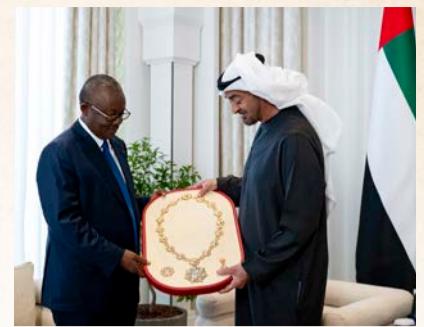


**UAE,
Guinea-Bissau**
Presidents discuss
ties, exchange
honours



The UAE President confers the Order of Zayed on the Guinea-Bissau President (Photo by Abdullah Al Bedwawi)

2-3

UAE President, King of Bahrain reaffirm commitment to boost ties

ABU DHABI (WAM)

President His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan visited His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, King of Bahrain, at his residence in Abu Dhabi.

During the meeting, His Highness and His Majesty, along with those in attendance, discussed the deep-rooted fraternal ties between the UAE and Bahrain and their peoples.

Both leaders reaffirmed their shared commitment to strengthening cooperation across all fields to support development and long-term prosperity for both nations and their citizens.

The meeting was attended by His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Chairman of the Presidential Court for Special Affairs; Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Tahnoon Al Nahyan, Advisor to the UAE President; Faisal Abdulaziz Al Bannai, Advisor to the UAE President for Strategic Research and Advanced Technology Affairs, and a number of Sheikhs and officials from both sides. See Page 4



The UAE President is received by Hamad bin Isa during the meeting (Photo by Hamad Al Kaabi)

**Mohammed bin Rashid
names best and worst
departments for limiting
bureaucratic procedures**

ABU DHABI (ALETIHAD)

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, on Sunday named the best and worst government departments for limiting bureaucratic procedures in their operations.

In a post on X, His Highness said: "The Department of Justice, the Department of State and the Department of Energy and Infrastructure have excelled in their efforts to combat bureaucracy."

"The three worst entities in reducing bureaucracy were Emirates Post, the Pensions Authority and the Ministry of Sports," His Highness said.

His Highness called for simplifying processes, saying government bureaucracy is the "art of turning simple things into complex ones, and the art of creating administrative systems to combat individual creativity".

"In government bureaucracy, procedures are more important than results, papers are more important than service delivery, and systems and rules are put in place to limit thinking outside the box." See Page 5



UAE sets global benchmark with its world-class Expo experience **5** Mohammed bin Rashid attends Al Salam Cycling Championship's Desert Race **6**

Historic win for Team ADQ at UAE Tour Women cycling

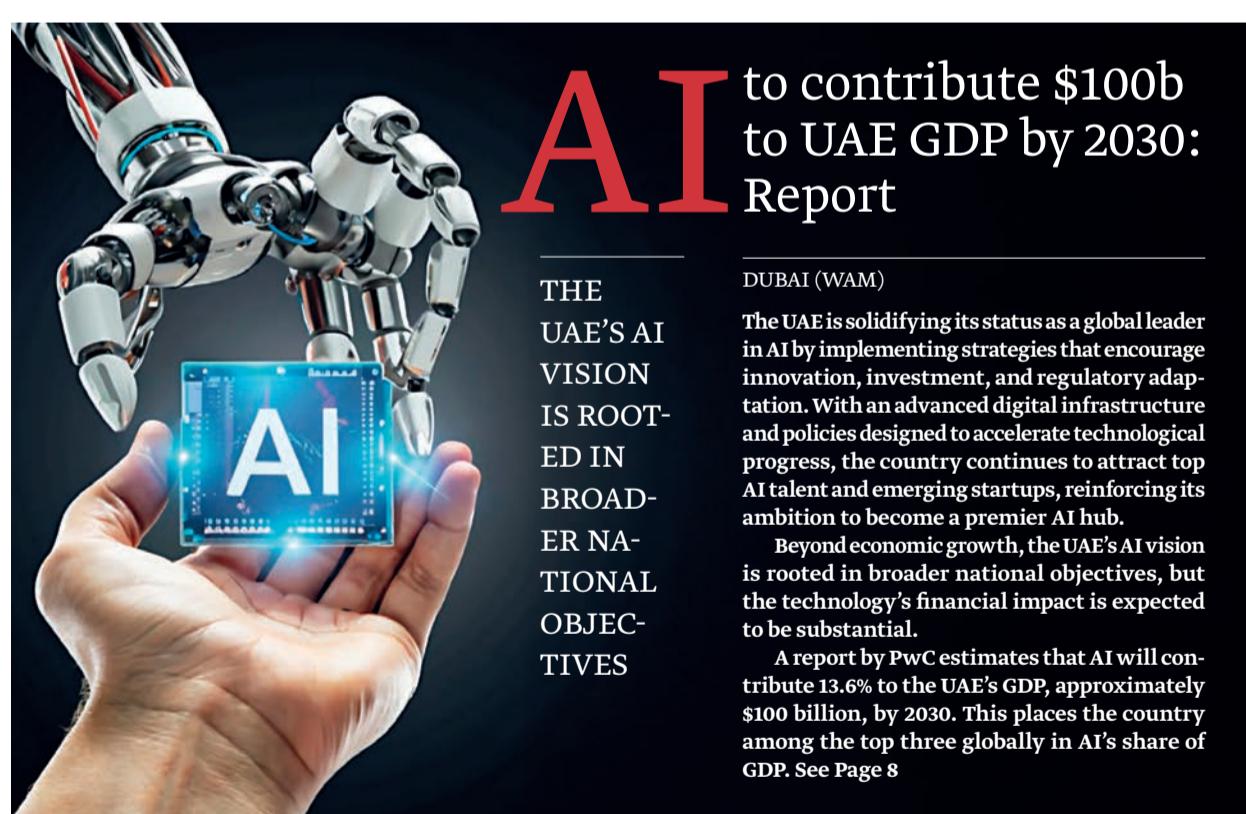
KUUMAR SHYAM (ABU DHABI)

The third staging of the UAE Tour Women wrapped up with home glory in a one-two finish for Team ADQ's Elisa Borghini and Silvia Persico on Sunday, while European champion Lorena Wiebes took all three sprint stages on offer.

The overall win was assured for Borghini once she took the third stage atop the Jebel Hafeet mountain in Al Ain on Saturday. This was a historic second win for Borghini having won with different teams.

Her teammate Persico secured second place in the general classification after fending off attacks from Kimberley Pienaar, who chased bonus seconds in the intermediate sprint category. See Page 17

The overall win was assured for Borghini once she took the third stage atop the Jebel Hafeet



AI to contribute \$100b
to UAE GDP by 2030:
Report

THE
UAE'S AI
VISION
IS ROOT-
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DUBAI (WAM)

The UAE is solidifying its status as a global leader in AI by implementing strategies that encourage innovation, investment, and regulatory adaptation. With an advanced digital infrastructure and policies designed to accelerate technological progress, the country continues to attract top AI talent and emerging startups, reinforcing its ambition to become a premier AI hub.

Beyond economic growth, the UAE's AI vision is rooted in broader national objectives, but the technology's financial impact is expected to be substantial.

A report by PwC estimates that AI will contribute 13.6% to the UAE's GDP, approximately \$100 billion, by 2030. This places the country among the top three globally in AI's share of GDP. See Page 8



Israeli military
withdraws from
Gaza's Netzarim
Corridor:
Reports
PAGE 15 | WORLD



**Louvre Abu
Dhabi**
welcomes
record 1.4m
visitors in 2024
PAGE 16 | ENTERTAINMENT

Gahwa Championships coffee masters are up for the cup **11**

Abu Dhabi's Zayed International Airport powers UAE aviation growth: Report

KHALED AL KHALDEH (ABU DHABI)

The UAE's aviation sector continued its rapid growth in 2024, seeing increases in revenue, passenger numbers and destinations, and the industry is expected to continue to fly high with several

major deals and routes on the horizon in 2025.

According to recent data from the General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA), passenger traffic increased by 10% in 2024 to reach 147.8 million from 134 million in 2023. The aviation

sector's workforce increased to more than 9,600 pilots and 36,000 cabin crew.

The growth was propelled by the rise of Abu Dhabi as an aviation hub, with Zayed International Airport (AUH) introducing 29 new routes last year. See Page 9

●
Passenger
traffic
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by 10% in
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reach 147.8
million



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UAE

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Aletihad

Both sides reaffirm dedication to strengthening bilateral ties

Presidents of UAE, Guinea-Bissau discuss cooperation, exchange top honours



The UAE President receives the President of Guinea-Bissau (Photos by Abdullah Al Bedwawi)

The two leaders discussed cooperation in fields like development, economy, trade, and investment

ABU DHABI (WAM)

President His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan on Sunday welcomed Umaro Sissoco Embaló, President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau at Qasr Al Shati in Abu Dhabi.

During the meeting, the two leaders discussed cooperation in fields like development, economy, trade, and investment, with a focus on advancing shared development priorities and fulfilling the aspirations of their peoples for progress and prosperity.

They also addressed a range of issues of mutual concern, reaffirming their dedication to strengthening bilateral ties for the benefit of their nations and citizens.

As part of the visit, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan conferred the Order of Zayed, the UAE's highest decoration awarded to heads of state, upon President Embaló in recognition of his efforts to bolster relations between the two countries.

In turn, the Guinea-Bissau leader presented His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed with the Amílcar Cabral Medal, his country's highest honour, in appreciation of his role in deepening ties across various fields and as a testament to the deep friendship between the two nations.



The UAE President and the President of Guinea-Bissau during the meeting, in the presence of Hamdan bin Mohamed bin Zayed

The talks focused on advancing shared development priorities and fulfilling the aspirations of their peoples for progress and prosperity

UAE

Aletihad •

en.aletihad.ae



The UAE President conferred the Order of Zayed upon President Embaló

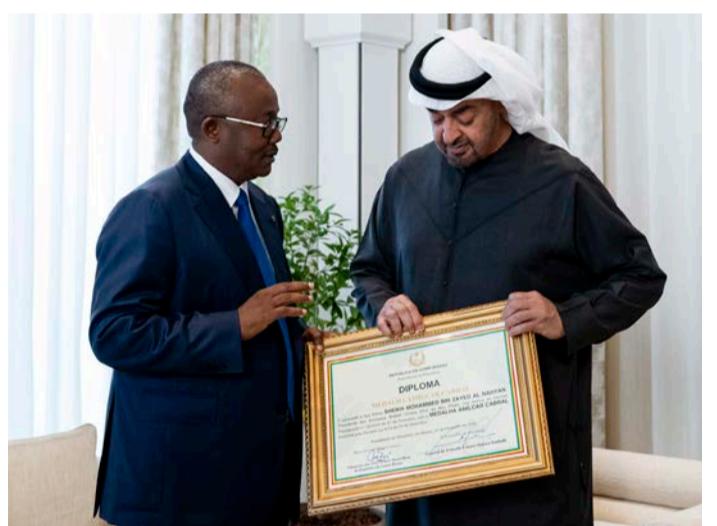
The Guinea-Bissau leader presented the UAE President with the Amílcar Cabral Medal



The UAE President confers the Order of Zayed upon the President of Guinea-Bissau



The UAE President receives the Amílcar Cabral Medal from the President of Guinea-Bissau



The UAE President during the meeting with the President of Guinea-Bissau



The UAE President during the meeting with the President of Guinea-Bissau, in the presence of Hamdan bin Mohamed bin Zayed and Mohammed bin Hamad bin Tahnoon



Hamdan bin Mohamed bin Zayed, Mohammed bin Hamad bin Tahnoon, Shakboot bin Nahyan and Ali Al Shamsi



Hamdan bin Mohamed bin Zayed, Mohammed bin Hamad bin Tahnoon and Shakboot bin Nahyan



The delegation accompanying the President of Guinea-Bissau

The meeting and the exchange of honours were attended by His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Chairman of the Presidential Court for Special Affairs; Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Tahnoon Al Nahyan, Advisor to the UAE President; Ali Mohammed Hammad Al Shamsi, Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for National Security; Sheikh Shakboot bin Nahyan Al Nahyan, Minister of State, and a number of top officials.

UAE

Aletihad

Meeting discusses deep-rooted fraternal ties between two nations

UAE President visits King of Bahrain at his residence in Abu Dhabi



The UAE President in conversation with Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa (Photos by Hamad Al Kaabi)

ABU DHABI (WAM)

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The UAE President and Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa during the meeting



The UAE President and the King of Bahrain during the meeting, in the presence of Faisal Al Bannai



Hamdan bin Mohamed bin Zayed during the visit



Mohammed bin Hamad bin Tahnoon during the visit



A number of Sheikhs and dignitaries during the meeting



His Highness praises progress in cutting red tape, calls for bold reforms

Mohammed bin Rashid: Bureaucracy should not stand in the way of service

His Highness commended the Department of Justice, the Department of State and the Department of Energy and Infrastructure for successfully streamlining procedures

ABU DHABI (ALETIHAD)

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, highlighted government departments leading efforts to streamline procedures, as well as those lagging in reducing bureaucracy.

In a post on X, published in Arabic, His Highness said: "The Department of Justice, the Department of State, and the Department of Energy and Infrastructure have ex-

celled in their efforts to combat bureaucracy."

"The three least efficient entities in reducing bureaucracy were Emirates Post, the Pensions Authority, and the Ministry of Sports," His Highness added.

His Highness called for simplifying processes, saying government bureaucracy is the "art of turning simple things into complex ones, and the art of creating administrative systems to combat individual creativity".

"In government bureaucracy, procedures are more important

than results, papers are more important than service delivery, and systems and rules are put in place to limit thinking outside the box," the statement added.

His Highness said that at the end of 2023, the UAE launched an initiative to "eliminate and reduce bureaucracy across government departments", with an assessment conducted to measure their response.

"We launched an assessment of the extent of the departments' response to ensure better services, higher efficiency, and

facilitation of people's lives," His Highness said.

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid praised the departments that had shown progress while urging those that lag behind to take swift action.

"We thank the outstanding performers. And to those who are not making sufficient efforts: the bad systems created by government bureaucracy over the years can be changed by bold and quick decisions in days. The same applies to people and officials," His Highness added.

Expo 2025 chief: UAE sets global benchmark with its world-class Expo experience

TOKYO (WAM)

Hiroyuki Ishige, Secretary-General of Expo 2025 Osaka, has affirmed that Expo 2020 Dubai will play a key role in shaping the success of the upcoming event, drawing on its organisational excellence and the expertise gained from hosting the world.

Speaking to Emirates News Agency (WAM) in Japan, Ishige said the UAE Pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka is expected to be among the most prominent, reflecting the country's rapid progress and its growing influence in global exhibitions. He emphasised that Dubai's experience in delivering a world-class event had provided valuable insights that will help Osaka refine its own approach.

Ishige noted the rising participation from the Arab world, with 11 Arab countries confirmed for Expo 2025 Osaka

Set to run from April 13 to October 13, Expo 2025 Osaka will take place on the artificial island of Yumeshima under the theme "Designing Future Society for Our Lives". The event will feature the world's largest wooden structure, known as the Grand Ring, a two-kilometre structure encircling the pavilions. Its rooftop will serve as a public walkway, offering panoramic views of Osaka city and its bay.

Ishige highlighted the strong

engagement of the UAE, host of Expo 2020, and Saudi Arabia, which will host Expo 2030. He also noted the rising participation from the Arab world, with 11 Arab countries confirmed for Expo 2025 Osaka, compared to seven at the last World Expo in Japan in 1970.

The event will include over 150 national and special days, allowing visitors to explore the history and culture of participating nations without leaving Osaka. A total of 158 countries and regions, along with nine international organisations, have confirmed their involvement. Ishige added that construction is progressing steadily and that more than 50,000 volunteers, primarily young people, have registered to support the event's organisation.



Hiroyuki Ishige (WAM)

Arab Fiscal Forum, Arab Meeting for Young Leaders and Young Arab Leaders Forum on the agenda

Day Zero of World Governments Summit 2025 kicks off Monday

DUBAI (WAM)

Monday, February 10, marks Day Zero of the World Governments Summit (WGS) 2025, which takes place in Dubai and runs until 13th February under the theme "Shaping Future Governments".

Day Zero will feature several key forums, including the Arab Fiscal Forum, the Arab Meeting for Young Leaders and the Young Arab Leaders Forum, amid wide participation from prominent officials, visionaries, decision makers and a host of international organisations.

The 12th edition of the WGS is expected to see record international participation, including over 30 heads of state and government, more than 80 international and regional organisations and global institutions, 140 government delegations alongside thought leaders and experts discussing major global trends during more than 200 interactive sessions featuring over 300 global speakers.

The summit will also host over 30 ministerial meetings and round-tables attended by more than 400 ministers.

The 9th Arab Fiscal Forum, jointly organised by the Arab Monetary Fund (AMF), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Ministry of Finance, will focus on designing efficient and equitable fiscal policies to address debt vulnerability and future challenges amid tighter financing constraints.

Key topics include subsidy reforms, tax administration and public sector enterprise reforms.

Speakers at the forum's opening session include Mohamed Al Hus-



World Government Summit (WAM)

saini, Minister of State for Financial Affairs in the UAE; Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund; Dr. Fahad Al Turki, Director-General and Chairman of the Board of the Arab Monetary Fund.

Other sessions at the forum, attended by Arab ministers of finance and governors of central banks, will address the Macroeconomic Developments and Implications for Fiscal Position; Options for Fiscal Policy Design in the Face of Mounting Debt Pressures, Fiscal Policy and Climate Resilience, and Revamping Tax Systems for Large Structural Economic Change.

Day Zero will also feature the Arab Meeting for Young Leaders, a shared platform for collaboration between decision makers and Arab youth, characterised by its extensive engagement of youth in all phases including preparation, implementation, attendance and participation.

The meeting is hosted in collaboration with the Arab Youth Centre, and is supported by governmental and non-governmental partners, both local and regional.

Sessions at the meeting include Arab Youth Competitiveness Index include: Thriving in a Rapidly Changing World, The Vision of the League of Arab States, The Art of Etiquette: An Arab Perspective, The Last Drop of Oil: Seizing Opportunities, Made in the Arab World among others.

The Young Arab Leaders Forum also takes place on Day Zero of the WGS 2025 - a dynamic platform dedicated to empowering the next generation of Arab innovators and professionals. This forum focuses on fostering entrepreneurship, leadership, and professional growth by leveraging mentorship programmes, educational initiatives, and insights from prominent Arab leaders.

Sessions at the forum will address topics like preparing young leaders for a new world, and the economic state of the Arab world. It will examine the status of Arab leadership in entrepreneurship, sport, arts and culture among other fields, while discussing the role of young leaders in planning and management at senior leadership positions.

Mohammed bin Rashid attends Al Salam Cycling Championship's Desert Race

Cyclists navigate sand dunes and rugged trails in Dubai's Al Marmoom Conservation Reserve



Mohammed bin Rashid follows the competition (WAM)

Riders faced a gruelling test of skill and endurance as they navigated sand dunes and rugged trails, tackling natural obstacles with precision and speed.

DUBAI (ALETIHAD)
In the presence and under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, the Private Office of His Highness the Ruler of Dubai organised the Desert Race on Sunday, marking the third stage of the ninth Al Salam Cycling Championship - the world's largest community race of its kind in terms of diversity and prize value.

The competition, held in Dubai's Al Marmoom Conservation Reserve, saw cyclists battle challenging desert terrain across two distinct routes - Sarouq Al-Hadid (52km) and Al Ashoosh (57km). The event also featured a timed sprint segment at Areeqib Brashi, adding another layer of strategy to the race.

Omair bin Jumaa Al Falasi, Director General of the Private Office of His Highness the Ruler of Dubai and Chairman of the Supreme Organising Committee of the Al Salam Cycling Championship, officially flagged off the event, which was attended by several distinguished guests.

Riders faced a gruelling test of skill and endurance as they navigated sand dunes and rugged trails, tackling natural obstacles with precision and speed. Equipped with mountain bikes fitted with front and rear lights, they adhered to strict safety measures, wearing helmets, cycling glasses and hydration packs to withstand the harsh conditions.

The winners of the race were crowned at the end of the event, with Shabab Al Ahli Cycling Club dominating the top three positions in the Al-Ashoosh 57km race. Their



The participating cyclists at the awards ceremony

The winners of the race were crowned at the end of the event, with Shabab Al Ahli Cycling Club dominating the top three positions

rider Grega Bol secured first place, followed by Cornelis Vermeltfoort in second place and Timo de Jong in third.

In the team rankings of the same category, Shabab Al Ahli Cycling Club claimed first place, followed by Airwerks Racing Team in second, and the General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs (GDRFA) Dubai settled for the third spot.

In the Sarouq Al-Hadid 52km race, Essaid Abelouache from Sheikh Ahmed bin Humaid Al Nuaimi's team secured first place, followed by Jaber Al Mansoori from the Shabab Al Ahli Cycling Team in second, and Soulayman Minaoual from the Yasi team in third.

In the team rankings for the



52km race, Shabab Al Ahli Cycling Club finished first, followed by Sheikh Ahmed bin Humaid Al Nuaimi's team in second, and the Dubai Police Cycling Team in third.

In the Dubai Endurance City Point Sprint Challenge, Ahmed Obaid Saif Al Marri from Sheikh

Ahmed bin Humaid Al Nuaimi's team took first place in the UAE Nationals (18-39 years) category.

Jaber Al Mansoori of Shabab Al Ahli Cycling Club finished second, and Abdulaziz Saeed of GDRFA Dubai Cycling Team came third.

In the Residents (18-39 years) category, Cornelis Vermeltfoort from Shabab Al Ahli Cycling Club claimed first place. Mohamed Farag of Yasi Team took second spot, and Roan Tamang finished third.

In the UAE Nationals (40+ years) category, Abdullah Saeed Al Hattawi from the Dubai Police Cycling Team secured first place.

Tariq Obaid of the GDRFA Dubai Cycling Team came second, and Naif Al Marzooqi ended in third place.

In the Residents (40+ years) category, Ian Dialo Cabahug from Talabat Boys 30+ won the top spot. Arturo Lada of LCW UAE Cycle Procap finished second, and Simon Heney of The Cycle Hub Radisson Team settled for third place.

Reflecting on the race, Omair bin Jumaa Al Falasi credited the visionary leadership and patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum for driving continuous innovation in Dubai's sporting scene. More than being just a sporting competition, the race offers a fabulous showcase of the emirate's stunning landscapes, providing participating cyclists with a unique challenge that spans road, desert and mountain terrains while at the same time promoting the natural beauty of the Al Marmoom Conservation Reserve.

The championship will conclude with the Women's Race on February 16 at Al Marmoom Conservation Reserve.

Al Falasi noted that the event was designed to celebrate the beauty of Dubai's desert landscapes, with carefully planned routes that not only challenged the field but also showcased the region's stunning natural settings.

He highlighted the importance of engaging audiences worldwide and ensuring that those following televised or social media coverage of the race could also enjoy the captivating expanses of Al Marmoom with its serene lakes and diverse geographic features.

Applauding the participants, he commended their ability to navigate the demanding course and their remarkable expertise gained over years of competition on surfaces ranging from asphalt to desert and rugged trails.

UAE Minister praises centennial milestone, reaffirming support for education and progress

Nahyan bin Mubarak: Birzeit University preserves Palestinian identity, shapes national consciousness

DUBAI (WAM)

Birzeit University marked its centennial with a special event in the UAE, hosted by the SEE Institute at The Sustainable City in Dubai. The gathering, the first of its kind outside Palestine, celebrated the university's legacy since its founding in 1924 as an elementary school for girls and its evolution into one of the Arab world's leading academic institutions.

The university has remained steadfast in its mission to empower Palestinian youth and contribute to the advancement of knowledge and research.

The celebration was attended by a distinguished group of officials and supporters, led by Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence, alongside Dr. Talal Shahwan, President of Birzeit University; Mohammed Asaad, Consul General of the State of Palestine in Dubai; Saad Ghazal, Deputy Consul-General of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in Dubai; Abdul Jabbar Odeh, Birzeit University Ambassador in the UAE; Sa'd Abdul Hadi; and Dr. Lina Barakat from the university's Board of Trustees.

In his address, Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak praised the university's remarkable journey, stating: "I am pleased to express our unwavering support for this university, which has demonstrated resilience, determination, and a clear sense of purpose. Birzeit University plays a pivotal role in preserving



Nahyan bin Mubarak in a group photo with attendees (WAM)

Palestinian identity, shaping national consciousness, and fostering a deep sense of belonging. Despite the many challenges it faces, it remains a prestigious institution ranked among the top universities globally. It is dedicated to serving its students, addressing national issues, and advancing knowledge while maintaining strong ties with various sectors of Palestinian society. The university enjoys great credibility both within and beyond Palestine and is widely respected by academic institutions across the region and the world."

He added: "Speaking about Birzeit University and its sister Palestinian universities is, in fact, a discussion about the future. It

Nahyan bin Mubarak said that the UAE stands in solidarity with the Palestinian people, striving to provide all forms of support

is about the resilience of the Palestinian people in shaping their destiny and the role of its youth in defining its course. I am delighted to congratulate Birzeit University on its centennial celebrations and to extend my deep appreciation for its rich history of achievements. I also extend my sincere gratitude to everyone associated with the university, its leaders, faculty,

The university emphasised that the received support reflects the UAE's dedication to fostering strong fraternal ties with Palestine

students, and alumni, affirming our collective commitment to its noble mission. The university's centennial is a historic milestone that inspires reflection and pride, urging us to look ahead with confidence and optimism. We reaffirm that this institution will continue to be a beacon of knowledge and progress, adapting to the evolving needs of its society and playing a

individual empowerment, societal progress, and the promotion of shared human values worldwide."

Dr. Talal Shahwan emphasised the significance of the centennial celebration, highlighting the university's legacy of resilience and determination since its founding. He said: "Birzeit University is not just an educational institution; it is a symbol of perseverance and resolve. We believe that education should be deeply connected to lived realities, reinforce Palestinian culture, and safeguard our collective memory. Our mission is to foster an academic environment that encourages free thought and diversity, where students can express themselves and develop their ideas freely."

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Birzeit University, represented by its President Dr. Talal Shahwan, members of its Board of Trustees, alumni, and attendees, expressed heartfelt gratitude to Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan for his presence and inspiring remarks.

The university emphasised that his participation and message of support reflect the UAE's dedication to fostering strong fraternal ties with Palestine and its commitment to education and knowledge development in the Arab world.

Additionally, Birzeit University extended its sincere appreciation to the UAE's leadership for hosting this milestone event, recognising the UAE's role in championing academic institutions and promoting education and innovation across the region.

Initiative aligns with Abu Dhabi's efforts to promote social responsibility

ADCMC launches campaign to enhance emergency readiness, crisis management

Educational lectures and practical training sessions will address the risks associated with thunderstorms, severe dust, heavy rain, and floods

ABU DHABI (ALETIHAD)

In line with President His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan's declaration of 2025 as the Year of the Community, the Emergencies, Crises and Disasters Management Centre - Abu Dhabi (ADCMC) has launched the "Our Community is Prepared" campaign in collaboration with strategic partners.

Targeting residents across Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, and Al Dhafra, the campaign aligns with the emirate's broader efforts to promote social responsibility, safeguard public welfare, and ensure sustainable resource management.

The campaign's first phase, developed in partnership with Abu Dhabi Police (ADP), the Department of Energy (DoE), and the Department of Municipalities and Transport (DMT), focuses on raising awareness of extreme weather conditions and the necessary preventive measures to mitigate their impact. It ensures the public has access to accurate and reliable information, empowering them to better understand climate-related hazards and adopt effective response strategies.

As part of the initiative, educational lectures and practical training sessions will address the risks

associated with thunderstorms, severe dust, heavy rainfall, and floods. The campaign also promotes knowledge-sharing through workshops and case studies from regions that have successfully mitigated weather-related damage.

Matar Saeed Al Nuaimi, Director General of ADCMC, said: "The Our Community is Prepared campaign marks a significant step forward in building a more informed and resilient community in the face of climate-related risks. It underscores Abu Dhabi's commitment to raising awareness about the critical role of each community member in effectively responding to any crises. This campaign is a joint endeavour involving multiple stakeholders, emphasising the significance of

strengthening preparedness for climate risks and prioritising the protection of lives and properties. This initiative further aligns with His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan's declaration of 2025 as the Year of the Community under the theme Hand in Hand. This signals a new chapter in the nation's sustainable development with an emphasis on fostering unity, community engagement and cohesion among its nationals."

Ahmed Mohammed Al Rumaihi, Undersecretary of DoE, said:



"This campaign is part of the collaborative efforts among various organisations in the emirate, ensuring the continuous and uninterrupted delivery of essential services like electricity and water. It also aims to create a secure and sustainable environment for the community under all circumstances. Our close cooperation with partners is key to ensuring the resilience of energy infrastructure and delivering prompt and effective emergency responses."

Brig. Gen. Mahmoud Yousef Al

Balushi, Director of the Traffic and Patrols Directorate at ADP, said that the directorate's efforts to attain the highest levels of traffic safety for all road users, as well as Abu Dhabi Police's commitment to working together with partners to improve driver safety as part of its strategic focus on road security.

He noted that educational lectures and workshops would reinforce adherence to speed limits and safe driving practices during dust storms, heavy rain, and poor visibility conditions.

Dr. Salem Al Kaabi, Director General of Operations Affairs at DMT, said: "Raising awareness and providing guidance to ensure everyone's safety, while providing them with the necessary knowledge to deal with the effects of adverse weather, are fundamental aspects of sound risk mitigation. This reaffirms Abu Dhabi's global leadership in disaster management, led by the Emergencies, Crises, and Disasters Management Centre for the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, in collaboration with various entities and organisations."

The campaign ensures the public has access to reliable information, empowering them to better understand climate-related hazards

Experts praise country's bold vision and rapid digital transformation

UAE strengthens global AI leadership with investment, regulation and innovation

Abu Dhabi
has set its sights on becoming the world's first AI-powered government, with a strategy focused on full-scale digital automation

DUBAI (WAM)
The UAE is solidifying its status as a global leader in AI by implementing strategies that encourage innovation, investment, and regulatory adaptation. With an advanced digital infrastructure and policies designed to accelerate technological progress, the country continues to attract top AI talent and emerging startups, reinforcing its ambition to become a premier AI hub.

Beyond economic growth, the UAE's AI vision is rooted in broader national objectives, but the technology's financial impact is expected to be substantial.

A report by PwC estimates that AI will contribute 13.6% to the UAE's GDP - approximately \$100 billion - by 2030. This places the country among the top three globally in AI's share of GDP, following China and the US. Across the region, AI's contribution to national economies is projected to grow between 20% and 34%, with the UAE leading due to its early and sustained commitment to AI-driven transformation.

Regulatory and policy frameworks have played a key role in shaping the country's AI landscape. According to KPMG International Limited, the UAE's regulatory framework paves the



way for innovations in financial technology and digital payments. Cybersecurity has emerged as a key driver of digital transformation, with the UAE introducing multiple data privacy laws to safeguard personal and organisational information.

Government-led AI initiatives are also advancing rapidly. Abu Dhabi has set its sights on becoming the world's first AI-powered government, with a strategy fo-

cused on full-scale digital automation, a 100% sovereign cloud computing infrastructure, and integrated AI across public sector operations.

Nick Redshaw, Oracle's Senior Vice President of Technology Cloud in MEA and UAE Country Leader, commended the UAE's leadership for setting a bold vision in the AI era. Ahmed Gamal, Business Development Manager for Nvidia AI Solutions at Advanced Integration,

highlighted the UAE's transformative progress in AI and its role as a model for both regional and international markets. He pointed to the country's early adoption of AI strategies, noting that the UAE was among the first to launch a national AI strategy in 2017. The UAE Strategy for Artificial Intelligence aims to establish the country as a global AI hub by 2031, with key applications in education, healthcare, transportation, and energy.

AI will contribute 13.6% to the UAE's GDP - approximately \$100 billion - by 2030

Gamal further stated that the UAE is home to numerous global AI projects, and its investments in AI are expected to yield substantial economic benefits in the coming years.

The UAE's success in AI development is also driven by strategic partnerships with global technology leaders such as NVIDIA and Google, further strengthening its position as a preferred destination for AI investment.

Samer Al Jayyusi, Specialty AI & GenAI Regional Lead - Central & Eastern Europe, Middle East, Turkey and Africa, emphasised the UAE's strategic approach, which combines flexible regulations with ambitious investments in emerging technologies. He noted that the UAE was among the first countries worldwide to implement policies governing AI usage while simultaneously fostering an environment for innovation.

Dr. Akram Awad, Managing Director & Partner with the Boston Consulting Group, highlighted the country's AI competitiveness, attributing its rapid progress to a well-developed digital infrastructure and an investment-friendly ecosystem. He noted that since 2022, the number of AI professionals in the UAE has grown by 40%, underscoring its emergence as a leading hub for AI expertise.

G42 and Microsoft launch Middle East's first Responsible AI Foundation

ABU DHABI (WAM)

G42 and Microsoft have officially launched the Responsible AI Foundation, the first centre of its kind in the Middle East, aimed at establishing ethical standards and best practices for AI development in the region and across the Global South.

The initiative is supported by Mohamed bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence (MBZUAI) as a research partner, while Inception, a G42 company, will serve as the programme lead to advance its objectives. Alongside the foundation's launch, Microsoft announced the expansion of its AI for Good Lab to Abu Dhabi, reinforcing the UAE's growing role as a global AI hub.

The Responsible AI Foundation will focus on two key areas - research and governance.

On the research front, it will work to advance the technical and ethical aspects of AI, developing safety methodologies, bias mitigation techniques, and explainability tools. Collaboration with global and regional research institutions will be key to setting new benchmarks for fairness, transparency, and accountability in AI.

In terms of governance, the foundation will create frameworks to ensure the ethical development and deployment of AI systems,



Representatives during the announcement ceremony (WAM)

The initiative aims to establish ethical standards and best practices for AI development in the region and across the Global South

taking into account cultural diversity and regional needs. This will involve designing risk assessment models, external ethics boards, technical audit tools, and adaptable governance guidelines to promote responsible and inclusive AI adoption.

As part of the collaboration,

Microsoft's AI for Good Lab will expand to Abu Dhabi, where it will work with NGOs and government organisations to apply AI to societal challenges, with a particular focus on projects in the Middle East and the Global South. The first researchers at the Abu Dhabi hub are set to begin work in March.

With the launch of the Responsible AI Foundation and the regional expansion of the AI for Good Lab, G42 and the UAE are positioning themselves at the forefront of ethical AI development, reinforcing their commitment to shaping a more responsible and inclusive AI landscape globally.

TRENDS opens registration for AI-focused research award

ABU DHABI (ALETIHAD)

TRENDS Research & Advisory has announced the opening of registration for the second edition of the TRENDS Hub Scientific Research Award, which focuses on specialised research in AI. Applications will be accepted until June 30, with the winners set to be announced on September 9, coinciding with the anniversary of TRENDS Research & Advisory's establishment.

Dr. Mohammed Abdullah Al-Ali, CEO of TRENDS Research & Advisory, described the decision to dedicate the second edition of the award to AI research as a strategic step towards strengthening innovation and development in a field that has become a cornerstone of modern life. AI, he noted, plays a central role in shaping industries and influencing critical sectors worldwide.

He highlighted the award's objective of accelerating AI advancements by supporting innovative research, fostering collaboration, and addressing the ethical and societal challenges posed by AI's rapid evolution. Scientific research, he added, is instrumental in refining AI tools and techniques, enhancing algorithm accuracy, and improving big data analysis capabilities. It also plays a key role in tackling



security and privacy concerns and advancing human-machine interactions.

The initiative aims to drive research that delivers practical solutions for AI integration across key domains, including healthcare, education, industry, and economic development.

Fahad Al-Mehri, Head of the TRENDS - Dubai Sector, explained that the award is designed to

build bridges between researchers, academics, and institutions, promoting knowledge exchange and fostering collaborations that advance practical AI applications. The award also focuses on research offering practical solutions to real-world problems, such as improving medical diagnostics, energy efficiency, enhancing AI ethics, and promoting social responsibility, he added.

The top three winning research papers will receive certificates of appreciation and monetary prizes - \$5,000 for first place, \$3,000 for second, and \$2,000 for third. In addition, winning studies will be published on TRENDS' digital platforms and social media channels, with researchers gaining the opportunity to apply for research fellowships and receive priority invitations to the centre's training courses.

Expansion of networks and infrastructure projects on the horizon

UAE's aviation sector to continue rapid growth in 2025 - report

KHALED AL KHAWALDEH (ABU DHABI)

The UAE's aviation sector continued its rapid growth in 2024, seeing increases in revenue, passenger numbers and destinations - and the industry is expected to continue to fly high with several major deals and route on the horizon for 2025.

According to recent data from the General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA), passenger traffic increased by 10% in 2024 to reach

147.8 million from 134 million in 2023.

The aviation sector's workforce increased to more than 9,600 pilots and 36,000 cabin crew.

The growth was propelled by the rise of Abu Dhabi as an aviation hub, with Zayed International Airport (AUH) introducing 29 new routes last year. Abu Dhabi Airports reported a 28% increase in traffic, handling 29.4 million passengers in 2024 compared to 22.9 million in 2023.

"2024 was a highly successful year for Abu Dhabi Airports, marked by record-breaking pas-

senger traffic, significant cargo growth, and the successful completion of key infrastructure projects," Elena Sorlini, MD and CEO of Abu Dhabi Airports, said.

The positive trajectory is indicative of the bullish sentiment towards aviation across the wider region. A recent report released ahead of two industry events, MRO Middle East and Aircraft Interiors Middle East (AIME), to be held in Dubai, projected the region's market to grow from \$34.4 billion in 2025 to \$44.7 billion by 2030.

It said this drive would mostly come from increased passenger demand and modernisation efforts.

In the UAE, the sector is al-

ready experiencing a period of sophistication and diversification - with growth in high-tech manufacturing.

Last year, Sanad, owned by

Abu Dhabi's Mubadala, signed a landmark Dh1.5 billion engine sale with Etihad Airways, covering 16 engines for Boeing 787, Airbus A380, A350 and A320 aircraft.

Meanwhile, the latest developments in infrastructure saw Dubai start construction on the world's largest airport terminal, which will cost \$35 billion and have 400 gates and five parallel runways.

Also on the list of construction projects is a new terminal at Sharjah International Airport, expected to be completed in 2026.

May Ismail, Event Manager at RX, which organises the annual AirportShow, said: "The Middle East has remained one of the world's fastest growing hubs for the civil

aviation industry, given its unwavering commitment to airport and airline developments and being at the new global travel crossroads."

"Regional airports have remained leading adaptors of new technologies, given their unwavering commitment to airport and airline developments and being at the new global travel crossroads."

The strong growth is underpinned by a consistently growing tourism sector, which saw international overnight visitors in Dubai increase by 9% in 2024.

It was also supported by the UAE's growing position as a logistics hub, with Abu Dhabi Airports handling 678,990 tonnes in 2024 - a 21% increase from 560,434 tonnes in 2023.



UAE Salary Guide 2025 reveals hiring trends, salary insights across industries

In-demand jobs in AI and data engineering, banking and finance offer top salaries

Roles in AI, machine learning and data science in the UAE are growing by over 30% annually, according to the report

MAYS IBRAHIM (ABU DHABI)

The UAE job market has seen a 9% increase in its workforce and a 14.5% rise in new businesses over the past year, according to the Michael Page UAE Salary Guide 2025.

It attributes this growth to the country's strategic initiatives, reinforcing its position as a leading destination for business and talent.

The report provides insights into the most in-demand roles across key industries, including banking, technology, healthcare and finance, while highlighting salary ranges.

Roles in AI, machine learning and data science in the UAE are growing by over 30% annually, according to the report.

With AI engineers and data engineers leading the list of most sought-after positions, salaries in this sector remain competitive in 2025, the report showed.

A chief data officer can earn between Dh80,000 and Dh120,000 per month, while AI product managers and machine learning Engineers can command salaries ranging from Dh35,000 to Dh55,000 per month.

The most in-demand skills in these sectors include NLP/LLM/Prompt Engineering, Cloud Data Engineering, Power BI/Tableau Development, AI-powered product development, and domain-specific analysis in areas such as procurement and finance.

The talent market for digital professionals in the UAE has also witnessed significant growth over the past few years, reflecting a



wider regional push towards digital transformation.

The top in-demand positions in the UAE's digital sector include Head of Software Development, Full Stack Software Engineer, Agile Product Manager, Senior DevOps Engineer, and Digital Adoption Specialist.

Salaries in the UAE's digital sector vary widely depending on role and experience. A Full Stack Developer earns between Dh18,000 and Dh25,000 per

month, while a Digital Adoption Specialist can make between Dh30,000 and Dh45,000. In leadership, a Chief Digital Officer earns between Dh60,000 and Dh120,000.

The UAE's banking and financial services sector has seen increased demand for fundraising/institutional sales and compliance professionals, according to the report.

The report attributes this to the growing asset management industry in UAE, coupled with increased investor interest, favourable regulatory changes, and a surge in Family Offices and Ultra High Net Worth Individuals (UHNWIs).

The top in-demand positions in the sector include Group CFO/Group Controllers, Commercial Finance Manager, Head of Tax, Head of Audit/Internal Auditors, and Accounting Managers.

According to the salary guide, a group CFO at a multinational corporation earns between Dh70,000 and Dh180,000 per month, while mid-level roles like a Finance Manager earn salaries ranging from Dh30,000 to Dh45,000.

A group CFO at a multinational corporation earns between Dh70,000 and Dh180,000 per month

UAE

Aletihad

UAE Presidential Court to host six sessions at WGS 2025

The discussions will explore ways to strengthen philanthropy in the Global South, where multiple crises continue to pose major hurdles to development

ABU DHABI (WAM)

The Office of Development Affairs at the Presidential Court is set to host six discussion sessions at the World Governments Summit (WGS) 2025, which begins on February 11.

The sessions will cover the following topics: Philanthropy in the Global South; Harnessing the Power of Sports as a Catalyst for Social Change; Designing Public Policy to Shift Behaviours around the Globe; Collaborative Pathways to Sustainable Development; Redefining Philanthropy: New Models for Global Impact; and Human-centric Futures: Building Experts for the New Economy.

The set of events will gather speakers from various regions, with three structured as open discussions and the remaining three as specialised round tables.

The topics reflect pressing global challenges, including the need for enhanced internation-



al cooperation in achieving sustainable development goals, the evolution of philanthropic models to maximise global impact, and strategies for fostering expertise in a rapidly shifting economic landscape. Additionally, the discussions will explore ways to strengthen philanthropy in the Global South, where multiple crises continue to pose major hurdles to development.

One of the key themes will

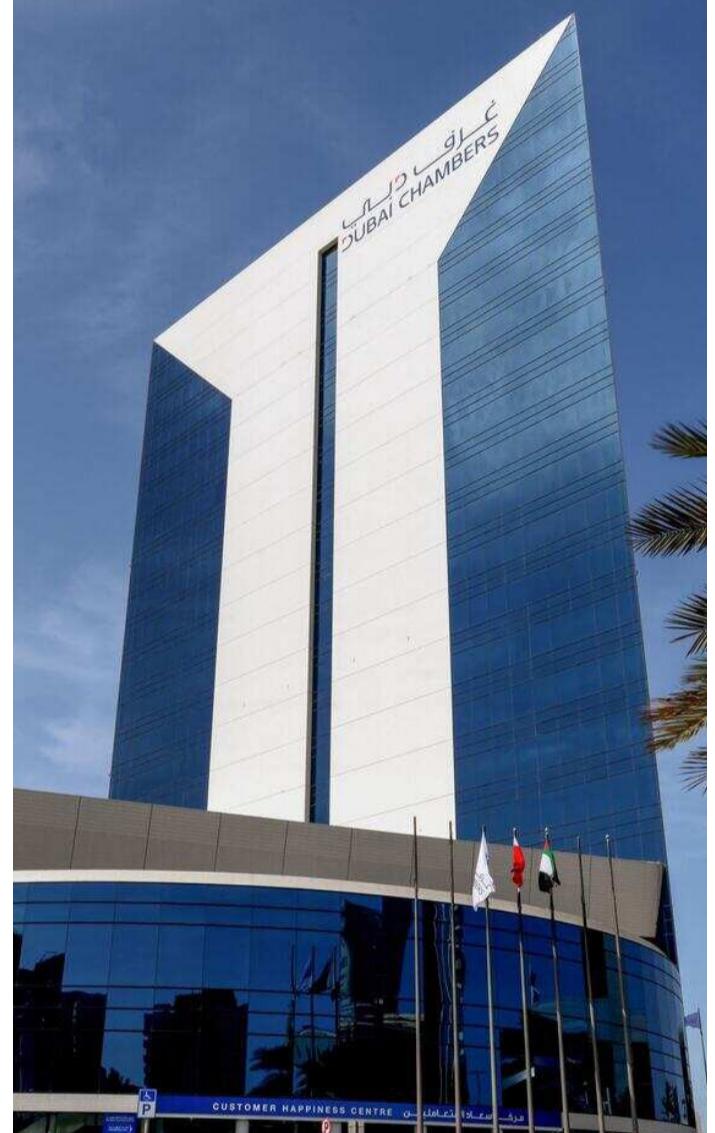
be the role of public policy in influencing behavioural shifts, a factor increasingly recognised as essential for tackling global issues such as climate change, social inequality, and economic inclusion.

By bringing together experts from across continents, the Office of Development Affairs aims to facilitate meaningful dialogue on shaping a sustainable and people-centred future.

- One of the key themes will be the role of public policy in influencing behavioural shifts, a factor increasingly recognised as essential for tackling pressing global issues

Sessions will focus on economic growth, partnerships, and family enterprises

World Governments Summit 2025 names Dubai Chambers as Featured Partner



Think tank will outline its research vision and efforts to empower young researchers

TRENDS to participate in World Governments Summit and Arab Meeting for Young Leaders

ABU DHABI (ALETIHAD)

For the third consecutive year, TRENDS Research & Advisory will be participating in the World Governments Summit 2025, to be held in Dubai from February 11 to 13, under the theme "Shaping Future Governments".

The summit will bring together over 30 heads of state and government, 140 government delegations, 80+ international and regional organisations, and 6,000+ participants, including leading global experts.

The Arab Meeting for Young Leaders

TRENDS, represented by its CEO, Dr. Mohammed Abdullah Al-Ali, is also participating in the fourth edition of the Arab Meeting for Young Leaders. The event is organised by the Arab Youth Centre in collaboration with the World Governments Summit and will take place on February 10, in Dubai, under the theme "Made in the Arab World: Arab Identity, Global Impact".

The meeting will be attended by Arab Ministers of Youth, with the participation of an elite group of young Arab government leaders and serves as a comprehensive umbrella platform for exclusive, direct discussions and unconventional consultative sessions to enhance youth engagement.

The event also aims to unify efforts, build qualitative partnerships and draw up a joint action agenda that serves and empowers Arab youth in all sectors.

This year's summit focuses on major global transformations, addressing the most pressing op-



- TRENDS will explore collaborative opportunities and strengthen partnerships with leading academic and research institutions

participation in the World Governments Summit and Arab Meeting for Young Leaders is an opportunity to gain insights into global best practices in governance and government innovation, as well as to promote and empower the youth. He highlighted the value of engaging in high-level global discussions to build research partnerships and exchange expertise that contribute to shaping the future.

Dr. Al-Ali stated that TRENDS' global vision empowers youth and society to anticipate and contribute to shaping the future. He noted that teamwork is key to enabling governments to invest in human capital - particularly youth - by harnessing their full potential.

He further noted that TRENDS' participation in the World Governments Summit and Arab Meeting for Young Leaders reflects its commitment to integrating efforts, exchanging insights and maximising the impact of research findings.

By presenting its studies in global knowledge forums that bring together heads of state, policymakers, experts, academics, and researchers, TRENDS continues to contribute to developing effective governance strategies for the future.

- Dr. Al-Ali highlighted the value of engaging in high-level global discussions to build research partnerships and exchange expertise

portunities and challenges across various sectors. It aims to develop shared visions and strategies to strengthen international cooperation and accelerate global development and prosperity.

TRENDS' Role in the Summit

During the summit, TRENDS will explore collaborative opportunities and strengthen partnerships with leading academic and research institutions at regional and international levels. The centre will outline its research vision and highlight its efforts to empower young researchers while presenting its research, training, and advisory services expertise.

Dr. Al-Ali said that the centre's

DUBAI (WAM)

The World Governments Summit (WGS) 2025 has named Dubai Chambers as a Featured Partner for the annual event, which will take place in Dubai from February 11-13 under the theme "Shaping Future Governments".

As part of its role, Dubai Chambers will lead high-level discussions on economic growth, business collaboration, and the evolving role of family enterprises in global markets.

Sultan bin Saeed Al Mansoori, Chairman of Dubai Chambers, will participate in a discussion session focused on the key drivers of economic growth and strategies to strengthen partnerships with the global business community. He will also chair a special roundtable on family businesses, which will convene government officials and more than 50 prominent leaders and executives from some of the world's largest family enterprises.

Sultan bin Saeed Al Mansoori said: "We are committed to strengthening international cooperation to advance shared economic and development goals by forging strategic partnerships with global stakeholders. Expanding the private sector's role in driving societal progress alongside the public sector is essential for creating innovative solutions that shape a better future and developing pioneering business models aligned with global transformations."

"The World Governments Sum-

- The event will feature 21 global forums exploring major global trends across more than 200 sessions and 300 speakers

mit echoes the UAE's vision for the future, which places people at the centre of development efforts and empowers governments and institutions to embrace innovation and creativity to achieve comprehensive and sustainable progress. At Dubai Chambers, we remain committed to collaborating with local and international partners to explore new opportunities for cooperation between the public and private sectors, fostering an integrated business environment that ensures sustainable economic and social growth."

This year's World Governments Summit will see record international participation, bringing together more than 30 heads of state and government, 140 government delegations, and over 80 international and regional organisations. The event will feature 21 global forums exploring major global trends across more than 200 sessions, with 300 speakers, including presidents, ministers, and thought leaders. Additionally, over 30 roundtables and ministerial meetings will convene more than 400 ministers, and 30 strategic reports will be published in collaboration with international knowledge partners.

Al Hosn Festival showcases Arabic coffee craftsmanship, celebrating Emirati culture and tradition

Gahwa Championships coffee masters are up for the cup

Visitors joined workshops facilitated by coffee masters at various events such as the Sane' Al Gahwa Championship, Gahwa Roaster Awards and Gahwa Beverage Concept Awards

SARA ALZAABI (ABU DHABI)

Coffee experts showed off their roasting, preparing and skills at serving traditional Arabic coffee at Al Hosn Festival 2025 Gahwa Championships, which concluded on Sunday.

Visitors joined workshops facilitated by coffee masters at various events such as the Sane' Al Gahwa Championship, Gahwa Roaster Awards and Gahwa Beverage Concept Awards.

Speaking to Aletihad about the competitions, Head Judge Abdulla Al Yammahi shared his insights regarding the inspiration of the expansion of the Gahwa Championships this year, and how it enhances the festival experience.

"Initially, the Gahwa Championships were held at the exhibition grounds, and due to the great turnout that was observed and the demand for such participation from members of the community, the Department of Tourism and Culture, represented by the Bait Al Gahwa (Coffee House), decided to transfer these championships to the Qasr Al Hosn grounds and prepare a festival that suits this heritage element, which was listed by UNESCO in 2015."

Al Yammahi noted that coffee is at the heart of the Emirati culture, symbolising its generosity and hospitality.

This serving of the beverage is part of receiving guests and its traditions are passed down through generations.

Using unique rituals with utensils such as the dallah (a traditional Arabian coffee pot), coffee has always been associated with gatherings at events of state importance.

It is a vehicle for socialisation, for smoothing tensions in conflict situations, and is a vital part of the

Coffee is at the heart of the Emirati culture, symbolising its generosity and hospitality

national identity of the UAE.

The Sane' Al Gahwa Championships is judged on the basis of three main criteria: grinding, brewing and presentation.

Participants are assessed based on their skills with the grinder and dallah, their professional presentation, and using the correct quantity of coffee for guests.

Judges also note the passion and expertise accumulated and handed down through the generations.

They pay very close attention to how the contestants go about serving and presenting the coffee, including all the customs and etiquette associated with it.

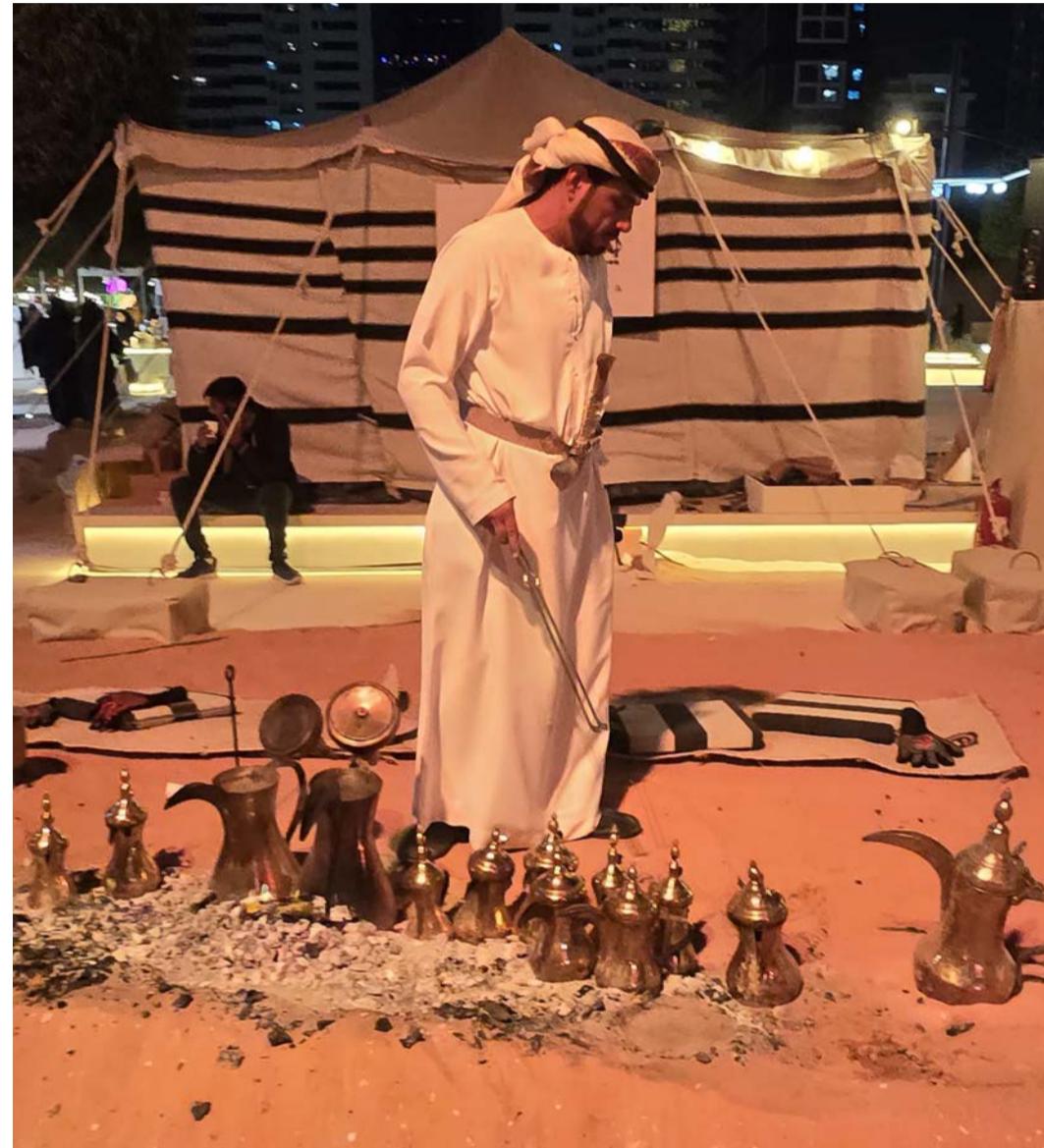
Participants are rated on how they prepare for the coffee roasting.

"The organising committee allocates coffee beans to the participants in this championship, and the committee also brings the necessary firewood to make the fire and prepares the place with the appropriate equipment and tools for this process. This championship is divided into two categories: the blonde coffee roasting category and dark coffee roasting category," said Al Yammahi.

Contestants are judged based on their skills, craftsmanship in roasting, and consistency in the colour of the coffee beans.

Judges also assess their fire control, tool safety and overall technique.

The Coffee Concept Award adds another dimension to the competition with an additional challenge in which contestants are required to create a new drink.



Brewing coffee over coals (Photo by Sara AlZaabi)

Participants are assessed based on their skills with the grinder and dallah, their professional presentation, and using the correct quantity of coffee for guests

tournament's progress and the creation of an elite group representing the country with their cultural and practical knowledge.

"The annual Gahwa coffee tournaments have played an important role in rooting and documenting this, and we can say that the element of Arabic coffee is an element that will remain not only in memory but in the daily life of Emirati society," he added.

"Since 2019, we have seen positive interaction from participants. In 2025, the judges noted a group of skilled contestants, reflecting the

The champions focus on both Arabic coffee traditions and specialty coffee, reflecting Emirati youth's growing interest, he added.

This supports the UAE's efforts to preserve coffee as cultural heritage.

He expressed optimism that with festivals, government support and the growing local coffee market, Arabic coffee will continue to thrive globally.

How special day of pre-Ramadan celebrations has evolved over the years

Spirit and tradition of 'Haq Al-Laila' alive in modern Emirati families

AMEINAH ALZEYOUDI (ABU DHABI)

The spirit and tradition of "Haq Al-Laila" is alive and well, and young and old in the Emirati community are looking forward to celebrating the special day in the UAE.

This celebration, also known as "Qarqi'aan", takes place on the night of the 15th of Sha'ban (14 February this year) and is an essential part of Emirati heritage that fosters family togetherness. It serves to introduce children to the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan and raise awareness of its significance.

It is a joyous day for children, who dress up in bright colours and go door-to-door in their neighbourhoods, asking for sweets and treats.

As Umm Abdullah, one of the elderly women in the UAE, recalls: "Children, then as now, eagerly await this occasion."

"In the past, the celebration began with families preparing special Haq Al-Laila clothes for

It is a joyous day for children, who dress up in bright colours and go door-to-door in their neighbourhoods, asking for sweets and treats

the children.

"Boys would wear the traditional Emirati 'kandura', while girls would wear a colourful dresses specifically made for the occasion. Their outfits would be incomplete without the cloth bag known as 'Al-Khreeyah', which would be filled with sweets.

"On the day of the celebration, after returning from their Quranic school (the "Kuttab"), children would go out in small groups to visit the homes of neighbours in the community.

"Upon arriving at each house, they would chant the traditional song, 'Give us Haq Al-Laila', and women at each home would open baskets filled



Children celebrate Haq Al-Lail (Photo by Ameinah Alzeoudi)

Many families in the UAE now order ready-made Haq Al-Laila treats from special accounts on Instagram

with sweets. Each child would open their bag and collect their share of sweets and nuts. The event would continue until all the homes in the neighbourhood had been visited and all bags were filled.

Today, the celebrations have changed somewhat, especially in the way the sweets are distributed to children. Umm Zayed explains: "The celebrations are no longer the same in their details, as the method of distributing Haq Al-Laila sweets has become more organised."

"Many families in the UAE now order ready-made Haq Al-Laila treats from special accounts on Instagram, where the sweets are pre-prepared

and delivered to the children in ready-made bags.

"The cloth bags now serve mostly for decoration and completing the traditional look, and children no longer roam the streets in search of sweets as they once did."

"Instead, the celebration is now held at home in front of the entire family, where grandparents distribute their own Haq Al-Laila sweets to the children."

Despite the changes in the celebrations, the essence of Haq Al-Laila remains rooted in its cultural values.

This celebration provides a great opportunity to enhance the spirit of cooperation and connection within the community, reinforcing social values related to solidarity and sharing.

Through this event, children are reminded of the importance of community values and preserving cultural heritage, fostering strong bonds between different generations.

Economy

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UAE Cabinet approves reconstitution of Board of Directors of Securities and Commodities Authority

ABU DHABI (WAM)

The UAE Cabinet has approved a resolution to reconstitute the Board of Directors of the Securities and Commodities Authority (SCA) for a three-year term, under the chairmanship of Mohamed Ali Al Shorafa Al Hammadi, Chairman of the SCA Board of Directors.

The board members include Dr. Ali Mohammed Bakheet Al Rumeithi, Member of the Board of Directors of the Central Bank of the UAE, Rashed Abdul Karim Al Blooshi, Undersecretary of Abu Dhabi Department of Economic Development, Faisal Yousuf Selaitin, CEO of the Dubai Economic Security Center, Arif Mohammed Hadi Amiri, CEO of the Dubai International Financial Centre Authority, and Hamad Sayah Al Mazrouei, CEO of the Registration Authority at Abu Dhabi Global Market, in addition to a youth representative to be nominated by the General Secretariat of the Cabinet.

The Board of Directors of the Securities and Commodities Authority is responsible for regulating and advancing the UAE's financial and commodities markets, ensuring transparency, fairness, and robust investor protection. It establishes policies and strategies that enhance market efficiency, drive economic growth, and ensure strict compliance with laws and regulations.

The Board of Directors of the SCA is responsible for regulating and advancing the UAE's financial and commodities markets

The SCA establishes policies and strategies that enhance market efficiency, drive economic growth, and ensure strict compliance with laws and regulations

drive economic growth, and ensure strict compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

The Board also plays a pivotal role in strengthening market confidence by monitoring performance and upholding the integrity of financial transactions and commercial practices.

Committed to financial stability and global competitiveness, the Board aligns its regulatory framework with international best practices, fostering a dynamic and resilient marketplace. It ac-

chaired by
H.E. Mohamed Ali Al Shorafa Al Hammadi
Chairman of the Department of Municipalities and Transport

The board members include

H.E. Dr. Ali Mohammed Bakheet Al Rumeithi Member of the Board of Directors of the Central Bank of the UAE.	H.E. Arif Mohammed Hadi Amiri CEO of the Dubai International Financial Centre Authority
H.E. Rashed Abdul Karim Al Blooshi Undersecretary of the Department of Economic Development – Abu Dhabi	H.E. Hamad Sayah Al Mazrouei , CEO of the Registration Authority at Abu Dhabi Global Market
H.E. Faisal Yousuf Selaitin CEO of the Dubai Economic Security Center	

tively develops legislation that governs market operations, promotes financial innovation, and enhances investment awareness.

Furthermore, the Board prioritises strategic collaboration with

local and international entities to facilitate knowledge exchange and ensure the UAE's markets remain at the forefront of global financial and commodities sector advancements.

Dana Gas announces net profit of Dh553m

Following the strong performance and improved cash position, company looks forward to resuming dividends and adopting a sustainable annual dividend policy

ABU DHABI (ALETIHAD)

Dana Gas, the Middle East's largest regional private sector natural gas company, announced its unaudited preliminary financial results for 2024.

The company, an Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange-listed business, reported revenue growth of 5% in 2024, reaching Dh1.63 billion (\$445 million), up from Dh1.55 billion (\$423 million) in 2023, driven primarily by the recognition of additional revenue from improved fiscal terms under the recently signed Consolidated Concession Agreement in Egypt.

Net profit stood at Dh553 million (\$151 million), compared to Dh586 million (\$160 million) in 2023, after a one-off impairment charge of Dh121 million (\$33 million) in Egypt related to past costs of old concessions. Excluding this one-off impairment, net profit for

the year was Dh674 million (\$184 million), a 15% increase from Dh586 million (\$160 million) in 2023.

In Q4 2024, revenue increased by 64% to Dh583 million (\$159 million), up from Dh356 million (\$97 million) in the same period last year, primarily due to the recognition of additional revenue under the newly signed Consolidated Concession Agreement in Egypt. Q4 net profit increased by 15% to Dh143 million (\$39 million), compared to Dh125 million (\$34 million) in Q4 2023, as a result of the additional revenue and lower financing costs.

At the end of 2024, Dana Gas formally signed the new Consolidation Agreement with the Ministry of Petroleum & Mineral Resources and the Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Company (EGAS). The agreement replaces the company's existing concessions with a single concession encompassing an ad-



ditional 297 square kilometres of exploration acreage and improved fiscal terms, enabling greater operational efficiency and unlocking further investment opportunities.

Under the agreement, Dana Gas has committed to a \$100 million development and exploration programme, including the drilling of 11 wells. This programme will help to mitigate the natural field declines by adding additional production which is expected to increase gas recovery by 80 billion cubic feet. Additionally, the increased gas supply is projected to generate cost savings of over \$1

billion for Egypt's economy, reducing reliance on imported LNG for power generation.

The company also received \$20 million from the Egyptian government in December 2024. As previously stated, these funds will be reinvested into the company's operations in Egypt, enabling Dana Gas to proceed with the first phase of the consolidation development programme and deliver on its commitments under the agreement.

Richard Hall, CEO of Dana Gas, commented: "I am pleased with the progress we made in 2024. In Egypt, the successful signing of

our new concession agreement has led to commencement of the planned investment programme, and we're excited about the potential upside possibilities under the new agreement. "We hope to build on these achievements in 2025. Looking ahead, we are optimistic about the future and are actively evaluating the resumption of sustainable dividend payments to our shareholders. We will also continue to focus on operational excellence, innovation, and strengthening partnerships in the KRI and Egypt to drive long-term growth."

UAE, Japan to complete CEPA negotiations before end of 2025: Al Zeyoudi

ABU DHABI (WAM)

Dr. Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, Minister of State for Foreign Trade, affirmed that negotiations for the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the UAE and Japan will be completed before the end of 2025.

In a statement to the Emirates News Agency (WAM), Al Zeyoudi explained that the negotiations for the agreement's terms reflect the commitment of both friendly nations to enhancing economic cooperation and opening new horizons for developmental partnership, thereby contributing to economic prosperity and creating further opportunities for the business communities in both countries.

He pointed out that the UAE is Japan's leading trade partner in the Arab World in terms of exports and imports, accounting for approximately 37% of Japan's total exports to Arab countries



Thani Al Zeyoudi

trading partners.

In September 2024, the UAE and Japan initiated discussions to reach a CEPA, aiming to unlock new opportunities for economic, investment and trade relations, taking them to new levels of developmental cooperation.



Dubai welcomes 18.72m international visitors in 2024, up 9% YoY

Hamdan bin Mohammed

- This achievement is the result of visionary leadership and strong collaboration between the public and private sectors
- Through strategic innovation, infrastructure development, talent acquisition, and market diversification, we will continue to enhance Dubai's competitiveness

Dubai is significantly ahead of other major global peer cities such as New York, Bangkok, Paris and Singapore, and nearly on par with London, in terms of total room inventory

DUBAI (WAM)

In yet another remarkable annual performance, Dubai welcomed 18.72 million international overnight visitors from January to December 2024, a 9% year-over-year (YoY) increase that surpasses the previous record of 17.15 million in 2023, according to data from the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET).

His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, and Chairman of the Executive Council of Dubai, said that Dubai's record-breaking tourism growth reflects the strategic vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, embodied in the Dubai Economic Agenda D33, to consolidate the city's status as a global hub for business and leisure and one of the world's best cities to visit, live and work in.

"This achievement is the result of visionary leadership and strong collaboration between the public and private sectors.

We are com-

mited to maintaining this exceptional growth momentum. Through strategic innovation, infrastructure development, talent acquisition, and market diversification, we will continue to enhance Dubai's competitiveness, attract more international visitors, and enhance tourism's role as a key driver of economic growth," Sheikh Hamdan said.

He also highlighted the city's strategic focus on expanding foreign investment, and attracting global talent to further accelerate growth. "By continuing to create new opportunities and value-driven offerings for the global traveller, Dubai will not only maintain its status as a preferred destination but also strengthen its position at the forefront of global growth in the sector," he added.

As a well-connected global destination strategically located at the crossroads of East and West, Dubai continued to attract visitors from across the globe. From a regional perspective, North East & South East Asia combined delivered the highest rate of growth of 24%, followed by Africa (+20%) and CIS & Eastern Europe (+16%). Visitors from Western Europe

also grew significantly, up 14%, while maintaining its position as the number one source region for international visitors to Dubai.

Helal Saeed Almarri, Director-General of the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET), said: "Dubai's exceptional performance in the tourism sector for 2024 is a powerful testament to the visionary leadership of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid.

"Through careful planning and dynamic, agile policy implementation, Dubai has successfully navigated global economic and geographic headwinds to achieve record-setting growth in tourism for a second consecutive year, having long resumed its pre-pandemic upward trajectory. This achievement is not an isolated milestone but a foundational pillar of Dubai's diversified growth strategy, one that fuels interconnected D33 objectives spanning talent acquisition, FDI inflow, and the global competitiveness of businesses operating within Dubai's ecosystem."

As a core element of the destination experience, hotels contributed significantly to the city's performance, with the steady growth in inventory. Dubai's hotel inventory at the end of December

2024 comprised 154,016 total available rooms across 832 establishments, compared to 150,291 rooms at 821 establishments in 2023.

According to STR data, Dubai is significantly ahead of other major global peer cities such as New York, Bangkok, Paris and Singapore, and nearly on par with London, in terms of total room inventory. Furthermore, a robust pipeline of new properties, such as the upcoming Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab and the Mandarin Oriental Downtown, will ensure the city is able to cater to ever-growing demand from both visitors and residents.

Performance on key hotel metrics remained strong in 2024, with average occupancy for the hotel sector growing to 78.2%, up from 77.4% in 2023, and occupied room nights rising to a high of 43.03 million, representing 3% growth compared to 41.70 million in 2023.

Reflecting the hospitality sector's commitment to cater to all budgets and preferences, the Average Daily Rate (ADR) of Dh538 only rose marginally against the ADR of Dh536 in 2023, and according to STR Data, Dubai provided guests with more attractive average rates than global peers including Paris,

New York, London and Singapore.

Meanwhile, the Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR) of Dh421 in 2024 was a 2% increase on the Dh415 the previous year.

Dubai's calendar of business, leisure and sporting events continues to attract international tourists. Organised by Dubai Festivals and Retail Establishment (DFRE), part of DET, some of the city's biggest events in 2024 included the eighth edition of the Dubai Fitness Challenge, which attracted a best-ever 2.7 million participants, and the Dubai Shopping Festival, which celebrated its landmark 30th edition.

Consolidating the city's position as the world's leading meetings destination, Dubai last year secured the hosting of 437 future events, driven by Dubai Business Events (DBE), part of DET and the city's official convention bureau.

Marking a 20% YoY increase in the number of successful bids, the events secured in 2024 are set to attract an estimated 210,731 delegates to Dubai over the coming years.



Africa to establish its own credit rating agency

The establishment of an Africa Credit Rating Agency aims to provide fair and transparent ratings that reflect the realities and potential of African economies

ADDIS ABABA (WAM)

The African Union (AU) will set up the Africa Credit Rating Agency (AfCRA) next week during a meeting of heads of state and government on the margins of the 37th AU Ordinary Summit here, Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) reported.

As the continent continues its march towards economic integration and resilience, the establishment of Africa Credit Rating Agency (AfCRA) represents a pivotal step in asserting Africa's position on global financial governance. In this regard, Heads of State and Government are set to convene for a Presidential Dialogue on the establishment of an Africa Credit Rating Agency on February

14, 2025. Facilitated by the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), the event will also bring together policymakers, financial experts, and development partners to deliberate on the operationalisation of a dedicated credit rating agency for the continent.

According to ENA, the event to be held on the margins of the 37th AU Ordinary Summit at the African Union Headquarters underscores Africa's commitment to enhancing the continent's financial sovereignty and addressing long-standing challenges associated with the three international credit rating agencies. The establishment of an Africa Credit Rating Agency aims to provide fair, transparent and development-focused credit



ratings that reflect the realities and potential of African economies.

The Africa Credit Rating Agency (AfCRA) is a continental initiative aimed at providing independent, credible, and African-owned credit ratings for sovereigns, sub-sover-

igns and corporates. Its primary objective is to enhance transparency, reduce reliance on the three international credit rating agencies, and address the specific needs of African countries, institutions and contexts.

AfCRA was established to address

concerns over perceived biases, inaccuracies, and high costs associated with international credit rating agencies when assessing African countries. It will provide an opportunity for the continent to have a credit rating system that reflects Africa's unique socio-economic realities and fosters a fairer representation of its creditworthiness.

AfCRA will reduce the cost of credit ratings for African countries and businesses, increase their access to capital markets, and ensure a fairer representation of their creditworthiness. It will also provide a platform for promoting African projects and investments, driving economic growth and regional financial stability.

The agency's objective is to enhance transparency, reduce reliance on the three international credit rating agencies, and address the specific needs of African countries

Perspectives

Aletihad •

Why Musk could be a problem for Trump



Aaron Blake

The writer is a senior political reporter with The Washington Post

The listless vessel that has been the Democratic Party finally found its bearings this week, homing in on a strategy that is largely focused on attacking not President Donald Trump, but rather Elon Musk. It's not clear that it will fix Democrats' many problems, but there are increasing signs and reasons to believe it could be a potent strategy.

The short version back then was that Musk's image did appear to have taken a hit in recent months, as the world's richest man inserted himself into American politics in an unprecedented way - and in many ways overshadowed Trump.

Four different polls last week showed negative views of Musk suddenly outpaced positive ones by double digits, even as Trump's own image was still improving and looking better. Since then, it's become even clearer that Musk's exploits - most notably launching a potentially illegal assault on a number of US government agencies - could be rubbing Americans the wrong way.

The first reason is that Americans seem to have real qualms about the level of influence this uber-wealthy, unelected man has commandeered. And that includes many Republicans.

Two YouGov polls this week have shown only between 11 and 13% of Americans say they want Musk to have "a lot" of influence in Trump's administration. That's significantly down from the 27%



who said the same thing in November.

Today, about four times as many say they want Musk to have no influence at all while the rest say he should have "a little" influence. And it's not just Democrats souring on the idea. The percentage of Republicans who say they want him to be so influential has fallen by about half, from 47% in November to between 21 and 26%.

A Quinnipiac University poll last week also showed 53% of Americans said they didn't want Musk to play a prominent role in

the Trump administration. An AP-NORC poll last month, meanwhile, showed 60% didn't like the idea of the president relying on a billionaire for policy advice.

All of which suggests Americans are preconditioned to see Musk's foray into wrecking shop in US government as problematic. That's because it's become abundantly clear that Musk does in fact have "a lot" of influence and will play a very prominent role.

Of course, this is just where things stand now as Musk's effort gets off the ground, and with

plenty of the battle to fight. His efforts will surely be judged, to some extent, on the results.

Americans who largely view the government as bloated and inefficient could come to view him and his efforts with the US DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) Service as fruitful and good. The AP-NORC data, for instance, showed about two-thirds of Americans said corruption and inefficiency were major problems in the federal government.

And a Reuters-Ipsos poll this week showed Americans by a

56-40 margin supported freezing foreign aid - the big story this week involving Musk - as long as "lifesaving humanitarian assistance" was exempted.

But Musk's methods are nothing if not blunt, and that's where the political danger seeps in. The targeting of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), for instance, has already jeopardised that supposedly exempted, lifesaving assistance. Lifesaving food and drugs have been held up (as even some GOP senators have complained), and the US government's highly successful anti-HIV efforts in Africa have been thrown into chaos.

Many of the agencies Musk and Trump have targeted for potential huge reductions also enjoy high levels of favourability. And the AP-NORC poll showed Americans oppose "eliminating entire federal agencies", 49% to 23%.

You begin to see how people might like the idea of cutting in theory, but not necessarily in practice or when it's Musk behind it. That should have been our first signal that this might not be a political winner for Trump. And plenty since then suggests it could well turn into a problem.

Currencies deflect the tariff thrust by United States



Mike Dolan

The writer is Editor-at-Large for Finance & Markets and correspondent at Reuters for 26 years

Hypersensitive currency swings to this week's "stop-go" US tariff threats suggest a persistent offset to the new administration's trade stance that may just help central banks look beyond it all.

The first salvos in President Donald Trump's latest trade war included 25% tariffs on Mexican and Canadian imports that were almost immediately pushed off for at least a month, as well as a 10% charge on Chinese goods that is still lingering.

The dollar initially surged against the peso and Canadian dollar, only to reverse course on news of the tariff delays. The reaction of the Chinese yuan was complicated by the fact that mainland markets were closed at the time of the announcement.

In the process, the DXY index, which measures the dollar against the most traded currencies, managed a 2% round trip from last Friday's low only to reverse by mid-week.

These shifts suggest that if any of these import taxes do hit, the market's reaction function will be to lift the dollar, as concerns about the potential for overseas economic damage and domestic US inflation irritation exaggerate the relative interest rate gaps.

That is a plus for many foreign firms because a stronger dollar can allow them to keep the dollar price of their goods stable in US markets, helping them to retain market share without a lockstep hit in their home currency earn-

ings.

Of course, a weaker local currency can affect both a country's employment and economic activity in complex ways, as recent studies have shown, but overall the currency market can offer an instant and significant offset to rising tariffs. A prime example is the weakening of China's yuan during Trump's 2018/19 bilateral tariff war, which clearly softened the fallout.

Given the myriad moving parts, it is probably impossible to make an accurate forecast of the eventual macro fallout of tariffs, even assuming one knows for certain whether they will be applied and how large they will be.

In theory, exchange rate shifts can dampen both the real impact of the tariffs and any upward pressure on US inflation, though that should rein in interest rates and bond yields, setting in motion yet more changes.

And then there are the debates about whether a one-off increase in prices actually boosts the inflation rate over time or how business switching and uncertainty douse domestic activity and global confidence and growth.

In this type of environment, rules of thumb tend to dominate. Goldman Sachs used one to suggest that sustained 25% tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico would amount to a 7 percentage-point increase in the "effective" overall US tariff rate. And that would lead to a 0.7% increase

in "core" prices in the Personal Income Expenditure basket.

What's curious is that the effective tariff increase roughly equates to the increase in the dollar index recorded since October, when polls suggested Trump was the clear favourite to win the election. The dollar's appreciation against both the peso and Canadian dollar over that period was roughly 10%.

Given all of these mind-numbing complexities, it is not hard to see why central banks have avoided taking a firm stance on the tariff question.

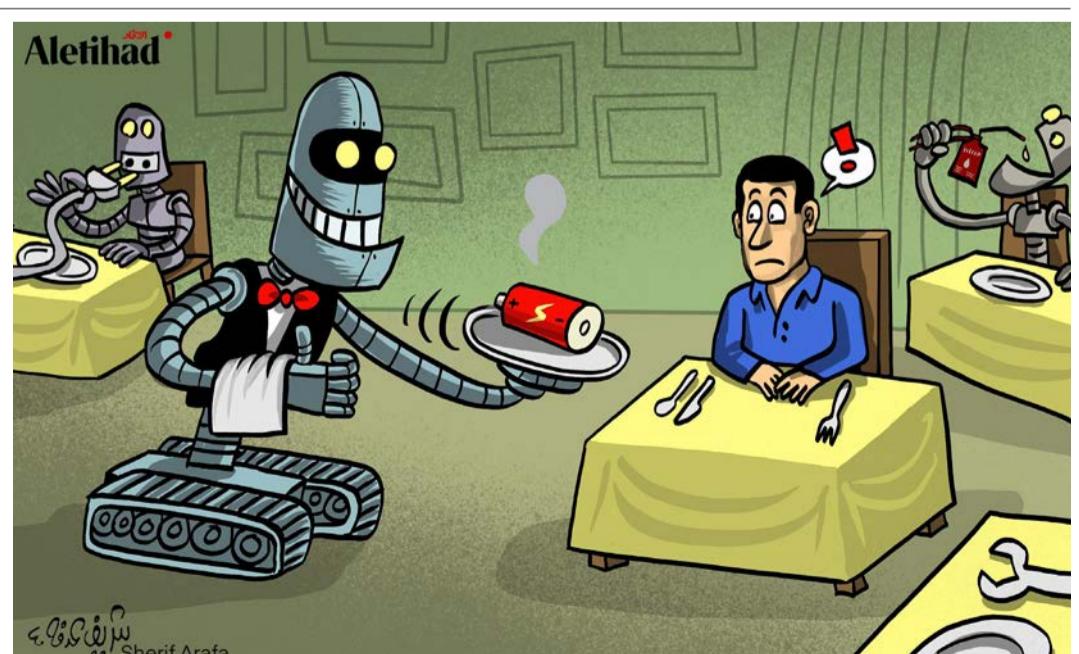
Federal Reserve officials this week have seemed intent on signalling that plans for further

easing remain intact, even if the multiple uncertainties mean there is no "hurry" right now as they assess the "totality" of Trump policies.

Meanwhile, the European Central Bank, Bank of England, Bank of Canada and Bank of Mexico all pushed ahead with interest rate cuts over the past week. BoE boss Andrew Bailey on Thursday put

it best when he said monetary policy has little impact on short-term forces influencing headline inflation, but it should also not be used to respond to factors that will fade by the time the policy actually takes effect. It is unclear what exactly Trump's tariffs are truly designed to achieve. Trump's nominee for US trade representative, Jamieson Greer, laid out his ideas this week, including "reciprocal" access to overseas markets.

But regardless of the intent, the rapid moves in the currency markets may sand down the sharper edges of any inflationary fallout - along with much the point of the tariffs in the first place.



World News

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GCC condemns Israeli statements against Saudi Arabia

Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Jassem Al-Budaiwi said these dangerous and irresponsible statements confirm the approach of the Israeli occupation forces in their lack of respect for international laws and treaties.

RIYADH (WAM)

The Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi strongly condemned and denounced, on Sunday, the statements issued by the Israeli occupation against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and their demand to establish a Palestinian state within Saudi territory.

In a press statement published by KUNA, Al-Budaiwi stated that these dangerous and irresponsible statements confirm the approach of the Israeli occupation forces in their lack of respect for international laws and treaties, as well as the sovereignty of nations.



Jassem Al-Budaiwi

He reaffirmed the firm and steadfast stance of Saudi Arabia and the GCC countries in supporting the Palestinian people in obtaining their legitimate rights, and the significant and valuable efforts exerted in regional and international forums to support the

Palestinian cause.

"These efforts focus on the necessity of a two-state solution, supporting Palestinian sovereignty over all Palestinian territories occupied since June 1967, establishing an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and ensuring the right of return for refugees, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative and international resolutions," he said.

The statement renewed the call for the international community to seriously and decisively stand against these aggressive Israeli statements, which pose a threat and danger to the security and stability of the region and the world at large.

Egypt to host emergency Arab summit on February 27

CAIRO (WAMO)

Egypt will host an emergency Arab summit on February 27 to discuss what it described as "serious" developments for the Palestinians cause, the Egyptian foreign ministry said on Sunday.

The move comes after high-level consultations with Arab leaders, including the State of Palestine, which requested the meeting, according to the statement.

The decision was taken in coordination with Bahrain, the current president of the Arab Summit, and the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, the foreign ministry noted.

Israeli military withdraws from Gaza's Netzarim Corridor: Reports

Corridor had cut off Gaza's north from south

CAIRO (REUTERS)

The Israeli military has withdrawn from an area of Gaza known as the Netzarim corridor that bisects the enclave, Gaza officials said on Sunday, a move that was expected under the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Gaza.

An Israeli security source, requesting anonymity as they were not authorised to speak publicly, confirmed the Israeli military was withdrawing from its positions in central Gaza.

Gaza officials celebrated the withdrawal as a victory and deployed their police force to the area to manage the flow of Palestinians crossing through. The Israeli military had no immediate comment.

Reuters footage showed what appeared to be Israeli military vehicles moving away from the coast and towards the Israeli border.

Since the early months of the war, Israeli forces had occupied the roughly 4 mile-long corridor south of Gaza City that stretches from the Israeli border to the Mediterranean Sea.

The corridor cut off Gaza's northern communities, including its largest metropolitan area, from the south.

Thousands of Palestinians have streamed through the corridor in recent weeks, returning to their homes in the north from southern



Displaced Palestinians cross the Netzarim corridor as they make their way to the northern parts of the Gaza Strip on Sunday (AFP)

Thousands of Palestinians return north in recent weeks

Gaza where they had sought shelter from the war.

Some who crossed over have described their shock after seeing the destruction of communities and discovering what they said were human remains in areas where Israeli forces had withdrawn.

Much of northern Gaza has be-

come a wasteland following Israel's devastating campaign. After finding their homes destroyed, some Gazans have gone back to the south, while others have set up tents where their homes once stood.

Former American soldiers employed as private contractors have been deployed to inspect vehicles passing through the corridor in recent weeks following the ceasefire agreement that was implemented on January 19 after more than 15 months of war.

Crowds of people were seen

traversing the corridor on Sunday as Gaza announced the Israeli military had withdrawn, while a long line of cars gathered, waiting to pass through.

Gaza police forces have increased their public presence since January's ceasefire, in what analysts say is an intentional message that the group has not been defeated.

More than 46,000 people have been killed by Israel's retaliatory assault, according to Palestinian health authorities, who say most of the dead are women and children.

Kremlin says cannot 'confirm or deny' Trump-Putin call

MOSCOW (AFP)

The Kremlin on Sunday declined to confirm or deny a US report of a phone call between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Washington and Moscow have not officially confirmed any communication between the leaders since Trump took office on a pledge to swiftly end the Ukraine fighting.

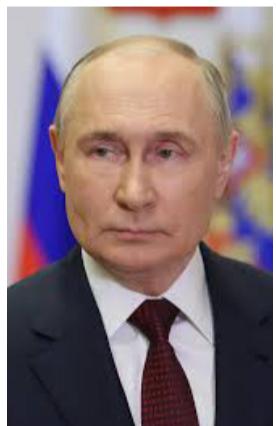
The New York Post late on Saturday reported that Trump told the publication he had spoken on the phone to Putin to discuss bringing an end to the conflict in Ukraine and the Russian President told him he "wants to see people stop dying".

The newspaper quoted Trump as saying he had "better not say" how often the leaders have spoken.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov in comments to TASS state news agency said he could not confirm or deny a conversation took place, but suggested he was unaware of any such call.

"What can I say about this news item? As the administration in Washington expands its work, many different communications arise. And these communications are held through various channels," the spokesman said.

"And of course, given



Vladimir Putin

The Kremlin has said it is awaiting "signals" on a possible meeting between Trump and Putin

these multiple communications, I personally can not know something, not be aware of something. Therefore in this case I can't either confirm or deny this."

Peskov previously several times denied reports of conversations between Trump and Putin before the US leader's return to the presidency.

The Kremlin has said it is awaiting "signals" on a possible meeting between Trump and Putin and that no-one in Trump's new administration has been in touch about setting one up.

Entertainment

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Tamaas Festival: A cultural fusion in Abu Dhabi

RAIED SHUQUM (ABU DHABI)

Abu Dhabi's vibrant cultural landscape is about to get a significant boost with the arrival of the debut of the Tamaas Festival at the NYU Abu Dhabi Arts Centre on February 13. The one-day event promises to be a captivating celebration of music and culture, bringing together a diverse array of artists from across the globe.

The festival, a first of its kind in the city, is generating considerable buzz and promises a unique experience that blends traditional and contemporary musical styles.

The Tamaas Festival is a carefully curated experience designed to showcase the power of music to transcend boundaries and connect people. The festival's name, "Tamaas", itself evokes a sense of connection and shared experience, hinting at the immersive journey awaiting attendees. The festival's mission is to create a platform for artists to share their unique musical perspectives, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and appreciation. This emphasis on cultural exchange is a key element of the festival's identity, setting it apart from more conventional music gatherings.

The Tamaas Festival features a diverse lineup of artists who will be performing on two stages. Here's the lineup:

Cimafunk (The East Plaza, 7pm-8:30pm):

Cimafunk, whose real name is Erik Iglesias Rodríguez, is a Cuban singer and bandleader known for his electrifying blend of Afro-Cuban rhythms and funk. He burst onto the scene with his debut album "Terapia" and has quickly become a global sensation. His music is a vibrant mix of traditional Cuban music, particularly son and rumba, infused with the funk and soul influences he absorbed growing up. Think James Brown meets Cuban percussion. Cimafunk's performances are high-energy affairs, with dynamic stage presence and infectious grooves that are guaranteed to get the audience dancing. He's a showman, connecting with the crowd and creating an immersive experience.

His music celebrates the rich musical heritage of Cuba while also pushing boundaries and exploring new sonic territories. He's often praised for his innovative approach and his ability to bridge cultural divides through his music.

KOKOKO! (The East Plaza, 8:45pm-10pm):

KOKOKO! is a unique electronic music group hailing from Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo. They are known for their raw, experimental, and often improvised sound, which blends traditional Congolese rhythms with electronic music and found sounds. Their instruments are often made from recycled materials, reflecting the resourcefulness and creativity of their environment. KOKOKO!'s music is a reflection of the vibrant and chaotic energy of Kinshasa. It's a sound that is both raw and



(Photo courtesy of NYUAD)

sophisticated, blending traditional instruments with electronic beats and found sounds. Their performances are often described as intense and captivating, with a raw energy that is both infectious and thought-provoking. They tell stories and share their experiences through sound.

Abosahar (The Black Box, 10pm-11pm):

Abosahar is an Egyptian artist making waves in the electro shaabi scene. Electro shaabi is a genre that blends traditional Egyptian shaabi music with elec-

tronic dance music. Abosahar's music is characterised by its pulsating beats, driving rhythms, and hypnotic melodies. He takes the raw energy of shaabi music and amplifies it with electronic production, creating a sound that is both familiar and futuristic.

His music is often played in the streets and clubs of Cairo, reflecting the energy and vibrancy of the city. Abosahar's performances are high-energy affairs, with intense rhythms and captivating stage presence. He creates an atmosphere that invites the audience to immerse themselves in the sounds of Cairo.

Aïta Mon Amour (The Black Box, 11:15pm-midnight):

Aïta Mon Amour is a project that reimagines Morocco's rich aïta poetry through a digital lens. Aïta is a traditional form

of Moroccan folk music, often performed by women. Aïta Mon Amour takes this traditional music and blends it with electronic music, creating a contemporary and innovative sound. The result is a sound that is both ancient and modern, paying homage to the rich cultural heritage of Morocco while also pushing boundaries and exploring new sonic territories. Its performances are both mesmerising and thought-provoking, inviting the audience to reflect on the power of tradition and the potential for innovation.

Attendees can expect a sonic tapestry woven from threads of world music, electronic soundscapes, traditional melodies, and experimental compositions. The festival's programme has been crafted to ensure a dynamic flow, with performances designed to complement and contrast each other, creating a rich and varied listening experience.

Beyond the music itself, the Tamaas Festival aims to create a holistic cultural experience. Organisers are keen to foster a sense of community and interaction among attendees, encouraging them to engage with the music and with each other. The festival grounds will feature dedicated spaces for socialising and networking, providing opportunities for attendees to connect with fellow music lovers and artists alike.

Louvre Abu Dhabi welcomes 1.4m+ visitors in 2024

ABU DHABI (ALETIHAD)

Louvre Abu Dhabi has recorded more than 1.4 million visitors in 2024, marking its highest attendance since its grand opening and bringing the total visitor count to more than 6 million.

According to the Abu Dhabi Media Office (ADMO), the achievement affirms the museum's dedication to creating cultural connections through world-class exhibitions, engaging educational initiatives, and immersive visitor experiences.

ences.

Reflecting its global appeal, international visitors made up 84% of total attendance. Across all visitors, both international and residents, China and Russia led with 12% each, followed by India at 7%, and France and the UK at 6%. This underscores the museum's broad reach as well as its vital role within the local community.

Saood Ab-

The achievement showcases the museum's dedication to creating cultural connections through world-class exhibitions, engaging educational initiatives, and immersive visitor experiences

dulaziz Al Hosani, Undersecretary of the Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi, said: "Louvre Abu Dhabi's record-breaking yearly attendance reflects the museum's contribution to the cultural transformation of the emirate. Through its collections, exhibitions and programming, this institution has enriched lives both in the

UAE community and around the world, revealing cultural connections and showcasing our shared humanity."

Manuel Rabaté, Director of Louvre Abu Dhabi, said: "2024 marks a defining year for the museum, truly our best yet across every aspect. As we celebrate our seventh year, we reflect on the growth and maturity we've achieved, a testament to the confidence we've built since our

opening. Our deep connection to local culture and heritage has been a driving force, as evidenced by the repeated visitation from UAE residents.

"We've not only contributed to, but also benefited from, the exceptional tourism success of the emirate. This success is reflected in the museum's ongoing evolution and the 1.4 million visitors mark achieved in 2024. It also plays a key role in paving the way for other cultural institutions to join us, further enriching and elevating Abu Dhabi's dynamic arts and cultural landscape".



Sports

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Borghini scripts history at UAE Tour Women for Team Emirates



Italian champion claims only Women's WorldTour race in the Middle East for second time with teammate Persico in second

KUUMAR SHYAM (ABU DHABI)

The third staging of the UAE Tour Women wrapped up with home glory in a one-two finish for Team ADQ's Elisa Borghini and Silvia Persico on Sunday, while European champion Lorena Wiebes took all three sprint stages on offer.

The overall win was assured for Borghini once she took the third stage atop the Jebel Hafeet mountain in Al Ain on Saturday. This was a historic second win for Borghini, having won with different teams. Her teammate Persico secured second place in the general classification after fending off attacks from Kimberley Pienaar, who chased bonus seconds in the intermediate sprint category.

The Italian took over from Persico as Team ADQ's lead rider this year, and both proved still to be the best of the lot at the finish line. A pile-up in the peloton marred the finish to the pan-flat 128km route, which began at Fatima Bint Mubarak Ladies Academy on the outskirts of Abu Dhabi and travelled through the city to finish on the waterfront.

Dutchwoman Wiebes missed out on a stage win last year here after a similar pile-up, but this



European champion Lorena Wiebes took all three sprint stages on offer to take the green jersey as points leader

time a slightly cautious approach still ensured a happy ending for the SD Worx-Protime cyclist.

"Today I lost position with about 2km to go but my team brought me back to the front," said Wiebes after picking up the green jersey as the points classification leader.

"At the end I had to find my own way and a small gap to come out. I also had to be patient and it worked. I heard a crash towards the end. I hope all the riders are okay. Coming to this race, I didn't expect to win three times so to reach 100 career victories as I now have 96, I hope it'll come before the end of this season."

It was a less eventful day for Borghini, who finished safely in the bunch, to again pick up the red jersey which she won in 2023 with Trek-Segafredo. She is the only Italian to win the race. Borghini said: "I used to rep-

resent Italy and, for the first time I am now representing two countries: Italy and the UAE. I'm proud of it because the UAE Tour Women is our home race. At the beginning of the season, the team made a clear call that we had to be fit for this race. But winning the GC plus the second place and the intermediate sprint and teams classifications, it's incredible."

In the battle for second, Borghini's compatriot Persico led out the sprint and picked the maximum three bonus seconds on the line, ahead of Pienaar and ADQ teammate Lara Gillespie.

"It shows the level we're at and how strong we rode over those four days," Borghini said. "Today we had to do the sprints with Silvia Persico to contest the second place overall."

"At the end, we wanted to set up the final sprint for Gillespie. Having the leader's jersey, it was also better to stay at the front and stay out of trouble. Starting on the right foot is always nice. It's a big booster of motivation for the coming races."

A "super happy" Persico said: "It was our first race together and I feel very good with these girls. Yesterday, I felt strong so I told Elisa that I'd ride full gas for her. For me, it's important to start the



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | Elisa Borghini (UAE Team ADQ) |
| 2 | Silvia Persico (UAE Team ADQ) +2' 06" |
| 3 | Kimberley Pienaar (Soudal) +2' 08" |

JERSEYS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Red (GC leader) – | Elisa Borghini (UAE Team ADQ) |
| Green (points leader) – | Lorena Wiebes (Team SD Worx) |
| White (young rider) – | Antonia Niedermaier (CANYON) |
| Black (intermediate sprint) – | Lara Gillespie (UAE Team ADQ) |

season with a good result."

Team Soudal's Pienaar said: "We tried [to take second overall], but UAE Team ADQ were just a better team. I'm still very happy with our achievements. It was the craziest

stage from my perspective. I had a good winter break for the 2025 season, it's a nice feeling to finish the first stage race in the top three overall. First race and first World-Tour podium is a dream result."

Sports

Aletihad

Exclusive chat with WTA Tour CEO Portia Archer

'Mubadala Abu Dhabi Open is setting a standard for young WTA500 events'

KUUMAR SHYAM (ALETIHAD)

Portia Archer has been working hard to help the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) Tour grow at a faster pace since she took over as Chief Executive Officer seven months ago. She spoke to Aletihad on the sidelines of the final of the Mubadala Abu Dhabi Open as she travels to the Middle East, a region which has been investing heavily in women's tennis among other sports. Here are some excerpts:

You have been here for a few days now. What's your take on the Mubadala Abu Dhabi Open? Oh, it's been fantastic. This is my first opportunity to visit this particular event. It's a relatively new event on the WTA calendar. They've made improvements from what I understand every year.

It's a first-rate WTA 500 event, and it's beginning to set a standard for other WTA 500 events.

What is the one differentiator here that strikes you the most compared to all other events happening around the world, especially those with fairly new experience to staging like Abu Dhabi?

Well, I think every tournament has its own sort of unique flavour and texture and characteristics. What I find interesting here and worth celebrating is that it's very distinct in its presentation. It really does showcase the flavour of the Middle East. There's art, there's music, there's history. All that is sort of woven into the fabric of the event, which I think is quite nice.

The other thing that stands out is that I think this event does an exceptional job in community engagement and development. They have the Community Cup, which engages young people and others all around the UAE.

In part, it will help create the next generation of stars from this region. It engages the community in healthy sport, healthy lifestyle, and beginning to learn more about and hopefully love tennis.



Crowd at the finals at the International Tennis Centre

I think this tournament, called Road to Mubadala Open, reaches tens of thousands of community members across the UAE. I believe they have 3,500 participants this year, which is more than double than what they had last year.

Before the WTA, you were also part of the NBA [in business development], and Abu Dhabi has been part of the recent plans for both NBA and WTA. What are your key takeaways?

This is an exciting market. There's a lot of opportunity and growth potential. The NBA obviously saw that as well with its global games being hosted here for three years now.

The Middle East has a very young population, a very social, forward, mobile-first community and population. And so that's quite attractive for many sports organisations. It's certainly attractive for tennis and for the WTA. And we embrace that opportunity, and the curiosity that the region has in sport.

The sporting kind of environment and culture is relatively new. And so it's good to be a part of kind of a new frontier, if you will.

The desert swing of tennis events in Abu Dhabi and Dubai are split by another in Doha. Could the UAE events not be held back to



Portia Archer

back for ease of logistics and also maybe save on some carbon footprint?

It's an interesting question. Every year the calendar for the Hologic WTA tour is like fitting together the pieces of a puzzle. I think if you ask the tournament operators, and if they were asked to do a back to back tournament, I don't know that they would think it's logistically easier. But there are a lot of pieces that go into developing the calendar - like a puzzle.

Part of it is the carbon footprint. Part of it is fitting together our

schedule of events that are back to back with our colleagues in the ATP, the men's tour. And so sometimes we have to sort of give and take around being able to fit all of those pieces together comfortably. At the moment, there are other sort of factors we have to layer into the calendar presents itself the way

it does. And Doha is just an hour away, right?

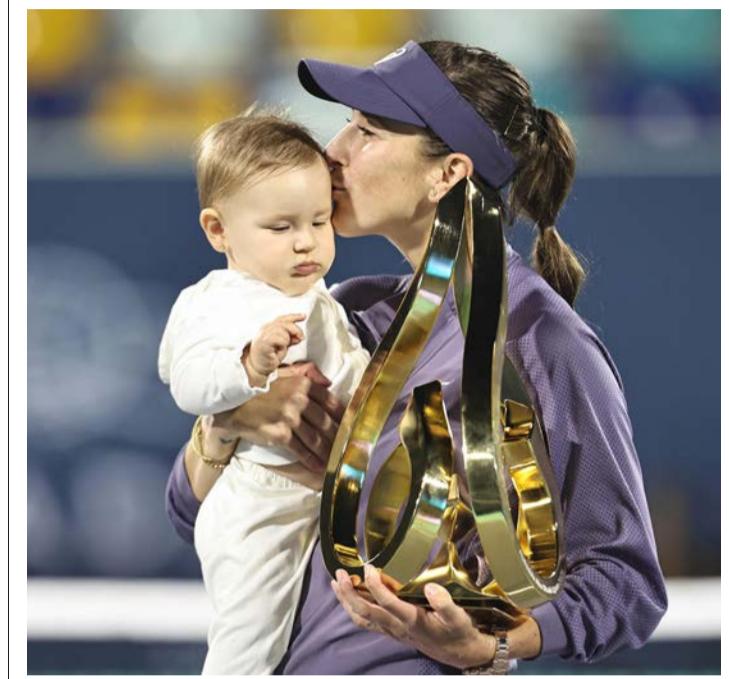
More and more players are benefiting from maternity leave rules, which have also evolved slightly more; yet some players think more needs to be done. Can you share with us the latest on that? Sure. I mean, there's always more we can do. And we are in very active conversations with our players and listen to their feedback. They have direct input into our thinking and into the outcomes.

At the same time, we're very proud of what we do offer in this area. I mean, we have benefits and services that range from special ranking for those who are out on maternity and upon their return. There are a series of kind of post-partum benefits that are available to our players.

Some include areas of physical health, but also areas of mental health to support the mothers and parents as they come back on to the tour; child care services are available.

The benefits are important and valuable to our players. There's certainly more that we can do, and we're thinking through some alternatives and options. So there'll be more on that to come as we work through the details of that. But we're proud of what we've done.

'Mini dream come true' for Bencic since motherhood



Belinda Bencic celebrates with her daughter while holding the Mubadala Abu Dhabi Open trophy (AFP)

KUUMAR SHYAM (ALETIHAD)

When Belinda Bencic took to the courts for her first match at Mubadala Abu Dhabi Open last week on a nippy afternoon, her husband Martin Kromkovic and six-month old Bella sat in the comfort of the media centre, given that the buzz around was too much for the little one even as her mom got down to work.

It was a profitable one for the family in the end as the Swiss picked up the glittering Arabic-themed trophy and the winner's cheque of \$164,000 to lend some financial security for the family.

Maybe her success story is the start of a purple patch and deserving for the efforts of the Dubai-resident player, yet the fact remains she got help from the WTA Tour with their evolving rules around maternity leave where steps have been taken to protect the player rankings of the new mothers for a certain period of time.

Bencic secured her first title since returning from a 13-month break for motherhood and her come-from-behind victory over American Ashlyn Krueger on Saturday at the Zayed Sports City has also become an inspirational win for fellow mothers such as Naomi Osaka and others.

The 2021 Tokyo Olympic gold medallist, also the winner of the inaugural Abu Dhabi Open in 2023, got back to action last October. Down

to 157 in the rankings at the start of the week, she beat the 51st-ranked Krueger 4-6, 6-1, 6-1 for her career's ninth title.

"It's tough to describe in words," Bencic said, hugging the trophy while Bella watched. "I think only we know what we went through as a family... then also having the good results on top of that... I'm incredibly grateful."

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"It's tough to describe in words," Bencic said, hugging the trophy while Bella watched. "I think only we know what we went through as a family. We are so appreciative and blessed to have Bella in our lives, and then also to be able to still do what I want to do, and then also having the good results on top of that - the emotions were just that I'm incredibly grateful, blessed and just a mini dream come true."

Bencic only managed to win 38% of her first-serve points in the opening set, but that statistic dramatically improved in the second, allowing the Swiss to carve out a 4-0 lead before forcing a decider.

Despite needing a medical timeout to treat hand blisters halfway through the final set, Bencic kept up her momentum and wrapped up the win in two hours and 23 minutes. Bencic was ranked outside the top 1,000 in November and will re-enter the top 65 when the new rankings are released on Monday.

Fazza Para Athletics Grand Prix

Emirati shot put para-athlete hopes to throw her weight well

DUBAI (ALETIHAD)

Promising Emirati para-athlete Rawdha Ghaneem is keenly waiting to make her second appearance at the Fazza Para Athletics Grand Prix in Dubai, which is marking its 16th year over the next few days.

With participation of around 400 para athletes from 52 countries, the Grand Prix is set to get under way from February 10-13 at the recently renovated Dubai Club for People of Determination grounds in Al Qusais.

Ghaneem, a trainee at the Dubai Club for People of Determination, wants to put up a good show at the Dubai 2025 Grand

Prix that will be held at her home ground next week. "I want to become one of the best in Asia," said the local resident who will compete in women's shot put F33.

"I'm so excited to compete at the Fazza Para Athletics for the second time. Hope I can get my personal best at the competition this time."

Ghaneem, who has used a wheelchair since childhood, highlighted that her desire to win medals at competitions to change the mentality of people who believe women don't do sports like shot put. "When I started doing shot put in 2020, there were many outside my family who questioned my sport - saying 'this sport is



Rawdha Ghaneem has switched from swimming to shot put and is determined to prove doubters wrong

not meant for women but only played by men'.

"I want to win medal in in-

ternational competition to end all their doubts and change the perception," said Ghaneem,

me one day."

Swimming is still close to her in a way. She admires American swimming legend Michael Phelps for a similar display of determination. "I saw him competing on TV when I was young and he really inspires me," said the promising player who aims to take up political science as a major subject in university.

At this Fazza Para Athletics Grand Prix competition, Ghaneem will be part of the hosts UAE's 64-member contingent aiming to make a mark. She will be competing alongside senior teammate Sara Al Jneibi, the Rio 2016 bronze medallist in the women's shot put F33 event.

Abu Dhabi:

A non-stop development process, an urban renaissance



Light threatens 'astronomical reserve'

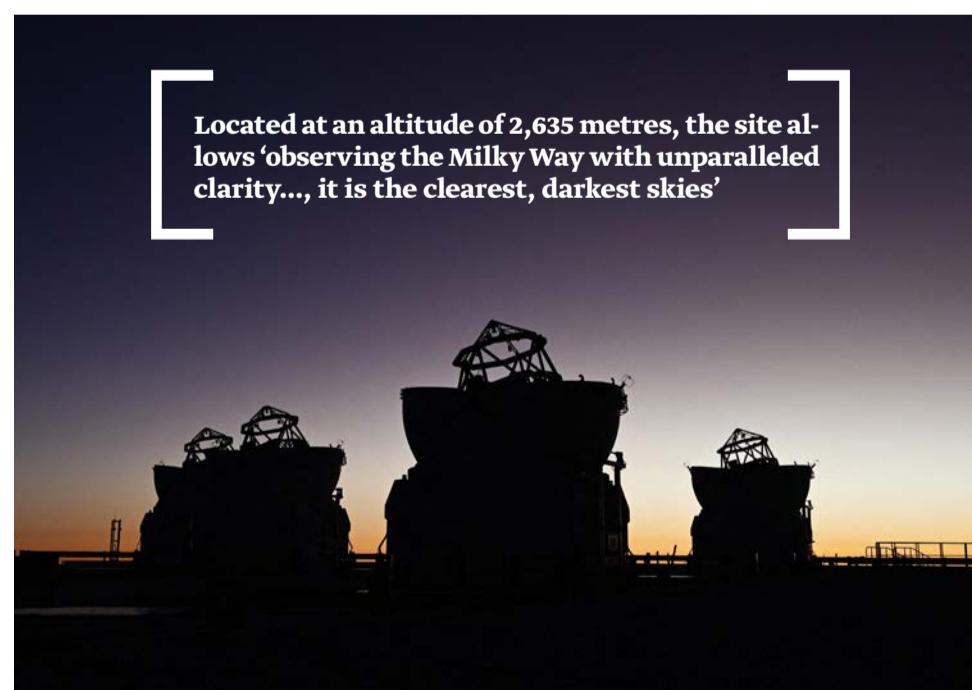
CERRO PARANAL (AFP)

Light pollution from a massive energy project is threatening the Atacama Desert, the "world's astronomical reserve", one of the purest and most star-rich in the world.

Located at an altitude of 2,635 metres, the site allows "observing the Milky Way with unparalleled clarity... it is the clearest, darkest skies", explained to AFP Itziar de Gregorio, a Spanish astronomer of the European Southern Observatory (ESO), which operates the place.

A few kilometres from this "global astronomical shrine", a clean energy plant is planned, as part of Chile's ambitious fossil fuel replacement programme by 2050. The Paranal Observatory in northern Chile could be threatened by the light pollution of a mega-energy project.

Scientists are concerned that the project will generate light pollution and warn that excessive artificial light limits the visibility of certain phenomena, such as eclipses and meteor showers.



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ABU DHABI MEDIA NETWORK

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www.masarpint.com +97144484000

Last Word

Fed officials see healthy jobs market, no rate-cut rush



Adriana Kugler
Federal Reserve Governor

'The prudent step is to hold the federal funds rate where it is for some time, given that combination of factors'

REUTERS

Federal Reserve officials said the US job market is solid and noted the lack of clarity over how President Donald Trump's policies will affect economic growth and still-elevated inflation, under-scoring their no-rush approach to interest rate cuts.

On Friday, the US Labor Department reported a 4% unemployment rate last month and the addition of 143,000 jobs, a picture "consistent with a healthy labour market that is neither weakening nor showing signs of overheating", Federal Reserve Governor Adriana Kugler said in Miami, Florida.

At the same time, she said, there is "considerable uncertainty" about the economic impact of new policy proposals, and "recent progress on inflation has been slow and uneven, and inflation remains elevated".

US inflation by the Fed's targeted measure, the 12-month change in the personal consumption expenditures price index, ticked up towards the end of last year, measuring 2.6% in December. The Fed's target is 2%.

"The prudent step is to hold the federal funds rate where it is for some time, given that combination of factors," Kugler said.

A University of Michigan survey published just ahead of her speech showed consumer expectations for inflation over the next year surged a full percentage point, to 4.3% - the highest since November 2023.

A line chart titled "Inflation expectations of US consumers" that tracks the metric over five years.

"We don't need to be in a hurry" is how Fed Chair Jerome Powell characterised the rate-path outlook last week, after the US central bank opted to hold short-term US borrowing costs steady in the 4.25%-4.50% range.

He cited disappointing progress on inflation, a strong labour market, and the need to wait for more information on what policies from the new administration will bring before responding with any rate moves.

That was before Trump announced 25% tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada at the weekend, only to put those plans on a month-long hold on Monday, while going ahead on Tuesday with 10% tariffs on Chinese goods.

Powell may provide fresh commentary on his economic and rate-path expectations when he gives the first of his twice-yearly monetary policy reports to Congress, next Tuesday and Wednesday.