

Littler advance, Nebrida scores major upset in Darts Masters

Philippine dart star Paolo Nebrida makes history with PDC World Series win at BIC | P 12

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Jessica Alba breaks silence following split from Cash Warren

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BUSINESS **5** Indian Ambassador opens NIA's new Manama branch

Fire breaks out in Hoarat Aali flat; no injuries

TDT | Manama

A fire broke out in a flat in Hoarat Aali yesterday, but thanks to the swift response of the Civil Defence force, the blaze was quickly brought under control.

Fire tenders and a National Ambulance team were on the scene promptly, ensuring that all residents were safely evacuated from the building. Fortunately, no injuries were reported.

At this stage, the cause of the fire remains unknown, and an investigation is currently underway to determine what led to the incident.

28-year-old killed in vehicle rollover near Juffair

TDT | Manama

A 28-year-old man was killed, and several others were injured when a vehicle overturned on Prince Saud Al Faisal Street near Juffair. National Ambulance teams quickly transported the injured to the hospital. An investigation is underway to determine the cause of the accident.



Heavy traffic on Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Highway after crash

TDT | Manama

Heavy traffic congestion was reported on Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Highway near Seef district towards Hamad Town yesterday following a collision involving two vehicles.

The General Directorate of Traffic confirmed the incident in a post on X, stating that necessary measures were taken to alleviate the traffic.

The Ministry urged drivers to exercise caution and follow traffic instructions, emphasising the importance of safe driving to prevent such accidents.

Ceasefire confirmed

Israeli security cabinet approves Gaza deal: PM office



A boy runs with a Palestinian flag atop a mound of rubble at a camp for people displaced by conflict in the central Gaza Strip following the announcement of truce

● **Israel pounded several areas of the territory, killing more than 100 people and wounding hundreds since the deal was announced on Wednesday.**

● **Of the 251 people taken hostage, 94 are still in Gaza, including 34 the Israeli military says are dead.**

TDT | agencies

Guns will fall silent in Gaza tomorrow bringing an end to 15 months of intense conflict.

Allaying worries over a fall out amid renewed strikes and bloodshed, the Israeli security cabinet approved a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release deal yesterday, recommending that the wider government give its final green light

"After reviewing all the political, security and humanitarian aspects, and understanding that the proposed deal supports achieving the objectives of the war, (the security cabinet) has recommended that the gov-

Israel publishes list of 95 Palestinian prisoners eligible for release starting Sunday

The Israeli justice ministry published a list of 95 Palestinian prisoners, the majority women, who are to be freed starting Sunday as part of the first exchange for Israeli captives under a Gaza ceasefire deal.

"The release of prisoners is... subject to government approval of the (ceasefire) plan and will not take place before Sunday 16:00 (1400 GMT)," the ministry said in a statement yesterday. The list includes 69 women, 16 men and 10 minors. According to the ministry, the youngest inmate on the list is 16. The list includes only seven prisoners who were arrested before the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas on Israel that sparked the war in Gaza.

Among those on the list is also Khalida Jarar, a leftist Palestinian lawmaker whom Israel arrested and imprisoned on several occasions.

Two sources close to Hamas told AFP that the first group of hostages to be released consists of three Israeli women soldiers. The first three names on a list obtained by AFP of the 33 hostages set to be released in the first phase are women under 30 who were not in military service on the day of the Hamas attack.

ernment approve the proposed framework," the office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement. The full cabinet will convene later Friday to decide on the deal.

It would also launch on Sunday the release of hostages held

in the territory since Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

The agreement, brokered by the United States, Egypt, and Qatar, outlines a 42-day truce during which several key actions are planned.

This ceasefire is seen as a significant step toward peace, offering hope to residents of Gaza and Israel.

Even before the start of the truce, Gazans displaced by the war to other parts of the territory were preparing to return home.

"I will go to kiss my land," said Nasr al-Gharabli, who fled his home in Gaza City for a camp further south in the territory.

"If I die on my land, it would be better than being here as a displaced person."

Egypt was on Friday hosting technical talks on the implementation of the truce, according to state-linked media.

French President Emmanuel Macron said French-Israeli citizens Ofer Kalderon and Ohad Yahalomi were on the list of 33 hostages to be freed in the first phase.

Biden said the second phase could bring a "permanent end to the war".

In aid-starved Gaza, where nearly all of its 2.4 million people have been displaced at least once, aid workers worry about the monumental task ahead.

Sickle Cell pathway proposed at SMC



Maryam Al Dhaen, MP

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

A proposal to establish a dedicated pathway and specialised medical team for sickle cell patients at Salmaniya Medical Complex will be put to a vote in Parliament next Tuesday.

The proposal, submitted by MP Maryam Al Dhaen, calls for a separate section within the emergency unit to be staffed by specialists to ensure immediate and effective treatment for sickle cell anaemia patients. The Services Committee has unanimously endorsed the initiative, emphasising its alignment with Article 8 of Bahrain's Constitution, which guarantees health-care for all citizens and mandates the state to build and maintain medical facilities.

The Bahrain Society for SCD Patients Care praised the proposal as a significant step toward improving patient welfare. The society also urged the government to take additional measures, including the creation of a dedicated care pathway for women to address their specific needs. It called for an increase in the number of trained staff focused on sickle cell care and ongoing professional development to better equip medical teams to handle emergencies and hospital treatments effectively.

The Health Ministry has indicated that many aspects of the plan are already in place.

Biden grants clemency to 2,500 people, most ever in a day

Washington, United States

President Joe Biden yesterday commuted the sentences of nearly 2,500 people convicted of non-violent drug offenses in what the White House called the largest single-day act of clemency in US history.

Those whose sentences were commuted were serving "disproportionately long sentences" compared to what they would receive today, Biden said in a statement.

Israel's retaliatory campaign has destroyed much of Gaza, killing 46,788 people, most of them civilians, according to figures from the Hamas-run territory's health ministry



Travel bans to be communicated via email and SMS notifications

H Naser
TDT | Manama

In a move that promises to modernise communication in the judicial system, the Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Endowments has announced plans to send all judicial judgments, including travel bans, via email and SMS notifications.

This comes in response to a parliamentary proposal calling for SMS alerts to keep citizens informed about every aspect of their legal cases—be it civil, criminal, or enforcement-related matters, including travel bans. The proposal was put forward by MPs Ahmed Qarata, Hanan Fardan, Hassan Al Dhaen, and Najeeb Al Kawari.

Minister Nawaf Al Maawda revealed that the objectives of

Citizens and residents can access judgments and decisions in civil cases and enforcement files, including travel ban decisions, through the government's e-services platform.

the proposal are already being fulfilled. Citizens and residents can now access judgments and decisions for civil cases and enforcement files, including travel ban updates, through the government's e-services platform.

"The ministry has successfully transitioned from a paper-based system to a fully electronic one," Minister Al Maawda explained. He pointed to several key regulatory decisions, such as Ministerial Decision No. 89 of 2018,

which introduced the regulation of electronic notifications. This decision laid the groundwork for the use of email and SMS to notify individuals in civil, commercial, criminal, and Sharia court cases. As part of this dig-

ital shift, the ministry has also set up a dedicated register to capture the email addresses and phone numbers of individuals and entities involved in legal proceedings. These contact details are either provided by the



Minister Nawaf Al Maawda

parties themselves or obtained from contracts and official correspondence.

The shift to electronic communication is part of the ministry's broader goal to streamline legal processes and ensure that citizens are promptly informed of important legal updates, including travel bans, making the judicial system more accessible and transparent.



GCC Secretary General to address Kochi Dialogue 2025

TDT | Manama

In a significant step toward fostering stronger ties between India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Secretary General of the GCC, Jasem Mo-

hamed Al-Budaiwi, will deliver a special address at the inaugural "Kochi Dialogue 2025" on 16-17 January in Kochi, Kerala.

Organised by the Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR) in collaboration with the Ministry

of External Affairs, Government of India, this first-of-its-kind Track 1.5 diplomacy dialogue will focus on the theme "India's Look West Policy in Action: People, Prosperity, and Progress."

The event aims to deepen partnerships and explore collaborative opportunities between India and GCC nations. It will gather diplomats, senior government officials, policymakers, business leaders, and experts

from both regions.

The dialogue will address critical areas of cooperation, including economic development, trade, and cultural exchange, aligning with India's strategic "Look West" policy.

The dialogue will focus on five key themes: Trade and Investments, Maritime Partnerships, Education and Technology, Diaspora Connect and Energy Innovation.



The Indian Community Relief Fund (ICRF)
(Serving the Indian Community in Bahrain Since 1999)



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- Labour Welfare and Awareness Outreach program
- Mortuary visit and repatriation of mortal remains
- Domestic worker support and Awareness Outreach program
- ICRF LIFE (Listen, Involve, Foster, Engage) – support towards mental well being
- Gate Keepers Training for teachers and social workers
- ICRF Yoga
- Thirst Quenchers program – water and fruit distribution at worksites
- Spectra - The biggest Inter-School Art carnival in Bahrain
- Emergency help - 24 hour helpline
- Workers day – A quarterly event
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Our mission is to extend a helping hand to the economically weaker section of the Indian community in Bahrain.

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Thattai Hindu Community holds blood donation camp



TDT | Manama

The Thattai Hindu Community, in collaboration with Salmaniya Medical Complex (SMC), hosted a blood donation camp yesterday at the Shrinathji Shri Krishna Temple audito-

rium on Al Hadrami Avenue, Manama.

This longstanding initiative, held for over 30 years, is organised quarterly, with an average of 150 devotees participating in each session, according to Mahendra Bhatia, General

Secretary of the Thattai Hindu Community.

This time, the camp saw a turnout of more than 175 individuals from six different nationalities, with 154 donations, including contributions from temple devotees.

Bank update scam: Court jails 12-member gang

Ministry employee loses BD468 after sharing code

H Naser
TDT | Manama

Twelve individuals involved in a fraudulent bank update scam using the Benefit Pay mobile app have been sentenced to prison terms by the High Criminal Court. The gang deceived several victims, including a ministry employee, by stealing their bank verification codes and using them to steal funds.

The ministry employee, a woman, lost 468 dinars after being tricked into sharing her verification code with a scammer



Representative picture

posing as a bank employee. She testified that she received a call from an Asian man claiming to be from her bank, asking her to update her banking information. Believing the call was legitimate, she provided her verification code, only to later discover that 468 dinars had been transferred from her account.

"I wasn't aware this was a scam to steal my money. He sounded like a bank employee. After sharing all my information, I received a text message, revealing that 468 Bahraini dinars were transferred from my account," she stated.

Following an extensive investigation, the defendants were arrested and charged with unauthorized access to victims' bank accounts and the fraudulent use of bank card verification codes. The Public Prosecution pressed charges for the gang's use of deceptive methods to steal money.

During questioning, the second defendant revealed that he had been introduced to the seventh defendant, who, along with the first defendant, had recruited them to contact individuals and obtain their Benefit Pay numbers. The fourth defendant explained that he had arrived

in Bahrain with the eighth defendant, who offered him work selling sweets for the twelfth defendant. However, the twelfth defendant later tasked him with collecting victims' numbers, and his phone contained screenshots of Bahraini Benefit Pay numbers.

Examination of the defendants' phones revealed further evidence of electronic fraud, carried out through the Benefit Pay app and other fraudulent techniques. Following the trial, the High Criminal Court sentenced the gang members to prison terms.

Plan for digital sign language centre gets parliamentary backing



Ahmed Al Salloom, MP

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

A proposal to establish a digital contact centre for real-time sign language interpretation, designed to help hearing-impaired individuals access government services, has gained unanimous approval from Parliament's Services Committee.

The initiative, submitted by MPs Ahmed Sabah Al Salloom, Mohammed Al Marafi, Iman Shuwaiteer, Zainab Abdulameer, and Khalid Buanaq, aims to promote equality by providing direct assistance to hearing-impaired citizens through specialised services in government institutions.

While supporting the proposal's objectives, the Civil Service Bureau suggested that training existing staff in sign language and adopting video communication technologies could achieve similar results. This approach, the bureau noted, would align with Bahrain's 2023-2026 government programme, which prioritises digital transformation to enhance public services.

The Ministry of Social Development pointed out that the plan involves collaboration among multiple government bodies, requiring a coordinated implementation strategy.

The proposal reflects a broader commitment to inclusion, ensuring that all members of society can access essential services seamlessly.

53-year-old woman dies in two-car collision on Budaiya highway

● The Interior Ministry has confirmed that an investigation is underway to determine the cause of the accident.

TDT | Manama

A 53-year-old woman tragically lost her life in a two-vehicle collision on Budaiya Highway, near Al-Badi'a Street in the Abu Saiba area.

The victim was quickly trans-



Representative picture, courtesy of AlAyam

ported to the hospital but, unfortunately, succumbed to her injuries shortly after arriving. Details regarding the num-

ber of people involved in the crash or the cause of the collision remain unclear at this stage.

A Civil Defence team arrived promptly at the scene, taking the necessary steps to manage the situation and secure the area.

The impact of the crash was so severe that debris from the vehicles scattered across the street, as reported by first responders.

The Interior Ministry has confirmed that an investigation is underway to determine the cause of the accident.

Court holds company to account

● Orders BD4,000 Repayment After Failure to Dispute Debt

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

The Lower Civil Court has ordered a company to pay BD4,000 to an individual after it failed to honour a repayment agreement and did not dispute the evidence against it.

The company was also directed to cover legal costs and attorney fees.

The claimant presented a signed debt acknowledgment from the company, stating that BD4,000 would be repaid in monthly instalments of BD300. Despite multiple requests, the company failed to make any payments.

The company, though represented in court, did not deny the validity of the debt acknowledgment or challenge the claimant's evidence.

The claimant's lawyer, Latifa Al Saadoun, noted that the defendant made no attempt to question the debt or raise any legal objections.

After reviewing the case, the court determined that the company had not fulfilled its repayment promise and provided no legitimate defence.

The company later appealed the ruling, but the Court of Appeal upheld the original decision. The appellate court dismissed the appeal, stating that the company had failed to provide new evidence or arguments, and its lack of engagement only strengthened the case against it.

BD4,500 compensation for man left with permanent disability after crash

● The court noted that the driver responsible for the accident had been convicted in a separate criminal case

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

A young man left bedridden with fractures and an 8% permanent disability following an accident has been awarded BD4,000 in compensation by the court, with the insurance company held liable for the damages. The court also instructed the company to pay BD500 for emotional distress suffered by the victim.

In addition to the compensation, the insurance company was ordered to pay 2% interest on the awarded sum from the date of the claim until the full amount is settled. The company



The victim had filed a lawsuit seeking BD6,000 in compensation, claiming that his car was struck by another vehicle driven carelessly

was also directed to cover BD900 and BD500 in legal costs. The victim had filed a law-

suit seeking BD6,000 in compensation, claiming that his car was struck by another vehicle driven carelessly. Lawyer Salah Al Jaber, representing the victim, stated that the injuries left the young man unable to work, causing mounting medical bills and lost earnings, which prompted the lawsuit.

The court agreed to the plaintiff's request to involve the Ministry of Health's Medical Commissions. A report from the Medical Commission confirmed that the victim suffered a fractured humerus requiring surgery, a leg laceration treated conservatively, and a 30 cm scar on his arm. The report also stated that his elbow movement was restricted, with the disability assessed at 8% of his total capacity.

The court noted that the driver responsible for the accident had been convicted in a separate criminal case, with the verdict finalized after a fine was paid.

Parliament Committee calls for stricter regulations on foreign business licenses

H Naser
TDT | Manama

A parliamentary committee has recommended tighter regulations on issuing business licenses and branch permits to foreign entities, citing concerns over unfair competition with local businesses.

The proposal, submitted by MPs Jalila Al Sayed, Dr Hesham Al Asheeri, Mohsen Al Asbol, Hassan Bukhmas, and Hassan Ebrahim, aims to protect Bahraini enterprises and job opportunities for nationals. The Financial and Economic Affairs Committee, chaired by MP Ahmed Al Saloom, highlighted the rising number of



Mohsen Al Asbol



Hassan Bukhmas



Hassan Ibrahim Hasan



Dr Hesham Al Asheeri



Jalila Al Sayed

foreign businesses as a potential threat to local economic stability.

The proposed measures call for stricter oversight by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, particularly targeting instances where licenses are granted without clear economic justification or when businesses deviate from their stated

purposes.

The proposal also seeks a deeper investigation into the factors driving foreign workforce expansion and practical solutions to address the issue.

Minister of Industry and Commerce Abdullah Fakhro shared insights during a parliamentary session last year, revealing that 16% of Bahrain's 83,000 active

registered businesses are fully foreign-owned, while the ma-

ority, 70,000, include at least one Bahraini partner, reflecting

a collaborative business environment.



As of February 2024, Bahrain has 83,877 active business licenses and 2,911 inactive but licensed businesses. The committee's recommendations will be presented to the House of Representatives for a vote next Tuesday.



Parliament, Shura clash over proposed 50% senior citizen fee discounts



Shura council
Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

A disagreement over a proposed 50 per cent discount for senior citizens on all government fees has sparked a rift between Parliament and the Shura Council, with the government warning that it could strain public finances.

The proposed changes to the elderly rights law, set for debate on Sunday, would mandate a 50



Hassan Ebrahim, MP

per cent discount on all government fees and encourage discounts on essential goods and services from private companies. Parliament's version also seeks exemptions from certain charges, subject to Cabinet approval.

However, the government argues that the existing system, which already provides targeted discounts such as for vehicle registration and driving licence renewals, is sufficient.



MP Mohsen Al Asbool, Chair of the Legislative and Legal Affairs Committee

Expanding discounts to all fees could jeopardise non-oil revenues and complicate Bahrain's budget balancing efforts.

The Shura Council's committee has backed the law but supports amendments allowing the Cabinet to decide which fees qualify for discounts. This, they argue, balances support for seniors and protects public funds.

Parliament remains firm on its broader proposal, reigniting tensions between the two chambers. Despite existing systems functioning effectively, the debate highlights the challenge of balancing fiscal responsibility with supporting senior citizens.

The Shura Council has called for more cooperation between government bodies, businesses, and social services to expand and raise awareness of existing senior benefits. The decision will determine the future scope of senior citizens' benefits in Bahrain.



New law shields child abuse victims from re-traumatising interviews

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

In Bahrain, child victims of sexual abuse are now protected from repeated questioning, thanks to a single-interview approach introduced under the 2022 Law on Restorative Justice for Children. Justice Minister Nawaf Al Maawda announced that this measure, alongside increased public awareness and professional training, has led to a decrease in cases referred to child justice courts and the Judicial Committee for Childhood.

"This approach spares children the pain of revisiting traumatic experiences multiple times," said Minister Al Maawda.

The 2022 law focuses on safeguarding children while offering rehabilitation to young offenders. The Justice Minister shared its progress in response to a query from Shura Council member Hala Ramzi.

A Judicial Committee for Childhood has been established to handle cases involving at-risk children or abuse victims. Social and psychological experts provide support for recovery, and many children have shown behavioural improvements.

Specialised courts and facilities, backed by new regulations, ensure effective implementation. The Justice Ministry has



Nawaf Al Maawda, Justice Minister



Hala Ramzi, Shura Council member



Picture for representation only

conducted 35 training sessions for police, social workers, and other professionals. Public awareness efforts, including workshops and campaigns, further support the initiative.

In 2024, the Ministry of Social Development launched the Himaya campaign to protect

children from online exploitation. Early successes include fewer court referrals, and alternative measures have helped reduce reoffending. Bahrain's law has also gained international recognition for aligning with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Fridge fiasco: Court orders BD1,600 refund after two-year legal battle

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

After a two-year legal battle, a court has ordered a seller to refund BD1,600 for selling two fridges that did not meet the agreed-upon specifications.

The fridges, which had a sticker price of BD2,000, were purchased by the buyer after paying 80% of the price, amounting to BD1,600 in instalments. However, upon discovering that the fridges were not as initially promised, the buyer refused to accept delivery or pay the remaining balance.

The fridges, which had a sticker price of BD2,000, were purchased by the buyer after paying 80% of the price, amounting to BD1,600 in instalments.

In response, the seller filed a lawsuit demanding BD2,600 for the products, as well as rent for the space occupied by the fridges, claiming that they were preventing him from renting out the shop.

The buyer filed a counterclaim, seeking BD1,800 in compensation, stating that the seller had initially agreed to refund him after the complaint but had delayed for two years. A witness who inspected the fridges, while

the buyer was abroad, testified that the appliances did not meet the seller's specifications, supporting the buyer's demand for a refund.

The seller, on the other hand, argued that the fridges had caused financial harm by blocking the rental of his shop. However, the court found that the seller had already rented out the shop, and the fridges were now being used by the tenant.

Based on these findings, the court dismissed the seller's lawsuit, ordered the refund, and instructed the seller to cover the legal costs and attorney fees for both cases.



Indian Ambassador opens NIA's new Manama branch

TDT | Manama

The New India Assurance Co Ltd (NIA), Bahrain opened its New Motor Claims Branch at Ground Floor, AlWazzan Building, Road no 385 Block 304, Al Khalifa Avenue, Manama on Thursday. The Branch was inaugurated by Mr. Vinod K. Jacob, Ambassador of India to the Kingdom Bahrain in the presence of Mr. Ravi Jain, Second Secretary of the Indian Embassy, Kingdom of Bahrain, industry leaders, and corporate clients at an impressive function.

The function was hosted by Ms. Nimisha Sunil Kadam, COO, NIA Bahrain, in the presence of the Director of Intercol, Mr. Abdulrahman Ali Alwazan other dignitaries, distinguished guests, and staff of NIA.

The New Claims office is fully digital-enabled and will ensure faster turnaround time of all motor claims settlement from accident to final settlement. The claim process is fully automated, linking the accident affected claimant to Vehicle towing, 24X7 Roadside Assistance, Car



The branch opening ceremony

Replacement, Online E-Traffic claim intimation, wide network of Garage selection for repairs, immediate online approvals, On-line payments.

NIA also launched at the hands of the Ambassador, H.E Mr Vinod k Jacob a low-cost medical insurance policy "Sehati Salamah". This policy will give one more affordable low-cost option to the residents of Bahrain to cover their medical needs. The insured member will have access to basic outpatient medical care at a well-established designated Medical Service Providers. This policy covers an individual and his family member, including spouse and children for premium as low as BD 5/- per month per member* (T&C apply) for a Sum Insured of BD 1500 each person. The entry age is from 18-65 years and newborn children can be covered after 90 days.

With the opening of its new office and launch of new product, NIA hopes to continue providing affordable options to the residents of Bahrain in catering to their insurance needs.

MP proposes BD 30 annual fee for Bahraini small businesses

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Bahraini business owners could pay as little as BD 30 annually for registration under a proposal by MP Jalal Kadhem aimed at reducing fees for small businesses and Bahraini-owned companies. The proposal, which has already gained the support of Parliament's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee, is set for a vote next Tuesday.

The amendments to the 2015 Commercial Register Law would set annual registration fees at BD 30 for small businesses and BD 60 for companies, provided they are entirely Bahraini-owned. Additionally, businesses would pay BD 10 annually for each activity conducted, with the first three activities exempt from fees.

For companies with foreign



Jalal Kadhem, MP

ownership or non-Bahraini stakes, fees would be determined by the minister concerned, subject to Cabinet approval.

Supporters of the proposal argue that it would reduce fi-

adjustments should align with the services provided and adhere to Bahrain's constitution and international trade commitments. While the ministry has not taken a stance on the proposal, it highlighted the need for a balanced approach that meets the needs of both businesses and government policies.

The Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry raised concerns about potential complications for businesses already operating under the current fee structure, arguing that existing charges are competitive across the Gulf region.

On the other hand, the Bahrain Businessmen's Association expressed full support for the proposal, calling it a significant step toward alleviating financial burdens on local entrepreneurs and fostering growth in Bahrain's commercial sector.

financial strain on Bahraini entrepreneurs, encouraging them to explore new ventures and contribute to economic growth.

The Ministry of Industry and Commerce, however, urged caution, emphasizing that fee

IMF raises global growth forecast, highlights economic disparities

● China's growth is expected to cool to 4.6% this year

TDT | agencies

Global growth is projected to rise slightly to 3.3% this year, the IMF said in an update to its World Economic Outlook. This marks a 0.1 percentage point increase from its October forecast but remains below the pre-pandemic average of 3.7%. Growth is expected to stay steady at 3.3% through 2026.

Global inflation is forecast to ease, dropping to 4.2% this year and 3.5% by 2026. Prices are expected to cool faster in advanced economies than in emerging markets.

The IMF noted a growing economic divide, with the United States showing resil-

ience, driven by a robust labor market and private demand. US growth is projected at 2.7% in 2025 and 2.1% in 2026. In contrast, the Euro area faces slower growth, with Germany's outlook dragging the region to just 1.0% growth this year.

China's growth is expected to cool to 4.6% this year, slightly revised upward due to recent fiscal support measures. India remains a bright spot among emerging markets, with growth forecast at 6.5% this year and next.

The Middle East and Central Asia will see slower growth due to OPEC+ oil production cuts, while Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa are expected to experience modest acceleration. Structural factors, such as the United States' stronger productivity and deeper capital markets, continue to drive economic divergence, the IMF noted.

Bahrain's Dinar secures second strongest currency ranking globally

H Naser
TDT | Manama

The latest Bankrate report has positioned Bahraini Dinar (BHD) as the second strongest currency worldwide.

The report analysed global currency values, ranking the Kuwaiti dinar at the top. However, the BHD's strong showing, with an exchange rate of 0.38 per US dollar, solidifies Bahrain's position as a leading economic



player. This ranking is attributed to the Kingdom's strategic diversification beyond its traditional oil-based economy, encompassing key sectors such as finance, tourism, and technology.

While the nation's oil reserves remain a significant contributor to the Dinar's strength, the Bankrate report highlights the broader economic policies and political stability that underpin Bahrain's success.

"The BHD draws its strength

from Bahrain's attractive investment climate. Furthermore, the nation has vast oil reserves and produces numerous petroleum-based products," the report stressed.

The report also acknowledges the strength of other regional currencies, including the Omani Rial (third on the list) and Jordanian Dinar (fourth on the list), reflecting the overall economic health of the this region.

Meanwhile, the British pound

sterling, a currency in circulation since 1489, holds the fifth spot globally, boasting a strong history, competitive inflation, and London's influential financial hub. Despite its global dominance as the world's reserve currency and leading trade currency, the US dollar surprisingly ranks only tenth in value, a position that nonetheless allows the American government to borrow at favourable interest rates, as per the report.



News in brief

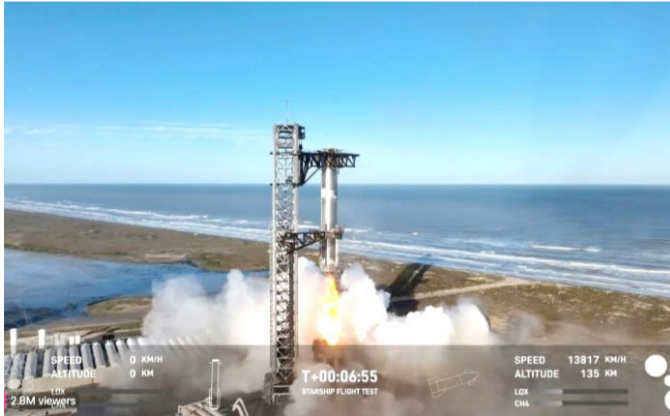
South Korea's Yoon refuses questioning again
Impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol yesterday again refused investigators' efforts to question him over his failed martial law bid, as the deadline on his detention neared. Yoon threw the nation into chaos on December 3 when he attempted to impose martial law, citing the need to combat threats from "anti-state elements". But his bid lasted just six hours, as the soldiers he directed to storm parliament failed to stop lawmakers from voting to reject martial law. In the following weeks, Yoon was impeached by parliament and resisted arrest while holed up at his guarded residence, before becoming South Korea's first sitting president to be detained.

China said yesterday its population fell for the third year running in 2024, extending a downward streak after more than six decades of growth as the country faces a rapidly ageing population and persistently low birth rates. Once the world's most populous country, China was overtaken by India in 2023, with Beijing seeking to boost falling birth rates through subsidies and pro-fertility propaganda. And by the end of the year, the population stood at 1.408 billion, Beijing's National Bureau of Statistics said -- down from 1.410 billion in 2023.

Indian troops kill 12 Maoist rebels
Indian security forces shot dead at least 12 Maoist rebels in central India, police said, as New Delhi steps up efforts to quell the long-running insurgency. More than 10,000 people have died in the decades-long insurgency waged by the rebels, who say they are fighting for the rights of marginalised Indigenous people. The firefight broke out Thursday in the forested areas of Bijapur district in the state of Chhattisgarh, known as the heartland of the insurgency. "We have received information of the killing of 12 Maoists in encounters with the security forces," senior police official Sundarraj P said.

SPOTLIGHT

SpaceX catches Starship booster again, but upper stage explodes



A screen grab shows the Starship's Super Heavy Booster is grappled mid-air as it returns to the launch pad

AFP | Washington

Hours after Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin nailed its first-ever orbital mission, SpaceX seized back the spotlight on Thursday as its latest test of Starship, its gargantuan next-generation megarocket, ended with the upper stage dramatically disintegrating over the Atlantic.

YOU KNOW WHAT
SpaceX has rapidly iterated on its Starship design after previous explosions, aiming to drastically increase the frequency of tests in 2025, while facing environmental and regulatory concerns

In terms of sheer excitement, Elon Musk's company didn't disappoint, underscoring its technical prowess by catching the first stage booster in the "chopstick" arms of its launch tower for a second time. But the triumph was short-lived when teams lost contact with the upper stage vehicle. SpaceX later confirmed it had undergone a "rapid unscheduled disassembly," the company's euphemism for an explosion. A taller, improved version of the biggest and most powerful launch vehicle ever built blasted off from the company's Starbase in Boca Chica, Texas, at 4:37 pm (22:37 GMT) for its seventh test.

The gleaming prototype rocket is key to Musk's ambitions of colonizing Mars, while NASA hopes to use a modified version as a human lunar lander. Around seven minutes after liftoff, the Super Heavy booster decelerated from supersonic speeds -- generating sonic booms -- before descending gracefully into the launch tower's waiting arms, prompting an eruption of applause from ground control teams.

Trump, Xi Pledge to Improve Ties

Leaders discuss trade, fentanyl, TikTok, and fostering global peace in pre-inauguration call

Trump threatens tariffs but remains open to balancing trade ties

Trump explores options to delay forced sale or ban of TikTok

AFP | Washington



China's President Xi Jinping (R) shakes hands with US President Donald Trump during G20 Summit in Osaka in 2019 (file photo)

Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke by phone yesterday, days before the incoming US president returns to the White House, with both leaders vowing to take a positive approach to improving ties between the rival countries. Xi said he hoped for a "good start" to relations with Trump, who in turn said "it is my expectation that we will solve many problems together, and starting immediately."

Trump in the election campaign threatened China and other US trading partners with huge tariffs, but he has also said he is open to talks with Xi, a leader he has long openly admired. The threat of a 10 percent tariff on Chinese products, in addition to existing tariffs dating back to Trump's first term, is driven by accusations that China allows fentanyl's chemical components to flow into Mexico and onto America where the drug causes 70,000 overdose deaths a year. "We discussed balancing Trade, Fentanyl, TikTok, and many other subjects," Trump said on his

social media platform after their call. "President Xi and I will do everything possible to make the World more peaceful and safe!" The US Congress passed a law last year forcing TikTok's Chinese owner ByteDance to either sell the platform or close it by Sunday due to national security concerns, but Trump pledged to save TikTok in his campaign speeches and has been mulling ways to stall the ban. The law was an answer to widespread belief in Washington that the highly popular app could be

YOU KNOW WHAT
This phone call marks a significant attempt to ease tensions between China and the US ahead of Trump's inauguration, following a bitter trade war during his first term

used by China for spying or propaganda.

Confrontational Trump

Trump's impending return to the Oval Office has stirred fears that tensions between the world's two largest economies could worsen rapidly.

This week Beijing slammed comments by Marco Rubio, Trump's nominee for secretary of state, as "unwarranted attacks," after Rubio called China "the most... dangerous near-peer adversary" the United States had ever faced.

President Xi and I will do everything possible to make the World more peaceful and safe!

DONALD TRUMP

"The US side must establish a correct understanding of China, cease unwarranted attacks and smear campaigns against China," foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said.

In December, Xi said China was willing to engage in dialogue and "expand cooperation" with the United States, but warned that a trade war would have "no winners."

The Biden administration has largely worked to ease multiple frictions and said that China has taken some action on fentanyl.

In his farewell speech, Biden said that China would "never surpass" the United States, which would remain the world's dominant superpower.

He added that Washington managed its complex ties with Beijing and that the relationship "never tipped over into conflict" in his four years as president.

S. Korea plane crash investigators find feathers in engines: media

AFP | Seoul

Investigators probing the Jeju Air crash that killed 179 people last month have found feathers in both engines, according to South Korean media reports, with a bird strike being examined as one possible cause.

The Boeing 737-800 was flying from Thailand to Muam, South Korea, on December 29 carrying 181 passengers and crew when it belly-landed at Muam airport and exploded in a fireball after slamming into a concrete barrier.

It was the worst aviation disaster on South Korean soil. "Feathers were found in both engines," the government-linked National Institute of Biological Resources told South Korean broadcaster MBN, without specifying who gave them the information.



A police officer and his dog search the crash site of the Jeju Air Boeing 737-800 aircraft

The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport declined to confirm the report when asked by AFP. South Korean and US investigators are still probing the cause of the crash, which prompted a national outpouring of mourning with memorials set up across the country. Investigators have pointed to a bird strike, faulty landing gear and the runway barrier as possible issues. The pilot warned of a bird strike before pulling out of a first landing attempt. The plane crashed on its second attempt when the landing gear did not emerge.

Los Angeles fire evacuees told no return for at least a week

AFP | Los Angeles

Tens of thousands of people ordered to flee their homes as wildfires tore through Los Angeles were told Thursday they would not be allowed back for at least a week, with fears over electrocution, landslides and exposure to toxic materials. Frustration is mounting among evacuees, who are angry over rules that prevent them from returning -- even to homes that survived the deadly blazes.

"There was a group chat where everyone was complaining, getting mad, saying, 'why do they keep on locking us out of our homes?'" Ronnen Miz told local broadcaster KTLA. But with 40,000 acres (16,000 hectares) burned in two ferocious fires, the situation is just



An entire area ravaged by the Palisades Fire is seen in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles

too dangerous, officials said. Electricity, gas and sewage lines are wrecked, there is toxic waste everywhere, and there is a growing threat of hazardous mudslides or landslides, officials said at a news conference. "It's going to be a while," said Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna. "I'm going to say at minimum, at least another week, and that's

Pakistan ex-PM Imran Khan sentenced to 14 years in graft case

AFP | Islamabad



Supporters shout slogans as Busrha Bibi the wife of Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan, arrives at Bani Gala in Islamabad (file photo)

Pakistan court yesterday convicted former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Busrha Bibi in a landmark graft case, sentencing Khan to 14 years in prison. Khan has been held in custody since August 2023 charged with around 200 cases but his party claim the latest conviction was being used to pressure him into stepping back from politics. "I will neither make any deal nor seek any relief," Khan told reporters inside the court room after his conviction.

The anti-graft court convened in the jail where Khan is being held near the capital Islamabad, and convicted the couple for graft linked to a welfare foundation they established together called the Al-Qadir Trust. "The prosecution has proven its case. Khan is convicted," said Judge Nasir Javed Rana, announcing a 14 year sentence for Khan and seven years for Bibi.

Faith healer Bibi, who was recently released on bail, was arrested at the court after the conviction, her spokeswoman Mashal Yousaf said. Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party said it would challenge the verdict.

The conviction comes a day after a rare meeting between PTI leaders and the government aimed at easing political tensions. Khan maintains all cases against him are politically motivated and designed to keep him from returning to power. He has been previously convicted four times since he was arrested, two of which have been overturned, while the sentences in the other two cases were suspended. But he remained in prison over the Al-Qadir Trust case, the longest running against him, and other charges related to inciting protests.

The court's announcement has been postponed three times, with analysts saying back-room negotiations were being held.

US Supreme Court upholds law banning TikTok

AFP | Washington

The US Supreme Court yesterday upheld a law that will ban TikTok in the United States, potentially denying the video-sharing app to 170 million users in two days.

In a major defeat for TikTok, the court ruled that the law does not violate free speech rights and that the US government had demonstrated legitimate national security concerns about a Chinese company owning the app.

The Supreme Court last week heard arguments from the company, ByteDance, that the law should be stopped because it was a violation of free speech. "There is no doubt that, for more than 170 million Americans, TikTok offers a distinctive and expansive outlet for expression, means of engagement, and source of community," the justices said.

"But Congress has determined that divestiture is necessary to address its well-supported national security concerns regarding TikTok's data collection practices and relationship with a foreign adversary," they concluded.

With that decision, Sunday's ban effectively stands even if lawmakers and officials across the political spectrum were



Supporters of Tiktok livestream in front of the US Supreme Court in Washington

calling for some sort of delay. Congress overwhelmingly passed a law last year forcing ByteDance to either sell the platform or close it in the United States by January 19. The law was an answer to widespread belief in Washington that the highly popular app could be used by China for spying or propaganda.

White House officials yesterday told US media that they would not enforce the ban and leave it up to President-elect Donald Trump, who takes office a day later.

Trump said that he discussed TikTok in a phone conversation with Chinese President Xi Jinping yesterday.

Speaking to Fox News on Thursday, Trump's incoming national security advisor Mike Waltz said the administration would put in place measures "to keep TikTok from going dark."

"The legislation allows for an extension as long as a viable deal is on the table," he said. "Essentially that buys president Trump time to keep TikTok going."

"It's been a great platform for him and his campaign to get his America first message out," he added. "But at the same time, he wants to protect (users') data."

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer on Thursday also called for a looming TikTok ban to be delayed.

Biden warns of threats to 'fragile' democracy

AFP | Washington

President Joe Biden warned Thursday against the dangerous erosion of the fundamental guardrails protecting an increasingly "fragile" American democracy.

A day after urging Americans to stand firm against an "oligarchy" forming under Donald Trump, Biden highlighted the specific threat posed by a cowed Supreme Court and Congress unable to keep an autocratic presidency in check.

Biden, in a recorded interview with MSNBC -- his last before leaving office on Monday -- also revealed details of his conversations with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and discussed the situation in Ukraine.

"I really am concerned about how fragile democracy is," Biden said. "I really think we're in an inflection point in history here where, unrelated to any particular leader, things are going to change drastically."

"So I guess what I'm worried about is that the thing that keeps it on track are the guardrails, that there's a Supreme Court that's independent," Biden said, and a Congress where you "speak your mind but you're held accountable to basic standards."

He said the president may be the "top dog" but "you can't dictate everything." Biden said he did not have any recent discussions with Trump about the negotiations that led to the Gaza ceasefire deal, for which the incoming president has sought to take credit.

As for Netanyahu, Biden said he still considers him a "friend" although "we don't agree on a whole lot lately."

Biden recounted one of his



US President Joe Biden delivers his farewell address

early conversations with Netanyahu after the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel by Hamas. "I told them we were going to help, but Bibi, I said, you can't be carpet-bombing in these communities."

"And he said to me: 'Well you did it... You carpet-bombed Berlin. You dropped a nuclear weapon. You killed thousands of people because you had to in order to win a war,'" Biden recounted.

Biden said he also kept reminding Netanyahu "that he has to find a way to accomo-

date the legitimate concerns of a large group of people called Palestinians who have no place to live independently." Touching on the conflict in Ukraine, Biden said Russia has suffered more than 670,000 wounded or dead since the invasion.

"They're losing big time too," he said. "It doesn't mean they're going to lose everything but it means they're not going to be able to have the kind of win (Russian leader Vladimir Putin) hoped," he said.

Putin wants to "reestablish the old Warsaw Pact," Biden said. "I can't let that happen."

Biden also said he was not concerned about his safety when he made his visit to Ukraine. The Secret Service were "very unhappy," he said, "but I didn't think that Putin would dare to take out an American president."

Biden, who dropped his reelection bid after a disastrous debate performance against Trump, also reflected briefly on his political failings. "Ironically, I almost spent too much time on the policy and not enough time on the politics," he said.

TOP 4 TWEETS



01 Syria is at a critical juncture; a moment of hope for a better future. With a crisis aid package of €235 million, we will get the needed humanitarian aid to the Syrian people. To help them cope with the current crisis, and build a brighter future.

@vunderleyen



02 The global scale-up of climate-health intervention packages is estimated to save 1.9 million lives per year. Military spending last year was a staggering \$2.4 trillion. Our ask for climate health action is a rounding error in comparison.

@DrTedros



03 We will continue to support Ukraine for as long as it takes.

@Keir_Starmer



04 It's an honour to meet @UNIFIL peacekeepers in Lebanon. In the face of strikes across the Blue Line, they stood with bravery, dedication and resilience. Some were injured while carrying out their duties. Attacks against peacekeepers are completely unacceptable & in breach of international law.

@antoniouterres

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

CELEBS

celebs

Jennifer Lopez reflects on 'holding her family together after challenging relationships'

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Jennifer Lopez has been left holding her family together after "challenging relationships".

The 55-year-old star - who has 16-year-old twins Max and Emme with her ex-husband Marc Anthony and filed for divorce from Ben Affleck last year - has opened up on how she relates to her role as Judy Robles in 'Unstoppable', which tells the real life story of one legged wrestler Anthony Robles.

She told Variety: "We were kindred spirits. We both grew up Latina in this country. We both had children and have hopes and dreams for them."

"We both had challenging relationships, which left us holding our families together."

The 'On The Floor' hit-maker is no stranger to playing empowered



women in films like 'Selena', 'Hustlers' and upcoming musical 'Kiss of the Spider Woman'.

And J-Lo insisted women "have to be" strong from the moment they "are born".

She explained: "Women are strong. We have to be. From the minute women are born, we're always having to prove ourselves, to show we're good enough."

"That creates a type of strength. And then a lot of us give birth - and there's nothing that makes you stronger than doing that."

Last summer, J-Lo and Ben - who tied the knot in 2022 after rekindling their relationship almost two decades after their first breakup - officially filed for divorce months after separating.

Speaking to Interview magazine in October, she said: "You have to be complete, if you want something that's more complete."

"You have to be good on your own. I thought I learned that, but I didn't."

Jennifer Lopez

"We were kindred spirits. We both grew up Latina in this country. We both had children and have hopes and dreams for them. We both had challenging relationships, which left us holding our families together"

JENNIFER LOPEZ

"And then, this summer, I had to be like, 'I need to go off and be on my own. I want to prove to myself that I can do that.'"

And she admitted it felt "lonely, unfamiliar [and] scary" to be making that move.

She added: "It feels sad. It feels desperate. But when you sit in those feelings and go, 'These things are not going to kill me,' it's like actually, I am capable of joy and happiness all by myself."

Over the

Hugh Grant reveals which of his early film roles he has 'forbidden' his wife to watch

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Hugh Grant has "forbidden" his wife from watching one of his early film roles.

The 64-year-old actor - who has been married to Anna Elisabet Eberstein since 2018 - starred in the 1995 romcom 'Nine Months' alongside Julianne Moore but even though he thinks highly of everyone involved in it, he feels as if he was the one drawback.

He told Variety: "Let me stress, everyone involved with ['Nine Months'], with the exception of me, was brilliant and talented. It was just me that let it down. "My wife wants to watch it, but I've forbidden her. I've put parental controls on the screen so that you can't get it."

Over the



course of his lengthy Hollywood career, the 'Wonka' star has appeared in numerous romcoms such as 'Bridget Jones' Diary' and 'Four Weddings and a Funeral' and admitted that while they can be "hard work" to film, he has learned in more recent years that they achieve a longevity because of the "pain" often involved in the plot.

He said: "They're hard. And with the benefit of time, I really appreciate the good ones I did. The Richard Curtis ones are really about pain. It's something my wife spotted. She's Swedish; they're good on pain. She was watching 'Love Actually', and she said, "Everyone's in pain, and the humor is all a means for dealing with pain."

'Mulholland Drive' and 'Twin Peaks' director David Lynch dies at 78

AFP | Los Angeles

David Lynch -- the singular and surreal director of "Mulholland Drive" and television's "Twin Peaks," who depicted the darkness lurking beneath the wholesome surface of American life -- has died. He was 78 years old.

An enigmatic artist who turned his hand to arthouse and blockbuster film, television, painting and music, Lynch was considered one of US cinema's great auteurs.

"It is with deep regret that we, his family, announce the passing of the man and the artist, David Lynch," read a statement on his official Facebook page.

The cause and location of death were not specified. Lynch, who lived in Los Angeles, had suffered from emphysema after years of heavy smoking.

He emerged on the US indie scene with his creepy 1977 horror "Eraserhead," and drew



David Lynch

both acclaim and a cult following with sadomasochist mystery "Blue Velvet" (1986) and surreal thriller "Mulholland Drive" (2001).

But he may be best remembered for his mesmerizing 1990s series "Twin Peaks," which paved the way for many a prestige television drama.

With four Oscar nominations, including a trio of best director nods, the filmmaker recognizable by his shock of white hair took home just one honorary statuette, in 2019.

Tributes from across Hollywood swiftly poured in.

Jessica Alba breaks silence following split from Cash Warren

Bang Showbiz | Los Angeles

Jessica Alba breaks silence following split from Cash Warren.

The 43-year-old actress has been married to film producer Cash, 45, since 2008 but it was revealed last week that the pair are heading for divorce and on Thursday, Jessica took to social media to break her silence.

She wrote on Instagram: "I've been on a journey of self realization and transformation for years - both as an individual and in partnership with Cash. I'm proud of how we've grown in our marriage over the last 20 years and it's now time for us to embark on a new chapter of growth and evolution as individuals."

"We are moving forward with love, kindness and respect for each other and will forever be family!"

Just hours before the post came, it was claimed that they

are expected to "remain close".

A source told PEOPLE: "No matter what's going on right now, it seems they will remain close."

"If they're filing for divorce, it's not because of some hateful drama. They still look happy together."

"Jess has mentioned over the years though that it's hard to keep the spark."

Last week, insiders claimed to TMZ that Jessica and Cash - who have daughters Honor, 16, and Haven, 13, and seven-year-old son Hayes - are "about to call it quits with a divorce filing" and they are "moving forward" with

Jessica Alba



'Parasite' director Bong Joon-ho to show new film at Berlin festival



Bong Joon-ho

AFP | Los Angeles

South Korean director Bong Joon-ho will present his new film "Mickey 17" out of competition in Berlin next month, the city's film festival announced on Thursday.

Six years ago, Bong won the Palme d'Or at Cannes then an Oscar for best picture for "Parasite" -- the first not in English to do so at the Academy Awards.

Science fiction black comedy "Mickey 17" stars Robert Pattinson as Mickey, who has volunteered in a programme in which cloning allows him to have multiple successive lives to the point where "dying is a habit".

SUDOKU

	2	8		4		3	9	
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	5		2	8				7
			1	9		2		
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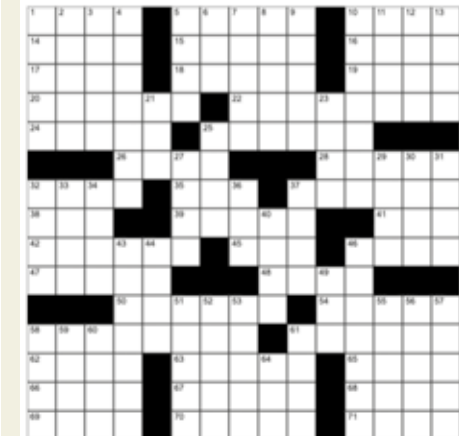
Yesterday's solution

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

How to play

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

CROSSWORD



Across

1- Polite address; 5- Skin of the upper part of the head; 10- II (razor brand); 14- "East of Eden" director Kazan; 15- Eagle's home; 16- Bank (on); 17- Bereft; 18- Mix dough; 19- French summers; 20- Short essays; 22- Cut across; 24- It's a wrap; 25- Magnetic induction units; 26- Lucy's husband; 28- Visionaries; 32- Cause of ruin; 35- North Pole aide; 37- Simpler; 38- PC panic button; 39- once; 41- PBS benefactor; 42- Destroy hearing; 45- Coffee maker; 46- Ohio nine; 47- Burn with water; 48- Must've been something; 50- Black Sea port; 54- With... of thousands; 58- Each person; 61- Remove; 62- Actress Moore; 63- Saline; 65-... all-time high; 66- Part of the eye; 67- Cara or Castle; 68- As to; 69- Fruit-filled pie; 70- Bird homes; 71- Sail support;

Down

1- Thaws; 2- Luau greeting; 3- Broadcaster; 4- Created by humans; 5- Fifth Avenue retailer; 6- 100 yrs; 7- Narrow mountain ridge; 8- Perjurors; 9- Foot-operated lever; 10- Locks; 11- Nerve network; 12- A Baldwin brother; 13- Fluid-filled sac; 21- U-turn from WSW; 23- American space agency; 25- Cash drawer; 27- Playwright O'Casey; 29-... kleine Nachtmusik; 30- Vibrating component of a woodwind instrument; 31- Sp. ladies; 32- Places to sleep; 33- Just...; 34- Final Four org; 36- Sick "season"; 37- Sicilian spouter; 40- "Tosca" tune; 43- Retailer of flowers; 44- Water swirl; 46- To recover; 49-... kwon do; 51- Red fluorescent dye; 52- It's a trap; 53- Tennis's Monica; 55- Big name in insurance; 56- Constellation components; 57- Article of faith; 58- Revise; 59- Aloe...; 60- Bahrain bigwig; 61- Changes color; 64- Blasting stuff;

Yesterday's solution

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

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Al-Rajhi wins historic Dakar Rally

Saudi driver makes history; Australian Sanders clinches motorbike category with dominant performance

● **Rajhi beat Henk Lategan by 3 minutes and 57 seconds**

● **Sanders finished 8 minutes and 50 seconds ahead of Tosha Schareina**

● **Carlos Sainz and Sebastien Loeb retired early**

AFP | Riyadh

Yazeed al-Rajhi made history yesterday by becoming the first driver from host nation Saudi Arabia to win the Dakar Rally.

The Overdrive pilot held onto his overnight lead to beat South Africa's Henk Lategan in a Toyota by 3min 57sec with Mattias Ekstrom of Sweden third in his Ford, 20min 21sec adrift.

Rajhi, 43, had previously recorded a best finish of third in 2022.

Saudi Arabia have hosted the Dakar Rally since 2020, when it moved from South America.

There was also a first win in the world's most famous endurance rally for Australia's KTM rider Daniel Sanders in the motorbike category.

The car category lost a lot of its gloss with two high-profile retirements early in the race.

Four-time winner and defending champion Carlos Sainz exited on the second stage after an accident.

A stage later it was France's nine-time world rally champion Sebastien Loeb who departed, his Dakar jinx continuing as



Saudi driver Yazeed Al Rajhi (R) and co-driver Edouard Boulanger (L) celebrate with Prince Khalid bin Sultan Al-Abdullah Al-Faisal, President of Saudi Automobile and Motorcycle Federation (C)

he was disqualified by the race stewards after his Dacia car was damaged in a crash.

Five-time winner Nasser al-Attiyah never really landed a blow but the Qatari took final stage honours yesterday and finished fourth overall.

Sanders, 30, dominated from the moment he won the prologue and finished a comfortable 8min 50sec faster than Spanish runner-up Tosha Schareina on his Honda.

Sanders' sublime performance is underlined by being the first rider to record three successive stage wins since Spain's Joan Barreda did that in the 2017 edition between Bolivia and Argentina.

Sanders is the second Austral-

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Daniel Sanders became the first rider since 2017 to win three consecutive stages at the Dakar Rally

ian to prevail in the motorbike category, Toby Price emerging victorious in 2016 and 2019.

"It was a tough race," said Sanders, whose three successive

stage wins.

"The last three days couldn't come quick enough. It was really, really exciting to see the finish line when we came over one dune.

"You see the whole bivouac, I just smiled and had chills go through my whole body. Super special, won't forget that moment."

Schareina, 29, said second place did not leave a bitter taste in the mouth, indeed he revelled in the achievement considering what the grizzled veterans of the event had told him.

"I'm super happy to be here on the finishing line," he said.

"It was a really hard race and many of the veterans have told



Red Bull KTM Factory Racing's Australian rider Daniel Sanders (R) celebrates with supporters

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DANIEL SANDERS
me that.
"It was the toughest ever edition, so I'm super happy to be here on the finishing line, so happy for the team and for everybody taking this second place we have earned.
"I'm super happy for Daniel, he has done a great job and had a great two weeks.
"I think the ten minutes more or less he took on the first day allowed him to control the race from then, but I'm super happy for them."

Fired-up Djokovic sends Melbourne warning

● **Osaka retired due to injury**

AFP | Melbourne

A "hot-headed" Novak Djokovic sent an Australian Open warning to join Carlos Alcaraz and Alexander Zverev in the last 16 yesterday, but Naomi Osaka's bid for a third Melbourne crown is over with injury.

Also on day six, women's defending champion Aryna Sabalenka "pushed to the limit" to set up an intriguing showdown with teenage talent Mirra Andreeva.

Djokovic, who is chasing a record-extending 11th Melbourne title and historic 25th Grand Slam crown, is on a collision course with Alcaraz in the quarter-finals.

Both kept that tantalising prospect alive with ruthless victories.

Under new coach and old rival Andy Murray, the 37-year-old Djokovic needed four sets in both of his opening two matches.

But not this time, swatting aside Czech 26th seed Tomas Machac 6-1, 6-4, 6-4 and letting out a roar at the end.

Djokovic also pointed to his ear and then someone in the Rod Laver Arena crowd.

"I am very hot-headed right now," said the fiery Serb, but added: "This is definitely the best match I played at this tour-



Red Bull KTM Factory Racing's Australian rider Daniel Sanders (R) celebrates with supporters

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Carlos Alcaraz, sporting a new buzz cut, vowed to get a kangaroo tattoo if he wins the Australian Open for the first time

nament."

Djokovic, who needed a medical break in the second set and used an inhaler, faces 24th seed Jiri Lehecka next.

Spain's Alcaraz, who raced into the last 32 for the loss of just 12 games, suffered a wobble in the third set against Portugal's unseeded Nuno

“I am very hot-headed right now. This is definitely the best match I played at this tournament

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

Borges.

But the third seed, who has won four majors but never been beyond the quarter-finals in Melbourne, regained his focus to ease through 6-2, 6-4, 6-7 (3/7), 6-2.

The 21-year-old knows how he plans to celebrate if he wins the tournament for the first time.

Alcaraz, who is sporting a new buzz cut in Melbourne, vowed to get a kangaroo tattoo if he goes all the way.

"It's a kangaroo, that's for sure. That's my idea," he said.

India cricketers to curb family time on tour after Australia defeat

AFP | New Delhi

India's cricket board has capped the amount of time players can spend with their families on tour after a string of Test defeats including a 3-1 drubbing in Australia this month.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) issued new policies Thursday for the senior men's team detailing guidelines to "promote discipline, unity and a positive team environment".

As part of the new guidelines, families will be allowed to stay with the players for a maximum of two weeks during overseas tours of 45 days



Indian players react during a match or more.
The guidelines also makes participation in domestic cricket "mandatory to be eligible for selection in the national team".
Non-compliance could result in disciplinary action including fines and a ban on participating in the lucrative Indian Premier League (IPL), Indian broadcaster NDTV reported.

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Littler advance, Nebrida scores major upset in Darts Masters

Philippine dart star Paolo Nebrida makes history with PDC World Series win at BIC

● Nebrida defeated Rob Cross

TDT | Manama

Bahrain International Circuit (BIC), 'The Home of Motorsport in the Middle East', hosted a hugely exciting opening night of action Thursday evening in the 2025 Bahrain Darts Masters.

Paolo Nebrida from the Philippines stole the spotlight from the eight Professional Darts Corporation (PDC) superstars, upsetting former World Champion Rob Cross of England in their first-round match-up, played in front of a record, sold-out crowd at the BIC Dome.

Nebrida became the first-ever Asian representative to take down a PDC rival in the history of Bahrain's event, and is also the first Filipino to win in the PDC World Series of Darts.



Luke Littler in action

Thursday's First Round Results

Light Heavyweight: Amilcar Alves vs Todd Stoute

Welterweight: Ion Surdu vs Kevin Ruat

Lightweight: Maciej Gierszewski vs Sahil Siraj

Featherweight: Ciprian Maris vs Mochamed Machaev

Bantamweight: Matiss Zaharovs vs Bilal Tipsaev



Paolo Nebrida marks a historic moment as the first Filipino to win a match in the PDC World Series of Darts

It was business as usual for the other PDC icons, all of whom marched through to the quarter-finals and joined Nebrida.

They include reigning World Champion and last year's winner in the Kingdom Luke Littler, World Number One Luke Humphries, former World Champions Gerwyn Price and Peter Wright, ex-World Match-play Champion Nathan Aspinall, and Bahrain debutants Stephen Bunting and Chris Doherty.

The stage was set for an exciting second day at BIC.

The Bahrain Darts Masters is organised by BIC and sports promoter CBX and supported by Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority (BTEA). This year's event is the third edition of the darts spectacle.



Neymar says Mbappe 'jealous' over Messi during PSG spell

AFP | Sao Paulo

Brazilian striker Neymar said Thursday that former Paris Saint-Germain teammate Kylian Mbappe became "jealous" of his relationship with Lionel Messi when the Argentine superstar joined the club in 2021.

Speaking on a podcast hosted by former Brazil striker Romario, Neymar blamed a clash of egos for the failure of the three stars to gel during their spell together at the French club.

The 32-year-old Neymar, who left PSG for Saudi club Al-Hilal in 2023, said he initially got on well with Mbappe when the France international joined him at PSG in 2017.

"I had my issues with him, we had a little fight, but he was a boy who at the beginning, when he arrived, was fundamental," Neymar said of Mbappe.

"I always told him, I joked with him, that he was going to be one of the best, I always helped him, I talked to him.

"He came to my house, we



Paris Saint-Germain's Lionel Messi (L), Neymar (C) and Kylian Mbappe discuss as they warm up (file photo)

went out to dinner together."

But Neymar said Mbappe's behavior changed when Messi arrived from Barcelona in 2021. Neymar already had a relationship with Messi from their successful stint as teammates at Barcelona between 2013 and 2017.

"We spent some good years together, but then, when Messi

arrived, I think he got a little jealous," Neymar said.

"He didn't want to share me with anyone and then the fights began, the change of behavior," he added.

Neymar added that a lack of teamwork lay behind the failure of PSG's superstar trio to fully realise their potential.

"You have to realise that you

"I had my issues with him, we had a little fight, but he was a boy who at the beginning, when he arrived, was fundamental. I always told him, I joked with him, that he was going to be one of the best, I always helped him, I talked to him. He came to my house, we went out to dinner together

NEYMAR

don't play alone. You have to have the others on your side: 'I'm the best, OK', but who's going to give you the ball? You have to have good people who give you the ball," Neymar said.

"It was everyone's ego...so it couldn't work. Nowadays, if nobody runs, if nobody helps each other, it's impossible to win," he added.

Haaland signs new Man City deal until 2034

AFP | London

Erling Haaland has signed a new 9.5-year deal at Manchester City that will keep him at the Etihad until 2034, the Premier League champions announced yesterday.

The 24-year-old striker's existing contract was due to expire in June 2027 but he has now committed his future to the club for the next decade.

The deal is the longest in the Premier League, eclipsing the nine-year contract Cole Palmer signed with Chelsea year and Haaland's salary will reportedly be about £500,000 (\$610,000) per week.

A post on the club's X account read: "Erling's here to stay! We're thrilled to announce Erling Haaland has extended Erling Haaland

his contract at City to 2034."

The Norwegian made an instant impact after joining City from Borussia Dortmund in 2022, firing 52 goals in all competitions to help the club win a Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup treble in his first season.

He scored a further 38 goals last season as City won a fourth consecutive league title and his overall tally stands at 111 goals in 126 games for the club.

