directly overhead at noon. Equinoxes are the only times when both the North and South poles are lit by sunshine at the same time.

Equinoxes have been marked and celebrated around the world for centuries. In Japan, for example, Vernal Equinox Day is a public holiday. At the Mayan site Chichen Itza in Mexico, people gather during the equinox to watch the sun create a shadow pattern that resembles a serpent descending a pyramid called El Castillo.

But what is happening in the heavens? Here's what to know about the Earth's orbit.

As the Earth travels around the sun, it does so at

an angle, making the sun's warmth and light fall unevenly on the northern and southern halves of the planet for most of the year.

But during the equinox, the Earth's tilt is neither toward the sun nor away from the sun, so both the northern and southern hemispheres get an equal amount of sunlight. The sun rises almost exactly due east and it sets almost exactly due west.

The word equinox comes from two Latin words meaning equal and night. That's because on the equinox, day and night last almost the same amount of time - though one may get a few extra minutes, depending on where you are on the planet.

The Northern Hemisphere's fall - or autumnal - equinox can land between Sept. 21 and 24, depending on the year. Its spring - or vernal - equinox can land between March 19 and 21.

The exact time of the equinox is the moment the sun is directly overhead at the equator. For 2026, it's Friday, March 20, at 10:46 a.m. EST. From there,

days will get a little longer every day in the Northern Hemisphere - and shorter in the Southern Hemisphere - until the solstice in June.

The solstices mark the times when the Earth's tilt is tipped most extremely either toward or away from the sun. This means the hemispheres are getting very different amounts of sunlight, and days and nights are at their most unequal.

At the Northern Hemisphere's summer solstice, the Earth's upper half is leaning toward the sun, creating the longest day and shortest night of the year. The summer solstice falls between June 20 and 22. This year it's the 21st.

The opposite happens at the Northern Hemisphere winter solstice: the Earth's upper half leans the furthest away from the sun, leading to the shortest day and longest night of the year. The winter solstice falls between Dec. 20 and 23.

These are just two different ways to carve up the year.

## SPORTS

# Dominant Nuggets keep pace with Timberwolves

SGA scores 40 in OKC 10th straight win

**DENVER, March 18, (AP): Christian Braun had 22 points, Nikola Jokic finished with 14 assists, and the Denver Nuggets routed the injury-plagued Philadelphia 76ers 124-96.**

Denver kept pace with Minnesota, which beat Phoenix on Tuesday night, in a tight Western Conference race. There are 1 1/2 games separating the third-place Los Angeles Lakers and the Timberwolves in sixth.

Philadelphia played without Joel Embiid (right oblique strain), Tyrese Maxey (sprained finger) and Kelly Oubre Jr. (left elbow strain). Paul George is serving a 25-game suspension.

The sold-out crowd booed Embiid when he came to the bench for the first time in the third quarter. Embiid has missed the last six Sixers games in Denver, denying Nuggets fans an MVP matchup between the Philadelphia big man and Jokic.

## Thunder 113, Magic 108

In Orlando, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 40 points and the Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Orlando Magic for their 10th straight win.

Chet Holmgren added 20 points and 12 rebounds for the Thunder and Ajay Mitchell had 16 points, five of them during a mid-fourth quarter run



Charlotte Hornets guard LaMelo Ball, front, drives to the basket against Miami Heat forward Keshad Johnson (16) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Charlotte, N.C. (AP)

that put the Thunder ahead to stay.

Paolo Banchero had 32 points, 10 rebounds and five assists for Orlando. Jalen Suggs added 14 points for the Magic, who lost on a second straight night after a seven-game win streak of their own.

Gilgeous-Alexander's record 129th game scoring 20 or more points was accomplished on 14 for 27 shooting and 9 of 11 free throws. He hit 3 of 5 3-point shots, the final one giving the Thunder a 102-96 lead with 3:11 remaining.

His streak of 20-plus point road games, also an NBA record, reached 61 games.

Holmgren scored on three dunks and a midrange jumper while Oklahoma City opened the second quarter on a 19-5 spurt to lead 45-27, the largest

## Cavaliers 123, Bucks 116

In Milwaukee, Evan Mobley had 27 points and a season-high 15 rebounds, and James Harden also scored 27 as the Cleveland Cavaliers opened a three-game trip by beating the short-handed Milwaukee Bucks.

Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo sat out with a left knee hyperextension and bone bruise. This was the career-high 32nd game the two-time MVP has missed this season, and the Bucks fell to 11-21 without him.

The Bucks also didn't have Myles Turner because of a right calf strain. Cleveland's Jarrett Allen missed a sixth straight game because of tendinitis in his right knee.

## Pistons 130, Wizards 117

In Washington, Jalen Duren had 36 points and 12 rebounds for the Eastern Conference-leading Detroit Pistons, who lost fellow All-Star Cade Cunningham to back spasms in the first half of victory over the Washington Wizards.

Cunningham was hurt early in the first quarter while diving for a loose ball. He played for a few more minutes before being taken out at the 6:40 mark, and the team said during the second quarter he would not return.

Reserve Daniss Jenkins added 15 points for the Pistons, who have won four of five and sent the Wizards to their 13th straight loss. The teams meet again on Thursday; should Detroit prevail, Washington would equal its 14-game skid from early this season that sent it to a 1-15 start.



Orlando Magic guard Jevon Carter (2) defends Oklahoma City Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, right, during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Orlando, Fla. (AP)

## Spurs 132, Kings 104

In Sacramento, Victor Wembanyama had 18 points and eight rebounds, and the San Antonio Spurs beat the Sacramento Kings.

Wembanyama shot 7 of 14 with a pair of 3-pointers and three assists to help the Spurs to their first win in Sacramento in more than two years.

Former Kings star De'Aaron Fox added 15, five rebounds and six assists for San Antonio. Keldon Johnson scored 18 points and Dylan Harper had 15.

The Spurs (51-18) have won eight of nine. They also improved to 11-3 on the second half of back-to-backs.

Maxime Raynaud had 32 points and nine rebounds for the Kings (18-52). Doug McDermott added 12 points.

Russell Westbrook had 10 assists to move past Mark Jackson and Steve Nash into fifth place on the NBA all-time list.

The Spurs led by 41 in the third

quarter, made 25 of 49 3-point attempts and cruised to their 25th road win of the season.

## Timberwolves 116, Suns 104

In Minneapolis, Julius Randle scored 32 points and Bones Hyland had 22 points off the bench to help the Minnesota Timberwolves offset the absence of All-Star Anthony Edwards and beat the Phoenix Suns.

Ayo Dosunmu added 19 points and Rudy Gobert had 19 rebounds for the Timberwolves, who are 7-4 without Edwards this season. The NBA's third-leading scorer will miss the next week or two with knee inflammation.

Devin Booker scored 34 points despite shooting 1 for 7 from 3-point range for the Suns, who finished a five-game road trip with their third straight loss.

After losing 120-112 in Boston the night before, the Suns played without three of their top five scorers as Grayson Allen (knee soreness)

joined the previously sidelined Dillon Brooks and Mark Williams.

The Timberwolves (42-27), who entered the evening tied with Denver for fifth place in the Western Conference, used a 16-2 run that started late in the third quarter to take control as Randle posted his second straight 32-point game.

## Hornets 136, Heat 106

In Charlotte, LaMelo Ball had 30 points and 13 assists, and the Charlotte Hornets pulled away in a huge fourth quarter to beat the short-handed Miami Heat.

Coby White scored 24 points off the bench and rookie Kon Knueppel added 22 as Charlotte (35-34) won for the ninth time in 12 games. Brandon Miller scored 16 for the Hornets, who are 10th in the Eastern Conference.

Tyler Herro had 20 points and eight rebounds to lead the Heat (38-31), who dropped their second straight following a season-best

seven-game winning streak. They played without star forward Bam Adebayo, who sat out with right calf tightness after being listed as questionable before the game.

Adebayo hadn't missed a game since Dec. 27. He scored 83 points last Tuesday in a 150-129 win over Washington, second-most in NBA history behind Wilt Chamberlain's 100-point game in 1962.

Miami remained seventh in the East, a half-game behind Orlando.

## Knicks 136, Pacers 110

In New York, Josh Hart scored a season-high 33 points on 12-of-13 shooting including 5 of 5 from 3-point range to lead the New York Knicks over the Indiana Pacers.

OG Anunoby scored 26 points and Karl Anthony Towns added 22 points and 11 rebounds in the Knicks' fourth straight win.

Jarace Walker led the Pacers with 16 points as Indiana's losing streak reached 14 games.

## AFA settles on Guatemala

Argentina last big World Cup tune-up vanishes and leaves squad untested



Inter Miami forward Lionel Messi, left, moves the ball against Nashville SC midfielder Patrick Yuzbek in the first half of a CONCACAF Champions Cup Round of 16 soccer match in Nashville, Tenn. (AP)

**BUENOS AIRES, Argentina, March 18, (AP):** Three months before its World Cup defense, Argentina lost a great chance to gauge where it's at against European champion Spain when the Finalissima was canceled.

Since winning the 2022 World Cup, Argentina has steamrolled through South American qualifying - four defeats in 18 matches - won the 2024 Copa America and played 11 low-key friendlies and won them all.

Coach Lionel Scaloni was counting on facing Spain this month to clear up the great uncertainty of captain Lionel Messi's availability for the World Cup, evaluate other starters and assess younger prospects.

But the war in the Middle East made staging the Finalissima in Qatar on March 27 impossible, and the Argentine Football Association couldn't find a suitable new date with UEFA. The AFA also had to scrap a friendly against Qatar.

That sent the AFA into frantic negotiations for new opponents in this month's international window and they settled for Guatemala at home on March 31.

"The work schedule, the squad selected for this FIFA date, and the stadium will be announced in the coming days," the AFA said in a statement.

Argentina has not confirmed any final warmup opponents in late May before the World Cup in June.

In January, Scaloni said, "The players need to be in top form shortly before the (World Cup) matches. I'm not saying it's pointless now, but the crucial part will be from March onwards. They need that bit of luck to arrive in peak condition."

Argentina could arrive at a World Cup without facing a European rival in the qualifying cycle for the first time ever.

This is the result of a deliberate strategy by the AFA to obtain greater commercial benefits, even at the cost of facing lower-level opponents in exotic locations.

Before the 2022 World Cup, Argentina faced Germany, Italy, and Estonia. In the last three and a half years, Argentina has profited from its world champion status and Messi's presence by playing Curaçao, Indonesia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, and Angola, among others.

Argentina still doesn't know if it will be able to count on Messi, who will turn 39 during the World Cup.

Regarding the possibility of playing in his sixth World Cup, Messi said late last year, "I'm going to take it day by day. Being honest and trying to be realistic and feel good."

Three-time champion Argentina begins World Cup group play against Algeria in Kansas City on June 16, followed by Austria and Jordan.

## Executive committee eyes new rule in September

# WADA delays decision over potential ban of Trump from major sporting events until after World Cup

**WASHINGTON, March 18, (AP):** The World Anti-Doping Agency on Tuesday put off a decision about barring government officials from major sporting events if their countries voluntarily withhold dues, pushing a potential conflict with President Donald Trump and other U.S. officials until at least after this summer's World Cup.

The WADA executive committee met and said it would consider the new rule in September, two months after the end of the World Cup, which the U.S. is hosting along with Canada and Mexico.

If such a rule is adopted later this year, it would presumably go into effect before the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028.

The U.S. hasn't paid its dues since 2023. If that continues, the new rule could place Trump and U.S. lawmakers on a banned list for Games in their own country, though there are doubts about whether an anti-doping regulator could keep any of them from attending the Olympics.

Conflict with WADA has not been a particularly partisan issue in the

U.S., which withheld the payments in 2024 and 2025 - once during Trump's presidency and once during Joe Biden's.

The U.S. has withheld \$7.3 million over the two years in protest of WADA's handling of a case involving Chinese swimmers and other issues.

WADA spokesman James Fitzgerald previously told The Associated Press the proposed rule would "not (be) applied retroactively so World Cup, LA and SLC Games would not be covered."

However, the proposal, a copy of which was obtained by AP, did not include language to that effect and Fitzgerald did not respond to multiple emails seeking clarification about his use of the word "retroactively."

After the meeting Tuesday, WADA director general Olivier Niggli said "the withholding of contributions by governments for political or other voluntary reasons remains a serious topic of concern for all WADA's stakeholders."

"Funding instability has a direct



In this file photo, President Donald Trump stands on stage next to the FIFA World Cup trophy after receiving the FIFA Peace Prize during the draw for the 2026 soccer World Cup at the Kennedy Center in Washington. (AP)

effect on the functioning and development of the World Anti-Doping Program," Niggli said. "Ultimately, those who are most directly and most negatively impacted are athletes around the world."

WADA started exploring the issue

in 2020, around the time the U.S. began threatening to withhold money. But it says the issue of penalizing governments for not paying is not directly related to the United States.

A U.S. representative on the executive committee during the Biden administration - drug czar Rahul Gupta - led the effort to reject the proposal in 2024.

The U.S. has since lost its spot on the committee. The proposal emerged again earlier this year, and in correspondence with European decision-makers, a copy of which was obtained by AP, WADA told them such a measure could be adopted "without undue delay."

The Europeans also asked WADA why the executive committee was taking up the issue again before a working group had finished its analysis.

A decision by the executive committee would have to be ratified by the WADA foundation board. Its next meeting is in November, though in the February letter to the Europeans, WADA said that board could meet sooner.

## Higgins crashes out, Trump advances at World Snooker Open

**NANCHANG, China, March 18, (Xinhua):** Defending champion John Higgins suffered a shock first-round exit at the World Snooker Open in Yushan county, south China's Jiangxi province.

The four-time world champion was edged 5-4 by Britain's 19-year-old Stan Moody, who reached the quarterfinals of this season's Wuhan Open after back-to-back wins over established names including Ding Junhui and Zhou Yuelong.

Moody, ranked 47th in the world, seized control early with his accurate long-potting and solid cueing, racing to a 4-1 lead after the first five frames to move within one frame of victory.

Higgins adjusted his rhythm in the sixth frame and made the most of his chances at the table, reel-

ing off the next three frames in a row. That run included a superb 135 break in the seventh frame, and he eventually leveled the match at 4-4 to force a decider.

In the final frame, Moody capitalized on a critical Higgins error and compiled a match-winning 65 break, taking the frame 65-15 to book his place in the last 32.

World No. 1 Judd Trump of Britain defeated Austria's Florian Nuessle 5-1 in the afternoon session.

"I'm really eager to get my form back on track here," Trump said in his post-match interview. "It's great to travel the world, but you never really know where you're living half the time. I love it

out here in Asia, the events here are completely different, they're run incredibly well. Being here in China is so much easier to get around, and the time zone is really manageable too." Under the tournament schedule, Trump will face fellow Briton Jackson Page in his next match.

Speaking about the upcoming tie, Trump said: "Jackson Page is a tricky, complex opponent, he's got an incredibly dangerous game. Yeah, I've heard his game has improved loads, he's been putting the work in on the practice table, and he's still getting better all the time." Highly watched Chinese prospect Zhao Xintong defeated Long Zehuang 5-4 in the evening session to advance to the last 32.

## Best of the Rest

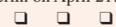
**16-team lineup confirmed for WC:** The 16 teams for the 2026 FIBA Women's World Cup have been confirmed after the conclusion of the qualifiers across four competition zones from March 11 to 17.

Prior to the qualifiers, host Germany and continental champions Australia, Belgium, Nigeria and the United States had already ensured their places in the global showpiece in Berlin from September 4 to 13.

In China's central city of Wuhan, China finished the qualifying campaign with a win-loss record of 4-1, sitting second in the group behind Belgium and qualifying for the World Cup along with Mali and the Czech Republic.

Other qualified teams are Hungary, Türkiye, Japan, France, South Korea, Italy, Spain and Puerto Rico.

The draw will be held in Berlin on April 21. (Xinhua)



**San Lorenzo sacks manager Ayude:** San Lorenzo has sacked manager Damian Ayude after a poor start to the Argentine top-flight season, the Buenos Aires club said.

The announcement followed a 5-2 home defeat to Defensa y Justicia, a result that left the club 10th in Group A of the Apertura tournament with three wins from 10 games. "This morning, Damian Ayude was informed that he is no longer the coach of San Lorenzo," the club said in a statement.

"He was the person who took charge of the squad at a very difficult moment for the institution, helped develop our young players both in the reserve team and the first team and, above all, showed respect and affection for the club at all times." Ayude led San Lorenzo to 10 wins, 10 draws and nine losses after taking charge in June last year. (Xinhua)

Problems are mounting for coach Rosenior

## Turbulent week at Chelsea sees humiliation and Enzo doubts follow financial scandal

LONDON, March 18, (AP) - A reputation-harming financial scandal. An early and humiliating Champions League elimination. A star player casting doubt on his future.

Life at Chelsea often resembles a soap opera, and this week has been appointment viewing at a club where the decision-making of its past and present ownership has come under scrutiny.

It started with Chelsea receiving a Premier League-record fine and a suspended transfer ban because of business dealings - including \$62 million of undisclosed payments to un-registered agents and third parties - under previous owner Roman Abramovich that, for some, have raised doubts about the legality of the trophy-winning squad that was built by the club.

It hasn't taken long for the focus to shift to the shortcomings of Chelsea's expensively assembled current squad and the methods of its inexperienced coach Liam Rosenior, who was recently hired in a bold call by Chelsea's American ownership.

A 3-0 home loss to Paris Saint-Germain on Tuesday wrapped up a chastening 8-2 aggregate loss for Chelsea in the round of 16 in the Champions League. It equaled the team's heaviest European defeat over two legs.

Todd Boehly, the U.S. businessman who fronts Chelsea's ownership, was pictured walking onto the field at Stamford Bridge and down the tunnel reportedly toward the locker room after the game.

It's not the sort of result Boehly and Clearlake Capital would have anticipated after overseeing a remarkable spending spree of around \$2 billion on players since buying the club from Abramovich in 2022.

Neither is languishing in sixth place in the Premier League - outside the Champions League qualification spots - with

eight matches remaining.

Problems are mounting for Rosenior, two months after he was thrust into his first Premier League job.

Chelsea midfielder Enzo Fernandez threw something of a curve-ball after the PSG game by placing in doubt his future at the club.

Speaking to ESPN Argentina, Fernandez - asked whether he could guarantee being at Chelsea next season - was quoted as saying: "I don't know. My focus is here for now. We have eight Premier League matches to play and the FA Cup. Then, the World Cup coming up so we'll see after that."

The Argentina international's comments were put to Rosenior in his post-match news conference and the coach said it was "hard for me to speak on speculation after a game."

"I need to focus right now," he said, "on the most important things, which is making sure we get a result against Everton on Saturday."

Chelsea is set to go into that game without two of its most important players, with captain Reece James facing another spell out with a hamstring injury and first-choice center back Trevoh Chalobah carried off on a stretcher against PSG with a serious-looking ankle injury.

Throw in concerns over the goalkeeper situation - Rosenior has switched it up with Robert Sanchez and Filip Jorgensen in recent matches - and worries about fatigue after Chelsea's summer-long, Club World Cup-winning campaign, and the coach has some big calls to make for upcoming games.

"I have to make really difficult decisions that at the time probably don't look great, to be honest," Rosenior said, adding: "But I want to make the right decisions for the football club in the long term as well."



Chelsea's Marc Cucurella, left, and PSG's Achraf Hakimi in action during the Champions League soccer match between Chelsea and Paris Saint-Germain in London, England. (AP)

## Japan overpowers South Korea to reach Women's Asian Cup final against Australia



Japan's Yui Hasegawa, right, has her shot at goal saved by South Korea's goalkeeper Kim Min-jung, left, during the Women's Asian Cup semifinal soccer match between Japan and South Korea in Sydney. (AP)

### Nadeshiko finally concedes goal in the tournament

**SYDNEY, March 18, (AP) - By the time Saki Kumagai scored to make it 3-0 on Wednesday, it was clear her Japan team was going to beat South Korea and feature in a final against Australia for the third time in four Women's Asian Cup tournaments.**

Riko Ueki opened the scoring in the 15th minute and Maika Hamano squeezed a right-foot strike between the near post and the goalkeeper in the 25th to give Japan a 2-0 halftime lead. Kumagai and Remina Chiba added second-half goals as Japan converted a glut of possession and field position into a lopsided 4-1 semifinal win at Sydney's Stadium Australia over the 2022 runner-up.

South Korea edged the Australians on goal difference in the group stage but struggled from the outset against Japan, the top-ranked team in Asia.

Japan could have gone ahead 3-0 before halftime with Aoba Fujino finding the back of the net in the 43rd minute, but the goal was



Japan players gesture to their supporters following the Women's Asian Cup semifinal soccer match between Japan and South Korea in Sydney. (AP)

disallowed after a VAR review for a handball much earlier in the attacking movement.

Japan increased its tally to 27 goals in the continental championship when Kumagai headed in from Momoko Tanikawa's swinging corner kick in the 75th. It was just her fourth goal in a long international career.

The Nadeshiko finally conceded a goal in the tournament when Kang Chae-rim turned and fired in

a right-foot shot from close range in the 78th.

But Chiba restored the three-goal buffer with a powerful strike to make it 4-1 in the 81st, giving Japan momentum ahead of Saturday's final in Sydney.

"Please don't tell Australia, but we have played better than we did today - but we were good today and I was happy with them," Japan coach Nils Nielsen said. "Because it is not easy, you sort of get

into a rhythm, and it wasn't that rhythm. We needed to find more, we needed to find a gear more, and we did."

Japan beat Australia in back-to-back finals in 2014 and '18 but neither team reached the championship decider in 2022, when China edged South Korea in the final.

Australia has reached the championship match four previous times since joining the Asian confederation but has only won the title once, in 2010. Japan lost four finals before finally clinching the title in 2014 for the first time.

Japan is the only Asian team to have won the Women's World Cup - beating the U.S. on penalties in the 2011 final.

Sam Kerr scored the winner in the 58th minute to secure Australia's 2-1 win in the first of the semifinals over defending champion China, two years after losing in the World Cup semifinals on home soil.

All four semifinalists here have qualified automatically for the 2027 Women's World Cup.

In playoffs Thursday for two more spots in Brazil, Taiwan will take on North Korea and Philippines faces Uzbekistan at the Gold Coast.

### Dane fears career might be over

## Schmeichel needs 2 shoulder operations

GLASGOW, Scotland, March 18, (AP) - Celtic and Denmark goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel fears his career might be over because he needs two shoulder operations that will require up to a year of rehabilitation.

The 39-year-old Schmeichel said he was given the diagnosis on a visit to a specialist on Monday. He has missed Celtic's last five matches after aggravating a longstanding left shoulder injury playing against Stuttgart in the Europa League last month.

"It's a bit of a body blow," Schmeichel told CBS Sports Golazo Network late Tuesday. "I've torn the bicep, torn the rotator cuff, dislocated the shoulder, torn the labrum - everything's kind of gone ... It's looking like 10-12 months of rehab."

"You don't really know how to react to this," he added. "Because I could have potentially played my last ever football game. I've been a footballer since the day I was born. That kind of thought is devastating. It's very, very hard to wrap my head around at the moment."

Schmeichel, who will be missing when Denmark plays in the World Cup playoffs next week, said he will undergo surgery on Friday and vowed to fight to continue his career.

"My mind is like, 'OK, I'm going to give it absolutely everything I can to see if I can get back,'" he said.

"It would be probably one of the greatest feats of my career if I could get back from

an injury like this. I'm going to fight, I'm going to try everything I can."

Schmeichel - the son of Manchester United great Peter Schmeichel - was a member of the Leicester team that won the Premier League in unforgettable style in 2016 as well as the FA Cup five years later. He then played for Nice and Anderlecht, before joining Celtic in 2024.

Relegation-threatened Cremonese fired coach Davide Nicola on Wednesday amid a more than three-month winless streak in the Italian league.

A 4-1 home loss to Fiorentina on Monday left Cremonese in 18th place and three points from safety.

Marco Giampaolo, who coached Lecce last season, was expected to take over for the final nine matches of the season.

Cremonese, which features former Leicester striker Jamie Vardy, visits Parma on Saturday.

Cremonese's last victory came against Lecce in early December.

The struggles over the last few months followed a strong start for Cremonese after winning the Serie B playoffs to return to the top flight after two years. Cremonese stunned Milan in its Serie A opener then remained perfect after a dramatic late win over Sassuolo in the second round and lost just one of its opening eight matches.

### Best of the Rest

**Aquino hat-trick leads Lanus rout of Newell's:** Striker Dylan Aquino netted a hat-trick as Lanus cruised to a 5-0 home win over Newell's Old Boys in Argentina's Apertura tournament on Tuesday.

Walter Bou opened the scoring with a 16th-minute penalty and Aquino struck twice in the space of three minutes as the hosts raced to a 3-0 lead at halftime.

Aquino scored again with a long-range drive into the top-right corner and the 20-year-old then set up his side's fifth goal with a precise cross that Eduardo Salvio swept in from six yards. (Xinhua)

**Govt to take 'further steps' against Roman:** The British government said Tuesday it will take "further steps" to ensure Roman Abramovich releases the 2.5 billion pounds (then \$3.2 billion) he pledged to donate from the sale of Premier League soccer giant Chelsea in 2022.

Abramovich was forced to sell Chelsea after his native Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, and the London club was bought by a consortium led by American investors Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital for what, at the time, was the highest price ever paid for a sports team.

Abramovich pledged to give the proceeds from the sale to victims of Russia's war in Ukraine but the funds remain frozen amid a dispute between him and the British government, which says he has objected to plans for the money be spent exclusively in Ukraine. (AP)

## WNBA and players union have reached agreement in principle

NEW YORK, March 18, (AP) - The WNBA and its players' union reached an agreement in principle on a transformational new collective bargaining agreement early Wednesday morning.

Specifics still need to be finalized over the next few weeks as lawyers on both sides work on the new CBA. A term sheet should be done in the next day or two. It will then need to be ratified by the players and then approved by the league's Board of Governors.

"I just want to say we have aligned on key elements of a new collective bargaining agreement together. We still need to finalize a formal term sheet, but the progress made in these discussions marks a transforma-

tive step forward for players and the league," WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert said. "It underscores a shared commitment to the continued growth of the game. So, we'll share additional details as they become available."

The deal is expected to greatly increase player salaries with million-dollar players - a first for the league entering its 30th season that will start on time. That would increase salaries fourfold from last season.

"For the first time player salaries are tied to a truly meaningful share of league revenue, driving exponential growth in the salary cap, increasing average compensation beyond half a million dollars and raising the standard across facilities, staffing

and support," union president Nneka Ogwumike said.

The agreement is set to reflect the league's skyrocketing growth and popularity. Attendance, viewership and investment from stakeholders has increased to historic levels over the past few years.

"The deal is going to be transformational," union vice president Breanna Stewart said. "It's going to build and help create a system where everybody is getting exactly what they deserve and more from the court and off the court aspects."

The deal came after the two sides spent the past eight days in intense in-person negotiations that lasted for more than 100 hours. They came to the agreement at about 2:20 a.m.

Wednesday after spending more than 10 hours of discussions on Tuesday.

"This is historical for women's sports. I told Cathy it's not just for the players that are entering the league or the players that aren't already here," Ogwumike added. "We're just really grateful to be able to come to a deal. We're proud of ourselves."

WNBA leadership and the union met with reporters together in the lobby of a New York hotel shortly before 3 a.m.

The deal comes 17 months after the players opted out of their previous agreement and five months after the previous deal was initially set to expire, with talks often becoming contentious.



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Venezuela Willyer Abreu reacts after hitting a home run during the fifth inning in the championship game of the World Baseball Classic against the United States in Miami. (AP)

# Sports

## Venezuela edges US to win World Baseball Classic title

Suárez delivers clutch double

MIAMI, March 18, (AP): Eugenio Suárez and his Venezuelan teammates stood on the stage behind second base with shiny medals draped over their proud chests, belting out their national anthem accompanied by tens of thousands of fans who remained in the ballpark a half-hour after the final out.

Back home, people were singing their praises, too.

Venezuela won the World Baseball Classic for the first time Tuesday night, beating the United States 3-2 in the championship game on Suárez's tie-breaking double in the top of the ninth inning.

Bryce Harper's two-run homer with two outs in the eighth tied the score for the U.S., but Suárez hit a go-ahead double in the ninth and Daniel Palencia pitched a perfect bottom half.

Venezuela acting President Delcy Rodríguez declared Wednesday a National Day of Joy and made it a non-working holiday except for essential workers.

"My country needs that championship," star outfielder Ronald Acuña Jr. said, wiping tears from his eyes. "I just want to make my people proud. That's what I did today."

Maikel García's third-inning sacrifice fly and Willyer Abreu's fifth-inning homer off rookie Nolan McLean built a 2-0 lead before a roaring, pro-Latin America sellout crowd of 36,190 at loanDepot park. Left-hander Eduardo Rodríguez and a string of lights-out relievers limited the Americans to two hits through the seventh.

Bobby Witt Jr. walked with two outs in the eighth and Harper drove the second straight changeup from Andrés Machado over the center-field fence.



The Venezuela team poses with their gold medals and trophy after defeating the United States in the championship game of the World Baseball Classic in Miami. (AP)

Boston's Garrett Whitlock started the ninth instead of San Diego's Mason Miller, perhaps baseball's best reliever, because U.S. manager Mark DeRosa promised the Padres he would use Miller only in a save situation.

Luis Arraez walked, and pinch-runner Javier Sanoja stole second just ahead of catcher Will Smith's one-hop throw. Sanoja came home when Suárez doubled to the left-center gap on a full-count changeup. Suárez spread his arms wide and

pointed to the sky at second base while teammates streamed from the dugout to greet Sanoja at the plate.

Palencia struck out two to finish a three-hitter for his third save of the WBC, ending the game by getting Roman Anthony to swing under a 99.7

mph fastball.

As Venezuelans ran onto the infield to celebrate, the dismayed Americans stared while leaning on their dugout railing.

While the U.S., Japan and the Dominican Republic got much of the

attention ahead of the sixth edition of the 20-nation event, Venezuela's success was not that surprising. Sixty-three players born in Venezuela appeared on Major League Baseball opening-day rosters last year, second-most from outside the U.S. behind the Dominican Republic's 100.

García was selected the tournament MVP after hitting .385 with a WBC-high 10 hits and seven RBIs.

Despite a heralded roster of stars led by Aaron Judge, Harper and Paul Skenes, the U.S. remained without a title since 2017. DeRosa also led the 2023 American team that lost the final 3-2 to Japan and would come back for 2029 if offered another chance.

Rodríguez (4 1/3 innings) was followed by Eduard Bazarzo (two outs), José Buttó (three), Angel Zerpa (two), Machado (four) and Palencia.

Judge was 0 for 4 with three strikeouts and hit .222 with five RBIs in the tournament, while Harper improved to .214 with three RBIs with two hits against Venezuela. Alex Bregman batted .143 with four RBIs. The U.S. scored nine runs in the three knockout-round games while batting .188.

After the final out, Harper walked over to Venezuelan players to shake their hands.

Ahead of a matchup with political overtones, players and coaches avoided discussing the government turmoil between the nations, heightened when the U.S. military captured Venezuela President Nicolás Maduro in January.

Venezuela became the second Latin American nation to win the WBC, after the Dominican Republic in 2013. The U.S. has just one title, in 2017.

Repeatedly during the tournament, Venezuelan players described the team as a family, and brothers Willson and William Contreras went on the podium together to receive their medals and sing the Venezuelan anthem, "Gloria al Bravo Pueblo (Glory to the Brave People)."

### Bodø/Glimt fairytale run over; Arsenal keeps hopes alive

## Real Madrid and PSG advance to Champions League quarterfinals



Arsenal's Leandro Trossard, right, and Leverkusen's Jarell Quansah challenge for the ball during the second leg of the Champions League round of 16 soccer match between Arsenal and Bayer Leverkusen, in London. (AP)

LONDON, March 18, (AP): Real Madrid and Paris Saint-Germain quickly snuffed out hopes of epic comebacks by Manchester City and Chelsea in the Champions League.

Instead, it was tiny Bodø/Glimt on the receiving end of a historic second-leg fightback in the round of 16.

Protecting three-goal leads from the first leg, Madrid won 2-1 at City - helped by an early red card to City captain Bernardo Silva - through two goals from Vinícius Júnior to advance 5-1 on aggregate and defending champion PSG scored twice in the first 14 minutes on the way to a 3-0 victory at Chelsea. That sealed an 8-2 aggregate success.

Bodø/Glimt, the Norwegian club from a fishing town of around 55,000 people north of the Arctic Circle, also had a 3-0 lead from the first leg but was blown away 5-0 by Sporting Lisbon after extra time.

There's only been one bigger comeback in the Champions League: Barcelona's storied "Remontada" against PSG in 2016-17.

Sporting's reward is a quarterfinal matchup with Arsenal, which beat Bayer Leverkusen 2-0 for a 3-1 aggregate win and kept alive its hopes of a quadruple of trophies this season.

It's the fourth time in five years that Madrid has eliminated City from the Champions League and this one was realistically over when Silva was shown a red card in the 20th minute - after a video review - for sticking out his elbow on the goal-line to block a shot from Vinícius.

The Brazil star tucked away his penalty to give Madrid a four-goal cushion and applied a close-range finish in second-half stoppage time to secure victory on the night for the record 15-time European champions.

Erling Haaland equalized in the 41st minute for City, which created enough chances - even with 10 men - to score

the goals required.

Kylian Mbappé entered as a second-half substitute to mark his return from nearly a month out injured. Madrid will hope the France striker stays injury-free before a quarterfinal against either Bayern Munich or Atalanta. Bayern leads 6-1 from the first leg.

Call it belated revenge.

Eight months after losing the Club World Cup final to Chelsea, PSG inflicted a huge two-legged beating of the English team with Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, Bradley Barcola and Senny Mayulu scoring the goals at Stamford Bridge.

PSG will continue its title defense against either Galatasaray or Liverpool in the quarterfinals. Galatasaray won the first leg 1-0.

On an otherwise tough night for English clubs, Arsenal ensured there will be Premier League representation in the last eight.

Eberechi Eze swiveled to fire home a rising shot from the edge of the area before Declan Rice added a second at Emirates Stadium.

Top of the Premier League by nine points, Arsenal is in the final of the English League Cup - it plays Man City on Sunday - and the quarterfinals of the FA Cup, where it will be a huge favorite against second-tier Southampton.

A quadruple should definitely not be ruled out.

The Bodø/Glimt fairytale is over - but only after an unlikely streak of wins that has charmed the world of soccer.

After beating Man City and Atletico Madrid in the final two rounds of the league stage to squeeze into the playoff round, the northernmost team ever to play in the Champions League defeated Inter Milan - last season's runner-up - home and away to advance to the round of 16.

### Senegal turns to CAS to appeal 'unfair' decision

## CAF strips Senegal, names Morocco champion



In this file photo, Senegal's Sadio Mané holds the trophy aloft as he celebrates with teammates after winning the Africa Cup of Nations final soccer match between Senegal and Morocco in Rabat, Morocco. (AP)

GENEVA, March 18, (AP): Morocco was stunningly awarded the Africa Cup of Nations title by governing body judges who overturned Senegal's victory in a chaotic final in January.

The Confederation of African Football said its appeals board ruled that Senegal is "declared to have forfeited the final" and its 1-0 win in extra time becomes a 3-0 default win for host nation Morocco.

The Senegalese Football Federation (FSF) has criticized the "unfair, unprecedented, and unacceptable decision" to strip its team of the Africa Cup of Nations title and award it to host nation Morocco two months after they contested the final.

The FSF said the decision "discredits African football," and that it will appeal "as soon as possible" to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne, Switzerland, a process that would typically take a year to deliver a verdict.

"The FSF reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the values of integrity and sporting justice and will keep the public informed of developments in this matter," the federation said in a statement.

In the Jan. 18 final in Rabat, Senegal players led by coach Pape Thiaw left the field in protest during stoppage time for 15 minutes - and fans tried to storm the field - when Morocco was awarded a penalty that was set to decide the match.

When play resumed, Morocco forward Brahim Diaz's spot kick - a controversial slow chip shot known as a "Panenka" - was saved by goalkeeper Edouard Mendy and Senegal scored the only goal in extra time.

Tension in the stadium was already raised by Senegal being denied a goal minutes before the penalty was given to Morocco.

In the second minute of stoppage time, Senegal's apparent go-ahead goal was ruled out for a foul by Abdoulaye Seck, but TV replays showed little contact on Morocco defender Achraf Hakimi. After the Senegal walk-off, the team's return to the field seemed to be as a result of urging by star forward

Sadio Mané to complete the game.

At an initial disciplinary hearing, CAF imposed fines of more than \$1 million for Senegal and Morocco players and officials but left the result untouched.

Senegal defender Moussa Niakhaté on Instagram posted an image of himself holding the trophy with a message that said: "Come and get it! They're crazy!"

In a similar post, left back El Hadj Malick Diouf added: "It's not what I expected... this thing isn't going anywhere."

Abdoulaye Seydou Sow, secretary general of the Senegalese Football Federation, said the organization will file an appeal.

"We will not back down. The law is on our side," Sow told the public broadcaster Radiodiffusion Télévision Sénégalaise late Tuesday.

He called the ruling a "shame for Africa." "This decision is a travesty that rests on no legal basis. We felt that the panel was not there to apply the law, but to carry out an order," Sow said.

CAF cited article 82 of tournament regulations for its marquee event to justify the verdict enforced on appeal, though not at the first hearing.

It states "if, for any reason whatsoever, a team withdraws from the competition or does not report for a match, or refuses to play or leaves the ground before the regular end of the match without the authorization of the referee, it shall be considered loser and shall be eliminated for good from the current competition."

Still, the appeal verdict did seem to override the referee's authority making field-of-play decisions.

The verdict Tuesday awards Morocco its first African title since 1976 and denied Senegal its second title, and second within three editions after also lifting the trophy in 2021.

Any appeal by Senegal to CAS in Lausanne, Switzerland, would typically take about a year to reach a verdict - long after both teams play at the 2026 World Cup being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico.