

**Djokovic, Sabalenka advance in Brisbane**

Djokovic cruises past Monfils, notching 20th straight win over the Frenchman | P12

Gaza rescuers say Israeli strikes kill police chief, two dozen others

# THE DAILY tribune



Beyonce 'paid her dancers huge bonus for working Christmas Day'

Wall Street lifts spirits after Asia starts year in red



HRH Prince Salman

**HRH Prince Salman condoles with Montenegro over mass shooting**

TDT | Manama

His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, yesterday sent a cable of condolences to Montenegro Prime Minister Milojko Spajic, following a mass shooting in Cetinje that resulted in several casualties.

HRH Prince Salman extended his heartfelt condolences and sympathies to the families of the victims, as well as to the leadership and people of Montenegro.

**Labour Ministry plan underway to employ 20,000 Bahrainis annually**

H Naser

TDT | Manama

The Ministry of Labour has revealed that Bahrain's unemployment rate is 6.3% and announced its aim to employ 20,000 Bahrainis and train 10,000 job seekers annually.

This announcement was made in response to an inquiry from MP Abdulwahed Qarata.

The Ministry cited the National Plan for Labour Market Regulation (2023-2026) as the driving force behind these efforts.

This plan aims to align education with market demands, strengthen partnerships with the private sector, attract domestic and foreign investment to create more high-quality job opportunities, and enhance oversight, regulation, and labor laws.

To support job seekers, the Ministry encourages registration and offers unemployment benefits: BD150 per month for non-university graduates and BD200 for university graduates for nine months (for first-time job seekers or those with less than 12 months of work experience).

# Threats to Bahrain's marine ecosystem

Oil and Environment Ministry cracks down on shrimp smuggling and illegal fishing practices

● **Dr Bin Daina pushes for cooperation with Shura Council to strictly enforce rules**

● **Protection of marine resources a 'shared responsibility' for future generations**

Mohammed Darwish

TDT | Manama



Shrimp smuggling, unlicensed trawling and other illegal fishing practices have triggered a clampdown by the Oil and Environment Ministry, according to a letter from the Minister, His Excellency Dr Mohamed bin Mubarak Bin Daina, addressed to the Shura Council.

Dr Bin Daina detailed a raft of violations, including the illegal sale of shrimp during the closed season, fishing without permits, and the use of banned tools such as bottom trawling nets.

"These practices threaten the delicate balance of our marine ecosystem, and we are taking decisive steps to confront them," the Minister wrote.

The crackdown includes the removal of unauthorised fishing structures, with the Supreme Council for Environment covering the costs.

Electronic monitoring, introduced in collaboration with Customs Affairs, has strengthened control over marine resource imports and exports, ensuring

only lawful fishing tools and healthy seafood enter Bahrain.

**Online sales**

The Ministry is also working with the Cybercrime Directorate to stamp out online sales of prohibited fishing equipment.

"We are leaving no stone unturned to protect Bahrain's waters," Dr Bin Daina said.

Raising awareness among fishermen has been central to the Ministry's efforts.

Regular meetings have been



**These practices threaten the delicate balance of our marine ecosystem, and we are taking decisive steps to confront them**

H.E. DR MOHAMED BIN MUBARAK BIN DAINA, OIL AND ENVIRONMENT MINISTER

held to explain existing laws and encourage sustainable practices.

**Penalties**

Notices in public spaces and posts on social media have been

used to warn against illegal fishing methods and educate people on the penalties they face if caught breaking the rules.

Joint enforcement campaigns, involving the Coast Guard, Customs Affairs, and other government directorates, have targeted a range of violations, including breaches of temporary fishing bans.

The Ministry is revising penalties for offenders and preparing new rules to regulate the capture of large predators, aiming to prevent any exploitation

**Smart monitoring room**

It also plans to establish a smart monitoring room equipped with advanced systems, in partnership with the Survey and Land Registration Bureau.

Dr Bin Daina concluded his letter with a call for cooperation with the Shura Council.

"Protecting Bahrain's marine resources is a shared responsibility, and we are committed to ensuring their preservation for future generations," he said.

**Disconnection warning**

## 53 days to clear your bills or lose electricity!

● **EWA offers options to allow customers maintain service while managing finances responsibly**

TDT | Manama

Households have 53 days to pay overdue electricity bills before facing disconnection, the Electricity and Water Authority (EWA) has revealed.

The authority, responding to a parliamentary question, outlined that the countdown begins from the bill's issue date and includes reminders via text and email before power is finally cut off.

EWA also disclosed plans to restructure the electricity and water sector with a proposed law separating operational and maintenance tasks from regulation and monitoring.

This move, inspired by successful examples across the Gulf Cooperation Council, is intended to sharpen oversight,

strengthen financial accountability, and protect service quality while ensuring customers' interests.

**Structured approach**

Addressing overdue payments, the authority emphasised its structured approach.

Monthly bills clearly show outstanding balances, and customers receive reminders before further steps are taken. Disconnection comes only after extensive warnings over the 53-day grace period.

For those struggling financially, the EWA offers options, including fixed monthly payment plans and instalments for overdue amounts, ensuring customers can maintain service while managing their finances



**Monthly bills clearly show outstanding balances, and customers receive reminders before further steps are taken.**

responsibly. The authority stressed that these measures and changes are part of its broader effort to improve services and ensure consumers benefit from dependable, high-quality utilities.

With remote reading capabilities, the meters eliminate the need for manual checks, reducing the risk of errors and cutting costs for site visits.

**Protections**

EWA added that smart meters include built-in protections, such as automatic power cut-off during overloading, which prevent damage to household appliances and systems.

They also make activating or deactivating electricity accounts remarkably quick, allowing power to be switched on or off in mere minutes via the government e-services portal – a far cry from the previous system requiring forms and physical visits.

**Gulf Air supports Bahrain team in Gulf Cup final**

TDT | Manama

Gulf Air, Bahrain's national carrier, announced it will operate nine round-trip flights to Kuwait International Airport to transport fans for the Gulf Cup (Khaleeji Zain 26) final against Oman on January 4, 2025, at Jaber Al Ahmad International Stadium. Return flights are scheduled for January 5.

The initiative, coordinated with the Bahrain Olympic Committee (BOC), is supported by Gulf Air and private sponsors. Free registration was facilitated through the committee, and additional flights were arranged to meet increased demand.

Gulf Air has enhanced its capacity for these flights, improving services including cabin crew, ground staff, and airport handling to ensure smooth travel for fans.

The airline expressed appreciation to all contributors and wished Bahrain team success in securing the Gulf Cup title.



# 'Redundant, impractical'

Shura Council Committee rejects stricter expat hiring conditions for public sector

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

A proposal to impose stricter conditions on hiring expat public sector employees — including a master's degree requirement and mandatory training of Bahraini replacement — was rejected by the Shura Council's Legislative and Legal Affairs Committee, despite being approved by Parliament last October.

The proposal, scheduled for debate and vote on Sunday, aimed to prioritise Bahrainis in government jobs, called for foreign employees to hold a master's degree and have at least 10 years' experience.

It also sought to cap contracts at two years, with a single renewal allowed, contingent on approval by the Civil Service Bureau, and required that Bahraini workers be trained during the contract term.

While Parliament endorsed the plan as a way to address unemployment and strengthen the local workforce, the Shura Council committee argued that the measures were both redundant and impractical.

## Foreigners

The committee report pointed out that current laws already ensure foreigners can only be



Shura Council in session

hired if no qualified Bahraini is available.

The regulations, enshrined in Article 6 of the Executive Regulations, also require appropriate qualifications for each role, allowing flexibility based on specific needs.

Imposing a blanket requirement for a master's degree, the committee noted, would not only increase costs but could also limit the pool of candidates for specialised technical positions, such as those in cybersecurity or artificial intelligence.

## Concerns

The Civil Service Bureau shared similar concerns during discussions, highlighting the success of its current localisation strategy.

Since 2019, the number of foreign public sector employees has dropped by 23 per cent, from 7,582 to 5,800, with most still employed in essential roles in health and education.

Moreover, all heads of human resources departments in government entities under the bureau's remit are now Bahraini nationals.

## Existing framework

The bureau emphasised that these achievements show the existing framework is working as intended, prioritising Bahraini talent while addressing the limited cases where foreign expertise is necessary.

The committee also took issue with the draft law's rigid structures, which it said would hinder

the Civil Service Bureau's ability to adapt to labour market needs.

Current laws delegate procedural specifics to executive regulations, which provide the flexibility required to ensure public services run smoothly.

## Unnecessary constraints

The proposed changes, by contrast, would place unnecessary constraints on hiring practices, creating inefficiencies and increasing costs.

The government also weighed in, arguing that employment conditions are best managed through executive regulations rather than fixed legislation.

It cautioned that imposing additional restrictions could result in staffing shortages in vital sectors and disrupt service delivery, particularly in healthcare and education.

## Draft law

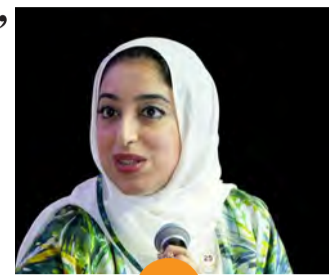
Although the committee found the draft law to be constitutionally sound, it concluded that its provisions duplicated existing policies and would create more problems than they solve.

Members noted that Bahrain's current approach aligns with employment practices in neighbouring countries, which also treat foreign hiring as an exception and rely on flexible regulations to govern the process.

## Bahrainis make up entire Tourism Ministry workforce on permanent contracts



MP Basma Mubarak  
H Naser  
TDT | Manama



H.E. FATIMA AL SAIRAFI, TOURISM MINISTER

The Ministry of Tourism has confirmed that its entire workforce consists of Bahraini nationals employed on permanent contracts.

This statement, made by Tourism Minister, Her Excellency Fatima Al Sairafi, in response to a parliamentary question from MP Basma Mubarak, highlights the ministry's commitment to Bahraini talent.

Al Sairafi emphasised the ministry's pride in and support for Bahraini capabilities, underscoring its active role in supporting national plans and initiatives aimed at developing the skills and abilities of Bahraini citizens.

The absence of any foreign employees within the Ministry, she stated, reflects a strong belief in the competence of Bahraini professionals and a commitment to providing them with opportunities to take on various roles and re-

**The absence of any foreign employees within the Ministry reflects a strong belief in the competence of Bahraini professionals and a commitment to providing them with opportunities to take on various roles and responsibilities**

H.E. FATIMA AL SAIRAFI, TOURISM MINISTER

sponsibilities. The Minister further noted that all employees are engaged on permanent contracts.

Training She also highlighted the ministry's focus on employee training, in accordance with the Civil Service Law.

"All employees participate in at least 40 hours of annual training, encompassing theoretical and practical training.

## King Hamad Leadership for Peaceful Coexistence Programme opens registration

TDT | Manama

Registration has opened for the King Hamad Leadership for Peaceful Coexistence Programme, an initiative designed to empower Bahraini youth with global leadership and cognitive skills to promote respect, coexistence, and human fraternity.

Bahraini youth interested in participating can apply via the centre's website (khgc.org.bh) between January 2-31, where further details and admission requirements are available.

The programme, led by the King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence, is part of efforts to prepare a new generation of young leaders committed to peaceful coexistence and mutual respect.

His Excellency Dr. Shaikh Abdulla bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, Minister of Transportation and Telecommunications and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence, highlighted the programme's alignment with the vision of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.

He emphasised that the initiative reflects Bahrain's commitment to being a model for dialogue and mutual understanding among religions and cultures.

The chairman noted that the programme is being implemented in collaboration with Faith in Leadership and the 1928 Institute, affiliated with Oxford University, following a Memorandum of Understanding signed last August in London.

The programme also aims to provide participants with academic training and professional tools to become ambassadors of peace, capable of addressing religious hate speech, racism, and disputes through peaceful means, he added.

Dr. Shaikh Abdulla bin Ahmed emphasised the programme's role in fostering leadership skills and enhancing global understanding.

The programme also aims to provide participants with academic training and professional tools to become ambassadors of peace, capable of addressing religious hate speech, racism, and disputes through peaceful means, he added.

Dr. Shaikh Abdulla bin Ahmed emphasised the programme's role in fostering leadership skills and enhancing global understanding.

## Police participation



The Ministry of Interior is participating in the Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority's (BTEA) Manama Retro event to highlight the history of police work in Bahrain, as part of enhancing community partnership, national belonging, and effective communication with various segments of society. The ministry's participation included a show by the Bahrain Police Parade presented by the Guard of Honour and the Police Band, which played national musical pieces. The Capital Governorate Police Directorate reviewed the stages of development of the police uniform, which emphasised the long history of the Bahraini police and its effective role in maintaining security and order over the past decades.



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# Bahrain Bay's Deep-Sea Detective: The Man Who Finds What's Lost

**Ashen Tharaka**  
(Exclusive)  
TDT | Manama

**A**bdulaziz Al Hamad, a 40-year-old PADI-certified scuba diving instructor and first aid trainer, undertakes an unusual but vital task — retrieving lost devices from the Bahrain Bay seabed.

His work combines a passion for diving, environmental stewardship, and helping others, creating a unique role that's as rewarding as it is challenging.

For Al Hamad, the motivation to retrieve lost devices goes beyond the thrill of the dive.

"It's about blending my love for diving with the joy of helping others," he explains. "Restoring valuable items and cherished memories to their owners is incredibly fulfilling. At the same time, it's an opportunity to keep the ocean clean and protect the marine environment."

## Patterns

Over time, Al Hamad has noticed clear patterns in how devices are lost in the Bahrain Bay area.

"Most occur during recreational activities like kayaking, jet skiing, or boating, where sudden movements or accidents cause items to fall into the water," he says.

Even simple actions like taking photos near the water's edge or balancing devices on unstable surfaces can lead to unintended losses.

This insight has led him to advocate for better precautions, such as using waterproof cases or securing devices with lanyards.

Equipped with specialized



Al Hamad holds a recovered phone after a successful dive in Bahrain Bay

scuba gear, Al Hamad's retrieval operations are a blend of skill and technology.

His kit includes a dive computer for precise depth tracking, underwater torches for visibility, and waterproof metal detectors for locating metallic devices.

A compass guides his navigation, while mesh bags ensure items are safely recovered without harming the marine environment.

His training as a PADI instructor is invaluable.

"Navigation, buoyancy control, and search techniques are essential," he says. "I follow methodical search patterns and stay calm under pressure, which is crucial in challenging conditions."

## Carelessness

While there's growing awareness of the risks of losing elec-



Al Hamad's thrilling underwater dive adventure (Pictures by Ashen Tharaka)



**It's about blending my love for diving with the joy of helping others. Restoring valuable items and cherished memories to their owners is incredibly fulfilling. At the same time, it's an opportunity to keep the ocean clean and protect the marine environment**

ABDULAZIZ AL HAMAD

tronic devices in water, Al Hamad observes that carelessness still persists.

"Excitement during activities like kayaking or jet skiing often overrides caution," he notes.

Education and awareness are improving, but there's still room to encourage better habits to prevent such losses.

The process of finding and retrieving devices is far from

straightforward.

It begins with gathering details about where and how an item was lost, followed by a systematic underwater search using grid or circular patterns.

However, environmental factors such as strong currents, poor visibility, and the presence of boats can make the task daunting.

"Timing is critical," Al Ham-



Recovered diamond wedding ring

ad emphasizes. "Devices have limited durability underwater, and delays can lead to further damage. Quick thinking and adaptability are essential."

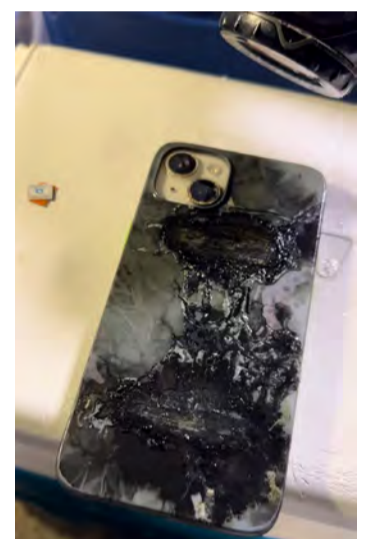
## Memorable retrievals

Among his many rescues, Al Hamad recalls two particularly memorable cases.

One involved recovering a diamond wedding ring worth \$3,000 from murky waters, bringing immense relief to the devastated owner.

In another instance, he retrieved a wallet and phone belonging to a Malaysian traveler on a tight transit schedule.

The wallet contained crucial documents and credit cards, making its recovery urgent.



Few of recovered phones

"The gratitude and relief on their faces made it all worthwhile," he reflects.

## Devices

By the end of 2024, Al Hamad estimates he has successfully recovered around 40 to 50 devices.

Each retrieval represents not only a technical achievement but also a testament to his dedication to helping others and protecting the marine environment.

For Al Hamad, diving is more than a profession — it's a mission to make a difference, one lost device at a time.

## SIU succeeds in upholding justice

From complaints to action, the body stands against violations

**H Naser**  
TDT | Manama

**T**he Special Investigation Unit (SIU) of the Bahrain Public Prosecution Office reported on its activities during the final three months of 2024.

The report, released by Mohammed Khalid Al Hazza, Acting Attorney-General and Special Investigation Unit (SIU) Chief, details significant achievements in upholding the rule of law and promoting human rights.

As per the report, the SIU received 12 complaints during this period; all alleging violations within its specialised jurisdiction.

Each complaint triggered a prompt investigation.

These investigations involved interviewing 25 complainants and witnesses, and questioning 20 suspects and individuals from the public security forces.

"Seven complainants were referred to the forensic medicine and psychological support department for further assess-



Mohammed Khalid Al Hazza

ment," the report revealed.

## Progress

Moreover, significant progress was made in several cases.

"One case, initiated by a complaint received via social media, led to the conviction of a member of the public security forces. The individual received a six-month prison sentence from the Lower Criminal Court on November 13, 2024, a sentence upheld by the Appeals Court," the report stated, adding: "In two separate cases, the SIU concluded investigations and referred two members of the public security forces to the Ministry of Interior's Military Courts for disciplinary action. This followed findings that substantiated the allegations against them. Furthermore, dis-

ciplinary actions were issued against two other members of public security forces in cases previously referred to the Military Courts."

The SIU's commitment to human rights was further demonstrated through its active participation in a significant event.

"On December 10, 2024, coinciding with International Human Rights Day and the 40th anniversary of the UN Convention against Torture, the SIU, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), hosted a discussion session titled '+Human Rights in the Bahraini Criminal Justice System - Achievements, Experiences, and Future Outlook+'. This session, attended by 60 participants from various national institutions, law enforcement agencies, and civil society organisations, focused on Bahrain's commitment to upholding international human rights standards, the evolution of national legislation, and strategies for future improvements."

## Man jailed and fined BD2,000 for forced labour

**Mohammed Darwish**  
TDT | Manama

**A**n Asian man has been sentenced to a year behind bars and fined BD2,000 for exploiting workers under harsh conditions in a forced labour case.

The Publication Prosecution revealed that the First High Criminal Court handed down the sentence, also ordering the defendant to cover the costs of returning the victim to their home country. The charges involved forcing the victim to work without pay and under gruelling conditions.

The case came to light when the Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) reported the defendant for exploiting two workers.

They endured long hours without wages, with conditions falling far below acceptable standards outlined by the law. Prosecutors interviewed the victim and a LMRA inspector.

## Court rejects foreign khul' divorce decree

**H Naser**  
TDT | Manama

**T**he Bahrain High Administrative Court rejected a woman's application to enforce a khul' divorce decree issued by a Gulf state court, citing the lack of necessary finality for enforcement within Bahrain.

The woman sought to have the divorce decree recognised, aiming to establish her legal separation from her husband and secure payment of expenses and legal fees.

She presented documentation of the divorce granted in a Gulf state court, but failed to provide sufficient evidence demonstrating the judgment's finality and the absence of appeals.

## Documentation

Despite being given ample time to comply with the court's request for this crucial documentation, she did not do so.

The court's decision clarified that enforcing foreign judgments in Bahrain requires

specific conditions.

These include ensuring Bahraini courts lack jurisdiction over the matter, while the foreign court that issued the judgment must have had proper jurisdiction according to international judicial rules.

All parties involved must have been properly notified and represented in the original case.

## Finality

Moreover, the judgment must have achieved finality under the laws of the issuing court and cannot conflict with any prior Bahraini court judgments or violate Bahraini public order or morality.

The court emphasised the absence of proof in the woman's application that the Gulf state court's judgment had reached finality under its own legal system.

Her failure to provide the requested evidence of finality, despite being given sufficient time to do so, directly resulted in the dismissal of her case.

# Pushing arts and culture forward

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

Bahrain has stepped up efforts to champion its arts and literature, with the Ministry of Information unveiling a range of projects and initiatives designed to place local creativity in the spotlight.

Working closely with the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities (BACA), the ministry is pulling out all the stops to celebrate the kingdom's rich heritage while encouraging modern artistic expressions.

In its response to Deputy Speaker MP Abdulla Salman, the ministry revealed plans for regular television and radio broadcasts that offer Bahraini writers, artists, and thinkers a platform to share their stories.

These interactive programmes aim to connect the public with the island's creative voices, giving a glimpse into their journeys and achievements.

Cultural events remain a cornerstone of the ministry's agenda.

## Media coverage

Festivals, exhibitions, and artistic gatherings such as "Mu-



H.E. Ramzan Al Nuaimi, Information Minister

harraq Nights", the "Spring of Culture" Festival, and the "Music Festival" are given wide media coverage to reach both local and global audiences.

Events spearheaded by the BACA also receive comprehensive exposure.

Adding to this, the Gulf Radio and Television Festival, held every two years, has become a focal point for media and artistic talents across the region.

Organised in collaboration with the Gulf Radio and Television Organisation, the festival offers a stage for showcasing new works and exchanging ideas.

## Artistic heritage

Beyond the borders, Bah-



MP Abdulla Salman, Deputy Speaker

rain Cultural Days has helped spread awareness of the kingdom's artistic heritage.

The ministry has backed these efforts with documentaries and television features that delve into Bahrain's literary and artistic traditions, preserving them for future generations while shining a light on its cultural treasures.

The ministry's drive to support talent includes the Media Talent Award, launched in 2023.

## Public speaking

The first year focused on public speaking, with the following year turning attention to acting.

In 2024, Al Dana Drama

Award made waves as the first Arab prize recognising drama productions from Bahraini and Gulf creators, attracting widespread attention across the region.

Homegrown productions are further supported by the Creative Content Competition, which backs drama, cinema, songs, and plays.

## Short stories

Meanwhile, the "We Write in Arabic" scheme, run in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Bahrain Islamic Bank, and the Bahrain Writers and Authors Association, encourages schoolchildren to craft short stories in Arabic, promoting a love for their native language.

The ministry has also joined forces with organisations such as the Bahrain Theatrical Society, Bahrain Cinema Club, and Bahrain Writers Association to keep Bahrain's artistic pulse alive.

Campaigns to promote the kingdom's cultural landmarks, from Bahrain Fort and the Bahrain National Museum to the UNESCO-listed Pearling Path, have been launched, ensuring these treasures are celebrated both locally and abroad.

## Majority of private sector workforce aged 30 to 39

### Employment and wage growth trends Continue

TDT | Manama

A recent statistical report has revealed that the majority of employees in Bahrain's private sector are aged between 30 and 39 years, with approximately 216,000 individuals falling within this age group.

This figure represents a significant portion of the total workforce, which exceeds 560,000 workers.

According to data published on the "Employment Skills" platform, there are over 3,000 employees under the age of 20 in the private sector, alongside more than 9,700 workers in their sixties.

### Age

The breakdown of employees by age is as follows: among those under 20, there are 2,712 males and 337 females.

For the 20-29 age bracket, the numbers rise to 109,617 males and 24,272 females.

The 30-39 age group constitutes the largest segment, with 182,329 male employees and 33,603 female employees.

### Females

Additionally, the report indicates that there are 126,920 male employees aged 40-49 and 16,566 females in the same age range.

For the 50-59 age group, there are 48,574 males and 5,561 females.

Notably, among those over 60 years, there are 8,875 male employees and 924 female employees.

According to a report by Labour Fund, Tamkeen, Bahrain's private sector experienced a 2% annual growth in the total number of employees in the third quarter of 2023, bringing the total to 567,411.

This marks a continuous upward trend since the second quarter of 2020.

### Women

Additionally, the representation of women in the private sector has increased by 2.5%, compared to a 1.5% increase for men.

For the first time, the total number of registered Bahraini workers in the private sector has surpassed 100,000, reaching 101,321 in the third quarter of 2023.

The average wages for Bahraini in the private sector also rose by 4% year-on-year during this period.

The manufacturing sector recorded the highest wage growth, followed by the mining and quarrying sectors, and then the accommodation and food services sector.

### Economy

The financial and insurance activities sector plays a crucial role in Bahrain's economy, contributing 18% to the real GDP, while the manufacturing sector accounts for 14% in the third quarter of 2023.

These sectors are characterized by high productivity levels and the highest average wages for Bahraini workers.

This comprehensive demographic analysis of Bahrain's private sector workforce underscores the ongoing trends in employment, wage growth, and the increasing participation of women, reflecting a dynamic labour market that continues to evolve.

## Northern Municipal Council approves new park

### Al Budaiya Park development plan deferred

TDT | Manama

The Northern Municipal Council held its last session in 2024, addressing several key proposals concerning the development of green spaces and public facilities.

The council approved the construction of a new park in Block 1204, Hamad Town, a proposal championed by Jasim Mohamed Hejris, representative of the eighth constituency.

Hejris emphasised the critical



The council meeting in progress

need for additional green spaces in the area, particularly for children and the elderly, highlighting the current shortage of such amenities.

He noted that the land des-

ignated for the park is already owned by the Northern Municipality.

The council also addressed a proposal from Mohamed Al Doseri, representative of the

third constituency, regarding the development of Al Budaiya Park in Block 555, Al Budaiya area.

However, this proposal faced opposition from the Deputy Chairperson, Zaina Jasim, and Zainab Al Derazi, representative of the 12th constituency.

They cited a previous letter indicating the park's inclusion in the 2025 budget, arguing that a new proposal was unnecessary.

Instead, they requested a letter be sent to the Undersecretary of Municipalities confirming the project's inclusion in the 2025 plans, referencing a previous letter from 2021 estimating the project cost at BD12,000.

## PBCS holds gala night and oath-taking ceremony

TDT | Manama

A total of 146 participants attended a gala night and oath-taking ceremony for the newly elected officers of the Philippine Bahrain Caregiver Society (PBCS), recently held at The Diplomat Radisson Blu Hotel in Manama.

The momentous occasion marked the notable transition to the organization's new leadership while paying tribute to the invaluable contributions of Filipino caregivers in Bahrain.

The event was honored by the presence of Her Excellency Anne Jalandon-Louis, the Philippine Ambassador to the



H.E. Philippine Ambassador Anne Jalandon-Louis with the newly appointed Bahrain Caregiver Society officers

Kingdom of Bahrain, as the guest of honor.

### Dedication

Ambassador Louis officiated the oath-taking ceremony for the newly appointed of-

ficers during the event kicking off their term and reinforcing their dedication to promoting the mission and values of PBCS.

The new set of officers of PBCS who took their oath: President, Maria F. Perez; Vice Pres-

ident, Mary Rose Rodriguez; Secretary, Joy Sacabon; Treasurer, Fleur Dubouzet; Assistant Treasurer, Mary Joy Remoroza. Public Relations Officers (PRO) are Jacqueline Natinga and Jessie John C. Roscain.

## Shakhura Park set to reopen in 30 days after renovation



H Naser  
TDT | Manama

Shakhura Park, located in Block 481 of the Shakhura area, is scheduled to reopen to the public within 30 days, according to Northern Municipal Council representative for the fifth constituency in the Northern Governorate, Tariq Al Farsani.

He told The Daily Tribune that renovation work is progressing rapidly to meet this deadline.

The upgrades, which benefit all residents of the fifth constituency, include a complete repainting of the park, replacement of restrooms, and a full refurbishment of the existing sports facilities.

This encompasses the football, basketball, and volleyball courts.

### Improvements

Al Farsani highlighted additional improvements, stating, "We will also be installing shade structures over the chil-

dren's playgrounds to protect them from the sun and allow them to play during the morning hours. This is part of our ongoing efforts to provide play spaces for all children in the district, encouraging a culture of physical activity and participation in various sports."

Furthermore, the park's lighting will be powered by solar energy, reflecting Bahrain's commitment to renewable energy.

### Renewable energy

Al Farsani explained, "We have prioritised this approach in line with the Kingdom's efforts to adopt renewable energy and achieve carbon neutrality."

He thanked the Minister of Municipalities Affairs, H.E. Eng. Wael Mubarak; the Undersecretary of Municipalities Affairs, Eng. Shaikh Mohammed bin Ahmed Al Khalifa; and the Director General of the Northern Municipality, Eng. Lamia Al Fadala, for their support.

# Wall Street lifts spirits after Asia starts year in red

● **Oil prices jumped on hopes of rebounding demand.**

AFP | London, United Kingdom

Wall Street made a positive start to the year Monday, shrugging off falls in Asia as investors await planned tariffs from US president-elect Donald Trump, adding to China's economic struggles.

Midway through 2025's first session, while the Dow was just 0.2% in the green the tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite Index had added around 0.6%.

That was despite EV maker Tesla, facing rising electric vehicle competition in China and other major markets, slipping around 5% after posting its first annual drop in electric vehicle deliveries.

"The stock market ended 2024 with a whimper, but it is poised to begin 2025 with a bang," Briefing.com's Patrick



Pedestrians walk past an electronic board showing the closing numbers on the Tokyo Stock Exchange, along a street in central Tokyo

## Key figures around 1650 GMT

New York - Dow:	▲ 0.2% at 42,617.28 points
New York - S&P 500:	▲ 0.4% at 5,902.14
Nasdaq Composite:	▲ 0.6% at 19,406.76
London - FTSE 100:	▲ 1.0% at 8,260.09 (close)
Paris - CAC 40:	▲ 0.2% at 7,393.76 (close)
Frankfurt - DAX:	▲ 0.6% at 20,024.66 (close)
Tokyo - Nikkei 225: closed	
Hang Seng Index:	▼ 2.2% at 19,623.32 (close)
Shanghai - Composite:	▼ 2.7% at 3,262.56 (close)
Euro/dollar:	▼ at \$1.0247 from \$1.0360 on Tuesday
Pound/dollar:	▼ at \$1.2368 from \$1.2520
Dollar/yen:	▲ at 157.63 yen from 157.32 yen
Euro/pound:	▲ at 82.87 at 82.74 pence
Brent North Sea Crude:	▲ 2.4% at \$76.40 per barrel
West Texas Intermediate:	▲ 2.6% at \$73.58 per barrel

O'Hare wrote in a note before markets opened on Wall Street.

Axel Rudolph, senior analyst with IG, saw European indices as "being dragged higher by their US counterparts", helping lift Paris, currently mired in political uncertainty, to a positive finish.

London, bolstered by rising commodity shares to offset banks going in the opposite direction, closed with a 1% gain, while Frankfurt ended 0.6 up.

The euro fell to its lowest level against the dollar since November 2022 while sterling lost similar ground to an eight-month low on weak UK factory data.

Oil prices jumped on hopes of rebounding demand.

"January can be a testing time for markets and that's already proved the case as investors fret about the impact of Donald Trump's trade policies," said Russ Mould, investment direc-

tor at AJ Bell.

"Technology and industrial stocks were among the areas worst hit, dragged down by weak Chinese manufacturing data and the fact Trump will be back in power in just over a fortnight.

"Tariffs are expected to be at the top of the new president's agenda and China is expected to be the biggest loser," Mould added.

The Hong Kong and Shanghai stock markets had set a negative tone earlier, slumping more than 2% by day end.

Tokyo was closed.

While the US Federal Reserve is seen cutting interest rates less than forecast this year, the European Central Bank is expected to keep reducing amid weakness for Europe's biggest economy Germany.

"Optimism about the strength of the mighty US economy remains buoyant for 2025," Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at Hargreaves Lansdown, said Thursday.

"Already growth has kept outpacing forecasts as consumers and companies have shrugged off the impact of high interest rates."

Following a largely successful 2024 for equity markets, as inflation reduced further and investors scooped up technology stocks, sentiment soured towards the end of the year.

Nevertheless, Wall Street's Dow index ended the year up around 13%, while the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq -- which have more tech stocks -- climbed more than 23% and around 29% respectively on the artificial intelligence boom.

Frankfurt's DAX added almost 20%, as did Japan's Nikkei. The FTSE 100 gained nearly six%, but France's CAC 40 was the outlier with a drop of 2.2%.

## Tesla reports lower 2024 auto deliveries, missing forecast



AFP | New York, United States

Tesla reported a dip in full-year auto sales Thursday, missing a company forecast in a sign of rising electric vehicle competition in China and other major markets.

Elon Musk's EV company reported 495,570 fourth-quarter deliveries, taking the full-year total to just under 1.8 million vehicles.

This was about 1.1 percent less than the 2023 sales, even as Tesla said in October that it expected a "slight growth" in vehicle deliveries for the year.

The figure caps a mixed 2024 for Tesla, a year in which Musk dove full-on into US electoral politics.

He helped to deliver the presidency to Republican Donald Trump through massive contributions and the amplification of anti-immigrant and other Trump rhetoric on Musk's X platform, the former Twitter.

Tesla's fourth-quarter sales rose from those in the prior-year period, but the increase was not enough to pre-

vent a full-year decline from 2023.

Tesla has called the current period of moderating sales reflective of its position "between two major growth waves," with the next period of volume increases due to advances in autonomy and the introduction of new vehicle products.

While 2024 saw an increase in road presence of Tesla's futuristic Cybertruck, the company has faced pressure to roll out other new vehicles.

A heavily-touted October launch event in Los Angeles showing off Tesla's autonomous robotaxi vehicles received mostly lackluster reviews.

Tesla has also faced increased competitive pressure from other auto producers, especially in China, which is home to electric car maker BYD.

BYD reported a surge in 2024 sales earlier Thursday.

Shares of Tesla fell 4.3 percent in early trading. But the electric vehicle maker is up more than 55 percent since the November US election.



The New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) is over 230 years old, having been founded in 1792 under a buttonwood tree on Wall Street. The agreement that started it all, the Buttonwood Agreement, was signed by 24 stockbrokers and merchants. They agreed to trade securities on a commission basis, laying the groundwork for what would become the largest stock exchange in the world.

## Moscow, Kyiv end Russian gas transit to Europe via Ukraine

AFP | Kyiv, Ukraine

Russia's gas transit to Europe via Ukraine stopped on Wednesday, Moscow and Kyiv said, ending a decades-long arrangement and marking the latest casualty of the war between the neighbours.

Russian gas has been supplied to Europe via pipelines crossing Ukraine since the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 in an arrangement that earned revenues for Moscow from the gas and for Kyiv from the transit fees.

The latest transit contract expired on Wednesday with Ukraine opting not to extend the deal following Russia's 2022 invasion.

Russian gas accounted for less than 10 percent of the European Union's gas imports in 2023 -- down from more than 40 percent before the war.

But some EU members, mostly in the east, still depend heavily on Russian gas for geographical and political reasons.

"We have stopped the transit of Russian gas," Ukraine's Energy Minister German Galushchenko said in a statement, calling it "a historical event."

"Russia is losing its markets, it will suffer financial losses,"



A view of pipelines at the Bilche-Volytsko-Uherske underground gas storage facility, the largest in Europe, not far from the village of Bilche village, in the Lviv region of western Ukraine

he added

Russia's Gazprom energy giant said in a separate statement that "Russian gas has not been supplied for transit via Ukraine since 8:00 am (0500 GMT)".

It said it had lost the "technical and legal right" to ship its gas across Ukraine to Europe.

European natural gas prices climbed above 50 euros (\$51.78) per megawatt hour for the first time in over a year on Tuesday as buyers in Eastern Europe

braced for the halt in supplies.

EU and NATO members Hungary and Slovakia have maintained close ties with the Kremlin despite the invasion.

The halt in Russian gas transit through Ukraine will force some countries to dip deeper into their reserves and seek to import more liquefied natural gas (LNG).

But Hungary is set to be largely unaffected by the move, as it receives most of its Russian gas

via the Black Sea pipeline, an alternative route that bypasses Ukraine by running via Turkey and up through the Balkans.

Brussels has downplayed the impact the loss of Russian gas supply will have on the 27-member bloc.

"The Commission has been working for more than a year specifically on preparing for a scenario without Russian gas transiting via Ukraine," it told AFP on Tuesday.

## Oil spill from Russian tankers spreads



Representative picture

AFP | Moscow, Russia

Oil that leaked from two stricken tankers off the Russian coast has been detected on more beaches on the annexed peninsula of Crimea, Russian authorities said, as volunteers mount a massive environmental cleanup operation.

Two ageing Russian tankers -- the Volgoneft-212 and the Volgoneft-239 -- were hit last month by a storm in the Kerch Strait, which links the Azov and Black Seas between Moscow-annexed Crimea and the southern Krasnodar region.

They were carrying 9,200 tonnes of heavy fuel oil, around 40 percent of which may have spilled into the sea, in what President Vladimir Putin called an "ecological disaster."

"Two sites of oil product pollution were detected in Crimea," Russia's emergency

situations ministry said Thursday.

They were near the beach in the city of Kerch and further south near the Tobechytske lake.

Almost 73,000 tonnes of contaminated sand has been removed from dozens of kilometres of beaches on the Russian coast since the spill, the ministry said Thursday.

Some 200,000 tonnes of sand and soil could have been contaminated in total, officials have said.

The regional headquarters overseeing the cleanup published images of volunteers in white suits scooping contaminated sand off beaches with shovels, including in the popular resort city of Anapa.

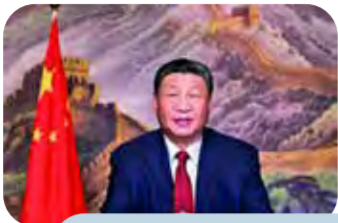
It said Thursday that 2,100 birds had been rescued so far.

Russian scientists last month criticised the cleanup, saying volunteers did not have the right equipment.



News in brief

◆ Last year was China's hottest on record and the past four years were its warmest ever, its weather agency said this week. China is the leading emitter, in total volume, of the greenhouse gases driving global heating. It aims to ensure carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions peak by 2030 and be brought to net zero by 2060. The average national temperature for 2024 was 10.92 degrees Celsius (51.66 Fahrenheit) -- 1.03C. It was "the warmest year since the start of full records in 1961", the China Meteorological Administration said on its news site late on Wednesday. "The top four warmest years ever were the past four years, with all top 10 warmest years since 1961 occurring in the 21st century," it added. In 2024, China logged its hottest month in the history of observation in July, as well as the hottest August and the warmest autumn on record. The United Nations said in a year-end message on Monday that 2024 was set to be the hottest year ever recorded worldwide. Other countries also recorded temperature records in 2024.



China says 2024 was its hottest year on record

◆ China sanctioned 10 US defence firms yesterday over arms sales to Taiwan, its second round of measures against American companies over the issue in less than a week. Subsidiaries of Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, and Raytheon that had "participated in selling arms to Taiwan" were added to China's "Unreliable Entities List", the country's Ministry of Commerce announced Thursday. They will be prohibited from import and export activities or making new investments in China, while their senior managers will be banned from entering the country, the ministry said. Last Friday China announced sanctions on seven US military-industrial companies, including Boeing subsidiary Insitu, also over US military assistance to Taiwan.

◆ Syria's education minister yesterday sought to minimise curriculum changes announced this week by the new Islamist-led authorities, after activists denounced them as "extremist" and potentially harmful to religious minorities. The amendments were announced Wednesday on the Facebook page of the interim leadership's education ministry, a little under a month since forces led by Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham toppled longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad. The changes include scrapping poetry relating to women and love and references to "Gods" in ancient history courses, and interpreting a Quranic verse about those who had angered God and strayed as referring to "Jews and Nasara", a derogatory term for Christians. The national anthem has also been removed from textbooks, with the ministry describing it as "the (Assad) regime's anthem".

Syria minister defends school curriculum changes after uproar



SPOTLIGHT

Secret lab developing UK's first quantum clock: defence ministry



AFP | London, United Kingdom

A top-secret lab in the UK is developing the country's first quantum clock to help the British military boost intelligence and reconnaissance operations, the defence ministry said yesterday. The clock is so precise that it will lose less than one second over billions of years, "allowing scientists to measure time at an unprecedented scale," the ministry said in a statement.

"The trialling of this emerging, groundbreaking technology could not only strengthen our operational capability, but also drive progress in industry, bolster our science sector and support high-skilled jobs," Minister for Defence Procurement Maria Eagle said. The groundbreaking technology by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory will reduce reliance on GPS technology, which "can be disrupted and blocked by adversaries," the ministry added. It is not a world first, as the University of Colorado at Boulder developed a quantum clock 15 years ago with the US National Institute of Standards and Technology. But it is "the first device of its kind to be built in the UK," the statement said, adding it could be deployed by the military "in the next five years". A quantum clock uses quantum mechanics -- the physics of matter and energy at the atomic and subatomic scale -- to keep time with unprecedented accuracy by measuring energy fluctuations within atoms. Accurate timekeeping is crucial for satellite navigation systems, mobile telephones and digital TV, among other applications, and may open new frontiers in research fields such as quantum science.

# Gaza rescuers say Israeli strikes kill police chief, two dozen others

AFP | Palestinian Territories

Israel struck a declared humanitarian zone in southern Gaza overnight, which rescuers yesterday said killed the head of the Palestinian territory's Hamas-run police force, his deputy and nine others.

Gaza's civil defence agency said two other Israeli strikes elsewhere in the territory later on Thursday killed 14 Palestinians. The Israeli military confirmed it had carried out the overnight strike on the area of Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, which it said targeted deputy police chief Hussam Shahwan over his alleged role in planning attacks against Israeli troops.

The civil defence agency said Shahwan was among 11 people killed in the strike, which according to the rescuers and authorities in Gaza also left the commander of the police force, Mahmud Salah, dead.

"Eleven people were martyred, including three children and two women, and 15 were injured after the (Israeli) occupation aircraft bombed a tent housing displaced people in the Al-Mawasi area, west of Khan Yunis city in the southern Gaza Strip," said a civil defence statement. Mahmud Bassal, spokesman for



A man mourns the death of displaced Palestinians killed in an overnight Israeli strike on a makeshift displacement camp in Mawasi Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip, in the yard of the Nasser hospital.

the agency, said the two senior police officers were among the dead. The Israeli military, which has not commented on Salah's death, said his deputy Shahwan "was responsible for developing intelligence assessments in coordination with... Hamas's military wing" in attacks on Israeli forces in Gaza. Philippe Lazzarini, chief of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, said that the strike on the Al-Mawasi humanitarian area showed that there was no place safe in Gaza. "Another remainder that there is no humanitarian zone let alone a 'safe zone'," Lazzarini posted on X. "Enough misleading and killing of civilians." Ambulance driver Saleem Abu

Subha said rescuers "found the injured lying on the ground, most of them children, as well as two female martyrs" at the site of the strike. "About 10 tents were damaged, and scattered fires were visible," he said.

The territory's Hamas-run interior ministry condemned in a statement the killing of the two top officers, saying "they were performing their humanitarian and national duty in serving our people".

It accused Israel of spreading "chaos" and deepening "the human suffering" in Gaza with the deadly strike.

"The police force is a civil protection force that works to provide services to citizens," the ministry statement said.

Hamas meanwhile stated that the strike was a continuation of what it described as Israel's "genocidal war against defenceless civilians".

Nearly 15 months of war, triggered by Hamas's unprecedented October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, have devastated the besieged Gaza Strip's infrastructure and institutions, with aid agencies warning of the breakdown of social order.

The interior ministry said Salah spent 30 years in the force and

## Palestinian Authority suspends Al Jazeera broadcasts

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories

The Palestinian Authority has ordered the suspension of broadcasts by Al Jazeera in a move the Qatar-based television network condemned on Thursday as reminiscent of Israeli practices.

Al Jazeera is already banned from broadcasting from Israel amid a long-running feud with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

On Thursday, the PA insisted its own suspension order was "temporary", adding its decision followed a complaint from the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate about the network's coverage.

"These measures shall be applied until Al Jazeera chooses to act in accordance with basic media ethics, including its duty to prevent deliberate disinformation, ban the glorification of violence and end the incitement to armed mutiny," the PA said. The syndicate, which repre-



A man photographs the closed door of the Doha-based Al-Jazeera TV channel in the occupied-West Bank city of Ramallah

sents about 3,000 Palestinian journalists, said several had filed complaints against Al Jazeera for "biased media coverage on its platforms, including incitement, misleading reports and content that stirs internal discord".

The suspension order involves "temporarily freezing the work of all journalists, employees, crews and affiliated channels until their legal status is rectified," official news agency Wafa reported.

was appointed police chief six years ago.

## Tesla Cybertruck explodes outside Trump hotel in Las Vegas, killing one

AFP | Los Angeles, United States

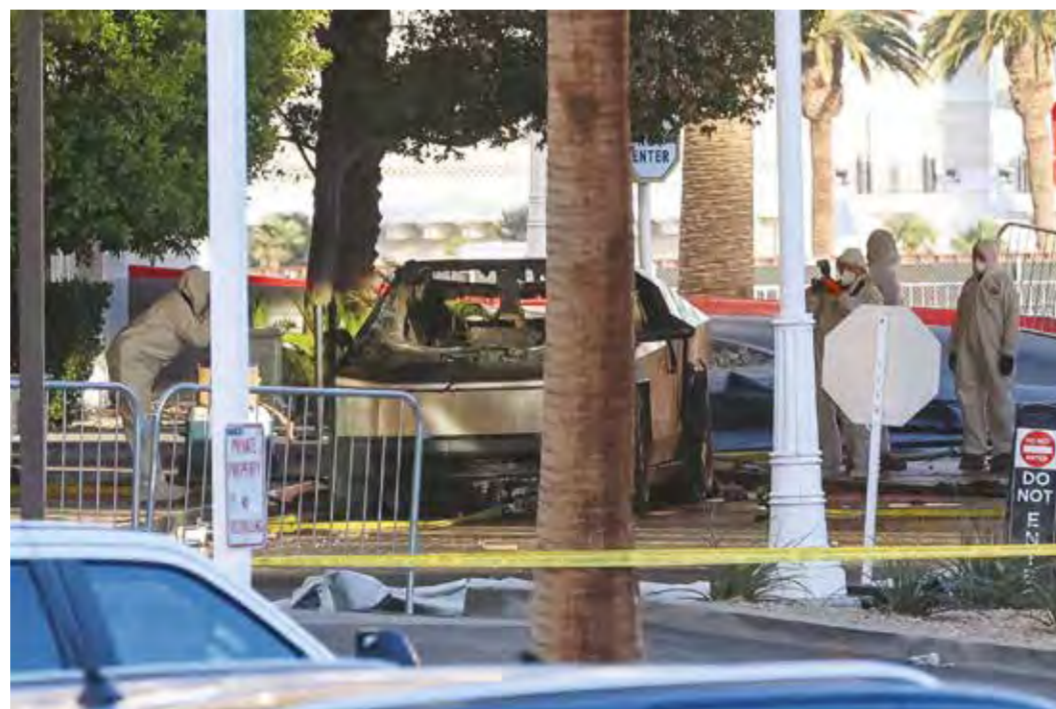
A Tesla Cybertruck exploded outside a hotel belonging to US President-elect Donald Trump in Las Vegas, killing at least one person and wounding seven, police said Wednesday.

US President Joe Biden said authorities were investigating any links between the Las Vegas explosion and an attack earlier Wednesday in New Orleans, where a truck plowed into a crowd of New Year's revelers, killing at least 15.

However, Biden cautioned that no such links had yet been found. The FBI and local law enforcement said they believed the Tesla blast was an isolated incident, but they were investigating whether it was an "act of terrorism".

The electric vehicle -- made by the company owned by Trump backer Elon Musk -- pulled up to the Trump International Hotel's glass entrance before a "large explosion," Las Vegas Sheriff Kevin McMahon told reporters.

Video footage shows the stainless steel truck parked at the hotel entrance before bursting into flames, followed by smaller explosions that appeared similar to fireworks. McMahon said there was "one



Investigators photograph a Tesla Cybertruck that exploded outside the lobby of President-elect Donald Trump's hotel

deceased individual inside the Cybertruck," while seven people received "minor" injuries. He said the hotel had been evacuated.

He told a later news conference that the back of the truck contained gasoline and camping fuel canisters, as well as "large firework mortars." McMahon also said the fact that it was a Cybertruck "really

limited the damage... because it had most of the blast go up through the truck and out," noting that the glass doors of the hotel, just a few feet away, "were not even broken by that blast."

Biden said authorities were probing "any possible connection with the attack in New Orleans." "Thus far, there's nothing to

## Hunting festival



Members of the 'Ekum Baba' light up the streets of Banjul ahead of the annual hunting festival in Banjul, Gambia. Rooted in tradition, this vibrant celebration marks the New Year with music, dancing, and a fierce yet friendly competition between hunting societies for the title of the best display of animal heads, masks and costumes.

## FBI probes 'terrorist' links in New Orleans truck-ramming that killed 15



Members of the National Guard monitor a blocked off section of the French Quarter, after at least 15 people were killed during an attack early in the morning

New Orleans, United States

US authorities were investigating Thursday after an army veteran with an Islamic State flag who was "hellbent" on carnage steered a pickup truck into a crowd of New Year's revelers in New Orleans, killing at least 15 people and wounding dozens.

The FBI identified the attacker as Shamsud-Din Jabbar, a 42-year-old US citizen from Texas. He appeared to have been a real estate agent working in Houston and had served as an IT specialist in the military.

Officials said they were searching for accomplices but gave few details.

Police Superintendent Anne Kirkpatrick described Jabbar as a "terrorist," and the FBI said "an ISIS flag was located in the vehicle," using another name

for the Islamic State jihadist group.

"It was just scary, I cried my eyes out honestly," tourist Ethan Ayersman, 20, told AFP in New Orleans.

He was among the masses visiting the colorful southern US city for New Year's celebrations and said he had enjoyed popular Bourbon Street -- where the deadly assault later unfolded -- into the early hours.

Later on, Ayersman said his brother woke him up after hearing gunshots and a car speeding.

From the window of their nearby rental, they could see "some of the bodies that were being lined up," Ayersman said.

US President Joe Biden, describing the attack as "despicable," said Jabbar had posted videos online hours before "indicating that he was inspired by ISIS."

## India clears toxic waste 40 years after Bhopal gas disaster



Some 3,500 people were killed in the immediate aftermath of the chemical leak in 1984

New Delhi, India

Indian authorities moved hundreds of tonnes of hazardous waste remaining more than 40 years after the world's deadliest industrial disaster struck the city of Bhopal, media reported Thursday.

Communities have for decades blamed a high level of sicknesses on contamination of the groundwater in the wake of the highly toxic gas leak from the Union Carbide factory in December 1984.

Some 3,500 people were killed in the immediate aftermath of the chemical leak on the night of December 2, 1984, and up to 25,000 are estimated to have died overall.

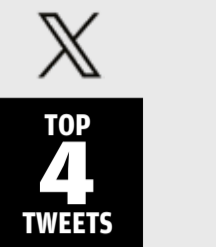
Around a dozen trucks began carrying the 337 tonnes of waste -- sealed inside containers and with a police escort--

in a slow convoy to the disposal site some 225 kilometres (140 miles) away at Pithampur late Wednesday night, the Press Trust of India news agency reported.

"The convoy has been fortified with the highest security protocol ever witnessed in the movement of industrial waste in the country," said state gas relief and rehabilitation department director Swatantra Kumar Singh, the Times of India reported.

Singh said that the waste will "undergo scientific disposal" through incineration.

In 1984, 27 tonnes of methyl isocyanate (MIC), used in the production of pesticides, swept through the city of over two million people after one of the tanks storing the deadly chemical shattered its concrete casing.



01



Together, we can make 2025 a new beginning. Not as a world divided. But as nations united.

@antonioiguterres

02



We strongly condemn the cowardly terrorist attack in New Orleans. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families. May they find strength and solace as they heal from this tragedy.

@narendramodi

03



In the UK, serious crimes such as rape require the Crown Prosecution Service's approval for the police to charge suspects. Who was the head of the CPS when rape gangs were allowed to exploit young girls without facing justice? Keir Starmer, 2008 -2013

@elonmusk

04



My new year message for 2025: Peace is the best medicine!

@DrTredos

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

# celebs

## Tara Fitzgerald would love Game of Thrones return



Tara Fitzgerald  
Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Tara Fitzgerald would love to return to 'Game of Thrones'.

The 57-year-old actress feels "blessed" to have portrayed Selyse Baratheon in the HBO fantasy drama - which ran for eight series until 2019 - but is disappointed that the suicide of her alter ego in season five would likely mean no possibility of a comeback if the show ever returned.

Asked if she'd like to return to the 'Game of Thrones' world, she exclusively told BANG Showbiz: "Oh god, of course yeah! That was something that I was really blessed to have been a part of that show.

"I love that show. I really love the show. So, of course. I'm sure any of the other actors would say 'yes'.

## Britney Spears teases huge business plans for 2025

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Britney Spears is set to launch her jewellery collection in 2025.

The 43-year-old pop superstar announced plans earlier this year to create the B Tiny brand, and on Saturday morning, she took to Instagram once again to tease what she has planned for next year.

She wrote on Instagram: "Obviously I have been showing spin offs of the collection B Tiny!!!! My collection is set to come sometime next year!!! We added belly rings to it yesterday!!! Ideas and inspiration!!!!"

The 'Toxic' hitmak-



Britney Spears

er has taken inspiration from some bracelets that she found in Mexico but joked that those ones were

too expensive for what they actually were.

She said: "These tiny exquisite bracelets were found in a deep hidden treasure spot in Mexico!!! So freaking cool!!! Psss I had to share because they inspired me but GEEZ they were like 400 dollars for each one!!! I was like .... It's a string."

Britney - who regained control of her multimillion-dollar fortune and various aspects of her life when a conservatorship that had been governed by her family was terminated in 2021 - shot to fame in the late 1990s with '...Baby One More Time' and went on to release a further nine albums but hasn't released a new record since 'Glory' in 2016 and recently admitted thwarted rumours of a musical comeback.

She wrote on Instagram: "Just so we're clear most of the news is trash!!! They keep saying I'm turning to random people to do a new album ... I will never return to the music industry!!!"

## Gwen Stefani 'celebrates' being a mom

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Gwen Stefani loves to "celebrate" being a mom at Christmas.

The No Doubt front-woman - who has Kingston, 18, Zuma, 16, and 10-year-old Apollo with ex-husband Gavin Rossdale and is now married to Blake Shelton - admitted her brood adore the festive season and they all enjoy being at home together.

She recently told Britain's HELLO! magazine: "Having a family and being a mom is something I always dreamed of, and Christmas is all part of celebrating that.

"My kids are so nostalgic and excited about Christmas, it's our favourite time of year."

The 'Don't Speak' hitmaker's household particularly love to craft some sweet treats.



Gwen Stefani

She explained: "We're always trying to create traditions, just as my parents did for us when I was a kid.

One of them is making Christmas marshmallow wreaths. Blake really loves those - they're addictive."

The 55-year-old star recently reflected on how her life was in "complete turmoil" before she started dating Blake, who she met when they both worked on 'The Voice'.

She told People magazine: "We had just met, and it was chaos. Both of our lives were in complete turmoil, all over the ground. Nothing could save us at that point.

"There was a point

## Ariana Grande would have ended up 'in an insane asylum' without Wicked prep

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Ariana Grande thinks she'd have "ended up in an insane asylum" if she hadn't done so much preparation for 'Wicked'.

The 'Thank U, Next' hitmaker portrays Glinda in the two-part adaptation of the beloved musical and she was determined to win the role on merit by pushing herself to the limit.

She recently told Britain's HELLO! Magazine: "There were so many reasons why I wanted to do this but I wanted to earn it.

"Vocally it's very different to what I usually sing, so I started training every single day with my vocal coach and my acting coach.



and paused everything else - I really wanted it.

"I do think, though, if it hadn't happened I might have ended up in an insane asylum. It's a very different experience than anything else, for sure."

The 31-year-old star felt an "immediate safety" when she met co-star Cynthia Erivo, who plays Elphaba, for the first time and their bond helped them both throughout filming.

Recalling their first meeting, she said: "We were at her house. We talked about everything and giggled.

"I felt an immediate safety. And we made a pact to take care of each other.

"I was s\*\*\*\*\* my pants. "But she's the warmest human being.

"That promise that we made to each other and how we kept it is one of the things we're proudest of.

"We have a lot of strange, similar, traumas and pains that we've been through.

Ariana Grande

## Beyoncé 'paid her dancers huge bonus for working Christmas Day'

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Beyoncé reportedly paid her dancers a huge bonus for working Christmas Day.

The singer, 43, performed for 13 minutes on the field at NRG Stadium in her hometown of Houston on 25 December at the halfway point of the Ravens clash against the Texans, alongside guests Shaboozey, Post Malone and her 12-year-old daughter Blue Ivy.

And The Sun has reported the performer forked out "double" rates on her dancers as a thank you for working with her on Netflix's NFL Christmas Day broadcast.

A source said: "Beyoncé paid her staff bonuses for working on Christmas Day. "The show was a big business deal and had to happen on Christmas Day so she paid her staff and dancers double pay to make it happen.

"She is also planning to bring some of her old dancers back

into the mix for her next tour."

The show was dubbed the 'Beyoncé Bowl' and was streamed live on Netflix and produced by the singer's Parkwood Entertainment company.

It saw her sport a white cowboy hat and chaps and sing hits from her country album 'Cowboy Carter', which included her number one song 'Texas Hold 'Em'.

Beyoncé - who has an estimated net worth of \$600 million - was reportedly



Beyoncé

paid \$20 million for her half-time performance during Netflix's NFL Christmas Day NFL broadcast.

DailyMail.com said the figure came partly from social media deals, with "several people" claiming the huge sum was also part of a larger contract between Beyoncé and Netflix.

The Mail added it has been reported the singer inked a three-project deal with the streaming giant in 2019, which is now two-thirds done.

### SUDOKU

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			5			3		
		1	3		2			5
5	2							
	8	6				1	3	
							4	2
4		6		3	8			
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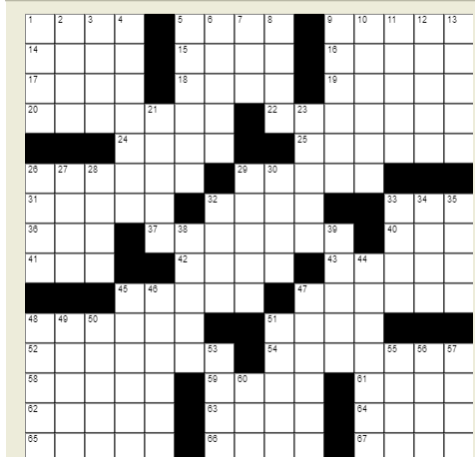
#### Yesterday's solution

5	3	8	9	2	6	1	7	4
4	2	6	5	7	1	8	9	3
7	1	9	4	3	8	2	6	5
6	5	1	7	8	4	9	3	2
3	4	2	6	9	5	7	1	8
8	9	7	3	1	2	5	4	6
2	7	4	1	5	3	6	8	9
9	8	3	2	6	7	4	5	1
1	6	5	8	4	9	3	2	7

#### How to play

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

### CROSSWORD



#### Across

1- Summer shirts; 5- Base times height; 9- Parlor game; 14- Seniors' org.; 15- James of 'The Godfather'; 16- Skip; 17- Bruins' sch.; 18- Moreno of 'West Side Story'; 19- Vixen's master; 20- Vacuum bottle; 22- Tornado; 24- Red flower; 25- Actually existing; 26- Conductors' rods; 29- Windows predecessor; 31- there yet?; 32- First class; 33- Musical ability; 36- Ich bin Berliner; 37- Shouting; 40- Grande; 41- Tafari (Haile Selassie); 42- Work up lather; 43- Harper sitcom; 45- Late bloomer?; 47- Roman general; 48- Sewing instrument; 51- Molten flow; 52- Peeved; 54- Whenever; 58- Grocery, e.g.; 59- He loved Lucy; 61- Novelist Bagnold; 62- City on the Rhine; 63- Traditional prayer ending; 64- Punjabi princess; 65- Minimum; 66- Days of; 67- Bad mood;

#### Down

1- Lacking play; 2- "From \_\_\_ according to his abilities..."; 3- Author \_\_\_ Stanley Gardner; 4- Songbird; 5- Beyond; 6- Elevate; 7- Chow down; 8- Med school subj.; 9- Gambling house; 10- Humbles; 11- Leases; 12- Palm fruits; 13- Blank look; 21- Medium of exchange; 23- Broaden; 26- Boxer Max; 27- Silks solo; 28- Sawbucks; 29- Tooth; 30- Quick cut; 32- Tropical plant; 33- Archer of myth; 34- Opera set in Egypt; 35- Laugh heartily; 38- First name in cosmetics; 39- Sauce; 44- Radiators; 45- Idolizes; 46- Most cunning; 47- Like a dog; 48- Twangy, as a voice; 49- \_\_\_ nous; 50- Name on a bomber; 51- Modern surgical tool; 53- WWII event; 55- \_\_\_ instant; 56- Short skirt; 57- Prepare for publication; 60- Funnyman Philips;

#### Yesterday's solution

A	P	P	A	L	I	O	V	H	A	R	A
M	O	O	S	E	L	G	O	D	O	S	E
F	O	S	S	I	L	I	Z	E	E	L	A
M	R	T	S	E	E	S	R	E	M	I	T
D	E	S	E	R	T	A	S	T	A		
A	R	O	M	A	S	L	E	T	T	E	R
S	O	L	O	H	O	N	P	A	P	A	
S	E	S	S	I	O	N	S	E	E	M	E
C	O	P	E	T	O	E	E	P	E	E	
S	P	A	I	N	T	O	E	S			
P	L	A	T	E	W	A	S	P	R	E	A
E	A	T	E	N	R	E	A	S	O	N	I
A	T	T	I	C	E	R	R	T	A	S	T
S	E	I	N	E	N	O	S	O	B	E	S







## Nkosi Ndebele's new year resolution has only one item: Regain the BRAVE CF Bantamweight title

TDT | Manama

Nkosi Ndebele is heading into 2025 with one goal: regaining the BRAVE Combat Federation Bantamweight title.

Nkosi, the first fully home-grown World Champion in BRAVE Combat Federation, lost his title in the main event of BRAVE CF 91 in Bahrain, where he was outclassed by fellow African Nicholas Hwende. Hwende claimed a decision victory after five gruelling rounds, and Ndebele is now looking for revenge.

Interestingly, this is not Nkosi's first high-profile title rivalry in BRAVE Combat Federation. Before facing Hwende, he engaged in a trilogy with Jose 'Shorty' Torres, which featured three title fights across three



Nkosi Ndebele celebrates his win

continents.

In the first fight at BRAVE CF 73 in Colombia, Nkosi suffered a decision loss. However,

the South African rebounded strongly, capturing the title at BRAVE CF 80 in Bahrain and successfully defending it at BRAVE

CF 82 in Mauritius.

No stranger to overcoming setbacks, Nkosi is now focused on doing the same against Nicholas Hwende as he prepares for a strong year in 2025. Training out of SOMA Fight Club in Bali, Nkosi has spent his entire professional MMA career in BRAVE Combat Federation and is a product of the visionary IMMAF-BRAVE CF Amateur pathway.

To date, Nkosi has competed 11 times in the organization, earning eight wins, with five coming by stoppage. The loss to Hwende snapped a two-fight winning streak, but with renewed motivation to reclaim the title, Nkosi plans to make a bold statement when he returns to the BRAVE CF cage in 2025.

## Perera's 46-ball ton gives Sri Lanka consolation T20 win over New Zealand



Sri Lanka's Kusal Perera plays a shot

AFP | Nelson

**Kusal Perera became the first Sri Lanka batter to cross 2000 T20I runs**

Kusal Perera cracked a career-best 101 off just 46 balls as Sri Lanka secured a consolation seven-run victory in the third and final Twenty20 match against New Zealand in Nelson yesterday.

Sri Lanka posted 218-5 in their 20 overs and New Zealand replied with 211-7.

New Zealand had already wrapped up the series after winning the first two games by eight and 45 runs respectively when the Sri Lankan middle order failed to fire.

But Perera was determined to show there was fight in the visitors as he plundered four sixes and 13 fours to register the fastest century by a Sri Lankan in T20 internationals.

He was helped by being dropped on 15 and 60 before he was caught at point by Rachin Ravindra off Daryl Mitchell in the penultimate over.

He was also shaken by the first ball he faced from Zak

Foulkes which was edged towards third man.

"It was a wake-up call so I had to back myself and try to execute my normal game," Perera said.

"The coach had said 'once you get a start you have to finish the game', so that's why I was trying to do my best."

Sri Lanka captain Charith Asalanka said he always felt his side were capable of beating New Zealand despite the first two losses.

"It's a good win for us. Throughout the series we have played good cricket but couldn't manage to get a win and finally we got it," he said.

Perera featured in partnerships of 41 with Avishka Fernando (17) and then 100 with Asalanka, who hammered 46 off just 24 deliveries with five sixes and one four.

## Australia axe Marsh, call-up Webster for fifth India Test

AFP | Sydney

Out-of-form all-rounder Mitch Marsh was axed yesterday from Australia's team for the series-deciding fifth Test against India in Sydney with Beau Webster to make his debut.

Fast bowler Mitchell Starc retained his place for Friday's match despite carrying a rib niggle and will line up in the attack alongside Pat Cummins, Scott Boland and Nathan Lyon.

"Mitcho obviously hasn't quite got the runs or wickets he would have liked this series and felt like it was time for a freshen up," said skipper Cummins.

"Beau's been with the squad and been



Australian bowler Scott Boland (C), Mitch Marsh (L) and Marnus Labuschagne (R) celebrate a wicket

great.

"It's a shame for Mitcho because we know how much he brings to the team, but we feel like now is a good time for Beau to get a chance."

Marsh's position had been under intense scrutiny after a poor series with bat and ball and his axing could potentially herald the end of the 33-year-old's Test career.

After making his debut in 2014, he struggled to cement his place in the team and with the emergence of Cameron Green had been on the red-ball sidelines in recent years. He returned to the Test side when Green was ruled out of the series following surgery on his spine.

Cummins said Marsh, who remains a key figure for Australia in the white-ball game, took the news well.

"He was totally understanding. I think his words were, 'I'm not necessarily blind-sided.'"

# Club World Cup sparks EPL concerns

Premier League chief fears Club World Cup's impact on Manchester City and Chelsea

● Club World Cup final on July 13, EPL starts August 16—4 weeks apart

● Players' unions demand 3-week rest period; conflict arises

● Leagues and unions are unhappy with FIFA's decisions

AFP | London

Premier League chief executive Richard Masters fears this year's Club World Cup could create "great difficulty" for Manchester City and Chelsea ahead of next season's English top-flight campaign.

The two clubs will be England's representatives in FIFA's expanded 32-team event in the United States, with players' unions threatening legal action on welfare grounds and national leagues unhappy about the potential knock-on effects on their own competitions.

The Club World Cup final is due to be played on July 13, with the 2025/26 Premier League season starting on August 16.

"The leagues and the players' unions are not happy with the decisions that are being taken



Chelsea's Enzo Fernandez (L) fights for the ball with Manchester City's Rico Lewis (R) (file photo)

at a global level," Masters told Sky Sports.

"We've seen the Club World Cup come in, and obviously that is going to have an impact on the Premier League.

"If either Manchester City or Chelsea get to the final of that competition, the Premier League starts four weeks later, and all players are supposed to have three weeks off as part of the contractual commitment.

"So how does that work? With great difficulty I would say."

**'Premier League is not a pension fund'**

Masters, meanwhile, insisted English football is "not on a financial precipice" as he reiterated the Premier League's concerns about the potential impact of an independent regulator on the game.

The Premier League spent

more than £45 million (\$56 million) in legal costs during the 2023/24 season as it attempted to uphold its rules amid challenges from clubs.

And there will have been additional and significant legal fees this season for the Premier League given their major disciplinary case against Manchester City is still ongoing.

The reigning champions were charged in 2023 with more than

“The leagues and the players' unions are not happy with the decisions that are being taken at a global level. We've seen the Club World Cup come in, and obviously that is going to have an impact on the Premier League”

RICHARD MASTERS

100 alleged breaches of the Premier League's financial rules.

An independent commission heard the case between September and December, with an outcome now pending.

City have also challenged the legality of the league's associated party transaction (APT) regulations, which seek to ensure deals done with organisations linked to a club's ownership are at a fair market value.

Both the current and former British government's aim in supporting an independent regulator is to safeguard the financial sustainability of clubs in the top five tiers of English football.

Masters, however, insisted too many regulations could damage the excitement on which the Premier League thrives.

"We have that jeopardy, we have that constant fizz of com-

**YOU KNOW WHAT**

If either Manchester City or Chelsea reach the Club World Cup final, their players will have significantly less than the contractually obligated three weeks off before the Premier League season starts

elling entertainment," he said.

"There are many different reasons (for the Premier League's global popularity) but that, I think, is what separates us from others."

He added: "We have always been pro investment within measured risks. The Premier League is not a pension fund, it is a place where capital is put at risk. There is no certainty of outcome -- that is one of the things that makes it interesting.

"We do worry that a new regulatory function might be risk-averse and might inhibit clubs' ability to invest. And the ability to invest is key to competitive balance, and that jeopardy that I'm talking about."

# Strong field set to compete in Bahrain Turf Series 2025 opener

TDT | Manama

Excitement builds as the Rashid Equestrian and Horseracing Club (REHC) hosts the second round of the 2025 Bahrain Turf Series today.

The event, held as part of the Club's 11th race of the season, features top horses, owners, and trainers from around the world.

The Bahrain Turf Series has elevated the Kingdom of Bahrain's profile in global equestrian sports, attracting high-ranked international horses, trainers, and jockeys.

It also enhances the development of local racing organised by the REHC.

The Series features 12 rounds held across separate racing evenings, with



Action from a previous event

two rounds per evening during the racing season.

The first round of the Series took place on Friday, 20 December 2024, during which the Bahraini horse Swift Asset won the first round, and the Irish horse Snellen claimed victory in the second round.

The Series rounds will continue until the final round in March 2025.

The 11th race will feature eight rounds, including the third and fourth rounds of the Series.

The third round, competing for Al Dana Cup over 2,000 metres, includes 16 strong entries from local and international stables: Locander, Bond's Boy, Merlin's Beard, Majestic, Bleak, Gulgarm, Killybeg's Warrior, Lion of War,

Signalman, Snellen, Mr Alan, Elwasme, Box to Box, West Suffolk, Vegas Jack, and Soldier's Empire.

The fourth round, Al Riffa Cup (sponsored by BBK), is a 1,200-metre sprint for Handicap (Imported) horses, featuring 18 contenders: Get It, Deep Intrigue, Jubilee Walk, Salvuccio, Mehmento, Thunder Moor, Inveigle, Jehangeer, The Parent, Nomadic Empire, Rocket Rodney, Spangled Mac, Grand City Hall, Wallbank, Squealer, Desert Cop, Kiwano, and Roman Dragon.

The Bahrain Turf Series continues to solidify the Kingdom of Bahrain's position on the global horseracing map while enhancing the local equestrian season.

# Swiatek battles back to take Poland into United Cup semis

AFP | Perth

Battling Iga Swiatek took Poland into a United Cup semi-final against Kazakhstan as last year's runners-up beat Britain in the mixed-team tournament yesterday.

The five-time Grand Slam champion and world number two Swiatek fought back to beat Katie Boulter 6-7 (4/7), 6-1, 6-4 and give Poland an unassailable 2-0 lead in the quarter-final in Sydney.

With the Australian Open just over a week away, Swiatek has now won all three of her singles matches at the United Cup to



launch her season.

"I am just exhausted," Swiatek, who required a medical timeout in the de-

ciding set and had strapping on one thigh, said after prevailing in just under three hours.

"This match was crazy, so many changes in momentum." A relieved Swiatek added: "I took four pain killers, a lot hurt, but happy we won."

It was a first-ever meeting between Swiatek and Boulter, who is ranked 24 in the world, but they did practise together before the United Cup.

Swiatek, at her first event since news broke in late November that she served a one-month ban for a doping violation, roared back in the second set after Boulter won a tight first.

**I took four pain killers, a lot hurt, but happy we won**

IGA SWIATEK

The former number one Swiatek took a medical timeout at 2-1 down in the final set as the duo went toe-to-toe in a tense encounter.

Swiatek, 23, finally wrapped it up on first match point when Boulter fired into the net, before running over to the rest of the Poland team court-side.

Before that, the 16th-ranked Hubert Hurkacz, who has not been at his best to start the season and has a new coach, defeated Billy Harris 7-6 (7/3), 7-5 in the men's singles.

The victory against a player ranked 109 places below him gave Poland one foot in the last four.

# Jesus hopes his goals can help end Arsenal title drought

AFP | London

Gabriel Jesus is determined to keep scoring as Arsenal look to end their more than 20-year wait for a Premier League title.

Jesus was on target again during a 3-1 comeback win away to Brentford on Wednesday, the Brazil striker scoring his sixth goal in four games.

It was all a far cry from a previously woeful run of just one goal in 33 appearances for the 27-year-old Brazilian, a four-time Premier League winner with now struggling

champions Manchester City.

Arsenal, who last won the English title in 2004, will have the chance to cut table-toppers Liverpool's lead to just three points when they travel to Brighton on Saturday -- the day before

Arne Slot's side face Manchester United at Anfield.

Liverpool also have a game in hand on the Gunners.

"I just want to keep winning and scoring and helping the team, the club, to be there always fighting for the title," Jesus told TNT Sports. Gabriel Jesus



# Djokovic, Sabalenka advance in Brisbane

● Djokovic cruises past Monfils, notching 20th straight win over the Frenchman

● Sabalenka beats Putintseva, eyes third consecutive Australian Open title

● Rising star Mirra Andreeva dismantles Noskova in straight sets

AFP | Brisbane

Novak Djokovic and Aryna Sabalenka were in ominous form ahead of the Australian Open as both powered into the Brisbane International quarter-finals yesterday.

On a day when rising stars the Mirra Andreeva and Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard underlined their potential, Djokovic cruised past fellow veteran Gael Monfils 6-3, 6-3 in 72 minutes.

In the women's draw, world number one Sabalenka -- who is aiming to win the Australian

**We've been playing a long time, I've known Gael since I was 15 and he was 16. I've had a good score against him over the years but we've had some incredible battles on different surfaces. Hopefully we can play some more before we both retire**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

an Open for the third time in a row -- beat Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva 7-6 (7/2), 6-4.

Djokovic and Monfils played Novak Djokovic



an entertaining match, but the 37-year-old Serb was always in control as he notched his 20th straight win over

the Frenchman. Former world number one Djokovic plays giant American Reilly Opelka in the last eight.

"We've been playing a long time, I've known Gael since I was 15 and he was 16," said Djokovic, who is pursuing a record 25th Grand Slam singles title when the Australian Open begins on January 12.

"I've had a good score against him over the years but we've had some incredible battles on different surfaces.

"Hopefully we can play some more before we both retire."

The 17-year-old Russian Andreeva demolished Linda Noskova 6-3,

6-0 in the women's draw while Mpetshi Perricard downed fourth-seeded American Frances Tiafoe 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) to reach the quarter-finals.

A year after losing to the same player at the season-opening event, Andreeva displayed her improvement over 2024 with a 63-minute romp over the Czech Republic's Noskova.

The teenager faces Ons Jabeur of Tunisia next. "Last year she (Noskova) almost killed me in the quarter-finals so I was thinking it's time to take my revenge," Andreeva said.

The Russian started the year ranked 16th in the world and is tipped by many to challenge for a Grand Slam in 2025.

"My number one goal for the 2025 season is to crack the top 10," said Andreeva, who is coached by former Wimbledon champion Conchita

Martinez. The towering Mpetshi Perricard, 21, who beat Australian Nick Kyrgios in an entertaining round-one clash, again served superbly to defeat US Open semi-finalist Tiafoe.

After serving 36 aces in his three-set win over Kyrgios, the Frenchman sent down another 20 against the more experienced Tiafoe.

Mpetshi Perricard plays the 19-year-old Czech Jakub Mensik.

"It was a good match, not very easy to play against Francis," Mpetshi Perricard said.

"The first set was very tight on serve but I managed to put some pressure on his second serve and it worked." Aryna Sabalenka

