

**Manama edge past Al Najma**

Ebrahim Al Khattal's second-half strike proves decisive in week nine affair in Nasser bin Hamad Bahrain Premier Football League | P12

**WORLD 6** Gaza hospital out of action after Israeli army assault: director



**8 CELEB** Britney Spears 'wants to reconnect with her family'

**BUSINESS 5**

Cloud Spending to contribute USD 1.2 billion to Bahrain's GDP by 2026



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**Ahli United Bank (Bahrain) announces its conversion to an Islamic Bank**

**HM King hails Bahrain-US ties and cooperation**

TDI | Manama

His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa commended the historical Bahrain-US relations and the advanced progress of cooperation in various disciplines, including coordination of military and defence cooperation.

This came as HM the King received US Minister of Defence, His Excellency Lloyd Austin, in the presence of His Royal High-



HM the King holds a meeting with the US Defence Minister

ness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister. The meeting reviewed bilater-

al relations and discussed ways to boost strategic cooperation.

HM King Hamad highlighted the crucial role the US government plays in maintaining security and stability in the region and promoting international peace, in cooperation with its allies.

The meeting discussed the latest international and regional developments, including the situation in the Gaza Strip, the importance of achieving a cease-

fire, protecting civilians, and the release of hostages and detainees; as well as ensuring that humanitarian aid is delivered to the Palestinians in Gaza as per international humanitarian law.

They also highlighted the importance of achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, supporting the peace process, and establishing the Palestinian state according to the two-state solution and international legitimacy resolutions.

**Bahrain Open Data Portal wins GCC eGovernment prestigious award**

TDI | Manama

The Bahrain Open Data Portal, data.gov.bh, won Best Open Data Initiative at the 5th GCC Digital Government Award.

The announcement was made during the opening of the 2nd Digital Government Forum, held in Riyadh under the theme 'Our Future Is Now' from yesterday until today.

In addition, several Bahraini initiatives participated, reaching the final stages after competing against GCC projects across a range of categories. The Commercial Registration Portal (Sijilat) was nominated in the Best Digital Service category, and the National Suggestion and Complaint System (Tawasul) was nominated in the Best Community eParticipation category, both reaching the finals.

**'We are committed to boosting UAE relations'**

TDI | Manama

His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, highlighted the Kingdom's dedication to boost relations between Bahrain and the UAE.

HRH Prince Salman affirmed the Kingdom's commitment to pursuing mutual aspirations, under the leadership of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and the UAE President, His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

His Royal Highness made the statements as he received yesterday the outgoing UAE Ambassador to Bahrain, His Excellency Shaikh Sultan bin Hamdan Al Nahyan, at Riffa Palace to mark the end of his tenure.

HRH the Crown Prince and Prime Minister commended the longstanding Bahrain-UAE relations as well as the joint visions and strategic partnerships that characterise it.

He praised the efforts of HE Shaikh Sultan bin Hamdan in



HRH Prince Salman with HE Shaikh Sultan bin Hamdan

advancing bilateral relations to benefit both nations and wished him success in his future endeavours. During the meeting, they discussed regional and global de-

velopments and opportunities for future cooperation.

HE Shaikh Sultan bin Hamdan expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to meet with His Royal Highness and noted HRH's commitment to strengthening bilateral relations, wishing the Kingdom further progress and prosperity.

HiH Shaikh Mohammed bin Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, and the Minister of Finance and National Economy, HE Shaikh Salman bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, also attended the meeting.

**Paycheck Mirage**

The Great Bahraini Pay Divide: Fact or Fiction?

Mahir Haneef  
TDI | Manama

A storm of debate has swept Bahrain's parliament this week, ignited by an MP's claim that nearly 16,500 foreigners pocket a luxurious BD1,000+ monthly salary.

This explosive statement fuelled a proposal to increase fees for hiring foreign workers, aiming to boost employment opportunities for Bahrainis. But is this picture reality, or a mirage?

Government data tells a different story, one where the average Bahraini in the private sector walks away with a paycheck three times fatter than their foreign counterpart.

The official figures paint a stark contrast: BD815 for Bahrainis versus BD260 for non-Bahrainis. The data was released by Social Insurance Organization in its 'Statistical Report 2023 - Quarter 3'.

Even at the median point, where half the workers earn more and half less, the gap yawns wide: BD450 for Bahrainis, BD110 for foreigners.

This pay disparity extends to new hires too. Fresh-faced Bahraini graduates bag an aver-



Image used for illustrative purposes only

age BD446, while their foreign counterparts start at a humble BD193. And age-wise, Bahrainis enter the workforce younger (23 years) and enjoy longer careers compared to non-Bahrainis who begin at 29.

The public sector paints a similar picture. Bahraini public sec-

tor employees, on average, earn BD945, while data for non-Bahrainis is curiously absent.

So, while some foreigners may indeed reach the BD1,000 mark, they represent a tiny fraction of the overall picture. The reality is a Bahraini-dominated landscape where local workers reap

the higher rewards on average, across demographics and experience levels.

The stark data raises a crucial dilemma - Should the fee hike be a blanket policy, or targeted towards sectors where high-earning foreigners compete with Bahrainis? Simultaneously, in-

vesting in robust training and upskilling programs can equip locals to climb the salary ladder and thrive in a competitive job market.

Whether the answer lies in targeted fee increases, enhanced skills development, or a combination of both, one thing is clear: the path to a more equitable Bahraini job market requires navigating beyond the mirage of generalizations and towards the data-driven oasis of reality.



**The path to a more equitable Bahraini job market requires navigating beyond the mirage of generalizations and towards the data-driven oasis of reality.**



**Defence Minister takes part in remote meeting**

TDT | Manama

His Excellency Lieutenant-General Abdulla bin Hassan Al Noaimi, Defence Affairs Minister, yesterday participated in an online meeting with his counterparts from brotherly and allied countries.

The Ministers discussed topics pertaining to combating maritime terrorism and piracy to safeguard regional stability and ensure the freedom of maritime navigation.

Major-General Ghanim Ibrahim Al Fadhala, Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, and a number of senior Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) officers, also took part in the remote meeting.

**Safeguarding marine wealth**

TDT | Manama

His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa yesterday issued Decree (110) of 2023, naming the ministry and minister responsible for implementing Decree-Law (20) of 2002 with respect to the Regulation of Fishing, Exploitation and Protection of Marine Wealth, based on a proposal by the Prime Minister, and following the Cabinet's approval.

The royal decree stipulates that the ministry and the minister in charge of marine wealth shall be responsible for implementing the provisions



HM the King

of Decree-Law (20) of 2002 with respect to the Regulation of Fishing, Exploitation and Protection of Marine Wealth.

HM the King Hamad issued Royal Decree (111) of 2023, ratifying the Middle East Green Initiative (MGI) Governance Charter, based on the proposal of the Prime Minister, and following the approval of the Cabinet.

The MGI charter, annexed to this decree, was approved on October 26, 2022.

The Prime Minister and ministers, each in their capacity, shall implement the provisions of the decrees, which come into effect the day following their issuance, and will be published in the Official Gazette.

**Interior Ministry, US Naval Support Activity conduct simulation exercise**

TDT | Manama

The Interior Ministry has conducted a simulation exercise with the US Naval Support Activity (NSA), as part of their ongoing cooperation and coordination.

Brigadier Mohammed Al Haram, the Assistant Chief of Public Security, said that the drill aims to develop joint emergency response plans, unify concepts, and exchange experiences between the two sides.

He expressed thanks to Captain Zachariah D. Aperauch, Commanding Officer, NSA Bahrain, for making the exercise a success. Director of Operations



**The drill develops joint emergency response plans and exchange experiences.**

at the Public Security Presidency, the In-Charge of the Joint Counterterrorism Centre, and concerned directorates' personnel attended the event.



**Empowering banking with AI and Analytics**

The Bahrain Association of Banks, in collaboration with Atyaf eSolutions and Uneecops, successfully culminated the "Analytics and AI - The Future of Banking" event held on Thursday, 7th December 2023, at the prestigious Grand Swiss-Belhotel Waterfront Seef. The event kicked off with riveting keynotes from AI and Analytics industry experts, providing attendees with unparalleled insights into the strategic implications of integrating analytics and AI in the banking sector and navigating the evolving landscape of financial technology. All attendees witnessed engaging panel discussions exploring thought-provoking topics, including ethical considerations in AI, the role of analytics in risk management, and the impact of emerging technologies on customer experience.

**EXCELLENCE CONTINUES**

**AS AN ISLAMIC BANK**



**Ahli United Bank (Bahrain) announces its conversion to an Islamic bank**



**Hamad Al-Marzouq**  
Chairman of Ahli United Bank

Ahli United Bank (Bahrain) has announced the completion of its conversion from a conventional to an Islamic bank after officially receiving its license as an Islamic Retail Bank from the Central Bank of Bahrain ("CBB") on 10 December 2023.

This conversion follows the acquisition of AUB Group by Kuwait Finance House in October 2022, which made the latter the second-largest Islamic bank in the world, in terms of assets.

AUB's conversion to Islamic bank is a significant milestone in the bank's growth journey and is a testament to its commitment to providing a comprehensive range of Sharia-compliant banking products and services.

"We are extremely proud to have completed our conversion process to an Islamic bank," stated Hamad Al Marzouq, Chairman of Ahli United Bank. AUB will be able to offer a full range of Sharia-compliant banking products and services, across retail, corporate, savings, investment, trade finance, as well as wealth management solutions tailored for our valued clients."

Furthermore, Mr. Al Marzouq stated that the conversion was completed in record time and in a seamless manner, highlighting the bank's focus on enhancing the quality of service provided to clients, ensuring that the process of conversion conducted efficiently in full engagement and effective communication with the bank's clients, to facilitate the conversion of their existing accounts and products to Sharia-compliant alternatives.

Mr. Al Marzouq stated this achievement would not have been possible without CBB's support and guidance. He expressed AUB's gratitude for CBB's key role in the conversion process which will lead to further advancement and growth of Islamic banking in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

البنك الأهلي المتحد



**ahli united bank**

Licensed as an Islamic Retail Bank by the CBB

# HM King hails solid Bahrain-UAE ties and cooperation

TDI | Manama

His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa affirmed the importance of the deep-rooted Bahrain-UAE relations and emphasised joint keenness on developing cooperation in various sectors.

HM the King highlighted the UAE's distinguished status on a regional and international scale, noting the developmental achievements in various sectors, led by His Highness Shaikh Mo-



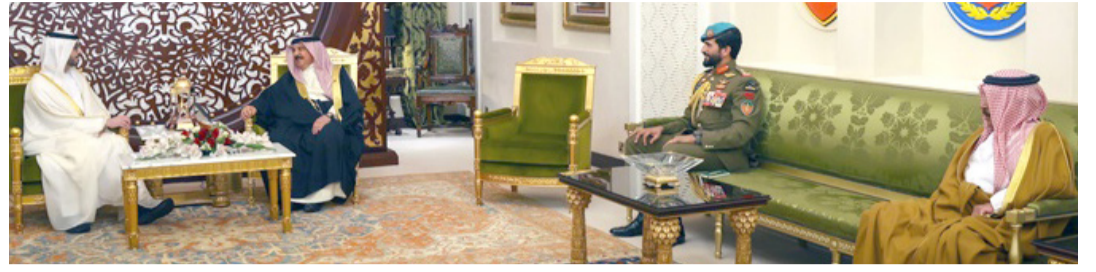
HM the King receives the UAE Ambassador

ammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE.

HM King Hamad was speaking as he received His Excellency

Shaikh Sultan bin Hamdan Al Nahyan, the outgoing Ambassador of the UAE to Bahrain.

He conferred the Order of



Bahrain-First Class on the ambassador in recognition of his efforts to develop bilateral relations.

Ambassador Al Nahyan extended his appreciation to HM King Hamad for bestowing the Bahrain Order upon

him, hailing the efforts of His Majesty on developing cooperation between the two countries.

# Financial relief joy for public on the horizon

Parliament approves urgent proposal urging government to halt rising interest rates on loans

TDI | Manama

The Parliament has approved an urgent proposal urging the government to take decisive action and issue a directive to banks, compelling them to cease the ongoing increase in interest rates on personal and real estate loans that were previously contracted with citizens.

The proposal, championed by MPs Khalid Bu Anq, Jalela Al Sayed, Jalal Kadhem, Dr. Ali Al Nuaimi, and Bader Al Tamimi, highlights their commitment to addressing the concerns and challenges faced by the citizens.

By presenting this proposal, they aim to protect the financial interests and well-being of the public, particularly those who have entered into loan agreements prior to the recent interest rate hikes.

The Parliament's approval of this proposal signifies a collec-



Image used for illustrative purposes only

tive recognition of the urgency of the matter and a call for swift action. It underscores the Parliament's commitment to safeguarding the economic stability and welfare of the nation's citizens.

The proposal intends to exert pressure on the government to utilise its authority and mandate to engage with banks and en-

sure that they comply with the directive to halt the increase in interest rates on personal and real estate loans. By doing so, the proposal seeks to provide immediate relief to individuals burdened by the financial implications of the rising interest rates.

Before voting on the proposal, several MPs expressed their

anger at the decision of several banks to hike the interest rate on loans taken before the decision to increase it. They voiced their concerns on how the local citizens will cope with this increase especially under the current economic conditions.



The approved proposal underscores the Parliament's commitment to safeguarding the economic stability and welfare of the nation's citizens.

## Violating vehicles seized, impounded for road safety



Crackdown on road safety violators

Zahra Ayaz  
TDI | Manama

In a bid to curb reckless driving and maintain public order, the General Traffic Department has seized and impounded a number of violating vehicles for a month.

This action comes after the drivers of these vehicles paraded and created annoying noises in various areas, causing inconvenience, disrupting public peace, and posing a threat to lives. Legal procedures are currently underway against the violators to ensure accountability.

The Kingdom has been grappling with a surge in accidents, particularly during the National Day, primarily attributed to aggressive driving, speeding, and a general disregard for basic traffic laws.

To address this pressing issue, authorities have taken a firm stance against those who put the lives of others at risk

through their reckless behavior.

A recent study has revealed that accidents are evenly distributed across the various days of the week, irrespective of differences in driving mileage and the number of trips undertaken.

### Approach

This finding underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to road safety, focusing on improving driver behavior, enforcing traffic regulations, and promoting responsible driving habits.

The General Traffic Department remains committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of all road users.

By taking decisive action against violating drivers and impounding their vehicles, they aim to promote a culture of respect for traffic laws and foster an environment of enhanced public safety.

## GCC Commercial Arbitration Centre Board convenes in Manama

● Celebrating national holidays

TDI | Manama

The Board of Directors of the GCC Commercial Arbitration Centre convened in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Dr. Kamal Abdullah Al-Hamad, the Centre's Secretary General, outlined that the board delved into discussions regarding the new operational plan and prospective strategy for the GCC Commercial Arbitration Centre, as the Centre aims to attain a prominent global position among the foremost arbitration Centres.

Dr. Al-Hamad further noted that the meeting concentrated on delineating key strategic measures to enhance and advance services in accordance with the highest international standards. This is part of the Centre's dedication to excel-



4. Cake-cutting ceremony.jpeg

lence, elevating quality standards, bolstering international standing, and solidifying its role as a primary reference for resolving global commercial disputes.

The Board of Directors celebrated Bahrain's national holidays, honoring the creation of the modern Bahraini state during the era of the founder Ahmed Al-Fateh as an Arab Muslim state in 1783 AD, as well

as recognizing the anniversary of His Majesty the King assuming leadership.

The Centre conveyed congratulations to the Kingdom of Bahrain, extending warm wishes to His Majesty the king, government, and people on the occasion of the national holidays. The center expressed hopes for the continued progress and prosperity of both the Kingdom and the Arab Gulf countries.

## Housing services distribution across Kingdom in full swing



Housing and Urban Planning Minister, Her Excellency Amna bint Ahmed Al Rumaihi, with housing unit beneficiaries

TDI | Manama

The distribution of 6,800 housing services to citizens is in full swing.

Following the directives of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and the order of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning is continuing procedures to distribute housing services in Salman City,

East Hidd City, and East Sitra City projects.

The ministry said that housing unit distribution plan is being implemented at an expedited pace to meet the deadline of the end of February next year. The ministry is also continuing to provide housing financing to citizens who have applied for financing options through Tas'heel programme, including Tas'heel Aqari (real estate), Tas'heel Ta'awon (collaborative), and Al Bayt Al Oud

(family house); in addition to financing for new categories of beneficiaries.

It said detailed information will be provided to citizens regarding the location and features of the housing project.

They will be informed on legal and financial procedures before receiving their housing units, as well as instructions for moving in and scheduling an appointment to pick up the keys.

# Exciting changes ahead

New-look Bahraini Farmers' Market to offer visitors unique shopping experience

TDI | Manama

The 11th Bahraini Farmers' Market, set to open on Saturday at the Budaiya Botanical Garden, is currently undergoing a major revamp to develop its various facilities, in cooperation with the National Initiative for Agricultural Development (NIAD).

Her Excellency Shaikha Maram bint Isa Al Khalifa, the Secretary-General of the NIAD, said that the development work aims to improve the event's various aspects and expand it so that it can accommodate the largest number of Bahraini farmers in a way that supports the Bahraini products and contributes to enhancing food security in Bahrain.

Shaikha Maram indicated that the development plan of the market's site is taking place in two phases.

The first phase, which has been completed, includes the development of the areas devoted to farmers, the traditional market, food and children, in addition to developing the bathrooms, the handicrafts and



Bahraini farmers will have a chance to display their agricultural products again "Kashta" areas, the entrances and parking spaces, she said, adding that buses have also been provided to transport market visitors from the parking lots to the market.

The second phase, to be implemented in January 2024, will include the development of the lake, theatre, games area, training workshops and the palm oasis areas, she added.

## Infrastructure

Shaikha Maram indicated that the infrastructure of the

farmers' market has also been developed comprehensively, giving the market a new identity, and providing more facilities to farmers and visitors, which will offer the latter a unique shopping experience.

She explained that electrical generators have been replaced with electricity, which now covers the entire market, adding that shopping aisles have been developed and maintained, and 12 more bathrooms have been added. She noted that the existing restrooms have been maintained, and special bathrooms

“The development and modernisation will benefit all aspects of the market, which will create a new visual identity, commensurate with its importance as an event aimed at supporting national products, developing the agricultural sector and consolidating the kingdom's food security.”

- HE SHAIKHA MARAM BINT ISA AL KHALIFA, THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE NATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT (NIAD)

for people of determination have been prepared.

Shaikha Maram stressed that the development and modernisation will benefit all aspects of the market, which will create a new visual identity, commensurate with its importance as an event aimed at supporting national products, developing the agricultural sector and consolidating the kingdom's food security.



surate with its importance as an event aimed at supporting national products, developing the agricultural sector and consolidating the kingdom's food security.

## Experience

The NIAD Secretary-General pointed out that visitors to this year's Bahraini Farmers' Market will have a different experience, as the capacity of the parking lots has been increased to accommodate the largest possible number of visitors, transportation buses will be provided, and chairs and shaded seating areas have been increased.

## Electronic scammer jailed for five years

TDI | manama

The High Criminal Court has handed down a five-year prison sentence to an electronic fraudster following his conviction for involvement in a fraud scheme targeting multiple victims through deceptive phone calls.

The convict, along with other accomplices, managed to deceive individuals and obtained a total of BD800 from one of the victims.

The incident came to light when a citizen lodged a complaint with the competent authorities, reporting that he received a text message urging him to update his personal information through a financial company's programme. Consequently, he provided his details.

The following day, he received a call from an individual claiming to be a specialised employee responsible for updating data. The caller requested a One-Time Password from him. To his surprise, the victim later discovered a withdrawal of BD600, followed by a withdrawal of BD300.

# Kochi Metro Short Filmmaking Workshop in Bahrain successful

TDI | Manama

The cinematic magic conjured by the Kochi Metro Film Institute India, a prestigious initiative of the Kochi Metro Short Film Festival (KMSFF), reached its crescendo as the Kochi Metro Short Filmmaking Workshop Bahrain drew its curtains on a high note.

The event, staged at the magnificent Theatre, Ahlia University, Kingdom of Bahrain, on December 13, 2023, was a vibrant celebration of talent and creativity.

The evening opened with a heartfelt welcome from Mrs. Sreelekha Chandrashekar, setting the stage for an exhilarating affair. Mr. Ravinder Elias, the Project Director, Actor, Writer, and Filmmaker extraordinaire at KMSFF, took center stage, painting an inspiring vision of the workshop's role in nurturing the next generation of cinematic storytellers.



Speakers and participants at the event

The gathering was graced by luminaries such as Prof. Christina Georgantopoulou, Dean of Edict at Bahrain Polytechnic, and Professor Mansoor Ahmed Hasan Husain Alaali, President of Ahlia University, Bahrain.

Their words of wisdom resonated deeply, underscoring the workshop's pivotal role in sculpting raw talent and fostering a culture of cinematic excellence.

"Today, we stand in awe of the remarkable dedication and strides made by our workshop participants," enthused Mr.

Ravinder Elias. "Their unwavering passion for the art of filmmaking serves as a beacon for the industry's future."

## Contribution

A shining moment arrived as Mr. Narendra Menon, the luminary Managing Director of Nikon Middle East, was honored for his unparalleled support and invaluable contribution to the workshop. Mr. Narendra Menon reiterated Nikon Middle East's commitment to nurturing cre-

ativity and innovation in visual storytelling.

The distribution of certificates was a heartening affair, an ode to the perseverance and zeal exhibited by each workshop participant. Over 90 enthusiastic students from Bahrain Indian School, Asian School, New Millennium School, Pakistan School, and Multinational School Bahrain, as well as students from the campuses of Ahlia University and Bahrain Polytechnic, actively participated in the six-day workshop.



They passionately honed their filmmaking skills, engaging in an enriching experience that culminated in the award of completion certificates. The Chief Guest and esteemed Guests of Honor extended their felicitations, paving the way for these emerging filmmakers to shine.

## Gratitude

Mr. Anand Omanakuttan, Programme Manager at KMSFF, orchestrated a symphony of gratitude, acknowledging the col-

laborative efforts that led to the workshop's resounding success.

The evening culminated in a spirited photo session, capturing the infectious energy and triumph shared by the participants, encapsulating a tapestry of accomplishment and camaraderie.

The valedictory function of the Kochi Metro Short Filmmaking Workshop Bahrain transcended boundaries, serving as a melting pot of talent, igniting creativity, and heralding a new era of storytelling in the cinematic realm.

## Bahrain National Day celebrated in Sri Lanka



The first ever Bahrain National Day Celebration in Sri Lanka organised by Sri Lanka Club Alumni in association with the Sri Lanka Club Bahrain was held at the JetWing Colombo Seven Hotel on 16 December. Mr. U.L.M. Jauhar, Actg. Additional Secretary (Multilateral Affairs & Middle East) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sri Lanka, participated in the event as the Chief Guest. Delivering his remarks, Addl Secretary Mr. Jauhar appreciated the significance of the event in strengthening the bilateral relations between the two countries. More than 50 current members of Sri Lanka Club Bahrain and members of the Sri Lanka Club Alumni joined the celebration organized under the leadership of Mr. Wasantha Kahaduwa, Honorary President of Sri Lanka Club Bahrain.

## Indian School to install mega solar plant on campuses

TDI | Manama

The Indian School Bahrain (ISB) has embarked on a groundbreaking initiative in collaboration with Kanoo Cleanmax Renewables Assetco WLL to harness solar energy at its Isa Town and Riffa campuses.

Over the upcoming months, the school plans to install solar panels, marking a significant stride towards meeting its energy needs sustainably.

The anticipated outcome is a solar power plant generating 1,866,600 units annually, equivalent to 63 to 64% of the school campuses' current energy consumption, contributing substantially to green energy initiatives. Over a 25-year span, the plant is projected to yield a total energy



Official handover of the project agreement

output of 43,334,821 units.

This visionary move aligns with the renewable energy policy of the Kingdom of Bahrain, showcasing the school's commitment to environmental sustainability. Under the solar power purchase agreement (PPA), Kanoo Cleanmax Renewables Assetco W.L.L. takes charge of designing, financing, installing, operating, and maintaining the solar energy systems at the two

campuses, incurring minimal to no cost for the school.

Entrusting the solar power plant project to Kanoo Cleanmax Renewables Assetco WLL, the ISB has entered into a 25-year lease agreement for a capacity of 1099 kWp. Technology Engineering WLL has been appointed as the project consultant.

The official handover of the project agreement took place, with Honorary Chairman

Prince S Natarajan and Hon. EC Member Finance-Legal Affairs Binu Mannil Varughese representing the school, and Sales Manager Mohammed Parvez Mustafa and Sarin Rajeevan Puthalath representing Kanoo Cleanmax Renewables Assetco WLL. Hon.Vice-Chairman Jyafar Maidani, EC Member-Health and Environment Ajayayakrishnan V, and Principal VR Palaniswamy attended.

# Cloud Spending to contribute **USD 1.2 billion** to Bahrain's GDP by 2026

TDT | Manama

**B**ahrain, a trailblazer in the digital transformation landscape, is set to witness a substantial economic boost, thanks to its strategic investment in cloud technology.

According to the recently unveiled Economic Impact Study by the International Data Corporation (IDC), Bahrain's cloud spending is poised to contribute an impressive USD1.2 billion to the Kingdom's GDP by 2026, equivalent to around 2.3% of the total GDP.

This groundbreaking study, which delved into the comprehensive analysis of national investments in cloud technology, revealed that Bahrain's forward-thinking legislation, business-friendly environment, and a pool of digitally skilled local talent have played pivotal roles in the Kingdom's remarkable cloud journey and technological progress.

In a proactive move, Bahrain emerged as a regional leader by being the first in the Middle East to mandate a national Cloud-First policy, responding with agility to global trends in digital innovation. This visionary policy, implemented in 2019, ignited a surge in cloud spending and laid the foundation for a mature, cloud-ready infrastructure and ecosystem. The establishment of a cloud security framework and flexible regulations further solidified Bahrain's position as a



Bahrain adopted a Cloud-First policy early on in its digital transformation journey, and we are proud to have been the first cloud provider, implementing advanced and secure technology infrastructure aiding in the growth of the country's IT and cloud spending

WOJCIECH BAJDA, MANAGING DIRECTOR, PUBLIC SECTOR, MIDDLE EAST, TURKEY, AND AFRICA AT AWS



Bahrain has continuously led the region in digital transformation and adoption of latest technologies. This has resulted in a number of strategic benefits to the Kingdom, including being the globally leading government

MUSAB ABDULLA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, ICT, AT BAHRAIN EDB



As Bahrain successfully drives its cloud-first strategy, economic benefits multiply from the ability to scale resources and leverage the workforce, increase accessibility and productivity, and reduce costs while increasing security

JYOTI LALCHANDANI, GROUP VICE PRESIDENT AND REGIONAL MANAGING DIRECTOR OF IDC MIDDLE EAST, TURKEY & AFRICA

Director, Public Sector, Middle East, Turkey, and Africa at AWS, affirmed their commitment to supporting Bahrain's strides in cloud infrastructure across all industries. He stated, "Bahrain adopted a Cloud-First policy early on in its digital transformation journey, and we are proud to have been the first cloud provider, implementing advanced and secure technology infrastructure aiding in the growth of the country's IT and cloud spending."

Jyoti Lalchandani, Group Vice President and Regional Managing Director of IDC Middle East, Turkey & Africa, highlighted the multiplying economic benefits of Bahrain's Cloud-First strategy. "As Bahrain successfully drives its cloud-first strategy, economic benefits multiply from the ability to scale resources and leverage the workforce, increase accessibility and productivity, and reduce costs while increasing security," Lalchandani commented.

Musab Abdulla, Executive Director of Business Development, ICT, at Bahrain EDB, underscored Bahrain's pioneering role in digital transformation and technology adoption. Abdulla said, "Bahrain has continuously led the region in digital transformation and adoption of latest technologies. This has resulted in a number of strategic benefits to the Kingdom, including being the globally leading government adopter of cloud infrastructure." The report also highlighted

prominent cloud and data centre hub in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

The IDC white paper emphasized that Bahrain's Cloud-First Policy, coupled with the public sector's commitment to digitizing national infrastructure, has significantly enhanced operational performance across various sectors. Investments in cloud-based solutions, coupled with the use of data analytics and advanced AI technologies, are expected to further drive

nationwide cloud adoption.

Government bodies, including the Information & eGovernment Authority (iGA) and Bahrain Economic Development Board (Bahrain EDB), spearheaded Bahrain's leading position in digitizing its economy and advancing its ICT infrastructure through key digital initiatives. Collaborative efforts between government agencies and private sector players, supported by the Labour Fund Tamkeen's investments in upskilling the

national workforce, resulted in pioneering regulations like the data jurisdiction law.

As part of its digital transformation journey, Bahrain achieved key milestones, attracting global giants such as Amazon Web Services (AWS). In 2019, AWS selected Bahrain as the destination to host the first AWS Region in the Middle East and North Africa, marking a significant achievement in the country's cloud infrastructure growth.

Wojciech Bajda, Managing

the economic impact of Bahrain's cloud adoption, comparing it to a similar study conducted in Europe in 2021. Despite Bahrain's major cloud spending starting in 2019, the impact on GDP contribution, revenue, and employment mirrors that of countries with earlier cloud service spending. Spending on public cloud services in Bahrain is projected to grow by an impressive 14.9 times between 2018 and 2026, making it one of the fastest-growing in the Middle East and Africa (MEA) region.

Bahrain's commitment to cloud technology not only positions it as a regional leader but also propels the nation toward accelerated innovation and a thriving digital economy.



The IDC white paper emphasized that Bahrain's Cloud-First Policy, coupled with the public sector's commitment to digitizing national infrastructure, has significantly enhanced operational performance across various sectors.

## Huawei ICT competition kicks off in Bahrain

Ashen Tharaka  
TDT | Manama

**H**uawei, a leading global provider of information and communications technology (ICT) solutions, has officially launched the Huawei ICT Competition 2023-2024 for the Middle East & Central Asia region. The opening ceremony took place at Bahrain Polytechnic University, marking the Kingdom's role as host for the regional stage of the competition.

This initiative aims to nurture and empower future ICT talent in the region. With a focus on developing practical skills and knowledge in cloud computing, networking, and other cutting-edge technologies, the competition expects to attract over 20,000 students and 500 universities from across the Middle East and Central Asia.

"Huawei is deeply committed to fostering the growth of the ICT sector in Bahrain and throughout the region, ICT Competition provides a valuable platform for talented students to showcase their skills, gain valuable industry experience, and potentially compete on a global stage." Aziz Tang, CEO of Huawei Bahrain told the Daily Tribune.



Aziz Tang, CEO of Huawei Bahrain



Chinese Ambassador to Bahrain Ni Ruchi speaks at the event



Attendees at the event

The opening ceremony was in the presence of Chinese Ambassador to Bahrain Ni Ruchi, representatives from Huawei, government officials, educators, and students. It served as a platform to reaffirm Huawei's commitment to collaborating

with partners in Bahrain and across the region to cultivate a robust and thriving ICT ecosystem.

The competition runs until tomorrow and the winners will be awarded at the closing ceremony.

## Tamkeen Partners with Bahrain Polytechnic to Support Apprenticeship Programs



Signing Ceremony

TDT | Manama

**T**he Labour Fund (Tamkeen) and Polytechnic announced that applications are now open for enterprises looking to benefit from its recently launched Apprenticeship Program. The program was launched as part

of the new bundle of programs Bahrainis annually to facilitate their employment and career development. The Apprenticeship Program is an initiative through which Tamkeen will collaborate with various training and educational partners to deliver quality training for

Bahrainis. The Program was designed to enhance employment opportunities for local talent by equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge required by the labor market through hands-on work experience delivered by specialized education providers such as Polytechnic Bahrain.

## Takaful names Fajer Abdulaziz Chief Underwriting Officer - General Takaful

TDT | Manama

**T**akaful International Company has named Fajer Abdulaziz as the Chief Underwriting Officer - General Takaful.

Prior to joining Takaful International Company, Abdulaziz served in various key roles at Bahrain Kuwait Insurance Company, where she excelled as a senior manager in the general insurance lines. Her dedication has been recognized, and she was honored as one of the



Fajer Abdulaziz



Essam Al-Ansari

100 most prominent Bahraini women for her contributions to the insurance sector.

"We are delighted to welcome Ms. Fajer Abdulaziz to Takaful International Company as our Chief Underwriting Officer -

General Takaful," said Essam Al-Ansari, the Chief Executive Officer of Takaful International Company. "Her extensive experience in the insurance industry makes her an invaluable addition to our team."

QUOTE OF THE DAY YOU MAY SAY I'M A DREAMER, BUT I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE. I HOPE SOMEDAY YOU'LL JOIN US. AND THE WORLD WILL LIVE AS ONE JOHN LENNON

TODAY IN HISTORY

1522

Suleiman the Magnificent accepts surrender of the surviving Knights of Rhodes, who are allowed to evacuate. They eventually settle in Malta and become known as the Knights of Malta.



1803

French flag lowered in New Orleans to mark the formal transfer of the Louisiana Purchase from France to USA, purchased for \$15M

1812

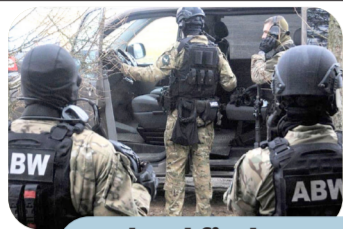
"Grimm's Fairy Tales" or "Children's and Household Tales" by Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm is first published

1917

Cheka forms - Soviet state security force and forerunner to the KGB, under Felix Dzerzhinsky after decree by Lenin

News in brief

A Polish court yesterday convicted 14 citizens of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine for preparing acts of sabotage on behalf of Moscow as part of a spy ring. The defendants were charged last month with acts of espionage such as preparing to derail trains carrying aid to neighbouring Ukraine, and monitoring military facilities and critical infrastructure in the NATO member.



Poland finds 14 foreigners guilty of spying for Russia

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin hailed his country's relationship with China yesterday, declaring an "all-time high" in bilateral ties during a visit to the Chinese capital, according to readouts from both Moscow and Beijing.

Russian PM in Beijing hails 'all-time high' in China ties

Pharmaceutical firms Pfizer and BioNTech are suing the governments of Poland and Hungary alleging they failed to pay for vaccines ordered during the Covid pandemic, lawyers said yesterday.

Pfizer sues Poland and Hungary over Covid debts

Chinese President Xi Jinping called for "all-out efforts"

Controversial African mask sale cleared by French court

Rescuers in remote villages of northwest China dug through the rubble of collapsed homes in freezing conditions yesterday after the country's deadliest earthquake in years killed at least 127 people.

French elderly couple yesterday saw its request to cancel the 4.2-million-euro sale of a rare African mask that they had let go for 150 euros thrown out, with the court calling their claim frivolous.



A "Ngil" mask of the Fang people of Gabon which is estimated at 300,000/400,000 euro

Rescuers in remote villages of northwest China dug through the rubble of collapsed homes in freezing conditions yesterday after the country's deadliest earthquake in years killed at least 127 people.

At least 127 dead in northwest China earthquake

Army demolishes home of Palestinian accused of killing 2 Israelis

Spain says to take part in Red Sea coalition within NATO

Gaza hospital out of action after Israeli army assault: director

AFP | Jerusalem, undefined

One of the last remaining hospitals in the northern Gaza Strip stopped operating yesterday after being stormed by the Israeli army, its director said.

Fadel Naim told AFP Israeli troops had attacked the Al-Ahli hospital and arrested doctors, medical staff and patients, destroying part of the building's grounds.

Israel's attack has "put the hospital out of action", he said. "We can't receive any patients or injured."

At least four people who were wounded by Israeli fire on Monday died yesterday after being injured in the Al-Ahli assault, he said.

"According to our information, there are dozens of wounded in the surrounding streets," he said. Al-Ahli, also known as the Bap-



A man mourns as he holds the wrapped body of a Palestinian child who was killed overnight during Israeli bombardment, at a hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip

Hammas and Islamic Jihad accuse Israel, which denies responsibility and blames a misfired rocket by Islamic Jihad for that blast.

Hospitals, protected under international humanitarian law, have repeatedly been hit by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip since the start of the war between Israel and Hamas on October 7.

Israel's troops have previously raided other medical facilities in Gaza, including Al-Shifa, the territory's largest hospital, which is now functioning at minimal capacity with a very small team.

On Sunday, the World Health Organization said the Al-Ahli hospital was receiving "critical patients" from Al-Shifa for surgery. The Al-Shifa emergency department, devastated by Israeli bombardments, is "a blood bath" and "in need of resuscitation", the WHO said.

Ashraf al-Qudra, spokesman for the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory, said on Tuesday another hospital in northern Gaza, Al Awda in the Jabalia area, had been turned "into a barracks" by the Israeli army.

He said the army was holding 240 people in the hospital, "including 80 medical staff and 40 patients," and had arrested its director, doctor Ahmad Mhanna.

Israel is facing mounting international pressure over the rising civilian death toll and destruction of hospitals in Gaza.

At least 127 dead in northwest China earthquake

Chinese President Xi Jinping called for "all-out efforts"

AFP | Dahejia, China



Collapsed buildings are seen after an earthquake in Dahejia, Jishishan County, in northwest China's Gansu province

A further 14 died and 198 were injured in Haidong in neighbouring Qinghai province, state-run newspaper the People's Daily reported.

The quake damaged more than 155,000 buildings, according to state broadcaster CCTV, and sent residents running into the freezing streets for safety.

At a village near the epicentre, AFP reporters saw huge cracks running through the exterior and interior walls of a brick home, and the roof of a building that had caved in completely.

"I am 70 and I have never experienced such a powerful quake in my life," resident Ma Wenchang told AFP. "I can't live (in this house) anymore because it's too dangerous. My relatives have been relocated somewhere else."

At another location, the top of a mosque had collapsed askew, and another building was reduced to mere rubble. The roads were full of emergency vehicles, and the AFP team saw trucks covered in red banners reading "earthquake relief supplies".

As evening fell, volunteers scrambled to set up tents in a town square to make a base for rescuers. Two dozen military trucks were parked nearby.

Radio sets make a comeback in war-torn Gaza

AFP | Gaza Strip, Territoires Palestiniens

Before war broke out in Gaza, Mahmud al-Daoudi could never have imagined the radio sets gathering dust in his shop would be in such high demand, offering his customers a precious link with the outside world.

Power cuts have long been a part of everyday life, but the besieged territory's 2.4 million people are now enduring long blackouts after Israel cut off electricity and fuel supplies.

It is now impossible to plug in computers or television sets, recharge phones or access the internet without generators or solar panels, a luxury few Gazans can afford.

But to keep up with the news, there's always the battery-powered radio.

"Now we're running out of phones," Daoudi told AFP. "Moving backwards" It's impossible to order new stock, with only limited humanitarian aid trickling into the territory.

"People want to follow the news, hear where the shelling is taking place and find out about the fate of their families," said Hussein Abu Hashem, who has run out of radios at his shop too.

According to the UN, 1.9 million Palestinians have been displaced since the start of the war, around 85 percent of the population. Many of them are now living in makeshift camps in the south of the territory where they lack basic supplies.

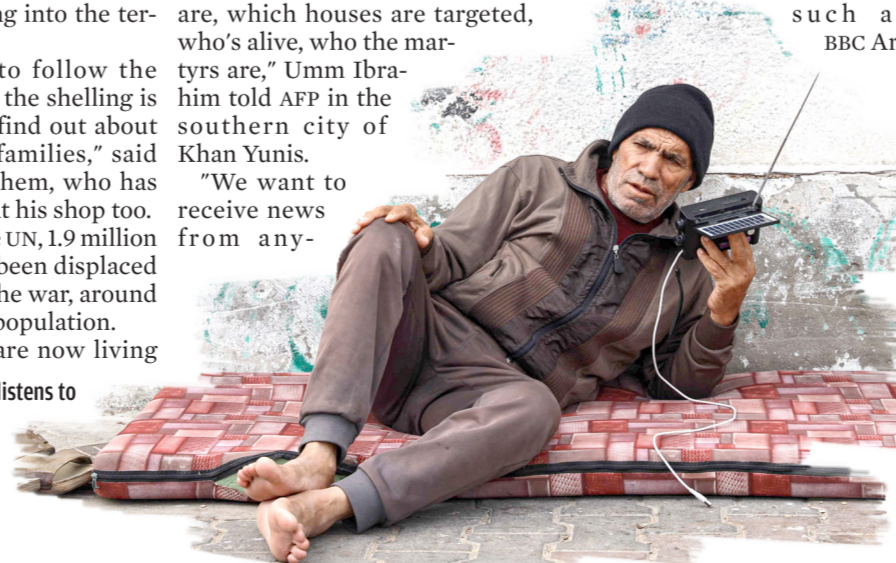
"I don't know what's happening around us, where the strikes are, which houses are targeted, who's alive, who the martyrs are," Umm Ibrahim told AFP in the southern city of Khan Yunis.

"When my battery runs out, I walk around the camp and listen out for other people's radios." Stations such as BBC Arabic and Al Jazeera have launched special channels to help keep displaced people up to date with the news.

Some Gazans, like 75-year-old Hebrew-speaker Mohammed Hassouna, manage to pick up the news from Israeli radio stations.

He said it allows him to keep up with the latest "from the Israeli side". "I keep my children and neighbours informed," he said.

Outside his tent, Salah Zorob, 37, spends his time flicking through radio stations on his mobile phone. "The world is moving forward with modern technology but here in Gaza we're moving backwards," he said. "They're going to take us back to the Stone Age."



A Palestinian old man listens to his radio in a refugee camp in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip

UNICEF spokesperson 'furious' over situation in Gaza

AFP | Geneva, Switzerland

Gaza is "the most dangerous place in the world" for a child, the UN children's agency spokesperson said yesterday, expressing his rage at the situation there after returning from the Palestinian territory.

"I'm furious that those with power shrug at the humanitarian nightmares unleashed on a million children," UNICEF spokesperson James Elder told a press briefing after spending nearly two weeks in Gaza.

He spoke of children having undergone amputations and who were then "killed in those hospitals" as the Israeli army bombardment of the Gaza Strip continues after the unprecedented October 7 attack by Hamas on Israel.

"I'm furious that there are more children hiding as we speak who will no doubt be hit and have amputations in the coming days," he said.

He said the Nasser hospital in southern Gaza's main city Khan Yunis -- the largest facility still functioning -- "was shelled twice" in the last 48 hours.

This hospital "not only shelters large numbers of children who had already been badly injured in attacks on their homes, but hundreds of women and children seeking safety," he said.

"I'm furious that Christmas is likely going to bring increased savagery and attacks as the world is distracted with its own love and goodwill," Elder said, deploring the deaths of thousands of children in Gaza who are "becoming statistics".

"I'm furious that hypocrisy is crushing empathy," he said of the situation, adding, "I'm furious at myself for not being able to do more."



Palestinian children react as they participate in an activity aimed to support their mental health

likely going to bring increased savagery and attacks as the world is distracted with its own love and goodwill," Elder said, deploring the deaths of thousands of children in Gaza who are "becoming statistics".

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Julian Assange 'final appeal' to be heard in February: campaigners



Julian Assange London, United Kingdom

A final appeal to prevent the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to the United States will be heard in London over two days in February, his support group said yesterday.

Assange, 52, is wanted on espionage charges and has been detained in the high-security Belmarsh Prison in southeast London since April 2019.

He was arrested after spending seven years held up in Ecuador's London embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden where he faced accusations of sexual assault, which were later dropped.

The US authorities want to put the Australian publisher on trial for divulging US military secrets about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Free Assange campaign said the case will be heard before two judges in the High Court in London on February 20 and 21.

It will review an earlier decision taken by a single judge in June which refused Assange permission to appeal.

Spain says to take part in Red Sea coalition within NATO

AFP | Madrid, Spain



Huthis said Tuesday they would not halt their attacks on Red Sea shipping in solidarity with Gaza despite the announcement by the United States of the new maritime protection force.

Spain said Tuesday it would stake part in an international coalition to quell Huthi attacks on ships transiting the Red Sea.

Yemen's Iran-backed Huthi rebels have launched a flurry of drone and missile attacks on vessels passing through the Red Sea, aimed at pressuring Israel over its devastating war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The flurry of drone and missile attacks by the rebels are imperilling a transit route that carries up to 12 percent of global trade.

The United States on Monday announced a 10-nation coalition to quell the Huthi missile and drone attacks on ships transiting the Red Sea, with Britain, France, Bahrain and Italy among countries joining the "multinational security initiative".

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said the security coalition also included the United States, Canada, Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain.

But Spain's defence ministry said Tuesday the country "depends on the decisions of the European Union and NATO and, therefore, will not participate unilaterally."

UK warship joins Red Sea coalition: govt

A British Royal Navy destroyer has joined a new international maritime protection force to protect shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, the



Representative picture

TOP 4 TWEETS

01



Kids are being recruited at an early age to use e-cigarettes and may get hooked on nicotine. I urge countries to implement strict measures to prevent uptake and to protect their citizens, especially their children and young people. 88 countries have no minimum age at which e-cigarettes can be bought and 74 countries have no regulations in place for these harmful products. @DrTedros

02



Hosted Finnish Foreign Minister @ElinaValtonen to further strengthen U.S.-Finnish relations, support Ukraine, and advance our partnership on emerging technology. Also signed the Defense Cooperation Agreement with Finnish Defense Minister @AnttiHakkanen. @SecBlinken

03



Illegal attacks on shipping by the Iranian-backed Houthis are causing the situation in the Red Sea to rapidly deteriorate. That's why HMS Diamond will join a new international task force to protect critical global shipping against those hostile actors who threaten British trade. @RishiSunak

04



Interacting with the young innovators at the Grand Finale of Smart India Hackathon 2023. Their problem-solving capabilities & ingenuity to address complex challenges is remarkable. @narendramodi

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



# Classifieds



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# Australia's Starc, Cummins set salary records at IPL auction

Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins rewrite IPL history, emerge as most expensive players ever

● Mitchell Starc returns to IPL after eight years, creating a record with Kolkata Knight Riders paying \$2.98 million

● Earlier, Pat Cummins became the costliest IPL player as Sunrisers Hyderabad secured him for \$2.47 million

AFP | Dubai

Australian fast bowlers Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins became the most expensive players in Indian Premier League history yesterday, with franchises dishing out millions of dollars for their services at the glitzy Twenty20 tournament.

Starc, who last played in the IPL eight years ago, made a smashing comeback when he was snapped up by Kolkata Knight Riders for 247.5 million rupees (\$2.98 million), setting an all-time IPL auction record.

"We won, Mr Starc!" the franchise posted on X, formerly Twitter.

Starc, 33, broke the record set by Cummins earlier in the day



Australia's Pat Cummins poses with the trophy after winning the World Cup

when Sunrisers Hyderabad paid 205 million rupees (\$2.47 million) for the World Cup-winning skipper.

Before yesterday, England all-rounder Sam Curran was the most expensive player after being bought for \$2.23 million last year by Punjab Kings.

"Pumped to be joining SRH for the upcoming IPL season," Cummins, who skipped this year's IPL because of a packed calendar, said in a video posted by the franchise on social media.

"I have played in Hyderabad a few times and always loved it so

can't wait to get started."

Hyderabad beat Royal Challengers Bangalore in a fervent bidding session for Cummins, to claps and cheers from other franchises participating in the auction, held this year in Dubai.

Both Australians were key members of the team that led Australia to ODI World Cup victory in November, beating hosts India in the final at Ahmedabad.

Cummins had silenced a crowd of nearly 100,000 when he bowled out star batsman Virat Kohli, and was widely lauded for leading Australia to the title.



Pumped to be joining SRH for the upcoming IPL season. I have played in Hyderabad a few times and always loved it so can't wait to get started

PAT CUMMINS

The 30-year-old made a previous auction record of \$2.17 million when he signed with the Kolkata Knight Riders in 2019.

Both Starc and Cummins had entered this auction with a base price of \$240,000, the top tier at which players can start the bidding for their services.

New Zealand all-rounder Daryl Mitchell was the third-top player at the auction, grabbed by Chennai Super Kings for \$1.6 million.

Mitchell, 32, was also one of the breakout stars at the World Cup, scoring two centuries against India -- in the group stage and in the semi-final.

## Bumper salaries

Chennai coach Stephen Fleming said Mitchell's performances over the last 18-24 months had "warranted this type of a price".



Attracting some of world cricket's top stars with bumper salaries, the pioneering IPL helped make Twenty20 hugely popular, attracting hundreds of millions of viewers and spawning copycat events worldwide

"He is an unfashionable player, often goes under the radar. With his ability to play spin he is competitive and he is also a handy bowler."

West Indies star Rovman Powell went to Rajasthan Royals for \$890,000 and Travis Head of Australia will play alongside Cummins for Hyderabad after being sold for \$818,000.

South African paceman Gerald Coetzee was sold to Mumbai Indians for \$602,000.

But up-and-coming New Zealand all-rounder Rachin Ravindra failed to arouse much interest, with Chennai paying an

underwhelming \$216,000 for his services.

Former Australia skipper Steve Smith went unsold in the first round, along with fellow wicket-keeper Josh Inglis.

More than 300 players were up for grabs at yesterday's auction for the cash-rich tournament, likely to be held from March next year.

The IPL is a huge earner for Indian cricket and the tournament makes more than \$11 billion for the economy each year, according to pre-pandemic estimates.

Last June, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) sold the broadcast rights for the next five IPL seasons to global media giants for an eye-watering \$6.2 billion.

Mumbai Indians are the richest and most successful side in IPL history, with five titles to their name.

Attracting some of world cricket's top stars with bumper salaries, the pioneering IPL helped make Twenty20 hugely popular, attracting hundreds of millions of viewers and spawning copycat events worldwide.

This year, the BCCI staged its inaugural women's edition of the T20 tournament, earning nearly \$700 million in combined franchise and media rights.

## Shadab dropped for New Zealand T20s as Pakistan look to future



Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi (2R) celebrates with teammates after taking a wicket (file photo)

AFP | Karachi

Spinning all-rounder Shadab Khan was left out of a 17-man squad announced yesterday for the Twenty20 internationals in New Zealand as Pakistan look to build back ahead of the World Cup.

Shadab disappointed with just two wickets and 121 runs from six World Cup (50 overs) matches in India in November before injuring an ankle in domestic competition.

"We have given chances to players who have done well in the domestic tournament as we want to build a good back-up for the Twenty20 World Cup," chief selector Wahab Riaz said while announcing the squad.

The Twenty20 World Cup will be held in the West Indies and the United States in June

next year.

Fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi will skipper the side after Babar Azam stepped down as captain in all three formats following Pakistan's exit from the 50-over World Cup.

The five-match New Zealand series will be played on January 12 (Auckland), January 14 (Hamilton), January 17 (Dunedin) and January 19 and 21 (Christchurch).

The squad includes wicketkeeper-batter Haseebullah Khan, fast bowler Abbas Afridi, and spinners Abrar Ahmed and Usama Mir, who have not played Twenty20 internationals before.

Sahibzada Farhan, who played three T20 internationals in 2018, earns a recall after being the top scorer in the last three editions of the national Twenty20 competition.

## Button expects Hamilton to bounce back 'with the right car'

AFP | London

Former Formula One world champion Jenson Button says his old teammate Lewis Hamilton needs "the right car" to return to the front of the grid next season with Red Bull favourites again to clean up in 2024.

For the second year running, Mercedes driver Hamilton failed to win a grand prix as Max Verstappen won 19 of the 22 races with Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez taking two of the other three.

"Red Bull are going to be at the front again next year," Button told AFP.

"They had a strong car this year and they've been able to work on next year's car.

"The thing is, if you just look at the results of the race, you go 'Oh Max Verstappen won again' but when you actually watch the races, there have been some amazing races this year.

"Max hasn't had it all his own way. He's come out on top in the end but there have been some great fights this season.

"I have enjoyed the year. Would I like more people winning? Yes of course. But it's just not happened."

Button, who has just announced a return to full-time racing in 2024 with the World Endurance Championship, knows a thing or two about domination having won six of the first seven races in 2009, a start that launched him to the title with Brawn.



Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton (C) chats with former driver Jenson Button (file photo)



Lewis wouldn't race if he didn't think he wasn't good enough. Lewis is definitely good enough to win races and to win a championship -- with the right car

JENSON BUTTON

And he has an admiration for the single-mindedness with which Verstappen set about his business.

"I think Max has done such an amazing job," said Button.

"He's not put a foot wrong. He's obviously driving a good car, you don't win without a good car, but you've just got to

compare him to where his teammate was most races. It's a big difference.

"Going into 2024, Red Bull are still the favourites but I think the other teams will be a bit closer.

"It's not going to be easy to beat Max in a Red Bull if his head is in the right place."

## 'Definitely good enough'

One of those with realistic expectations of challenging Verstappen is seven-time champion Hamilton who will be 39 by the start of next season.

Can he legitimately expect to compete as he did in the thrilling and controversial 2021 title race?

"Lewis wouldn't race if he didn't think he wasn't good enough," says Button who shared a pit with Hamilton



Button, who has just announced a return to full-time racing in 2024 with the World Endurance Championship, knows a thing or two about domination having won six of the first seven races in 2009, a start that launched him to the title with Brawn

when they were both at McLaren.

"Lewis is definitely good enough to win races and to win a championship -- with the right car.

"Coming up against Max is difficult but if Lewis is in a car that suits him... I look forward to that fight.

"Hopefully we will see it before Lewis retires, he's definitely got the ability to do that."

Button, 43, will contest the full programme of eight races, including Le Mans, in the World Endurance Championship in the Hypercar category with Hertz Team JOTA driving a Porsche 963.

# Burger, De Zorzi take South Africa to ODI victory over India

Nandre Burger's impressive 3-30 restricts India to 211 despite half-centuries from Sudharsan and Rahul

● **De Zorzi's brilliant 119\* secures South Africa's eight-wicket win with 7.3 overs to spare**

AFP | Gqeberha

Left-arm fast bowler Nandre Burger and opening batsman Tony de Zorzi took South Africa to a series-leveling eight-wicket win in the second one-day international against India at St George's Park yesterday.

Burger, in his second one-day international, took three for 30 as India were bowled out for 211 despite half-centuries by Sai Sudharsan (62) and captain KL Rahul (56).

Dreadlocked left-handed De Zorzi, in his fourth appearance, made 119 not out – his maiden international century – as South Africa achieved victory with 7.3 overs to spare.

The result set up a series decider in Paarl on Thursday after India won the first match by eight wickets in Johannesburg



South Africa's Tony de Zorzi plays a shot

on Sunday.

The strongly-built Burger, 28, took advantage of an unusually well-grassed St George's Park pitch after South African captain

Aiden Markram won the toss and sent India in to bat.

"It was a tough wicket to bat on," said Rahul. "But a couple of us got set. If one of us

## Scorecard

South Africa 215 for 2 (de Zorzi 119\*, R Hendricks 52) beat India 211 (Sudharsan 62, Rahul 56, Burger 3-30) by 8 wickets

could have gone on to make a big hundred and control the innings we could have got 60 runs extra."

Burger generated consistent pace and occasional steep bounce. His fastest delivery was timed at 147km/h.

Opening batsman Sudharsan and Rahul batted sensibly in a third-wicket stand of 68 before Sudharsan was caught behind off a sharply-lifting ball from Lizaad Williams with the total on 114.

No other batsman could reach 20.

Mukesh Kumar and Arshdeep Singh posed problems with the new ball when Reeza Hendricks and De Zorzi started South Africa's innings. Hendricks was dropped at second slip by Rituraj Gaikwad off Kumar when he was on seven.

Hendricks went on to score 52



**Tony de Zorzi's century marks his maiden international century, a standout achievement in South Africa's series-leveling triumph**

in an opening stand of 130 with De Zorzi which took the hosts a long way towards victory.

"It was a much better all-round performance," said Markram. "It was still quite a tough wicket when the openers walked out. To put on a hundred partnership to set the game up was great."

Man of the match De Zorzi hit some powerful strokes in making his runs off 122 balls with nine fours and six sixes.

**PSG football club goalkeeper targeted in burglary**



Alexandre Letellier

AFP | Paris

Four burglars targeted the home of Paris Saint-Germain goalkeeper Alexandre Letellier early yesterday, threatening him and his wife, police and prosecutors said.

The burglars hit the wife of Letellier -- who is a substitute goalkeeper at Ligue 1 leaders PSG -- in the face and demanded jewellery and money as they threatened the couple with a knife, according to a police source.

Letellier's two young children were in the home at the time.

The alarm in the house located in Hardricourt, west of Paris, went off at 2:00 am (0100 GMT) and the couple tried to contact police by telephone.

"The alarm worked perfectly well and police intervened quickly as did the club's security service," a source close to the case said.

## Bulls shock Sixers, Timberwolves rally to beat Heat

AFP | Los Angeles

The Chicago Bulls withstood a 40-point double-double from Philadelphia star Joel Embiid on Monday to snap the 76ers' six-game NBA winning streak with a 108-104 victory.

Coby White scored 24 points and Nikola Vucevic added 23 for the Bulls, who saw a 12-point lead to start the fourth quarter whittled to one point on Tyrese Maxey's three-pointer with 33.2 seconds remaining.

DeMar DeRozan, who finished with 15 points, drained a trio of free-throws to give Chicago some breathing room, and reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Embiid came up empty on two possessions in the waning seconds.

Embiid added 14 rebounds to notch his 11th straight game of at least 30 points and 10 rebounds, but the Sixers could not maintain the momentum after racing to a 16-4 lead in the opening minutes.

"I think we kind of forgot our fundamentals," Embiid said. "I thought we made a pretty



Chicago's Nikola Vucevic shoots a lay up over Philadelphia 76ers star Joel Embiid

**"I think we kind of forgot our fundamentals. I thought we made a pretty good run. We came back in the game... we had opportunities, we fought. Just came up short"**

JOEL EMBIID

good run. We came back in the game... we had opportunities, we came back. We fought. Just came up short."

The Minnesota Timberwolves rallied late for a 112-108 victory over the Heat in Miami to match Boston for best record in the league at 20-5.

Anthony Edwards scored 32 points and Karl-Anthony Towns added 18 for the Timberwolves, who tightened the defensive screws in the second half to overcome an early 17-point deficit.

## Wembanyama to miss meeting with Bucks with sore ankle

AFP | Los Angeles

Victor Wembanyama's first clash with Giannis Antetokounmpo will have to wait after the San Antonio Spurs said their sensational rookie would miss the NBA game against the Milwaukee Bucks with a sore right ankle.

Wembanyama was listed as "out" for the game on the Spurs' injury report on Monday.

ESPN reported the 19-year-old French star, who was the number one pick in the NBA draft,



Victor Wembanyama

is not expected to miss much time.

The Spurs visit the Chicago Bulls on Thursday and the Dallas Mavericks on Saturday.

Wembanyama scored 17

points with 13 rebounds, four assists and four blocked shots in 31 minutes in San Antonio's blowout loss to the New Orleans Pelicans on Sunday.

In 24 games this season he has averaged 19 points, 11 rebounds and three blocked shots and has posted a double-double in his past eight games.

Yesterday marked just the second game Wembanyama has missed this season. He sat out a game against the Pelicans on December 1 with tightness in his right hip.

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# Manama edge past Al Najma

Ebrahim Al Khattal's second-half strike proves decisive in week nine affair in Nasser bin Hamad Bahrain Premier Football League

● **Facundo Agustin Tobares registers brace to help lift Manama to third win**

● **Hidd go ahead twice but Busaiteen equalise each time to forge 2-2 draw**

TDI | Manama



Manama's Ebrahim Al Khattal, right, and Al Najma's Issa Mousa vie for possession during their match last night

Manama posted a narrow 3-2 victory over Al Najma last night in their ninth week clash in the 2023/2024 Nasser bin Hamad Bahrain Premier Football League.

Two goals in the second half broke a 1-1 deadlock at the break and the victors held on after conceding a late penalty to come away with the hard-earned result.

Meanwhile, in yesterday's other fixture, Hidd and Busaiteen

played to a 2-2 stalemate. It was an affair between the league's two bottom sides.

Last night's matches wrapped up week nine's action.

Manama powered ahead in the 13th minute against Najma following a perfectly timed pass from their own half unleashed Facundo Agustin Tobares for a two-on-one against Najma goalkeeper Ashraf Waheed, and with

teammate Ebrahim Al Khattal on his right. Tobares opted to take the shot himself and he sent the ball into the bottom-right corner of goal from the left of the box.

Manama's celebrations were short lived, however, as Edimar Ribeiro Da Costa Junior levelled the scores just three minutes later. A shot by Najma's Abdulla Al Masaeed was uncleared by

Manama claimed their third win last night and improved to 11 points, although still remained in the bottom-half of the league table. Najma suffered their third loss but are still a point ahead of Manama

**Standings**

	P	W	D	L	+/-	Pts
Al Ahli	9	5	2	2	0	17
Al Khaldiya	9	3	5	1	8	14
East Riffa	9	4	2	3	1	14
Riffa	7	4	1	2	4	13
Muharraq	9	3	4	2	2	13
Al Najma	9	3	3	3	3	12
Sitra	8	3	3	2	0	12
Al Hala	9	4	0	5	-6	12
Manama	9	3	2	4	0	11
Al Shabab	8	2	2	4	-3	8
Hidd	9	2	2	5	-4	8
Busaiteen	9	1	4	4	-5	7

Manama goalkeeper Fayez Al Rashidi, and Da Costa Junior pounced on the opportunity, tapping in from close range. That forged the tie at the interval.

Just 10 minutes after the restart, Manama regained the lead and Tobares was again on target. He slotted home after some porous Najma defending, finally beating Waheed who had made a number of impressive saves until that point.

Al Khattal then virtually sealed the win in the 70th minute, scoring Manama's third

points, although still remained in the bottom-half of the league table. Najma suffered their third loss and stayed a point ahead of Manama.

In last night's other match, Hidd took the lead in the 21st minute through Jacques Medina Iemopele, who scored from close range. Just two minutes later, Busaiteen were awarded a spot kick for a handball violation in the box. Robson Da Silva stepped forward to take the shot and he sent the ball into bottom-left corner of goal.

Hidd were in front once again in the 30th minute after Hisham Ahmed Mansour scored following a scramble in the box. But Busaiteen were later given another penalty in the 55th minute following a foul by goalkeeper Mohsen Ali Yousef, and Robson again took the shot and made no mistake with his effort.

Following the draw, Hidd improved to eight points from nine games, and Busaiteen went to seven markers—still as the league's bottom teams.

## Bahrain beat Morocco in handball friendly

TDI | Manama

Bahrain's senior men's national handball team defeated their counterparts from Morocco 28-22 last night in a friendly game played at the Bahrain Handball Association arena in Um Al Hassam.

The tune-up was part of the Bahrainis' preparations for the 21st Asian Men's Handball Championship, which is set to be hosted by the Kingdom from 11 to 25 January next year.

The two sides were tied at 13-all at the interval, but the hosts stepped it up in the final 30 minutes to come away with the win.

Yesterday's contest was the first of two friendlies between Bahrain and Morocco this week. They meet again tomorrow evening at the same venue.

The games with the Moroccans follow the nationals' two



Bahrain's Mujtaba Al Zaimour goes for goal during their friendly match against Morocco last night

friendlies against Iraq held last week, both of which they won.

Following these fixtures, the Bahrainis travel to Nantes in France for an international friendly tournament that also features Brazil and Tunisia from 4 to 6 January.

The 21st Asian Men's Handball Championship also acts as a qualifier for 2025 IHF World Men's Handball Championship. There are a total of 16 nations in the competition, with the top four securing places at the worlds.

The tournament is being hosted by Bahrain for the fourth time in its history, adding to the 2016, 2014 and 1993 events. The Bahrainis have never won the title, but have claimed the silver medals five times in the past and also won the bronze medal once.

Bahrain are in Group D for the preliminary round along with the UAE, Hong Kong and Kazakhstan.

## Dar Kulaib survive tough Al Nasser challenge



Dar Kulaib's Abdulla Mohammed goes for an attack against Al Nasser during their Top Six clash

● **Defending champions need maximum five sets to defeat rivals, maintain unbeaten record**

TDI | Manama

Defending champions Dar Kulaib survived a tough challenge from Al Nasser in their second week match of the Top Six round in the 2023/2024 Isa bin Rashid Bahrain Volleyball League.

The title holders were taken to the maximum in the clash and needed to fight back from an early deficit to win with a final score 3-2 (22-25, 25-18, 25-16, 32-34, 15-10) score line.

Dar Kulaib's Bahrain national team star Mohammed Yaqoob finished as the game's top performer with a season-high 34 points, six of which came defensively with blocks.

Mahmoud Abdulwahed added 23 points, while Hassan Alaiwi had 16 and Abdul-

la Mohammed finished with eight. Dar Kulaib maintained their unbeaten record after just two games in this stage of the competition, following their previous triumph against Al Najma.

For a battling Nasser, Ebrahim Mohammed finished with 18 points as their leading scorer. Yousef Ali added 14 while Mohammed Omar chipped in with 10. Nasser suffered their second successive defeat. They lost their opening Top Six encounter against Nabih Saleh.

Action in the Top Six continues on Saturday and Sunday with the third matchday. On Saturday, Nasser are back on the playing court when they take on Al Ahli, as are Dar Kulaib who will be going up against Muharraq. On Sunday, Nabih Saleh face Najma in the evening's lone fixture.

The Top Six of the league is being held in a double round-robin. The first round continues until the first week of next month, with the second round still to be scheduled by the Bahrain Volleyball Association.

## Messi to face boyhood club Newell's in friendly

AFP | Miami

Lionel Messi is expected to line-up against his boyhood club Newell's Old Boys after the Argentine team agreed to a pre-season friendly game at Inter Miami in February.

The Major League Soccer club announced on Monday that they would host Newell's at their DRV PNK Stadium on February 15.

Newell's are based in the city of Rosario where Messi was born and grew up, playing for their youth team before moving to Spanish club Barcelona aged 13.

Inter coach Gerardo 'Tata' Martino also hails from the city and played for the club in three



Inter Miami's Argentine forward #10 Lionel Messi runs with the ball

spells before returning as the team's coach in 2012.

"I am delighted to welcome my beloved Newell's to our

home here in Miami. It will be a special match due to everything Newell's Old Boys means to me," Martino said.



**I am delighted to welcome my beloved Newell's to our home here in Miami. It will be a special match due to everything Newell's Old Boys means to me**

INTER COACH GERARDO 'TATA' MARTINO

"It will also be a good opportunity to prepare for what will surely be an exciting season," he added.

The fixture is the latest in a busy pre-season schedule for Miami who will kick-off the preparations by facing the El Salvador national team in San Salvador on January 19.