

## Winter is coming

TDT | Manama

It's official: winter is here. The General Authority of Meteorology says Bahrain could start experiencing a cold wave soon.

In the northern and central areas, people can expect a significant drop in temperatures, which may reach as low as 12°C.

Meteorological data also confirms that the most substantial impact will be felt in the highlands, where active northwesterly winds are expected to reach speeds of up to 80 km/h. The authority has also issued a warning about the potential formation of frost at night, particularly in exposed areas.

The cold wave is forecast to last until the end of the week, with rain also likely in the southern regions.



## UAE says will not arm Sudan paramilitary RSF: White House

Washington, United States

The United Arab Emirates has informed the United States that it will not arm paramilitaries in Sudan's brutal civil war, US lawmakers quoted the White House as saying on Thursday.

The assurance came as the United States announced \$200 million in new aid for Sudan, one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters where tens of thousands have died in fighting since April 2023.

Two US lawmakers said the UAE pledged to address their concerns and that, as a result, they would drop their attempt to block \$1.2 billion in sales of advanced rockets and long-range missiles to the Gulf country.



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**The Nakba Never Ends**

Palestinian children help push a car as people evacuate from their homes with their belongings, after received evacuation orders from the Israeli military, at the Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip, amid the ongoing war between Israel and the Palestinian Hamas movement.

## Israel media report accuses troops of indiscriminate killing of Gaza civilians

Jerusalem, Undefined

A leading Israeli newspaper, citing unnamed soldiers serving in Gaza, described indiscriminate killings of Palestinian civilians in the territory's Netzarim Corridor, prompting a firm rejection Friday from the military.

Haaretz, a left-leaning Israeli daily that has faced severe criticism from the country's right-wing government, quoted soldiers, career officers and reservists who said commanders were given unprecedented authority to operate in the Gaza Strip.

They alleged commanders had ordered or allowed the killing of unarmed women, children and men in the Netzarim Corridor, a seven-kilometre-wide (4.3-mile-wide) strip of land that cuts across Gaza from Israel to the Mediterranean, and which has been turned into a military zone.

The report quoted an officer who recalled an incident in which a commander had announced that 200 militants were killed, when actually "only 10 were confirmed as known Hamas operatives".

Soldiers meanwhile told Haaretz they received questionable orders to open fire on "anyone who enters" Netzarim.

"Anyone crossing the line is a t\*\*\*\*\* -- no exceptions, no civilians. Everyone's a t\*\*\*\*\*," a soldier quoted a battalion commander as saying.

The soldiers also described how division commanders received "expanded powers" allowing them to bomb buildings or launch air strikes that previously required approval from the army's top echelons.



A man carries the body of a boy, killed in an Israeli strike at Al-Maghazi refugee camp

# Big Boost for Salman City

H Naser  
TDT | Manama

A BD 2.3 million commercial development project is set to commence in Salman City early next year.

The project, spanning five plots of land and covering 14,000 square metres, will be undertaken by Yusuf Al Zayani Trading and Contracting Company, as confirmed by Basim Abu Idris, representative of the Northern Governorate's second constituency.

Abu Idris stated that preparations are well underway, with fi-



nal paperwork being processed between the contracting company and the relevant authorities to ensure construction begins

in 2025.

The development will include waterfront restaurants, a supermarket, a fitness centre, and various retail shops, with a total built-up area of approximately 5,000 square metres.

This initiative follows a tender issued by the Housing Bank in August, which attracted bids from ten construction and contracting firms. Yusuf Al Zayani Trading and Contracting Company was ultimately chosen to lead the project, which is expected to enhance commercial opportunities and amenities in Salman City.

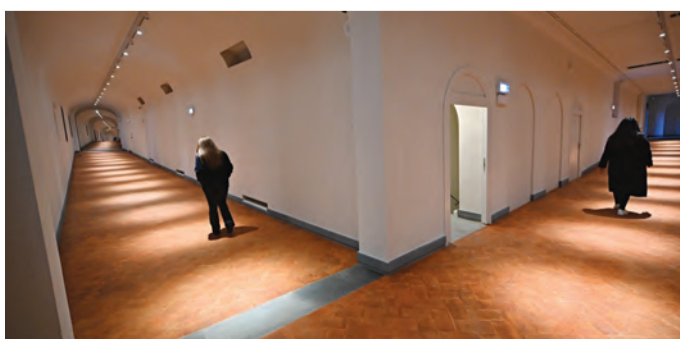
## Step into history

## Medici secret passageway in Florence reopens after refit

AFP | Florence, Italy

A secret passageway built 500 years ago to allow the Medici family to pass through the Italian city of Florence unhindered reopens to the public Saturday after an 10-million-euro restoration.

The Vasari Corridor, which is more than 700 metres (nearly half a mile) long and runs above the famous Ponte Vecchio, has



A view of the interior of the Vasari Corridor gallery, in the center of Florence

been closed for eight years.

Designed in 1565 by Giorgio Vasari, a commission by Duke Cosimo I to mark his son's wedding, the corridor begins at what is now the Uffizi Galleries and ends up in the Pitti Palace across the Arno river.

Its 73 windows offer unrivalled views over the city centre, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and will now finally be accessible to the general public.

# Farewell finally: 76-Year-Old laid to rest after nine-month wait

H Naser  
TDT | Manama

A 76-year-old Arab national, who passed away nine months ago, has finally been laid to rest after a prolonged delay caused by the lack of identification documents.

According to lawyer Amani Hamid, the man had been a resident of Bahrain for over 40 years. He died on January 20, 2024, at Salmaniya Medical Complex but



Lawyer Amani Hamid

*The man, who worked in construction and had no family in Bahrain, had been living without documentation for years.*

had no official identification, as all his papers had been lost.

The man, who worked in construction and had no family in Bahrain, had been living without documentation for years. In his final months, he contacted a

close Bahraini friend to inform him of a tumor in his left hip, as noted in a police report. He was later admitted to Salmaniya Medical Complex under a false identity.

After his death, efforts to lo-

cate his family were unsuccessful. However, a relative residing in another Gulf state was eventually traced and traveled to Bahrain. The relative initiated legal proceedings to obtain a death certificate and claim the

body.

The court case, involving the Information and eGovernment Authority, resulted in a court order requiring the issuance of a death certificate and the official registration of the death.

After nearly nine months, the man was finally buried, underscoring the challenges faced by individuals living without proper identification and the crucial role family members play in such situations.

# Mother leaves country with daughter, court grants custody to father

H Naser  
TDT | Manama

A Bahraini court has ruled to revoke a mother's custody of her five-year-old daughter following a prolonged custody

dispute with the child's father. The father, seeking legal action, complained that the mother had left Bahrain in 2023



Picture for representation only



Lawyer Khalil Ebrahim

had created significant obstacles for the father in exercising his parental rights. The ruling also cited the logistical and administrative difficulties in ensuring the child's well-being from a different country.

In addition, the court highlighted the mother's failure to comply with the order to return to the marital home and her absence for over a year as key factors in its decision.

Consequently, the court ruled to strip the mother of custody and granted full custody of the child to the father.

without returning, thereby preventing him from exercising his parental rights.

Lawyer Khalil Ebrahim, representing the father, explained that his client had secured a court order demanding that the mother return to their marital home. When this order was ignored, a second ruling was made preventing the child from leaving the country.

However, investigations by the Ministry of Interior's Immigration and Passports Department revealed that the mother and daughter had already left Bahrain in January 2023, months before the travel ban was issued.

The court, while acknowledging the daughter's legal custody by the mother, noted that her departure to another Gulf country

# Two sentenced for human trafficking and exploitation of restaurant worker

H Naser  
TDT | Manama

A 35-year-old businessman and a 25-year-old supervisor, both Asian nationals, have been sentenced by the High Criminal Court to three years in prison and a fine of 2,000 Bahraini dinars each for human trafficking and exploiting a restaurant worker. The court also ordered them to cover the costs of repatriating the victim.

The two defendants were charged with trafficking a woman who was brought to Bahrain on a tourist visa under false pretenses. They were accused of forcing her into servitude by receiving, transporting, and sheltering her under duress, involv-

ing physical assault and threats, with the intent of exploiting her for forced labour. The victim was made to work long hours without pay and under poor conditions, and was coerced into engaging with customers, some of whom were allowed to harass her.

The supervisor was additionally charged with stealing the victim's passport, which had been entrusted to her. According to the victim's testimony, she had been recruited by the supervisor for a waitress job where her pay depended solely on customer tips. She explained that she was forced to interact with customers inappropriately, including physical contact and phone calls, to boost tips. When

she resisted, she was assaulted, and her phone was confiscated. The victim eventually managed to escape, and two other women provided similar accounts of exploitation.

A police investigator testified that the defendants had been involved in bringing women to Bahrain under false promises of waitressing jobs. These roles, however, provided no base salary and required women to work up to 12 hours a day without rest days, solely relying on tips. Their passports were also confiscated. The investigator further explained that the victim was lured to Bahrain with promises of a waitressing job, only to be subjected to forced labour and denied the ability to return home.

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# Hiring hiccups

Parliament calls for reform after finding flaws in workforce management and Bahrainisation compliance



Hisham Al Awadhi

Abdulla Al Dhaen, MP

- Investigations reveal ministries failing to meet Bahrainisation targets within individual contracts, bypassing legal requirements.

- Reliance on temporary contracts, outsourcing, and rehiring retirees undermines local workforce opportunities.

- Lawmakers criticise repeated contract renewals with the same suppliers, creating long-term dependencies on external firms.

- The parliamentary committee urges stricter enforcement of hiring laws, including penalties for non-compliance and transparency in staffing decisions.

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

In a growing storm of controversy, lawmakers are raising their voices against what they describe as a series of alarming inconsistencies in the handling of workforce contracts across Bahrain's ministries.

From repeated supplier renewals to inconsistent Bahraini-

The committee also noted that some ministries repeatedly renewed contracts with the same suppliers, leading to a long-term dependence on external firms.

The Civil Service Bureau (CSB), central to the investigation, reviewed 1,227 labour supply requests between 2020 and November 2023

One concern highlighted was the funding of contracts through project budgets rather than operational funds, which risks distorting the state's financial planning.

Some ministries defended their use of third-party contractors, citing recruitment challenges and skill shortages.

sation quotas and the questionable use of public funds, ministries are under fire for practices that have left many puzzled and concerned.

A detailed investigation by a parliamentary committee has uncovered a disturbing trend: ministries are heavily relying on temporary contracts, outsourcing vital services, and even rehiring retired government employees.

In doing so, they are often bypassing legal safeguards—while persistently reporting staffing shortages.

The probe, launched in November 2023, casts a critical eye on how ministries and state-run companies have been handling hiring, procurement, and Bahrainisation compliance.

Lawmakers asked: Are the rules being followed when it comes to hiring? Are ministries assessing staffing needs before outsourcing? And, most impor-

tantly, is the contract process transparent and fair?

#### The Concerns

The inquiry revealed several recurring issues.

One concern highlighted was the funding of contracts through project budgets rather than operational funds, which risks distorting the state's financial planning. This shift has made development spending appear higher than it actually is.

#### Long-Term Reliance

The committee also noted that some ministries repeatedly renewed contracts with the same suppliers, leading to a long-term dependence on external firms. This was particularly evident in IT, consultancy, and security services, raising questions about whether some "temporary" contracts had effectively turned into permanent arrangements.

#### Deprived Bahraini Jobs

The committee pointed out

that the reliance on temporary, part-time, and outsourced roles deprived many Bahraini workers of stable employment benefits, such as salaries and long-term job security. It specifically mentioned how ministries were outsourcing tasks like security and IT maintenance—areas where a locally trained workforce could potentially be employed.

#### Third-Party Contractors

Some ministries defended their use of third-party contractors, citing recruitment challenges and skill shortages. The Ministry of Works, for example, reported an 86% Bahrainisation rate, explaining that foreign workers were hired only when no suitable Bahraini candidates were available. Similarly, the Ministry of Health noted the need to hire overseas professionals for specialised medical roles but assured that all sup-

pliers adhered to Bahrainisation certification rules.

#### The Loophole

However, the committee found a significant loophole: current laws only require Bahrainisation targets to be met across a company's entire workforce, not within individual contracts. This allowed some suppliers to meet legal quotas on paper while employing fewer Bahrainis on government projects. The committee recommended that Bahrainisation standards be applied on a contract-by-contract basis and that non-compliance be penalised with fines rather than administrative fees.

#### Rehiring Retired Employees

The committee also raised concerns over ministries rehiring retired government employees through third-party suppliers, effectively bypassing the rules of Bahrain's voluntary retirement scheme. In some cases, retirees returned to their former

roles under new contracts, despite official restrictions against such practices.

#### CSB Helpless

The Civil Service Bureau (CSB), central to the investigation, reviewed 1,227 labour supply requests between 2020 and November 2023, covering consultancy, specialist roles, and support services such as maintenance and cleaning. However, the CSB clarified that its approval was only preliminary, with the power to finalise contracts resting solely with the relevant ministries.

#### Points System

The committee also proposed awarding suppliers' additional points when bidding if they exceeded Bahrainisation targets, taking inspiration from Bapco's tendering approach. It urged ministries to provide clear justifications for staff shortages before outsourcing roles and recommended reinstating essential but previously eliminated positions, such as drivers, security guards, and maintenance staff, to reduce reliance on external suppliers.

#### Call for Deeper Reform

In conclusion, the parliamentary committee acknowledged some progress in hiring Bahraini staff but emphasised that deeper reforms were needed to ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability in public-sector hiring. It called for the implementation of the National Audit Office's recommendations from the past three years and for stronger laws governing Bahrain's workforce contracts.

*The probe, launched in November 2023, casts a critical eye on how ministries and state-run companies have been handling hiring, procurement, and Bahrainisation compliance.*

# 186 import violations in 2024, MOIC reveals



**H Naser**  
TDT | Manama

The Bahraini Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC) has identified 186 violations related to the importation of products that failed to meet required technical regulations and standards in 2024.

In response to a query from Shura Council member Leena Kassim, the MOIC explained that the Inspection and Metrology

Directorate is tasked with ensuring compliance both at borders and within the domestic market.

"Non-compliant goods are seized, and retailers are required to remove these products from the market through re-exportation, destruction, or recycling," the Ministry stated.

Additionally, the Ministry ensures that retailers are educated on the risks and responsibilities of handling non-compliant

products. "These awareness campaigns target both businesses and consumers, making sure everyone understands the necessary procedures and standards for importing and selling products."

The MOIC also works closely with the Gulf Cooperation Council Standardisation Organisation (GSO) to issue conformity certificates and partners with other governmental bodies like the Ministry of Works, the Electricity and Water Au-

thority (EWA), and the Supreme Council for the Environment to handle licensing and regulatory matters. Close collaboration with customs officials further ensures effective border control.

In addition, the Ministry actively participates in the GCC's rapid alert system, "Urgent", for the recall of products deemed harmful to health and safety, based on reports from manufacturers, the GSO, or other reliable sources.

## Court sentences woman to three years for human trafficking and forced labour

*The victim was forced to work without compensation in harsh conditions*



**H Naser**  
TDT | Manama

The High Criminal Court has sentenced a woman to three years in prison and imposed a fine of 2,000 Bahraini dinars after finding her guilty of trafficking a young woman for forced labor. The court also ordered her to cover the expenses of repatriating the victim to her home country.

The case began after the Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) reported the defendant's exploitation of the victim, who was forced to work without compensation in harsh conditions. The victim

was subjected to long hours of labour without rest or proper working conditions.

Following the LMRA's report, the Public Prosecution launched an immediate investigation. The victim's testimony, along with witness statements and police investigations, led to the defendant's referral to trial. During the investigation, the victim was placed in a shelter operated by the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking.

The court's verdict underscores Bahrain's commitment to combating human trafficking and protecting workers' rights.

## ISB Annual Cultural Fair 2024 kicks off with enthusiastic turnout



**TDT | Manama**

The first day of the ISB Annual Cultural Fair 2024 saw a lively and vibrant turnout of parents, students, teachers, and well-wishers at the Indian School grounds in Isa Town. The Fair was officially inaugurated by Indian Ambassador Vinod K. Jacob.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by several dignitaries, including Ministry of Labour Assistant Undersecretary Ahmed Al Hayki, Private Education Director Lulwa Ghassan Al Muhanna, Director of Risk Assessment and Legal Affairs

(Ministry of Education) Reem Abodh Al Sanaei, General Directorate of Traffic Captain Khulood Yahya Ebrahim, Lt. Gen.

Shaikha Ahood Abdulla Ahmed Khalifa, BKG Holding and Qatar Engineering Laboratories Chairman & General Manager

KG Baburajan, Amad Baeed Electrical Managing Director Pambavasan Nair, ICRF Chairman Adv. VK Thomas, ISB Chairman



Adv. Binu Mannil Varughese, Secretary V. Rajapandian, Star Vision Events Chairman & CEO Sethuraj Kadakkal, Vice-Chairman & Member HSSE and Sports Dr. Mohammed Faizal, Assistant Secretary & Hon. Member-Academics Ranjini Mohan, Member - Projects & Maintenance Mithun Mohan, Member Biju George, Member - Transport Mohammad Nayaz Ullah, Principal VR Palaniswamy, Junior Wing Principal Pamela Xavier, and Fair Organising Committee General Convener Vipin Kumar.

In his speech, Ambassador Vinod K. Jacob commended the achievements of Indian School

students, specifically noting their enthusiastic participation in the Bharat Ko Janiye quiz contest organized by the Ministry of External Affairs, India. Of the 8,000 registrations from Bahrain, 3,200 were from Indian School.

The audience was also treated to an energetic performance by singer Vineeth Sreenivasan and his team, who entertained the crowd with lively tunes. As the fair continues on Friday, excitement builds for the upcoming North Indian musical performances led by musician and singer Tia Kar, along with more cultural displays and activities.

# Over BD100 Million in tenders launched for public projects

● **The Hussain Ali Yateem Health Centre and Abu Subh Coastal Development project draw strong interest, with competitive bids reflecting the government's commitment to expanding healthcare and enhancing the coastline.**

● **Other notable tenders include community sports facilities, airport maintenance, consultancy services, and upgrades to Al Awali Hospital, alongside projects aimed at beautification and improving public services.**

**H Naser**  
TDT | Manama

**B**ahrain's Tender Board has launched a significant round of tenders, marking a key investment in infrastructure, healthcare, and public services, with a combined value estimated at over BD 100 million. A total of 54 bids were submitted across 13 tenders from nine government entities.

The construction of the Hussain Ali Yateem Health Centre in Salman City, which received five bids, is set to advance Bahrain's healthcare services. The lowest bid for the project was BD 8,319,000. The Abu Subh Coastal

Development Project also garnered significant interest, with ten bids submitted, the lowest being BD 57,000, reflecting the government's commitment to enhancing Bahrain's coastline.

The government is also investing in community sports facilities, evidenced by five bids for the construction of a sports field in Al Aker, the lowest at BD 27,000. Gulf Air Group received a bid of BD 2,380,000 for cleaning high-rise buildings and facades at Bahrain International Airport, demonstrating attention to the airport's aes-

thetics and safety. Additionally, three companies competed for the air conditioning and mechanical equipment maintenance contract at the airport, with the lowest bid standing at BD 5,400,000.

Other key tenders included Tamkeen's marketing services tender (eight bids, lowest BD 2,875), Bahrain International Circuit's freight forwarding tender (one bid, BD 115,000), consultancy services for the Sakhr Sports City design (one bid, BD 105,000), and the construction and upgrade of Al Awali Hos-

pital's Southeast Wing (Bapco tender, six bids, lowest BD 1,299,000).

Additional tenders focused on consultancy services for the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (seven bids, lowest BD 45,000), the Southern Governorate Municipality's agricultural workforce tender (one bid, BD 192,000), transportation services for government hospitals (three bids, lowest BD 418,000), and the beautification of the Crown Prince Roundabout (Ministry of Municipalities Affairs, three bids, lowest BD 310,000).

# Lifesaver

Shura Council to vote on bill to liberalise Bahrain's pharmacy sector

● **New legislation could allow unlimited pharmacy openings**

● **Competition is expected to lower drug prices**

**Mohammed Darwish**  
TDT | Manama

**M**edicines are to get cheaper and easily available in Bahrain, for plans are progressing swiftly to liberalise Bahrain's pharmacy sector.

If a new bill is approved, individuals and companies—both local and multinational—will be able to open an unlimited number of pharmacies across the Kingdom.

This change aims to eliminate queues for medicines while providing cheaper alternatives.

The reform involves scrapping a decades-old rule that limits pharmacy licenses.

Shura Council members are



According to NHRA's 2023 report, Bahrain now has 4,211 registered medicines, and the pharmacy inspection team licensed 51 new pharmacies, bringing the total to 434—a 6% increase from the previous year.

leading the charge to remove these restrictions.

Chances for a positive outcome is high, the Services Committee has already given the proposal its approval.

Next Sunday will be crucial, as on that day Shura members will deliberate whether to reject or approve the bill.

**More stores, cheap drugs**

Officials believe the move will expand the reach of drugstores and bring down medicine prices.

The general notion is that the new decision will foster competition, improve accessibility, and ensure fair pricing.

The Services Committee's approval follows extensive consultations with top health officials,

industry representatives, and legal advisers. The draft law proposes the removal of Article 28 of Decree-Law No. 18 of 1997.

**Attracting multinationals**

The Ministry of Health says the deregulation will help attract international drug firms to the Kingdom, providing Bahrainis with a wider and more affordable range of medicines.

"This shift ensures that as new cities emerge and populations grow, access to pharmacies will remain steady," said Health Minister Dr. Jaleela bint Al Sayed Jawad Hasan.

**Chamber cautious**

While the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Indus-

try welcomes the reforms, it has urged measures to protect local pharmacies from being overshadowed by larger players. The Chamber also highlighted the need to monitor profit margins and long-term financial impacts, calling for additional studies to ensure market stability.

It said a more open field might reduce disputes and bring in clearer ground rules.

**Pharmas' hopeful, wary**

The Bahrain Pharmacists Society expressed a mix of hope and caution. The Society believes the reforms could elevate healthcare standards, create more jobs for local pharmacists, and stimulate the pharmaceutical trade.

However, they warned that fewer regulations might prioritise high-profit medicines over essential drugs, potentially harming public access. There are also concerns that large chains could dominate the market, marginalising smaller pharmacies and reducing consumer choice.

## MPs to vote on Digital Cooperation Charter



**Mohammed Darwish**  
TDT | Manama

**B**ahrain's standing in the world of digital cooperation is set for debate next Tuesday when Parliament votes on a proposed law to ratify the Digital Cooperation Organisation charter, formally securing the kingdom's place as a founding member.

The proposed law seeks to reinforce Bahrain's role in shaping international digital policy while strengthening ties with tech-focused nations. If approved, it will pave the way for deeper collaboration on digital projects, expanded support for entrepreneurs, and improved access to online services across member states.

The Digital Cooperation Organisation was formed in 2020 by Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, and Pakistan, and now counts 16 countries among its members. Riyadh serves as its permanent headquarters, while Bahrain held the organisation's council leadership in 2023. The kingdom helped launch major initiatives such as the 'Digital Prosperity Awards' and the 'UN Friends Group for Digital Cooperation.'

The proposed law, linked to Decree No. (87) of 2024, was referred to the Public Utilities and Environment Committee in October. After two rounds

of discussion, the committee completed its review in early December and recommended its approval.

The legislation includes two key points: ratifying the organisation's charter and setting the rules for Bahrain's role in its operations. The charter outlines the group's mission, leadership structure, and governance procedures across 19 articles.

The Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications confirmed that Bahrain's financial obligation will be limited to a \$50,000 annual membership fee. The ministry stressed the importance of international cooperation on digital policy, pointing out that the organisation's work on cross-border technology issues matches Bahrain's ambitions in the tech sector.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also backed the proposal, describing the charter as a step toward strengthening Bahrain's global partnerships while enhancing its role in the digital economy. It confirmed that the kingdom would only be liable for the annual membership fee, with no added costs.

Parliament's Public Utilities committee approved it unanimously, describing it as an opportunity to boost Bahrain's influence in the global tech community.

## Parliamentary Committee approves Bapco renaming amid Energy Reforms

**Mohammed Darwish**  
TDT | Manama

**P**arliament's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee has approved a measure to rename Bahrain Petroleum Company as 'Bapco Refinery, a Bahrain Shareholding Company (Closed) (B.S.C.)', part of a broader effort to keep the firm's identity in step with its parent company, Bapco Energies.

The change, enacted through Royal Decree-Law No. (19) of 2023, was referred to the committee for review.

Officials explained that the new name was necessary to unify the identities of companies

under Bapco Energies, which itself underwent a rebranding last year. They added that updates to Bapco Refining's bylaws were overdue, given the company's expanded role in refining, trading, and exporting energy products.

Parliament was assured that all previous obligations tied to Bapco's old name, whether legal or contractual, would remain intact under the new framework.

Under the new framework, Bapco Refining will keep its headquarters in Awali, with the flexibility to open branches abroad. The company's financial structure also remains robust, with an authorised capital of BHD 755 million and issued and

paid-up capital of BHD 320 million, divided into 320 shares valued at BHD 1 million each.

The decree also paves the way for operational changes, including the restructuring of Awali Hospital. Now managed by Awali Hospital Company, an independent entity, the facility remains majority-owned by Bapco Refining. Bahraini employees transitioned smoothly to new contracts while retaining their previous benefits. Meanwhile, expatriate staff were offered revised terms, and the hospital is expected to increase its Bahraini workforce in the coming years.

Another recent move involved the sale of a small stake in Bap-

co Refining to the American investment giant BlackRock for \$4.6 million. Officials described the deal as a step towards raising the company's international profile. However, speculation about a potential public share offering has been firmly dismissed, with no plans to list the company on any stock exchange.

Bapco Refining's workforce has also seen adjustments, with 532 Bahrainis hired since the start of its refinery expansion project, while more than 300 foreign workers have been let go. Additional reductions in expatriate staff are expected as the company continues to favour Bahraini talent.

QUOTE OF THE DAY  
IN LIFE, AS IN CHESS, FORETHOUGHT WINS  
CHARLES BUXTON

TODAY IN HISTORY

1898  
Scientists Pierre and Marie Curie discover radium

1968  
First manned Moon voyage launched with Frank Borman, Jim Lovell and William Anders aboard Apollo 8

1988  
Lockerbie disaster: A terrorist bomb destroys Pan Am Flight 103 mid-air, over Scotland; killing all 259 passengers and crew on board, and 11 people on the ground

1991  
Soviet Union formally dissolves as 11 of 12 republics sign treaty forming the Commonwealth of Independent States

News in brief

Macron extends visit cyclone-hit Mayotte after locals vent anger  
French President Emmanuel Macron extended his visit to cyclone-devastated Mayotte yesterday after angry residents vented exasperation and despair over the scale of the disaster. Locals jeered and shouted their grievances Thursday during Macron's visit to the Indian Ocean archipelago, five days after Cyclone Chido left a trail of destruction in its wake.

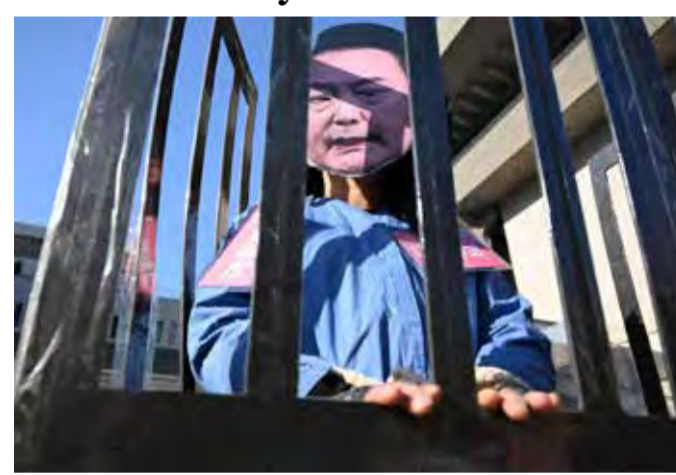
"I decided to sleep here because I considered that given what the population is going through," leaving the same day could have "installed the idea that we come, we look, we leave," he told reporters late Thursday.

China's ruling Communist Party used an agent in California to influence state politics, US prosecutors said Thursday as they unveiled criminal charges against a Chinese national. FBI agents arrested Yaoning "Mike" Sun, 64, at his home in Chino Hills, near Los Angeles, on charges that he acted as an agent for a foreign government while getting involved in local politics. The complaint claims Sun served as the campaign manager and close confidante for an unnamed politician who was running for local elected office in 2022.

Japan inspects US air base over chemical spill  
Japanese authorities yesterday staged an inspection of a US military base in Tokyo, a government spokesman said, after being informed by the American side of a chemical leak. Japan's probe at the Yokota Air Base followed a US notice two months ago that water containing PFOS -- classified by the World Health Organisation as "possibly carcinogenic to humans" -- had spilled from the site. PFOS is part of a large group of man-made chemicals known as PFAS, sometimes called "forever chemicals" because they do not degrade easily, experts say.

SPOTLIGHT

South Korea probe team issues Christmas Day summons for Yoon



A protester wearing a mask of impeached South Korea President Yoon Suk Yeol performs in a mock prison during a demonstration

Investigators probing suspended South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol over his foiled martial law bid yesterday ordered him to appear before the country's corruption watchdog on Christmas Day -- after he snubbed a previous summons this week.

Conservative leader Yoon was stripped of his duties by parliament last weekend following his short-lived December 3 martial law declaration, which plunged the country into its worst political turmoil in decades.

Yoon faces impeachment and criminal charges of insurrection that could see him jailed for life, or even face the death penalty, over a drama that stunned democratic South Korea's allies around the world.

He is being investigated by prosecutors as well as a joint team of police, defence ministry and anti-corruption investigators.

"The Joint Investigation Headquarters has notified President Yoon Suk Yeol of a second summons request," the latter said in a statement yesterday.

AFP | Seoul

US House rejects shutdown averting bill

Republican infighting dooms funding bill, threatening government shutdown before Christmas

- Republican debt hawks opposed the bill
- Trump and Musk opposed the original bipartisan package
- Democrats refuse to support the Republican bill

AFP | Washington

The US House of Representatives on Thursday overwhelmingly rejected a Republican-led funding bill aimed at averting a government shutdown, with federal agencies due to run out of cash yesterday night and cease operations starting this weekend.

The contentious legislation would have kept the government open through mid-March and suspended the country's borrowing limit for President-elect Donald Trump's first two years in office.

But dozens of debt hawks in the Republican ranks -- unhappy about allowing the national debt to rise unchecked for half of Trump's term -- rebelled against their own leadership to sink the



US President-elect Donald Trump and Elon Musk watch the launch of a test flight of SpaceX Starship rocket (file photo)

package. It marked a defeat for the Republican leader, who with tech billionaire Elon Musk -- his incoming "efficiency czar" -- had thrown his weight behind the plan.

And with party leaders announcing no further votes in the House on Thursday, the race to keep the lights on and prevent 875,000 non-essential workers being sent home over Christmas without pay is set to go down to the wire.

The bill was supposed to fix a mammoth bipartisan package that Trump and Musk sabotaged on Wednesday amid conservatives' complaints about unrelated items in the text ballooning its overall cost.

But Democrats refused to support the Republican bill

They argued that the bill was too narrow and would not address the root causes of the debt problem.

Party leaders had landed on a stopgap bill -- known as a "continuing resolution" (CR) -- to keep operations functioning through mid-March.

Major Trump donor and ally Musk spent much of Wednesday bombarding his 208 million followers on X with posts trashing the deal, and amplifying complaints from debt hawks in the House who balked at numerous expensive add-ons shoehorned into the package.

Twelve hours later, Trump, who appeared to be playing catch-up, began threatening the reelection prospects of Republicans thinking of supporting it and demanding out of the blue that the bill increase or even scrap the country's debt limit.

Funding the government is always fraught and lawmakers are under pressure this time around because they failed to agree on full-year budgets for 2025 despite months of negotiations.

The... proposal is not serious, it's laughable. Extreme MAGA Republicans are driving us to a government shutdown

DEMOCRATIC MINORITY LEADER HAKEEM JEFFRIES

Elon Musk, the incoming "efficiency czar," publicly trashed the bill on social media, influencing Republican dissent

AFP | Washington

Palestinian officials accuse Israeli settlers of mosque arson in West Bank

AFP | Nablus

Palestinian officials reported yesterday that Israeli settlers had set fire to a mosque in the occupied West Bank, an act Israeli police said was under investigation.

According to Abdallah Kamil, the governor of Salfit, the attack targeted the Bir Al-Walidain mosque in the village of Marda.

"A group of settlers carried out an attack early this morning by setting fire to the mosque," Kamil said in a statement.

In addition to the arson, the settlers vandalized the mosque's walls with "racist graffiti" in Hebrew, he said.

Photographs shared on social media showed slogans



Palestinians inspect the damage done to a mosque

spray-painted in black including "Death to Arabs."

Villagers of Marda confirmed the details, with one resident telling AFP: "They set fire to the entrance of the mosque and wrote Hebrew slogans on its walls."

Another resident said the fire was extinguished before it could engulf the entire structure.

King Charles quips he's 'still alive' amid cancer fight

AFP | London

King Charles III yesterday joked that he was "still alive" as he met east London community members at the end of a year in which the British monarch has battled cancer.

The quip, which came after a member of the public asked Charles how he was, followed reports yesterday that the 76-year-old sovereign will continue his cancer treatment into next year.

Buckingham Palace sources told Sky News that "his treatment has been moving in a positive direction and as a managed condition the treatment cycle



Britain's King Charles III attends The King's Foundation's annual 'Crafts at Christmas' at Highgrove Gardens

will continue into next year."

The palace announced in February that Charles had been diagnosed with an undisclosed cancer and would withdraw from public life to undergo treatment.

The following month, his daughter-in-law Catherine, Princess of Wales, 42, revealed that she too had been diagnosed with cancer and was undergoing chemotherapy.

Charles returned to work within two and a half months and has gradually ramped up his duties during the rest of the year, including making several foreign trips.

Yesterday's event, which saw Charles and Queen Camilla visit Waltham Forest in the east of the British capital to celebrate community cohesion, is their final public engagement before they begin their Christmas break.

Malaysia agrees to resume search for missing MH370 plane



A ship of US company Ocean Infinity is seen during a previous search

Malaysia agrees to resume search for missing MH370 plane.

The Boeing 777 carrying 239 people disappeared from radar screens on March 8, 2014 while en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

Despite the largest search in aviation history, the plane has never been found.

Transport Minister Anthony Loke said Malaysia had agreed to a new search operation by maritime exploration firm Ocean Infinity, which also carried out an unsuccessful hunt in 2018.

The company's first efforts followed a massive Australia-led search for the aircraft that lasted three years before it was suspended in January 2017.

Loke said a new 15,000 square kilometre (5,800 square mile) area of the southern Indian Ocean

would be scoured by Ocean Infinity, which is based in the United Kingdom and United States.

"The new search area proposed by Ocean Infinity is based on the latest information and data analysis conducted by experts and researchers," Loke said.

"The proposal for a search operation by Ocean Infinity is a solid one and deserves to be considered," he told reporters.

The government said it agreed Ocean Infinity's proposal "in principle" on December 13, with the transport ministry expected to finalise terms by early 2025.

The new search will resume "as soon as the contract is finalised and signed by both parties", Loke said.

"They have informed us that the ideal time for the search in the designated waters is between January and April. We are working to finalise the agreement as quickly as possible," he added.

Russian missile barrage on Kyiv kills one, damages diplomatic missions



Ukrainian firefighters try to extinguish a fire on the site of a Russian missile attack in Kyiv

Russian missiles targeted Kyiv at sunrise yesterday, killing at least one person and damaging six diplomatic missions and a university in the centre of the Ukrainian capital.

Moscow said it attacked Ukraine as retaliation for a strike using Western missiles on a chemical plant in Russia earlier in the week.

Russian aerial attacks regularly target the capital but rarely cause damage of that scale as Kyiv is well protected by air defence, nearly three years into Russia's invasion.

"There were explosions after explosions in a row," said 45-year-old Ksenia, who was staying at a hotel near the site of a wreckage.

The air force said it downed all five Iskander missiles Russia launched at the capital, but that debris caused damage in several districts.

The strikes killed a 53-year-old man and wounded 12 people, most suffering from shrapnel injuries, the city's administration said.

They also damaged a building housing the diplomatic missions of Albania, Argentina, Palestine, North Macedonia, Portugal and Montenegro, the Ukrainian foreign ministry said.

"These are barbaric attacks on diplomatic institutions, this is crossing all possible red lines and international rules," foreign ministry spokesman Georgiy

Russia's hypersonic missile "Oreshnik" is claimed by Putin to be impervious to air defences, sparking new tensions in the escalating conflict

Tykhon was quoted as saying by Ukrainian agency Interfax.

In the absence of the Russian ambassador in Lisbon, the chargé d'affaires of the Russian Federation has been summoned to be presented with a formal protest, the Portuguese government said.

The building of the Kyiv National Linguistics University was also impacted, according to the institution's Instagram account, which posted photos of a main campus building whose windows had been completely blown out, glass shards covering the floor.

The ministry said it had targeted an office of the SBU security service and a defence industry site, and that "all the targets have been struck".

Putin at a press conference on Thursday had suggested a "high-tech duel" over Kyiv to test his claims that Russia's new hypersonic ballistic missile, dubbed Oreshnik, is impervious to air defences.

hell," she said. Air Force spokesman Yuriy Ignat said Ukraine Patriot air defence systems had been deployed to shoot down the missiles.

The Ukrainian think tank Defence Express said: "All the missiles were successfully intercepted, but in one case, the warhead failed to be destroyed and it exploded near a business centre in the city centre."

Moscow claimed responsibility for the overnight attack on Ukraine, carried out a day after Russian leader Vladimir Putin threatened to strike Kyiv.

"You know that such strikes on Russian territory have been carried out, and you know that the president has said that every time there will be a response," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

His comment came soon after the Russian defence ministry said that "in response to the actions of the Kyiv regime, supported by its Western handlers, a combined strike with long-range precision weapons was launched today".

The ministry said it had targeted an office of the SBU security service and a defence industry site, and that "all the targets have been struck".

Putin at a press conference on Thursday had suggested a "high-tech duel" over Kyiv to test his claims that Russia's new hypersonic ballistic missile, dubbed Oreshnik, is impervious to air defences.

TOP 4 TWEETS  
01  
Food. Water. Power. Many Syrians I spoke to were clear: help us secure these essentials and not only will we rebuild our lives, but we will help others. That's why projects like this UN partnered Aleppo bread factory are a lifeline for so many.

02  
In the occupied Syrian Idlib, there should be no military forces in the area of separation other than @UN peacekeepers - period. Syria's sovereignty, territorial unity, and integrity must be fully restored, and all acts of aggression must come to an immediate end.

03  
The Tories left our roads in a shocking state. Potholes aren't just annoying, they cost motorists. My government is giving councils the funds to repair our roads and get Britain moving again. Our Plan for Change will put more money in people's pockets.

04  
The Georgian people have been protesting against the government's choice to halt the EU path. Peaceful protests, met with police violence. Today we propose visa restrictions for Georgian diplomats. Our message to the leadership is clear: Stop harming your own people.

05  
Rescuers extend search for Vanuatu quake survivors

06  
Rescuers say they have expanded a search for survivors in quake-rocked Vanuatu to "numerous places of collapse" beyond the stricken capital, as the reported death toll climbed to 10.

07  
Rescuers extend search for Vanuatu quake survivors

08  
About 80,000 people have been directly affected by the earthquake in the archipelago of 320,000 people which sits in the Pacific's quake-prone Ring of Fire, the UN said.

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



# Classifieds



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# Man Utd's Mount faces lengthy layoff

Manchester United's Mason Mount sidelined for several weeks after injury in Manchester derby

● **Manager Amorim says it will be "a long time"**

● **Rashford returns for Bournemouth game**

● **Amorim sees improvement in United's attack**

AFP | London

Mason Mount is facing another lengthy spell on the sidelines, compounding his misery during another stop-start season at Manchester United.

The former Chelsea midfielder has been a peripheral figure since arriving at Old Trafford in July last year, struggling with a loss of form and persistent injury issues.

The England international has played just 32 times for United so far, scoring a solitary goal, and has started just nine Premier League games in total.

United boss Ruben Amorim said the 25-year-old would be out for "several weeks" after be-



Manchester United's Mason Mount receives medical treatment during a match (file photo)

ing forced off early in last week's Manchester derby, which United won 2-1.

"I don't know the exact date, but it's going to be for a long time," he said. "And that's it. It's part of football and we continue."

The former Sporting Lisbon boss said he would try to help Mount, who has impressed in recent weeks, even while he is out of action.

"What I can do is to help Mase, to teach him how to play our game when he's recovering. Try

to use that time for him to think in different things," he said.

"And then I think the worst part is that we don't have time to train like we should do when you are recovering from a lot of injuries.

"So we are always travelling,

**"I don't know the exact date, but it's going to be for a long time. And that's it. It's part of football and we continue"**

RUBEN AMORIM

we have games, training, we don't have all the team together. And this is really hard to recreate the game before they come to the game."

Amorim said Marcus Rashford would be available for Sunday's home match against Bournemouth after being absent from the squad for the game against City and Thursday's 4-3 defeat to Tottenham in the League Cup quarter-finals.

The Portuguese manager insisted it was not a disciplinary issue.

Rashford, 27, admitted earlier this week that he was "ready for a new challenge" after being asked in an interview about his future at United.

Amorim, who replaced the sacked Erik ten Hag at Old Trafford last month, said he felt United were making progress,

**BETTER YOU KNOW**

Mason Mount has started only nine Premier League games for Manchester United since his high-profile move from Chelsea

even though they are still a lowly 13th in the Premier League.

"I think we are improving near the opponent's box," he said. "We had some games that we are near the box, but without a real threat. You could see different things (against Tottenham).

"You can see that we can shoot. We are near the goal and you feel it, you really feel it. I think it's a good thing in our team. I feel that our team is faster, are pressing more.

"The physicality is improving, the understanding of the game and you can see it by the controlling of the game."

## Spurs boss Postecoglou blasts 'offensive' personal criticism

AFP | London

Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou says he welcomes scrutiny but that some of the criticism directed at him is "offensive".

Injury-hit Spurs took a big step towards a first trophy since 2008 on Thursday with a thrilling 4-3 victory over Manchester United in the quarter-finals of the League Cup.

Tottenham led 3-0 before two howlers from goalkeeper Fraser Forster let United into the game, but the home side held on for a precious win.

Sky Sports pundit Jamie Carragher, a former Liverpool defender, said Spurs should be more flexible in their approach rather than sticking to all-out attack.

Ahead of Sunday's visit of Liverpool, Postecoglou found an ally yesterday in opposite number Arne Slot, who said he was a big fan of the Spurs manager's style.



Tottenham Hotspur's Head Coach Ange Postecoglou Cristian Romero (R) (file photo)

Postecoglou discussed in detail the analysis of Carragher and others when asked at his pre-match press conference yesterday if he would listen more to someone like Slot than the ex-Reds defender

"Jamie Carragher, mate. You can name him. He'll enjoy that," Postecoglou laughed.

He added: "I love the fact peo-

ple are talking about our games and analysing our games. I think that is important as well for this football club and I'd rather that than us be anonymous and no one talk about us, or we're just grinding out an existence.

"As I've always said, you have to be prepared for scrutiny, you have to be prepared for criticism and it's how you react to that

**"I love the fact people are talking about our games and analysing our games. I think that is important as well for this football club and I'd rather that than us be anonymous and no one talk about us, or we're just grinding out an existence"**

ANGE POSTEOGLOU

that is more important.

"What I am saying is I don't need validity and it won't change what I believe because what I believe (comes from) a lifetime of experiences and values that I won't let anyone tamper with from the outside."

But the Australian said he did not understand "some of the other stuff", believing it was about getting headlines.

## Bangladesh completes sweep of three T20s over West Indies



Bangladesh's Jaker Ali in action during the match

AFP | Kingstown

Jaker Ali's blistering unbeaten 72 highlighted a dominant Bangladesh effort as the visitors thrashed the West Indies by 80 runs in the third and final T20 International to sweep the series 3-0 at the Arnos Vale Stadium in St Vincent on Thursday.

Benefiting from a huge reprieve when he thought he had been run out on 18, the attacking right-hander took heavy

toll of an uninspired Caribbean team, belting six sixes and three fours off just 41 balls to pace his side to a challenging 189 for seven after skipper Litton Das opted to bat first.

Beaten in the first two low-scoring matches at the same venue, the West Indies were never in the hunt for a consolation victory after losing Brandon King to the second delivery of their reply and were eventually bundled out for 109 off 16.4 overs.

## Messi's Miami to host NYCFC in MLS 2025 season opener

AFP | Miami

Lionel Messi's Inter Miami will play host to New York City FC in the opening match of the 2025 Major League Soccer season under a schedule unveiled on Thursday.

The Argentine star led Inter Miami to the best record in MLS last season but the squad was upset by Atlanta in the opening round of the playoffs.

Miami will open at home on February 22 against NYCFC -- a match that falls between the team's legs of a CONCACAF Champions Cup series against Kansas City on February 18 and 25.



Lionel Messi of Inter Miami celebrates with teammates after a goal (file photo)

Messi and his teammates will face their Eastern Conference rivals and visit San Jose, Houston and Minnesota from the Western Conference.

Inter Miami will entertain West rivals Dallas, Seattle and the reigning MLS champion Los Angeles Galaxy in a feature clash on August 16.

The Galaxy will open the 2025 campaign at home against MLS expansion club San Diego on February 23.

San Diego's debut marks the launch of the 30th MLS club in the league's 30th season, in which each club will play 34 matches, evenly split in road and home fixtures.

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# Tunisian stars dominate semifinal lineup at Arab Elite Tennis

TDT | Manama

The fourth Arab Elite Tennis Championship, organized by the Bahrain Tennis Federation, reaches its semi-finals on Saturday. The tournament, hosted at the Public Security Officers Club, features top-ranked Arab players from the ATP and ITF circuits.

In the highly anticipated semifinal matchups, Tunisia's Aziz Dougaz will face Egypt's Mohamed Safwat, while fellow Tunisian Moez Echargui is set to play Syria's Hazem Nou.

The quarterfinals, held yesterday,



Action from a match

showcased high-level performances that thrilled spectators. Defending champion and top-seeded Tunisian

Aziz Dougaz took another step toward retaining his title, defeating Saudi Arabia's Ammar Al-Haqbani in straight sets, 6-4, 6-3.

In a dramatic turnaround, Tunisian Moez Echargui overcame Algeria's Samir Hamza, rallying from a first-set loss to win 4-6, 6-2, 10-7. Meanwhile, Egypt's Mohamed Safwat booked a clash with Dougaz in the semis after a hard-fought victory over Tunisia's Ala Trifi, 6-4, 7-6. Completing the semifinal roster, Syria's Hazem Nou ousted Tunisia's Aziz Al-Waqi with a convincing 6-3, 6-3 win.

## Classification Matches

In the classification rounds, Algeria's Mohamed Makhlof defeated Jordan's Mohamed Qutb 3-6, 6-3, 13-11. Algeria's Tawfiq Sahtli bested Morocco's Taha Badi 1-6, 6-2, 10-6. Egypt's Kareem Ibrahim secured a win against Bahrain's Elias Abdulreda 6-4, 6-1, while Lebanon's Fadi Beidan overcame Egypt's Kareem Mabrouk 6-4, 7-5.

Praise for Tournament Organization  
Players praised the championship's organization, calling it a success both technically and logistically.

"The tournament is exceptional, both

in terms of organization and the high level of competition," said Aziz Dougaz, noting the strong field of Arab players.

Syrian player Hazem Nou expressed gratitude to the Bahrain Tennis Federation and the Ministry of Interior for their hospitality, commending the Arab Federation's efforts in uniting young Arab talent in such a competitive environment.

The tournament continues to be a key event in showcasing Arab tennis talent, fostering regional unity, and providing thrilling matches for fans.

# Slot praises Postecoglou's style

Liverpool manager Slot says he is Postecoglou 'fan' ahead of Spurs clash

● Liverpool, Tottenham paired in League Cup semi-finals

● Liverpool face Tottenham in Premier League on Sunday

AFP | London

Liverpool manager Arne Slot says he is a fan of Ange Postecoglou's gung-ho approach to football and hopes he wins a trophy -- just not the League Cup -- after the teams were paired together in the semi-finals.

Premier League leaders Liverpool also travel to face Spurs in the English top flight on Sunday, needing to win to keep fast-charging Chelsea at bay.

Tottenham, chasing their first trophy since 2008, beat Manchester United 4-3 in a chaotic League Cup quarter-final on Thursday.

Postecoglou has been criti-



Players of Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur react during a match (file photo)

cised by some for his unwillingness to compromise on his attacking instincts but he gave a passionate defence of his approach after the match, asking: "Are you not entertained?"

And Slot admits he is a devotee of the Australian's methods, saying his team are a "joy" to watch.

"I hope, hope, hope that he wins a trophy," he said yesterday. "Not the League Cup but I'm completely a fan of his team for the Europa League because people always talk about trophies, trophies, trophies, and that is so important. "Now, for me, his brand of

football, his style of football is so much more important and if he can combine it with something, that would be so good for football in general because then people can stop talking about it as too attacking or whatever.

"How on earth can you play too much attacking football?"

“I hope, hope, hope that he wins a trophy. Not the League Cup but I'm completely a fan of his team for the Europa League because people always talk about trophies, trophies, trophies, and that is so important

ARNE SLOT



Tottenham hasn't won a trophy since 2008, making Postecoglou's attacking style a bold gamble for success

Liverpool had a nine-point cushion at the top of the Premier League earlier this month but Chelsea could be at the summit when Slot's team kick off in London on Sunday.

Slot, whose team have a game in hand on their rivals, said it was too early to make judgements.

"I look at it like I've said for the three, four, five months -- judge the table after 19 games because then everybody has played the same opponents," he said.

"Probably we all had a bit of the same bad luck and a bit of the same luck, that means Arsenal for example had a lot of red cards in the beginning of the season, that's why they dropped points.

"Now we were unfortunate to receive a red card (Andy Robertson was sent off in last week's 2-2 draw with Fulham) and we dropped points as well... Don't look at it where you were during the season -- it is about where you are at the end of the season."

# Dias ruled out for up to four weeks as Man City suffer fresh blow

AFP | London

Manchester City defender Ruben Dias has been ruled out for up to four weeks with a muscular issue, compounding Pep Guardiola's problems as he seeks to save the club's season.

The Portugal international missed all five matches in November with a calf problem but returned at the start of December and has been an ever-present this month.

But he will not be available for City's trip to Aston Villa on Saturday, while there is uncertainty about the fitness of goalkeeper Ederson.

"Ruben is out for a long time and Ederson I don't know if he will be ready tomorrow," Guardiola said yesterday.

The City boss added that Dias would be out for "three or four weeks".

"After 75 minutes against United he felt something," he



Manchester City's Ruben Dias (L) and Manchester United's Rasmus Hojlund fight for the ball (file photo)

said. "He's strong and wanted to stay on the pitch but now he's injured."

Injury-hit City have suffered a dramatic collapse in form over recent weeks, losing eight of their past 11 games in all competitions and are fifth in the Premier League table.

Nathan Ake remains out but fellow defenders Manuel Akanji and John Stones are back in full training.

"Manuel and John are back in training," said Guardiola. "That is good for us. As many players that are back the better.

# UAE, Iran, Japan, Lebanon advance to Junior Asian Padel semi-finals

TDT | Manama

The semi-finalists of the inaugural Junior Asian Padel Championship, hosted by Bahrain at LETS PADEL courts, have been confirmed. Teams from the UAE, Iran, Japan, and Lebanon secured their spots in the final four of the tournament, which runs until December 21 under the patronage of HH Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

The UAE will face Iran, while Japan takes on Lebanon in semifinal matches to determine the finalists. Meanwhile, teams from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain will compete for fifth to seventh positions.

The third day of group stage action saw Lebanon defeat Kuwait 2-1, the UAE overcome Japan 2-1, and Iran sweep Saudi Arabia 3-0. Group A concluded with the UAE topping the standings with four points, followed by Japan with three, and Bahrain with two. In Group B,



Action from a game

Lebanon and Iran both secured five points, with Lebanon leading on match wins, followed by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia with four points each.

Fahad Fawzi Kanoo, President of the Bahrain Padel Federation, expressed gratitude to the tournament's sponsors,

including Spartan Gym, Yusuf Bin Ahmed Kanoo, the National Bank of Bahrain, and Gulf Insurance Group as gold sponsors. He also thanked bronze sponsors Noon Watches, Megachips, and the technical partner, Malaeb app, for their support of the championship.