

**Karters put on exciting show in Rotax MAX Challenge fifth round**

Abdulaziz Alsarraf, Shaikh Ahmed bin Saqr Al Khalifa, Nasser Nass, Vedant Menon, Abdulla Sajjad, and Mohamed Almahroos triumph in respective classes | P12

**WORLD 6 Firefighters race to beat LA blazes as winds grow and death toll hits 16**

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**Financing just got more rewarding**



**Bahrain attends joint Arab-Western meeting on Syria**



H.E. Dr. Al Zayani speaks at the event

Riyadh

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Dr. Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, participated in the joint Arab-Western ministerial meeting held in Riyadh at the invitation of Saudi Arabia, chaired by His Highness Prince Faisal bin Farhan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia.

The meeting discussed the situation in Syria, its regional implications, and support measures to safeguard Syria's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity.

The meeting also discussed supporting economic growth, development, refugee repatriation, and fulfilling the Syrian people's aspirations for peace and prosperity.

Arab participants included foreign ministers from Jordan, the UAE, Bahrain as chair of the current Arab Summit, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, along with the Secretary General of the Arab League and the Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

**Efforts intensified to curb spread of mosquitoes**

TDT | Manama

The Ministry of Health is stepping up proactive campaigns to curb the spread of mosquitoes during the current cold season.

Raja Al-Saloum, Head of the Environmental Health Section at the Public Health Directorate, said these efforts are part of a comprehensive strategy aimed at safeguarding public health by targeting mosquito breeding grounds across the Kingdom's governorates.

Al-Saloum emphasised that mosquitoes, present throughout the year, experience a significant surge during this period.

## CBB Unveils Silver Jubilee Commemorative Coin

TDT | Manama

The Central Bank of Bahrain (CBB) has announced that reservations for the first batch of a limited-edition silver commemorative coin will open tomorrow.

The coin has been issued to celebrate the Silver Jubilee marking the 25th anniversary of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa's accession to the throne.

The silver coin will be available in a limited quantity of 1,000 coins, each priced at BD125.



The limited-edition silver coin

weighing 62.2 grams, the coin is a testament to Bahrain's rich heritage and innovation.

The obverse side of the coin features an image of HM the King and the Silver Jubilee logo, while the reverse side depicts the iconic Sakhr Palace.

Notably, the CBB has employed cutting-edge 3D technology for the first time in designing both sides of the coin, setting a new benchmark for commemorative minting.

In line with directives from His Majesty, all proceeds from the sale of the coin will be directed to charitable societies and funds through the Royal Humanitarian Foundation (RHF).

Appointments for purchasing the coin can be made starting tomorrow, at 11am, through the national application "Mawaeed."

Buyers will need to visit the CBB headquarters in the Diplomatic Area on the appointed date to collect their coins.

The date for reservations of the second and final batch of the commemorative coins will be announced in due course.

# \$30 billion ambition

Bahrain to invest in 22 major infrastructure projects, including five artificial islands

Mohammed Darwish

TDT | Manama

Bahrain is planning a \$30 billion surge in infrastructure projects, which includes 22 major developments such as five artificial islands.

The construction market is forecast to grow to \$3.17 billion by 2025 and \$3.89 billion by 2030, according to a report by Mordor Intelligence.

Public-private partnerships are expected to drive much of this growth, in line with Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030.

The government's efforts to back large-scale construction projects are a key force behind the market's expansion.

Productivity

Reforms led by the Economic Development Board are also improving productivity across the building and design sectors.

However, the report acknowledges that the industry faced setbacks in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and falling oil prices.

Bahrain stands out in the Gulf for offering comparatively low construction costs.

Its designation as a 'free zone' allows 100% foreign ownership of businesses and properties.

Investors

This, coupled with the free movement of profits and capital,



makes the country attractive to investors.

In 2021, the government allocated BD600 million (\$1.6 billion) to fund projects over two years.

These funds have supported developments in infrastructure, housing, health, education, sports, culture, and utilities.

**Economic diversification**

Among the largest initiatives is a \$30 billion plan that includes artificial islands to support urban growth and economic diversification.

The plan is designed to align with Bahrain's long-term strategy to reduce its reliance on oil and gas, diversify its economy, and invest in workforce training.

The focus on private sector partnerships is key to completing many of these developments.

**Challenges**

While the outlook is optimistic, the report points to challenges.

Bahrain's heavy dependence on oil and gas leaves it vulnerable to price swings.

These risks can discourage foreign companies from investing, especially given the broad impact of oil prices on the wider economy.

**Urban development**

Among the projects underway is Marassi Al Bahrain, an urban development featuring a two-kilometre beach and a mix of residential and commercial properties near Diyar Al Muharraq.

Another major project, a \$360 million initiative led by Tatweer Petroleum, started in 2022 and aims to support the energy sector.

At the same time, affordable housing is being pushed through various private sector initiatives.



**Bahrain's investor-friendly policies play a key role in attracting the funding needed to meet its goals.**

**New law under review**

## Proposal aims to limit children's online access

TDT | Manama

Courts may gain the power to restrict children's access to certain websites or limit their movements within set areas for up to 12 hours a day, under a new law being reviewed by the legislative authority.

The proposed changes to the Restorative Justice Law for

Children and their Protection from Maltreatment aim to overhaul juvenile justice, introducing more flexible options for sentencing while ensuring that children's rights and progress remain a priority.

The draft law also strengthens the role of the Child Protection Centre and gives the Ministry of Interior a larger

part in overseeing children's welfare.

One of the key measures would allow courts to tailor restrictions based on individual circumstances.

This includes limiting a child's movements within a specific area or blocking access to certain online platforms for a period of two to 12 hours daily.

These restrictions must respect the child's religious beliefs and avoid interfering with their education or work commitments. Courts could also order children to stay at home under the supervision of their parents or guardians, who would be required to report regularly on their compliance.

The draft law broadens the

role of the Child Protection Centre, enabling it to prepare judicial assessments, oversee rehabilitation efforts, and ensure effective follow-up on judicial measures.

The centre would work alongside the Ministry of Interior and coordinate with the Child Justice Court and Judicial Committee for Childhood.



# Exploring partnership

Prime Minister of the Republic of Yakutia, Russia Visits Bapco Refining



TDT | Manama

**H**is Excellency Mr. Kirill Bychkov, Prime Minister of the Republic of Yakutia, Russian Federation, visited the recently inaugurated Bapco Modernization Project (BMP).

The project, inaugurated under the patronage of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, is the largest strategic investment project in the history of the Kingdom.

This visit was part of his tour to Bapco Refining, a subsidiary of Bapco Energies – the integrated energy company leading the energy transition in the King-

dom of Bahrain.

During the visit, His Excellency Mr. Bychkov met with several key officials in the energy, oil, and gas sectors, including Dr. Abdulrahman Jawahery, CEO of Bapco Refining, Eng. Basema Al-Mahroos, CEO of Bapco Tazweed, Eng. Yasser Abdulrahim Al-Abbasi, CEO of the Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company (GPIC) and senior representatives from Bapco Upstream and the Ministry of Oil and Environment. Dr. Jawahery highlighted the strategic review of all efforts and projects undertaken by the Bapco Energies Group, including renewable energy initiatives, technological innovations, and

environmental programs.

These initiatives are strategically aimed at reducing emissions and promoting the use of clean energy.

### Joint investment

Dr. Jawahery stated that the visit of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Yakutia aims to explore potential joint investment opportunities in the energy field and underscores the significance of fostering new economic and commercial partnerships in the energy and industrial sectors.

Discussions were held around enhancing bilateral relations and the most recent projects undertaken by Bapco Refining.



H.E. Kirill Bychkov with Bapco Refining and other key officials in the energy, oil, and gas sectors

The delegation reviewed up- the technologies used in refining units, and how operations are dates on production operations, and production across various managed efficiently.

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## Empowering local workforce

Tamkeen supports more than 50 Bahrainis at MTQ Oilfield Services through Career Development and Apprenticeship programs



Representatives of Tamkeen and MTQ Oilfield Services

TDT | Manama

**A**s part of its commitment to supporting employment opportunities and career development for local talent in the private sector, the Labour Fund “Tamkeen” announced its support for over 50 Bahraini employees at MTQ Oilfield Services, a company specialized in providing technical solutions and maintenance for equipment used in the oil and gas industry.

This support includes wage increment for more than 40 Bahraini employees at the company as well as training for 10 Bahrainis under the Apprenticeship program.

This support for MTQ Oilfield Services aligns with Tamkeen’s strategic priorities for 2025, which focus on enhancing the position and competitiveness of Bahrainis in the private sector, equipping Bahrainis with suitable skills for career development in the private sector, and prioritizing enterprise growth, digitization, and sustainability.

### Enhancing Bahraini career development

He added that through supporting MTQ Oilfield Services, Tamkeen will enhance career development for over 40 Bahraini employees at the company and provide training for 10 Bahrainis under the apprenticeship program to refine their skills and improve their opportunities in the labor market.

“We are proud of the Bahraini workforce in our company and believe in their significant role in enhancing the growth and success of the business across various functions,” said MTQ Oil-

field Services Human Resources Manager Mr. Ahmed Abdullah on the occasion.

### Productivity

“We greatly appreciate Tamkeen’s support in increasing their salaries, enhancing their career development and refining their skills, which leads to higher retention rates and increased productivity in turn positively reflecting on the company’s contribution to the national economy.”

MTQ Oilfield Services is a Singapore-based company that provides services to the oil and gas industry.

It offers a wide range of services, including technical solutions and maintenance for equipment used in drilling and production operations.

Additionally, it provides manufacturing, assembly, disassembly, heavy equipment maintenance and marine vehicle services for the oil industry along with technical support and field services for numerous companies operating in the sector.

# 'Unfair advantage'

Shura Council rejects proposal for stricter hiring requirements for expats, calling it unnecessary and unworkable



H.E. Ghanim Buainain  
**Mohammed Darwish**  
TDT | Manama

Stricter rules for hiring non-Bahrainis could backfire by giving foreign workers an unfair advantage, the Shura Council warned yesterday, as it rejected a controversial proposal to amend the Civil Service Law.

The proposal sought to impose a master's degree, 10 years of experience, and two-year contract limits for foreign hires, while requiring them to train Bahraini employees.

Members also raised alarm over the continued presence of 5,800 expatriates in public sector roles, despite a five-year reduction of just 2,000.

Parliament passed the proposal in October, aiming to open up more opportunities for Bahrainis.

However, the Shura Council



Dr Mohammed Ali Hassan

called the proposal unnecessary and unworkable, with members pointing out that some of its measures already exist in law.

### Red tape

The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, His Excellency Ghanim Buainain, said, "The current law already ensures foreign contracts include training Bahraini employees. What we see here isn't filling a gap, but adding more red tape."

Buainain also noted that Council members opposed the master's degree requirement, arguing it would do more harm than good.

"This condition would just add to costs and create barriers in hiring for critical roles," he said.

Dr Mohammed Ali Hassan backed the importance of prioritising Bahraini workers but questioned the practicality of



Dr Ahmed Al Arrayedh

the proposed changes.

### Job levels

"Requiring a master's degree in every case is unnecessary, especially in fields like healthcare, where precise expertise is what matters most. Costs don't come from degrees — they come from job levels," he said.

Dr Ahmed Al Arrayedh echoed the need for more practical thinking, adding that many roles rely on experience and skills rather than formal qualifications.

"Not all jobs need a master's degree, and plenty of roles can depend on specialised training. We need to ask whether this proposal actually helps Bahrainis or just makes hiring harder," he said.

Jamal Fakhro, the Council's First Deputy Chairman, described the issue of replacing expatriates with Bahrainis as a



Jamal Fakhro

pressing concern.

### Payroll

He noted the government had reduced the number of foreign workers in the public sector by 2,000 over five years but argued this was too slow, with 5,800 expatriates still on the payroll.

"This isn't moving fast enough. Why is it taking so long to bring more Bahrainis into these jobs?" Fakhro asked.

Dalal Al Zayed, head of the Legislative and Legal Affairs Committee, shared concerns about the proposal's unintended effects.

"Demanding a master's degree for foreign hires could push up salaries for expatri-



Dalal Al Zayed

ates, making the problem worse rather than better," she said.

### Practical steps

Instead, she called for practical steps to monitor and manage contracts better to prioritise Bahrainis.

Fuad Hajji also weighed in, warning that the master's degree requirement could backfire.

"It might sound like it protects Bahraini jobs, but in practice, it could give foreigners an edge for specialised roles. The proposal needs more work to meet its goals," he said.

### Revisions

Hajji, Dr Mohammed Ali



Fuad Hajji

Hassan, and Fakhro initially pushed for the proposal to be reviewed and sent back for revisions but later withdrew their request after legal arguments from committee members and the Chief of Advisors.

In the end, they backed the recommendation to reject the proposal.

The Civil Service Bureau, the Council argued, is already working on training Bahraini employees and localising jobs, making the measures redundant.

Members also warned that stricter rules could delay hiring in critical sectors like health and education.

## MP proposes new department to process mixed marriages

H Naser  
TDT | Manama

MP Hamad Al Doy has proposed the creation of a specialised department within the Passport Directorate to process applications for marriages between Bahraini citizens and foreigners.

As per the proposal, the department would issue preliminary approvals before the legal or religious marriage ceremony takes place.

The explanatory memorandum accompanying the proposal argues that this new department would establish clear guidelines and regulations for such marriages, requiring all parties to obtain prior approval to safeguard rights and prevent social and legal problems.



MP Hamad Al Doy

Speaking further about the proposal, Al Doy told The Daily Tribune: "The main justification for the proposal is to reduce family disputes. Prior approval would minimise legal and social conflicts, particularly those affecting spouses and children. It would also streamline legal procedures, facilitate legal processes for families, and ensure the protection of

rights in case of future disagreements."

### Experiences

Meanwhile, the proposal suggests learning from the experiences of other Gulf countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Oman, which have similar regulations requiring minimum ages or official approvals to ensure marital stability.

"The proposal aims to regulate marriages with foreigners in a manner that serves the public interest, protects family rights, safeguards children, and ensures their social and legal stability. It also seeks to strengthen family stability, reduce separation or annulment rates, and ensure thorough review of applications before marriage contracts are finalised," he concluded.

## Rehabilitation leads to reduced penalty

TDT | Manama

A young man who damaged public property while driving under the influence of alcohol avoided a lengthy prison sentence after his lawyer confirmed he had stopped drinking.

The case, heard in the Lower Criminal Court, concluded at first instance with a BDL,000 fine.

The case, detailed by defense lawyer Taqi Hussain, involved



Taqi Hussain, defense lawyer

an incident where the defendant, while heavily intoxicated, lost control of his vehicle and collided with a metal barrier.

The accident caused damage to public property, and the driver was also cited for following too closely to the vehicle in front of him.

The court heard arguments from the lawyer who said his client had stopped drinking after the incident and was committed to rehabilitation.




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# Shura approves tax deal with Hong Kong



Rana Faqihi



Dr Ebtesam Al Dallal



Khalid Al Maskati



Abdulla Al Nuaimi

**Mohammed Darwish**  
TDT | Manama

Shura Council has given the green light to an agreement with Hong Kong aimed at eliminating double taxation and boosting trade.

The decision follows a reported \$88.2 million in imports from Hong Kong and \$41.1 million in exports in 2023.

The pact, outlined in Decree No. (40) of 2024, is designed to prevent taxing the same income twice while creating a more attractive setting for businesses to thrive.

The CEO of the National Bureau for Revenue, Rana Faqihi, described the trade relationship as strong, and said the agreement would help smooth the flow of goods and investments between Bahrain and Hong Kong.

## Global tax standards

Khalid Al Maskati, who chairs the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee, said the move is in line with Bahrain's commitments to global tax standards.

He explained that the agreement builds on Bahrain's existing framework of 45 similar pacts with other countries, aimed at making the country more appealing for international investments.

Al Maskati stressed that such agreements not only encourage trade but also position Bahrain as an open and reliable partner in the region.

Stronger tax administration Shura Council member Abdulla Al Nuaimi suggested the need for a stronger tax administration to handle agreements like this effectively.

He called for training Bahraini experts in tax matters and encouraged tapping into the experience of retired professionals to create a well-rounded system.

"We need a solid structure that ensures these agreements are implemented smoothly and delivers real results," he said.

Dr Ebtesam Al Dallal pointed out that before the pandemic, trade with China, including Hong Kong, stood at \$73 million.

## Ttrade volumes

She believes the new agreement could lead to a dramatic increase in trade volumes.

Dr Al Dallal also noted Bahrain's strategic position as a gateway to the Gulf market, which is valued at \$2 trillion.

She said low operational costs, modern infrastructure,

and a skilled local workforce make the kingdom an attractive choice for international businesses looking to expand.

## Major projects

Ali Al Shihabi, another member of the Shura Council, drew attention to major projects in Hong Kong, such as factories for electronic chips and air conditioners, and urged Bahrain to tap into these opportunities.

He also pointed to the recently completed Hong Kong-Macau Bridge, a 90-kilometre engineering marvel, as an example of the region's ambition and potential for growth.

The agreement, which aims to remove tax barriers and attract investments, is expected to strengthen Bahrain's position as a trade hub while opening the door to new partnerships with Hong Kong.

## Centralised system for emergency responses

TDT | Manama

Civil Defence is developing a centralised system to analyse incident patterns, aiming to sharpen future planning and improve emergency responses.

The system will help the Directorate respond more effectively, with the broader goal of enhancing safety across the board. This forward-thinking approach coincides with the Director-General's appointment as head of the International Civil Protection Organisation — a rare honour for Bahrain and a testament to its growing influence in global safety efforts.

## Emergency calls

Locally, the Directorate handled over 16,000 emergency calls in the first two months of 2024, compared to 14,542 in 2023.

The cases ranged from fires in homes and industrial facil-

ities to severe car accidents, waterlogging, and clearing fallen trees and other hazards.

The push to involve the community has also gained momentum.

A volunteer programme has seen its first group of 52 participants graduate.

## Volunteers

These volunteers are now assisting with firefighting operations, inspections, and emergency preparedness, strengthening local readiness and adding an extra layer of support to the Directorate's efforts.

Safety inspections have ramped up.

By November 2024, the Directorate had conducted more than 2,500 checks on restaurants, hotels, and commercial properties, up from just over 2,000 in 2023.

## Northern Governorate rolls out smart waste containers



Metal garbage containers

TDT | Manama

The Northern Governorate Municipality has started distributing sensor-equipped waste containers, municipal sources confirmed to The Daily Tribune.

According to the sources, 60 waste smart containers will be distributed in the first stage, with plans to replace all the existing containers in the Governorate.

"Block 460 in the Northern Governorate was the first one to receive such smart containers," the source revealed.

Commenting on the positive aspects of deploying such containers, the source added: "Our system allows for real-time monitoring and tracking of all waste containers, providing detailed data on their location, fill levels, and overall distri-

tribution across the service area. This data enables efficient waste collection routes, optimised resource allocation, and proactive maintenance scheduling."

## Comprehensive upgrade

A December report in The Daily Tribune indicated that the Southern Governorate Municipality is implementing a comprehensive upgrade to its waste management system, leveraging GPS technology to enhance efficiency and improve the cleanliness of residential areas.

The initiative involves the replacement of all existing metal waste containers with modern, eco-friendly alternatives, and a crucial element of this upgrade is the integration of GPS tracking into each new container.

## Manufacturing sector leads in loan acquisition

H Naser  
TDT | Manama

The manufacturing sector in Bahrain received the highest percentage of loans in the first half of 2024, accounting for 25% of total loans disbursed, according to new statistics from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Statistical Centre.

It reflects the Kingdom's commitment to industrial diversification and growth, and the strong performance of its manufacturing sector.

This, however, contrasts with the overall GCC trend. The data shows that in Qatar,

the "other services" sector received the largest share of loans (48%), while in Saudi Arabia, individual loans constituted the largest portion (47%).

This figure was 37% in Oman, 36.3% in Kuwait, and 26.3% in the UAE, primarily for household consumption.

Across most GCC countries (excluding Oman), real estate activity secured the second-largest share of loans and credit facilities.

## Total loans

This sector accounted for 19.2% of total loans in Qatar, 19.1% in Kuwait, 16.3% in Bah-

rain, 12.5% in the UAE, and 10.4% in Saudi Arabia.

Oman allocated 8.5% of its loans to the "other services" sector.

In Bahrain, wholesale and retail trade secured the third-largest share of loans at 14.5%.

## Financial and insurance activities

The UAE saw 11.8% allocated to financial and insurance activities, a similar figure to Kuwait (11.6%). Qatar directed 11% of its loans to transportation and storage, while Oman allocated 8% to manufacturing and Saudi Arabia 7.1% to wholesale and

retail trade.

## Capital adequacy ratio

The report highlights Bahrain's leading position in capital adequacy ratio among GCC countries, reaching 23.8% in June 2024.

Saudi Arabia followed at 19.4%, then Qatar (18.6%), the UAE (18.3%), Kuwait (18.1%), and Oman (17.8%).

All GCC countries exceeded the regulatory minimum capital adequacy ratio of 8.5%.

Bahrain also ranked second in net profits among GCC commercial banks, achieving 14.5% in the period.

## Thanksgiving Unity



Dina E. Sta. Ana, President of Pinay Ikaw Na (PIN), hosted a heartfelt Thanksgiving dinner at her Jidhafs home, bringing together community members, Philippine Embassy staff, and leaders from the Migrant Workers Office and Overseas Workers Welfare Administration. The evening fostered unity, reflection, and hope for the year ahead, underscoring PIN's dedication to women's empowerment and community building in Bahrain.

## OFOQ2 system pilot launch



The Customs Affairs and CrimsonLogic Company signed memorandums for the pilot launch of the Customs Single Window (OFOQ2) system after passing phases of the national project as part of efforts to promote customs services and information security. The OFOQ2 is an integrated system that aims to facilitate commercial and customs operations.

# Financing just got more rewarding

NBB launches personal finance campaign offering a total of BHD 5,000 cash prizes

TDI | Manama

The National Bank of Bahrain (NBB) has introduced its latest Personal Finance campaign presenting customers the chance to win a total of BHD 5,000 in cash prizes, running until 31st March 2025.



Subah Abdullatif Al Zayani

Those who apply for new Personal Finance or top-up their existing finance with a minimum amount of BHD 5,000 will be automatically entered into the draw. Two winners will be selected, with each receiving a prize of BHD 2,500. The Bank is also offering exclusive interest

rates, a grace period of up to 3 months, waived processing fees and a streamlined approval process, providing an exciting opportunity to kick off the year with rewarding benefits.

Commenting on the occasion, Subah Abdullatif Al Zayani, Chief Executive - Retail Banking

at NBB said, "We are pleased to

commence the year with a campaign that welcomes both new and existing customers to enjoy rewarding financing solutions, where they can benefit from our personal finance campaign by applying through the NBB Digital Banking App or any of our

branches."

Interested customers can explore the campaign's benefits, review the applicable terms and conditions, or apply for Personal Finance through the NBB Digital Banking App. They can also visit any NBB branch, website, or call for more information.

## GFH announces investment through Blackstone in Invenergy

TDI | Manama

GFH Financial Group yesterday announced an investment in Invenergy, the largest privately-held developer, owner, and operator of clean energy solutions, through investment vehicles managed by Blackstone's infrastructure group.

With headquarters in the U.S., Invenergy has a 20-year track record of responsibly developing, building, owning and operating wind, solar, and natural gas generation projects, and energy storage facilities. To date, Invenergy has developed more than 200 projects and 33 GW of generating capacity in the Americas, Europe, and Asia with over 2600 employees and a deeply experienced management team. The company also invests in transmission lines essential to connecting generation and energy storage capacity, moving power long distances across regions from where it's produced to areas of high de-



Hammad Younas, Group Chief Investment Officer of GFH

mand. Invenergy projects deliver reliable, affordable clean energy to meet rapidly growing electricity demand. Complementing GFH's thematic focus, this investment benefits from energy transition trends, the U.S.'s 2050 Net Zero targets, industrial megaprojects, and the growth of artificial intelligence.

Hammad Younas, Group Chief Investment Officer of GFH said, "In line with our focus

on market-leading businesses in sectors with strong macro tailwinds, we're pleased to announce this investment. Invenergy represents North America's premier renewable energy platform, and we are delighted to be investing in their business through Blackstone, the world's largest asset managers in alternative investments with expertise across sectors including infrastructure and renewable

energy." Further commenting, Mr. Younas added, "In line with our impact investing strategy, Invenergy comes with a high conviction investment theme. The current macro environment in the US creates a favorable backdrop for renewable energy investments, while generating stable and recurring cash flows stemming from strong growth in development pace and renewables demand."



## Apple wants to keep diversity programmes disavowed by other US firms

San Francisco, United States

Apple's board of directors has recommended shareholders vote against a proposal to end the company's diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs, going against the grain of decisions by other large US corporates.

The National Center for Public Policy Research, a conservative think tank, proposed Apple shareholders consider ending the firm's DEI program to prevent lawsuits following a 2023 Supreme Court's ruling against affirmative action in universities.

But the Apple board has recommended voting against the proposal when it meets late this month.

"The proposal is unnecessary as Apple already has a well-established compliance program," said the board, which includes Tim Cook, the California-based company's boss.

"The proposal also inappropriately attempts to restrict Apple's ability to manage its own ordinary business operations, people and teams, and business strategies," it said, accusing the think-tank of trying to "micromanage" the

company.

The board said the iPhone maker "is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate in recruiting, hiring, training, or promoting on any basis protected by law".

The proposal will be put to a shareholder vote at Apple's annual general meeting on February 25.

Following in the footsteps of McDonald's, Ford, Walmart and a host of others, Meta became the latest US firm to end its DEI programs.

The Friday announcement by Meta which owns Facebook and Instagram, comes amid what it described as "a changing legal and policy landscape".

President-elect Donald Trump who takes office next week, has been a harsh critic of Meta and its owner Mark Zuckerberg for years, accusing the company of bias against him and threatening to retaliate against the tech billionaire once back in office.

Zuckerberg has been moving aggressively to reconcile with Trump since his election in November, including donating \$1 million to his inauguration fund and hiring a Republican as his public affairs chief.

## Blue Origin set for first launch of giant New Glenn rocket

AFP | Cape Canaveral, United States

A quarter century after its founding, Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin is finally ready for its maiden orbital voyage with a brand new rocket the company hopes will shake up the commercial space race.

The launch initially scheduled for Sunday was pushed back a day due to "unfavourable" sea conditions, Blue Origin posted on X.

Named New Glenn after a legendary astronaut, the rocket stands 320 feet (98 meters) tall, roughly equivalent to a 32-story building -- and is set to blast off from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in a launch window that now opens at 1:00 am (0600 GMT) Monday.

"Pointy end up!" the company's CEO, Dave Limp posted on X alongside photos of the gleaming white behemoth.

With the mission dubbed NG-1, Bezos, the world's second-richest man, is taking direct aim at the world's wealthiest: Elon Musk, whose company SpaceX dominates the orbital launch market through its Falcon 9 and Falcon Heavy rockets.

These serve the commercial sector, the Pentagon, and US space agency NASA -- including,



Blue Origin's New Glenn rocket sits on the launch pad one day before its maiden flight (NG-1) at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida

crucially, ferrying astronauts to and from the International Space Station.

"SpaceX has for the past several years been pretty much the only game in town, and so having a competitor... this is great," G. Scott Hubbard, a retired senior NASA official, told AFP.

SpaceX, meanwhile, is plan-

ning the next orbital test of Starship -- its gargantuan new-generation rocket -- the very next day, upping the sense of high-stakes rivalry.

### Landing attempt

If all goes to plan, shortly after launch, Blue Origin will attempt to land the first-stage booster

on a drone ship named Jacklyn, in honor of Bezos's mother, stationed about 620 miles (1,000 kilometers) downrange in the Atlantic Ocean.

Though SpaceX has long made such landings a near-routine spectacle, this will be Blue Origin's first shot at a touchdown on the high seas.

Meanwhile, the rocket's upper stage will fire its engines toward Earth orbit, carrying a Defense Department-funded prototype spaceship called Blue Ring, which will remain aboard for the roughly six-hour test flight.

Limp emphasized that simply reaching orbit is the prime goal, while successfully recovering the booster would be a welcome "bonus."

Blue Origin has experience landing its New Shepard rockets -- used for suborbital tourism -- but they are much smaller and land on terra firma rather than a ship at sea.

Physically, New Glenn dwarfs the 230-foot Falcon 9 and is designed for heavier payloads.

It slots between Falcon 9 and its big sibling, Falcon Heavy, in terms of mass capacity but holds an edge with its wider payload fairing, ideal for transporting more voluminous cargo.

### Slow v fast development

Blue Origin has already secured a NASA contract to launch two Mars probes aboard New Glenn. The rocket will also support the deployment of Project Kuiper, a satellite internet constellation designed to compete with Starlink.

For now, however, SpaceX maintains a commanding lead,

while other rivals -- United Launch Alliance, Arianespace, and Rocket Lab -- trail far behind.

Like Musk, Bezos has a lifelong passion for space. But whereas Musk dreams of colonizing Mars, Bezos envisions shifting heavy industry off-planet onto floating space platforms in order to preserve Earth, "humanity's blue origin."

He founded Blue Origin in 2000 -- two years before Musk created SpaceX -- but has adopted a more cautious pace, in contrast to his rival's "fail fast, learn fast" philosophy.

"There's been impatience within the space community over Blue Origin's very deliberate approach," Scott Pace, a space policy analyst at George Washington University and former member of the National Space Council, told AFP.

If New Glenn succeeds, Pace added, it will give the US government "dissimilar redundancy" -- valuable backup if one system fails.

Musk's closeness to President-elect Donald Trump has raised concerns about potential conflicts of interest, especially with private astronaut Jared Isaacman -- a business associate of Musk -- slated to become the next NASA chief.



News in brief

South Korea's suspended

President Yoon Suk Yeol will not attend the first hearing of his impeachment trial next week because of safety concerns, his lawyer said yesterday. 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. "Concerns about safety and potential incidents have arisen. Therefore, the President will not be able to attend the trial on January 14," lawyer Yoon Kab-keun said in a statement sent to AFP. "The President is willing to appear at any time once safety issues are resolved. The Constitutional Court has scheduled five trial dates spanning January 14 to February 4, which will proceed in his absence if he does not attend.



S. Korea's Yoon will not attend first impeachment hearing: lawyer

Sweden's Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said Sunday his country was not at war but not living in peacetime either, citing hybrid attacks, suspected sabotage in the Baltic Sea and a proxy war fought on its soil. Several underwater telecom and power cables have been severed in the Baltic Sea in recent months in incidents that experts and politicians say are part of hybrid war actions orchestrated by Russia. "Sweden is not at war, but there is not peace either. Real peace means freedom and no serious conflicts between countries," he told the annual Folk och Forsvar defence forum in Salen in central Sweden. "We and our neighbouring countries are subjected to hybrid attacks that are not carried out with missiles and soldiers but with computers, money, disinformation and threats of sabotage," he said.

Direct flights between Rome and Tripoli resumed on Sunday after a 10-year hiatus, with Italy's foreign ministry citing a "concerted effort" to strengthen ties with its former colony Libya. Italy's flag carrier ITA Airways on Sunday announced it had launched its first commercial flight between Tripoli's Mitiga airport and Rome's Fiumicino, with flights scheduled for twice a week. Resumption of flights between the two countries after a decade "is part of a constant and concerted effort by Italian institutions and the business system, with the aim of strengthening ties with Libya, a strategic and privileged partner for our country," wrote Italy's foreign ministry in a statement.

Direct flights resume between Rome and Tripoli



Saudi Arabia urges Syria sanctions relief at talks with regional, EU diplomats



Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan hosting a meeting of top diplomats from the Middle East and Europe to discuss Syria, poses for a picture with the participants in Riyadh

AFP | Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia yesterday called for the lifting of sanctions on Syria after meetings with top diplomats from the Middle East and Europe that focused on the war-ravaged country's future. "We stressed the importance of lifting unilateral and international sanctions imposed on Syria, as their continuation hinders the aspirations of the Syrian people to achieve development and reconstruction," Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said after Sunday's talks concluded in Riyadh.

included Turkey, France, the European Union and the United Nations.

Syria's new leader Ahmed al-Sharaa, who led the main rebel group in the alliance that overthrew Assad, is pushing for sanctions relief. His administration is represented at the Riyadh talks by Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani. Western powers, including the United States and the EU, imposed heavy sanctions on Assad's government over his brutal crackdown on anti-government protests in 2011, which triggered civil war. Some US sanctions long pre-date the conflict, with Washington labelling Syria a "state sponsor of terrorism" in 1979 and adding further measures in 2004.



A fire fighting helicopter drops water as the Palisades fire grows near the Mandeville Canyon neighborhood and Encino, California

Firefighters race to beat LA blazes as winds grow and death toll hits 16

AFP | Los Angeles, United States

Firefighters battled yesterday to get on top of massive wildfires around Los Angeles as winds ramped up, pushing the blazes toward previously untouched neighborhoods. At least 16 people were confirmed dead from fires that have ripped through the city, leaving communities in ruins and testing the mettle of thousands of firefighters -- and millions of California residents.



Firefighters work to put out flames in the Mandeville Canyon neighborhood of Los Angeles, California

A brief lull in the wind was rapidly giving way to gusts that forecasters warned would feed the blazes for days to come. "Critical fire-weather conditions will unfortunately ramp up again today for southern California and last through at least early next week," the National Weather Service said. "This may lead to the spread of ongoing fires as well as the development of new ones."

Gaza doctor treats war victims after losing leg

AFP | Deir El-Balah, Palestinian Territories

Palestinian paediatrician Khaled al-Saidani moves through his Gaza hospital with determination, using a prosthetic leg and an aluminium walker as he cares for children also injured in the war. With a stethoscope draped over his shoulders, he carefully examines his patients at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, offering warm smiles and handshakes to the children as he moves from one to the next. He knows all too well the devastating impact of wounds sustained during war, having lost his right leg after an Israeli air strike on his house last year.



A girl rocks a makeshift metal cradle where a child is lying, as families displaced by conflict take shelter by graves in a cemetery in Deir el-Balah in the central Gaza Strip

Accountability of company directors

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DR. ABDELGADIR WARSAMA GHALIB



Legally speaking the positions of chairmanship & membership of the board of directors in public joint stock companies got their burdens and liabilities, likewise, their credits and advantages. This legal burden and liability is clearly coming from the fact that everyone has the right to take legal action, against all members of the board. They are, as we can see, exposed to legal proceedings from within or without the company and, as a fact, this is happening every now and then.

This indicates that the Chairman and directors should perform their duties with utmost care and due diligence, honesty and high standards of professionalism, failing which the company or the shareholders or any other third party may take proceedings against them jointly or individually.

The general assembly of the company shall specify who should take the legal proceedings, if any, on behalf of the company versus the chairman and directors of the Board. A shareholder, may initiate such proceedings if he \ she can clearly prove the occurrence of particular damage to him \ her and all necessary steps shall be taken to notify the management of the company of his \ her intention to initiate legal proceedings.

We believe, this is very important because the intention of the legislature is to close the door for some directors who may prefer an "alibi" when they know that certain issues will be discussed and they don't want to involve themselves for any reason whatsoever.

The general assembly of the company shall specify who should take the legal proceedings, if any, on behalf of the company versus the chairman and directors of the Board. A shareholder, may initiate such proceedings if he \ she can clearly prove the occurrence of particular damage to him \ her and all necessary steps shall be taken to notify the management of the company of his \ her intention to initiate legal proceedings.

An additional burden, relates to the fact that neither the chairman nor members of the board shall do or start any work that may cause any competition to the company. The conflict-of-interest rule shall be observed very carefully to streamline the concepts of corporate culture and corporate governance. This is needed to deprive occurrence of all instances of malpractices, opportunism and importation or even criminal breach of trust.

The medical facility is located in Deir el-Balah, where Israeli forces have frequently clashed with Hamas militants.

(The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Daily Tribune)

CAPTAIN'S CORNER

A balancing act for better productivity

CAPTAIN MAHMOOD AL MAHMOOD



Larsen & Toubro is a renowned engineering company in India but recently they have hit the headlines for the wrong reasons. At a press conference where he was asked why employees worked a six-day week instead of five, Chairman SN Subrahmanyan retorted that he was all for a 90-hour work week with Sunday too put in as a work day.

That seems excessive at a time when most time-consuming manual work and work needing repetitive processing has been automated or computerized, both on the factory floor or the office desk. We are in the Age of AI and a lot of creative processes too are being put through the filter of AI. How then can a top corporate boss justify the demand that his staff work a 90-hour week?

We are in the Age of AI and a lot of creative processes too are being put through the filter of AI. How then can a top corporate boss justify the demand that his staff work a 90-hour week? Especially when the most coveted economic position (USA) clocks in just a 36 hour work week and the one seen as the world's largest manufacturing hub (China) pulls in 48 hour work week.

If you remove the manual and repetitive processes from work content, what remains is creative and inter-personal inputs. And nobody can be in top creative gear continuously for seven days of the week or give their best to relationships in the workplace without taking a break.

Luckily, in Bahrain we have a more realistic handle on our work-life balance. A recent news item declared that there are 17 public holidays in the Kingdom's 2025 calendar. Now this may seem a brief break compared to other countries - Nepal has the highest number of public holidays at 35 per year - but on a daily basis, Bahrain's labour conditions are sensible, rewarding and designed to take into account life responsibilities. Women, for example, get extensive maternity breaks after childbirth and even "lactation" time out where they can leave early for breastfeeding schedules. When close relatives pass away, employees get a three-day mourning pause in their work days. Our working day has a generous lunch gap where most private sector employees re-connect with family halfway through the working day. Government offices wrap up by 3 p.m. so that a sensible amount of the day is still left for personal life.

And that's the way we like it! We have a growing leisure industry and Bahrain's thriving restaurant sector would be crushed if we robbed them of their customers by putting everybody's nose to the grindstone for a terrifying 90 work hours a week, 7 days in a row.

A balanced life means a good mental health perspective and better creativity. In my opinion, that's a win-win all round.

(Captain Mahmood Al Mahmood is the Editor-in-Chief of the Daily Tribune and the President of the Arab-African Unity Organisation for Relief, Human Rights and Counterterrorism)



TOP 4 TWEETS

01



Paying homage to Swami Vivekananda on his Jayanti. An eternal inspiration for youth, he continues to ignite passion and purpose in young minds. We are committed to fulfilling his vision of a strong and developed India.

@natendramodi

02



To the brave men and women who ran towards danger over the past 24 hours in Southern California, I want you to know your President, and the rest of the country, is with you. You suited up and risked your lives to save the lives of your fellow Americans. We are indebted to you.

@JoeBiden

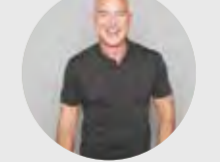
03



Exciting to see the new RTX 50-series GPUs and Windows Subsystem for Linux powering models from Nvidia NIM and Azure AI Foundry on Windows 11 PCs. A game-changer for running AI on the edge.

@satyanadella

04



Amazon is working with first responders, nonprofit partners and humanitarian relief agencies on the ground in Los Angeles to get them thousands of vital supplies. The team will continue to support relief efforts in coordination with community partners and humanitarian organizations in the coming weeks.

@JeffBezos

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

**Celebs**  
celebs

# Angelina Jolie opens home to friends amid wildfires



**Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles**

Angelina Jolie has opened her home to friends who were forced to evacuate due to the California wildfires. The 49-year-old actress “is heartbroken” by the natural disaster in Los Angeles and has taken in some friends who were impacted by the fires. A source told PEOPLE: “Angie is heartbroken for those who have lost their homes, or are impacted by the fires. “She’s doing everything”

she can to help, even opening her home to friends who were forced to evacuate.” It is estimated that around 10,000 structures, including homes and offices, have been destroyed between the Palisades and Eaton fires and more than 80,000 people have been displaced. The County of Los Angeles Department of Medical Examiner (DME) has also revealed it is investigating 11 fire-deaths. Meanwhile, Dennis Quaid, 70, spoke about the devastating impact of the fires and shared how lucky he feels that his Brentwood home was saved. He said: “We woke up to this big plume of smoke. That was a real exciting day as far as here in the Palisades, it went up on Wednesday. “It came within 150 yards of the house and these guys with their planes came down and put that retardant down there. And those helicopter pilots, they’re incredible, what they do. And I can’t say enough about the firefighters and the first responders in this town. We got some good ones, good people here. “We’re fighting as hard as we can to save our city. Gosh, I never thought I’d say that. But that’s what’s going on.

## Jennifer Aniston shows concern for pets amid wildfires

**Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles**

Jennifer Aniston has expressed her concern for pets amid the Los Angeles wildfires. The Hollywood star has taken to social media to offer guidance to residents and pet owners in the city amid the ongoing disaster. Jennifer, 55 - who owns two dogs, Clyde and Lord Chesterfield - wrote on Instagram: “If you’re near the Palisades fires please be mindful that wild animals are fleeing the flames and may show up in your yards. “The California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection advises bringing your pets indoors at night to give wildlife a safe path to pass through. “Consider leaving out buckets of water for these animals - they are scared, exhausted, and may have lost their homes. A little kindness can help them recover and survive.” Jennifer has also shared the details of her evacuation centres, which are open to people, pets and large animals. A host of well-known celebrities have already lost their homes amid the wildfires, including Paris Hilton, Milo Ventimiglia, Mel Gibson, Miles Teller, and Billy Crystal. Billy, 76, recently revealed that he’s praying for the “safety of the firefighters and first responders”. In a statement given to PEOPLE, the comedy star said: “Words cannot describe the enormity of the devastation we are witnessing and experiencing. We ache for our friends and neighbours who have also lost their homes and businesses in this tragedy.” Billy and his wife Janice actually raised their two daughters - Jennifer and Lindsay - in the home that’s now been burned to the ground. The film star shared: “Janice and I lived in our home since 1979. “We raised our children and grandchildren here. Every inch of our house was filled with love. Beautiful memories that can’t be taken away.”

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Jennifer Aniston

## Kate Beckinsale offers help to those affected by California wildfires

**Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles**

Kate Beckinsale has offered shelter to those affected by the California wildfires. The 51-year-old actress has been left heartbroken at seeing the devastation waging through the Pacific Palisades neighbourhood where she once lived with then-partner Michael Sheen and their daughter Lily, now 25, and has pledged her support to the families who have “lost everything” as a result of the shocking blazes. She wrote on Instagram: Hearing the winds last night I prayed. I

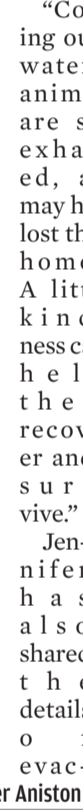


knew it would be bad - we had to evacuate many times during our life there - but the shock at the whole of the Palisades being destroyed is unthinkable horrific. “My daughter and I lived there for most of her childhood and most of her childhood is gone. Her primary school, every shop or restaurant we used to go to with my parents and Michael’s parents - and devastatingly

**My heart is breaking for the families who have lost everything, and the people and their animals, not to mention the horses and all the wild animals, people’s businesses and livelihoods. This is just like hell**

KATE BECKINSALE

most of her friends homes. My heart is broken. “The Pacific Palisades is a community very unusual to find in Los Angeles, heavy on families with young children and pets, I’m weeping for all of the people and pets involved, so



# Halle Berry packing up her ‘entire closet’ to help wildfire victims

**Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles**

Halle Berry is donating her “entire closet” to help victims of the California wildfires. The Hollywood actress sprung into action after seeing fellow screen star Sharon Stone post an appeal for donations to help those who have lost everything in the disaster - which has claimed 10 lives and burned thousands of homes to the ground in southern California - and Halle urged others to help by bringing donations to the COOP store in Los Angeles. In a post on Instagram, she wrote: “I’m packing up my entire closet and heading over to the COOP! If you live in the Southern California area, I urge you to do the same. This is something we can do right now today to help all of the displaced families that are in need of the basics today! Thank you @sharonstone for your leadership. Love you Lady.” In a video posted on the platform, Halle added: “A group of thoughtful, committed citizens can make a difference. We’re at COOP at 7282 Beverly Boulevard collecting gently used clothing for kids, men, women, children, people that have been displaced, affected by the fire. We have beautiful cashmere sweaters, jeans, new socks, shoes, clothes, blankets ... You can come and shop and you can also donate.” Sharon pre-

viously appealed for donations on her Instagram page appealing for “gently used” clothing, hats, shoes and gloves as well as new underwear and socks. Jenna Cooper - who runs COOP - reveals she was inspired to help after realised the disaster was unfolding so close to home. She told The Hollywood Reporter: “I was nauseous and awake being just miles away from such wreckage. I kept thinking, what the hell can I do? ...”

**Halle Berry is donating her entire closet, including cashmere sweaters, jeans, socks, shoes, clothes, and blankets, to help families displaced by the California wildfires**

### SUDOKU

2 7 1

9 8 1

4 8 9 5 1

9 5

5 2 9 7

2 4

3 1 9 8 5

8 6

6 7 2

### Yesterday's solution

7 6 3 4 8 5 1 2 9

1 8 4 2 9 7 6 5 3

9 2 5 6 1 3 8 7 4

3 7 6 9 5 2 4 1 8

2 5 1 8 6 4 3 9 7

8 4 9 7 3 1 2 6 5

6 3 2 5 4 9 7 8 1

4 9 8 1 7 6 5 3 2

5 1 7 3 2 8 9 4 6

**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- Jessica of "Dark Angel"; 5- Born, in France; 8- German river; 12- Fights; 14- Sun. speeches; 15- Scat queen Fitzgerald; 16- Go along; 17- Frat party purchases; 18- Teen follower; 19- Unduly suspicious; 21- Fancy home; 23- Align the cross hairs; 24- Explosive initials; 25- Corn unit; 26- "Fiddler on the Roof" setting; 30- Sticker; 32- Norman Vincent; 33- Surmountable; 37- Humorist Bombeck; 38- Sporting blades; 39- Psychic; 40- Enchant; 42- Aromatic wood; 43- Utopias; 44- Destroys, as documents; 45- Puncture sound; 48- Mos. and mos.; 49- Shoebox marking; 50- Tidily; 52- Delay; 57- Jocular Johnson; 58- Has a mortgage; 60- Simmons rival; 61- Folk singer Burl; 62- Prying; 63- Blue book filler; 64- For fear that; 65- Supplement, with "out"; 66- Hardy girl;

Down

1- Snakes; 2- Not of the cloth; 3- Yes; 4- Perforated; 5- Apply chrisn; 6- Slender boat; 7- "and hers"; 8- At any time; 9- fide; 10- Et (and other men); 11- Env. notation; 14- Endless; 15- Mutter; 20- Prepare to be shot; 22- Cookie fruit; 25- Needed liniment; 26- Rome's Fontana di; 27- Public transports; 28- Endure; 29- Kansas city; 30- Sudden forward thrust; 31- Superior of a monastery; 32- Brings up; 34- Dagger of yore; 37- Ailment; 40- Country; 42- Control; 43- Set apart; 45- Cave dweller; 46- Contusion; 48- Former Russian rulers; 49- Spanish dance; 50- Employs; 51- This can be guilty or not guilty; 52- Ready for plucking; 54- Put on it; 55- Created; 56- Hammer head; 59- Frat letters;

### Yesterday's solution

A T O N S O P H O S A B E R L O

R A T E O T T O S A R E L T

C R O C T H A W S L E E R

O P E R A T E S O L I V E

O D O R L A R A

G O A P E C O M E D I A N

A M A S S P L A T O T S E

V E R Y I R O N S C A N S

E G O D R E S S R E L E T

L A N G U A G E S L O W S

L E N O E A V E

T R A I T C O M P R E S S

R E D D S A L S A I S L E

I N E E A G A I N A A A S

B O E R S E N N A C U P S







# Sabalenka starts strong in Melbourne

Aggressive Sabalenka, Zverev shine despite Melbourne weather chaos on Australian Open's opening day

● Sabalenka defeated Stephens in straight sets

● Zheng also advanced to the second round

● Storms caused significant delays on outside courts

● Nishikori won a five-set marathon match



People walk in heavy rain beside tournament signage

AFP | Melbourne

Aryna Sabalenka powered past Sloane Stephens to begin her quest for a third consecutive Australian Open crown yesterday with Alexander Zverev and Zheng Qinwen also winning as storms caused havoc on day one of the Grand Slam.

Belarusian top seed Sabalenka had a first-set wobble but was otherwise in control against 2017 US Open champion Stephens, romping home 6-3, 6-2 in 71 minutes on Rod Laver Arena.

Sabalenka is aiming to become the first woman since Martina Hingis (1997-99) to win three

consecutive titles at Melbourne Park.

If she lifts the winner's Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup again, she will join a select group of Margaret Court, Evonne Goolagong, Steffi Graf, Monica Seles and Hingis as the only women to complete a three-peat.

"Always tough matches against her," said Sabalenka, who won the Brisbane International in the lead-up. "I didn't play my best, probably, but I'm glad I was able to close the match in two sets."

Men's second seed Zverev was clinical in his match against French wildcard Lucas Pouille,

who made the last four in 2019 before losing to eventual champion Novak Djokovic.

The German, who is on the same side of the draw as Novak Djokovic and Carlos Alcaraz, cruised home 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 as he bids to better the semi-final he made in 2024.

Olympic champion Zheng, the fifth seed and last year's losing finalist, had the honour of playing the first point on centre court against Romania's 110th-ranked Anca Todoni.

She came through 7-6 (7/3), 6-1 but was rusty after opting not to play a warm-up event.

Zheng had three set points on



**YOU KNOW WHAT**  
Aryna Sabalenka aims to become the first woman since Martina Hingis (1997-99) to win three consecutive Australian Open titles

her own serve at 5-3 in the first set, but allowed Todoni to come roaring back before closing her down in the tiebreak then racing through the second set.

"The first match is always not easy," she said. "Just happy to get through the match, the tiebreak and find my rhythm."

The 22-year-old enjoyed a breakthrough 2024 with her Australian Open exploits helping spur her to Olympic gold --- beating Iga Swiatek on the way --- and three WTA titles.

While Zheng was able to play, the action on outside courts at Melbourne Park was halted barely an hour after it started when storms rolled in that

turned the sky black.

'A bit hard'

Thunder and lightning saw players and fans rushing for cover, with the heavy rain a headache for organisers who face a match backlog.

Play finally resumed after a six-and-a-half hour delay.

Only the three main stadiums -- Rod Laver Arena, Margaret Court Arena and John Cain Arena -- have roofs.

Norway's Ruud said a head of the event that playing better at Grand Slam was on his agenda this year after an under-

whelming 2024 at the majors.

But the sixth seed will need to lift his game to go deep in Melbourne after a rollercoaster 6-3, 1-6, 7-5, 2-6, 6-1 win over Spain's Jaume Munar, ranked 106.

Japanese veteran Kei Nishikori also came through a five-set marathon, saving two match points to beat Brazil's Thiago Monteiro 4-6, 6-7 (4/7), 7-5, 6-2, 6-3 in 4hr 6min.

"I almost gave up at match point," said the 35-year-old, who is on the comeback trail after spending years sidelined by major hip surgery and an ankle injury.



Aryna Sabalenka

## Bahrain unveils exciting plans for National Sports Day 2025

TDT | Manama

The stage is set for Bahrain Sports Day 2025, an event promising inclusivity, community spirit, and a vibrant celebration of healthy living. Details were unveiled yesterday during a press conference held at the Bahrain National Stadium yesterday, where speakers emphasized the unifying power of sports.

Dr. Abdulrahman Askar, along

with representatives from the General Sports Authority and the Bahrain Sports Federation, highlighted the importance of this annual event, which will take place in February. "Bahrain Sports Day is not just for sports people but for everyone looking to take a step toward a healthier life," Dr. Askar remarked, stressing that the day will only be a success if it inspires people to break free from sedentary habits.

The event's inclusivity was a key theme, with activities tailored for children, teenagers, and elders alike.

Sama Bay will serve as the main venue, hosting a variety of activities, while events will also take place across Bahrain to ensure everyone can participate. Organizers are also taking cues from the Gulf Cup success and Muharraq Nights to add a festival-like atmosphere, complete with food vendors, fam-

ily-friendly games, and tourist attractions.

Adding to the excitement is the "Unity Kick-Off," a charity match scheduled for January 31 at 7:30 PM at the Bahrain National Stadium. This friendly game will feature football legends such as John Terry, Roberto Carlos, and Dimitar Berbatov, alongside social media influencers, making it a star-studded event that celebrates togetherness.

## Djokovic reveals 'energetic disc' as new secret weapon

AFP | Melbourne

Novak Djokovic has revealed a new secret weapon that he credits with helping keep him healthy and prolong his career -- a green "energetic disc".

Known for his new-age spiritual interests, the Serbian

star is in Melbourne hoping to wind back the clock and win an 11th Australian Open and record 25th Grand Slam singles title.

To help achieve the feat, he has a device made by an engineer in Serbia he claims has helped him deal with several ailments.

## BRAVE CF Awards: BRAVE Combat Federation announces KO of the Year Contenders for 2024

TDT | Manama

BRAVE Combat Federation, the world's most global MMA organization, announces the nominees for Knockout of the Year as part of its annual awards, kicking off 2025 by celebrating the outstanding moments of 2024.

Leading the list is Filipino superstar Marwin Quirante, who delivered an 18-second front-kick knockout against Pakistan's Aqib Awan at BRAVE CF 85 in Pakistan, shocking the MMA world.

Also earning a nomination is Alex Lohoré, who showcased his knockout skills at BRAVE CF's debut event in the Netherlands,



BRAVE CF 83. Lohoré, making his BRAVE CF debut, stopped former Super Welterweight champion Marcin Bandel in the first round, announcing his arrival in spectacular fashion.

Pakistani superstar Rizwan Ali secured his spot on the list

with a third-round knockout of Indian MMA veteran Srikant Sekhar at BRAVE CF 85 in Pakistan. In a fight that was a contender for Fight of the Year, Rizwan knocked out Srikant in the third round, earning bragging rights for his nation in the heated In-

dia vs. Pakistan rivalry.

Bahrain's Mohamed Alsameea rounds out the list of nominees. After a setback at BRAVE CF 84 in China, Alsameea bounced back with a huge knockout victory over Egypt's Salah Walid at BRAVE CF 91 in Bahrain. Alsameea secured the win with a vicious knee, earning a well-deserved spot among the nominees.

BRAVE Combat Federation will unveil nominations for Submission of the Year, Breakout Fighter of the Year, Fight of the Year, and Fighter of the Year in the coming days as part of its End-of-Year Awards.

## Bahrain football team receives over BHD 1.2 mln following Gulf Cup success



Players celebrate their win

TDT | Manama

The Bahrain national football team, fresh from their Gulf Cup title, has been showered with financial support totaling BHD 1,206,000 from various benefactors and sponsors.

Crown Prince and Prime Minister, His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, led the support with a generous BHD 200,000 contribution. Other significant contributions included BHD 100,000 from His Highness Shaikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the King's Personal Representative.

BHD 100,000 from His Highness Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Representative of the King for Humanitarian Work and Youth Affairs.

BHD 100,000 from His High-

ness Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Chairman of the General Sports Authority.

Corporate supporters also rallied behind the team, showing the unity between sports and the private sector. Bahrain National Bank, Alba, Bapco Energies, BBK, and BEYON each contributed BHD 100,000, adding up to BHD 500,000. Additional donations came from Benefit Bahrain (BHD 26,000) and Nass Group (BHD 20,000).

Further contributions included Bank Al Salam: BHD 100,000, GFH Financial Group: BHD 50,000 and GPIC: BHD 40,000.

Bahrain's journey to the title saw them deliver stellar performances throughout the tournament. In the final, they overturned Oman with a 2-1 comeback, cementing their legacy as Gulf Cup champions.

## Bahrain Cricket Club qualifies for semi-finals with dominant win over Public Security

TDT | Manama

In a scintillating quarter-final clash of the Khalid Bin Hamad Cricket League under Division A (2024) series, Bahrain Cricket Club (BCC) stormed into the semi-finals after comfortably defeating Public Security by 8 wickets. The win came on the

back of a stellar all-round performance, with Sohail Ahmed's match-winning knock leading the charge.

Public Security, after winning the toss and opting to bat first, posted a total of 122/8 in 20 overs. Mohammed Ismail Raja was the standout performer for Public Security, remaining un-

beaten on 60 off 50 balls, but the lack of substantial partnerships saw their innings falter. Despite a quickfire 18 from Wajid Mahmood, wickets fell at regular intervals, and the team could not build on Raja's resilience.

In reply, Bahrain Cricket Club made light work of the target. Openers Sarfaraz Ali and

Shahbaz Badar provided a quick start, and it was Sohail Ahmed's unbeaten 56 from just 33 balls that sealed the win for the team. With valuable contributions from Fiaz Ahmed (26\* from 17 balls) and Badar (22 from 16), Bahrain Cricket Club comfortably chased down the target of 123 in just 12.5 overs.

# Karters put on exciting show in Rotax MAX Challenge fifth round

● Abdulaziz Alsarraf, Shaikh Ahmed bin Saqer Al Khalifa, Nasser Nass, Vedant Menon, Abdulla Sajjad, and Mohamed Almahroos triumph in respective classes

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Bahrain International Circuit (BIC), 'The Home of Motorsport in the Middle East', hosted over the weekend the fifth round of the 2024/2025 Bahrain Rotax MAX Challenge (BRMC).

Abdulaziz Alsarraf, Shaikh Ahmed bin Saqer Al Khalifa, Nasser Nass, Vedant Menon, Abdulla Sajjad, and Mohamed Almahroos were the winners of their respective categories in the hotly contested meeting.

Action took place along the 1.414-kilometre track at BIC's world-class grassroots motorsport facility, Bahrain International Karting Circuit (BIKC).

The round was organised by BIC and BIKC in cooperation with the Bahrain Motor Federation, Bahrain Karting Commission, and the Motorsport Marshals Club.

In the Micro MAX class, Tariq Soofi appeared to be headed towards continuing his season-long dominance as he topped the practice timesheet, claimed pole in qualifying, and won the pre-final. He then went



Action from a race

on to cross the finish line in first place after nine laps in the final, but was given a 10-second time penalty by the stewards, relegating him to second and promoting Abdulaziz Alsarraf to first. Abdulaziz thus won with a time of nine minutes 19.443 seconds, and Tariq was classified not far behind. Leo Saruhan joined them on the podium in third.

## Impressive comeback

In the Mini MAX category, Shaikh Ahmed bin Saqer Al Khalifa set the practice pace and Jude Andrews bagged pole in qualifying. But then, despite starting from nearly the back of the grid, Shaikh Ahmed powered on to win the pre-final ahead of Jude by 1.426s, before taking an outright victory in the nine-lap final in 8:50.986. Austin Gray

followed 1.886s behind, while Jude was third 4.052s back.

## Tough competition

Nasser Nass maintained his winning ways in the Junior MAX class but had to overcome some tough competition on the way. Khaled Najjar had taken practice and qualifying but Nasser was not to be denied in the pre-final, beating Khaled by 0.123s. He then led from start to finish in the 11-lap final, winning in 13:47.036 and enjoying a 4.738s gap from Rashid Hilal. Demir Abali took the third podium step after being classified 4.908s back.

With the Senior MAX featuring the round's largest grid of 17 karters, the wheel-to-wheel battles were intense. Gracie Rose Grantham was the early



Winners celebrate on the podium



**In the Micro MAX final, Tariq Soofi crossed the finish line first but received a 10-second penalty, handing the win to Abdulaziz Alsarraf**

aggressor and she pipped Mohammed Alhasan by 0.057s to top the practice times. Tye Mejia then beat Najashi Rashdan by 0.015s for pole, and later brilliantly defended his position to win the pre-final. In the 15-lap final, however, Mejia lost the advantage on lap nine and Alhasan took over at the front. Alhasan crossed the finish line in first

place, but was given a 10-second time penalty by the stewards, dropping him all the way back to ninth on the race classification.

Vedant Menon inherited the victory with a time of 13:34.023, while Grantham joined him on the podium as runner-up 0.446s behind. Mohammed Hilal came third 0.661s from the winner.

## Close duel

In the DD2 MAX class, Oliver Kruglov edged out Abdulla Sajjad by a mere 0.008s to rank first in practice, and then beat Sajjad again in qualifying, this time by 0.047s. Their close duel continued in the pre-final with Kruglov securing the win, but in the final, Sajjad made his move for the front on the penultimate lap and held on to triumph in 13:23.136 after 15 laps – beating Kruglov by 0.176s. Raoul Sadi came third 3.048s behind.

In the DD2 MAX Masters class, Mohamed Almahroos had gotten the better of Roberto Giannotti

in the opening three sessions, and then won comfortably in the 15-lap final in 13:51.817, with Giannotti unable to finish the race.

Following all the action, the winners were presented their respective awards in the podium ceremonies.

Along with their trophies, the top finishers also earned valuable points for their respective championship standings as they aim to be one of those who will win the incredible opportunity to represent Bahrain at the annual Rotax MAX Challenge Grand Finals – one of the most prestigious karting events in the world.

The BRMC's 2024/2025 calendar features eight rounds, running until next month. The championship resumes with its sixth meeting on 24 January, and then the seventh and penultimate round will take place on 8 February. That will set the stage for the BRMC finale two weeks later on 21 February.

# Elzahrawi doubles in Bahrain Touring Car Challenge

TDI | Manama

Moaz Elzahrawi clinched a fantastic double to headline the list of winners in the fourth round of National Race Day this 2024/2025 season, held over the weekend at Bahrain International Circuit (BIC) in Sakhir.

Elzahrawi took the chequered flag in both the meeting's races in the Bahrain Touring Car Challenge (BTCC).

Meanwhile, Mohamed Alzaidan and Nawaf Al Shuaibi triumphed in their respective classes in the Bahrain Motorcycle Championship (BMC), and Yazeed Sameer Al Saheel, Hisham Bediea Al Bediea, Sultan Tamer Kayello, Mohamed Sami Aldoseri, Sultan Turki Al Saud, and Maan Mahmoud Al Jabrah were those who emerged victorious in the various categories of Time Attack.

The BTCC, BMC, and Time Attack made for a packed National Race Day programme at 'The Home of Motorsport in the Middle East', where the action took place along BIC's 2.55-kilometre Inner Track.

The event was organised by BIC, the Bahrain Motor Federation, the Circuit Racing Com-



Action from the race

mission, the Bahrain Motorcycle Commission, the Bahrain Autocross and Drift Commission, and the Motorsport Marshals Club.

In the BTCC, Moaz Elzahrawi was the man to beat from the opening session. Behind the wheel of his Honda Civic, he led practice with a fastest lap that was 0.597s quicker than Isa Ebrahim, also in a Civic. Then, in qualifying, Elzahrawi captured pole with a best time of one

minute 17.716 seconds – 1.206 seconds quicker than Ebrahim.

## Maintaining pace

Elzahrawi maintained his strong pace in race one where he won with a total time of 20:02.262 after 15 laps – 5.512 seconds ahead of Ebrahim. Andreas Buelow, also driving a Civic, finished third 17.236s adrift. In race two, Elzahrawi won in 24:33.537 – just 2.165s ahead of

Buelow. The Radio Bahrain entrant, driving a Honda Integra, claimed the other podium step in third 10.843s from the victor.

Ali Baqer, also in a Honda Civic, claimed first place in both races in the BTCC's Junior class.

In the BMC, Mohamed Alzaidan was the overall winner of the round's sole race. He also was first in the 600cc category on his Kawasaki ZX6 bike, completing the 14-lap sprint in 16:41.673. Ali Bou Shehri on a Honda CBR 600RR came second overall 9.918s behind, while Nawaf Al Shuaibi completed the overall podium in third, while also taking the win amongst the 1,000cc riders. Al Shuaibi was 25.333s off Alzaidan's mark, riding his Honda CBR 100 RR.

Joining Alzaidan and Bou Shehri on the 600cc podium was Abdulrahman Ahmed, also on a Honda CBR 600RR, in third.

Amongst the 1,000cc riders, Hassan Al Awadhi and Mujahed Alkhashram were second and third in class, competing on identical Yamaha R1 bikes.

Earlier in the meeting, Achraf Hamoud on a Suzuki GSX R600 and Saud Al Toura on a BMW S1000RR paced the 600cc and 1,000cc, respectively, during practice, and then Al Toura



**Moaz Elzahrawi dominated the BTCC, leading practice, qualifying, and winning both races in his Honda Civic**

clinched overall pole while Bou Shehri was the leading starter in his category.

In Time Attack, Yazeed Sameer Al Saheel won the ULA class in his Porsche GT3RS with a fastest mark of 1:09.554 on the combined timesheet. Ahmed Bainaid in a Porsche GT2RS was the runner-up 1.439s behind, while Abdulaziz Yousef Aly-aesh in a Tesla Model S took third 5.042s behind.

In the ULB class, Hisham Bediea Al Bediea won in his Lotus Exige with a time of 1:17.609. Abdulaziz Alramih in a Toyota 86 was second 4.308s back.

Sultan Tamer Kayello tri-

umphed amongst the MA class competitors after posting a time of 1:16.513 in his Mitsubishi Evo X RS. Abdulaziz Saud Al Saud in a Toyota Yaris GR finished second 0.312s behind, while Fady Mohammed Asha in a Cadillac ATS-V was third 2.645s adrift.

The SA class saw Mohamed Sami Aldoseri clinch first place in his Audi RS3 with a fastest time of 1:16.730. Rakan Talal Al Saheel in a Porsche 718 Spyder followed 0.796s off the mark, while Mohammed Abdullah Alghamdi driving a Renault Megane was third 8.537s off the winner's mark.

Sultan Turki Al Saud triumphed in the MB class in his Toyota GR86. He had a time of 1:22.480 – 0.801s from Fares Mazyad Almutairi in a Subaru BRZ. Ali Khalifa Almansoori took third 1.453s back in a Mazda MX5.

Finally, Maan Mahmoud Al Jabrah won the SB class behind the wheel of his Toyota GR86, while clocking a best time of 1:24.225 on the combined timesheet. Fares Mohammad Almedani was second 5.131s behind in his Fiat Abarth 695 2013, while Faisal Khalid Al Rashid, also in a Toyota GR85, was third 10.245s adrift.