

HM King Hamad, HRH CP, PM receive phone call from US Vice President



TDT | Manama

His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa received a phone call yesterday from US Vice President Kamala Harris. The conversation focused on the strong bilateral relations between Bahrain and the United States, as well as ways to further enhance them.

Vice President Harris expressed deep appreciation for Bahrain's role in strengthening cooperation and friendship between the two nations across various fields, supporting their shared interests. Bahrain's strategic importance to the United States was emphasised, along with its vital contribution to regional security, stability, and peace.

King Hamad highlighted the historical depth and solid nature of the partnership between the two countries and expressed gratitude for the efforts made to strengthen Bahraini-American ties.

During discussions with His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Vice President Harris emphasised Bahrain's importance as a strategic partner of the United States.

2024 hottest year on record, crossed 1.5 global warming limit: UN

Geneva, Switzerland

The year 2024 was the hottest measured, with global surface temperatures averaging 1.55 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, culminating a decade-long "extraordinary streak of record-breaking temperatures", the United Nations said Friday.

While this does not mean the internationally-agreed 1.5C warming threshold has been permanently breached, UN chief Antonio Guterres said the "blazing temperatures in 2024 require trail-blazing climate action in 2025".

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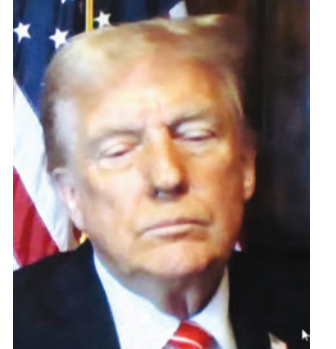


Bahrain expresses solidarity with US

Hollywood ablaze: Stars and Streets reduced to ashes

Bahrain yesterday expressed solidarity with the United States following the tragic wildfires in California, which have resulted in numerous deaths, injuries, and the destruction of hundreds of homes. In a statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bahrain conveyed its condolences to the government and people of the United States for the victims of the wildfires and wished the injured a speedy recovery. In this aerial view taken from a helicopter, homes burned from the Palisade fire smoulder near the Pacific Palisades neighbourhood of Los Angeles, California. Among the hundreds who lost their homes to the devastating wildfires are celebrities such as hotel heiress Paris Hilton, two-time Oscar winner Anthony Hopkins, Oscar-winner Jeff Bridges, "Roseanne" actor John Goodman, and Oscar winner Jamie Lee Curtis. The massive wildfires, which have ravaged entire neighbourhoods and displaced thousands, remain completely uncontained, according to authorities. Meanwhile, US National Guard soldiers are preparing to assist in quelling unrest. Large swaths of Los Angeles, the nation's second-largest city and a hub of the entertainment industry, lie in ruins, with smoke shrouding the skyline and an acrid stench permeating the air.

Trump sentenced to 'unconditional discharge' for hush money conviction



New York, United States

A judge sentenced Donald Trump to an unconditional discharge yesterday for covering up hush money payments to a porn star despite the US president-elect's last-ditch efforts to avoid becoming the first felon in the White House.

The judge spared Trump prison or a fine even though the 34 counts of falsifying business records on which he was convicted in May 2024 carried potential jail time.

Instead New York judge Juan Merchan handed down the mildest criminal sanction available, an unconditional discharge -- a relatively uncommon measure.

"Never before has this court been presented with such a unique and remarkable set of circumstances," said Merchan.

"The only lawful sentence that permits entry of a judgment of conviction without encroaching on the highest office of the land is an unconditional discharge." Trump attended his sentencing virtually.

Limit foreigners, MPs say; Shura differs

Mps propose to limit foreign public sector jobs to Master's Degree holders

H Naser
TDT | Manama

A controversial bill calling for hiring only foreigners with a master's degree in the public sector has hit a roadblock. Opposition is mounting against the bill, originating from the House of Representatives, with key committees and the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) raising alarms.

The bill also limits public sector jobs to foreigners with at least 10 years of experience. Additionally, contracts would be capped at two years, with only one renewal allowed.

Critics warn the bill, which aims to tighten hiring rules for foreign nationals, could create skill shortages, disrupt key sectors, and slow recruitment processes. The CSB and the Shura Council's Legislative and Legal Affairs Committee argue that the proposal is impractical and could harm key sectors like healthcare and education, where over 90% of foreign workers in the Kingdom are employed.

Declining numbers



Foreign workers in public sector are already on the decline. CSB data shows a 23% drop over the last five years, from 7,582 in 2019 to 5,800 in 2024. Bahrainis now make up 86% of the public sector workforce, with foreign nationals comprising only 14%.

The bureau warns that imposing such strict requirements would worsen the situation. Varying roles across sectors of-

ten require specialized skills and certifications rather than advanced academic qualifications. Blanket requirements like a master's degree would force a re-evaluation of hiring criteria, potentially delaying recruitment processes.

Critical sectors

The CSB emphasizes that the healthcare and education sectors would be the hardest

hit. The proposal could lead to significant skill shortages, disrupting operations and affecting essential services.

To address these challenges, the bureau has been actively training Bahraini workers. All contracts for foreign employees already include provisions for skill transfer to local staff, ensuring long-term sustainability.

Already favour Bahrainis

The Shura Committee highlights that existing laws already prioritize Bahraini nationals for public sector roles. Foreign workers are hired only when there is a critical skills gap that cannot be filled locally.

Additionally, the committee noted that Bahrainis currently head all HR departments under the Civil Service Bureau's purview.

A risky proposal

Critics argue that while the proposal aims to empower Bahraini workers, it could have unintended consequences. Skill shortages, delayed recruitment, and disrupted workflows are among the risks highlighted by experts.

The bill also limits public sector jobs to foreigners with at least 10 years of experience. Additionally, contracts would be capped at two years, with only one renewal allowed.



India readies for mammoth festival of 400 million pilgrims

New Delhi, India

The world's largest gathering of humanity begins in India on Monday with the opening of the Kumbh Mela, a six-week festival organisers expect to attract up to 400 million pilgrims.

"Some 350 to 400 million devotees are going to visit the mela, so you can imagine the scale of preparations," festival spokesman Vivek Chaturvedi said.

The last celebration at the site, the "ardh" or half Kumbh Mela in 2019, attracted 240 million pilgrims, according to India's government.

That compares to an estimated 1.8 million who take part in the annual hajj pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

Muharraq demands action on stalled investment panel

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Missed investments and delayed projects have prompted the Muharraq Municipal Council to renew calls for reviving its Investment Panel, arguing that inaction is squandering opportunities to transform public properties into productive assets.

During its latest meeting, council members voiced frustration over the lack of progress in setting up the panel, previously proposed as a key step toward better managing and enhancing the value of municipal properties.

"The current bidding terms scare off investors," said council member Ahmed Al Moqahwi. "We need to be in the loop to ensure projects succeed. Let's



Muharraq Municipality Director General Khalid Al Qallaf

tackle this together to create the right conditions for investment that benefits the whole community."

The push to establish the panel began in late September, when the council recommended that it be chaired by the Director General of Muharraq Municipality. A formal letter urged municipal officials to finalise the panel's structure,

convene its first meetings, and advance plans to overhaul municipal property management.

Despite reassurances from officials that the issue is being addressed, councillors claim there is no tangible progress. Director General Khalid Al Qallaf has since promised increased collaboration with the council, but members remain sceptical.

Al Moqahwi stressed the need for better coordination in shaping projects to avoid repeating past mistakes. "We've looked at previous bids and projects to identify what went wrong," he said. "We hope to review bidding documents before they're sent out so we can address issues that deterred investors in the past. We need to build something solid this time around."



Osama bin Saleh Al Alawi, Social Development Minister, conducted an inspection visit to the Child Welfare Home. The visit aimed to enhance field supervision, assess the home's operations, and review the services provided to children.

A night of culture and excellence

Annual Day Celebrations of BIS



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Bhavans Bahrain Indian School (BIS) celebrated its Annual Day on Thursday at the Cultural Hall, marking a significant occasion for the school community and its senior students. The event was graced by Ms. Huwaida Saleh Aldoseri, Person in charge of the duties of the head of the administrative and educational staff support group, Directorate of Licensing and Follow-up of Private Schools at the Ministry of Education, who served as the chief guest. Directors Mr. Himanshu Verma & Mrs. Ritu Verma also graced the occasion.

The event commenced with a welcome from the Principal Mr. Saji Jacob. The audience was then treated to a welcome song performed by the students.

This special occasion also witnessed BIS's commitment to social responsibility. School Director Mr. Himanshu Verma handed over a donation cheque amounting BD 1000 to Mr. Yusuf Al Yaqoob, Assistant Secretary General, from Royal Humanitarian Foundation.



The event featured a range of performances, including classical songs, vibrant dance routines, and a skit based on the story of Pocahontas.

A highlight of the evening was the release of the school's annual magazine by Chief Guest and BIS Management. The magazine features articles, photographs, and achievements from the past year.

Following the magazine release, the Annual Report was presented, detailing the school's accomplishments and future goals. Director Mr. Himanshu Verma emphasized the importance of perseverance, teamwork, and the pursuit of knowledge in shaping future leaders.


In his address, Director Mr. Verma stated, "Education is not just about imparting knowledge; it is about nurturing character and instilling values that will guide our students throughout their lives." He encouraged students to embrace challenges as opportunities for growth.



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Halt heavy vehicles during peak hours on King Hamad Highway

H Naser
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A proposal to restrict heavy vehicles on King Hamad Highway during peak hours has received preliminary backing from the Ministry of Interior.

The ministry stated that its response is initial, with a more detailed official stance to be provided in the government's memorandum.

If passed, the proposal would prohibit heavy vehicles from us-



ing King Hamad Highway between 6:30 AM and 8:00 AM, and

between 2:00 PM and 3:00 PM. The proposal, put forward by

MP Lulwa Al Rumaihi, aims to regulate the movement of trucks

and heavy vehicles, particularly during morning and evening

rush hours. Al Rumaihi argues that the measure would improve road safety, as heavy vehicles—often transporting materials like rocks and industrial goods—pose a significant danger to other road users.

The Foreign Affairs, Defence, and National Security Committee has reviewed and recommended the proposal for approval. If implemented, the restriction is expected to improve traffic flow and greatly enhance safety for commuters during peak times.

Youth Centres set for increased funding and support



Dr Muneer Seroor, MP



Rawan Tawfiqi, Minister of Youth Affairs

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Youth centres are in line for enhanced support, including more funding and tailored programmes to assist young people, Minister of Youth Affairs Rawan bint Najeeb Tawfiqi told Parliament.

In response to MP Muneer Seroor's question, Tawfiqi emphasised the ministry's commitment to making youth centres a hub for emerging talent. A new department has been established to assess and address the specific needs of young people, with 127 youth-led projects already funded under the Youth Market scheme, covering areas such as arts, technology, and sports.

Funding for youth centres is linked to their activity plans and adherence to youth development guidelines. Additional financial support is available for urgent needs like rent or repairs. Tawfiqi highlighted that centres now have the opportunity to branch into business ventures under recent legal changes, offering an extra source of income.

The Minister confirmed that centres in the Northern Governorate, including Qurayyah Youth Centre, Dumistan Youth Centre, and Buri Club, are considered for extra funding based on specific needs and available resources. Requests must outline innovative ideas or pressing needs for review.

BD 72 Million infrastructure upgrades underway in Southern Governorate

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Over BD 72 million worth of infrastructure projects are currently underway in the Southern Governorate, focusing on road improvements, sewer networks, and public spaces, Minister of Works Ebrahim Al Hawaj announced in Parliament.

A total of 24 schemes are being carried out, including the development of four main roads to serve Khalifa City Housing. The Minister revealed that 10 major upgrades have already been completed, covering roads in the Educational Zone, Block 929 in Hajiyat, and Northern Riffa. Additionally, a plan to enhance rainwater drainage networks is part of broader efforts to improve local infrastructure.

Al Hawaj also disclosed that 34 ongoing projects, worth more than BD 50 million, are in progress, with over 87% of developed areas now connected to the sewer network. Some individual projects exceed BD 2 million in cost.

Meanwhile, Minister of Municipalities and Agriculture Affairs Wael Al Mubarak highlighted the region's green spaces, noting that the Southern Governorate currently has 42 parks and walkways, with 11 more under development and 19 planned for the future. Over



Minister of Municipalities Affairs, Wael Al Mubarak



Mohammed Al Ma'arafi, MP

96,000 trees have been planted, and the area is home to four markets and shopping centres, with two more in development. The Minister confirmed that more than 70 active or planned projects are ongoing in the region. MP Mohammed Al Ma'arafi raised concerns about the reliance on sewage tankers in some areas and criticised the year-long delay in completing work on Hajiyat Avenue.

MP Maryam Al Dhaen point-



Minister of Works, Ebrahim Al Hawaj



Maryam Al Dhaen

ed out the lack of urban development in Isa Town, where a growing population is burdened by an outdated road network. She called for a thorough review to expand and improve access to the town, including better street lighting.

The Southern Governorate is at the forefront of a series of upgrades aimed at addressing long-standing challenges and improving residents' quality of life.

Parliament to vote on BD500m grant proposal

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

A BD500 million proposal aimed at helping Bahrainis manage rising living costs will be put to a vote in Parliament next Tuesday.

The Financial and Economic Affairs Committee, which has endorsed the proposal, believes it could alleviate financial strain and promote social stability.

Led by MP Khalid Saleh Buanaq, the proposal seeks to allocate the funds to the 'Improving Living Standards' section of the 2025-2026 budget.

If approved, the funding would be used to increase social security payments, provide cash support for low-income families, and expand subsidies for utilities like electricity and water. Public sector workers would also benefit from wage increases and bonuses, alongside initiatives to create job opportunities for unemployed Bahrainis in government roles.

The report supporting the proposal was prepared under the leadership of rapporteur Zainab Abdulameer and committee chair Ahmed Sabah Al Salloom.

In an interview with The Daily Tribune, Buanaq highlighted the urgency of the situation, stating, "Flat wages and rising costs are stretching families thin. This funding is crucial to bridge the gaps and build a more resilient community."

The Financial and Economic Affairs Committee's report argues that the BD500 million would not only ease immediate financial pressure but also work towards reducing utility costs, raising social benefits, and providing direct cash support to vulnerable groups. Buanaq also envisions creating government jobs to reduce unemployment while improving pay and bonuses for public sector employees.

"This is our chance to make a meaningful difference," Buanaq concluded.

Labour Ministry reviews 2,587 grievances, approves 911

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

The Labour Ministry's grievance committee announced that it reviewed 2,587 complaints between June and October 2024, of which 911 were accepted after careful consideration.

Common grievances included delays in registration following involuntary job loss, non-compliance with electronic attendance requirements, and refusals of job offers, training, or interviews. Some complaints also involved missed applications for opportunities or other procedural matters. In response to concerns raised by MP Basma Abdulkarim Mubarak, the Ministry referred to Bahrain's Unemployment Insurance Law of 2006, which governs the benefits system.

Benefit payments and eligibility decisions are handled automatically by an electronic system, reducing manual in-

tervention and ensuring consistency. The system allows individuals to file complaints, track their status, and view decisions.

It also connects them to job openings and training schemes tailored to their qualifications. These systems are integrated with the Information and eGovernment Authority to ensure accuracy and transparency.

Unemployment payments have been extended from six to nine months annually. University graduates now receive monthly allowances of BD200, up from BD150, and the compensation cap for dismissed workers has doubled to BD1,000.

The Ministry confirmed that some closed cases have been reopened after further review.

While the Ministry did not disclose the total number of closed files, it emphasised that its grievance-handling process reflects its commitment to fairness.

Environmental cases: Appeal period may double

Dr. Ali Al Noaimi argued that the current 30-day window is insufficient for stakeholders to challenge decisions effectively.

H Naser
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The Public Utilities and Environment Committee has



Dr. Ali Al Noaimi

endorsed MP Dr. Ali Al Noaimi's proposal to extend the appeal period for administrative decisions under Bahrain's environmental protection law from 30

to 60 days.

Dr. Al Noaimi argued that the current 30-day window is insufficient for stakeholders to challenge decisions effectively. The proposal aligns with existing Bahraini laws that provide a 60-day timeframe for similar appeals, such as the 2022 law on biological weapons.

The Ministry of Oil and Environment and the Supreme Council for the Environment deferred to the government for an official stance, while the Supreme Judicial Council stated it cannot provide input at this stage.

The House of Representatives will discuss and vote on the proposal next Tuesday.

Parliamentary report calls for stricter Bahrainisation policies in key sectors

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Government offices continue to rely heavily on foreign consultants, while key sectors like healthcare, education, and banking avoid setting quotas for hiring Bahrainis, according to a parliamentary investigation.

The report reveals that many government departments bypass restrictions on hiring expatriates, and private companies in critical sectors fail to guarantee local employment. Government-owned companies were also criticised.

The investigation also highlighted that Bahrainis are often overlooked for scholarships in high-demand fields, with lim-



Basema Mubarak, MPw

ited opportunities for practical training.

To address this, the committee proposed several solutions. These include setting quotas for Bahraini workers in private hospitals, schools, and universities, and urging government-owned companies to ensure at least



Hassan Ebrahim, MP

90% of their workforce is local. The committee also called for stricter oversight to prevent expatriates from filling positions that Bahrainis are qualified for and recommended that Tamkeen fund practical training to help locals transition into the workforce more smoothly.



Maryam Al Dhaen, MP

The report further suggested stronger hiring policies in the private sector, particularly for senior roles and HR departments, which should be reserved for Bahrainis. Private companies meeting these targets would be rewarded with incentives, while government agencies would be



Hamad Al Doy, MP

required to provide regular progress updates.

However, the investigation faced setbacks. Some ministries and government bodies were criticised for delaying or failing to provide requested data.

On a positive note, the report acknowledged several govern-

ment entities that have achieved full Bahrainisation, including the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Ministry of Electricity and Water Affairs, Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, and Ministry of Youth Affairs. Municipal councils in the capital, Muharraq, and other regions, along with the Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority and the Real Estate Regulatory Authority, were also praised for having no expatriate employees.

The Parliamentary Investigation Committee on Bahrainisation, led by MPs Basema Mubarak, Hassan Ebrahim, Hamad Al Doy, and Hanan Fardan, is set to present its findings to Parliament on Tuesday.

MPs to revisit proposal for tougher penalties on reckless drivers

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

A proposal to impose tougher penalties on reckless drivers responsible for fatal crashes is back for parliamentary discussion this Tuesday, following its review in October.

The amendment calls for a minimum six-month jail sentence and fines between BD 2,000 and BD 6,000. However, it has faced strong opposition from the Ministry of Interior, which



According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 1.3 million people die each year as a result of road traffic accidents, with reckless driving behaviors such as speeding, alcohol impairment, and distracted driving being major contributing factors.

questions the practicality and narrow scope of the proposal.

Supported by five MPs—Abdulla Al Rumaihi, Abdulhakim Al Sheno, Ali Al Doseri, Najeeb

Al Kuwari, and Waleed Al Doseri—the amendment targets dangerous driving behaviours such as reckless overtaking and misuse of emergency lanes,



Ali Saqer Al Doseri, MP

which are often linked to fatal accidents.

The Ministry of Interior ar-



Abdulla Al Rumaihi, MP

gues that the proposal could undermine judges' ability to consider individual circum-

stances by imposing mandatory minimum penalties. The ministry also criticised the vague wording in the amendment, particularly terms like 'security and safety,' which it believes could lead to inconsistent enforcement.

The committee reviewing the proposal has recommended rejecting it, citing existing laws—such as Article 342 of the Penal Code—that already address reckless driving leading to fatalities.

The Indian School celebrates Vishwa Hindi Diwas



TDT | Manama

The Indian School Bahrain (ISB) celebrated Vishwa Hindi Diwas with a series of vibrant programmes at the Jashannal auditorium on Thursday.

ISB Asst. Secretary & Member-Academics Ranjini Mohan inaugurated the festivities in the presence of Principal VR Palaniswamy, Senior School & Academic Administration Vice-Principal G Sathesh, Middle Section Vice-Principal Jose Thomas, Staff Representative Parvathi Devadas, Head Teachers, Heads of Departments, and other esteemed guests.

The programme, orchestrated by the Hindi Department, commenced with the national anthems of Bahrain and India, followed by the school prayer.

Grade 8 student Shahid Qamar recited verses from the Holy Qur'an. Janki Sajikumar extended a warm welcome to the gathering, marking the grand finale of the celebrations conducted in two phases.

The first phase featured inter-school competitions held in December, engaging various CBSE schools, including The New Millennium School, The Asian School, The New Indian School, Bahrain Indian School, New Horizon School, and Ibn Al Hytham Islamic School. Apart from these competitions, the programme featured a diverse array of patriotic songs, value-based songs, and folk dances. First prize winners in categories such as Hindi Poem Recitation, Hindi Doha Recitation, and Hindi Solo Song showcased their

talents.

HoD Baboo Khan announced the names of winners who were presented with trophies and certificates by Ranjini Mohan.

The organizing team included Srilata Nair, Kahkashan Khan, Mahanaz Khan, Mala Singh, Shabreen Sulthana, Sheema Attukandathil, Sayali Amod Kelkar, Sreekala Suresh, Nanditha Devu Sunil, Smita Helwatar, Girija MK, Yogeeta Srivastava, Ganga Kumari, Simarjit Kaur, Viji Vijoy, Nita Pradeep and Joolie Vivek. Students Janki Sajikumar, Aiza Mariam, Ayesha Khan, Khadeeja Subhani, Ishan Mistry, Arjun K Binil, Zoya Shaikh, Deepshikha Kishore, Insia Rizvi, Asra Rashid, Shreya Mathur, Prakrithi G Shetty and Devika Bineesh were the masters of ceremonies. ISB Chairman

Adv. Binu Mannil Varughese, Secretary V Rajapandian, Executive Committee Members and Principal VR Palaniswamy congratulated the winners.

Winners:

- Hindi Handwriting Competition (Class IV): 1. Beryl Mahilvetharaj Jerusha-The Asian School, 2. Serah Soni-The New Horizon School, Jewel Susan Abraham-The Indian School Bahrain, 3. Prathiksha Murali-The Asian School, Ameya Suresh-New Millennium School.

- Hindi Poem Recitation (Class V): 1. Mihika Amitkumar Bamanya-The Indian School Bahrain, 2. Sharon Aiman-Ibn Al Hytham Islamic School, 3. Sahilkumar Mistry- Bahrain Indian School, Shirsh Yadu-The New Indian School.

- Hindi Storytelling Competition (Class VI): 1. Chandra Khyathi,-Bahrain Indian School, 2. Akshat Suresh Kumar-New Millennium School, 3. Uday Pratap Singh-The Asian School.

- Hindi Speech Competition (Class VII): 1. Deepanshi Gopal-The Indian School Bahrain, 2. Aditya Mishra-Bahrain



- Indian School, 3. Aaditi Saxena-The Asian School.
- Hindi Doha Vachan Competition (Class VIII): 1. Shashankit Rupesh Iyer-The Indian School Bahrain, 2. Kenisha Gupta-Bahrain Indian School, 3. Debabrato Biswas-The New Indian School.
- Hindi Solo Song Competition (Class IX): 1. Tanvi M Nambiar-The Asian School, 2. Shreya Muralidharan-The Indian

- School Bahrain, 3. Shaik Mehabeen-Ibn Al Hytham Islamic School, Rajneer Singh Sethi-New Millennium School.

- Hindi Vigyan Making Competition (Class X): 1. Gopikha Bharathi Rajan-The Asian School, 2. Vedika Sudheer-The Asian School, 3. Nidhi Nair,-The Indian School Bahrain, Manisha Sandhu-The Indian School Bahrain.



Non-Oil GDP hits 86%

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Non-oil sectors now contribute approximately 86% of Bahrain's GDP, according to third-quarter 2024 data announced by Deputy Prime Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa.

Shaikh Khalid added that the Kingdom has transformed its economy into one of the most varied in the region, thanks to the guidance of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and the oversight of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister.

Progress has been steady, with 68% of planned projects completed by the close of 2024.

His remarks came in response to parliamentary questions from MPs Khalid Saleh Buanaq and Abdulwahid Qarata on the progress of the Government Action Plan (2023-2026).

Shaikh Khalid explained that an advanced digital system keeps track of ministries' work, project timelines and progress, with updates regularly provided to the Cabinet and ministerial committees.

Bahrain has made headway through its Economic Recovery Plan, launched in October 2021. Of 27 programmes, 22 have been completed, focusing on job creation, business efficiency, major development projects, strengthening sectors, and sound public finances. In employment, over 29,000 Bahrainis were hired in both 2022 and 2023, and another 27,147 in 2024, alongside tens of



Shaikh Khalid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, Deputy Prime Minister



thousands trained, exceeding yearly targets. Foreign investment brought in \$2.86 billion by the end of 2023, surpassing earlier goals. Major infrastructure undertakings valued at over \$30 billion included the Bapco Modernisation Programme (BMP), King Hamad American Mission Hospital and upgrades to utilities in Hawar Island and East Hidd. Bahrain's non-oil economy grew by 7.5 per cent in 2022 and 4 per cent in 2023, supported by focused strategies across key industries such as logistics, manufacturing, and finance.

EWA



An interesting fact about GDP is that it is often used as an indicator of a country's economic health, but it doesn't measure the overall well-being of a population. For example, GDP can grow due to increased production or spending, but it doesn't account for factors like income inequality, environmental sustainability, or quality of life. This has led to the development of alternative indicators, such as the Human Development Index (HDI), which aims to provide a broader view of societal progress.

Infrastructure remains a cornerstone of the government's efforts. In electricity, new transmission stations, including the Jasra 400 kV station and three 66 kV stations in Karzakan, Northern Riffa and Bilaj Al-Jazair, have been established. Water supply systems, such as the East Sitra project with 11 million gallons of capacity and new reservoirs in South Saar and Hunainiya holding 22.5 million gallons, have enhanced the kingdom's water infrastructure.

Kuwait Health Centre

In healthcare, the expansion of the Kuwait Health Centre

is nearing completion, while a long-term care hospital in Muharraq has been built, with its inauguration expected soon. By the end of 2024, Bahrain registered 941 healthcare facilities, including 29 hospitals and 368 medical centres, as part of efforts to broaden access to medical services. The 'Sahati' insurance scheme is also being developed to streamline health coverage.

Academic buildings

Education has seen similar investment. New academic buildings were added to schools in Riffa, Busaiteen and Qalali, in-

creasing capacity for hundreds of students. Private investment in education surpassed BD 12 million in 2023, demonstrating strong collaboration between the government and local businesses to support infrastructure and training.

Sitra Housing Project

Housing projects continue apace, with 1,269 units completed as part of the third phase of the Sitra Housing Project. Other works in Salman City and Buhair are underway, alongside the redevelopment of older areas such as Muharraq. Plans for Muharraq include 300 new or renovat-

ed homes, upgraded services, and the introduction of spaces for tourism and culture.

Tree planting

The environment is also firmly on the agenda. Tree planting, waste management programmes, and updated systems for monitoring air quality have been implemented. Efforts to protect marine life and habitats reflect Bahrain's focus on balancing growth with ecological care.

Kept inflation low

To ease cost-of-living pressures, the government has kept inflation low at 1.3 per cent during the first half of 2024, compared to a global average of 4.3 per cent. Citizens continue to benefit from a range of support programmes, including allowances for housing, pensions, and disability assistance. Fuel and utility subsidies are maintained for eligible households. The 'Tamkeen' Labour Fund has launched initiatives targeting 50,000 Bahrainis, helping to raise wages in the private sector and bolster small businesses.

'Sijilat 3.0'

Digital transformation has been a key focus, with 695 government services now available online. Upgrades to platforms such as 'Sijilat 3.0' and the 'Tawasul' national complaints system have streamlined processes for residents and businesses alike. Plans are in place to develop another 300 services, ensuring that the government remains accessible and efficient.

Bahraini manufacturers secure 75% of GCC market with strategic deals

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Preferential treatment deals with Saudi Arabia and UAE in government procurements have ensured Bahraini manufacturers access to 75% of the GCC market, said Industry and Commerce Minister Abdulla Fakhro.

Speaking in Parliament, Fakhro outlined the ministry's evaluation of 200 factories as part of its digital transformation initiative, supported by 20 internationally certified Bahraini assessors through Tamkeen. A key component of this strategy is the 'Takamul' programme, launched in August 2023, which redirects industrial sector spending towards the local market.

The Minister explained that the reciprocity agreements with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, reached in February and November of the previous year, grant Bahraini manufacturers the same advantages once reserved for domestic producers in these countries. He also highlighted a new incentive for businesses that employ more Bahrainis, invest in their training, and offer competitive wages. These



Minister of Industry and Commerce, Abdulla Fakhro



Ahmed Al Salloom, MP



businesses can qualify for a value-added certificate from the ministry, which provides a 10% advantage in future government tenders. Additionally, Fakhro revealed that a study on manufacturing gaps has been completed to help localise industries and reduce dependency on imports. The findings were shared with the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI), paving the way for new opportunities for existing factories and international investors.

The minister encouraged the private sector to capitalise on these opportunities, noting that several initiatives, including smart factories incorporating Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies, are already in progress.

MP Ahmed Al Salloom praised the achievements, recognising them as the result of collaborative efforts by various government entities, particularly the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. He also advocated for a regular review of incentives for industrial companies, especially start-ups, small businesses, and large foreign firms contributing to Bahrain's economy.



News in brief

Navalny lawyers face long sentences in 'extremism' trial
A Russian court was to issue guilty verdicts yesterday in an "extremism" trial against three lawyers who worked for Alexei Navalny, escalating a crackdown against the Kremlin critic's allies even after his death. The charismatic opposition leader brought tens of thousands onto the streets to protest against President Vladimir Putin, while his investigations into the hidden wealth of Putin's inner circle racked up millions of views online -- drawing scorn and retribution from the Kremlin. Following his death in an Arctic prison colony almost one year ago, Russian authorities have targeted Navalny's allies and relatives, most of whom had already fled abroad.

South Korea's presidential security chief said yesterday there must be no bloodshed if investigators attempt to execute another arrest warrant for impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol over his failed martial law bid. Yoon has refused questioning and last week resisted arrest in a tense stand-off between his guards and investigators after his short-lived power grab plunged South Korea into its worst political crisis in decades. "I understand many citizens are concerned about the current situation where government agencies are in conflict and confrontation," Presidential Security Service (PSS) chief Park Chong-jun told reporters yesterday before he was questioned at the Korean National Police Agency.

Hammer attacker wounds 8 at Japanese university: media
Eight people were wounded in a hammer attack at a university in Tokyo yesterday, with a 22-year-old student arrested at the scene, Japanese media said. All those hurt were conscious, according to public broadcaster NHK, which cited police sources as saying that the afternoon attack took place at Hosei University's Tama Campus. NHK and other media outlets said the attacker, a woman sociology student, had swung a hammer during a class.

SPOTLIGHT

Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai to visit native Pakistan for girls' summit



Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Malala Yousafzai (file photo)
AFP | Islamabad

Taliban accountable for their crimes against Afghan women and girls." Pakistan's education minister Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui said the Taliban government have been invited to attend, however officials from the neighbouring country have not responded to AFP requests for comment. Afghanistan is the only country in the world where girls and women are banned from going to school and university. Since returning to power in 2021, the Taliban government has imposed an austere version of Islamic law which will focus on education in Islamic nations. "I am excited to join Muslim leaders from around the world for a critical conference on girls' education," she said yesterday in a post on X. "On Sunday, I will speak about protecting rights for all girls to go to school, and why leaders must hold the

Los Angeles fire deaths at 10 as National Guard called in

Thousands displaced, over 10,000 structures destroyed in devastating California fires

Over 35,000 acres burned across Los Angeles County

Pacific Palisades and Altadena hit hardest; celebrity homes destroyed

AFP | Los Angeles

Massive wildfires that engulfed whole neighborhoods and displaced thousands in Los Angeles have killed at least 10 people, authorities said, as California's National Guard soldiers readied to hit the streets to help quell disorder. Swaths of the United States' second-largest city lay in ruins yesterday, with more than 10,000 structures destroyed according to the state's fire service.

"I lost everything. My house burned down and I lost everything," said Hester Callu, who had reached a shelter after fleeing her Altadena home. Firefighters were battling multiple blazes backed by water-dropping helicopters, thanks to a temporary lull in winds, as the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner announced the death toll had reached 10. With reports of looting, Los Angeles County ordered a nighttime curfew, and the state's National Guard was on hand to patrol affected areas. Governor Gavin Newsom said the



A Bank of America is fully engulfed in flames along Lake Ave. during the Eaton fire in the Altadena area of Los Angeles county

service members were part of a thousands-strong deployment of state personnel. "We're throwing everything at our disposal -- including our National Guard service members -- to protect communities in the days to come," he said.

"And to those who would seek to take advantage of evacuated communities, let me be clear: looting will not be tolerated." Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said his officers were patrolling evacuation zones and would arrest anyone who was not supposed to be

there. The flames have so far burned more than 35,000 acres (14,160 hectares) in Los Angeles, the state's fire agency reported. Firefighters said they were starting to get a handle on the Pacific Palisades blaze, with six percent of its perimeter contained -- meaning it can't spread any further in that direction.

YOU KNOW WHAT
The Los Angeles wildfires could be the costliest ever recorded, with estimated damages and losses ranging from \$135 billion to \$150 billion



Kenneth fire (below) approaches homes while the back side of the Palisade fire (above) continues

into their own hands. Nicholas Norman mounted an armed vigil at his home after seeing suspicious characters in the middle of the night. "I did the classic American thing: I went and got my shotgun and I sat out there, and put a light on so they knew people were there," he told AFP.

"Death and destruction" The biggest of the multiple blazes has ripped through almost 20,000 acres of the upscale Pacific Palisades neighborhood, while another fire around Altadena has torched about 13,700 acres. Firefighters said they were starting to get a handle on the Pacific Palisades blaze, with six percent of its perimeter contained -- meaning it can't spread any further in that direction.

-- revealed desolation. "This is crazy... All these homes, gone," said helicopter pilot Albert Azouz. On highly coveted Malibu oceanfront plots, skeletal frames of buildings indicated the lavish scale of what has been destroyed. Multimillion-dollar mansions have vanished entirely, seemingly swept into the Pacific Ocean by the force of the fire. In the Palisades, grids of roads that were until Tuesday lined with stunning homes now resemble makeshift cemeteries. The fires could be the costliest ever recorded, with AccuWeather estimating total damage and loss between \$135 billion and \$150 billion.

For millions of people in the area, life was disrupted: schools were closed, hundreds of thousands were without power and major events were canceled or, in the case of an NFL playoff game between the Los Angeles Rams and the Minnesota Vikings, moved somewhere else. Meteorologists have warned that "critical" windy and dry conditions, though abated, were not over. A National Weather Service bulletin said "significant fire growth" remained likely "with ongoing or new fires" into yesterday. Wildfires occur naturally, but scientists say human-caused climate change is altering weather and changing the dynamics of the blazes.

Trump says arranging a meeting with Putin

AFP | Washington

US President-elect Donald Trump said Thursday that Russian leader Vladimir Putin wanted to meet and that a rendezvous between the pair was being arranged. He made the statement just a week and a half before taking office, following promises during his campaign to bring peace to Ukraine, which has been under Russian invasion since February 2022. "He wants to meet, and we're setting it up," Trump said at a meeting with Republican governors at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida. "President Putin wants to meet, he's said that even pub-



US President Donald Trump (R) attends a meeting with Russia's President Vladimir Putin during the G20 summit in Osaka (file photo)

licly, and we have to get that war over with, that's a bloody mess." Trump has never made any

military aid the United States has sent to Kyiv. Trump has also frequently mocked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as a "salesman," while raising eyebrows in Washington by rarely criticizing Putin -- and even speaking admiringly of the Kremlin leader. In addition to criticizing the massive military aid sent to Ukraine under President Joe Biden, Trump has raised doubts over continued US involvement in the Western military alliance NATO. "The United States under Biden has been Ukraine's biggest wartime backer, providing military aid worth more than \$65 billion since February 2022.

Globally ostracized, Venezuela's Maduro takes third presidential oath

AFP | Caracas

Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro is set to take the oath of office for a third six-year term later yesterday, shunned internationally over claims of voter fraud and repression but bolstered by a loyal military. The ceremony comes a day after thousands took to the streets to protest his alleged power grab, with opposition leader Maria Corina Machado briefly held by security forces, according to her team. Critics have reported a fresh wave of repression in the lead-up to yesterday, with several activists and opposition figures arrested in recent days --



Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro gestures next to First Lady Cilia Flores prompting the UN to express alarm. Maduro had ordered the deployment of thousands of police and soldiers who cast a menacing pall over Thursday's rallies

and are keeping a watchful eye over the capital Caracas. "We are ready!" Maduro proclaimed on his Telegram channel ahead of the investiture ceremony scheduled for noon (1600 GMT). "No fascism or imperialism that can stop" the swearing-in, he added -- using terms by which he often refers to the opposition. The opposition accuses Maduro, 62, of stealing the election of July 28 last year, and the United States, European Union and several Latin American countries have recognized opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia as Venezuela's legitimate president-elect.

Last 2 years crossed 1.5C global warming limit: EU monitor



A woman walks through flood waters

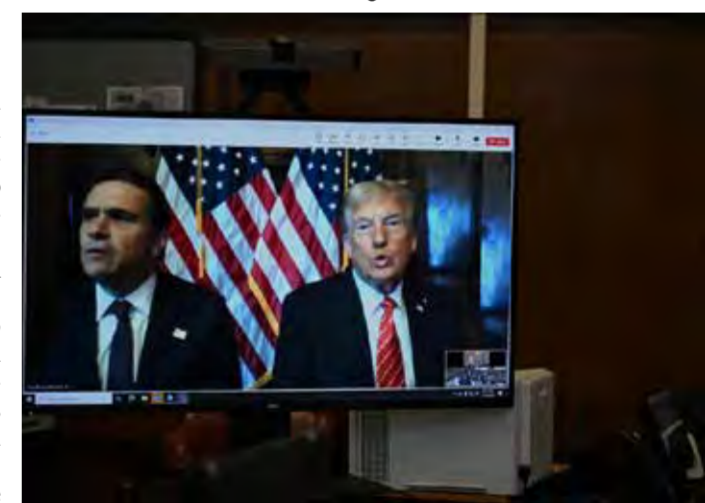
AFP | Paris

The last two years exceeded on average a critical warming limit for the first time as global temperatures soar "beyond what modern humans have ever experienced", Europe's climate monitor said yesterday. This does not mean the internationally-agreed 1.5C warming threshold has been permanently breached, but the Copernicus Climate Change Service said it was drawing dangerously near. Copernicus confirmed that 2024 was the hottest year on record, surpassing 2023 and extending a streak of extraordinary heat that fuelled climate extremes on all continents. Another record-breaking year is not anticipated in 2025, as climate sceptic Donald Trump takes office, and a deadline looms for nations to commit to curbing rising levels of greenhouse gases. But scientists predict that 2025 will likely still rank among the top three warmest years in the history books. This excess heat supercharges extreme weather, and 2024 saw countries from Spain to Kenya, the United States and Nepal hit by disasters that cost more than \$300 billion by some estimates. Los Angeles is battling deadly wildfires that have destroyed thousands of buildings and forced tens of thousands to flee their homes. US President Joe Biden said the fires were the most "devastating" to hit California and were proof that "climate change is real". Copernicus said sustained, unprecedented warming made average temperatures over 2023 and 2024 more than 1.5 degrees Celsius hotter than pre-industrial times. "This 'should alarm us all'", Britain's Energy Security Minister Ed Miliband said yesterday.

Trump sentenced to 'unconditional discharge' for hush money conviction

AFP | New York

A judge sentenced Donald Trump to an unconditional discharge yesterday for covering up hush money payments to a porn star despite the US president-elect's last-ditch efforts to avoid becoming the first felon in the White House. The judge spared Trump prison or a fine even though the 34 counts of falsifying business records on which he was convicted in May 2024 carried potential jail time. Instead New York judge Juan Merchan handed down the mildest criminal sanction available, an unconditional discharge -- a relatively uncommon measure. "Never before has this court been presented with such a unique and remarkable set of circumstances," said Merchan. "The only lawful sentence that permits entry of a judgment of conviction without encroaching on the highest office of the land is an unconditional discharge." Trump attended his sentencing virtually, with the judge, lawyers and media packed into the scruffy Manhattan courtroom that was the backdrop to the trial's high drama, legal wrangling and vitriolic personal attacks by the divisive Republican. "This has been a very terrible experience. I think it's been a tremendous setback for New York and the New York court



US President-elect Donald Trump appears remotely for a sentencing hearing

ceeding unfolded. Ahead of the sentencing, prosecutor Joshua Steinglass said Trump had been convicted of "a premeditated and continuous deception." "The verdict in this case was unanimous and decisive and it must be respected," he said. The trial saw Trump forced to look on as a string of witnesses testified that he had fraudulently covered up illicit payments to porn star Stormy Daniels in an effort to stop her disclosing their tryst ahead of the 2016 presidential election, which he ultimately won. Trump had sought a suspension of the criminal proceedings after a New York State appeals court dismissed his effort to have the hearing delayed. But the Supreme Court ruled that the sentencing could proceed.

” The only lawful sentence that permits entry of a judgment of conviction without encroaching on the highest office of the land is an unconditional discharge
NEW YORK JUDGE JUAN MERCHAN

TOP 4 TWEETS

01
@POTUS

I'm surging every federal resource possible to Southern California, including hundreds of federal firefighters, 30 firefighting helicopters and planes, 8 DoD C-130s, and 500 military ground-clearing personnel. We're working with @DeptofDefense to identify what more we can surge.

02
@antoniguterres

António Guterres @antoniguterres · 9h I congratulate Joseph Aoun on his election as President of the Republic of Lebanon. After a presidential vacuum of over two years, this is an important development. I encourage the swift formation of a new government to address the needs & aspirations of the Lebanese people.

03
@DrTedros

President Jimmy Carter's resolute and humble leadership saved millions of lives. I hope his legacy will serve as a guide for the world and generations to come.

04
@vonderleyen

Almost 3 years into Russia's war of aggression, Ukraine can keep counting on its friends and partners. Today, we deliver €3 billion to Ukraine, the 1st payment of the EU part of the G7 loan. Giving Ukraine the financial power to continue fighting for its freedom -- and prevail.

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

CELEBS

celebs

'Wicked' tops SAG Awards nominations

● Wicked earns five nominations, including Best Cast, Lead Actress, and Stunt Ensemble

● Bob Dylan biopic A Complete Unknown secures four nominations, including Lead Actor

● Adrien Brody's The Brutalist only scores one nod; Angelina Jolie's Maria shut out

● Globes darling Emilia Perez and Cannes favorite Anora each receive three nominations

AFP | Los Angeles

Hit musical "Wicked" topped the nominations Wednesday for the influential Screen Actors Guild Awards, which are key to Oscars glory, while Golden Globes darling "The Brutalist" only got one nod and "Maria" star Angelina Jolie was shut out. "Wicked," the big-screen adaptation of the Broadway smash, earned five nods including for



Marc Platt, Ethan Slater, Ariana Grande, and Cynthia Erivo accept the Best Film Award for "Wicked" from Ryan Reynolds onstage during The National Board of Review Annual Awards Gala

"outstanding performance by a cast" -- the top SAG Awards prize -- lead actress, supporting actor and actress, and stunt ensemble. Bob Dylan biopic "A Complete Unknown" scored four nominations while surreal narco-musical "Emilia Perez," a major winner at Sunday's Globes, scored three nods. Those three films will battle with Cannes favorite "Anora," which also had three nominations, and papal thriller "Conclave" for the top cast award,

organizers announced. "The Brutalist," an epic immigrant drama about a Hungarian architect who survives the Holocaust and moves to the United States, was left out of that category, only earning one nomination for Globes winner Adrien Brody. The SAG Awards are voted on by Hollywood actors, who represent the biggest branch of the membership of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which votes for the Oscars.

The prizes are therefore closely watched as indicators of who might be in the running for an Academy Award. Jolie's failure to secure a SAG nomination for her portrayal of opera diva Maria Callas in "Maria" may not bode well for her Oscars hopes. Vying for lead actress honors with "Wicked" star Cynthia Erivo will be Globes winner Demi Moore for body horror film "The Substance," Pamela Anderson ("The Last Showgirl"), Karla

BETTER
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Screen Actors Guild Awards, voted on by Hollywood actors and closely watched as an Oscars predictor, will take place on February 23 in Los Angeles and will be streamed live on Netflix

Sofia Gascon ("Emilia Perez") and Mikey Madison ("Anora"). Also left out in that stacked category was Nicole Kidman, who earned critical acclaim for her turn in the steamy "Babygirl," and Globes winner Fernanda Torres, for "I'm Still Here" about Brazil's military dictatorship. Brody will compete for lead actor honors against Ralph Fiennes in "Conclave," Timothee Chalamet for his turn as Dylan in "A Complete Unknown," Daniel Craig in "Queer" and Colman Domingo for "Sing Sing." "Wicked" had a difficult night at the Golden Globes, only win-

ning the award for cinematic and box office achievement, but it came roaring back in the SAG nominations, with Ariana Grande and Jonathan Bailey earning individual nods. The SAG Awards also honor television, with Japanese historical drama "Shogun" -- already a big winner at the Emmys and Golden Globes -- leading with five nominations. The SAG Awards will take place on February 23 in Los Angeles, and will stream live for the second year running on Netflix. The live-in-person announcement of the nominations on Wednesday was cancelled due to the devastating wildfires in the Los Angeles area. Later Wednesday, organizers of the Critics Choice Awards -- scheduled for Sunday -- told AFP the gala would be postponed due to the blazes.

DGA nominations

Hollywood's directors' guild also announced its own nominations on Wednesday. The shortlist includes Sean Baker for "Anora," Jacques Audiard for "Emilia Perez," Edward Berger for "Conclave," Brady Corbet for "The Brutalist" and James Mangold for "A Complete Unknown." Jon Chu was shut out for "Wicked." The DGA Awards take place on February 10.



Johnny Depp warns fans over 'deceptive' social media accounts

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Johnny Depp has warned his fans of the dangers posed by "online scammers." The 61-year-old actor has taken to social media to wish his fans a happy New Year and to warn them of "deceptive social media and email accounts" that are "impersonating" him. Johnny wrote on Instagram: "Happy New Year, Everyone - "Sadly, it has been brought to my attention that online scammers are intensifying their efforts to target my fans and supporters. As

part of their tactics, they create multiple, deceptive social media and email accounts impersonating me and members of my team. "Today, AI can create the illusion of my face and voice. Scammers may look and sound just like the real me. But, neither I, nor my team, will ask you for money or your personal information. "We are actively working to combat these illicit schemes. (sic)" Johnny then listed the handles of his official accounts on Instagram, Facebook and TikTok. The Hollywood star - who has more than 28 million followers on Instagram - noted that he doesn't "interact directly with fans on any social media platforms, via email, or via chat-based platforms".

Johnny Depp

Tom Holland and Zendaya get matching tattoos

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Tom Holland and Zendaya got matching tattoos before getting engaged. The 28-year-old actor is believed to have popped the question to his 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' co-star over the Christmas period but before they agreed to get married, they made another commitment by getting one another's first initial inked onto their bodies on 27 November. Lily Jarnryd told how the pair visited the Boston Tattoo Company and she inked a small 't' just underneath 28-year-old Zendaya's armpit, and a tiny 'z' at the top of Tom's ribcage. She added to People magazine: "They were lovely to meet and it was a lot of fun!" News of the couple's engagement emerged after fans spot-



Tom Holland and Zendaya

ted the 'Challengers' actress sporting a huge diamond ring at the Golden Globe awards over the weekend, and it was later claimed that, while she initially planned to keep the news

secret, Zendaya was ultimately too "excited" to stay quiet. A source told UsWeekly: "Tom figured the holidays were the best time to propose in a very low-key way. "She didn't want anything over the top." "Zendaya tried to keep it a secret but was very excited to show off her ring. She didn't think people would notice but didn't care either way." The insider noted that Tom - who met Zendaya in 2018 and the pair went public with their relationship in 2021 - feels as if it is "right time" for marriage even though she never put any "pressure" on him to pop the question. The source said: "Tom wanted to propose because he feels he is at the right time in his life and feels ready to settle down."

SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

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- Tickle pink; 6- Flat sound; 10- Environmental sci; 14- Unit of volume; 15- ___ Ness monster; 16- That's ___; 17- The devil; 18- Winglike parts; 19- Makes brown; 20- Wipe off; 21- Light ax; 23- Paranormal letters; 25- Start to fix; 26- Emulates Eminem; 29- ... saw Elba; 32- Alpaca's cousin; 37- Greek letter; 38- Actual; 39- Sailor; 40- In spite of; 43- Tempt; 44- Little bit; 45- It's nothing; 46- Place on a scale; 47- Russo of "Tin Cup"; 48- Designer Chanel; 49- Yale student; 51- U-turn from NNW; 53- Malarkey; 58- California-Nevada lake; 62- First class; 63- Russian ruler; 64- Unified; 65- Matches a bet; 66- Goldfinger portrayer Frobe; 67- Beat back; 68- Warts and all; 69- Garfield's pal; 70- Short literary composition;

Down

1- Otherwise; 2- Storyteller; 3- ___ boy; 4- Tantalizes; 5- Sea eagles; 6- Blind piece; 7- Han ___ was a "Star Wars" character; 8- Shrimp dish; 9- Clip wool; 10- I could ___ horse; 11- Cat's nail; 12- Sty cry; 13- ___ Mis@rables; 22- Treasure State capital; 24- Golfer Calvin; 26- Extend a subscription; 27- Make up for wrongdoing; 28- Singer LaBelle; 30- College cheer; 31- Borden bovine; 33- Boy; 34- Acid type; 35- Crazy; 36- ___-Saxon; 38- Wealth; 39- Fills to the gills; 41- Hairpiece; 42- Imperial unit of weight; 47- Washed lightly; 48- Stops; 50- Release; 52- Blank look; 53- Denials; 54- That's ___ haven't heard; 55- Capone's nemesis; 56- Indian garment; 57- Harper's Bazaar illustrator; 59- Jumps on one leg; 60- Draft rating; 61- Hard to hold; 62- Al Jolson's real first name;

Yesterday's solution

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

Classifieds



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Sinner denies wrongdoing in doping case

Jannik Sinner maintains innocence as ATP chairman defends handling of his clostebol case

● Sinner twice tested positive for clostebol

● He claims contamination caused the positive tests

● WADA appealed the ITIA's decision to not suspend him

AFP | Melbourne

World number one Jannik Sinner said yesterday he had done nothing wrong as ATP chairman Andrea Gaudenzi stressed the Italian's doping case was "run by the book" with no preferential treatment.

Defending Australian Open champion Sinner twice tested positive for traces of the steroid clostebol in March.

He was exonerated by the International Tennis Integrity Agency, which accepted his explanation that the drug entered his system when his physio used a spray containing it to treat a cut, then provided massage and sports therapy to the player.

But the World Anti-Doping Agency appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport and Sinner



Italy's Jannik Sinner throws a sweat band after finishing a training session

is awaiting the verdict with a suspension possible.

The 23-year-old said he had always been "very, very careful on every single medicine I take, even what I eat".

"When the bottle is open, I throw it away, I take a new one," he said in Melbourne on the eve of the Australian Open.

"In my mind I know exactly what happened, and that's how

I block it (out).

"I haven't done anything wrong, that's why I'm still here. That's why I'm still playing."

Sinner, who faces a stern first-round test at Melbourne Park against big-hitting Chilean Nicolas Jarry, admitted the scandal continued to play on his mind.

"You think about this, of course," he said. "I would lie if I would tell you I forget.

"It's something what I have with me now already for quite a long time. But it is what it is. I'm here trying to prepare the Grand Slam. Let's see how it goes."

Asked if he knew when a verdict on the WADA appeal was due, he said: "I know exactly as much as you guys know.

"We are in a stage where we don't know many, many things." Last week, Novak Djokovic

“When the (medicine) bottle is open, I throw it away, I take a new one. In my mind I know exactly what happened, and that's how I block it (out). I haven't done anything wrong, that's why I'm still here. That's why I'm still playing

JANNIK SINNER



Jannik Sinner explained that the clostebol entered his system due to contamination from a spray used by his physio, a claim accepted by the ITIA but appealed by WADA

called for more transparency around doping suspensions in tennis, saying high-ranked players appeared to be treated differently to others.

Gaudenzi told newswire Australian Associated Press in an interview published yesterday that was not true and Sinner's case had been dealt with properly.

"I genuinely believe there has been a lot of misinformation out there, which is unfortunate," Gaudenzi said.

"I am 100 percent sure that there has not been any preferential treatment. The process has been run by the book and according to the rules, by the ITIA."

While Djokovic said he believed Sinner when he said he tested positive due to contami-

nation, the 24-time Grand Slam winner asserted that players had been "kept in the dark" throughout the process.

But Gaudenzi said he only found out about the case "two days before the announcement from the ITIA -- the way it should have been".

"I initially was a bit shocked. (But) it is completely independent and they obviously went to an independent panel."

Gaudenzi pleaded for patience so the saga could play out, while declaring that the sport would survive should Sinner be banned.

"If that is the case, I think he'll survive and I think we'll survive. Overall, tennis is a very strong product," he said.

Murray braced for Djokovic ire in coaching debut

AFP | Melbourne

Andy Murray says he is ready to be on the receiving end of Novak Djokovic's ire in pressure moments at the Australian Open, with the "unique opportunity" to coach him worth it.

The Serbian 24-time Grand Slam winner Djokovic made the shock decision to hire Murray in November, just months after the Scot called time on his playing career.

In his first comments since then, fellow former number one Murray, who has known Djokovic since their junior playing days, said the call came out of the blue.

"I said to him: 'Look, I need to think about it and talk to my family,'" the BBC quoted Murray as saying.

"So I spoke to them and after a couple of days I thought that it was a pretty unique opportunity and experience.

"I thought it would be a good idea to try it."

Murray is himself a three-time major winner -- and five-time finalist in Australia -- with



Novak Djokovic (R) listens to coach Andy Murray during a training session

both players members of the so-called "Big Four", along with Rafael Nadal, who retired last year, and Roger Federer, who left the sport in 2022.

Djokovic and Murray faced each other 36 times in their careers with the Serb winning 25 of them.

Nineteen of those clashes came in finals, with both men

known for sounding off at their box in pressure moments.

This time it could be Murray on the receiving end.

"I know it's not easy out there -- it's stressful and at times he's going to want to vent towards his team and his box," said Murray.

"Providing that he's giving his best effort and trying as hard as

Murray is himself a three-time major winner -- and five-time finalist in Australia -- with both players members of the so-called "Big Four", along with Rafael Nadal, who retired last year, and Roger Federer, who left the sport in 2022

he can, I'm absolutely fine with him expressing himself how he wants."

With Djokovic chasing an 11th Australian Open title and record 25th major, Murray made clear he was not in town for a holiday.

"At times it's very enjoyable. But high performance is not supposed to be laughs and jokes and messing around," he said.

"In all the times I've been on tour, I haven't seen that from any of the best players in the world. I've seen it from some of the lower-ranked players, and that's one of the reasons why they're not there."

Veteran Monfils powers past teenager to reach 35th final

AFP | Auckland

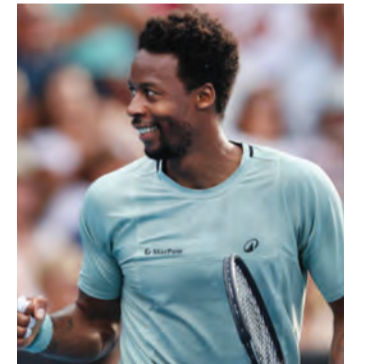
The 38-year-old Gael Monfils swept aside an opponent half his age yesterday to reach the final of the Auckland Classic, setting up a shot at his 13th title.

The Frenchman beat American qualifier Nishesh Basavareddy 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 in their semi-final to become the second-oldest men's singles finalist at any event since the ATP Tour began in 1990.

Monfils capitalised on opportunities better than his 19-year-old opponent, converting his only break point of the match late in the second set.

He said he was relieved to reach a 35th career final to kick-start his 21st year on tour, hoping it sets him up well for the Australian Open in Melbourne starting Sunday.

"I'm very happy. This kid has



Gael Monfils celebrates a point

a bright future in front of him, he pushed me to the limit," said Monfils, who faces fellow Frenchman Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard in the first round of the Australian Open.

Saturday's Auckland final will pit the unseeded world number 52 against either seventh-seeded Portuguese Nuno Borges or unseeded Belgian Zizou Bergs.

Combustible Kyrgios says tennis 'a bit mundane' without him

AFP | Melbourne

Nick Kyrgios claimed yesterday tennis was getting mundane without him as he prepares for his Grand Slam comeback at the Australian Open, saying he was feeling "pretty good" after an injury scare.

The polarising Australian made his return to tennis after 18 months last week in Brisbane following knee surgery and wrist reconstruction.



Nick Kyrgios

He crashed out in the first round after three tough sets against rising French star Gio-

vanni Mpetshi Perricard, also playing two doubles matches with Novak Djokovic.

But he withdrew from an exhibition match against Djokovic on Rod Laver Arena on Thursday with an abdominal strain, raising concerns about his fitness.

"Today, this morning, was out there feeling pretty good," he said after an early practice session, with a second hit scheduled for later.

"I'm just taking it day by day. Just enjoying all the moments again, being a part of the tournament, going through the hallways, locker room, seeing everyone again.

"It's been an emotional time for me the last couple weeks. I'm just enjoying being back."

Kyrgios has always been combustible and earned a reputation for outbursts and meltdowns on court early in his career, dividing fans.

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Royal Humanitarian Foundation Secretary-General visits Endurance Race riders



Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, Secretary-General of the Royal Humanitarian Foundation (RHF), visited the female riders representing the foundation participating in the Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa Endurance Race held at the Bahrain International Endurance Village. The Secretary-General praised the participation of riders Shaima Ahmed and Al-Hanouf Abdullah in the race, wishing them success in this and all future competitions. He affirmed the foundation's pride in their participation and its commitment to nurturing and encouraging the talents of its members and refining their skills to contribute to the nation's progress and represent the Kingdom of Bahrain in various events and at all levels.

Newcastle boss Howe eager to hang onto goalkeeper Dubravka

AFP | London

Newcastle manager Eddie Howe still hopes goalkeeper Martin Dubravka will stay at St James' Park beyond the end of the January transfer window.

The in-form 35-year-old Slovakia international has been heavily linked with a move to Saudi Pro League side Al Shabab as he enters the final six months of his contract with the Magpies.

Dubravka has conceded just two goals in seven games in all competitions -- all of them victories -- while deputising for the injured Nick Pope during a run where Newcastle are closing in on a place in the English League Cup final and are fifth in the Premier League table.



Martin Dubravka

"Martin's been in a difficult situation," Howe said yesterday.

"Like any player that is coming out of contract in the summer, with every player that I've ever worked with, there's always that feeling of doubt.

Slot wary of Accrington's 'Champions League final' at Anfield

AFP | London

Liverpool manager Arne Slot said Accrington Stanley's trip to Anfield in the FA Cup third round on Saturday will be the League Two side's "Champions League final".

The clubs are 86 league positions apart in the 92-team pyramid with Slot's men leading the Premier League, while Stanley sit just outside the relegation zone in the fourth tier.

"I think every team that plays against us it is a special occasion, but especially for a lower league team. They will be all up for it, they have looked forward to this game for many weeks," said Slot at his pre-match press conference yesterday.

"If you go to a Champions League final everyone is completely hyped up and ready and,



Arne Slot

tomorrow, for them that will feel like it is the Champions League final, so we have to be aware of that."

Despite that warning, the Dutchman is likely to take the opportunity to rotate his side during a hectic spell of fixtures in four competitions.

That could open the door for Federico Chiesa to make just

"I think every team that plays against us it is a special occasion, but especially for a lower league team. They will be all up for it, they have looked forward to this game for many weeks"

ARNE SLOT

his second start for the Reds since joining from Juventus in August.

The Italian international forward's career has been injury-ravaged and the 27-year-old has struggled for fitness in the early months of his time in England.

But Slot said his fleeting appearances so far also have much to do with the form of Mohamed Salah and the rest of his forward line.

"It's not only been difficult for him in terms of match fitness, it's also that he has to compete with the likes of Cody Gakpo, Luis Diaz, Diogo Jota, Darwin Nunez and Mo Salah," added Slot.

"Everybody here knows the numbers Mo Salah brings in. There's not many times a reason to take him out during a game or before a game.

"It's a combination of reasons why he didn't play that much yet but let's wait and see in the upcoming weeks and months if he's able to help us because the second half of the season is even more important than the first."

Djokovic alleges poisoning in 2022 detention

Novak Djokovic claims he was poisoned with lead and mercury before 2022 Australian Open deportation

● Djokovic was held in a detention hotel due to his vaccination status

● Australian authorities insist food provided was nutritious, safe, and culturally appropriate

● Djokovic says he holds no grudge against Australians despite the controversy

AFP | Melbourne

Novak Djokovic has claimed that he was "poisoned" by lead and mercury in his food while he was briefly held in Melbourne in 2022 before being deported on the eve of the Australian Open.

The former world number one had his visa cancelled and was eventually kicked out of the country over his refusal to be vaccinated against Covid.

He was held in a detention hotel as he fought a fruitless legal battle to remain.

"I had some health issues. And I realised that in that hotel in Melbourne I was fed some food that poisoned me," the 37-year-

YOU KNOW WHAT

Djokovic stated his health issues stemmed from detention food, but Australia's Park Hotel kept samples of detainee meals for quality assurance

old Djokovic told GQ magazine in a lengthy interview published Thursday.

"I had some discoveries when I came back to Serbia. I never told this to anybody publicly, but discoveries that I had a really high level of heavy metal. I had lead, a very high level of lead and mercury."

When asked if he believed his food was contaminated, the Serb replied: "That's the only way."

A spokesperson for Australia's Department of Home Affairs said it could not comment on individual cases "for privacy reasons".

But the government says a lease agreement with the Park Hotel where he was held

provides for freshly cooked, individually portioned lunches and dinners for detainees.

Nutritious

All catering staff have undertaken food safety certifications, it says.

And, as of December 31,

2021, the hotel had been providing samples of the food provided to detainees at each meal to the contractor responsible for detention services.

Australia says detainees had access to a variety of food and drink that was nutritious, culturally appropriate and satisfied specific medical or dietary requirements.

They were also offered breakfast items such as bread, cereal, noodles, tea and coffee at any time of the day or night.

Djokovic will be bidding for an 11th Australian Open title and a record-setting 25th major when the season's first Grand Slam event gets underway on Sunday.

He insists that he does not hold "any grudge over the Australian people" despite the 2022 controversy. A year later, he returned to Melbourne where he swept to the title.

"A lot of Australian people that I meet in Australia the last few years or elsewhere in the world, have come up to me, apologising to me for the treatment I received because they were embarrassed by their own government

at that point," he said.

"I had some health issues. And I realised that in that hotel in Melbourne I was fed some food that poisoned me. I had some discoveries when I came back to Serbia. I never told this to anybody publicly, but discoveries that I had a really high level of heavy metal. I had lead, a very high level of lead and mercury"

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

"And I think the government's changed, and they reinstated my visa, and I was very grateful for that.

"I actually love being there, and I think my results are a testament to my sensation of playing tennis and just being in that country."

However, he added: "Never met the people that deported me from that country a few years ago. I don't have a desire to meet with them. If I do one day, that's fine as well. I'm happy to shake hands and move on."



Novak Djokovic

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