

Israel attacks in Gaza kill dozens on Day 98 of war
 AFP | Jerusalem

Telecommunication services were cut across besieged Gaza yesterday, as Israeli strikes killed dozens in southern cities where hundreds of thousands are struggling to survive hunger and cold on day 98 of the war between Israel and Hamas. The fighting between Hamas fighters and Israeli forces raged after a night of heavy Israeli shelling, and came amid growing fears of the conflict widening after US and British forces struck pro-Hamas Houthi rebels in Yemen after attacks on Red Sea shipping. In Gaza, strikes and shelling hit areas between the territory's southern cities of Khan Yunis and Rafah, which is crowded with people who have fled from the north.

UN warns 2024 could be 'hotter' than record 2023
 AFP | Geneva

This year could be hotter under El Nino's influence than the record-shattering 2023, the United Nations warned yesterday, as it urged drastic emissions cuts to combat climate change. The UN's World Meteorological Organization said new monthly temperature records were set every month between June and December, and the pattern is likely to continue due to the warming El Nino weather phenomenon. The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) predicted there is a one in three chance that 2024 will be warmer than 2023 - and a 99 percent certainty that 2024 will rank among the five warmest years ever.

Over 30 left dead in Khartoum violence
 AFP | Al-Jazira State, Sudan

Fighting between rival Sudanese forces, including air strikes on the capital Khartoum, have killed at least 33 civilians, pro-democracy lawyers said overnight yesterday. Sudan has been gripped by nearly nine months of war.

Graduate gains or business drain?

Bahrain eyes mandatory graduate training in private sector, sparking debate on job market shakeup



The outcome of Shura Council's debate will shape the future of Bahrain's workforce
 TDT | Manama

A proposed law demanding private companies with at least 50 employees train Bahraini university graduates is set to ignite debate at the Shura Council tomorrow. The ambitious legislation, championed by five lawmakers, aims to bridge the gap between academic qualifications and practical experience, tackling the issue of graduate unemployment head-on.

The plan mandates companies to train Ministry-nominated graduates for three months, at a ratio of one trainee per 50 workers. Proponents argue this will not only equip young graduates with valuable skills but also fulfill companies' "desired social role" in boosting national employment and reducing reliance on foreign workers. "The absence of mandatory

vocational training in the private sector has led to a high percentage of unemployed graduates," the proposal states. "It has become necessary for the legislative authority to intervene and establish a robust legal system."

Concerns

This intervention, however, might not sit well with all businesses. Concerns about addi-

tional costs and administrative burdens are likely to be raised, alongside questions about the law's impact on existing recruitment practices. The proposal emphasizes the need to "activate the social function of capital" within the framework of constitutional justice. This echoes a broader government aim to prioritize Bahraini citizens in the job market, potentially creating ripple effects across industries.

Ultimately, the Shura Council's debate promises to be lively, pitting pragmatic economic considerations against a vision for empowering local graduates and shaping the future of Bahrain's workforce. Whether the proposed law becomes reality remains to be seen, but it's certain to spark a much-needed conversation about bridging the gap between education and employment in the kingdom.

“The absence of mandatory vocational training in the private sector has led to a high percentage of unemployed graduates. It has become necessary for the legislative authority to intervene and establish a robust legal system.”
 - PROPOSAL STATEMENT

Military intervention

US and UK defend strikes against Iran-backed Houthis

AFP | Washington

The US does not seek conflict with Iran despite carrying out strikes on Yemen's Tehran-backed Houthi rebels to stop their attacks on Red Sea shipping, the White House said yesterday.

"We're not looking for conflict with Iran. We're not looking to escalate and there's no reason for it to escalate beyond what happened over the last few days," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told MSNBC. "That said... we know that Iran supports the Houthis. We know that they're supplying them with the missiles and the drones, the same things they've used to attack shipping. "And we have made it very clear Iran should stop that sup-



The US launches air strike against Houthi targets in Yemen

port." US President Joe Biden said the strikes were designed to end the Houthis' ability to attack ships. **Lawful and proportionate** Britain yesterday insisted that

overnight US-led strikes against Houthi rebels were lawful and "proportionate", as the Western allies faced criticism for the military action. Publishing what it called a summary of the "legal position" behind the joint strikes, the UK



The air strikes on targets in rebel-held Yemen killed five people and wounded six.

government said the Houthis have conducted dozens of "serious attacks on shipping in the Red Sea for a sustained period". London noted that British flagged vessels had been threatened in those incidents, and that it had assessed the attacks

would continue "unless action is taken to deter them". "Military intervention to strike carefully identified targets in order to effectively downgrade the Houthi's capabilities and deter further attacks was lawfully taken," the brief from Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's office stated. "It was necessary and proportionate to respond to attacks by the Houthis and this was the only feasible means available to deal with such attacks," it added, using an alternative spelling for the rebel group. "The UK is permitted under international law to use force in such circumstances where acting in self-defence is the only feasible means to deal with an actual or imminent armed attack and where the force used is necessary and proportionate."

US-UK joint attacks in Yemen draw experts' deep scrutiny

TDT | Manama

The US and UK joint strikes against Houthi rebels in Yemen sparked a flurry of questions and assessments from experts at London's International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), highlighting the operation's complexities and potential ramifications.

Assessing the Strike's Scope and Impact

Fabian Hinz, Research Fellow for Defence and Military Analysis at IISS

The US military stated that it had attacked about 60 targets in several regions in Yemen, including command and control nodes, munition storage sites, launchers, production facilities and air defence systems. The scope of the attack makes clear that this was not merely a symbolic strike but an attempt to seriously degrade Houthi anti-ship capabilities.

However, the types of systems used by the Houthis for their attacks in the Red Sea are relatively compact, mostly mobile and can be dispersed and concealed relatively easily. It therefore remains uncertain what percentage of Houthi anti-ship missile and UAV systems the joint British-American system managed to neutralize.

Sustaining Naval Presence and Maritime Trade

Nick Childs, Senior Fellow for Naval Forces and Maritime Security at IISS

This is clearly seen internationally as a major threat to global maritime trade and an issue



"Airstrikes over time could force behaviour change by the Houthi in a way that defensive action in the Red Sea was not achieving."

- SIR TOM BECKETT



"How long such a mission can be sustained will depend on how many other governments and navies are also ready to take a meaningful share of the burden."

- NICK CHILDS



"The US and UK's attempt to paint the conflict in the Red Sea as being wholly unconnected to the war in Gaza has so far been unsuccessful in the region."

- HASAN ALHASAN



"The scope of the attack makes clear that this was not merely a symbolic strike but an attempt to seriously degrade Houthi anti-ship capabilities."

- FABIAN HINZ

of Yemen, which it has failed to do. The US/UK and aligned OPG countries do not need to do this. Airstrikes over time could force behaviour change by the Houthi in a way that defensive action in the Red Sea was not achieving.

Regional Reaction, Especially from Gulf States

Hasan AlHasan, Senior Fellow for Middle East Policy at IISS

Traditional US partners in the region including Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Jordan, and Türkiye have issued statements over the past 24 hours expressing concern over the potential for US and UK strikes against the Houthi in Yemen to lead to further escalation in the region.

While the Gulf states recognize the need to maintain the freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, they appear to believe that a de-escalatory pathway involving a ceasefire in Gaza would lead to an overall lowering of the temperature in the region including the Red Sea. This suggests that the US and UK's attempt to paint the conflict in the Red Sea as being wholly unconnected to the war in Gaza has so far been unsuccessful in the region. Bahrain, which is playing an active role in supporting US and UK military operations logistically, is the only exception to this regional trend so far. Bahrain's position can be explained by its recent signing of a CSIPA agreement with the US, its traditional role in hosting the US Fifth Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces, and September 2023 attack by the Houthis that killed five Bahrain servicemen in southern Saudi Arabia.

of freedom of navigation. But all navies are stretched. Both the US Navy and the UK Royal Navy will be hard-pressed to maintain their current commitments indefinitely and their ships are spread quite thin as it is in terms of the potential area of sea at risk.

How long such a mission can be sustained will depend on how many other governments and navies are also ready to take a meaningful share of the burden. Another issue is how the threat may evolve. And for all there is the question of whether continuing to denude their resources in ships and missiles in a defensive

mission is sensible, or whether other measures like further air and missile strikes are necessary.

All this adds to the potential stresses and strains on governments as they judge how to respond now. The shipping industry, too, will be looking at how the threat develops. There is a debate over what impact a prolonged disruption will have on the global economy, and the extent to which the shipping community will adapt. That could include returning to using the Red Sea if the threat can be returned to acceptable levels. In the end, this is a major shipping route, and there are stakes

involved well beyond the region that will bear on calculations of what needs to be done to keep it open and safe.

Escalation Risks and Houthi Deterrence

Sir Tom Beckett, Executive Director, IISS-Middle East

Notwithstanding the chance of miscalculation leading to escalation, from the Axis of Resistance standpoint, Tehran is likely to be thinking two things: 1) what will regional escalation mean directly for Iran (will it be attacked, by whom, from where, at what targets, at what scale, and for what duration) and

indirectly how will escalation further Tehran's goal to drive the US from the ME regions; and 2) how will escalation further Iran's goal to destroy the State of Israel. It is hard to see how it can be optimistic about either. Perhaps more important for Iran currently, will be to pressure Iraq to expel US forces. This would be a 'strategic victory' as part of 1) above.

The Saudi led coalition had two aims for the Yemen campaign. To restore the 'legitimate' government of Yemen and, consequently, to defend Saudi territory. To achieve this, it needed to achieve a level of territorial con-

Bahrain congratulates Morocco on UNHRC Presidency

TDT | Manama

Bahrain congratulated Morocco for winning the election to lead the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) for the year 2024.

This reflects Morocco's international recognition of its foreign policy, human rights achievements, efforts to consolidate tolerance and peaceful coexistence, and support for the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed Bahrain's appreciation for Morocco's diplomatic and legal efforts and initiatives on a regional and international level, as well as its confidence in its ability to lead the inter-governmental body and to promote and protect human rights.

The ministry wished Morocco and its people further success and prosperity, under the leadership of His Majesty King Mohammed VI.

Real estate sector holds promise for Bahraini jobseekers

TDT | Manama

The Labour Minister, His Excellency Jameel bin Mohammed Ali Humaidan, affirmed the importance of hiring Bahraini employees in various sectors, including in real estate, which attracts jobseekers due to its promising career path.

He called for the real estate sector to benefit from the newly launched initiatives by the Labour Fund, Tamkeen, particularly those related to the develop-



HE Ali Humaidan with Al Mushaima and Bahraini employees

ment of national competencies.

This came as the Labour Minister met with Hassan Ali Al Mushaima, Director General

of Grnata Real Estate Group, accompanied by several Bahraini employees.

The meeting reviewed the

group's achievements in employing more than 83 Bahrainis during the recent period in supervisory, technical, adminis-

trative, and marketing positions.

Al Mushaima noted that the expansion plan for the group will require the recruitment of more than 70 Bahrainis, in both administrative and technical positions.

Humaidan commended the group for cooperating with the ministry in recruiting Bahraini employees in various directorates and divisions.

The Director General commended the ministry's and Tamkeen's efforts in supporting the private sector.

Boosting health sector



Her Excellency Dr. Jaleela bint Al Sayyed Jawad Hasan, Minister of Health, met with Dr. George Cheriyan, CEO and Chief Medical Officer of the American Mission Hospital. The meeting discussed investment opportunities in the health sector as well as ways to strengthen cooperation with regard to training national competencies and supporting medical research. Dr. Jaleela affirmed the importance of promoting partnerships between the public and private sectors to improve the quality and efficiency of health services. Dr. Cheriyan expressed his appreciation to the minister for her continuous support for the hospital.

Accreditation certificate

The General Directorate of Verdict Enforcement and Alternative Sentencing briefed a Moroccan delegation about steps taken to get the accreditation certificate by the American Correctional Association (ACA). The brief took place during participation in the association's conference in Maryland, USA, including mechanisms to obtain the certificate and its positive effect on the world environment. The delegation hailed the achievement, stressing the importance of exchanging expertise.



Kingdom's security and stability aligned with royal vision

TDT | Manama

The Interior Minister, His Excellency General Shaikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, has asserted that Bahrain is blessed with security and stability in line with the royal vision of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and the follow-up of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister.

He pointed out the role of joint efforts in enhancing security through purposeful programmes and initiatives and the impor-



HE General Shaikh Rashid bin Abdullah with the Austrian Federal Minister and other officials

tance of continuing these efforts to improve comprehensive security within the framework of security cooperation and coordination between brotherly and

friendly countries.

General Shaikh Rashid bin Abdullah made the statement during his visit to Austria where he was received by the Federal

Minister of the Interior, Gerhard Karner.

Acting Chargé d'Affaires at the Mission of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the United Nations in

Geneva, Hassan Musa Shafi'i, and members of the delegation accompanying HE the Interior Minister attended the event.

The Austrian official welcomed HE the Interior Minister, asserting the importance of the visit to promote cooperation and coordination to achieve common goals.

Cooperation

The meeting discussed cooperation, exchange of experiences, and development of capabilities in all areas of security work in light of the security changes and challenges the world is

witnessing, and in a way that contributes to maintaining and strengthening security, in addition to the importance of building on future visions to achieve security.

HE the Interior Minister and his Austrian counterpart signed a "Declaration of Intent" between the Ministries of the Interior of the two countries as part of work to strengthen security cooperation in law enforcement and criminal justice. It was agreed to activate the declaration through communication and coordination between the two sides.

Asian woman on trial for attacking policewoman



Image used for illustrative purposes only

TDT | Manama

The High Criminal Court has commenced the trial of an Asian woman accused of assaulting a policewoman.

The alleged incident took place when the latter attempted to control the defendant's behaviour while she was at a café in the Qudaibiya area.

The defendant caused chaos and set fire to chairs in the café. The defendant justified her actions, claiming self-defense. The court has adjourned the next session until January 16 for further review and response, while the defendant remains in custody. Meanwhile, the defense team will be allowed to review the recorded footage of the incident.

The victim, as part of her duty in the police patrols, received a request for assistance at the location due to the pres-

ence of the defendant who was allegedly exhibiting abnormal behaviour and attempting self-harm at a café in the Qudaibiya area.

Crime scene

The officer proceeded to the scene and witnessed the defendant holding a knife to her own neck. The defendant had closed the café's doors using chairs and set fire to one of the café's chairs, while also attempting to assault passersby and customers.

The officer immediately filmed the defendant to document the situation and attempted to calm her down. However, the defendant punched her in the face, causing her glasses to fall off.

The witness stated that she tried to retrieve her glasses, but the defendant struck her with her hand, causing scratches and pain in her right hand.

Breaking barriers: Shura Council debates key law

Proposes doubling quota for disabled workers, tailored job placement and support programs

TDT | Manama

A landmark proposal set for Shura Council debate this week aims to shatter glass ceilings for persons with disabilities in the Bahraini workforce.

Championed by five council members, the ambitious legislation proposes a 100% increase in the mandated quota for disabled employees, alongside tailored job placement and support programs.

Currently, private companies with 50 or more workers are required to employ at least 2% of their workforce from the disabled community. This new proposal seeks to double that quota to 4%, a significant step towards a more inclusive and equitable employment landscape.

"The integration of persons with disabilities into the labour market and society is not just a legal obligation, but a moral imperative," declared Sabeeka Khalifa Al Fudalah, one of the proposal's proponents. "This law will bridge the gap between potential and opportunity, empowering individuals with disabilities to contribute their



Image used for illustrative purposes only

unique talents and skills to our national economy."

The proposal, however, goes beyond mere quotas. It outlines a comprehensive framework for job placement, ensuring compatibility between disability type and job requirements.

Dedicated decree

Furthermore, it calls for the Minister of Labour, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, to develop a dedicated decree specifying suitable positions for individuals with disabilities.

The Ministry of Labour, while acknowledging the exist-

ing 2% quota, highlighted the challenges faced in integrating individuals with intellectual disabilities into the workforce. With 105 individuals with intellectual disabilities currently seeking employment, the ministry emphasizes the need for specialized training and support programs.

This proposed law, if adopted, wouldn't simply offer jobs – it would offer hope. It would empower individuals with disabilities to break free from the shackles of underemployment and discrimination, paving the way for a more inclusive and

“The integration of persons with disabilities into the labour market and society is not just a legal obligation, but a moral imperative. This law will bridge the gap between potential and opportunity, empowering individuals with disabilities to contribute their unique talents and skills to our national economy.”

-SABEKA KHALIFA AL FUDALAH, ONE OF THE PROPOSAL'S PROPONENTS

productive Bahrain. The Shura Council's upcoming debate promises to be a pivotal moment in the fight for disability rights and economic justice, watched by not just Bahrain, but the entire region.

Bahrain affirms commitment to preserving environment

● Supreme Council for Environment hosts symposium in collaboration with United Nations

TDT | Manama

The Supreme Council for the Environment has affirmed the Kingdom of Bahrain's unwavering dedication to fulfilling its obligations under the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

This resolute commitment was emphasised during the inauguration of a symposium organised by the Supreme Council for the Environment in collaboration with the United Nations Industrial Development Or-



Participants in the forum

ganization (UNIDO) to address the disposal of ozone-depleting chemicals used in the foam and thermal insulation sector.

The symposium garnered extensive participation from manufacturers and suppliers from European and regional countries, along with the presence of distinguished specialists in the field.

The symposium focused on deliberating strategies to completely eliminate chemicals that impact the ozone layer from the industrial sectors, aiming for full cessation of their usage by the year 2025.

The event underscored the national plan's endorsement of multiple environmentally friendly alternatives that have

been developed over the past decade, ensuring a seamless transition for end users in the industrial and thermal insulation domains without encountering impediments.

Collaborative efforts

Over the past three years, the Supreme Council for the Environment has actively engaged

with industrial sectors and investors to facilitate a smooth transition to new alternatives.

Notably, in collaboration with UNIDO, the Council has successfully procured suitable quantities of alternative chemicals for use in thermal insulation.

Rigorous laboratory testing has ensured their compatibility with Bahrain's climate and regulatory standards, establishing them as viable replacements for ozone-depleting substances.

The Council expressed gratitude to UNIDO for its ongoing environmental support and lauded the active participation of stakeholders from both local and international sectors.

The Council extended its best wishes for the successful realisation of their collective goals in advancing sustainable development.

Verdict set for man charged with knife attack

TDT | Manama

The High Criminal Court has set January 29, 2024 as the date to announce its ruling in the case of a 24-year-old Asian man accused of inflicting a permanent disability on his roommate, as determined by medical committees, estimating it to be around 5% disability.

The incident occurred when the accused struck his roommate's face with a knife due to disputes over payment of the electricity bill.

The victim had filed a complaint, stating that they shared a residence, and the electricity bill was shared between them.

Captivating artistic journey

18th Spring of Culture Festival commences with spectacular "Bahraini Sound Art' ceremony



Bahraini artists, orchestrated by the Bahrain Music Band, mesmerise the crowd

TDT | Manama

The 18th Spring of Culture Festival, renowned as the largest cultural season in the Kingdom of Bahrain, commenced on Thursday evening at the Bahrain National Theater.

The event witnessed the grand inauguration of the "Bahraini Sound Art" ceremony in the esteemed presence of His Excellency Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, Chairman of the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities (BACA), alongside several other dignitaries.

The theater's 1,000 seats were filled with high-level diplomats and a large audience, signifying the festival's significance and appeal.

Intangible heritage

This groundbreaking ceremony marks the first instance of sound art being showcased on such a grand platform, underscoring BACA's commitment to highlighting the importance of this art form and the intangible heritage it embodies for the Kingdom.

The distinguished Bahraini artists Ahmed Al Jumairi, Muhammad Al Tamimi, and Abdul Rahman Awad actively participated in the ceremony, which was orchestrated by the Bahrain Music Band under the guidance of Maestro Ziad Ziman.

Attendees were treated to a captivating artistic journey, featuring various musical excerpts showcasing the seminal works of Bahraini sound art pioneers

and founders such as Muhammad bin Faris, Dhahi bin Walid, and Muhammad Zuwaid.

The art of voice holds a significant place in ancient Arabic singing and serves as the local form of popular singing for the Gulf region, particularly the Kingdom of Bahrain. Muharraq city is recognized as the cradle and epicenter of this art, from where it radiated across the region.

Despite the evolution of the local singing and music scene, the art of voice in Bahrain has preserved its originality and artistic essence to this day. It is revered as the art of the "elite," with its early pioneers in the Kingdom being regarded among the finest vocal artists in the region.

The ceremony garnered enthusiastic engagement from the

audience, particularly during the captivating presentation of "Al-Zafna," the traditional dance accompanying Bahraini vocal art.

Resounding applause

The performance of "The Deal" also evoked a strong response from the attendees, evident in the resounding applause, underscoring the rhythmic allure that distinguishes this authentic art form. Notably, the Spring of Culture Festival is set to continue until March 1.

The festival is jointly organised by BACA, the Shaikh Ibrahim bin Mohammed Al Khalifa Center for Culture and Research, and the Dana Theater, in collaboration with Al Rawaq Arts Space, Al Barih Fine Arts, Art Concept, and the La Fontaine Center for

Contemporary Art.

The diverse array of programs and events featured in the festival spans various cultural venues across Bahrain, encompassing art exhibitions, musical and theatrical performances, workshops, as well as literary, intellectual, and poetic gatherings, among other offerings.

This esteemed festival enjoys strategic sponsorship from the Economic Development Board, with gold sponsorship from the Labour Fund, Tamkeen, and silver sponsorship from Aluminum Bahrain (Alba), the Bank of Bahrain and Kuwait (BBK), and the National Bank of Bahrain (NBB). Several embassies in the Kingdom, including those of the US, Italy, France, and Japan, actively contribute to the festival's program.

Bahraini envoy granted 'Order of Friendship' medal by Putin



HE Ambassador Al Saati

TDT | Manama

Russian President Vladimir Putin has conferred the prestigious "Order of Friendship" upon His Excellency Ahmed Abdulrahman Al Saati, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the Russian Federation.

This award stands as one of the highest honours bestowed by the Russian President upon foreign officials and diplomats.

Ambassador Al Saati emphasised the solid relations between Bahrain and Russia, underscoring the unwavering support and attention these ties receive from His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister.

Bhavans-Bahrain Indian School celebrates annual day with enchanting stories



Ms. Lulwa receiving memento from BIS Director

TDT | Manama

Bhavans-Bahrain Indian School (BIS) celebrated its 10th annual day with an enchanting theme of stories-Katha, captivating the audience with a magical journey through the realms of imagination.

The event took place on 11th January 2024 at Bahrain Cultural Hall and was graced by the esteemed presence of Mr. Lulwa Ghassan Al Muhanna, Director, Directorate of Licensing and Follow-up of Private schools-Ministry of Education as the chief guest.

BIS Director Mr. Himanshu Verma and Mrs. Ritu Verma felicitated the Chief Guest with a bouquet. Principal Mr. Saji Jacob addressed the gathering



Students present cultural program

and welcomed everyone for a spectacular show.

The annual day festivities began with the distinguished dignitaries and the school's management lighting the ceremonial lamp, symbolizing the illuminating power of knowledge and wisdom.

This act set the stage for an evening filled with inspiration

and creativity as the students presented a spectacular display of storytelling through various performances and presentations.

The school's annual report added a sparkle as the proud parents were delighted to witness the school's progress and achievements of the students.

The Chief Guest applauded the school for its achievements



Lamp lighting by dignitaries

and commendable efforts in the field of education.

Spectacular performances

The event also featured spectacular performances by the students, showcasing their talents in dance, drama, and music, all centered around the theme of stories.



The annual day celebration at BIS was a resounding success, leaving a lasting impression on everyone in attendance. The event not only showcased the creativity and talent of the students but also highlighted the school's dedication to holistic education.

Director Mr. Himanshu Verma in his address appraised the

audience that the annual day celebration was indeed a testament to the school's commitment to providing a well-rounded educational experience that goes beyond academics.

Directors along with the Principal extended heartfelt gratitude to the Chief Guest for gracing the occasion and inspiring the students with her presence.



Oil prices surge on Red Sea escalation

AFP | London, United Kingdom

Key figures around 1430 GMT

Brent North Sea Crude:	▲ 2.8% at \$79.55 per barrel
West Texas Intermediate:	▲ 2.9% at \$74.10 per barrel
New York - Dow:	▲ 0.2% at 37,778.17 points
New York - S&P 500:	▲ 0.3% at 4,796.33
New York - Nasdaq:	▲ 0.3% at 15,009.02
London - FTSE 100:	▲ 1.0% at 7,649.52
Paris - CAC 40:	▲ 1.0% at 7,463.69
Frankfurt - DAX:	▲ 1.1% at 16,722.51
EURO STOXX 50:	▲ 0.9% at 4,483.82
Tokyo - Nikkei 225:	▲ 1.5% at 35,577.11 (close)
Hong Kong - Hang Seng Index:	▼ 0.4% at 16,244.58 (close)
Shanghai - Composite:	▼ 0.2% at 2,881.98 (close)
Euro/dollar:	▼ at \$1.0967 from \$1.0969
Dollar/yen:	▼ at 144.61 yen from 145.29 yen on Thursday
Pound/dollar:	▲ at \$1.2771 from \$1.2770
Euro/pound:	▼ at 85.91 pence from 85.94 pence

Oil prices surged four% yesterday after US and UK forces launched strikes against Iran-backed Huthi rebels following their attacks on ships in the Red Sea, fuelling worries about a wider conflict in the crude-rich region.

Wall Street opened higher as earnings season got underway in earnest with a slew of banks reporting results and wholesale inflation unexpectedly dipping in December.

JPMorgan Chase's profits dropped in the fourth quarter to \$9.3 billion, but that was due to a one-off special levy of \$2.9 billion by US regulators after the failures of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank.

Both revenues and operating profits rose.

The bank's share price climbed around 2.5% as trading got underway in New York.

Tokyo ended the week with strong gains while European stock markets were higher as traders brushed off data showing that US inflation rose more than expected in December.

The luxury sector was also in focus after British fashion

brand Burberry posted a profit warning, sending its share price sliding more than nine% at one stage in London.

That fed through to peers, with Gucci-owner Kering losing 2.1% in Paris, where LVMH was down 1.0 percent.

The oil market was in sharp focus as US and British forces struck rebel-held Yemen on Friday after weeks of attacks on Red

Sea shipping by the Iran-backed Huthis, who say they are acting in solidarity with Palestinians in war-ravaged Gaza.

"The fear in the oil market is that the region is on an unpredictable escalating path, where at some point down the road supply of oil will indeed in the end be lost," noted Bjarne Schieldrop, chief commodities analyst at SEB bank.



A woman walks past an electronic board showing a share price of the Tokyo Stock Exchange along a street in Tokyo

He noted that if the allied attacks were unsuccessful in destroying Huthi weapons, and oil tankers need to go around Africa, then up to 80 million barrels will be locked in transit -- sending prices up as much as \$5-10 per barrel.

The Huthis have carried out a growing number of strikes on vessels in the Red Sea, a key in-

ternational shipping route, since the Gaza war erupted in October.

The attacks have affected trade flows at a time when supply strains are putting upward pressure on inflation globally.

After rising more than 4% -- with Brent crude rising above \$80 per barrel -- oil prices pared gains.

The jump in oil prices sparked

concerns about a fresh spike in inflation that could complicate central bank efforts to cut interest rates.

Data out Thursday showed that US consumer price index rose more than forecast in December, dimming prospects that the Federal Reserve would start its rate-cutting cycle in March.

But data out Friday that US wholesale prices defied predictions to edge lower in December last year.

"The key takeaway from the report is that inflation at the wholesale level has been brought under wraps, with deflation appearing in several components, and is expected to translate into friendlier inflation readings for the PCE Price Index that is the Fed's preferred inflation gauge," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare.

Investors are keenly waiting for a drop in interest rates, which central banks hiked in 2022 and 2023 in a bid to cool decades-high inflation.

While rates of price rises have slowed, inflation remains above target for the Fed, European Central Bank and Bank of England.

Tesla's German factory suspends production over Red Sea delays

Berlin, Germany

Electric car manufacturer Tesla has announced it is suspending for two weeks the bulk of production at its factory in Germany, citing a shortage of parts due to shipping delays caused by Houthi rebel attacks in the Red Sea.

The suspension was disclosed just hours before the United States and Britain announced early Friday they had carried out air strikes against the Iran-backed rebels over their repeated threats to vessels in the key waterway.

The Red Sea attacks had led to delays that created a "gap in the supply chains", resulting in production at the facility southeast of Berlin being suspended "with the exception of a few sectors", Tesla said in a statement sent to AFP.

"From February 12, production will resume in full," it added.

China deflation extends into a third straight month in December

AFP | Beijing, China

Deflation in China continued for the third month in a row in December, according to official figures released yesterday, bucking the trend in other major inflation-hit economies.

The consumer price index (CPI) fell 0.3% on-year last month, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

China slipped into deflation in July for the first time since 2021 and following a brief rebound the following month, prices have been in constant decline since September.

Analysts surveyed by Bloomberg expected a drop of 0.4% last month, having sunk 0.5% in November. While deflation suggests goods were cheaper, it poses a threat to the broader economy as consumers tend to postpone purchases, hoping for further reductions.

A lack of demand can then force companies to cut production, freeze hiring or lay off workers, while potentially also having to discount existing stocks -- dampening profitability even as costs remain the



People select vegetables at a supermarket in Beijing

same. By way of comparison, inflation in the United States stood at 3.4% in December.

Inflation in China for the whole of 2023 rose by an average of 0.2%, in contrast to other major economies, which saw prices soar once again.

The NBS also said producer prices sank 2.7%, marking the 15th consecutive month of declines. The PPI index, which measures the cost of goods leaving factories and provides an insight into the health of the



economy, fell three% in November.

IMF okays \$700 m disbursement for Pakistan

AFP | Washington, United States

The IMF's executive board approved an immediate disbursement of around \$700 million for Pakistan Thursday as part of a program to support the cash-strapped South Asian country through an economic crisis. The funds were unlocked after the International Monetary Fund board approved the first review of a nine-month, \$3 billion loan agreement reached in July

2023 to help Pakistan weather a balance-of-payments crisis and service crippling external debt. Thursday's disbursement brings the total released under the agreement to around \$1.9 billion, the Fund confirmed in a statement. Pakistan's advancement under the program "has supported significant progress in stabilizing the economy following significant shocks," IMF Deputy Managing Director Antoinette Sayeh said, according to the statement.

UK economy rebounds in November

AFP | London, United Kingdom

Britain's recession-threatened economy rebounded in November from the previous month. Gross domestic product expanded 0.3% in November after contracting by 0.3% in October, the Office for National Statistics said. "GDP bounced back... led by services with retail, car leasing and computer games companies all having a buoyant month," noted ONS chief economist Grant Fitzner. "The longer-term picture remains one of an

economy that has shown little growth over the last year," he added. Separate data showed Britain's economy shrank in the third quarter of last year, raising fears of a recession before UK elections expected in 2024. Recession is defined as two straight quarters of negative economic growth. "The 0.3%... rebound in real GDP in November probably means the economy escaped a recession in 2023," noted Ruth Gregory, deputy chief UK economist at Capital Economics research group.

US bank Citigroup to cut 20,000 jobs in medium term

AFP | New York, United States

Citigroup plans to cut 20,000 jobs over the next couple of years as part of a corporate reorganization designed to boost profits and return cash to shareholders, the US bank said yesterday.

The downsizing was laid out in a presentation released in connection with the New York-based lender's fourth-quarter results in which it reported a large loss.

The move will put headcount



Representative picture

at about 180,000 in the 2026 time period, down from 240,000 at the end of 2022 -- while also reflecting the expected spinoff

of Citi's Mexico subsidiary, Banamex.

Citi Chief Executive Jane Fraser has unveiled a corporate

overhaul with five business lines instead of two.

The bank has also significantly shrunk its global consumer banking footprint, divesting assets in China, Vietnam and other markets. "Last month we announced consequential changes that align our organizational structure with our strategy and changes how we run the bank," Fraser said.

"When completed, we will have a simpler firm that can operate faster, better serve our clients and unlock value for our

shareholders."

Overall, Citi reported a fourth-quarter loss of \$1.9 billion compared with profits of \$2.5 billion in the 2022 period. Revenues fell three percent to \$174 billion.

The results were weighed down by several cost items, including \$780 million for severance and other costs expenses connected to the reorganization.

Citi Chief Financial Officer Mark Mason said the fourth-quarter charge corresponds to 7,000 job cuts over

the next year.

Other one-time costs included a \$1.7 billion special assessment to replenish a Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) emergency fund after the failures of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank.

Citigroup also booked reserves of \$1.3 billion associated with risks connected to Argentina and Russia, plus a hit of \$880 million from the devaluation of the Argentine peso.

Shares of Citi rose 0.8% in morning trading.

autobuzz

E-bike craze in high gear at CES gadget fest

AFP | Las Vegas, United States

Electric bicycle makers at CES touted slick features like ChatGPT as they rode a trend of people wanting to enjoy a breeze in their face without sweat on their brow.

Some 44 million "e-bikes" were sold worldwide last year, and that number is expected to top 77 million by the year 2030, according to market tracker Statista.

E-bike sales are outpacing sales of electric cars, according to data and companies pitching their latest models at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) that ends in Las Vegas on Friday.



Urtopia chief executive Bo Zhang poses with an electric bicycle

"Bikes are fun," said Futurum Group research director Oliver Blanchard, a self-confessed bicyclist.

"There is something about the freedom of being on a bicycle, out in the open air feeling the sun and wind on your skin."

And with e-bikes, that exhilaration comes with knowing you won't have to pedal hard up hills or exert much energy at all if you are tired.

China-based Urtopia grabbed attention at this year's AI-obsessed CES with the introduction of an e-bike with ChatGPT chatbot capabilities built in.

Riders can speak to a smartphone-size control panel mounted to the center of the

handlebars, prompting it with requests such as finding a fun one-day bike tour around Las Vegas.

The bike could also be asked to map a rider's route, with the right or left handle bar grip vibrating to signal which way to turn so they can keep their eyes on the road.

"I don't think the world needs another normal e-bike," Urtopia chief executive Bo Zhang said with a hand on his company's latest model.

"Everything is connected; everything is smart. That is definitely the future."

Also based in China, scooter-maker Okai started making e-bikes after seeing the trend

picking up speed in Europe when cities began reopening in the wake of Covid-19 shutdowns, Jia Ren said at the company's CES booth.

People wanted the convenience and cost-savings of getting around cities by bicycle, and were averse to public transport given Covid concerns, Ren said. E-bikes are particularly popular with younger folks accustomed to the mode of transportation, and with "the senior crowd" that wants to stay active but may be dealing with aging issues such as knee trouble, she added.

"E-bikes give people a chance to be laid-back, to be lazy," Ren said.

Talking heads, airlifts and checkpoints for pets

AFP | Las Vegas, United States

Whether dreaming of an artificial friend available around the clock, lifting off from traffic jams or doing without your cat's dead bird "gifts," CES inventors have no shortage of imagination.

Here are a few highlights from the Consumer Electronics Show, the world's biggest tech and consumer electronics trade fair, which runs in Las Vegas until Friday.

'Supportive, nonjudgmental' "I'm designed to be a supportive and nonjudgmental presence in your life," assured Wehead, a sort of computer creature made of a set of screens, mounted on a robotic head, projecting a human face and that uses artificial intelligence.

The US startup of the same name developed this strange object that can be placed on your desk like a paperweight or small sculpture and engage in human-like chat.

"Sometimes you just need somebody to talk to and create your own solutions," said Wehead founder Ilya Sedoshkin.

"You can do that with ChatGPT, but you will not have this natural feeling that somebody's listening to you," said Sedoshkin.

Wehead runs on ChatGPT, has real-time internet access and more memory than the



People view the XPeng AeroHT "modular flying car" which will enter mass production with pre-orders beginning in the fourth quarter of 2024

famous OpenAI chatbot that produces text, sound or images from a simple query in everyday language.

"If you discuss today what you will do at CES...in a week's time, it will ask you 'how was CES?'" Sedoshkin said.

Enthusiasts can adopt a talking head on a subscription basis, for \$200 a month.

"Did it feel real? No," said Alan Pierce, a retired professor attending the tech show, calling it a cleverly designed "talking head."

Air taxi

A cross between a helicopter and a plane, the electric powered S-A2 is pitted to become the transport of choice for cities paralyzed by traffic jams.

Its real name is eVTOL - electric vertical take-off and landing vehicle. It has a pilot and up to four passengers on board.



A woman photographs a Humanoid Robot from AI Life with Bio-Inspired communicative AI

"It's urban aerial mobility," Jaiwon Shin, head of Supernal, a subsidiary of South Korea's Hyundai Group, told AFP. "The biggest market is the United States -- cities like Las Vegas or Los Angeles."

An hour-long car journey due to traffic jams can be replaced by a flight of just 10 minutes, departing from so-called vertiports that would be dotted around a city.

The aim is to make the flight less expensive than a helicopter flight.

After landing, a robot scans to check the integrity of the aircraft -- whose propellers are attached to a single long wing and rotate for take-off and landing.

Jaiwon hopes to launch in 2028, but the regulatory hurdles are considerable.

"It has never been done before in aviation... It's really a revolution and the battery is a techno-

The futuristic concept Alpha-Able electric vehicle from LG is displayed at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada



A vertical takeoff electronic aircraft from Supernal

logical challenge," he said.

No 'gifts'

Installing a door hatch to let cats and dogs roam freely in and out of the house also leaves the home open to wildlife.

For Martin Diamond, a resident of the desert state of Arizona, unwelcome visitors could include coyotes, venomous snakes and raccoons.

Not eager to meet one of these in his living room, Diamond invented Pawport, a hermetically sealed door that opens with a badge worn by the pet.

Pawport can be installed on an existing hatch, is available in several sizes and finishes.

and can be powered by a rechargeable battery, a solar panel or connected to the elec-

trical grid. Available from May, it will cost a minimum of \$459.

Swiss twins Oliver and Denis Widler turned to other unpleasant surprises: the "gifts" -- birds and rodents in general -- that some cats proudly bring back to their owners.

With their Flappie access door, AI cameras keep an eye on things and block access if the feline's mouth isn't empty.

The AI also will spot snakes and fish, the startup claims, with an efficiency of over 90 percent.

Flappie starts at 299 Swiss francs (\$350).



A man experiences an iYU Spa massage from Capsix Robotics, an AI assisted massage therapy device

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People view the Celestron Origin, billed as the world's first Intelligent Home Observatory. The Celestron Origin, billed as the world's first Intelligent Home Observatory, from Celestron, offers an onboard camera sensor and AI-powered image processing bringing celestial objects from deep space to smartphones, tablets or smart TV/projectors in stunning detail and colours.

the door opens only to those with a microchip. The device can be connected to an app so that owners can track their pet's comings and goings, complete with images.

Flappie starts at 299 Swiss francs (\$350).

Honda unveils futuristic EV designs to hit US market in 2026

AFP | Las Vegas

Honda unveiled a new electric vehicle series to launch commercially in 2026, revealing a futuristic concept car at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

"We have gone back to basics and formulated the Honda 0 Series with a design for the new era," Shinji Aoyama, global vice president, said of the snazzy offerings. "A bold and pure proportion that from the first glance is overwhelmingly different from other EVs to evoke a new perspective for people."

The "Saloon" model features a low platform with a wide interior and sleek silhouette, with



Japanese automaker Honda unveils its electric vehicle concept Space-Hub during the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada

capacity to introduce "new advancements in design, automated driving, connected technologies, performance, and battery efficiency," according to a Honda

press release. The firm plans to introduce a commercial model based on the Saloon in the United States in 2026. The Japanese company also presented a



An Afeela electric sedan by Sony Honda Mobility Inc., a joint venture between Sony Group Corp. and Honda Motor Company to produce battery electric vehicles.

second concept car dubbed the Space Hub that employs some of the same visual motifs as the Saloon, but in a larger form akin to the sport utility vehicles

currently popular in the United States.

To mark a new era, Honda is tweaking its signature "H" mark from the current incarnation, which dates to 1981. The new design evokes "two outstretched hands" to represent "Honda's commitment to expand the possibilities of mobility and continue to meet the needs of its customers," the company said.

Three years ago, Honda set an ambitious target of achieving 100 percent electrified vehicle sales by 2040.

The company is also working with US auto titan General Motors on a driverless taxi service.

When that plan was announced in October, "dozens" of the taxis were expected to be launched in Tokyo in early 2026.

But in an interview with Bloomberg TV in Las Vegas on Tuesday, Honda CEO Toshihiro Mibe no longer gave a specific time frame.

"We're thinking of sometime in the late 2020s for introducing self-driving vehicles into an urban environment," he said, according to Bloomberg.

The robotaxi project is being developed by GM's self-driving car subsidiary Cruise, whose operations have been on hold since October 27 after California halted testing of the vehicles.

The venture has been under scrutiny since a self-driving car operated by Cruise ran over a woman who had been knocked in front of it by a hit-and-run driver in San Francisco.

Classifieds



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Loeb takes Dakar stage win

Bahrain Raid Xtreme star outpaces leader Sainz as gruelling rally reaches half-way point

● **Sebastien Loeb takes 25th stage success in Dakar**

● **BRX driver climbs to third place on overall rankings**

TDT | Manama

The Dakar Rally reached the halfway point in Saudi Arabia yesterday as Sebastien Loeb claimed his second stage victory for Bahrain Raid Xtreme following more drama in the Empty Quarter.

Loeb and Fabian Lurquin in the BRX Prodrive Hunter completed the second part of the new two-day Chrono stage with a 2 mins 01 secs winning margin over outright rally leader Carlos Sainz in an Audi.

It was Loeb's 25th stage success on the Dakar, taking him level with Japan's Hiroshi Masuoka as the joint sixth most decorated driver on the world's biggest rally-raid event.

While Loeb climbed again to third place overall, Nasser Al Attiyah's hopes of completing a hat-trick of Dakar victories were shattered



Sebastien Loeb and the rest of the Dakar drivers erected their own tents at the overnight bivouac separating the two parts of the 48-hour Chrono stage

when mechanical problems halted his Prodrive Hunter for more than two hours 40 minutes en-route from the bivouac to the start this morning.

The rally now has a rest day in Riyadh before restarting with a 483km stage to Al Duwadimi tomorrow, with Sainz holding a 20 minutes 21 seconds lead over Audi team-mate Mattias Ekström heading for the finish in Yanbu next Friday.

Having finished runner up to Al Attiyah for the last two years, Loeb, who is nine minutes away from second place again, was determined from the start to go one better this time, and

dunes. We knew 550kms in the Empty Quarter would be very hard for the car so I tried to take it a bit easier for the first part and not break anything on the first day.

"But for today it was more like a sprint, so I pushed quite hard to gain some time. Overall, it was good to do a strategy, but maybe we went a little bit too far as what we see is that others gained a bit of time in other ways, but OK. We are still in the game and that was the main objective to be within 30 mins of the lead, but we will see as there is still a long way to go."

Five-time Dakar winner Al Attiyah broke a steering arm on a hub carrier in his vehicle and had to wait for his assistance truck to arrive to carry out repairs, allowing him to continue in the first round of this year's World Rally-Raid Championship.

He said that his objective is the W2RC championship, that he will try to pick up as many points as possible, and that he will be ready to help fellow Prodrive Hunter driver Loeb if necessary.

developments yesterday remind him that the gap to Sainz is far from insurmountable.

World champion

The nine-time World Rally Champion, who was fastest on stage four, set a recorded-breaking six successive best times in Saudi last year at the wheel of his BRX Prodrive Hunter, and with six more stages remaining this time, could be on another roll.

He said at the finish yesterday: "It's great to win the difficult 48h Chrono stage after we've had two good days in the

Sebastien Loeb and Fabian Lurquin in action in their Bahrain Raid Xtreme Prodrive Hunter



We are still in the game and that was the main objective to be within 30 mins of the lead, but we will see as there is still a long way to go

SEBASTIEN LOEB

McIlroy fights back to maintain Dubai Invitational lead

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Rory McIlroy battled back after a quadruple-bogey to remain two shots clear at the halfway stage of the Dubai Invitational yesterday in his first appearance of the year.

The world number two made a flying start with an opening nine-under-par 62 and stretched further clear early in the second round with birdies on the third and fourth holes.

But he hit two balls into the water on the par-three eighth en route to a potentially ruinous seven.

However McIlroy, who has won five European Tour titles in Dubai, restored his advantage with three more birdies on the back nine to card a one-under 70 for a 10-under total.

"I think if I look at the other

17 holes that I played, I played very, very well again," said the four-time major champion. "Hit some good iron shots.

"Played not too dissimilarly to the way I played yesterday. I maybe holed a couple more putts yesterday but the conditions were getting a little trickier."

McIlroy made headlines earlier this week when he claimed a "world tour" was his "dream scenario" for golf as talks aimed at ending the split in the sport caused by breakaway circuit LIV Golf continue.

German Yannik Paul remained two strokes behind despite a run of three bogeys in five holes in his round of 70.

Dane Jeff Winther fired a joint-best round of the day with a 66 to join Paul in a tie for second place, with Tommy Fleetwood one of five players a shot further back.

S.Africa strips U19 cricket skipper of captaincy over Gaza protest fears

Johannesburg, South Africa

Under-19 Cricket World Cup host South Africa said yesterday it has stripped its skipper of the captaincy over fears he could be targeted by protesters over his pro-Israeli views.

David Teeger was cleared of wrongdoing last month after he praised Israeli soldiers fighting in Gaza at an award ceremony for Jewish achievers.

Cricket South Africa (CSA) said it has been advised that protests over the conflict are likely to

target the tournament's venues and focus on the teenager, with a risk of "conflict or even violence".

"CSA has decided that David should be relieved of the captaincy for the tournament. This is in the best interests of all the players, the SA U19 team and David himself," it said.

Teeger will remain a member of the squad and a new captain will be announced in due course, it added.

David Teeger



Muharraq eke into Top Six!

Al Ahli also triumph last night to stay in title contention in 2023/2024 Zain Bahrain Basketball League

● Tyler Wilkerson carries Muharraq against Al Hala with 30 points

● Al Ahli more than double Bahrain Club output in massive victory

TDT | Manama

Muharraq and Al Ahli were both victorious last night as the Top Six line-up was completed in the 2023/2024 Zain Bahrain Basketball League.

Muharraq roared back from a 15-point deficit entering the fourth quarter to defeat Al Hala 76-73 and eke into the next stage. Ahli, meanwhile, secured their berth following a massive 125-62 victory over Bahrain Club.

Yesterday's games wrapped up the regular season schedule in the current league campaign. Muharraq and Ahli joined defending champions Manama, Al Ettihad, Hala, and Al Najma as the teams marching through to the Top Six and staying in title contention.

Muharraq's victory earned

STANDINGS

	P	W	L	+/-	Pts
Manama	10	10	0	312	20
Al Ettihad	10	7	3	188	17
Al Ahli	10	7	3	155	17
Al Hala	10	7	3	92	17
Muharraq	10	6	4	118	16
Al Najma	10	6	4	95	16
Nuwaidrat	10	6	4	32	16
Samaheej	10	3	7	-140	13
Bahrain Club*	10	2	8	-299	12
Isa Town	10	1	9	-219	11
Sitra	10	0	10	-334	10

*One of Bahrain Club's losses was a forfeit due to a no-show



Muharraq's Mohammed Juma'a goes for a lay-up as Al Hala's Alex Young goes for a block

them a place along with Najma while eliminating Nuwaidrat. All three teams ended the regular season with identical 6-4 win-loss records, but Muharraq and Najma advanced as they had superior points differentials from their 10 games.

The Top Six will be battling it out for a place in the Golden Square semi-finals. The schedule for this phase's games has yet to be released by the Bahrain Basketball Association.

Muharraq appeared to be on the brink of being booted out last night but they showed their

heart and fought back in their game's final stanza, when they were down 45-60.

Inspired by the hustle and scrappy defence of Ali Shukralah—despite being a liability offensively—Muharraq stormed back to begin the fourth and went on a game-changing 13-0 run to get to within 58-60.

Buried

Hala responded and both sides traded jabs, but then American professional Ra'shad James buried a three-pointer with 50 seconds to play to give Muharraq

the lead for good at 75-73. Countryman Tyler Wilkerson sank one of two free throws with 39 seconds left to ice the contest, as Hala were unable to put up an attempt to tie in the closing seconds.

Wilkerson carried Muharraq for much of the night, scoring 30 points while grabbing nine rebounds. James added 20 and none of their other players finished with more than six markers.

For Hala, Alex Young had a game-high 39 while Tyrone Nash scored 18 and took down

17 boards, but it was not enough to lift Hala, who finished the regular season with a 7-3 record.

In Ahli's big victory, they claimed their seventh win in 10 games and went to 17 points, safely putting them in the upper half of the 11-team standings. Bahrain Club were already out of the running for a Top Six place and finished with a 2-8 win-loss record.

Ahli burst out of the gate in their fixture while holding their opponents to just single digits in the first quarter for a commanding 33-9 lead. They stretched

that advantage to 66-21 at the half and never let up the rest of the way, leading by as many as 65 points.

American professional Unique McLean scored 26 points to spearhead Ahli, while Jamaican import Adrian Uter added 23 to go with 12 rebounds and seven assists. Five others finished in double figures, including Ali Hussain who had 15 and Ahmed Aldurazi who chipped in with 12 points.

For Bahrain Club, who were playing with a foreign professional, Mansoor Jaber scored 23 points and Sayed Mohammed Habib had 10.



Muharraq and Al Ahli join Manama, Al Ettihad, Al Hala and Al Najma in the Top Six. Following Muharraq's victory last night, they tied Najma and Nuwaidrat with identical 6-4 win-loss records, but Muharraq and Najma advanced with superior points differentials

Hosts Qatar ease past Lebanon to open Asian Cup

Doha, Qatar

Defending champions and hosts Qatar got their Asian Cup campaign off to a flying start with a 3-0 win over Lebanon in the tournament's opening game yesterday.

Akram Afif rifled in a shot on the stroke of half-time to put the 2022 World Cup hosts ahead, before Almoez Ali doubled their lead after the break and Afif

bagged a late third.

Over 80,000 fans initially packed into the Lusail Stadium, where a Lionel Messi-inspired Argentina beat France on penalties in the World Cup final 13 months ago.

Qatar's win over Lebanon did not have the same drama and some spectators left as early as half-time, even with the home team winning.

By the final whistle there were

swathes of empty seats.

But it was a welcome start for a team that claimed their first Asian Cup five years ago and only changed their coach last month, with Tintin Marquez replacing Carlos Queiroz.

Qatar stunned Japan in the 2019 final in the United Arab Emirates, lifting the trophy after winning every game they played at the tournament.

But they flopped on home soil

at the World Cup, making a first-round exit after losing all three games. Qatar were far more assured against a Lebanon side playing in only their third Asian Cup. Ali, who scored an Asian Cup-record nine goals and was named player of the tournament in 2019, had the ball in the net as early as the sixth minute.

Qatar hit their stride after the break and were rewarded with their second goal of the game in

the 56th minute.

The huge crowd began to filter out after Qatar's second goal.

They missed a deft finish from Afif for Qatar's third goal in the 96th minute, putting the final touch on an impressive individual performance.

They will face Tajikistan in their next game on Wednesday, with China the other team in Group A.

Saturday's action begins with

Qatar's forward #11 Akram Afif celebrates



Australia taking on India, before China play Tajikistan and Uzbekistan face Syria.

Dar Kulaib rally in win over Al Nasser

Defending champions claim sixth win in seven games in league's Top Six round

TDT | Manama

Dar Kulaib posted a hard-earned, come-from-behind victory in four sets against Al Nasser last night in the Top Six stage of the 2023/2024 Isa bin Rashid Bahrain Volleyball League. The defending champions gave up the opening frame but rallied in the next three to capture the win with a 3-1 (22-25, 25-19, 25-21, 25-23) score line.

Dar Kulaib's Bahrain national team superstar Mohammed Yaqoob closed out the contest for Dar Kulaib with a brilliant spike. His attack was one of the key plays that helped his team come away with the win.

Dar Kulaib were also spearheaded by top talents Ali Mohammed, Hassan Alaiwi, Ali Habib, Hassan Al Warqa, Abdullah Mohammed, Mahmoud Abdulwahed and Brazilian import Caio Oliveira.

Nasser tried to overcome the

tough challenge behind their leading players Ebrahim Mohammed, Yousef Khaled, Mohammed Omar, and newly

Dar Kulaib's Mohammed Yaqoob attacks Al Nasser's blockers during their game last night



signed import Pelegrin Vargas from Puerto Rico, but they could not carry on the momentum from their strong start.

Dar Kulaib posted their sixth win in seven games so far in

this Top Six stage of the league, while Nasser suffered their sixth loss to go with just one win so far.

The Top Six is being played in a double round-robin to determine the cast for the Golden Square semi-finals. Action

continues tonight with Al Ahli taking on Nabih Saleh at 6.30pm. Ahli head into the contest

with five wins from six games, while Nabih Saleh has three wins from three outings.

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Brazen Bolt sprints to victory

Winners from yesterday's races

John Quinn-trained gelding leads home one-two for North Yorkshire in Al Wasmiya Cup of Bahrain Turf Series

● **First Bahrain Turf Series success for Italian jockey Alberto Sanna riding Brazen Bolt**

● **Zagato claims Al Adiyat Cup for Al Mohamediya Racing, ridden by jockey Neil Callan**

TDT | Manama

The sprint division of round three of the 2023/2024 Bahrain Turf Series was won by John Quinn-trained Brazen Bolt, who showed blistering speed to burn off all of his 17 rivals in the 1,000m Al Wasmiya Cup yesterday at Rashid Equestrian and Horseracing Club (REHC) in Sakhr.

Among those in attendance at the meeting was REHC honorary president His Highness Shaikh Abdulla bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa and other high-ranking officials.

In recording his impressive win, Brazen Bolt jumped to the

top of the leaderboard in the latest standings of the Bahrain Turf Series, having now accumulated 30 points from just three runs.

One of five internationally trained horses running in the 18-horse race, Brazen Bolt and jockey Alberto Sanna barely saw another horse, jumping smartly from stall five, the pair led from early on and after making their way across to the far rail were not for catching.

Quinn's consistent seven-year-old gelding was following up a good second last time out and led home a one-two for North Yorkshire trained horses, with the runner-up spot taken by Squealer, trained by Nigel

Tinkler. Speaking afterwards, Quinn, who was enjoying his first visit to REHC, said of Brazen Bolt's victory: "He seems to thrive in the sun and he loves fast ground. Bahrain has made it very appealing for people to bring horses here. There is great prize money and we thought if we had suitable horses we'd come. I am also delighted for the owners who are here today. Peter (Furr) who owns him, bred him as well, which is wonderful.

Pleased

"We have been very pleased with the horse since he arrived and he's been running better and better. Ahead of today's race, he'd been training nicely and although his best form is at six furlongs (1,200m) he's never been slow and he loves top of the ground."

The win was a first in the Bahrain Turf Series for Italian born jockey Sanna, who said afterwards: "It's an amazing feeling because people can forget your abilities very quickly, so you have to prove yourself all the time and prove you are in good form.

"I was drawn five and when I spoke with the trainer he agreed

to try and go for the rail. I want to thank connections for giving me the chance to ride this magnificent horse, he was an easy ride, beautiful. He's a tough horse too and keeps going. When he gets to the rail it helped him gallop all the way through to the line."

The Al Adiyat Cup, round three of the middle-distance division in the Bahrain Turf Series, was won impressively by the strong galloping Zagato, ridden by Neil Callan and trained by Fawzi Nass for Al Mohamediya Racing.

The son of champion sire Frankel won by nearly five lengths in the 1,800m race. Isle of Jura, a winner and a runner-up in his two starts to date retains his place at top of the leaderboard for the middle-distance division of the Turf series.

Launched in 2021/2022, this season is the third edition of the ten-race Bahrain Turf Series. The series runs alongside the domestic programme in Bahrain with international horses competing in the series also eligible to run in other Bahrain Turf Club races open to imported horses.

Brazen Bolt powers to victory with jockey Alberto Sanna in the saddle



Each race is worth \$80,000 with bonus prizes for the horses accumulating most points in the two divisions, sprint and middle distance.

Qatar triumph to begin title-defence

Defending champions aiming to secure record sixth successive Asian handball crown

TDT | Manama

Defending champions Qatar defeated Chinese Taipei 33-26 yesterday to kick off their bid for an unprecedented sixth straight title in the 21st Asian Men's Handball Championship.

The Qataris, winners of the tournament's past five editions, lived up to their tag as one of the favourites with their opening triumph in Group A of the competition's preliminary round.

They raced out to a quick 6-1 lead early in the contest and never looked back. A Zarko Markovic goal gave them a 17-11 advantage at the half, and they did well to close things out in the final 30 minutes for the final seven-goal winning margin.

"We know that this competition is special for us and it is very hard. Now all the teams are ready for this championship, and we will take it game by game and I hope in the final we will be in first place," Qatar's veteran pivot

YESTERDAY'S SCORES

Group A: Qatar defeat Chinese Taipei 33-26
Half-time: 17-11
Best Player of the Game: Ahmad Madadi (Qatar)
Group B: Iran defeat New Zealand 40-13
Half-time: 20-7
Best Player of the Game: Milad Ghalandari (Iran)
Group A: Kuwait defeat Oman 27-26
Half-time: 13-11
Best Player of the Game: Hasan Safar (Kuwait)
Group B: South Korea defeat China 32-30
Half-time: 12-12
Best Player of the Game: Yeonbin Kim



Qatar's Youssef Ben Ali goes for goal in their match against Chinese Taipei yesterday

Youssef Ben Ali told TDT.

"We are now thinking only about this competition; we keep going, keep positive, and today we won and now we are only thinking about the next game."

Markovic top scored for the Qataris in yesterday's win with six goals, while three others

contributed five each, including Ahmad Madadi, Frankis Marzo and Moustafa Heiba. Allaedine Berrached and Wajdi Sinen scored three apiece, while Ben Ali finished with two goals.

Chao Hsein-Chang was the top performer for Chinese Taipei with nine goals yesterday,

while Huang Chun-Wei added four.

Record

Qatar are aiming to beat the record of nine-time champions South Korea of five straight Asian titles, won in 1983, 1987, 1989, 1991 and 1993. The Qataris

had been successful in 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020 and in 2022.

Qatar are back in action tomorrow when they face off with Gulf rivals Oman, while Chinese Taipei take on Kuwait.

The Kuwaitis edged past the Omanis 27-26 in yesterday's other Group A fixture. Meanwhile, in Group B, Iran beat New Zea-

TODAY'S SCHEDULE

1pm: Group C, Saudi Arabia vs India
3pm: Group D, UAE vs Kazakhstan
5pm: Group C, Iraq vs Japan
7pm: Group D, Bahrain vs Hong Kong

land 40-13, while South Korea came up with the key late-game plays in a tight 32-30 win over China, also in Group B.

The preliminary round continues until Tuesday next week. The field has been divided into four groups for this stage, at the end of which the top two from each move on to the main round and stay in contention for the coveted title.

The bottom two squads will compete for the Martyr Fahad Al Ahmad Al Sabah Cup.

Today, Bahrain are in action against Hong Kong at 7pm in the last of the day's four games. All are welcome to attend. Entrance to the venue is completely free of charge.