

**Star trio set for Bahrain Championship**

Rasmus Hojgaard, Pablo Larrazabal and Romain Langasque latest players confirmed for Kingdom's DP World Tour event | P11

WORLD 6 Israel launches deadly Gaza strikes



Britney Spears won't return to music

8 CELEB

BUSINESS 5 European, US stocks creep higher

**Teenage boy gone missing, father pleads for help**



Abdullah  
TDT | Manama

An appeal for help has gone out from the family of a teenage boy who went missing yesterday in Isa town.

The 14-year-old had gone missing since the Dhuhr prayer yesterday, and his worried father, Mohammed Huwash Namlah, reached out to our sister newspaper Al Ayam to share his plea for assistance.

According to Mr Namlah, his son Abdullah had accompanied his younger brother to perform prayers at the Abu Bakr Al Siddiq Mosque in Isa Town. However, after the prayer, Abdullah mysteriously vanished, leaving his family deeply concerned for his safety and well-being.

Describing his son's appearance, the distraught father mentioned that Abdullah was last seen wearing a blue T-shirt.

While his younger sibling safely returned home at noon, Abdullah remains unaccounted for despite exhaustive search efforts conducted thus far.

The Namlah family resides in Hamad Town, and they promptly filed a report with the local police station in Isa Town.

Mr Namlah implores anyone with information regarding his son's whereabouts to come forward and contact him directly at the provided phone number: 35563605.

# 'A modern classic'

## Formula 1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix 2024 to mark Kingdom's landmark 20th anniversary in top flight

TDT | Manama

Bahrain International Circuit (BIC) officially launched yesterday the exciting lead-up to the Formula 1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix 2024—an historic occasion set to celebrate the Kingdom of Bahrain's landmark 20th anniversary in F1.

Fantastic plans for the highly anticipated motorsport and entertainment spectacle, scheduled to take place 29 February to 2 March, include a campaign commemorating "20 Years of a Modern Classic", three days of non-stop racing, and loads of family fun and entertainment.

Details of the grand prix weekend were announced last night at the official public launch event, organised by BIC at The Avenues Bahrain.

Speaking at the launch were Minister of Tourism Fatima bint Jaffer Al Sairafi, BIC Chief Executive Shaikh Salman bin Isa Al Khalifa, and Gulf Air Chief Executive Captain Waleed Al Alawi.

F1 CEO Stefano Domenicali and McLaren F1 Team superstar Lando Norris also delivered video messages at the event, which was hosted by legendary F1



Tourism Minister Fatima bint Jaffer Al Sairafi speaks during yesterday's launch event

mentator David Croft along with local media personality Imran Al Aradi.

**'Extraordinary'**

Tourism Minister praised F1's incredible impact on Bahrain's tourism sector. "Since 2004, our presence on the global sports tourism map has been solidified, backing initiatives to make Bahrain a preferred destination for sports tourism in the Middle East and beyond," she said.

"The hosting of the Formula 1 event aligns with the objectives of Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030.

"The impact of F1 on our tourism sector is nothing short of extraordinary. In 2022, we saw a remarkable attendance of

98,000 on all race days and 35,000 on the day of the race alone. In 2023, these numbers soared even higher, reaching 99,500 on total race days and 36,000 on the race day itself.

"Such grand events in Bahrain not only offer a firsthand experience of the Formula 1 race but also create an immersive environment for visitors to witness the spectacular success.

"Beyond the adrenaline-pumping excitement, these events are a golden opportunity to showcase the seamless integration and continuous development of Bahrain's tourism sector. The array of tourist attractions, coupled with world-class facilities, reflects the nation's commitment to providing an unforgettable experience for visitors.

"At the Ministry of Tourism, Formula 1 holds a special place in our priorities as one of the most important international tourism and entertainment events in Bahrain. This year, we've meticulously planned and coordinated with all stakeholders to accommodate the growing popularity of motorsports locally, regionally, and globally."

**20 years of F1**

Meanwhile, Shaikh Salman explained the inspiration behind the slogan for this year's grand prix: "20 Years of a Modern Classic". The BIC chief commented: "The idea of a modern classic is to reflect the fact that we are a modern circuit but have had the chance to create 20 years of history in the Middle East, which we are really proud of."

Such grand events in Bahrain not only offer a firsthand experience of the Formula 1 race but also create an immersive environment for visitors to witness the spectacular success



220 fils (includes VAT)



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**LIFE UNPLUGGED**

# Abu Dhabi: Where Culture Cools You Down in Winter

Forget frosty landscapes and cozy fireplaces - this winter, find your warmth in the heart of Abu Dhabi!

A recent press trip hosted by the Department of Culture and Tourism-Abu Dhabi proved that the emirate's "Can't Wait to Winter" campaign isn't just a slogan, it's a sensory explosion.

My journey began with a pulse-quickening drive through the newly minted Abu Dhabi International Airport. My chatty cab driver, Ali, couldn't contain his excitement as he recapped the recent National Day festivities, his words bubbling with pride and patriotism. This infectious energy set the tone for a trip brimming with cultural immersion and modern marvels.

**Palaces Past and Present**

First on the docket was Qasr Al Watan, a presidential palace that transcended mere architecture. It was a monument to Arabian heritage, intricately woven with history and purpose. Every chamber whispered tales of past rulers, while the library showcased the legacy of Arab thinkers in fields from astronomy to art.

Moving forward in time, the Louvre Abu Dhabi offered a captivating blend of East and West. This architectural marvel, designed by Pritzker Prize winner Jean Nouvel, houses a treasure trove of art spanning epochs and continents. As twilight descended, we were treated to a mesmerizing drone and light show that danced across the Saadiyat Island skyline.

**Underwater Adventures and Mangrove Magic**

Next stop, SeaWorld Yas Island! This watery wonderland whisked us through eight thematic zones, where we came face-to-fin with playful dolphins, majestic manta rays, and even curious Arctic foxes. As the sun dipped below the horizon, we glided through the lush mangroves aboard a boat, the silence broken only by the



Louvre Abu Dhabi



Qasr Al Watan



**PRADEEP PURAVANKARA**



SeaWorld Abu Dhabi

gentle lapping of water.

**Desert Tales and Oasis Dreams**

Day three dawned with a trip to Al Jahili Fort in Al Ain. This restored fortress, now a cultural hub, whispered tales of explorers like Sir Wilfred Thesiger, who crossed the vast Empty Quarter. The Al Ain Zoo further fuelled our adventurous spirit, offering camel rides, giraffe feeding, and a chance to meet adorable creatures at the Elezba petting zoo. Our day culminated in a breathtaking safari drive through the Al Ain Oasis, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where emerald palms whispered secrets beneath the watchful gaze of Jebel Hafet Mountain.

**Culinary Delights and Rotana Respite**

Throughout our journey, the Rotana Group provided luxurious sanctuaries. Beach Rotana Abu Dhabi and Al Ain Rotana pampered us with Michelin-starred cuisine, serene spa treatments, and a chance to unwind at the beach club. From Antonia's pizza perfection to the fusion symphony at Bushra,

**The emirate proved that winter isn't just about escaping the cold, it's about embracing the warmth of new experiences, rich traditions, and unforgettable memories**

each meal was a celebration of flavour.

**A Tapestry Woven with Memories**

As we bid farewell to Abu Dhabi, I carried with me not just souvenirs and photos, but a tapestry woven with breathtaking landscapes, cultural gems, and culinary delights. The emirate proved that winter isn't just about escaping the cold, it's about embracing the warmth of new experiences, rich traditions, and unforgettable memories. So, this winter, ditch the mittens and pack your bags - Abu Dhabi's "Can't Wait to Winter" campaign is waiting to embrace you with open arms.

# Work begins on new BD3.5M Hamad Town market

Venue to include restaurants, a commercial centre and dedicated areas for meat, fish, vegetables and other stalls

TDT | Manama

Construction has begun on a new BD3.5million central market in Hamad Town, which will be a comprehensive venue serving residents in the Northern Governorate, MP Jameel Mulla Hassan has revealed.

The market will include restaurants, a commercial centre, a meat market, a fish market, a vegetable market, and other stalls.

Quoted by our sister newspaper Al Ayam, the MP indicated that the project will continue for 18 months, starting from this year. It will cover an area of 12,300 square metres, with a total construction area of approximately 5,000 square meters.

Hassan added that the new market will have a large dedicated space for the meat market, another for the fish market, and a 1,400-square-metre air-conditioned and fully equipped vegetable market that meets the highest health and service standards in this field.

**Dedicated areas**

In addition, there will be a dedicated area for commercial exhibitions (a commercial cen-



Jameel Mulla Hassan

tre) covering an area of 2,500 square metres, with commercial shops covering approximately 300 square metres.

The new market will also include several restaurants offering various cuisines in an area of approximately 500 square metres, including drive-through restaurants, as well as stalls selling various products on an area of 90 square metres.

There will also be an administrative building covering an area of 200 square metres dedicated to monitoring the market's affairs and administrative matters. Furthermore, the new project will include

**Hamad Town market to cover 12,300 square metres, and will take a total of 18 months to complete**

designated areas for gathering and landscaping, covering an area of 7,335 square metres.

The tender for the market's development was awarded to The Malls Real Estate Development Company BSC (Closed), with a total cost of approximately BD3.5million, which the company will invest in the establishment and operation of the market.

The total amount of usufruct fees returned to the ministry during the contract period will be BD3.1 million.

**BDF Commander-in-Chief inspects unit**



Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) commander-in-chief Field Marshal Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa made an inspection visit yesterday to a BDF unit. The commander-in-chief affirmed that the national force is moving forward in developing its defence systems and strengthening its military capabilities and has reached an advanced level of efficiency, under the leadership of His Majesty the King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, supported by His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and Prime Minister. Left, the commander-in-chief during his inspection visit.

**Foreign Affairs Minister receives outgoing Saudi Deputy Ambassador**



Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Abdullahif bin Rashid Al Zayani received outgoing Deputy Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Bahrain Counsellor Saleh bin Falah Al Otaibi. The minister praised the counsellor's efforts that contributed significantly to strengthening the close, historical relations between the two countries. He wished the deputy ambassador continued success in his diplomatic duties. Counsellor Al Otaibi expressed his appreciation to the minister and all officials in Bahrain for their support and cooperation he received throughout his tenure, wishing the Kingdom further progress and prosperity. Above, the officials at their meeting.

# Mosquito menace!

Northern Municipal Council member urges release of details regarding Health Ministry's strategy to combat mosquito season

● **Health Ministry's proclaimed plan to combat mosquito season exists only on paper: Abdullah Al Qubaisi**

Zahra Ayaz

TDI | Manama



Abdullah Al Qubaisi

The Ministry of Health's "Insecticide Spraying" Department has been called on to reveal its strategy for dealing with the upcoming mosquito season.

This has come from Abdullah Al Qubaisi, a prominent member of the Northern Municipal Council and representative of the Ninth District.

Al Qubaisi stressed the im-

portance of transparency in disclosing information such as the quantity of mosquito spraying machines, contracted companies involved, and the workforce assigned to insecticide spraying.

This request was highlighted in a statement reported by Al Ayam, our sister paper.

Expressing his concerns, Al

Qubaisi asserted that the ministry's proclaimed plan to combat the mosquito season exists only on paper.

He further criticised the Health Ministry's lack of responsiveness to citizen complaints, stating that even if responses were received, they were often delayed, leaving citizens' requests for pesticide spraying unaddressed.

Al Qubaisi shared his personal experience of contacting the department in January, only to have his request granted in December, a staggering 11 months later.

Highlighting the severity of the issue in the Northern Governorate, Al Qubaisi pointed out that the region is significantly affected by the mosquito season due to its extensive "green strip" and the abundance of swamps.



He pointed out that since 2018, the Northern

Governorate has been grappling with the same mosquito infestation problem, resulting in the elderly and children being particularly vulnerable to mosquito bites.

Al Qubaisi strongly criticised the allocation of just one insecticide spraying machine for the entire governorate, deeming it insufficient to adequately cover the area.

The demand for transparency and a comprehensive mosquito control plan comes as the Northern Governorate's residents continue to suffer from the recurring mosquito problem.

## Drug mule's sentence upheld

● **Court of Appeals upholds five-year prison sentence for smuggler with over 120 drug capsules inside his body upon his arrival at the airport**

TDI | Manama

The Court of Appeals has upheld a five-year prison sentence for an individual convicted of smuggling over 120 drug capsules inside his body upon his arrival at Bahrain International Airport.

The incident dates back to when the suspect arrived in the Kingdom on a flight from his home country.

A customs officer directed him to the red channel and questioned him about his condition and belongings. The suspect claimed he did not possess any prohibited items, arousing the suspicions of the customs officer who referred him to a doctor.

The doctor noticed the suspect's agitation and requested his transfer to the hospital. Through analysis and medical imaging, foreign objects were discovered in the suspect's intestines. Under increased pressure, the suspect admitted to the presence of drug tablets inside his body.

### Capsules

Necessary medical procedures were carried out to extract the capsules, revealing the existence of over 120 compressed drug tablets.

The suspect confessed to preparing the cannabis substance in his home country and packaging it in capsules in an attempt to smuggle it into Bahrain. However, security investigations revealed that the suspect was involved in a drug smuggling network.

He was subsequently referred to the Public Prosecution, which charged him with intentionally importing and trafficking cannabis and psychotropic substances. Additionally, he was found to be in possession of, and using, illicit drugs.

## Employment, development programmes plans inquiry

TDI | Manama

MP Jameel Mulla Hassan has directed a parliamentary inquiry to Cabinet Affairs Minister Hamad Al Maliki seeking detailed information on various support programmes and their outcomes.

The questions encompass employment support, career development, and institution support programs. They are as follows:

- How many individuals have benefited from employment support programmes, career development programmes, and institution support programmes in total? Please provide a breakdown for each type and category of programme, along with the respective costs for each type and category.

- Regarding employment support programmes, how many Bahraini individuals were able to retain their jobs after the conclusion of the support period? Additionally, how many individuals were terminated or resigned from their positions during the same period?

### Complaints

What is the total number of complaints received by Tamkeen concerning all the programmes? Please provide a detailed breakdown of the complaints for each type and category of programme. Fur-

thermore, what actions have been taken in response to these complaints?

- In the context of institution support programmes, how many individuals have benefited and continued their operations after the support period? Additionally, how many of these institutions closed during the support period, and what were the reasons for their closure? Moreover, how many institutions closed after the support period, and what actions were taken in response to these closures?

- How many individuals have benefited from training programmes for each type and category? What was the associated cost for each type and category? Furthermore, how many training institutions have provided these services, and what was the cost incurred by these institutions? Additionally, how many individuals gained employment after completing the training, and how many did not?

- Among the beneficiaries of development programmes, how many individuals were promoted following their participation, and how many were not promoted?

The numbers to be provided for the aforementioned questions cover the period from the beginning of the current legislative session until the present.

## NVTC executive director receives Pakistani Ambassador

TDI | Manama

Nasser Vocational Training Centre (NVTC) executive director Dr Abdullah bin Nasser Al Noaimi received Pakistani Ambassador Saqib Rauf.

The meeting reviewed bilateral relations and discussed ways to advance cooperation in the education and training sectors, includ-

ing industry, energy, and technology.

This comes in light of the centre's wide-ranging training programmes, which are designed to meet the local labour market's needs and the international labour market's skills requirements.

Dr Al Noaimi commended NVTC's efforts in molding qualified professionals.

## Money launderer's sentences reduced

● **Criminal Court sentences defendant to a total of six years instead of 10 for his crimes**

TDI | Manama

The High Criminal Court has decided to reduce the total sentence of a defendant from 10 years to six after reviewing his two cases related to unauthorised fund collection and subsequent money laundering.

The defendant was extradited to the Kingdom of Bahrain by Interpol.

In the first case regarding unauthorised fund collection, a victim stated that she knew the defendant as her brother's friend. She used to work in real estate but had to stop due to economic difficulties.

Her brother suggested dealing with the defendant due to his experience working in the real estate sector. She thus handed him two checks, one for BD30,000 and the other for BD150,000 in exchange for receiving profits. The Public Prosecution accused the 58-year-old defendant of collecting a total



Representative image

amount of BD180,000 from the victim between 2015 and 2016, intending to invest it without obtaining the necessary license from the Central Bank.

The court initially sentenced the defendant in absentia to five years in prison, issued him a fine of BD100,000, and ordered him to return the BD180,000. However, after the defendant was apprehended and appealed the verdict, the court upheld the fines but reduced the prison sentence to three years instead of five.

### Money laundering

Meanwhile, in the money laundering case, the court

sentenced the defendant to five years in prison, a fine of BD5,000, and the confiscation of BD180,000 from his assets. However, the court reduced the prison sentence to three years instead of five.

The court stated that the defendant misappropriated funds from the victim in the first case by using them for investment without the required authority from the competent authority in the money laundering case.

The Public Prosecution charged the defendant with money laundering by using funds obtained from the investment crime for unauthorised

investments.

The defendant conducted transactions on the funds obtained from the first case, aiming to legitimise them while being aware that they were proceeds of that crime. He transferred amounts totalling BD180,000.

Regarding the details of the lawsuit, an officer stated that his investigations revealed the defendant's involvement in money laundering activities related to investment crimes and misappropriation of others' funds.

The officer further explained that upon uncovering the defendant's accounts through a financial report, it became evident that he received BD180,000 from the victim through two checks. He conducted transfers to various accounts, including those of his son and wife, with the purpose of concealing the source of the funds.

It is worth noting that the Head of the Financial Crimes and Money Laundering Prosecution stated that international cooperation efforts led to the arrest of the fugitive defendant and his extradition, based on an international arrest warrant issued by the Public Prosecution to enforce the sentence imposed on him.

## SCIA president congratulates councils' chairmen

TDI | Manama

Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA) president Shaikh Abdulrahman bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Khalifa received Justice, Islamic Affairs and Endowments Affairs Minister Nawaf bin Mohammed Al Maawda, along with Sunni Endowments Council chairman Dr Shaikh Rashid bin Mohammed Al Hajri and Jaffari Endowments Council chairman Yousef bin Saleh Al Saleh.

The SCIA president congratulated the chairmen on obtaining the royal trust from His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa in appointing them within the



The officials at their meeting

new structure of Sunni and Jaffari Endowments Councils.

He wished them success in preserving and developing plac-

es of worship following Sharia values and principles.

The chairmen expressed their appreciation towards

SCIA's efforts, headed by Shaikh Abdulrahman, in serving Islam and Islamic affairs in Bahrain.

# Negligence costs life: docs jailed

Two physicians sentenced to three years' imprisonment for fatal medical error that caused the death of a young Bahraini man

● **Court sets BD500 fee for suspended jail term, pending the outcome of appeals**

TDT | Manama

Two doctors accused of a medical error, resulting in the death of a young man during a gastric sleeve operation, have each been sentenced to three years behind bars by the Lower Criminal Court.

The court also set an amount of BD500 to suspend the punishment, pending the outcome of their appeals.

The Public Prosecution referred the two physicians to criminal trial for causing the death of a citizen due to their violation of professional standards and their negligence of



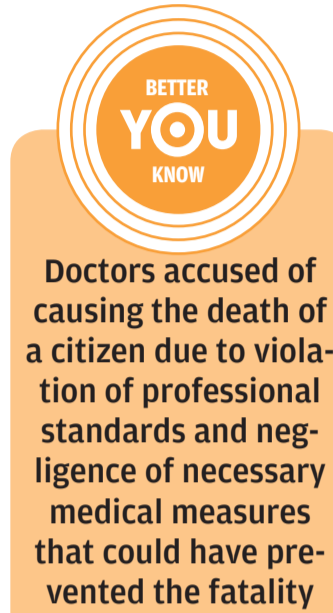
Representative image

necessary medical measures that could have prevented the fatality.

The Prosecution received a report from the deceased's father, stating that his son's death was caused by a medical mistake.

Immediate investigations were initiated upon receiving the report, and the deceased's body was examined.

The medical file was seized and statements were taken from the deceased's father and the



**Doctors accused of causing the death of a citizen due to violation of professional standards and negligence of necessary medical measures that could have prevented the fatality**

medical staff who were supervising his condition. A forensic doctor was appointed by the

Public Prosecution to perform an autopsy on the deceased's body to determine the cause of death.

The National Health Regulatory Authority (NHRA) was tasked with reviewing the medical procedures followed with the deceased, as well as assessing the compliance with medical standards in his case, and the medical error attributed to the doctors and its relation to the death.

## Evidence

The Attorney General affirmed before the ruling hearing that the evidence presented by the Public Prosecution in the case conclusively and beyond reasonable doubt proves the defendants' guilt.

"The doctors' mistake was violating the principles of their profession, which directly caused the victim's death," said the

Attorney General. "The investigations revealed the defendants' disregard for human life and their failure to fulfill their sworn duty of providing necessary medical care.

"The prosecution called for maximum penalties against the accused, highlighting the immense pain and distress inflicted upon the victim's family by the loss of their son."

It is worth noting that a consultant doctor had earlier testified about the incident, confirming that one of the defendants, a GCC national, made the error of not admitting the victim to the hospital after experiencing post-operative pain.

Neglecting to prescribe antibiotics, the GCC doctor's fault ultimately led to the victim's death due to a failure to diagnose the patient correctly and take necessary measures, despite multiple visits by the victim.

## Boosting commerce: 1,122 shops honoured in fee-free festivity drive

TDT | Manama

Minister of Industry and Commerce Abdullah bin Adel Fakhro honoured a number of shops and commercial establishments that benefited from the national initiative launched by the ministry's Consumer Protection Directorate.

The initiative exempted businesses from promotional campaign fees, coinciding with the National Days celebrations.

Throughout November and December last year, 1,122 establishments participated in the initiative, which witnessed a great turnout from businesses across all governorates.



Ministry officials and shop representatives during the awarding

This was initiated by the ministry to encourage the commercial sector to partic-

ipate in the Kingdom's festivities and to increase the number of consumers visiting

commercial avenues at that time.

The Consumer Protection

Directorate at the ministry grants licenses for promotional campaigns, commercial



Abdulla bin Adel Fakhro, Minister of Industry and Commerce

discounts, and prize draws before they are implemented by commercial establishments in the local markets, following the provisions of the ministerial decision issued in this regard.

## NOTICE

**Sanad branch closure and unavailability of service from 4<sup>th</sup> February 2024**

Al-Hilal Islamic Banking Services - Ahli United Bank B.S.C. (c) (AUB) - gives notice of its intention to cease to provide all the financial services licensed by the Central Bank of Bahrain at its Sanad Branch (Building A2417, Road 66, Block 646), as of 4<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

البنك الأهلي المتحد



**ahli united bank**

Licensed as an Islamic Retail Bank by the CBB

## Education Minister receives new batch of assistant principals



The Education Minister with the assistant principals

TDT | Manama

Minister of Education Dr Mohammed bin Mubarak Juma received on Wednesday the first batch of assistant principals for academic affairs and assistant principals for supporting education, who have acquired their job titles as a result of the Education Ministry's new organisational structure.

Dr Juma indicated that the

post of assistant principal had been launched at government schools decades ago, and was practised according to traditional practices. He noted that new global trends in school institutions require determining the roles within schools by creating the post of assistant principal for academic affairs to support the principal in the educational and learning fields, as well as an assistant principal for supporting education

to assist the principal in the administrative, logistical and supervisory services.

The minister congratulated the assistant principals, noting that the move represents a quantum leap for government schools in the kingdom.

He affirmed that the new assistant principals will officially acquire their new job titles in coordination with the Civil Service Bureau.

# European, US stocks creep higher

AFP | New York

Europe's major stock indices edged higher yesterday, while Wall Street opened mixed, following a series of losses at the beginning of the year.

Frankfurt, London and Paris stocks rose slightly from heavy falls Wednesday, when deadly blasts in Iran rattled markets and fanned fears of a broadening conflict in the Middle East.

Most Asian stocks dipped yesterday in line with Wall Street on Wednesday, after minutes from the US Federal Reserve's December meeting dampened hopes for an early interest-rate cut.

The Dow rose 0.2 percent at the start trading yesterday, while the S&P 500 and tech-heavy Nasdaq both slid.

Oil prices rallied further on supplies worries.

"With Western nations threatening more forceful actions to



A pedestrian with an umbrella walks by the Bank of England building (L) and Stock Exchange building (R), in the financial district, central London

defend shipping in the Red Sea, the situation was looking tense even before yesterday's explosions in Iran," noted Steve Clayton, head of equity funds at UK stockbroker Hargreaves Lansdown.

"The Israeli/Hamas conflict

rages on, leaving oil traders increasingly wary of the security of supplies from the region."

## Stocks rally fades

A global rally for equities that characterised the last months of 2023 has petered out on con-

cerns that the buying may have run ahead of itself.

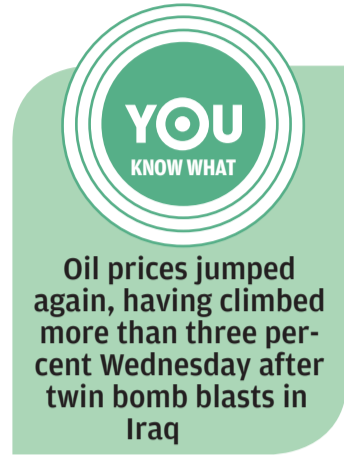
The selling pressure was enhanced Wednesday when the Fed minutes showed officials expect to keep US interest rates elevated for some time as they want to make sure they have inflation under control.

That dealt a blow to confidence on trading floors, where investors had been betting on a cut as soon as March after the US central bank's post-meeting statement last month showed they envisioned three reductions in 2024.

Officials were keen to begin cutting this year but gave no indication of when.

"The trouble is that the markets are pricing in up to 150 basis points-worth of rate cuts this year, double the Fed's forecast," said market analyst David Morrison at Trade Nation.

"Consequently, there's plenty of scope for disappointment."



**YOU KNOW WHAT**  
Oil prices jumped again, having climbed more than three percent Wednesday after twin bomb blasts in Iraq

Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare noted that yields on US government bonds have risen following the publication of the Fed minutes on "rate-cut angst".

Data released yesterday showed the US private sector added more jobs than anticipated in December, but wage growth slowed.

Focus now turns to the release

of key non-farm payrolls data due on Friday.

"The US unemployment situation is a key factor in the outlook for inflation," said Morrison.

Oil prices jumped again, having climbed more than three percent Wednesday after twin bomb blasts ripped through a crowd commemorating Revolutionary Guards general Qasem Soleimani, who was killed four years ago in a US strike in Iraq.

The explosions, which killed 84 people, came with tensions already sky-high in the crude-rich region owing to Israel's Gaza war and following the killing of Hamas's deputy leader in Lebanon this week.

The news added to supply concerns after the closure of a Libyan oil field.

The yen continued its post-quake slide, losing more than one percent against the dollar and euro.

## TotalEnergies to review land buyouts in contested Africa projects

AFP | Paris

French energy giant TotalEnergies yesterday said it had launched a review of its land acquisition practices for controversial \$10-billion projects in Uganda and Tanzania slammed by environmentalists.

TotalEnergies is pushing ahead with its Tilenga drilling project in Uganda and the 1,443-kilometre (897-mile) East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) to transport it to the coast in Tanzania in the face of opposition from activists and environmentalists.

"This mission will evaluate the land acquisition procedures implemented, the conditions for consultation, compensation and relocation of the populations concerned, and the grievance handling mechanism," the statement said, adding that it would submit its report by April.

Tilenga targets oil under the rich Murchison Falls nature reserve in western Uganda with a planned 419 wells, trigger-



Guards work at TotalEnergies' central processing facility construction in Buliisa, Uganda

ing fears for the region's fragile ecosystem among the people who live there and environmentalists.

Drilling began in mid-2023 and production is slated to begin in 2025.

TotalEnergies, which is working with Chinese oil company CNOOC on the project, says that its 6,400-hectare acquisition

plan affects "19,140 households and communities owning or using plots of land and includes the relocation of 775 primary residences".

"To date, 98 percent of the households concerned have signed compensation agreements, 97 percent have received their compensation, and 98 percent of households to be relo-

cated have taken possession of their new homes," the company added.

Resistance to the project has rallied opponents of fossil fuel development as well as conservationists and those fearing the effect on local populations.

Human Rights Watch called in July for the plans to be halted, saying in a report that it had already "devastated thousands of people's livelihoods in Uganda".

The oilfield would "ultimately displace over 100,000 people," it charged.

Four environmental groups -- Darwin Climax Coalitions, Sea Shepherd France, Wild Legal and Stop EACOP-Stop Total in Uganda -- filed a criminal complaint in France in September accusing TotalEnergies of "ecocide".

A first case filed in 2019 was thrown out last year by a Paris court, while TotalEnergies says the Tanzania-based East African Court of Justice has also rejected a complaint.

## German emissions at 70-year low as coal use drops

AFP | Berlin

German emissions were at their lowest point in around 70 years, as Europe's largest economy managed to reduce its dependence on coal faster than expected, a study published yesterday showed.

Europe's biggest economy emitted 673 million tonnes of the greenhouse gases last year, 73 million tonnes fewer than in 2022, according to the energy think tank Agora Energiewende.

The figure was at its lowest point "since the 1950s", Agora said in a statement, while warning that Germany had work to do to further reduce its emissions.

The drop was "largely attributable to a strong decrease in coal power generation", Agora said.

Germany resorted to the fuel in the wake of the Rus-



Vapor rises from the cooling towers of a lignite-fired power station

sian invasion of Ukraine, when Moscow cut off gas supplies to the European giant. But since then, Berlin has managed to pare back its use significantly.

Electricity generation from renewable sources was over 50 percent of the total in 2023 for the first time, while coal's share dropped to 26 percent from 34 percent, according to figures published by the federal network agency on Wednesday.

## APA to acquire Callon Petroleum in \$4.5 bn deal

AFP | New York

US energy company APA Corporation has agreed to buy competitor Callon Petroleum in a transaction valued around \$4.5 billion including debt, the firms announced yesterday, marking the latest deal in the sector.

APA will acquire Callon in an all-stock deal, where each share of Callon is exchanged for 1.0425 shares of APA stock, worth \$38.31.

This is nearly a 14 percent premium over Callon's closing price on Wednesday.

The transaction comes after several high-profile agreements in the energy industry, such as ExxonMobil's megadeal to acquire Pioneer Natural Resources for about \$60 billion and Chevron's \$53 billion acquisition of Hess.

"Callon's assets provide additional scale to APA's opera-

tions across the Permian Basin, most notably in the Delaware Basin, where Callon has nearly 120,000 acres," said APA in a statement.

As a result, it expects the combined company's daily production to exceed 500,000 barrels of oil equivalent.

Existing APA shareholders are anticipated to own about 81 percent of the combined company, while current Callon shareholders are to own approximately 19 percent.

APA is expected to issue some 70 million shares of common stock in the transaction.

The deal is anticipated to close in the second quarter of 2024, and has been given the green light by both APA and Callon's boards of directors.

APA shares slipped 6.3 percent in trading yesterday morning, while Callon jumped 4.2 percent.

## Nepal signs hydro energy export deal with India

AFP | Kathmandu

Nepal signed a deal with India yesterday for the Himalayan republic to export 10,000 megawatts of hydroelectricity over the next decade to its energy-hungry neighbour.

More than four in five Nepalis did not have access to electricity in 2000, according to the International Energy Agency, but a dam building spree in the years since has helped connect nearly all of its 30 million people to the grid.

It currently has installed capacity of over 2,600 megawatts from over 150 projects, with another over 200 projects under construction.

Nepali foreign ministry spokesman Amrit Bahadur Rai confirmed the "long-term power trade" deal to AFP, signed during a visit of Indian foreign minister S. Jaishankar to Kathmandu.

Further details of the agreement have not been made public, but Independent Power Pro-



Nepal's Minister of Foreign Affairs NP Saud speaks with his Indian counterpart Subrahmanyam Jaishankar (L) in Kathmandu

ducers' Association of Nepal president Ganesh Karki said the deal was "historic".

"Now the government must focus on creating laws and a conducive environment to support production of that scale," he added.

Experts expect the agreement will drive further investment to

Nepal's hydropower sector.

"Details of the agreement may have to be worked out... but having a number will make investment more bankable," said Sagar Prasai, co-author of a study on electricity trading in South Asia.

Water-rich Nepal has a mountain river system that could make it an energy-producing

powerhouse, with some studies estimating its total potential capacity at 72,000 megawatts -- 25 times the size of current installed capacity.

Landlocked Nepal has already been exporting electricity on a smaller scale to India since late 2021.

Sandwiched between India and China, Nepal's two powerful neighbours have long competed for influence and investment opportunities in the hydro sector.

India has been the favoured partner, in part because it has insisted it will not source energy from projects financed by a third country.

The world's most populous country is heavily reliant on polluting coal for energy generation but has pledged to reach net zero emissions by 2060.

Conservationists have criticised Nepal's rush to develop its hydro potential, saying that environmental compliance safeguards are sometimes ignored in construction.



News in brief

Italian reporters protest at Meloni event over 'gag law' Italian journalists boycotted a prime ministerial press conference yesterday over a proposed change in the law they say would hinder reporting on arrests of politicians and other high-profile individuals.

Mexican authorities said Wednesday that they had rescued 32 migrants kidnapped while heading for the US border by bus through a northeastern region where criminal gangs operate.

African Union appeals for calm in Ethiopia-Somalia row The African Union on yesterday joined the United States in appealing for calm in the Horn of Africa after regional tensions soared following a contested deal between Ethiopia and the breakaway region of Somaliland.

SPOTLIGHT Africa's large birds of prey facing 'extinction crisis': study The flamboyantly plumed Secretary Bird and the serpent-catching Snake Eagle are among dozens of Africa's large birds of prey facing a human-driven "extinction crisis" researchers said yesterday.

Israel launches deadly Gaza strikes

Israeli airstrikes target Gaza City and Khan Yunis, causing widespread devastation as tensions escalate with Lebanon

Hezbollah leader Nasrallah warns Israel against provoking full-scale conflict with Lebanon

AFP | Gaza

Israeli bombing killed dozens of people overnight in Gaza, the health ministry of the Hamas-run Palestinian territory said yesterday, as regional tensions have surged over the almost three-months-old war.

The Gaza health ministry reported "dozens of martyrs and more than 100 wounded in the continued barbaric aerial and artillery bombardment of citizens"



People inspect the rubble of a building where the displaced Palestinian Jabaleh family were sheltering after it was hit by Israeli bombardment in Rafah

homes in the Gaza Strip". Fires sparked by bombing raged in Gaza's central Deir al-Balah area and the Al-Maghazi refugee camp.

"People were safe in their homes, the house was full of children," resident Ibrahim al-Ghimri told AFP. "There were around 30 people. All of a sudden their houses fell on them... What have these children done?"

Tensions have also surged with Israel's northern neighbour Lebanon, where a strike in Beirut on Tuesday, widely assumed to have been carried out by Israel, killed Hamas deputy leader Saleh al-Aruri, who was set to be buried

Aruri was killed in the south Beirut stronghold of the powerful Iran-backed Hezbollah movement, which has traded tit-for-tat fire across the border with Israel for months, while both sides have avoided full-scale war.

Hezbollah has vowed that the killing of Aruri and six other Hamas operatives on its home turf will not go unpunished, labelling it "a serious assault on Lebanon... and a dangerous development".

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah warned Israel against all-out conflict, after Israeli army chief Herzi Halevi, in a visit to the Lebanese border, said troops were

YOU KNOW WHAT The United Nations estimates 1.9 million Gazans are displaced, and the World Health Organization has warned of the risk of famine and disease, with only a minimal amount of aid entering the territory

"in very high readiness".

Nasrallah said that "for now, we are fighting on the frontline following meticulous calculations" but warned that, "if the enemy thinks of waging a war on Lebanon, we will fight without restraint, without rules, without limits and without restrictions".

The Lebanese Shiite Muslim group said yesterday another four of its fighters were killed overnight, raising its death toll to 129 since the outbreak of border hostilities.

Mossad chief David Barnea warned on Wednesday that the

Israeli spy agency "is committed to settling the score with the murderers" who carried out the Hamas attack.

Anyone who "participated directly or indirectly in the slaughter of October 7, his blood shall be upon his own head," Barnea said.

'Hit in their sleep'

Israel's relentless bombardment and ground invasion has reduced swathes of Gaza to rubble and claimed at least 22,313 lives, according to the health ministry. The United Nations estimates 1.9 million Gazans are displaced, and the World Health Organization has warned of the risk of famine and disease, with only a minimal amount of aid entering the territory.

A strike in Gaza's south killed displaced Palestinians living in tents, said bereaved residents who were mourning the dead, wrapped in shrouds at a hospital in Khan Yunis.

Baha Abu Hatab said his nephews were killed.

"They had been living in a tent to protect them from the cold weather, but Israeli airstrikes hit them in their sleep", he added.

"Why?" he asked. "Because they threaten Israel and the United States?"

As the Israel-Hamas war has raged, another regional flashpoint

has seen Yemen's Iran-backed Huthi rebels fire at merchant vessels in the Red Sea, disrupting a key global shipping lane, in attacks the rebels say are in solidarity with Hamas.

The United States and 11 of its allies jointly warned the Huthis of unspecified consequences unless they immediately halt the attacks. US President Joe Biden's administration described the statement -- joined notably by Britain, Germany and Japan -- as a final warning as he weighs possible military strikes if attacks persist.

"I would not anticipate another warning," a senior US official said, calling the message "very clear". On Sunday, the US military said it had sunk three Huthi boats following attacks on a container ship of Danish shipping giant Maersk. The rebels said 10 of their fighters were killed.

Regional tensions rose further after twin bomb blasts in Iran on Wednesday killed 84 people, according to a revised death toll, near the grave of Revolutionary Guards general Qasem Soleimani, who died in a 2020 US strike in Baghdad.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei blamed "evil and criminal enemies of the Iranian nation" and said: "This disaster will have a harsh response, God willing."

Hopes fade for survivors of Japan earthquake



A man walks a dog past destroyed buildings in Anamizu, Ishikawa prefecture

AFP | Tokyo

Thousands of Japanese rescuers yesterday battled rubble and blocked roads as hopes faded for dozens listed as missing three days after a devastating earthquake that killed at least 84.

Hundreds of people in more than a dozen communities remained cut off in Ishikawa prefecture in central Japan, devastated by the 7.5-magnitude quake on New Year's Day.

Regional governor Hiroshi Hase told a disaster management meeting that as of 4:00 pm (0700 GMT), 72 hours after the quake, "the survival rate of those in need of rescue is said to drop precipitously".

Many cheered on social media late yesterday news reports that a woman in her 80s trapped on the ground floor of her house had been rescued three days after the quake.

"Incredible! Hope she'll get bet-

ter," one user wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

"Rescue team, thank you!" said another.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told a press conference that the quake is "the worst catastrophe" in the current imperial Reiwa era in the Japanese calendar, which began in 2019.

"Access to this area was extremely difficult, partly due to the geographical constraints of the affected area being a peninsula, and partly due to the intermittent occurrence of major quakes," he said.

"The situation remains difficult, but we will continue to do our utmost to support the victims."

The powerful main tremor, followed by hundreds of aftershocks, injured at least 330 people, local authorities said.

Authorities published a list yesterday of 179 people whose whereabouts were unknown.

Toll in deadliest Russian strike on Kyiv rises to 32

AFP | Kyiv

A December 29 missile strike killed 32 people in Kyiv, authorities said yesterday, raising the toll of the deadliest attack on the Ukrainian capital since the war began.

Russia has in recent days intensified aerial attacks against Ukraine, which says it has enough munition to withstand a few powerful assaults but would soon need more aid.

"The total number of dead as a result of the enemy missile attack on December 29 is 32 people," said the head of the Kyiv military administration Sergiy Popko.



Police officers and local residents inspect damage outside a destroyed high-rise building following a Russian missile attack in central Kyiv

Thirty people were wounded, warehouse, Ukrainian authorities said. Russia says it only added. All the 32 killed were in a targets military infrastructure.

Hezbollah source says local chief among 4 killed in south Lebanon

AFP | Beirut

Four Hezbollah fighters were killed overnight in southern Lebanon, the Iran-backed movement announced yesterday, in what Lebanese state media said were Israeli strikes on the border town of Naqura.

The deaths, which according to a source close to the powerful militant group include a local Hezbollah leader, follow a strike on Beirut this week that killed a senior Hamas leader, raising regional tensions as war rages in Gaza.

Hezbollah said in a statement the four fighters had been killed "on the road to Jerusalem" -- a phrase it has been using to announce deaths of its members due to Israeli fire since the Is-



Mourners carry the casket of Ahmed Hamoud, killed together with Hamas' deputy leader Saleh al-Aruri in a strike in a southern Beirut suburb

rael-Hamas fighting started on October 7.

The group did not elaborate, but a source close to Hezbollah said that the four were killed in Naqura near the Israeli border, adding that one of them was the movement's local leader.

Lebanon's official National News Agency said Israeli air-

emergency exits, broadcaster NHK reported.

By this time, the cabin was filling with smoke and getting hotter, with babies crying and people begging for the doors to be opened, footage showed.

In one video clip, a young voice can be heard shouting: "Please let us out. Please. Please open it. Just open it. Oh, god."

There were eight emergency exits but the evacuation began from two slides at the front of the plane because of the fire.

Crew members opened a third exit at the rear themselves because the broken intercom system meant they couldn't request that the cockpit do so.

It took 18 minutes to evacuate the entire plane, with the pilot the last person to set foot on the tarmac at 6:05 pm.



Officials look at the burnt wreckage of a Japan Airlines (JAL) passenger plane on the tarmac at Tokyo International Airport at Haneda in Tokyo

YOU KNOW WHAT JAL said it expected a damage cost of \$15 billion yen (\$105 million) for the destroyed plane, which should be covered by insurance, and is calculating damage to company earnings

was burning as the cabin crew needed permission to open the



TOP 4 TWEETS

01



Halve inflation then cut your taxes. That was the plan - we're sticking to it.

@RishiSunak

02



By securing a historic pay raise, Culinary Workers Union Local 226 has shown our nation what's possible when workers fight, organize, and stand together.

@VP

03



Even though Internet Archive has a ton of negative bs about me, it is still a public good that should exist. Support the Internet Archive!

@elonmusk

04



Right now, the average driver in America is spending over \$100 less than if gas prices had stayed at their peak.

@POTUS

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

# CELEBS

## celebs



### Chris Hemsworth tells fans why major New Year's resolutions won't work

**Celebretainment | Los Angeles**

Chris Hemsworth has warned fans making huge lifestyle changes for New Year won't be "sustainable". The 40-year-old actor and fitness fanatic - who recently launched Chris Hemsworth

his Centr exercise app - made the declaration as he urged his fans in an online video to make one "small" change every week in January so they wouldn't end up feeling overwhelmed by trying to stick to their 2024 resolutions.

He said in an Instagram video: "Happy New Year everyone. As I sit here starting 2024 with my family

and friends, it really got me thinking about the 'New Year, New Me' mentality that makes the rounds on social media and in the world.

"I have some thoughts. We as a society have to start working on our goals in progression and never in absolutes.

"Flipping a switch in yourself when the calendar changes is nev-

er going to be a sustainable way to achieve your goals - its' just a quick way to get discouraged.

The only way to move forward consistently is to make easy lifestyle changes until they become your new habit - your new routine."

Detailing his "challenge" to fans, Chris added: "I want to challenge everyone out there who is think-

ing about their 'New Year, New Me' plans to just making one small lifestyle change a week for the month of January.

"For me, it's with my Centr Plan. I'm going to put more breathwork into my workouts, more meditations, better sleep practices and finally more functional movements into my exercises.

### Britney Spears won't return to music

**Celebretainment | Los Angeles**

Britney Spears will "never" record new music.

The 'Toxic' hitmaker - who hasn't released a studio album since 2016's 'Glory' - has hit out at recent reports Charli XCX has been approached to pen tracks for her comeback record and insisted she is content just to write "for fun" or for other artists out of the spotlight these days.

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!!!

"When I write, I write for fun or I write for other people!!!

"For those of you who have read my book, there's loads that you don't know about me ... I've written over 20 songs for other people the past two years!!! I'm a ghostwriter and I honestly enjoy it that way!!! (sic)"

The 42-year-old star also claims her memoir, 'The Woman in Me',

was released "illegally" without her approval.

She added: "People are also saying MY BOOK WAS RELEASED WITHOUT MY APPROVAL ILLEGALLY and that's far from the truth ... have you read the news these days ??? I'm so LOVED and blessed !!! (sic)"

It had been claimed Charli had submitted a "really strong" track for Britney's consideration.

A source recently told The Sun newspaper: "Work has been going on behind the scenes for quite a while to gather a series of killer songs to bring Britney back with a bang.

"She is one of the biggest stars of the 21st Century so there is pressure for the music to be great. Charli has a great track record when it comes to writing clever pop songs.

"She went into the studio earlier in the year to make some songs using Britney's guidance

"She came up with a really strong track that is expected to make it on to the album, which Britney's team hope will be out in 2024."

Britney Spears

**When I write, I write for fun or I write for other people !!! For those of you who have read my book, there's loads that you don't know about me ... I've written over 20 songs for other people the past two years !!! I'm a ghostwriter and I honestly enjoy it that way !!! (sic) !!!**

**When I write, I write for fun or I write for other people !!! For those of you who have read my book, there's loads that you don't know about me ... I've written over 20 songs for other people the past two years !!! I'm a ghostwriter and I honestly enjoy it that way !!!**

**BRITNEY SPEARS**

**CINEMA**

**FERRARI (15+) (DRAMA/SPORT)**  
 OASIS JUFFAIR: 12.30 + 3.15 + 6.00 + 8.45 + 11.30 PM  
 OASIS JUFFAIR (VIP): 10.30 AM + 3.15 + 8.15 PM  
 CITY CENTRE: 12.45 + 3.30 + 6.15 + 9.00 + 11.45 PM  
 CITY CENTRE (THEATRE): 1.30 + 4.30 + 7.45 + 11.00 PM  
 SEEF (I): 10.30 AM + 1.00 + 3.45 + 6.30 + 9.15 + 12.00 MN + (12.30 MN THURS/FRI)  
 WADI AL SAIL: 12.15 + 3.00 + 5.45 + 8.30 + 11.15 PM  
 AL LIWAN: 12.00 + 2.45 + 5.30 + 8.15 + 11.00 PM  
 ADAM DRIVER, PENÉLOPE CRUZ, SHAILENE WOODLEY

**NIGHT SWIM (15+) (THRILLER/HORROR)**  
 OASIS JUFFAIR: 12.15 + 2.30 + 4.45 + 7.00 + 9.15 + 11.30 PM  
 OASIS JUFFAIR (VIP): 1.00 + 6.00 + 11.00 PM  
 CITY CENTRE: 10.30 AM + 12.45 + 3.00 + 5.15 + 7.30 + 9.45 + 12.00 MN  
 CITY CENTRE (THEATRE): 1.00 + 3.45 + 6.30 + 9.15 + 12.00 MN  
 SEEF (I): 10.30 AM + 12.30 + 2.45 + 5.00 + 7.15 + 9.30 + 11.45 PM + (12.30 MN THURS/FRI)  
 WADI AL SAIL: 12.00 + 2.15 + 4.30 + 6.45 + 9.00 + 11.15 PM  
 AL LIWAN: 11.45 AM + 2.00 + 4.15 + 6.30 + 8.45 + 11.00 PM  
 WYATT RUSSELL, KERRY CONDON, AMÉLIE HOFERLE

**THE IRON CLAW (15+) (DRAMA/SPORT)**  
 OASIS JUFFAIR: 12.00 + 2.45 + 5.30 + 8.15 + 11.00 PM  
 CITY CENTRE: 12.30 + 3.15 + 6.00 + 8.45 + 11.30 PM  
 SEEF (I): 10.30 AM + 1.00 + 3.45 + 6.30 + 9.15 + 12.00 MN  
 WADI AL SAIL: 1.15 + 6.15 + 11.15 PM  
 AL LIWAN: 3.00 + 8.00 PM  
 ZAC EFRON, JEREMY ALLEN WHITE, HARRIS DICKINSON

**ESABET AZEEMA (PG-15) (ARABIC/COMEDY/CRIME)**  
 OASIS JUFFAIR: 11.45 AM + 4.15 + 8.45 PM  
 CITY CENTRE: 12.00 + 2.15 + 4.30 + 6.45 + 9.00 + 11.15 PM  
 SEEF (I): 12.30 + 2.45 + 5.00 + 7.15 + 9.30 + 11.45 PM  
 WADI AL SAIL: 1.00 AM + 4.00 + 9.00 PM  
 AL LIWAN: 12.45 + 5.45 + 10.45 PM  
 ESAAD YOUNIS, MOHAMED MAHMOUD, KARIM AFIFI

**DOLPHIN BOY (PG) (ANIMATION/ADVENTURE)**  
 OASIS JUFFAIR: (KIDS CINEMA): 2.00 + 8.00 PM  
 CITY CENTRE: 11.00 AM + 3.00 + 7.00 + 11.00 PM  
 SEEF (I): 10.30 AM + 2.30 + 6.30 + 10.30 PM  
 AL LIWAN: (JUNIOR CINEMA) : 2.00 + 8.00 PM  
 POLINA AVDEYENKO, ALEKSANDR FENIN, VASILISA RUCHIMSKAYA

**THREE ROBBERS AND A LION (G)**  
 OASIS JUFFAIR: (KIDS CINEMA): 12.00 + 6.00 PM  
 CITY CENTRE: 1.00 + 5.00 + 9.00 PM  
 SEEF (I): 12.30 + 4.30 + 8.30 PM  
 AL LIWAN: (JUNIOR CINEMA) : 4.00 + 10.00 PM  
 AKSEL HENNIE, THORBJORH HARR, MAD S HANSEN

**RAASTHA (PG-13) (MALAYALAM)**  
 FROM THURS 12.30 PM ONWARD  
 SEEF (I): 12.00 + 2.30 + 5.00 + 7.30 + 10.00 PM  
 SARJANO KHALID, ANAGHA NARAYANAN, ARADHYA ANN

**KAATERA (I) (KANNADA)**  
 SEEF (I): 12.45 + 4.15 + 7.45 + 11.15 PM  
 DARSHAN THOOGUDEEPA, RADHANA RAM, JAGAPATHI BABU

**DUNKI (PG-13) (HINDI/DRAMA/COMEDY)**  
 OASIS JUFFAIR: 10.30 AM + 1.30 + 4.45 + 8.00 + 11.15 PM  
 CITY CENTRE: 11.00 AM + 11.30 AM + 2.15 + 2.45 + 5.30 + 6.00 + 8.45 + 9.15 + 12.00 MN + (12.30 MN THURS/FRI)  
 SEEF (I): 10.45 + 2.00 + 5.15 + 8.30 + 11.45 PM  
 WADI AL SAIL: 1.00 + 4.15 + 7.30 + 10.45 PM  
 AL LIWAN: 1.15 + 4.30 + 7.45 + 11.00 PM  
 AL HAMRA: 11.30 AM + 5.45 PM  
 SHAH RUKH KHAN, BOMAN IRANI, TAAPSEE PANN

**AQUAMAN AND THE LOST KINGDOM (PG-13)**  
 OASIS JUFFAIR: 12.00 + 2.45 + 5.30 + 8.15 + 11.00 PM  
 CITY CENTRE: 10.30 AM + 1.00 + 3.45 + 6.30 + 9.15 + 12.00 MN + (12.30 MN THURS/FRI)  
 CITY CENTRE (IMAX-2D): 10.30 AM + 3.45 + 9.00 PM  
 CITY CENTRE (3D): 12.00 + 2.45 + 5.30 + 8.15 + 11.00 PM  
 CITY CENTRE (THEATRE): 12.30 + 4.00 + 7.15 + 10.30 PM  
 SEEF (I): 12.30 + 3.15 + 6.00 + 8.45 + 11.30 PM  
 WADI AL SAIL: 12.00 + 5.15 + 10.30 PM  
 AL LIWAN: 1.00 + 6.00 + 11.00 PM  
 JASON MOMOA, PATRICK WILSON, AMBER HEARD

**NERU (PG-15) (MALAYALAM)**  
 OASIS JUFFAIR: 11.30 AM + 2.30 + 5.30 + 8.30 + 11.30 PM  
 SEEF (I): 11.00 AM + 2.00 + 5.00 + 8.00 + 11.00 PM  
 AL HAMRA: 2.45 + 9.00 + (12.00 MN THURS/FRI)  
 MOHANLAL, PRIYAMANI, ANASWARA

**WONKA (PG) (ADVENTURE/COMEDY/MUSICAL)**  
 CITY CENTRE (ATMOS): 11.30 AM + 2.00 + 4.30 + 7.00 + 9.30 + 12.00 MN  
 CITY CENTRE (IMAX-2D): 10.30 AM + 3.45 + 9.00 PM  
 CITY CENTRE (THEATRE): 2.45 + 8.30 PM  
 SEEF (I): 11.00 AM + 1.30 + 4.00 + 6.30 + 9.00 + 11.30 PM  
 WADI AL SAIL: 2.45 + 8.00 PM  
 AL LIWAN: (ATMOS) : 10.30 AM + 1.00 + 3.30 + 6.00 + 8.30 + 11.00 PM  
 TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET, CALAH LANE, KEEGAN-MICHAEL KEY

**ABU NASSAB (PG-13) (ARABIC/ACTION)**  
 OASIS JUFFAIR: 2.00 + 6.30 + 11.00 PM  
 CITY CENTRE: 10.30 AM + 12.30 + 2.45 + 5.00 + 7.15 + 9.30 + 11.45 PM + (12.30 MN THURS/FRI)  
 CITY CENTRE (THEATRE): 12.00 + 5.45 + 11.30 PM  
 SEEF (I): 12.00 + 2.15 + 4.30 + 6.45 + 9.00 + 11.15 PM  
 WADI AL SAIL: 6.15 + 8.30 + 10.45 PM  
 AL LIWAN: 10.45 AM + 3.45 + 8.45 PM  
 MOHAMED EMAM, YASMINE SABRI, MAGED EL KEDWARY

**SALAAR (PG-15) (ACTION/DRAMA/CRIME/THRILLER)**  
 OASIS JUFFAIR: 4.30 PM  
 SEEF (I): 12.30 + 4.00 + 7.30 + 11.00 PM

**TELUGU**  
 SEEF (I): 12.00 + 7.00 PM

**TAMIL**  
 OASIS JUFFAIR: 1.00 + 8.00 + 11.30 PM  
 SEEF (I): 3.30 + 10.30 PM  
 PRABHAS, PRITHVIRAJ SUKUMARAN, TINU ANAND

**MIGRATION (PG) (ANIMATION/ADVENTURE)**  
 OASIS JUFFAIR: (KIDS CINEMA): 4.00 + 10.00 PM  
 CITY CENTRE: 10.30 AM + 12.30 + 2.30 + 4.30 + 6.30 + 8.30 + 10.30 PM  
 SEEF (I): 11.00 AM + 1.00 + 3.00 + 5.00 + 7.00 + 9.00 + 11.00 PM  
 WADI AL SAIL: 12.15 + 2.15 + 4.15 PM  
 AL LIWAN: (JUNIOR CINEMA): 12.00 + 6.00 PM  
 KUMAIL NANJIANI, ELIZABETH BANKS, AWKAFINA

**HYPNOTIC (PG-15) (ACTION/THRILLER)**  
 CITY CENTRE: 10.30 AM + 12.30 + 2.30 + 4.30 + 6.30 + 8.30 + 10.30 PM  
 SEEF (I): 12.45 + 6.00 + 11.15 PM  
 BEN AFFLECK, JD PARDO, ALICE BRAGA

**SILENT NIGHT (15+) (ACTION/DRAMA)**  
 CITY CENTRE: 11.45 AM + 2.00 + 4.15 + 6.30 + 8.45 + 11.00 PM  
 JOEL KINNAMAN, CATALINA MORENO, KID CUDI

**NAPOLEON (15+) (DRAMA/HISTORICAL)**  
 CITY CENTRE: 1.00 + 4.15 + 7.30 + 10.45 PM  
 SEEF (I): 2.45 + 8.00 PM  
 JOAQUIN PHOENIX, VANESSA KIRBY, BEN MILES

**SUDOKU**

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

**Yesterday's solution**

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

**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- Meanies; 6- Actor Cobb; 10- Lab culture; 14- Single-master; 15- Raines of film; 16- Limerick language; 17- Horn-shaped bone; 18- Linguist Chomsky; 19- Pro follower; 20- Hail, to Caesar; 21- Pathfinder; 24- Causes to remember; 26- Furry swimmers; 27- Peeples or Long; 28- Multitude; 30- Bottle; 33- Satisfies; 34- Bee follower; 37- Timber wolf; 38- Set free; 39- Fellow; 40- FedEx rival; 41- Leg joints; 42- Merchandise; 43- Shoe ties; 44- Heston's org; 45- Horrify; 48- Sports arena; 52- Disease of the heart; 55- Sugar suffix; 56- Monetary unit of Cambodia; 57- Faithful; 58- ... alia; 60- " ... quam videri" (North Carolina's motto); 61- Screen; 62- Growl angrily; 63- Cheek; 64- Foreign dignitary; 65- "Siddhartha" author;

**Down**  
 1- Academy award; 2- Covering for the hand; 3- Composer Ned; 4- Great length of time; 5- Soviet satellite; 6- Horne and Olin; 7- "The Time Machine" race; 8- Airline to Tel Aviv; 9- Festive gathering; 10- Add fizz; 11- Feed on grass; 12- Late bloomer; 13- Brings up; 22- Nutritional std.; 23- Old Fords; 25- Not ... many words; 28- Can't stand; 29- Elevator man; 30- Stomach, Asian, or Hong Kong; 31- Chop off; 32- Bodybuilder's pride; 33- Dagger of yore; 34- Bus, bigwig; 35- Break off; 36- French connections; 38- Lay bare; 39- Incite; 41- Wife of Shiva; 42- Like grandpa's hair; 43- Soup spoons; 44- Ultimate; 45- Lots of lots; 46- Monetary unit of India; 47- Squeeze; 48- Guide; 49- Little bits; 50- Software buyers; 51- Blackbird; 53- Schoolmarmish; 54- Autobahn auto; 59- Compass dir.;

**Yesterday's solution**

S	C	H	A	V	A	R	A	B	S	O	R	T	O
O	H	A	R	A	D	O	L	E	S	E	R	B	
N	A	R	E	S	E	T	A	L	P	L	I	E	
I	R	S	S	U	P	E	R	I	O	R	I	T	Y
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## India level Test series despite Markram's herculean effort

AFP | Cape Town

India beat South Africa by seven wickets despite a stunning century by Aiden Markram on the second day of the second Test at Newlands yesterday and level the series.

Set to make 79 to win, India needed just 12 overs to secure the victory.

South Africa won the first Test in Centurion by an innings and 32 runs.

Chasing a small target on a difficult pitch, Indian opening batsman Yashasvi Jaiswal went on the attack from the first ball, making 28 off 23 deliveries before being caught on the boundary off Nandre Burger.

Shubman Gill (10) and Virat



Jasprit Bumrah raises the ball after taking his fifth wicket

Kohli (12) fell to Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen before Shreyas Iyer hit the winning boundary with his only scoring stroke.

Captain Rohit Sharma was unbeaten on 16.

## REHC hosts eight-race card today



Action from a previous meeting at REHC

● **Alba Cups to be won in each of the day's races, which make up the 14th meeting of the season**

TDT | Manama

Rashid Equestrian and Horseracing Club (REHC) hosts an eight-race card today in Sakhr, with each event offering an Aluminum Bahrain (Alba) Cup.

Action in the 14th meeting of the season gets underway from 1.30pm and all are welcome to attend.

The feature of the day is the sixth race, to be held over nine furlongs with a BD4,000 total prize.

There are six contenders set to battle it out for this race's Alba Cup, three of whom are representing Al Mohamediya Racing. Ahdab and Gulmarg are both trained by Fawzi Nass, with seven-year-old

gelding Ahdab to be ridden by Stephane Ladjad and four-year-old Gulmarg to be saddled by Jason Watson.

Bond's Boy is the other Mohamediya entry, trained by Osama Hashim and to be ridden by Husain Makki.

The others in the field are Graignes owned by Delancey, Burglar of Al Adiyat Racing and Man of Eden of Al Afoo Racing.

Four other races are set to feature BD3,000 in prizes. The fourth of the day is over five furlongs, race five will be over 11 furlongs, and the last two over seven furlongs each.

The seventh and penultimate race is a Graded Class One event with 11 runners in the field, while the final race will have 12 contenders.

Meanwhile, the first race of the day will be over six furlongs with BD1,500 in prize money. Race two is over 10 furlongs and race three over 12 furlongs, with each offering BD2,000 along with their Alba Cups.

# Aquatics sports boost

## HH Shaikh Khalid patronises groundbreaking ceremony for world-class centre for aquatics sports

TDT | Manama

A world-class centre for aquatics sports is set to be built in Bahrain.

The groundbreaking ceremony for the project was held yesterday under the patronage of Supreme Council for Youth and Sports first deputy chairman, General Sports Authority president and Bahrain Olympic Committee (BOC) chief His Highness Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

It is to be constructed at University of Technology Bahrain by World Aquatics—the international governing body of sports such as swimming, diving, water polo, and others—and the BOC, in partnership with GFH Financial Group (GFH) and the Bahrain Swimming Association.

HH Shaikh Khalid attended yesterday's ceremony, along with GFH Financial Group board member and CEO Hisham Alrayes; World Aquatics president, Olympic Council of Asia director general, and Kuwait Olympic Committee secretary general Captain Husain Al Mus-



HH Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa with other officials at yesterday's ceremony

allam; and other high-ranking officials.

HH Shaikh Khalid said that yesterday's groundbreaking ceremony has brought Bahrain a step closer to establishing a global centre for aquatic sports in the Kingdom.

He added that the project will help enhance aquatics across the region, and add another important dimension to the nation's position as a leading sporting destination.

HH Shaikh Khalid further underlined the importance of the centre for the swimming community in the Kingdom, and said

that it is one of the most successful sports projects held in partnership with the private sector.

HH Shaikh Khalid also stressed the BOC's keenness to strengthen the partnership with World Aquatics, in cooperation with the GFH Group, to make Bahrain a centre for developing various aquatic sports.

The centre is the first of its kind in the Middle East and will join a network of existing centres in France, Hungary, Canada, the US, Thailand and Australia. It will provide modern facilities ideal for world-class training and modern sports science.

One of the most important elements of the project is the construction of two swimming pools, one with a length of 50 metres and the other for diving with a depth of five metres, both of which will be built according to Olympic specifications.

There will also be 1,000 seats for spectators during competitions being hosted in Bahrain in the future. In addition, there are integrated facilities for training and sports science, accommodation, restaurants, and retail units, all of which will enhance the spirit of community belonging.

## All Eyes set on Khalid bin Hamad Endurance Race Championship

TDT | Manama

To be held under the patronage of His Highness Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa, First Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, President of the General Sports Authority, and President of the Bahrain Olympic Committee, attention will be fixed on the Bahrain International Endurance Village, which will host the Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa Endurance Race Championship.

The championship will feature a series of international and local races, as well as qualification races and a race for young riders, taking place on Friday and Saturday.

Today, the Bahrain International Endurance Village will witness the organisation of international qualification races covering distances of 120 km and 100 km, a local race of 100



Participating horses are seen at the Bahrain International Endurance Village ahead of the event

km, local qualification races of 40 km and 80 km, and a local race for young riders covering a distance of 60 km.

Veterinary examinations were conducted for the participating horses in the races, under the

supervision of the judging and veterinary committees.

A number of riders, stables, and various committees were present for the veterinary examinations, especially as they were conducted for the races taking

place today, which include distances of 40 km, 80 km, and 100 km, as well as the local race for young riders covering a distance of 60 km, and the two international races covering distances of 100 km and 120 km.

### Race for Young Riders

The Bahrain Royal Equestrian and Endurance Federation (BREEF) is organising the race for young riders as an extension of the successes witnessed in previous races, supporting the younger category of riders who will be the nucleus of Bahrain's future endurance. The federation is following the vision set by the board of directors to qualify and refine talents and support them through the organisation of these races.

It is expected that it will witness widespread participation, building on the excellent participation seen in previous races.

# Star trio set for Bahrain Championship

Rasmus Hojgaard, Pablo Larrazabal and Romain Langasque latest players confirmed for Kingdom's DP World Tour event

● **Bahrain Championship set to take place at the Royal Golf Club from February 1 to 4**

● **Free online registration for tickets for those wishing to attend DP World Tour event**

TDT | Manama

With just over a month to go until the first tee shot is hit, excitement is building for the Bahrain Championship, set to take place at the Royal Golf Club from February 1 to 4, with Rasmus Hojgaard, Pablo Larrazabal and Romain Langasque the latest players to confirm their places in the field.

The DP World Tour is returning to Bahrain for the first time in 13 years for what promises to be an enticing spectacle both on and off the course, with a full programme of entertainment and activities on offer alongside the world-class golfing action.

Hojgaard, who has four DP World Tour titles to his name, is relishing the opportunity to tee



Rasmus Hojgaard



Romain Langasque



Pablo Larrazabal

it up again alongside fellow Danish countryman Thomas Bjorn, who headlines a field which also includes rising stars Dan Bradbury, Alex Fitzpatrick, Yannik Paul and Jordan Smith.

"Thomas was a big inspiration to Nicolai and myself when we were coming through the ranks," said Hojgaard, who became the third youngest winner in DP World Tour history when he secured his first title in just his fifth start in the 2019 AfrAsia Bank Mauritius Open, aged 18 years and 271 days old.

"His achievements in the game put Denmark on the world golfing map and it's been amaz-

ing being able to play alongside him on the DP World Tour. I love getting to experience new cultures and countries through the game of golf and can't wait to visit Bahrain for the first time."

Spaniard Larrazabal is the most experienced of the trio with an impressive nine DP World Tour titles to his name and he's no stranger to success in the Middle East, having won the prestigious Abu Dhabi Championship in 2014.

The 40-year-old, who has played on the DP World Tour since 2008, was in the field the last time the Tour visited Bahrain, finishing tied 24th at the

Volvo Golf Champions en route to a career-high 17th place finish on the Race to Dubai, and he's looking forward to a return to the Kingdom next month.

"I really liked the Royal Golf Club course the last time we played there and I believe they've made some enhancements recently so it's going to be even better," said Larrazabal referencing the recent redesign of several greens on the front nine. "I love starting my season off in the Middle East - the weather is perfect and they have some fantastic golf courses, so I'm really looking forward to what promises to be a great event in Bahrain."

**"I love starting my season off in the Middle East -- the weather is perfect and they have some fantastic golf courses, so I'm really looking forward to what promises to be a great event in Bahrain"**

PABLO LARRAZABAL

Langasque is also keen to add to his DP World Tour trophy cabinet having claimed his maiden victory at the 2020 ISPS Handa Wales Open.

The Frenchman has posted some strong results in the Middle East, including a tied 11th place finish at last year's season-ending DP World Tour Championship and a tied 16th placing in the Hero Dubai Desert Classic at the start of 2023 and he's looking forward to a first visit to the Royal Golf Club next month.

"I enjoy playing golf in the Middle East," he said. "A lot of the courses suit my eye and we always get looked after really well at the events in the region

so I can't wait to experience playing in Bahrain for the first time."

General admission to the tournament is free of charge for spectators while there will also be a host of premium experiences available.

Tickets will include access to the tournament's Village Square, which will boast a wealth of activities for the whole family to enjoy. Little ones will be entertained in the Kids Zone with face painting, glitter stations and roaming entertainers, while live music from local bands, free golf lessons, delicious F&B options and an activation dedicated to Bahraini culture will ensure fans enjoy the off course action just as much as the thrilling golf on offer at Royal Golf Club.

Fans can also grab the opportunity to play with a DP World Tour pro by purchasing a spot in the Pro-Am taking place on January 31.

Prices start at BD825 and include an invitation to the exclusive Bahrain Championship Players Party, a one-night stay at the official hotel, and a host of other benefits.

General admission is free of charge but all spectators must register online in order to gain entry. To keep up to date with tournament news, follow @bahraingolfchamps on Instagram.



Bahrain's senior men's national football team continued their training camp in Dubai yesterday in preparation for the fast-approaching AFC Asian Cup. The Kingdom's squad welcomed the arrival of midfielder Mohammed Marhoon, who was the last of the team's 26 players called up to join the camp. The Bahrainis are scheduled to play two friendly matches while in the UAE. They first take to the pitch tomorrow for an international tune-up against continental powerhouses Australia. Their next fixture will be an informal training game on Wednesday next week against Angola. The nationals then depart the next day for Doha, where the AFC Asian Cup will be held from 12 January to 10 February, featuring 24 of the continent's top national teams. Above left, head coach Juan Antonio Pizzi speaks with the team, and above right, players stretch as they warm up for training



## BRAVE CF Awards: international talents in the running for Breakout Fighter of The Year



TDT | Manama

BRAVE Combat Federation has made it a mission to unearth some of the best young talent worldwide in mixed martial arts and has delivered each year with ever-growing prospects turning into superstars. The class of 2023 is now upon us as four fighters from four different continents have been nominated in the BRAVE Awards for Breakout Fighter of The Year.

Starting with the representative from Africa, Eliezer Kubanza. The Congolese Super Welterweight had an unforgettable start to life as a BRAVE CF fighter, as he won his two bouts in devastating fashion, with two violent knockouts, instantly announcing himself as a threat at 175 pounds.

Iran's Mohsen Mohammedseifi has been with BRAVE CF

since 2021, but after scattered bouts, he went on a run in 2023 finally putting together his immense potential as a legend of Wushu Sanda, with five world championships to his name.

Marciano Ferreira from Brazil only needed one minute and 56 seconds to earn a nomination this year, as the newcomer disposed of former Flyweight number one contender Edilceu Alves with a huge KO victory. His power, which is unusual for a 125-pounder, means he's one of the top Breakout stars of 2023.

And last but not least, another huge Flyweight standout has made the cut as Ukrainian Vitalii Yakymenko broke the bank at Bantamweight by beating fan-favorite Mohammed Farhad before finishing former undefeated star Maysara Mohamed to make two out of two in 2023.

## Manama edge past Al Najma

● **Sir'Dominic Pointer sinks two free-throws with a minute left to help lift defending champions to crucial win**

TDT | Manama

Defending champions Manama eked out a thrilling 69-68 victory over Al Najma last night to cap the 10th week of play in the 2023/2024 Zain Bahrain Basketball League.

Sir'Dominic Pointer sank two pressure-packed free-throws with a minute remaining to help lift his team to the win. Elijah Robinson, a former Manama star now playing with Najma, had a chance to

tie the game from the stripe with 40 seconds remaining, but he made just one of two and Manama were able to hold on from there.

Najma's Joshua Caldwell missed a potential game-winning three-pointer at the buzzer.

With the result, Manama remained undefeated in nine games and are most likely headed into the league's Top Six round as the number one seeds. Najma, on the other hand, will be waiting to learn of their fate, as they dropped their fourth game in 10 tries and are hoping that neither Muharraq or Nuwaidrat take their spot in the ensuing stage.

Both Muharraq and Nuwaidrat are on 5-4 win-loss records.

In last night's encounter,



Manama's Sir'Dominic Pointer goes for a lay-up against Al Najma last night

Manama led 64-60 with less than five minutes to play, but Najma went on a stunning 5-0

run, capped by a Caldwell pull-up triple, to take the lead. Robinson charities made it 67-64, but Manama's veteran court general Hussain Shaker sank a cool three-pointer to tie the game with a minute-and-a-half left. That set the stage for Pointer's heroics.

He finished as Manama's top scorer with 23 points, while Shaker added 13 and Ahmed Najaf had 12. For Najma, Caldwell was their leading man with 28, while Robinson scored 20.

Only one week remains in the regular season of the league, after which the top six clubs move on to the next round, where they will battle for a place in the Golden Square semi-finals.

@bahraingolfchamps on Instagram.

# Kingdom set for Formula 1 spectacle

F1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix 2024 to be held for first time on a Saturday night at Bahrain International Circuit

- Bahrain to kick off 2024 FIA Formula 1 World Championship
- F1 pre-season testing set to be held at BIC 21 to 23 February
- BIC's Corporate Lounges already completely sold out
- Grandstand tickets, hospitality packages selling out fast



BIC Chief Executive Shaikh Salman bin Isa Al Khalifa, second from left, and Gulf Air Chief Executive Captain Waleed Al Alawi, second from right, on stage last night with David Croft, right, and Imran Al Aradi



F1 commentator David Croft speaks on the podium

TDI | Manama

This year's highly anticipated Formula 1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix is set to open the 2024 FIA F1 World Championship, and it will be the Kingdom's first-ever Saturday night race, making for an additional spectacle to the weekend's 20th anniversary celebrations at Bahrain International Circuit (BIC) in Sakhir.

Details of the event, taking place 29 February to 2 March at "The Home of Motorsport in the Middle East", were announced yesterday at the official launch. On hand were Minister of Tourism Fatima bint Jaffer Al Sairafi, BIC Chief Executive Shaikh Salman bin Isa Al Khalifa, and Gulf Air Chief Executive Captain Waleed Al Alawi.

"The hype for this year's race is already significant, with fans across the world wanting to come to Bahrain for the first race of 2024 and celebrate our 20th anniversary," Shaikh Salman said.

"With our race sold out in record time last year, we expect the demand to continue this year so I would urge fans to book their tickets as soon as possible." At yesterday's launch, Shaikh Salman and Captain Al Alawi unveiled 2004 and 2024 F1 show cars. These will also be displayed at various locations across the Kingdom in the lead-up to the grand prix weekend, as part of BIC's nation-wide fan-engagement activities to get Bahrain

buzzing with excitement.

## Testing

Prior to the race weekend, BIC is also set to host three days of F1 Aramco Pre-Season Testing 2024 from February 21 to 23. The three days of on-track running will be the F1 teams' and drivers' only chance to sample their 2024 contenders ahead of the start of this year's FIA F1 World Championship, taking place just one week later.

BIC will be announcing details in due course on how fans will be able to watch the testing and get a glimpse of the new cars and F1's star protagonists in action.

Bahrain has become the ideal venue for F1 to hold its pre-season tests, with teams able to get maximum time out on BIC's 5.412-kilometre track. This year's sessions will mark the fourth straight year that testing is being held at "The Home of Motorsport in the Middle East".

## Fully booked

Shaikh Salman revealed yesterday that the circuit's Corporate Lounges have already completely sold out for this year's race weekend.

The circuit chief hailed the tremendous response to BIC's Early Bird promotions in grandstand ticket sales.

He highlighted the immense interest of F1 fans coming to Bahrain from overseas. Last year's grand prix welcomed over

10,000 international supporters who travelled to the Kingdom from all corners of the globe—the most ever in the history of Bahrain's F1 extravaganza.

## Non-stop racing

The F1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix 2024 will be the sixth time the Kingdom will have the honour of hosting the opening round

of the new F1 season. But it is not the only international race series that will be kicking off its 2024 campaign in Sakhir.

Both the FIA Formula 2 Championship and FIA Formula 3 Championship will also be launching their calendars at BIC, with the future stars of F1 lining up on the grid to showcase their prowess to the world.

## Bahrain sprint race possibility discussed: BIC chief

Bahrain has looked into the possibility of holding a Formula 1 sprint race as part of future F1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix weekends.

This was revealed yesterday by Bahrain International Circuit (BIC) Chief Executive Shaikh Salman bin Isa Al Khalifa during the question-and-answer session at the official public launch for this year's grand prix, held at The Avenues Bahrain last night.

When asked by a fan about the chance of having a sprint race in 2025, Shaikh Salman replied that Bahrain's traditional place early in the F1 calendar makes it difficult to hold the sprint here. "When you're early in the season, it is when [the teams] are still learning the new cars," Shaikh Salman explained.

Legendary F1 commentator David Croft, who hosted yesterday's launch, agreed. "Teams are reluctant to have a sprint for



Nezar Janahi was named the first-ever Bahrain GP Superfan last night. His video submission stood out amongst the scores of entries from people of all ages and who competed for the celebrated tag and the money-can't-buy grand prize. Above, Shaikh Salman with Janahi.

the first race of the calendar because there is so much to learn about the cars," he said.

Despite this, Shaikh Salman confirmed the possibility of holding an F1 sprint race at BIC has been discussed. "We have talked about this, but it's not

Also set to support F1 will be the BIC-born and bred Porsche Carrera Cup Middle East. The region's leading one-make series will be holding its fifth and penultimate round in Sakhir, with competitors from all over the world driving identical Porsche 992 GT3 Cup cars.

Yesterday's launch was just the first of a series of exciting fan-engagement activities held as part of Bahrain GP Live Week-

end, organised by BIC.

The festivities continue today and tomorrow from 10am to 11pm at The Avenues Bahrain.

The attractions at Bahrain GP Live Weekend include F1 race simulators, F1 show cars from 2004 and 2024, a soft games area, a balloon twister performer, a henna artist, face painting for kids, and much more. All are welcome to enjoy the experience, completely free of charge.

**“We have talked about this, but it's not just us who decides, it's also the teams and Formula 1. We will see**

SHAIKH SALMAN BIN ISA AL KHALIFA

crossed for the future.”

An F1 sprint is an additional event to the grand prix weekend held only in select rounds. This season's F1 calendar features six venues that will be hosting a sprint race. They include Shanghai in April, Miami in May, Spielberg in June, Austin in October, and Sao Paulo and Lusail, both in November.

Brazil is set to host its fourth Sprint weekend, with Austria to host its third, Austin and Qatar returning for a second year, and China and Miami joining the line-up for the first time.

## BRX set for gruelling Dakar challenge

- Bahrain Raid Xtreme to be spearheaded by motorsport legend Sebastien Loeb, partnered by teammate Fabian Lurquin in their BRX Prodrive Hunter

- Dakar Rally's 2024 edition gets underway today, with world's most demanding motor race set to covers a total distance of 7,891km over the next two weeks

TDI | Manama

Bahrain Raid Xtreme (BRX) are set to get their campaign underway today in the

Dakar Rally 2024 in Saudi Arabia.

The Dakar is the world's most demanding motor race. It is a test of speed and endurance, with drivers racing over two weeks across some of the harshest terrain in the Arabian desert.

Reaching the end is an achievement in itself.

This year's event covers a total distance of 7,891km.

Rally legend Sebastien Loeb is set to lead BRX in the Dakar. He has set his sights on a landmark victory as he looks to build on the team's record-breaking achievement in last year's edition.

Loeb will be partnered by Fabian Lurquin in their BRX Prodrive Hunter. They are determined to better their second-place finishes from the past two editions of motorsport's biggest adventure.

The BRX crew produced a stunning performance in the BRX Prodrive Hunter on the 2023 Dakar, taking 50 per cent of the stage victories and a record-breaking six stage wins in succession.

With nine World Rally Championship crowns and an impressive set of accolades under his belt from Le Mans and X Games to Touring Cars, Loeb is as motivated as ever as he looks to steer BRX to a first Dakar triumph.

Ahead of today's race start, technical and administrative scrutineering took place yesterday in AlUla, with the big guns in rally-raid being the centre of attention.

This year's Dakar is the fifth time it is being held in Saudi, and it will be the opening round of the 2024 World Rally-Raid Championship.



Sebastien Loeb and Fabian Lurquin with their BRX Prodrive Hunter