

# Kingdom keen on preserving environment, wildlife

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Bahrain is keen to support all environmental issues, especially those related to biodiversity, in order to achieve the Kingdom's sustainable development goals (SDGs).

This was affirmed yesterday by His Majesty the King's personal representative and Supreme Council for Environment (SCE) president His Highness Shaikh Abdulla bin Hamad Al

Khalifa.

In a statement marking the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Wildlife Day, observed every December 30, HH Shaikh Abdulla asserted that Bahrain has attained numerous regional and global honourable achievements and gains in conserving the environment and mitigating climate change effects, as well as in enhancing joint-cooperation and exchanging experiences in the field of preserving wildlife

and biodiversity with other GCC countries.

## GCC Initiatives

HH Shaikh Abdulla commended the GCC countries' efforts to implement the Convention on the Conservation of Wildlife and Their Natural Habitats, citing their designation of December 30 as an annual occasion to celebrate wildlife.

HH Shaikh Abdulla highlighted the SCE's great interest in



HH Shaikh Abdulla bin Hamad Al Khalifa

promoting awareness of the importance of preserving wildlife and its great role in human life. SCE activities have included

organising field visits to reserves and parks, contributing to projects of school and university students regarding the mangrove plant cultivation, and participating in forums on the mangrove plant project and its importance in mitigating the effects of climate change to enhance environmental awareness among all segments of society, HH Shaikh Abdulla said.

HH Shaikh Abdulla indicated that there are a great number of

natural reserves in Bahrain.

He added that the SCE has inaugurated the Mangrove Nursery in Ras Sanad, within the Tubli Bay Reserve. This is part of the SCE's plans to intensify national efforts aimed at moving forward towards increasing the green area and quadrupling mangrove trees by 2035, in line with the Kingdom's commitment to achieving zero carbon neutrality to preserve the environment.

## WHO chief 'very concerned' by Gaza infectious disease threat

AFP | Geneva

World Health Organisation (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said yesterday he was "very concerned" about the growing threat of infectious diseases in the Gaza Strip.

"As people continue to be massively displaced across the south of Gaza, with some families forced to move multiple times and many sheltering in overcrowded health facilities, my WHO colleagues and I remain very concerned about the increasing threat of infectious diseases," Tedros said on X, formerly Twitter.

Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas -- considered a "terrorist" group by the United States and European Union --- in retaliation for the October 7 attack which left about 1,140 people dead, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli figures.

Around 250 hostages were also taken during the attack, more than half of whom remain captive.

Israel's relentless aerial bombardment and ground invasion in Gaza have killed at least 21,320 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza.

Tedros said that since mid-October until mid-December, people living in shelters had continued to fall sick. He said that close to 180,000 people were suffering with upper respiratory infections, while 136,400 cases of diarrhoea have been recorded -- half of those among children aged under five.

# 'An impossible situation'

UN Security Council holds late night meeting on Gaza crisis

- Aid convoys shot at: UN humanitarian chief
- Israel pounds Gaza, nearly 12 weeks into war
- Egypt hosts Hamas delegation for talks

AFP | Gaza City

The United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees said yesterday an aid convoy came under fire from Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip, without causing any casualties.

"Israeli soldiers fired at an aid convoy as it returned from northern Gaza along a route designated by the Israeli army -- our international convoy leader and his team were not injured but one vehicle sustained damage," UNRWA's director in Gaza, Tom White, wrote on X.

According to UNRWA, the incident took place on Thursday afternoon. Responding to requests for comment, the Israeli military said it was looking into reports about the incident.

Earlier yesterday, UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths described on X "an impossible situation for the people of Gaza, and for those trying to help them." Aid convoys had been shot at, he said, without elaborating.

"You think getting aid into Gaza is easy? Think again," he said.

Israeli officials have laid the blame for the limited humanitarian deliveries into Gaza on



A child eats amid the rubble of destroyed buildings following Israeli bombardment in Rafah on the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. AFP

aid agencies themselves.

Earlier this month, Israeli President Isaac Herzog claimed there had been "a failure by the United Nations predominantly, and other partners in the inflow of trucks into Gaza."

The Israeli military body responsible for civilian affairs in the Palestinian territories, COGAT, took a swipe at UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini on Sunday regarding aid flow. "Right now, hundreds of trucks after inspection are waiting on the Egyptian side to be received up by your organisation," COGAT wrote on X.

"Instead of tweeting, come work with us to increase humanitarian aid. We are ready. Are you?" Lazzarini responded yesterday, describing as "base-

less misinformation" the remarks by Israeli officials who he said "have insinuated or directly held UNRWA responsible for gaps in aid deliveries."

"The delivery of much needed and urgent aid continues to be limited in quantities and riddled with logistical hurdles," he said in a statement.

Lazzarini described "a state of despair" in Gaza, with Palestini-

as the ongoing crisis in Gaza continues to worsen, France added.

Russia, meanwhile, criticised the United States as the only country besides Israel not supporting cessation of hostilities.

ans going to UNRWA warehouses "to take supplies or interrupt aid trucks picking food to eat on the spot."

## Pounded

Israel pounded Gaza yesterday, nearly 12 weeks into the war started by the October 7 attacks, as Egypt hosted a Hamas delegation for talks aimed at ending the con-

flict that has devastated much of the besieged Palestinian territory.

With vast areas of northern Gaza in ruins and largely deserted, Israeli air strikes and ground combat have focussed on central and southern districts, driving ever more displaced families into crowded areas around Rafah near the Egyptian border.

Intense fighting around central Deir al-Balah and the biggest southern city, Khan Yunis, has driven about 100,000 newly displaced people into already-overcrowded Rafah, said the UN humanitarian office, even as targets there were bombed too. Rafah residents combed through rubble for survivors and bodies after a deadly air strike On Thursday.



# Kingdom's digital strides recognised

Bahrain Open Data Portal wins Best Open Data Initiative at fifth GCC eGovernment Awards

● **Bahrain Open Data Portal developed 387 government databases and over two million records, adhering to global best practices and UN standards for open data**

● **Team behind National Suggestions and Complaints System (Tawasul) receive Certificate of Excellence in the Best Digital Community eParticipation category**

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Nearly 400 government databases and over two million records have been established in the Bahrain Open Data Portal, which has won the Best Open Data Initiative



Mohammed Ali Al Qaed, third from right, with other iGA officials and the award

ative at the fifth GCC eGovernment Awards.

Information and eGovernment Authority (iGA) chief executive Mohammed Ali Al Qaed congratulated and thanked the team behind the portal, data.gov.bh, which adheres to global best practices and United Nations standards for open data.

The team's endeavors included developing infrastructure and databases and updating the portal with statistics, culminating in the establishment of 387 government databases and over two million records, contributed by 34 government entities.

The portal is designed to em-

power decision-makers, investors, researchers, and citizens by providing them with accessible, useful, and valuable information.

Al Qaed also congratulated and thanked the team behind the National Suggestions and Complaints System (Tawasul) for their efforts and for receiving a Certificate of Excellence in the Best Digital Community eParticipation category, reaching the final stage of the award which saw strong competition from a range of GCC digital projects.

He commended these achievements, which are the result of the iGA teams' dedicated efforts

to develop the portal—one of the key digital initiatives supporting the Kingdom's digital transformation and its enhancement of government services.

Al Qaed expressed his gratitude to the senior leadership and government for their support of information and communication technology (ICT), driven by a vision that focuses on advancing technology and digital transformation across the Kingdom's key sectors.

He also congratulated Minister of Interior and Ministerial Committee for Information and Communication Technology (MCICT) chairman General Shai-

kh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, acknowledging his crucial role in guiding and overseeing the iGA's national initiatives and ongoing project development.

These efforts were pivotal in the recent launch of the revamped Bahrain Open Data Portal, a significant accomplishment for the Gulf region.

Al Qaed reaffirmed the commitment to further enhancing the portal and all national systems and projects, to improve user experience.

Al Qaed highlighted the portal's role in promoting transparency, encouraging eParticipation and innovation, and disseminat-



The Bahrain Open Data Portal is designed to empower decision-makers, investors, researchers, and citizens by providing them with accessible, useful, and valuable information

ing government data. He invited everyone to utilise the portal's extensive features, which allow for the sharing and distribution of government information in accessible formats, free of charge, and in accordance with established guidelines to meet the diverse needs of stakeholders and specialists.

## King's economic affairs advisor receives IGOAI president

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His Majesty the King's economic affairs advisor Dr Hassan bin Abdulla Fakhro received International Group of Artificial Intelligence (IGOAI) president Dr Jassim Haji Jassim.

Dr Fakhro expressed appreciation to Dr Haji highlighting his efforts to promote the culture and awareness of artificial intelligence (AI) science in society and among entrepreneurs.

Dr Haji, who is also the executive advisor to the HH Shaikh Nasser Centre for Research and Development for AI and Data Sciences, expressed gratitude to Dr Fakhro for the major role he has played in developing AI



Dr Hassan bin Abdulla Fakhro, right, with Dr Jassim Haji during their meeting in the Kingdom.

Dr Haji presented Dr Fakhro with a commemorative gift on behalf of the IGOAI in recognition of his efforts to develop AI in the Kingdom over past years.

## Foreign Minister meets with newly appointed ambassadors



The Foreign Minister, centre, with the newly appointed ambassadors during their meeting

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Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Abdul Latif bin Rashid Al Zayani received Bahrain's newly appointed ambassadors at the ministry.

The ambassadors were Es-sam Abdul Aziz Al Jassim, Osama Abdullah Al Absi, Dr Waleed Khalifa Al Manea, Shaikh Khalifa bin Abdullah bin

Hamad Al Khalifa, Ali Jassim Al Aradi, Adel Aziz Mohammed Al Eid, and Bassam Ahmed Marzouq.

The minister congratulated the ambassadors on the royal appointment. He highlighted the importance of Bahraini diplomacy in implementing the foreign policy of the Kingdom of Bahrain and attending to the interests of the country and its

citizens, in light of the directives of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and the approach of the government led by His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister.

On their part, the ambassadors expressed this appreciation and gratitude for the royal trust.

## Indian Embassy holds open house

● **Around 50 Indian nationals take part in grievance redressal process, in presence of Indian Ambassador**

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Around 50 Indian nationals took part in the Indian Embassy's last open house of the year, held yesterday and chaired by Indian Ambassador Vinod K Jacob.

The embassy's consular team and panel of lawyers were also present, as those who attended took part in the grievance redressal process.

The Indian Ambassador thanked the Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) for organising a valuable interactive session earlier this month, in connection with labour and social affairs.



Officials and attendees at the open house

The community members present in the open house were briefed on the LMRA guidelines.

The ambassador thanked Bahrain government authorities, including the Ministry of Labour, LMRA and immigration officials for their prompt support and action concerning consular and community welfare matters. He also appreciated the commitment and dedication

of Indian community organisations and volunteers in helping the distressed members of Indian diaspora throughout the year.

The mission continues to help distressed Indian nationals including housemaids by providing boarding and accommodation, as well as granting emergency certificates and tickets to persons in need through the Indian Community Welfare

Fund.

The grievances/issues of the Indian nationals were successfully addressed, with some being resolved at the open house and others to be taken up at the earliest possible time.

Ambassador Jacob thanked all the Indian associations and community members for their active participation in the open gathering.

## Shura chairman praises Bahrain's housing strategy

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Shura Council chairman Ali bin Saleh Al Saleh has affirmed that the remarkable progress made by the Kingdom in providing housing services to citizens over the past years, as part of the government's programmes and initiatives, is in line with His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa's directives to implement development and urban projects that serve citizens and ensure the stability of Bahraini families.

Al Saleh commended the tremendous efforts exerted by the government, led by His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, to implement housing projects and distribute housing units to the citizens across the Kingdom's regions.

He pointed out that the inauguration of the East Sitra



Ali bin Saleh Al Saleh

housing project, held under HRH the Crown Prince and Prime Minister's patronage on Thursday, adds to the Kingdom's rich record of housing achievements, noting that it is within Bahrain's unwavering efforts to provide distinguished projects according to the best and modern construction standards, in a way that achieves stability for the citizens.

## Court begins appeal review of sentenced employee

● Administrative employee given jail time for exploiting authority, manipulating salary

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The High Appeals Court has begun reviewing the appeal of a company's administrative employee who was sentenced to three years in prison after being convicted of abusing his authority in the General Organisation of Social Insurance (GOSI) System.

He increased his eligible salary by more than BD100 in order to increase his insurance benefits.

The Court of Appeals has decided to postpone the next session until January 14.

The incident's details indicate that the accused holds the position of an administrative manager in a company. He exploited his available authority in the electronic system of the GOSI, being one of the individuals with access.

Based on that, he manipulated the data in the information technology system to show incorrect data as if it were correct, stating that he increased his eligible salary from BD1,752 to BD1,855.

This resulted in the company being obliged to pay insurance benefits to the administrative manager in the amount of BD1,400 for a year until his actions were discovered and he was referred to the relevant authorities.

After conducting the necessary investigations into the incident and reviewing the company's records in the electronic system of the GOSI, it was found that a person authorised by the company had accessed the employer's account and modified the salary.

It was revealed that the administrative manager was the one who carried out this incident as he was one of the individuals with access to the electronic system, and possessed the ability to modify the salaries of employees.

# Overcoming obstacles, one powerful note at a time

Bahraini singer Mahmood AlHaiki inspires at Side by Side Festival in Armenia

Mahir Haneef  
TDT | Manama

Standing tall amidst a chorus of diverse voices, Bahraini singer Mahmood AlHaiki wasn't just representing his country at the Side by Side Festival in Armenia; he was redefining artistic expression, one powerful note at a time.

Despite the physical challenges that life has thrown his way, Mahmood's passion for music burns bright.

Financial hurdles too threatened his participation in Armenia, but Hilton Garden Inn and the National Institute for Disabled in Bahrain stepped in, proving that music truly knows no bounds.

Transcending limitations, Mahmood's voice became a beacon of hope and inspiration, not just for fellow artists with disabilities, but for anyone who dares to dream.

"This song, it's speaking to everyone," Mahmood says, his words resonating with a quiet strength. "Don't despair. You have a role in this life, even if you miss something. God gave you a voice, use it to sing, to share your



Mahmood AlHaiki at the Side by Side Festival in Armenia



Mahmood AlHaiki with a supporter at the hall of his performance

message."

And share he does. Mahmood's music isn't just entertainment; it's a testament to the human spirit's ability to overcome. His song from last year, 'Don't Despair', was a deeply personal anthem, a chronicle of his own journey.

This year, his voice soared

across borders, carrying a message of universal resilience.

But his impact wasn't limited to the stage. Meeting other artists with disabilities at the festival ignited a passion for inclusivity within him. "We need this in Bahrain," he declares, his voice filled with conviction.

"Imagine professional sing-

ers sharing the stage with those who have the talent but need a little guidance. That respect, that encouragement, it can change lives."

And change is exactly what Mahmood wants to see. His message to aspiring Bahraini artists with disabilities is one of unwavering belief: "There are



Don't despair. You have a role in this life, even if you miss something. God gave you a voice, use it to sing, to share your message.

- MAHMOOD ALHAIKI

no limits to your talent, your dreams. Believe in yourself, work hard, and share your voice. The world is waiting to listen."

His own future is brimming with possibilities. The Side by Side Festival wasn't just a platform; it was a springboard.

Mahmood is already preparing a new song for next year's event, his heart set on spreading his message of inclusivity even further.

As the final notes of his story fade, one thing becomes abundantly clear: Mahmood AlHaiki is more than just a singer; he's a symbol of hope, a testament to the power of music to bridge divides and empower us all to sing our own unique song.

## Appeals Court adjourns case of drug trafficking gang

● Defendants part of an organised network involved in smuggling drugs into Kingdom

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The High Criminal Appeals Court has decided to postpone the trial of a gang composed of five convicted individuals involved in the importation of drugs concealed in cricket and tennis balls.

The defendants will be brought from their detention facilities for the next hearing.

Previously, the lower court had pronounced the five defendants guilty of importing, possessing, and trafficking drugs and controlled substances. The prosecution accused them of concealing the illicit substances within cricket and tennis balls.

The court sentenced the defendants to 15 years in prison, along with a fine of BD5,000 each. Additionally, the confiscated items were ordered to be seized, and the defendants will be permanently expelled from the country upon completion of their sentences.

According to the details of the incident, the Public Prosecution initiated an investigation based



Representative image

on a report received from the Anti-Narcotics Department of the General Directorate of Criminal Investigation and Forensic Science. The report stated that a postal package containing drugs was discovered by the customs authorities at an air entry point.

The package had been sent from an Asian country and was addressed to one of the defendants.

Further examination revealed that the drugs, including cannabis and the psychotropic substance methamphetamine, were intricately concealed inside tennis and cricket balls. Two successful ambush operations led to the arrest of the defendants.

The investigations indicated that the defendants were part of an organised network involved in smuggling drugs into the Kingdom of Bahrain, with a non-resident defendant serving as the network's leader.

They smuggled drugs using sophisticated methods and sub-

sequently brought them into Bahrain. The first defendant, who is believed to be the network's leader, had already left the Kingdom before the arrival of the shipment. The second and third defendants were responsible for receiving the smuggled parcels, while the fourth and fifth defendants were involved in concealing and trafficking the drugs.

The Public Prosecution interrogated the defendants, presenting them with the seized drugs and the evidence against them. Testimonies from witnesses were heard, and experts were appointed to examine the confiscated items.

## Works Minister inspects progress in Muharraq infrastructure projects



Minister of Works Ibrahim Hassan Al Hawaj made an inspection visit to the infrastructure development projects in the fifth constituency of Muharraq Governorate, which are currently implemented as part of the third batch of projects for developing roads, sanitation, and municipality services. The minister inspected the project to set up a sanitary network in Galali on Block 255, which will serve 75 real estate properties, as part of the development project of Shaikh Isa bin Rashid Al Khalifa Street and Road 5441 in Block 254 in Galali, which will serve 205 properties. Al Hawaj reviewed the progress of work in the project to set up a sanitary network in Wahat Al Muharraq in Block 255, which will serve 356 properties. The Works Minister also inspected an upcoming sanitary network project in Block 255 in Galali.

## ICRF conducts medical camp for 200 workers



Officials at the medical camp

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The Indian Community Relief Fund (ICRF) organised a medical camp for workers of Eastern Precast Company.

The medical camp was held in Eker and nearly 200 employees

took advantage of the medical

checkup and doctors consultation. Doctors and paramedics from Kims Health Hospital, Al Hilal Medical Centre, Shifa Al Jazeera Medical Centre and Dar Al Shifa Hospital, along with Dr Sandhu and Dr Manoj, conduct-

ed the checkup.

The camp was inaugurated by Indian Embassy assistant consular officer Suman Bhat. ICRF Chairman Dr Babu Ramachandran addressed the workers and briefed them about ICRF's medical awareness campaigns.

The company's safety officer Mr Nishant thanked ICRF for their commitment to the community as well as for arranging the medical camp.

All the workers were given dinner packets after their medical checkup.

# Rightful compensation awarded

High Administrative Court orders insurance company to pay claimant BD12,000 following car accident-related disability

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The High Administrative Court ruled to compel an insurance company to compensate an individual with BD12,000 after a car insured by the company caused permanent disability to the claimant in a traffic accident, evaluated by medical committees at a rate of 30 per cent.

The court affirmed that the driver of the car was at fault, as he was driving in the opposite direction and caused the claimant's injury.

Additionally, the court confirmed that the vehicle involved in the accident was insured by the company (the defendant), making it liable for the rightful

compensation to the claimant based on the insurance contract.

The claimant filed a lawsuit, alleging that the defendant was responsible for causing his permanent disability during a traffic accident. He claimed that the defendant was driving in the wrong direction, resulting in a head-on collision that led to the claimant's injury, as well as damage to his own vehicle.

A criminal judgment was issued, convicting the defendant. The court reviewed the case and examined the report provided by the appointed medical committees, which concluded that the claimant suffered severe injuries resulting in a permanent disability accounting for 30 per cent of



Representative picture

their total disability.

The court stated that a criminal judgment holds authority in civil proceedings before a civil



**Court-appointed medical committees concluded that the claimant suffered severe injuries resulting in a permanent disability accounting for 30 per cent of their total disability**

court whenever it renders a decisive ruling on the occurrence of the act constituting the common basis between the criminal and civil claims, as well as its legal qualification and attribution to the perpetrator.

Therefore, if the criminal court has ruled on these matters, the civil court is precluded from re-examining them. It must consider and be bound by these findings in its examination of the civil rights connected to the case, to ensure that its judgment does not contradict the previous criminal judgment.

As a result, the Court ruled in favour of the claimant, ordering the defendants to compensate him and pay BD12,000.

## Public Security Chief receives Pakistani Ambassador



The Chief of Public Security Lt-General Tariq Al Hassan received newly appointed Pakistani Ambassador Saqib Rauf. Al Hassan welcomed the envoy, hailing the good ties between the two friendly countries and his dedication to reinforcing them, especially in security. Al Hassan wished Ambassador Rauf the best in his new assignment. Above, Al Hassan with Ambassador Rauf.

## Bahrain to host GCC radio, TV festival

● Information Minister affirms Kingdom's readiness to host successful event

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Bahrain will be hosting the 16th Edition of the Gulf Radio and Television Festival next year.

Information Minister Dr Ramzan bin Abdulla Al Noaimi discussed the Kingdom's preparations and arrangements for the event in a meeting with Gulf Radio and Television Organisation director-general Majri Mubarak Al Qahtani. Information Ministry Radio and Television Affairs assistant undersec-



Dr Ramzan bin Abdulla Al Noaimi, right, during his meeting with Majri Mubarak Al Qahtani

retary Abdulla Khalid Al Dosari was also on hand.

The parties talked about the efforts Bahrain has made to ensure the success of this important Gulf Cooperation Council

(GCC) event.

Dr Al Noaimi commended the vital and influential role played by the Gulf Radio and Television Organisation in strengthening joint-GCC media action, to be

more expressive of the aspects of GCC states' development and progressive strides, as well as improve the artistic and technical levels of GCC radio and television production.

The Information Minister affirmed the Kingdom's keenness to harness all potentials to ensure the success of the festival in 2024, as it is an important occasion to honour GCC creative people and artists.

He underlined the Kingdom's pride in hosting the biennial event, stressing keenness to ensure that it will be more successful than the previous editions.

Al Qahtani expressed thanks and appreciation to the Information Minister for his constant support for efforts to enhance joint GCC media cooperation.

## Southern police arrest two women for stealing handbag with BD4,000

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Southern Governorate police were able to arrest two women, aged 46 and 24 years old, after they stole a handbag containing BD4,000 at a commercial exhibition.

The police directorate indicated that, immediately after receiving a report from a woman that her personal bag had been stolen, security personnel



took the necessary measures to review footage from CCTV cameras.

The accused were then iden-

tified and arrested after they left the exhibition. It was found that one of the women monitored the victim, while the second robbed her of her bag.

It was later also revealed that the pair had criminal records.

The Southern Governorate police directorate indicated that the necessary legal measures had been taken and the case had been referred to the Public Prosecution.

## Northern Governor attends competition ceremony

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Northern Governor Ali bin Al Shaikh Abdulmohsen Al Asfoor attended the final ceremony of the seventh edition of the Biggest Winner Competition.

Al Asfoor said that the competition promotes efforts to fight chronic diseases by encouraging people to lose weight.

## MP questions ministry on mass weddings



Osama bin Ahmed Khalaf Al Asfoor

TDT | Manama



MP Hanan Mohamed Fardan

questions underscored concerns about potential obstacles and impediments faced by these associations in carrying out their mission.

MP Hanan Mohamed Fardan has raised a series of probing questions to Minister of Social Development Osama bin Ahmed Khalaf Al Asfoor about the conduct of mass weddings and potential violations within charitable associations operating in Bahrain.

Deputy Fardan, who represents the twelfth constituency of the Northern Governorate, sought clarity on the number of active associations involved in organising mass weddings in the country.

Additionally, she inquired about the ministry's requirements for associations seeking to host such events. The MP's

Furthermore, Deputy Fardan questioned the accuracy of a ministry circular that, according to her, verbally imposed a ban on charities organising group weddings. She delved into the mechanisms employed by the ministry to monitor and verify reports from financial and literary associations and the reasons for the actions taken against associations.

The deputy also sought detailed information on violations and transgressions observed by the ministry and inquired about the supervisory tasks.

## A colourful gathering



Scenes from a military parade organised by the Ministry of Interior in the Southern Governorate, in cooperation with various security departments. Southern Governor His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali Al Khalifa attended the programme.

# Young ICT talent from the Middle East and Central Asia recognised at regional finale of Huawei ICT competition 2023-2024

● Students from the Kingdom of Bahrain put forth an extraordinary performance and clinched two titles.

● Students from Pakistan, Qatar, and Kazakhstan bagged the grand prizes, while students from Lebanon, Kazakhstan, and Bahrain secured the first prizes.

● Winning student teams to compete at the global finals of the Huawei ICT Competition in China in May 2024.

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Winning student teams of the regional finals of the Huawei ICT Competition 2023-2024 Middle East and Central Asia (ME & CA) were felicitated at a grand closing and awarding ceremony on December 21, 2023, in Manama, Bahrain. Hosted under the patronage of His Highness Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, His Majesty the King's Representative for Humanitarian Work and Youth Affairs, and in partnership with Bahrain's Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunication and the University of Bahrain, the ceremony was held at the University of Bahrain.

Students from the Kingdom of Bahrain put forth an extraordinary performance and clinched two titles. The first prize for the Computing Track was bagged by a team consisting of Natheer Zaher Jaffar Ahmed Mohammed Radhi, Ali Salman Ali Fardan, and Ali Abdulwahed Jasim (Bahrain Polytechnic). The second prize of the Network Track was secured by a team consisting of Sayed Mohammed Adnan, and Ali Naser Alfadhli (University of Bahrain), and Fahad Abdulla (Bahrain Polytechnic). This year, the grand prize for the Network Track went to a team of students from Pakistan, while Qatari students secured the grand prize in the Cloud Track, and the grand prize for the Computing Track was given to students from Kazakhstan.

The closing and awarding ceremony of the regional finals of the Huawei ICT Competition 2023-2024 was attended by H.E. Jameel bin Mohammed Ali Humaidan, Minister of Labor, Bahrain; Dr. Mohammed Mubarak Juma, Minister Of Education, Bahrain; Mohammed bin Thamer Al Kaabi, Minister of Transportation and Telecommunications, Bahrain; Ayman Tawfeeq Abdulrahman Almoayyed, Secretary-General of Supreme



## Grand Prize

### Network Track

•Pakistan - Muhammad Bilal Gul and Muhammad Usman (University of Engineering & Technology Taxila), and Zain Tanvir (Al-Khwarizmi Institute of Computer Science UET Lahore)

### Cloud Track

•Qatar - Hadih Abdulmajeed and Mohamed Mouemel Abdollahi (Qatar University), and Saba Wynne (University of Doha for Science and Technology)

### Computing Track

•Kazakhstan - Oralbay Utebay from Yessenov University, Nikolay Zhilyakov from AUPET, and Daniyal Sarsenbay from the Kazakh-British Technical University

### First Prize

### Network Track

•Lebanon - Alain Nohra, and Raed Diab (American University of Science and Technology), and Roudy Wahid Maroun (Holy Spirit University of Kaslik)

### Cloud Track

•Kazakhstan - Aida Bagaidarova and Didar Moldakhmetov (al-Farabi University); and Gaukhar

Zhanel (Kazakh-British Technical University)

### Computing Track

•Bahrain - Natheer Zaher Jaffar Ahmed Mohammed Radhi, Ali Salman Ali Fardan, and Ali Abdulwahed Jasim (Bahrain Polytechnic)

## Second Prize

### Network Track

•Bahrain - Sayed Mohammed Adnan, and Ali Naser Alfadhli (University Of Bahrain), and Fahad Abdulla (Bahrain Polytechnic)

•Iraq - Bashar Qahhar Qader, and Bayar Qahhar Qader (Erbil Polytechnic University), and Bawar Zring Jalal Qadr (KOUKOYA UNIVERSITY)

### Cloud Track

•Pakistan - Vishal Sagar, Onkar, and Asfand Yar Jamali (NUST University Islamabad)

•Lebanon - Wassef Talal Hijazi, and Bashar Ramzi Abou Chakra Beirut Arab University (BAU), and Michelle Robert Haddad (Holy Spirit University of Kaslik)

### Computing Track

•Iraq - Bayad Aram Hassan, and Brwa Shirwan Awrahman (University of Human

Development), and Adil Mohammed Adnan AL Qaba (University of Mosul)

•Jordan - Sara Maher Khaleel Hamad, and Nizar Moh'd Khier Jamil Al Daradkeh (Princess Sumaya University for Technology), and Ahmad Naser Abdul Kareem Ass'ad (Applied Science Private University)

## Third Prize

### Network Track

•Jordan - Mohammad Motaseem Ahmad Aabussa, Ammar Yaser Khaled Shhadeh, and Yasmeen Waleed Ahmad al Sameer (Al-Balqa Applied University)

•UAE - Yonathan Kiflom Michael (Khalifa University), Khawla Mohammed Alblooshi (United Arab Emirates University), and Muhammad Yousuf (Ajman University)

•Saudi Arabia - Leen Saud N Altowaim (Arab Open University - Saudi Arabia Branch), Waleed Ahmed Mohammed Alkathiri (College of Telecom and Electronics), and Atheer Ayman A Aleyadhy (Princess Norah bint Abdulrahman University)

•Kuwait - Faisal Alnwayem, Othman Muzher, and Haya Sammour (Australian University)

## Cloud Track

•Saudi Arabia - Amr Abdulrahman H Alanazi (Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University), Reem Abdulrman A Alothimen (University of Jeddah), and Abdulmalik Mohammad A Almuhanna (King Saud University)

•Iraq - Mohammed Jumaa Sabir, and Abdalrahman Mohammed Abdaala (University of Human Development), and Govar Dlashad Ali Mohammed (University of Garmian)

## Computing Track

•Lebanon - Ahmad Chehab El din, and Mohamad Mahmoud Hweidi (Beirut Arab University), and Mariam Anwar Zaiter (American University of Science and Technology)

•Oman - Osama Qasim Khalaf ALSaidi, Tanbir Ahmed, and Mohammed Hassan AlBalushi (University of Technology & Applied Science - Shinas)

•Saudi Arabia - Ghufra Sultan M Alansari (Arab Open University - Saudi Arabia Branch), Nourhan Alaa Mohamed Shawky Ibrahim (King Khalid University), and Ghuyudh Abdulaziz F Almutairi (Princess Norah Bint Abdulrahman University)

Council for Youth and Sports, Bahrain; Ni Ruchi, the Ambassador of People's Republic of China to the Kingdom of Bahrain; Dr. Fuad Mohammed Al Ansari, President of the University of Bahrain; Dr. Osama Alsayed, Deputy CEO, Bahrain Polytechnic; Steven Yi, President of Huawei Middle East and Central Asia; Xueman, Vice President, Huawei Group; Aziz Tang, CEO, Huawei Bahrain; Eric Li, Managing Director, Huawei Bahrain; Dr. Raida Al Alawi, President, Bahrain Society of Engineers; and Dr. Jassim Haji, President International Group of Artificial Intelligence. In addition, dignitaries of Ministry offices, presidents, deans, and professors from regional universities were also present.

All the winners received their trophies and prizes from His

Highness Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, and Steven Yi, President of Huawei Middle East & Central Asia. All the participating students in the regional finals received internship opportunities at the Huawei offices in their respective home countries.

His Highness Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa said, "We commissioned the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Youth Affairs, the Ministry of Labor, and the Ministry of Education three years ago to examine ways to reskill our youth, and we made it clear to our ministers that we in the military place great emphasis on lifelong training and education. I wanted to promote participants and improve their skills. I wanted high-intensity, high-impact, competitive

training camps to help gain new skills, assess abilities objectively, and be ready to tackle new challenges and opportunities."

"I was very pleased when Huawei was one of the first companies to respond to this vision and to introduce to us the Middle East and Central Asia competition, which was aligned with our direction. This is a fantastic start to an excellent long-term collaboration between the private sector and the public sector in preparing our youths for their future," he added.

Dr. Mohammed bin Mubarak Juma, Minister of Education, Bahrain, stated, "Since it was first launched in the region in 2017, the Huawei ICT Competition has played an influential role in tapping into future talents, honing the skills of graduating university students, en-

abling them to keep pace with the latest technologies and modern scientific developments, and gaining practical expertise amid tremendous strides witnessed by the information and communications technology sector."

His Excellency also shared his appreciation for the role Huawei played "in developing the information and communications technology sector, and supporting efforts aimed at achieving sustainable development goals and spurring economic growth in the Kingdom of Bahrain."

Steven Yi, President of Huawei Middle East & Central Asia, congratulated all the winners and said, "Developing ICT talent is essential for the continued development of digital economies across the Middle

East and Central. At Huawei, we're cognizant that the digital skills gap affects national economies and individual lives, and we've activated a number of ICT talent development programs and initiatives, including our successful Huawei ICT Competition."

"Huawei is really grateful to our gracious host, Bahrain, for their world-class hospitality. The Kingdom of Bahrain has set an excellent roadmap for an open collaborative environment that promotes partnerships between public and private sectors and academia. I would like to express our gratitude to our partners from regional governments, organizations, and universities for their continuous support and contribution to the success of the competition," Yi added.

The seventh edition of Huawei's flagship ICT talent development initiative witnessed the highest level of participation since the competition's launch in 2017. More than 27,500 students from over 600 universities across 21 Middle Eastern & Central Asian countries participated in this year's Middle East & Central Asia Huawei ICT Competition. Twenty-two national final teams, consisting of 66 students and 20 tutors, from 11 Middle Eastern & Central Asian countries, including Bahrain, Pakistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE, and Oman, qualified for the regional finals. These national finalists participated in exams, field trips, and workshops in the Kingdom of Bahrain from December 19-21, 2023.

The ME & CA Huawei ICT Competition has emerged as the most significant and impactful initiative of its kind in the region. It serves as an essential platform to help nurture young ICT students, contributing to enhancing the national competitiveness of regional countries through the development of future ICT leaders. The competition has garnered support and endorsement from UNESCO, along with over 20 regional ministries, operators, and industry partners.

The program aims to narrow the digital skills gap in the region by arming students with technical and practical skills in the latest technologies like 5G, Artificial Intelligence, Cloud, and more. Students gain an opportunity to learn first-hand from Huawei experts on the latest ICT developments, international trends, and hands-on skills development training at Huawei's state-of-the-art labs, R&D centers and facilities. This aids in preparing the students for their future careers and assists in improving their future employment opportunities in the ICT sector.

# Google agrees to settle \$5 billion lawsuit over 'incognito' mode

San Francisco, United States

Google has agreed to settle a consumer privacy lawsuit seeking at least \$5 billion in damages over allegations it tracked the data of users who thought they were browsing the internet privately.

The object of the lawsuit was the "incognito" mode on Google's Chrome browser that the

plaintiffs said gave users a false sense that what they were surfing online was not being tracked by the Silicon Valley tech firm.

But internal Google emails brought forward in the lawsuit demonstrated that users using incognito mode were being followed by the search and adver-

tising behemoth for measuring web traffic and selling ads.

In a court filing, the judge confirmed that lawyers for Google reached a preliminary agreement to settle the class action lawsuit -- originally filed in 2020 -- which claimed that "millions of individuals" had likely been affected.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs were seeking at least \$5,000 for each user it said had been tracked by the firm's Google Analytics or Ad Manager services even when in the private browsing mode and not logged into their Google account.

This would have amounted to at least \$5 billion, though the

settlement amount will likely not reach that figure, and no amount was given for the preliminary settlement between the parties.

Google and lawyers for the consumers did not respond to an AFP request for comment.

The settlement came just weeks after Google was re-

fused a request that the case be decided by a judge. A jury trial was set to begin next year.

The lawsuit, filed in a California court, claimed Google's practices had infringed on users' privacy by "intentionally" deceiving them with the incognito option.



News in brief

China named former navy commander Dong Jun as its new defence minister yesterday, replacing a predecessor removed after just months as Beijing and Washington restart critical military-to-military talks.



China names navy ex-chief as new defence minister

A Russian court yesterday sentenced Ksenia Fadeyeva, who led jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny's now-banned organisation in the Siberian city of Tomsk, to almost a decade in prison.

Russian court jails Navalny ally Fadeyeva for nine years



A Russian court yesterday sentenced Ksenia Fadeyeva, who led jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny's now-banned organisation in the Siberian city of Tomsk, to almost a decade in prison.

Police in India said yesterday they were working to track down the kingpins of a people smuggling ring uncovered when French authorities halted a planeload of passengers bound for Nicaragua.

Indian police hunt kingpins in France people-smuggling case



Police in India said yesterday they were working to track down the kingpins of a people smuggling ring uncovered when French authorities halted a planeload of passengers bound for Nicaragua.

SPOTLIGHT

N. Korea's new nuclear reactor likely fully operational next summer



Representative picture AFP | Seoul, South Korea

A new reactor at North Korea's main nuclear facility will likely be fully operational by next summer, Seoul's defence minister said, a week after the UN atomic agency called it a "cause for concern".

Shin noted that while no country has used light-water reactors to produce weapons-grade plutonium, Pyongyang could potentially use the new reactor to produce tritium for hydrogen bombs or to conduct tests for developing small nuclear reactors used in nuclear-powered submarines.

Israel troops ignored pleas for 'help' before hostage killings

A Hamas delegation is due in Cairo Friday to give its "observations" about an Egyptian plan for a ceasefire, a Hamas official said.

Israeli forces shot dead a Palestinian in the occupied West Bank on Friday, medics said, after military officials alleged he carried out a car ramming.

In the Red Sea, where Yemen's Huthis have repeatedly targeted vessels with strikes they say are in support of Palestinians in Gaza, the US military said it shot down on Thursday a drone and an anti-ship ballistic missile fired by the Iran-backed rebels.

AFP | Jerusalem, Undefined



Israeli security forces stand guard as Palestinian Muslims gather for Friday prayer in east Jerusalem investigation published on Thursday.

Red Cross denies involved in transfer of Palestinian bodies Jerusalem, Undefined

The Red Cross on Friday denied reports that it was involved in the transfer of dozens of Palestinian bodies from Israel to Gaza, where Israeli forces have been battling Hamas militants.

Former Nepal cricket captain Lamichhane convicted of rape

AFP | Kathmandu, Nepal

Nepali cricket star Sandeep Lamichhane was yesterday convicted of rape after a repeatedly delayed trial that had left him free to continue his sporting career.



Nepali former national cricket captain Sandeep Lamichhane (l) is escorted by police outside the district court following his release on bail after three months in custody for rape charges, in Kathmandu

Lamichhane, 23, was once the poster boy for the rise of cricket in Nepal and the leg spinner's onfield success had boosted the sport's profile in the Himalayan republic.

YOU KNOW WHAT About 2,300 rape cases were reported in Nepal in the 2021-22 fiscal year, according to police, but rights workers say many more assaults go unreported.

Argentina formally rejects BRICS membership

AFP | Buenos Aires, Argentina

Argentine President Javier Milei has sent letters to BRICS leaders to formalize his decision to reject an invitation to join the grouping of major emerging economies, the presidency said Friday.



Javier Milei (C) delivering a message to the nation from the Casa Rosada presidential palace in Buenos Aires

UN hands control of its Timbuktu camp back to Mali

AFP | Bamako, Mali

The UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has handed over control of one of its last major camps in the northern Timbuktu region, ORTM public television reported yesterday.

Regional governor Bakoun Kante was seen thanking the UN during an official handover ceremony Thursday broadcast

Russian strikes kill 18, leave dozens wounded across Ukraine

AFP | Kyiv, Ukraine

Russia launched drone and missile strikes across Ukraine yesterday, killing at least 18 people and wounding over a hundred in one of the most massive air attacks of the war.



Ukrainian firefighters extinguish a fire inside a destroyed building after a missile attack in Odesa

Poland says Russian missile passed through its airspace

AFP | Warsaw, Poland

A Russian missile passed through Polish airspace Friday, entering from and then back into Ukraine, the Polish army said, as Russia pummelled Ukraine with one of the biggest air attacks of the war.

Polko. AFP journalists also saw smoke near the building of Lukyanivska metro station close to the city centre. Popko said the metro station had been damaged but it reopened later in the day.

TOP 4 TWEETS



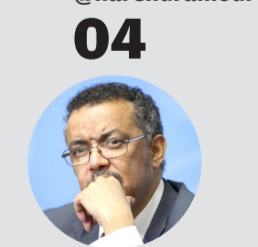
As hostilities in Gaza intensify, I remain gravely concerned about further spillover of this conflict, which could have devastating consequences for the entire region.



Ukrainians have done what no one thought was possible: stood toe to toe with one of the biggest militaries, conceded no territory, and they pushed Russia's navy back in the Black Sea and opened a corridor to allow them to export grain and other products to the world.



Over the last two days, attended the Conference of Chief Secretaries. We had fruitful deliberations on a wide range of policy related issues and also discussed on means of ensuring better service delivery as well as ensuring good governance for all citizens.



Since September, nearly 500,000 Afghans have returned to their country from Pakistan, many requiring a range of health services, especially considering the colder weather.

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

# autobuzz



# Decoding the Contrast

Understanding difference between GCC and American Specs in Automobiles

TDT | agencies

Dubai, known for its opulence, thriving economy, and love for luxury vehicles, takes center stage as a dynamic metropolis in the heart of the United Arab Emirates. For those embarking on the car-buying journey in Dubai, a pivotal decision awaits – choosing between GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) or American car specifications. But fear not. Get ready to delve into the intricacies of the automotive world with this guide.”

Navigating this choice can be daunting

### What do GCC specs entail?

Designed to endure the distinctive climatic conditions of the region, GCC specs ensure that vehicles are equipped to navigate the prevalent extreme heat and sandy terrains.

Notable features include robust air conditioning systems and measures for dust protection, making them well-suited for the challenging environmental factors encountered in these countries.

### Follow these steps for an informed decision when purchasing a vehicle:

#### ● Check the VIN:

Verify the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) of the car. If it starts with the letter “W,” it indicates that it is likely a GCC spec vehicle. However, it’s important to note that not all GCC spec cars have a VIN starting with “W,” but a significant majority do.

#### ● Examine Chassis Plate:

Inspect the chassis plate on the door card. Look for Arabic writing or a phone number from a GCC country. This can be a strong indicator of GCC specifications.

#### ● Observe Side Mirrors:

Pay attention to the inscriptions on the side mirrors. GCC spec cars often have inscriptions in Arabic, which can further confirm their specifications.

Keep in mind that these steps are active measures you can take to identify whether a car is GCC

spec or not, providing valuable information for your purchasing decision.

### What are the pros and cons of GCC specs?

There’s no doubt that GCC specs can handle extreme weather conditions, which is quite common in the Gulf region, but it also has a set of disadvantages that comes with it. Here’s a list of key points to consider while buying a GCC spec car.

#### ● Pros

Designed for regional climatic conditions and can face intense heat and sand.

Features enhanced climate control (reinforced air conditioning).

Has safe dust protection measures.

Higher resale value than other specs.

#### ● Cons

Limited to a variety of models and options.

Potentially fewer advanced features compared to American spec cars.

Has restricted access to im-

ported vehicles.

Comes with only localized warranty and service support.

### What are the pros and cons of American specs?

American specs can have a wide array of features catered for every person’s needs, however it has practicality issues which many might not prefer while buying a car. Below mentioned pros and cons can give you a clear picture of American spec vehicles:-

#### ● Pros

Plethora of models and options.

Equipped with advanced features and technologies.

Has the availability of imported vehicles.

Broad service and warranty support.

#### ● Cons

Potentially higher price than GCC specs.

Unable to withstand regional conditions like heat, sand, etc

Limited availability of specific models.

Resale value may be lower compared to GCC spec cars.

## Toyota subsidiary to halt all shipments over rigged safety tests

Tokyo

Toyota subsidiary Daihatsu said it will suspend shipments of all car models in Japan and abroad, following news it had rigged safety tests.

The announcement came after an independent panel also found the malpractice dated back to 1989, when the oldest instance was confirmed and reports said the firm faced on-site inspections by government officials.

Toyota, the world’s biggest carmaker, expressed its “sincere apologies” over the issue and said it would carry out “a fundamental reform”.

The panel was set up earlier this year to probe a safety scandal that emerged in April.

The investigation “found new irregularities in 174 items within 25 test categories” in addition to wrongdoing previously detected in April and May involving door parts and side-collision tests, Toyota said.

In a statement, Toyota also recognised the “extreme grav-

ity” of Daihatsu’s neglect, which has “shaken the very foundations of the company as an automobile manufacturer”.

Daihatsu employees were “exposed to the intense pressure to pass crash tests on their first attempt” to minimise the number of vehicles destroyed and thereby “reduce costs”, committee chair Makoto Kaiami told reporters.

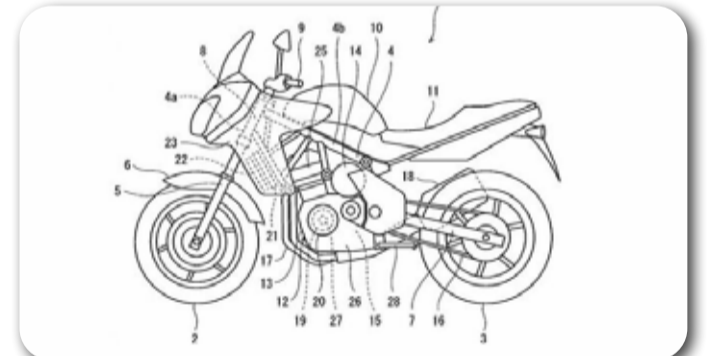
“No failure can be forgiven” -- that was the kind of mindset,” he said.

With the latest findings, the number of car models linked to wrongdoing now totals 64, including some sold under the Toyota brand which will also be suspended.

In April, Daihatsu admitted falsifying crash test results for four of its models, involving a total of 88,000 vehicles manufactured in Thailand and Malaysia in 2022 and 2023.

Then in May, it announced it was halting production in Japan of two hybrid vehicle models because of similar “irregularities”, including the Toyota Raize SUV, manufactured on behalf of its parent company.

## Kawasaki Versys Hybrid on way!



TDT | agencies

sembles the one employed by Kawasaki for the Z 7 Hybrid.

Kawasaki recently revealed the international launch of the Z 7 Hybrid, and there are indications that the Japanese motorcycle manufacturer is in the process of developing a new hybrid model, the Versys hybrid. Information about its powertrain and other details has surfaced through leaked patent designs that have emerged online.

Analysis of the leaked patent documents suggests that the Versys Hybrid may adopt a similar configuration to the Z 7 Hybrid. This potential setup includes a 9kW motor, a 1.4kWh battery, and a 451cc parallel-twin engine. Notably, the cooling system depicted in the leaked images closely re-

sembles the one employed by Kawasaki for the Z 7 Hybrid. The proposed configuration has the potential to enhance the touring capabilities of the bike, allowing the rider to seamlessly transition from fully electric to an Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) mode once the battery depletes. For context, the 451cc parallel-twin engine is capable of producing 69bhp. Anticipated features encompass options for manual or automatic gear shifts, full LED lighting, a digital dashboard, and more.

Presently, the Kawasaki Versys Hybrid appears to be in the early stages of development, suggesting that it may take some time before an official teaser is released, followed by a global debut.



### Huawei’s Luxeed S7

Visitors look at the Luxeed S7, the first sedan produced by Chinese tech giant Huawei, at a Huawei showroom in Hangzhou, in China’s eastern Zhejiang province. The top-end Luxeed S7 will have a driving range of more than 800 kilometers (497 miles) and be capable of driving another 400 km on 15 minutes of supercharging using Huawei’s facilities. By comparison, the dual-motor Tesla Model S has a 715 km range and can add 347 km in 15 minutes.



## Ferrari bounty scheme offers rewards for exposing counterfeiters

TDT | agencies

Ferrari has initiated an Anti-Counterfeiting Reward Scheme, encouraging individuals worldwide to report potential trademark violations. Customers are invited to disclose

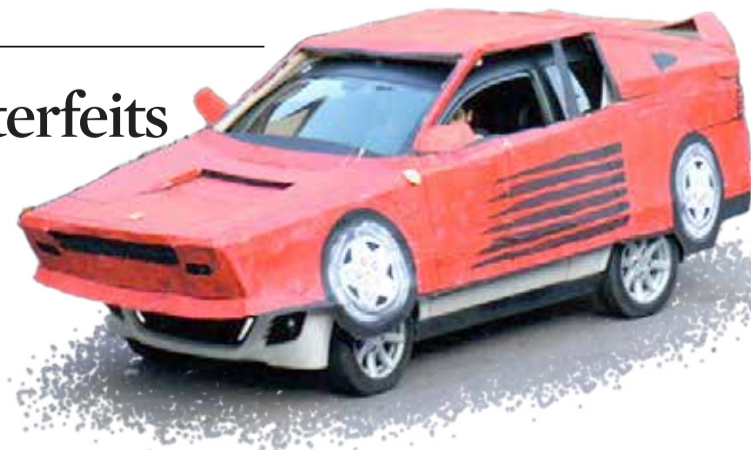
information about products infringing on Ferrari trademarks, particularly those sold in physical establishments.

The program appears to target sales occurring primarily through brick-and-mortar locations rather than online plat-

forms. The guidelines specify a focus on reporting from physical stores, and while reporting online sales, particularly on eBay, is mentioned, obtaining the seller’s address is highlighted as a prerequisite.

Regarding rewards, Ferrari provides limited details, vaguely

mentioning an unspecified “gift item” available “while stocks last.” The company also reserves the right to withhold rewards if insufficient information is provided, if the reported seller has already been flagged, or for any other reason deemed valid by Ferrari.”







# Classifieds



Call us on +973 36458394  
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## Nadal 'feeling good' but plays down Australia expectations

AFP | Brisbane, Australia

Rafael Nadal said yesterday he was "feeling good" but played down any chance of winning tournaments in the near future as he returns from a near year-long injury absence.

The 37-year-old has not played since a second-round loss at the Australian Open this year, undergoing two rounds of hip surgery on the long road back.

It raised fears his career could be over, but he will again grace the courts at the Brisbane International starting on Sunday ahead of the Australian Open in Melbourne.

"I am feeling good," the Spaniard, who has previously indicated it could be his farewell season, said at a promotional event in the city.

"I can't complain. I feel much better today than what I expected one month ago, but for me, it's impossible to think about winning tournaments today.

"What's possible is to enjoy the comeback to the court.

"I don't expect much, honestly," he added. "The only thing that I expect is to be able to go on court, to feel myself competitive and to give my best."

The 22-time Grand Slam champion spent time at his academy in Kuwait this month in search of temperatures and conditions similar to those he will encounter in Australia.

But his level of training has been limited and he admitted

would be "a tough process in the beginning".

"It's not like I've been practising with good intensity for the last six months. I just have been practising for the last month in a very good intensity," he said.

"Nothing is impossible. But for me, just being here is a victory, and I hope that I will have a chance to enjoy, and the crowd too."

A two-time Australian Open champion, in 2009 and 2022, Nadal has slipped behind old rival Novak Djokovic in the all-time list of Grand Slam singles titles, as the Serb won three this year in his absence to take his tally to a record 24.

Nadal said at this stage of his career "I cannot have super long-term goals because I don't see myself playing for a super long time."

"But in my mind, I'm going to try to give myself the opportunity to be more competitive as the season goes."



## Norrie beats teammate Boulter's boyfriend as Britain down Aussies

AFP | Perth, Australia

Britain eased to victory over hosts Australia in their United Cup opener on Friday with Cameron Norrie defeating Alex de Minaur the boyfriend of British teammate Katie Boulter.

Boulter showed no mercy to Ajla Tomljanovic, who missed 10 months of action this year due to a knee injury, beating her 6-2, 6-4 to clinch victory for Britain in the mixed teams event.

The British ran out 2-1 winners as Australia saved some honour in prevailing in the mixed doubles.

The winners joined Spain, who beat Brazil 2-1 to begin the competition at the 18-team tournament being staged in Perth and Sydney prior to the Australian Open. Norrie lifted his level at the end to overcome good friend and training partner Alex de Minaur 6-4, 2-6, 7-6 (7/2), repeating a victory he earned against the Aussie at the event a year ago.

South Africa-born Norrie,



Britain's Cameron Norrie hits a return against Australia's Alex de Minaur during their men's singles match at the United Cup tennis tournament in Perth

with family in Australia watching, ended a nine-match loss streak against Top 20 opponents as he beat de Minaur in front of a packed-out local crowd.

"I had to dig deep and play bravely in the third set," Norrie said after a match that lasted nearly two-and-a-half hours.

"At the end of the second set he was firing and I could not match his level.

"We always have great battles, I had to run a lot today. But it's

good to start the year with a win," added the 28-year-old.

Boulter, ranked 56 in the world, was thrilled to give Britain an unassailable lead on her United Cup debut.

"I've been training well coming in, I've tried to work as hard as I could.

"This win starts the year really well. Having the entire team behind really does help you."

Earlier world number 11 Beatriz Haddad Maia got her season

off to a winning start, but it was not enough to prevent Brazil losing 2-1 to Spain.

The tie came down to a deciding doubles rubber, with Alejandro Davidovich Fokina and Sara Sorribes Tormo defeating Haddad Maia and two-time Grand Slam winner Marcelo Melo 6-4, 7-5.

Davidovich Fokina got Spain off to a winning start as he dispatched Thiago Seyboth Wild 6-4, 6-0, requiring four match points to earn the first victory of the tournament.

Haddad Maia then prevailed by defeating Sorribes Tormo 7-6 (7/1), 6-2 to level the tie at 1-1.

The end of the crunch mixed doubles tie was tight, with Brazil saving a match point before falling seconds later.

"I knew I had to be calm near the end," Davidovich Fokina said. "I needed to focus on every point -- in doubles things can change very quickly."

Spain are playing without Rafael Nadal, with the 37-year-old ending a year-long injury absence at the Brisbane International instead.

## Ancelotti snubs Brazil, commits to Real Madrid

AFP | Madrid, Spain

Carlo Ancelotti extended his contract with Real Madrid to June 2026 on Friday which would rule him out of becoming Brazil national coach.

"Real Madrid and Carlo Ancelotti have reached agreement on the extension of his contract till June 30, 2026," Real said in a statement.



Carlo Ancelotti

It had been reported in July this year that 64-year-old Ancelotti would become the first for-

eigner to coach Brazil in almost 60 years once he saw out his present Real contract next year.

The Brazil Football Confederation had named Fernando Diniz as the temporary manager before they anticipated Ancelotti taking control for the 2024 Copa America.

Ednaldo Rodriguez, the then president of the CBF, held months of negotiations with

Ancelotti, who had previously stated the Real job would be his last in football.

However, it appeared one of the most glamorous and challenging jobs in football had brought a change of mind.

"We went after him not only due to his record, but also because he is a decent person," Rodriguez told beIN Sports earlier this year.

# Riffa, Al Nahda semi-final clash confirmed

Asian Football Confederation hosts official draw for 2023/2024 AFC Cup knockout stage

TDI | Manama

Riffa Club's pairing with Al Nahda of Oman in the West Zonal semi-finals of the 2023/2024 AFC Cup has been confirmed, following the official draw for the teams that progressed into the knockout stage of this season's competition.

The draw took place Thursday at the Asian Football Confederation House in Kuala Lumpur. Riffa officials Salman Al Mawawada Ahmed Al Kooheji attended the event.

Riffa and Nahda face off in one final four pairing, while Al Ahd of Lebanon and Al Kahrabaa Club of Iraq go head-to-head in the other.

The West Zonal semi-finals

and final will be two-leg ties, with the last four matches scheduled for February 12, 13 and February 19, 20. The final will be on April 16 and 23.

Riffa booked their place in this phase after finishing as winners of Group C in the AFC Cup's preliminary round. Nahda, on the other hand, were the top-ranked squad from Group A.

The draw also set up the pairings for the Inter-Zone semi-finals in March and Inter-Zone final in April for teams outside the West zone. FC Abdysh-Ata of Kyrgyzstan take on Taichung Futuro of Taipei while Odisha FC of India face the champions of the ASEAN Zone final.

The semis in the ASEAN Zone are between Macarthur FC of

Australia and Sabah FC of Malaysia, and between Central Coast Mariners of Australia and Phnom Penh Crown of Cambodia.

That will set the stage for this season's AFC Cup final, which is scheduled for May of next year.

The AFC Cup is the annual continental club competition of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) for the continent's top teams not competing in the AFC Champions League. Riffa are the lone Bahraini outfit in this year's tournament.

They are looking to become only the second club from the Kingdom to win the tournament title. Muharraq won the AFC Cup twice in the past, in 2008 and in 2021, and also finished as runners-up in 2006.



Riffa players during a local training session

# Cummins the hero as Australia beat Pakistan to win series

AFP | Melbourne, Australia

A fired-up Pat Cummins bagged five wickets and 10 in the match to earn Australia a nail-biting 79-run win in the second Test and clinch the series against a battling Pakistan yesterday.

Set 317 for victory, the visitors put up a stellar fight as they chased their first Test triumph in Australia since 1995.

But they were dismissed for 237, with the last five wickets falling for 18 runs.

Australian skipper Cummins was the chief destroyer, taking 5-49 to go with his first innings 5-48 -- only the second 10-wicket haul of his Test career.

Mitchell Starc chipped in with 4-55 as the tail collapsed after Shan Masood (60), Agha Salman (50) and Babar Azam (41) gave them a fighting chance.

"Little bit twitchy, felt okay but they were batting pretty nicely," said Cummins.

"Anything with a three in front of it was the aim, so we got that," he added of the target they wanted to set Pakistan. "Felt like we had enough to bowl at but a little



Australian bowler Pat Cummins (C) celebrates with teammate Marnus Labuschagne (L) after dismissing Pakistan batsman Shaheen Shah Afridi

bit tight."

It was always going to be a tough task, with the highest-ever successful fourth innings run chase at the Melbourne Cricket Ground the 332-7 England man-

aged in 1928, with no other team getting past 300.

"We have to look at the bigger picture. The smiles are that there are a lot of positives," said Pakistan captain Masood.

"This is the way we want to play Test cricket, fighting until the end and a result was possible for us. A lot to work on. But this is a blueprint."

Opener Abdullah Shafique de-

parted for four during a tricky session before lunch, caught by Usman Khawaja in the slips off Starc following a period of intense pressure.

Imam-ul-Haq survived the initial blitz, but was no match for Cummins after the break, with the pacer sending down a probing ball that nipped back and trapped him lbw for 12.

Masood was given out lbw by the umpire on 12, but it was overturned on review and he quickly got back in his stride.

He took a nasty ball to the ribs that needed treatment, but was undeterred and raced to a gutsy 50 before Cummins again came to Australia's rescue, enticing an edge to Steve Smith.

There was plenty resting on the shoulders of Azam as the side's premier batter and he looked in good nick.

But after reaching 41, Josh Hazlewood got a ball to jag back and it clattered into his off stump.

Mohammad Rizwan also looked dangerous on his way to 35 before Cummins again worked his magic, with Alex Carey collecting a catch behind

the stumps after the ball went off the batsman's glove.

Cummins then removed Aamer Jamal and Shaheen Shah Afridi in quick succession before Starc cleaned up.

## Bounced back

The Pakistanis padded up after the hosts were all out in their second innings for 262, after resuming on 187-6.

Mir Hamza was the best of the bowlers with 4-32, while Afridi took 4-76.

Carey slammed 53 to help Australia build their overnight lead.

He resumed on 16 after Australia had bounced back from 16-4 thanks to an attacking 96 from Mitchell Marsh and Smith's gutsy 50.

Carey, who made his first and only Test hundred in Melbourne a year ago, hit consecutive fours in his first over off Hasan Ali to build confidence.

At the other end, Starc lived dangerously and fell for nine with the impressive Afridi getting the breakthrough on a pitch still offering a bit for the bowlers.

The Interior Ministry showjumping team won first place in the grand prix of the Bahrain Royal Equestrian and Endurance Federation (BREEF) Showjumping Championship. The competition was held under the patronage of BREEF showjumping committee chairman Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Khalifa. Interior Ministry team supervisor Major-General Abdulaziz Al Rumaihi gifted the achievement to Interior Minister General Shaikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa and thanked him for his support. Al Rumaihi hailed the follow-up of Public Security Chief Lt-General Tariq Al Hassan to all the ministry's sports teams. Right, members of the Interior Ministry's showjumping team.



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HH Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa receives the Al Riffa Cup from REHC High Committee chairman His Highness Shaikh Isa bin Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa



Action from yesterday's races at REHC

# Baker hails **superstar** Lucander

Bahrain Turf Series produces two thrillers with Al Riffa Cup and Al Dana Cup

● Scott and Shepherd fire home another winner with Rocket Rodney in the sprint

● Gallant Lucander records third course win after titanic battle in middle distance

TDT | Manama

Round two of the 2023/2024 Bahrain Turf Series produced two thrilling races at Rashid Equestrian and Horseracing Club (REHC) yesterday, with victory in both divisions, sprint and middle-distance, going to internationally trained horses.

The George Scott-trained Rocket Rodney, owned by His Highness Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa's Victorious Racing, returned to form when taking the Al Riffa Cup, although his owner, trainer and jockey were denied a famous double when their Isle Of Jura could not peg back Lucander, trained by George Baker, in the



REHC High Committee chairman His Highness Shaikh Isa bin Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa with winners from the Al Dana Cup

The two top-weights, Isle Of Jura and Lucander, served up a fantastic finish to the Al Dana Cup, with the seven-year-old Lucander prevailing by the narrowest of margins to deny Isle Of Jura a second win in the Bahrain Turf Series. Back in third was the gallant Box To Box (trained by Hugo Palmer), delivering a 1-2-3 for the internationals.

Afterwards, a delighted trainer-George Baker, together with his owners, welcomed back Lucander, who was twice a winner in Bahrain last season, saying: "These horses, you travel the

world to find them, and then when you find them, you travel the world with them."

He added: "That was a huge thrill, what a horse he has become. Last year was amazing, but this more than matches it. He's tough and he's game and Patsy (Cosgrave) gave him a beautiful ride. He really stuck his neck out, I thought we were going to be done in the shadows of the post.

"He's just been a superstar for us. He has won off a rating of 100 today, so we will have a think in the morning about which way we go from here."

Half an hour before Isle of Jura was narrowly beaten, his connections were cheering home a surprise winner.

A prolific performer last year, including when runner-up at Royal Ascot, Rocket Rodney shot back to form in the Al Riffa Cup to give owners Victorious, trainer George Scott and jockey Callum Shepherd their second win in this season's Bahrain Turf Series. Rocket Rodney led home a clean sweep for the internationals with Brazen Bolt (trained by John Quinn) and Anthem National (Philip Kirby) finishing second and third respectively.

Victory in the sprint division was a poignant one for trainer George Scott, as he revealed the key role Rocket Rodney has played in getting his career back on track.

"He (Rocket Rodney) has been a great friend of HH Shaikh Nasser's and myself and he really helped kick start my career again last year. He was the first horse HH Shaikh Nasser had with me and HH Shaikh Nasser has been very patient, so it is lovely to have the horse back and for him to win a Bahrain Turf Series race.

Referring to the delay at the start of the race, Scott added: "He's got a great mind. He's not a typical sprinter, he would walk around quietly all day. Then, once the race was underway, we were stuck on the rail but it was probably a good thing because by the end he really needed the line, so if he had got out sooner, he may have got tired. He has thrived here in the last couple of weeks so that gave me hope."

Even so, the win was a welcome surprise for jockey Callum Sheppard, as Rocket Rodney put behind him an unplaced effort in round one of the Bahrain Turf Series sprint division.

Shepherd said: "That was a little unexpected, though we hoped he would run better. It is just great for him to get his head back in front. He was a prolific juvenile, and it is really good he has gone and won today and done so in these circumstances.

"The step up in trip helped and we got a nice tow into the race. I thought I might get through up the rail, but when I pulled him out, he has picked up the leader nicely."

Running from December through to February, the Bahrain Turf Series provides opportunities for internationally trained runners (rated 85-100) to compete against local Bahrain based horses across ten races. Each race is worth \$80,000 with bonus prizes for the horses accumulating most points in the two divisions, sprint and middle distance.

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

## Mudallal clinches Owners Cup in Class One race

● Byline wins The Humphrey Butler Fine Jewellery Cup

● Zagato comes away with Kuwait Finance House Cup

TDT | Manama

Mudallal lifted the Owners Cup in one of yesterday's other big races at Rashid Equestrian and Horseracing Club.

The five-year-old gelding triumphed for owners Al Mohamediya Racing and trainer Fawzi Nass, with jockey Jason Watson in the saddle.

The Owners Cup was on offer in the fifth race of the day, held



Winners at a prize presentation

over 10 furlongs. It was a Class One-Domestic Grade One event carrying \$31,500 in prize money.

Mediterranean Moon finished as the runner-up for M and E Racing, AM Smith and Edinson

Rodriguez; while Taaris came third for Abdulla Fawzi Nass, Fawzi Nass and Husain Makki.

Elsewhere yesterday, Byline hoisted The Humphrey Butler Fine Jewellery Cup, Zagato won the Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Cup, and Ganadeel claimed The Bahrain Jockey Academy Cup.

Byline won The Humphrey Butler Fine Jewellery Cup in the eighth and final race of the day, held over eight furlongs with a \$14,000 total prize. It was a Class One-Domestic Grade Two event.

Byline took first place for Al Adiyat Racing and AM Smith, with Gerald Mosse in the saddle.

Mehmento finished second for Al Afooo Racing, Mohammed Hasan and Soufiane Saadi; and Gumais came third for Al Mohamediya Racing, Fawzi Nass and Jason Watson.

Zagato took the KFH Cup in the seventh and penultimate race—a Class One-Domestic

Grade Two event—held over 12 furlongs with a \$14,000 total prize. Zagato triumphed for the Mohamediya-Nass-Watson triumvirate; while Chronograph came second for Al Adiyat Racing, AM Smith and Gerald Mosse; with Simply Sondheim in third for PJJ Racing, George Baker and Patrick Cosgrave. Ganadeel lifted The Bahrain Jockey Academy Cup in race two, held over a six-furlong straight with a \$6,000 prize. The three-year-old filly won for owner HH Shaikh Isa bin Abdulla bin Isa Al Khalifa, trainer Haider Ebrahim and jockey Abdulla Faisal. Portofino was the runner-up for Abdulla Fawzi Nass, Fawzi Nass and Husain Makki; while Najran came third for HH Shaikh Hamad bin Abdulla bin Isa Al Khalifa, Haider Ebrahim and Nathan Crosse.