

**Muharrag, Al Khaldiya power through**

Muharrag narrowly defeat Riffa on penalties, Al Khaldiya hit four past Ettihad to advance to HM the King's Cup semi-finals | P12

**WORLD 6 South Africa files ICJ case accusing Israel of 'genocidal acts' in Gaza**

**THE DAILY tribune**



**Zac Efron 'disconnects' in nature 8 CELEBS**

**BUSINESS 5 Markets eye uncertainty ahead after blowout 2023 for US stocks**

**BD200M economic boost**

**Mumtalakat's direct contributions to state budget to reach BD200M in 2024**

TDT | Manama

Mumtalakat has revealed that its direct contribution to the state's general budget will reach BD200million over an eight-year period, from 2017 until the end of the upcoming year 2024.

The Kingdom's sovereign wealth fund stated that it has injected BD40million into the current year's budget for 2022, and it will also allocate BD40 million for the budget of the following year.

At the same time, Mumtalakat affirmed its policy of self-sufficiency in managing its operations, as it does not burden the government with any financial obligations nor does it receive direct support from the state. In fact, the company contributes a portion of its profits to the public account.

In a memorandum to the Council of Representatives, Mumtalakat clarified that it publishes audited financial statements on its website in line with best governance practices. Those interested in knowing the company's financial standing can access its financial data, which is made available to the public.

The company emphasised its commitment to safeguarding state funds, enhancing transparency, and enabling various oversight bodies to monitor its financial transactions. The Council of Representatives and the National Audit Office were mentioned as among the key entities responsible for auditing the company's data.

**Adherence**

Mumtalakat highlighted its adherence to the provisions of the Companies Management and Governance Charter, issued by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce.

Regarding the transfer of its profits to the state's general budget, the company stated that

the proportion of net profits transferred to the budget is determined by a decision from the shareholder, represented by the government.

This determination takes into account the alignment with the Council of Representatives through discussions on the state's general budget, considering the company's economic conditions and surrounding circumstances. It also considers the company's need for cash liquidity to implement its future plans and investment strategy during the two subsequent financial years following the budget project.

The company added: "The reconciliation between the government's needs and the company's requirements is taken into consideration, which in some years has led to the company's contribution to the general budget despite its negative results."

"As a result, Mumtalakat is committed to contributing to the general budget annually during the past six years, the current year, and the upcoming year."



In continuation of the Kingdom of Bahrain's celebrations of the national holidays, the Ministry of the Interior organised a military column parade in the Northern Governorate. The show included an infantry column and police military formations, with the participation of the cavalry division, the camel division, the honour guard, and the police musical band. *More pictures on Page 2*

**Russia vows 'punishment' as strike on Belgorod kills 14**

AFP | Moscow

Russia called a meeting of the UN Security, held early today morning, Bahrain time, accusing Ukraine of having targeted civilians in the city of Belgorod with missiles and rockets, killing at least 14 people and wounding dozens more.

It was an attack, said Moscow, that would "not go unpunished".

The attack came a day after Ukraine said a barrage of Russian missile strikes on several cities had killed at least 39 people, wounding dozens more.

Fresh strikes yesterday caused more casualties in the northeastern city of Kharkiv, Ukrainian officials said.

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**Transfer tax tango**

Gulf hub's future hinges on risky financial pirouette

TDT | Manama

The Central Bank of Bahrain (CBB) is sounding the alarm over a new parliamentary proposal that wants to tax money sent abroad by foreigners.

The CBB warns this "Foreign Financial Transfers Tax" could cripple the Kingdom's financial sector and send its attractiveness as a business hub plummeting.

The proposed tax, a hefty two per cent on all outbound cash transfers, has supporters who see it as a golden goose for diversifying Bahrain's oil-dependent economy. They argue it will keep millions circulating within the country, fuelling growth.

But the CBB paints a different picture. It fears the tax will drive banks and financial institutions fleeing, taking their business and investment dol-



lars with them. Bahrain's competitive edge against its Gulf neighbours and other top expat destinations, all tax-free for foreign transfers, would evaporate.

The ripple effects could be far-reaching, squeezing em-

ployers forced to shoulder the tax burden and ultimately impacting citizens and businesses alike. Foreign talent, lured by Bahrain's open economy, might reconsider with a new financial levy hanging over their heads.



**Central Bank of Bahrain warns that a "Foreign Financial Transfers Tax" could cripple Kingdom's financial sector and send its attractiveness as a business hub plummeting**

The CBB also warns of unintended consequences: a surge in shady, unofficial channels for sending money out of the country, bypassing the official system and undermining its transparency.

This proposed tax is not the first rodeo. Similar attempts earlier had met with strong opposition from the government, the Ministry of Finance, and even the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry. All see the potential harm far outweighing any short-term revenue gains.

The Council of Representatives, however, seems determined to see this through. Despite the CBB's dire warnings and widespread opposition, they're set to discuss the proposal soon.

The question remains: Will Bahrain risk its hard-earned reputation as a financial hub with this controversial tax, or will they listen to the CBB's pleas and steer clear of a potential economic calamity?

The answer will have consequences for not just Bahrain's bank accounts, but the future of its entire economy.

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**Northern Governorate holds military parade**



**Bahraini Farmers' Market perfect for shoppers: Tourism Minister**

TDT | Manama

The Bahraini Farmers' Market has become a favourite destination for citizens, residents, tourists, and visitors to the Kingdom, individuals and families alike, Tourism Minister Fatima bint Jaffar Al Sairafi has affirmed.



The Tourism Minister with other officials during their visit to the Bahraini Farmers' Market

This is due to the unique experience the market offers, including many attractive and exciting elements. These include its location in the Budaiya Botanical Garden, its good organisation, the distinguished presence of Bahraini farmers,

and the Bahraini agricultural products they provide, in addition to the entertainment areas and accompanying events, she said.

While visiting the Bahraini Farmers' Market, in its 11th edition, Al Sairafi praised the outstanding organisation of the market this year.

**Destination Bahrain!**

Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority launches roadshow in Shanghai, Guangzhou



BTEA officials with roadshow participants from Bahrain and China

● Roadshow aims to promote Kingdom as top regional, global tourist destination for visitors from East Asia

● Meetings held with Chinese travel agents, tour operators to discuss packages, specialised programmes

TDT | Manama

The Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority launched a promotional roadshow in the Chinese cities of Shanghai and Guangzhou involving prominent travel, tourism, aviation, and hotel sectors.

The roadshow aims to promote Bahrain as a prominent tourist destination in regional and global markets, enhancing the sector's contribution to the gross domestic product, in line with the Kingdom of Bahrain's tourism strategy for 2022 to 2026.

BTEA CEO Dr Naser Qaedi said the roadshow aims to promote tourist sites in the Kingdom, attract East Asian visitors, and support the growth of the tourism sector.

It will highlight Bahrain's status and competitiveness as an ideal tourist destination with advanced facilities and services that meet modern life requirements.



Roadshow showcases Bahrain's uniqueness as a tourist destination, highlighting Kingdom's world-class luxury hotels, attractions, and archaeological sites

The roadshow also seeks to build partnerships and establish cooperation agreements. It revealed a growing interest from Chinese tourism entities to explore Bahraini tourism opportunities and products, indicating a positive image of Bahraini tourism among Chinese tourism sector leaders, Qaedi said.

This opens the way for the private sector to offer more programmes and attract new tourists to enjoy the Kingdom's nature, diverse activities, and ancient cultural heritage, he added.

**Boosting the economy**

BTEA collaborated with the private sector to create distinctive tourism products that contribute to boosting the economy

and increasing the number of visitors to the Kingdom.

Bahrain is aiming to increase foreign investment, double the number of tourists, develop the tourism and travel sector, and highlight its components on Gulf, regional, and global levels; based on the positive indicators achieved in the current year, Qaedi said.

In the BTEA's two roadshow events in Shanghai and Guangzhou, Chinese travel agencies were invited to showcase the Kingdom's tourism offers and packages, as well as Bahraini tourism products.

Bahraini destination management companies and hotels met with Chinese travel agents and tour operators to discuss joint-tourism packages and specialised programmes to attract Chinese tourists and encourage their extended stay in the Kingdom.

The roadshow aimed to showcase Bahrain as a unique tourist destination, combining cultural heritage and urban development. It highlighted the country's world-class luxury hotels, attractions, and archaeological sites.

Exhibition World Bahrain won the best new event and conference centre award for 2023. The centre hosts numerous events, exhibitions, and cultural activities, making it an ideal destination for Chinese tourists seeking unique experiences.

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# Dance like a pirate, dine like a king

Bahrain's unforgettable New Year's Eve adventure begins!

Zainab Zaman  
TDT | Manama

As the final moments of 2023 slip away, Bahrain eagerly anticipates the arrival of 2024 with a spectacular array of events to mark the transition.

Throughout December, Celebrate Bahrain has been a canvas for the nation's traditions and celebrations, setting the stage for the grand finale on New Year's Eve (NYE).

The countdown to the new chapter or a reflective pause on the past becomes a shared experience, building up to the highly anticipated annual fireworks show near the Avenues Park.

Lessons from previous years guide the crowd: leave home early to secure the best vantage point and savour the entire dazzling display starting precisely at midnight, free of charge.

Beyond the Avenues Park, Bahrain transforms into a canvas of vibrant celebrations. Marassi Beach, Water Garden City, Bahrain Fort, Bahrain Bay, Bahrain National Museum, Al Najma Club, and Bahrain Financial Harbour host free fireworks shows. Attendees can immerse themselves in live music, tantalizing food vendors, and enticing pop-up shops.

For the night owls, lounges and restaurants beckon with enticing New Year's Eve packages. The Dilmun Club, for instance, metamorphoses its poolside into a glamorous extravaganza with a



live DJ and delectable meals, all for a pocket-friendly BD15 from 8pm to 1am.

For those seeking a closer view of the Bahrain Harbour fireworks, Charthouse.bh offers a buffet dinner reservation for

BD30, promising a feast for the senses. Early birds among the first fifty patrons enjoy a special discount.

Solymar Beach Club beckons romantic souls to a beachfront NYE experience. For BD85 per

person, the package includes a premium buffet, drinks, live music, a light show, VIP bar, and live DJs. Online tickets fetch a discounted BD35, while door tickets are priced at BD50.

Azul Beach Resort, near Nor-



Throughout December, Celebrate Bahrain has been a canvas for the nation's traditions and celebrations, setting the stage for the grand finale on New Year's Eve

dic Hotel, promises a night of international and local musical talents. Tally Shum, Blacky, Xenia Liloo, One Off, and Andy Van Dee are set to create an unforgettable musical ambiance from 5pm until the wee hours of the night, all for an entry fee of BD10.

## Countdown

The countdown to the New Year extends to social media, where various events are making waves. S Hotel Bahrain offers an electrifying New Year's Eve with DJ K88 at Havana Club Lounge, featuring special packages for both revellers and food enthusiasts.

The M Restaurant invites guests to a feast with a NYE Diner Buffet in Adliya, offering a

culinary journey for the senses at 7pm.

Elite Seef Residence and Hotel plans a Pirates Eve at 8pm, promising a swashbuckling bash for a night of fun.

CUT by Wolfgang Puck at Four Seasons Hotel Bahrain Bay ensures a sophisticated affair with a NYE event from 7pm to 1am.

Four Seasons Hotel Bahrain Bay also invites guests to an "Around-the-World"-themed brunch today from 1pm to 4pm.

Mövenpick Hotel Bahrain transports revellers to "The Terminal" for an extraordinary New Year's Eve celebration at Silk's Restaurant & Gallery Lobby Lounge, starting at 8pm.

The Ritz-Carlton, Bahrain, entices guests with a culinary journey across its award-winning restaurants, featuring entertainment ranging from DJ beats to a Mariachi Band.

Hilton Bahrain hosts a Met Gala NYE Extravaganza, encouraging guests to glam up and dance into 2024 with various package options.

Lagoona Beach Resort in Budaiya invites guests to a celebration starting at 9pm.

The Ritz-Carlton, Bahrain, promises an enchanting open sky celebration at Seabreeze, Thai Lounge, and La Plage, starting at 8pm.

Crowne Plaza Bahrain closes the list with an "Around the World in Ninety Minutes" party, promising live DJs, international dancers, a global buffet, and live band melodies.

## New Year, New Dreams



2024 is about letting go of regrets and embracing time with loved ones.

- VETH NJUNE



I want to work harder, help students achieve their dreams, and prioritise my health.

- PARVATHY THANUMOORTHY



I want to become a millionaire and help anyone seeking to study abroad.

- FUAD MAHZOOZI



Bahrain is paradise. Set your goals, focus, and achieve them.

- MOHAMMED SUHAIR



I can't wait to discover more historical sites and traditions in 2024.

- FIONA WALKER DOYLE

### Bahrainis and visitors share aspirations for 2024

Zainab Zaman  
TDT | Manama

As the clock strikes midnight on December 31, Bahrainis and visitors alike find themselves not just celebrating the passing year, but gazing into the horizon of 2024 with hopes and resolutions dancing in their eyes.

The air crackles with a collective hum of ambition, a tapestry woven from personal triumphs and lessons learned.

Veth Njune, a solo female trav-

eller wrapping up a week in Bahrain before rejoining her family in Kenya, speaks for many when she says, "2024 is about letting go of regrets and embracing time with loved ones."

Her solo adventures have fuelled her spirit, and she encourages others to conquer their fears and explore the world.

Parvathy Thanumoorthy, a consultant at international recruitment agency Taiba Overseas Consultants, echoes the sentiment of self-improvement. "I want to work harder, help students achieve their dreams, and prioritise my health," she says, acknowledging the need for a balanced life that includes nurturing her role as a mother.

Fuad Mahzoozi, who owns Taiba Overseas Consultants, sets

As the calendar turns a page, hearts and minds in the Kingdom are ready to dream, strive, and celebrate the year to come

his sights on financial success and spreading kindness. "I want to become a millionaire and help anyone seeking to study abroad," he declares, adding that 2023 taught him the value of continuous growth in his career.

For Mohammed Suhair, a newcomer in Bahrain, the new year is all about spreading the love for his adopted home. "Bahrain is paradise," he proclaims,

urging everyone to consider calling it home. His motto? "Set your goals, focus, and achieve them!"

Fiona Walker Doyle, Deputy Head of Mission for the British Embassy, embodies the spirit of cultural exchange. Amidst settling into her new role six months ago, she's determined to master Arabic and strengthen the bond between Brits and Bahrainis.

"The past year has been a privilege," Fiona beams, "and I can't wait to discover more historical sites and traditions in 2024."

News of Bahrainis no longer requiring visas to visit the UK adds another layer of excitement to the new year. Doyle proudly says, "Bahrain is one of the first

countries granted Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) access," paving the way for easier travel between the two nations. ETA applications are scheduled to go live for Bahrainis from February 1, for travelling to the UK from February 22 onwards.

As the final moments of 2023 tick by, a sense of shared optimism takes flight in Bahrain. From solo journeys to family reunions, career aspirations to cultural immersion, the air vibrates with the promise of a year brimming with possibilities.

This New Year's Eve, amidst the fireworks and festivities, it's not just the calendar that turns a page, but the hearts and minds of a kingdom ready to dream, strive, and celebrate the year to come.

### New Year's Eve: Safety Directions

- Stick to the rules of the road
- Leave early to account for traffic
- Use maps to avoid traffic congestion
- Those who want to watch fireworks at the sites at Bahrain National Museum and Marassi Beach on boats should adhere to maritime safety instructions
- Inspect safety of boats and tools before sailing
- Keep safe distance between boats and event sites.
- For assistance, the Maritime Operation of the Coastguard can be contacted on 994 or 17700000
- Call 999 for emergency services, fire, police, and ambulance. When dialling 999, you will be asked which service you need.
- Al Kindi Hospital: 1724 0444
- American Mission Hospital: 17 177 711
- Royal Bahrain Hospital: 1724 6888
- Bahrain Specialist Hospital: 1781 2111
- Al Hilal Hospital: 8040 8080
- KIMSHEALTH: 1782 2123
- Middle East Hospital: 03-4299505
- Al Amal Hospital: 1760 2602
- International Medical Centre: 1749 0006
- King Hamad University Hospital: 17 444 444
- Noor Specialist Hospital: 17 260 026

# Attempted murder jail term upheld

Cassation Court approves 15-year sentence for father who tried to kill son

● Defendant earlier sentenced to life in prison, but High Appeals Court reduced it to 15 years, which was approved by Cassation Court

TDT | Manama

The Cassation Court has confirmed a jail term of 15 years issued against a man accused of attempting to murder his son with a chainsaw. The defendant was earlier sentenced to life in prison, but the High Appeals Court reduced it to 15 years behind bars, which was approved by the Cassation Court.

The defendant was held guilty on grounds of premeditated assault.

According to court files, the man reportedly tried to kill his son under the pretext that the



Representative image

teenager was on drugs and he was acting unstable. The victim's mother told prosecutors that the pair weren't seeing eye to eye.

"Before the incident, the school requested us to come because an issue arose involving our son," the mother told prosecutors. "They told us he was

caught smoking e-cigarettes. I managed to convince them to punish him by suspending him for two days.

"On the day of the crime, I was out in the evening, and my son was asleep. When I returned I saw my husband's clothes were blood-stained. I rushed inside and saw my son fighting

for his life."

The victim is said to have been rushed to hospital and managed to survive. The father handed himself in to police and confessed to his crime.

"He used to insult me regularly and he has gone out of control," the father pointed out to prosecutors.



On the day of the crime, I was out in the evening, and my son was asleep. When I returned I saw my husband's clothes were blood-stained. I rushed inside and saw my son fighting for his life.

- MOTHER OF THE VICTIM

## Caring for senior citizens

● Social Development Ministry integrates 'Elderly Card' with national ID, enabling easier access to services, discounts

● Around 70,000 elderly individuals to benefit from deals offered by both government, private entities

TDT | Manama



Through the 'Elderly Card', citizens above the age of 60 can benefit from discounts offered by both government and private entities

The Ministry of Social Development announced the integration of the "Elderly Card" with the national ID, enabling all citizens above the age of 60 to access elderly services electronically through their national ID card.

The ministry emphasised that these services are not limited to individuals who possess the specific "Elderly Card."

The number of elderly individuals in the Kingdom is estimated to be around 70,000, and all of them can now benefit from discounts offered by both government and private entities. The ministry highlighted that 28 private sector institutions have joined the Elderly Card programme. These participating institutions offering "Elderly Discounts" include private hospitals, medical centres, clinics, medical laboratories, and pharmacies, among others.

In response to a query from the Services Committee in the Council of Representatives regarding entities providing 50 per cent discounts on their transaction fees to the elderly, the ministry pointed out several fees, including construction fees, fees for certificates of ownership, municipal fees for house and apartment rentals, driver's license renewal fees, vehicle registration renewal fees, passport renewal fees, national ID card issuance fees, domestic worker sponsorship fees, worker license renewal fees, and fees for private rooms at Salmaniya Medical Complex.

In addition, there is a BD10 discount on electricity and water bills for single households occupied by elderly individuals.

The Ministry of Social Development's statement comes at a time when the Council of Representatives is expected to discuss a law that would encompass "Elderly Discounts" for all government services,

without exception. The law would be accompanied by Cabinet decisions outlining the regulations and exemptions for discounts.

The new parliamentary legislation also proposes granting the discounts on essential living supplies from private sector entities interested in participating.

The parliamentary proposal was put forth by MPs Khalid Bu Anq, Zainab Abdul Amir, Mohammed Al Hussein, Hanan Mohammed, and Mariam Al Dhaen.

The Ministry of Social Development further stated that it has prepared a comprehensive national implementation plan for the national elderly strategy. The plan includes utilising the expertise of elderly individuals in the Kingdom, expanding day care institutions for parental care, enhancing cultural programmes for older adults, and implementing an intergenerational communication programme to benefit from past experiences.

### Government's response

The government, on its part, sees the need to reconsider the proposed law, as the intended objective has already been achieved through the decisions issued by the Cabinet and relevant ministries, which granted exemptions for half the fees on some covered services for the elderly.

It pointed out that the proposed law would disrupt the state's general budget and financial equilibrium programme.

Additionally, it lacks the essential elements necessary for its implementation, as it requires a thorough financial study to determine the respectable government's financial deficit resulting from its implementation and the necessary proposals to manage the required financial resources.

## LMRA launches e-service to settle violations

● Initiative enables employers to swiftly settle eligible criminal violations electronically, without the need for in-person visit

TDT | Manama

Simplifying compliance and saving time for businesses, the Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) announces yesterday the trial launch of its Electronic Settlement service, "E-Settlement".

This innovative initiative enables employers to swiftly settle eligible criminal violations electronically, without the need for in-person visits.

"LMRA is committed to leveraging technology to enhance service delivery and improve ease of use for our clients," explained LMRA Enforcement and Protection Sector deputy CEO Noora Isa Mubarak.

"E-Settlement builds upon our recent launches of other electronic and virtual services,



all currently undergoing trial and evaluation for full-scale im-

plementation."

This user-friendly platform

expedites the resolution process, allowing employers to settle eligible criminal violations electronically from the comfort of their office, pay settlement fees instantly through secure online channels or accredited bank, and rectify the legal status of the establishments and remove the administrative notices swiftly.

"E-Settlement offers a convenient and efficient alternative for resolving eligible violations," said LMRA Labour Inspection acting director Marzouq Abdul Karim Salem. "Employers receive a notification via SMS and email, and, upon approval, they can initiate the E-Settlement process through our online 'E-Support' system."

The streamlined workflow involves electronic application submission and processing, automatic invoice generation upon approval, and instant violation clearance upon making the settlement payment.

For further information or inquiries, contact the LMRA Call Centre on 17506055.

## Customs chief receives transportation ministry officials



President of Customs Shaikh Ahmed bin Hamad Al Khalifa received officials from the Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunication. The meeting reviewed topics of common interests and cooperation and coordination. Above, Shaikh Ahmed, right, with an official.

## MPs request talks on governorate services

TDT | Manama

Several MPs have submitted a request for a general discussion to clarify the government's policy regarding the provision of government services in the Northern Governorate.

The aim is to shed light on the government's strategy for delivering government services within the governorate.

The MPs justified their re-

quest by citing the continuous population growth rates in various areas of the Northern Governorate. They noted that the governorate has been expanding geographically and experiencing a higher population density compared to other regions in the Kingdom.

This necessitates the provision of increasingly accessible and convenient facilities to meet the diverse needs of citizens in

terms of various government services.

They emphasised that there are difficulties in accessing a number of these services, whether in the administrative, healthcare, or educational fields. The service-related challenges extend beyond a specific domain, highlighting significant shortcomings in healthcare and social care plans for the elderly.

# Markets eye uncertainty ahead after blowout 2023 for US stocks

AFP | New York, United States

As Wall Street closed the books Friday on a surprisingly strong 2023, the focus is shifting to the US presidential election and other risks confronting equities in 2024.

Major indices faltered in Friday's final session of the year, but the declines were minimal compared with the winnings amassed over the last 12 months.

"This has been a great stock market year," said David Kotok, chief investment officer of Cumberland Advisors.

Propelled by so-called "Magnificent Seven" stocks, the Nasdaq led the major US indices with a gain of 43%.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average tacked on 14% while the broad-based S&P 500 jumped 24%.

The surge -- which was mirrored by double digit gains on leading Asian and European bourses -- has surprised leading market watchers who had bet on a recession in 2023 given the Federal Reserve's aggressive interest rate increases to counter inflation.

"We started the year fearful because there were concrete signs of recession," said Maris Ogg of Tower Bridge Advisors. "You end the year with complete

## Key figures around 2130 GMT

New York - Dow:	▼ 0.1% at 37,689.54 (close)
New York - S&P 500:	▼ 0.3% at 4,769.83 (close)
New York - Nasdaq:	▼ 0.6% at 15,011.35 (close)
Paris - CAC 40:	▲ P 0.1% at 7,543.18 (close)
Frankfurt - DAX:	▲ 0.3% at 16,751.64 (close)
EURO STOXX 50:	▲ 0.2% at 4,521.65 (close)
London - FTSE 100:	▲ 0.1% at 7,733.24 (close)
Tokyo - Nikkei 225:	▼ 0.2% at 33,464.17 (close)
Hong Kong - Hang Seng Index:	■ at 17,047.39 (close)
Shanghai - Composite:	▲ 0.7% at 2,974.93 (close)
Euro/dollar:	▼ at \$1.1040 from \$1.1061 on Thursday
Dollar/yen:	▼ at 141.01 yen from 141.41 yen
Pound/dollar:	▲ at \$1.2738 from \$1.2733
Euro/pound:	▼ at 86.63 pence from 86.87 pence
West Texas Intermediate:	▼ 0.2% at \$71.65 per barrel
Brent North Sea Crude:	▼ 0.1% at \$77.04 per barrel

A general view shows the Tokyo Stock Exchange before a ceremony to mark the close of the end-of-year trading in Tokyo



euphoria."

Many of the gains accumulated since late October as market watchers cheered moderating inflation and a still-strong US labor market as indicating the US economy could avoid a recession.

The Federal Reserve's December forecast of three interest rate cuts in 2024 "poured more fuel in the market's fire," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare.

The market also benefited from emergency measures engineered by the Fed and other US bank regulators following the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank in March.

Steps such as guaranteeing all deposits of SVB and two other banks that ended up failing contained the crisis, avoiding a broad economic impact.

The market has also cheered advances in artificial intelligence

in the belief that the technology will further boost productivity and growth.

Bullishness over AI helped produce the outsized gains for the "Magnificent Seven" stocks: Amazon, Apple, Google parent Alphabet, Meta Platforms, Microsoft, Nvidia and Tesla.

Among international markets, Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei index finished surged more than 28% in 2023, its best performance in

a decade.

Frankfurt registered a yearly gain of 20.3% and Paris 16.5%, having recently hit record heights.

London, however, gained less than four% in 2023, with analysts pointing to fears interest rates could stay high due to inflation.

Political 'uncertainty premium'

For now, US investors are

broadly confident of the inflation outlook.

"The market clearly closed out 2023 on a very hopeful note," said O'Hare.

Stocks could have further upside if the job market stays strong, O'Hare said. However, stocks could suffer if the economic picture deteriorates or if the Fed backs away from interest rate cuts, he said.

Analysts are currently estimating healthy 2024 earnings growth of 12%.

But given higher labor costs 2024 could prove a "difficult" year for earnings, said Ogg, who also pointed to lofty equity valuations as a potential drag.

Then there is politics. While investors likely already have the 2024 presidential election somewhere on their radar, the time frame was too distant to affect trading in recent months.

"The uncertainty premium of political dysfunction in the US is very high and not measurable," said Kotok, who noted the unpopularity of President Joe Biden and his likely challenger, former president Donald Trump.

"The country is faced with a Biden Trump rematch that it doesn't want," Kotok said.

Biden's approval rating was 39% at the end of 2023, according to Gallup.

## Former vice-chair of China's banking regulator handed life sentence

AFP | Beijing, China

A former vice-chairman of China's banking regulator has been sentenced to life imprisonment, state media reported Friday, the latest target in a crackdown on corruption in the second-largest economy's finance sector.

Beijing launched a sprawling campaign to counter graft in 2012, following the ascension of leader Xi Jinping to the top of the governing Communist Party.

Since then, some 4.8 million

party officials have been investigated, according to the latest official figures from June 2022.

Such investigations generally result in convictions and are suspected of serving as a tool for sidelining political figures seen as opposing Xi.

Cai Esheng was found guilty of accepting 407 million yuan (\$57.5 million) in bribes while in office, state broadcaster CCTV reported, citing a decision by a court in Zhejiang.

He was also said to have taken an additional 110 million yuan in bribes after retiring.

CCTV reported he was sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve, which will be commuted to life in prison.

Born in 1951, Cai spent most of his career in finance and served for eight years as a vice-chairman of the country's banking regulator.

Now retired, he came under scrutiny in 2021 with the launch of an investigation into "serious violations of discipline and the law" -- wording that typically designates acts of corruption or embezzlement.

## China's Huawei says expects revenue up almost 9% in 2023

AFP | Beijing, China

Chinese tech giant Huawei said Friday it "weathered the storm" of US sanctions as it announced a rise of almost nine percent in revenues in 2023, a year that saw it shock Washington with the release of a high-end smartphone.

The Shenzhen-based giant has been at the centre of an intense standoff between China and the United States, with Washington warning its equipment could be used for state espionage, an allegation the company denies.

Sanctions since 2019 have cut the firm off from access to US-



billion yuan (\$99.2 billion), Hu said -- an increase of nearly nine percent from last year.

But the revenue remains much lower than the 891.4 billion yuan it earned in 2020, the year before the company announced a sharp decline in turnover due to US sanctions.

The firm, however, appears to be bouncing back, announcing moderate sales growth for the first nine months of the year in October.

"Shared conviction has helped us break the siege and forge ahead together," chairman Hu said.

He warned the firm faces "serious challenges ahead of us".

## Fresh Eurostar cancellations cause misery for New Year travellers

AFP | London, United Kingdom

All Eurostar trains were cancelled yesterday due to flooded tunnels in southern England, causing misery for New Year travellers in the second major disruption in 10 days.

The latest cancellations follow a wildcat strike by French unions days before Christmas and weather warnings from the UK's Met Office for rain, snow and ice across large parts of the country.

Hundreds of travellers were left stranded at London's St Pancras station after Eurostar cancelled all services for the entire day.

Newly-weds Nicole Carrera, 29, and her husband Christopher, 31, visiting from New York said their plans to spend New Year's Eve at Disneyland Paris



flooded water in a tunnel used by Eurostar trains, near Ebbsfleet International station in Kent, southern England

had been "ruined".

"Now we won't get into Paris tomorrow until about 6:00 pm," Carrera said, adding that instead

they would just walk around the French capital.

After earlier cancelling all trains up to 4pm UK time (1600

GMT), Eurostar said that flooding in two tunnels had "not improved".

"Eurostar has therefore had to take the unfortunate decision to cancel all services for the rest of the day," it said.

It added that it was "extremely sorry" for the impact it would have on customers at "a vital time to get home at the end of the festive season".

Another couple, Christina David, 25, and Georgina Benjamin, 26, from Sydney, had planned to make Paris their final stop in Europe before flying home.

David said she felt "frustrated, angry, sad", adding that "there were lots of people crying" and that they now had nowhere to stay.

The services were cancelled after tunnels near Ebbsfleet In-

ternational station in Kent were flooded.

Eurostar runs services from London to Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam via Ashford, midway between London and the southern English coast.

In a statement, Southeastern Railway said the flooding meant "all lines are blocked".

### Year of travel chaos

Simon Shaw, 36, and his wife Heather, 37, from central England, had been due to travel to the French Alps for a skiing holiday with friends and family.

"We just arrived and saw everything was cancelled this morning... it was chaos," Simon Shaw said.

The disruption comes after French unions ended a wildcat strike that had stranded holiday-

makers and held up freight just days before Christmas.

The surprise walkout by workers that blocked the tunnel sparked hours of chaos at rail hubs in Paris and London.

Eurostar train services resumed on December 22 after an agreement was reached, with unions saying negotiations had yielded "results that satisfy us".

Saturday's cancelled services top off a year of travel disruption for UK travellers due to strikes, storms and other problems.

Travellers to France in April endured waiting times of up to 16 hours at Dover due to larger than expected numbers and weather conditions.

The then interior minister Suella Braverman denied the delays were a consequence of Brexit.



# celebs

## Cher: People are 'nicer' at Christmas

**Celebretainment | Los Angeles**

**C**her thinks Christmas makes people "nicer".

The 77-year-old singer – who has Chaz, 54, and Elijah, 47, from her previous marriages – believes the festive season brings out the best in everyone and makes them appreciate what they have.

She told Britain's *OK!* magazine: "People are nicer, you know, they're kind of somehow on their best behaviour. Christmas brings out that in people, I think. It's a great time of year to just try to stop what you've been doing and concentrate on being happy with your family and your friends and doing things for people that are not as fortunate. It's a time where you feel the spirit."

Despite her global fame, the 'Turn Back Time' hit-maker insisted her own Christmas celebrations are always "normal" and "traditional".

She said: "I have lots of really young friends and I've got children. I'm like the old woman in the shoe when it comes to godchildren.

"We just do normal Christmas things. I don't know, I never plan it. I could be dancing or could be in the kitchen putting mashed potatoes on everybody's plates. That's how we do it.

"There's turkey and dressing and pumpkin pies. We're very traditional when it comes to celebrating the dinner. Everybody expects that.

"We have a long line and then everyone just takes their own, what they want.

"We always have a party though, and decorate the house."

Despite her flamboyant persona, Cher insisted she can actually be very "shy".

**Cher**



## Zac Efron 'disconnects' in nature

**Celebretainment | Los Angeles**

**Z**ac Efron loves to "disconnect" in nature when he's finished a project.

The 36-year-old actor can find his "true self" again in the great outdoors and needs to do that to decompress after he's completed work on a role before he can reconnect with his loved ones.

He told *The Rake* magazine: "When filming is done I need to disconnect.

"Be out in nature and let the character drift out of me and I then find my true self again.

"The best place for me to do that if not in nature is to be somewhere new.

"I think you need to re-engage with who you are before you head back and try to be with your friends and family."

The 'Iron Claw' actor loves getting to travel and immersing himself in a new culture, which he sees as



Zac Efron

a great antidote to how "small" life in Los Angeles can be.

**When filming is done I need to disconnect. Be out in nature and let the character drift out of me and I then find my true self again. The best place for me to do that if not in nature is to be somewhere new. I think you need to re-engage with who you are before you head back and try to be with your friends and family**

ZAC EFRON

He said: "One of the biggest blessings of my journey is that I've been able to travel from a young age.

"At the beginning it was really just for press, being called across to Japan for 'Hair-spray' and I got to see

Japanese culture and I was really taken with that.

"That curiosity in me kept growing and usually if I am not working then I will be on a trip finding something new.

"A new part of the world, trying the food, meeting the people, finding out as much about their culture as possible.

"It is a great way to live, and it opens your eyes to something much bigger than Hollywood, it can all feel very small if you're stuck in LA and I was stuck there for quite a few years."

## Natalie Portman had never seen *Star Wars* before being cast

**Celebretainment | Los Angeles**

**N**atalie Portman had never seen a 'Star Wars' film until she was cast in the franchise.

The 42-year-old actress played Padme Amidala in 1999 prequel 'The Phantom Menace' and its 2002 and 2005 sequels, and though she was "aware of the lingo" of the sci-fi world, she hadn't actually sat through any of the original trilogy.

She admitted to *Radio Times* magazine: "I didn't know the films at all before I was cast!"

"I was aware of the lingo, as American culture is so immersed in 'Star Wars'.

"Even if you've never seen the movies, you know what Princess Leia buns are, what a lightsaber is, what a Jedi is, you know who Yoda and Obi-Wan are... you know all these

words and names before you even see the films.

"But I only saw the films when I was approached to do them."

Natalie can next be seen in 'May December' and although she wasn't "comfortable" shooting a sex scene for the film, she was thankful there was an intimacy coordinator on board to guide her through it.

She said: "It's never comfortable. And we just figured it out between ourselves. I think we all had a very good, open communication."

"But I think intimacy coordinators can be really wonderful, especially in environments that are uncomfortable or hostile. It can be helpful to have some sort of structure around it."



Natalie Portman

## Eminem seeks protective order against Gizelle Bryant, Robyn Dixon in trademark dispute case

**ANI | Los Angeles**

**R**apper Eminem's legal beef with 'The Real Housewives of Potomac' stars Gizelle Bryant and Robyn Dixon rages on.

As per *People* magazine, Eminem requested a protective order against Gizelle and Robyn on December 15 in their ongoing trademark dispute case regarding their trademark application for the name of the Reasonably Shady podcast.

In the filing, the rapper opposed the TV personalities' request made in late October that he appear in person for a deposition.

The Grammy winner, who has long been recognized by the Slim Shady and Shady monikers and owns the trademark to use on his merch and records, cited in the filing that it would be "unduly burdensome" for him to be deposed himself due

to his "limited knowledge of the subjects at issue."

The documents also argued that the motion filed by Bryant, 53, and Dixon, 44, was "premature and procedurally improper," as they "have yet to serve" Mathers, who first opposed their trademark application back in February 2023.

The trademark battle began after Gizelle and Robyn filed to trademark their podcast's name in order to sell merchandise. Eminem's team filed an opposition to that, claiming it could cause consumer confusion.



Eminem

## Kevin Hart suing YouTuber LaTasha Kebe over interview 'ransom' threat

**Celebretainment | Los Angeles**

**K**evin Hart is suing YouTuber LaTasha Kebe.

The comic, 44, has taken a case of extortion against the influencer, known as Tasha K, after she allegedly threatened to release a bombshell interview with his former assistant unless he paid her a six-figure "ransom".

According to a lawsuit obtained by Page Six, LaTasha sat down with Kevin's former assistant Miesha Shakes in November to record a chat in which the latter made "false and defamatory statements regarding Hart".

Kevin claims that after the interview an alleged associate of LaTasha's called his team and threatened to "publish the interview unless Hart paid a ransom of \$250,000".

At the time, they allegedly

warned Kevin the stories told during the sit-down, which were linked his marriage and business dealings, would be "damaging" to his reputation.

LaTasha is then said to have posted a "teaser" for the interview in which she and Miesha allegedly "touted the supposedly salacious and damaging nature" of the interview as a "threat to Hart" for not paying the "ransom" allegedly demanded.

The lawsuit said: "The teaser included a statement from Kebe at the 2:06 mark of the video specifically warning that, 'When you don't pay, we have to get money

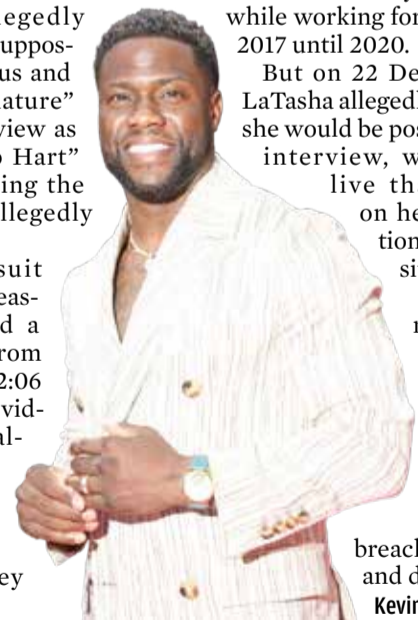
by any means necessary."

At that point, Kevin's team allegedly contacted police and sent LaTasha a cease and desist letter, noting that Miesha had previously signed a Non-Disclosure Agreement as well as a Confidentiality Agreement while working for Kevin from 2017 until 2020.

But on 22 December 22, LaTasha allegedly told Kevin she would be posting the full interview, which went live that evening on her subscription-based website.

Kevin is now suing both women for extortion and invasion of privacy and suing Miesha for breach of contract and defamation.

Kevin Hart



### SUDOKU



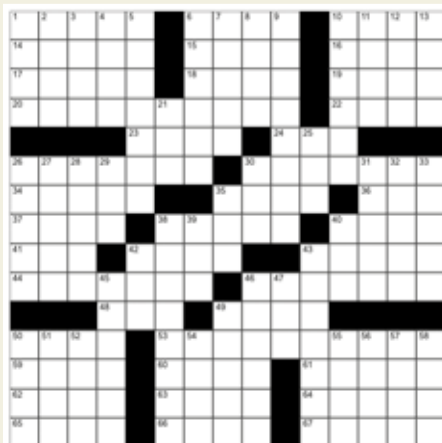
Yesterday's solution

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

How to play

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

### CROSSWORD



Across

1- Basics; 5- Wild party; 9- Mimic; 13- Wyoming resource; 14- Politico Kefauver; 16- Actress Hatcher; 17- Kachina doll maker; 18- Onto; 19- Follow; 20- Recipe amt.; 21- Low island; 22- Compel by intimidation; 24- Lowly worker; 26- Molecular component; 27- Body of salt water; 29- Meat fat; 33- Mission-stopping command; 34- Mower brand; 35- Kit item; 36- President pro.; 37- Massenet opera; 38- Song syllable; 39- Gave the once-over; 41- Don Juan's mother; 42- Plait; 44- Keep at a distance; 46- Mikhail's wife; 47- Now ... me down...; 48- Campus mil. group; 49- Asian deer; 52- Distress call; 53- Lyric poems; 57- No. 1; 58- Plant problem; 60- Playthings; 61- Earth Day subj.; 62- Floor worker; 63- Legal wrong; 64- Pigeon coop; 65- Ruse; 66- Mars, to the Greeks;

Down

1- Zwei cubed; 2- Simpleton; 3- Hats; 4- Cinderella candidate; 5- Lighthouse; 6- Dam extending across the Nile; 7- Corset stiffener; 8- Part of H.R.H.; 9- Try; 10- Fleshy fruit; 11- Actor Stoltz; 12- Make angry; 15- Subdivision; 23- Alley; 25- Devour; 26- ... con pollo; 27- Follows orders; 28- Celestial body; 29- Recipient; 30- Little bits; 31- Water wheel; 32- Delighted; 33- To ... (perfectly); 34- Sharp; 37- Mosque tower; 40- Trickle; 42- Cricket need; 43- Soft cheese; 45- In the manner of; 46- Series of prayers; 48- Lover of Juliet; 49- Blueprint detail, for short; 50- With the bow, in music; 51- Debatable; 52- Offer; 54- Entrance; 55- Bronze heroine; 56- Fast flier; 59- Immerse;


Yesterday's solution







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## Nadal draws qualifier at comeback tournament in Brisbane



Spain's Rafael Nadal attends a training session in Brisbane

AFP | Brisbane

Rafael Nadal avoided meeting a seed first up at his comeback tournament after drawing a qualifier in the Brisbane International, with Russia's Aslan Karatsev a potential second-round opponent.

The 37-year-old Spaniard has been out of the game for almost 12 months following hip surgery after the 2023 Australian Open in January.

It was feared that Nadal, the winner of 22 Grand Slam singles titles, would never play professionally again.

However, he has fought his way back and was granted a wildcard to the season-opening Brisbane International in preparation for the first Grand Slam of the year at Melbourne Park beginning January 14.

While he missed out on facing a seed, there are plenty of accomplished players competing in Brisbane qualifying, including 2020 US Open champion Dominic Thiem and former world number eight Diego Schwartzman.

If Nadal advances, he will play eighth-seeded Karatsev or Australian wildcard Jason Kubler in the second round, with fourth seed Ugo Humbert lurking as a potential quarter-final opponent.

Britain's Andy Murray drew second-seeded Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov in an intriguing first-round clash.

Murray is a two-time winner of the Brisbane International, and beat Dimitrov in the final in 2013.

In the women's draw, four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka will be pitted against Germany's world number 84 Tamara Korpatsch in the opening round as she makes her highly anticipated return.

The Japanese star, who gave birth to daughter Shai in July and has previously struggled with her mental health, has not played since September 2022.

If she sees off Korpatsch, she will face three-time Brisbane champion Karolina Pliskova in the second round.

## Luiz sends Aston Villa joint top of Premier League, Man City close in

AFP | London

Douglas Luiz's late penalty took Aston Villa joint top of the Premier League with a 3-2 win over 10-man Burnley yesterday as Manchester City closed on the leaders by sweeping aside Sheffield United 2-0.

It looked like a festive season to forget for Villa was set to continue after dropping points at home for the first time this season to Sheffield United and blowing a 2-0 lead to lose 3-2 at Manchester United on Boxing Day.

But Luiz's spot-kick that crept in off the underside of the bar sent Unai Emery's men level on points with Liverpool at the top of the table and break Burnley hearts.

Leon Bailey's opener for the home side was quickly cancelled out by Zeki Amdouni.

Moussa Diaby restored Villa's lead before half-time and they had a man advantage for the final 35 minutes after Sander Berge saw a second yellow card.

But Villa's high line is begging to be picked off by opponents and Lyle Foster timed his run to blast past Emi Martinez 19 minutes from time.

There was a final twist though as Jhon Duran was upended



Manchester City's Julian Alvarez (C) vies with Sheffield United's Oliver Norwood (R)

inside the box and Luiz fired home.

Despite missing Erling Haaland for a seventh consecutive game due to a foot injury, City were never troubled by the bottom-of-the-table Blades.

Rodri ended Sheffield United's resistance after just 14 minutes when the Spanish midfielder surged forward and fired low into the far corner.

Julian Alvarez again ably filled Haaland's shoes as the Argentine tapped in his fourth goal in three games to make the points safe from Phil Foden's cross just after the hour mark.

City move alongside Arsenal on 40 points, just two points behind Villa and Liverpool, who are in action at home to Newcastle on Monday.

Chelsea snapped a run of four consecutive away defeats thanks to Cole Palmer's double but had to withstand a nervy finale to beat Luton 3-2.

Powerful strikes from Palmer and Noni Madueke gave the visitors a 2-0 half-time lead.

Mauricio Pochettino's men appeared to have ridden out a second half storm when Palmer's classy finish made it 3-0.

Former Chelsea midfielder

**“**  
We controlled the game until the 65th minute. We needed to win and we deserved the result  
**”**  
MAURICIO POCHETTINO

Ross Barkley sparked a Luton revival and Elijah Adebayo bundled home from close range to set up a thrilling finale.

“That is the Premier League. Luton are a team that fight until the end, you could see that from their games against Liverpool and Arsenal and Man City and Newcastle,” said Pochettino.

“We controlled the game until the 65th minute. We needed to win and we deserved the result.”

Luton remain just one point adrift of safety as Everton slumped to a 3-0 defeat at Wolves.

Max Kilman, Matheus Cunha and Craig Dawson were on target for Gary O'Neil's men, who secured a third win in seven days.

Any fears that Crystal Palace could be dragged into the relegation battle were eased by the Eagles first win in nine games as Brentford were beaten 3-1 at Selhurst Park.

## Thunder end Nuggets winning streak, Bucks rally to beat Cavs

AFP | Los Angeles

The Denver Nuggets' six-game winning streak came to an end on Friday with the defending NBA champions failing to a 119-93 loss at home to the Oklahoma City Thunder.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 40 points for the Thunder, shooting 14 of 20 from the field and making 10 out of 10



Oklahoma City Thunder's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander shoots the ball

free throws.

The win moves the Thunder above the Nuggets into second place in the West on 21-9, behind leaders Minnesota (23-7).

The Nuggets' Serbian star Nikola Jokic made 19 points shooting nine of 10 from the field and had ten rebounds but gave up seven turnovers.

The Thunder led 54-48 at the break and extended their lead to

20 points by the end of the third quarter.

It was the fifth time this season that Gilgeous-Alexander enjoyed a 40-point game and he said it was a “super fun” performance.

“We have so many weapons on the floor that I get to play in space and when I play in space, in my comfort zone, I have pretty good nights,” he said.

# Bahrain's sporting triumphs: A glance at 2023's headline-making achievements

Bahrain's prominent place on the international sporting map is undeniable. From the world-class sportsmen and women to the Kingdom's hosting of some of the biggest international events in all kinds of sports, the tiny island nation is "punching above its weight" as it continues to further cement its status as a global sporting powerhouse. TDT takes a look back at some of the biggest sporting achievements that made the headlines in 2023.

## HH Shaikh Nasser crowned endurance horseracing world champion



His Majesty the King's humanitarian work and youth affairs representative and Royal Endurance Team captain His Highness Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa registered another major accomplishment in his illustrious sporting career, by winning the FEI World Endurance Championship held at the Boudheib International Endurance Village in the UAE in February. HH Shaikh Nasser won the 160-kilometre race, which featured 126 male and female riders representing 36 countries from around the world.

## Bahrain enjoy best-ever Asian Games medal haul in Hangzhou



Bahrain enjoyed the Kingdom's best-ever performance at the Asian Games after bagging 20 medals at the 15th edition of the quadrennial, multi-sport event, held in Hangzhou, China. Bahrain's team of world-class athletes captured 12 gold, three silver and five bronze medals to finish an impressive ninth overall in the final medal standings. They were the top-ranked Arab national team amongst the total 41 countries from across the continent to step onto a podium.

## BRAVE CF sets new records



Founded under the vision of His Highness Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa, BRAVE Combat Federation officially entered the record books this year by achieving a historic number in its latest event. BRAVE CF 74, which took place in September in Nantes, turned France into the 29th nation to host a BRAVE CF production. It is a world record in mixed martial arts (MMA), with BRAVE becoming the first and only MMA organisation to achieve this number. BRAVE CF hosted four events between December 5 and 15 including the IMMAF Asian Championships

## Winfred bags world title in sensational 2023 athletics season



Bahraini elite athlete Winfred Yavi achieved one of the Kingdom's biggest individual accolades of the year, capturing the women's 3,000 metres steeplechase world title at the World Athletics Championships 2023 held in Budapest, Hungary

## Verstappen cruises to victory in season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix



Max Verstappen cruised to victory at the Bahrain Grand Prix, stamping his authority on the season in the opening race at Bahrain International Circuit

## Spirit Dancer races to Bahrain International Trophy victory!



The fifth running of the Bahrain International Trophy, and the first following the race's Elevation to Group 2 status, produced a memorable result and scenes of jubilation as the six-year-old gelding Spirit Dancer, co-owned and bred by Sir Alex Ferguson, scored a decisive victory to land the winner's share of the \$1million prize fund. In front of an excited crowd at Rashid Equestrian and Horseracing Club (REHC), Spirit Dancer, ridden by Oisin Orr and trained by Richard Fahey, came clear of his rivals, leaving Israr and Point Lonsdale to fight out the finish for second and third place. His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister, was in attendance and he presented Sir Alex with the Bahrain International Trophy

## Minasyan claims double in weightlifting worlds



Bahrain's superstar weightlifter Gor Minasyan came away with a superb medal double at the World Weightlifting Championships 2023 held in Riyadh. Competing in the men's +109kg category, Minasyan clinched silver in the snatch and a bronze medal for his total lifts

## Manama crowned first-ever FIBA WASL champions



Bahrain's Manama Club made basketball history this year after being crowned the first-ever champions of the FIBA West Asia Super League (WASL). The Kingdom's most decorated basketball club and reigning national league champions captured the gold medals in the inaugural edition of the International Basketball Federation (FIBA)-sanctioned tournament after defeating Kuwait Sporting Club 67-59 in the gold medal game of the FIBA WASL Final Eight, which came to a close in Dubai

## 2 Seas Motorsport capture British GT teams' title



Bahraini-British motor racing team 2 Seas Motorsport clinched the GT3 Teams' Championship title in the 2023 Intelligent Money British GT Championship. 2 Seas, co-owned by His Highness Shaikh Isa bin Abdulla bin Hamad Al Khalifa, captured the team's historic crown after winning four of the nine races held this past season in their Mercedes AMG-GT3 cars. Drivers James Cottingham and Jonny Adam also finished second and third, respectively, in the GT Drivers' Championship

## DP World Tour stars set to compete in Bahrain Championship



The DP World Tour, also known as the PGA European Tour, is set to return to the Kingdom of Bahrain for the first time in 13 years with the Bahrain Championship, scheduled to take place at The Royal Golf Club from 1 to 4 February next year. Supreme Council for Youth and Sports first deputy-chairman, General Sports Authority president and Bahrain Olympic Committee chief His Highness Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa penned an agreement earlier this year to bring the major event to the Kingdom. Many of the leading DP World Tour elite stars will be teeing off in the Bahrain Championship, which features a prize fund of \$2.5 million

# Muharraq, Al Khaldiya power through

Muharraq narrowly defeat Riffa on penalties, Al Khaldiya hit four past Ettihad to advance to HM the King's Cup semi-finals

● **Muharraq edge past Riffa after 5-4 penalty shootout triumph**

● **Al Khaldiya outclass Al Ettihad with resounding 4-0 victory**

TDI | Manama

Muharraq and Al Khaldiya last night punched their tickets to the semi-finals of the 2023/2024 His Majesty the King's Cup—the richest football tournament in Bahrain.

Muharraq advanced with a 5-4 penalty shootout triumph against Riffa in a thrilling encounter between two of Bahrain's football heavyweights. The match was deadlocked at 1-1 at the end of regular and extra time.

Khaldiya, meanwhile, booked their berth following a resounding 4-0 victory over Al Ettihad.

Muharraq and Khaldiya are



Muharraq's Waleed Al Hayyam, right, vies for possession with Riffa's Komail Al Aswad during their exciting clash last night

now set to meet in the final four in a hugely exciting fixture that has yet to be scheduled by the Bahrain Football Association.

The HM the King's Cup is the richest football competition in the Kingdom, with the winners

set to take home BD100,000 in prize money and BD50,000 going to the runners-up.

Matches in the competition's quarter-finals continue tonight. Manama face off with Al Ittifaq while Busaiteen take on Al



**Muharraq and Al Khaldiya are now set to meet in the final four in a hugely exciting fixture**

Ahli. Both games are scheduled for 5.30pm kick-offs at separate venues.

In Muharraq's tight victory, Riffa's Bahrain national team star Komail Al Aswad put his side ahead just two minutes after half-time with a fine low volley from close range. He slotted home off a cross from the left supplied by Vinicius Vargas Dos Santos.

Muharraq equalised in the 54th minute when Abdulla Al Khalasi hit a stunning left-footed strike from several metres out-

side the penalty area. His shot came after the ball was cleared off a corner-kick, and it bounced into the net past Riffa goalkeeper Abdulkarim Al Fardan.

Neither team could find the net in extra-time, paving the way for the decisive shootout. There, Riffa's Ali Hassan Saeed and Muharraq's Ahmed Al Sherooqi got their respective sides off to a positive start, and then Ali Har- am and Hassan Al Karani also converted.

But Lazar Dordevic misfired for Riffa, and Nasser Mohammed put Muharraq ahead. Abdulaziz Khaled kept Riffa alive, before Abdulwahab Al Malood coolly sent home for a 4-3 Muharraq advantage. Al Aswad tied it one last time, and then Waleed Al Hayyam sent Muharraq through with his game-ending penalty.

In Khaldiya's match, the victors enjoyed a brilliant start after opening their account less than 20 seconds after kick-off. Dominique Mendy was the scorer, sending in a floating shot over opposing goalkeeper Mahboob Yahya Al Dosari.

Khaldiya then doubled their advantage on the stroke of half-time when Abdulla Al Hazza headed in from close range after Al Dosari failed to punch the ball away to safety. His attempt to clear went directly towards a waiting Al Hazza in front of goal, and the Khaldiya defender took advantage.

Mahdi Humaidan made it 3-0 with a penalty in the 66th minute. Khaldiya were awarded the spot kick after a foul by Ettihad's Emeka Francis Atuloma on Gleison Wilson Da Silva Moreira. Humaidan stepped forward to take the shot, and he made no mistake with his effort.

Mahdi Abduljabbar made it four for Khaldiya, scoring two minutes from full time after rounding the keeper on a one-on-one and tapping the ball into an empty net.

Veteran Ismaeel Abdullatif could have made it five for Khaldiya after Waleed Al Tayeb was brought down in the box by Ettihad's Haider Abdulla. But he missed his retaken penalty shot.

## Nabih Saleh stun Dar Kulaib in volleyball league

● **Nabih Saleh eke out five-set victory to hand defending champions first loss of season**

● **Al Ahli power past Al Najma in three sets to rise to solo first place on league standings**

TDI | Manama

Nabih Saleh posted a stunning five-set victory over defending champions Dar Kulaib to wrap up the fourth week of play in the Top Six round of the 2023/2024 Isa bin Rashid Bahrain Volleyball League.

Nabih Saleh were the underdogs in their contest against the previously undefeated title-holders, but were able to fight back from a set down and come away with a resounding 3-2 (17-25, 25-23, 25-22, 15-25, 15-13) result.

Hussain Ashoor was their



Nabih Saleh blockers look to stop Dar Kulaib's Hassan Alaiwi during their match

leading scorer in the match, finishing with 14 points, while Nigerian professional Oyewale Oyedepo added 13. Bahrain senior men's national team stars Sayed Hashem Isa and Mohammed Jassim also had 13 apiece, as Nabih Saleh enjoyed a balanced effort from their side to eke out the big win.

For Dar Kulaib, who tasted their first loss of the entire sea-

son, Mohammed Yaqoob was their top man with 25 points, while Ali Mohammed added 12 in the losing effort.

Nabih Saleh claimed their second victory in four outings to stay in contention for a place in the Golden Square semi-finals, while Dar Kulaib stayed on three victories in four games.

In another week four contest, Al Ahli went to solo first place

after coasting to a well-deserved 3-0 (25-18, 25-22, 25-19) triumph against Al Najma.

Bahraini international Ali Ebrahim scored 13 points to spearhead Ahli, while Mohammed Habib added 10 and Sayed Mohammed Abrar contributed nine. Nasser Anan finished with six markers to fuel the Ahli cause.

For Najma, Swedish professional Jacob Link scored 22 points, but it was not enough to help lift his team to the win. Fadhel Abbas added six and Hassan Dhahi had five.

Ahli extended their undefeated record after four matches in the Top Six as they went to the top with Dar Kulaib's defeat. Najma, on the other hand, suffered their third loss to go with just a single win so far.

The Top Six of the league is being played in a double round-robin. The first round continues until the first week of January, with the second round following soon after from January 7 to 29. That will set the stage for the Golden Square.

## Recharged Swiatek helps Poland sweep past Brazil in United Cup



Poland's Iga Swiatek hits a return against Brazil's Beatriz Haddad Maia

AFP | Perth

World number one Iga Swiatek helped Poland sweep past Brazil 3-0 at the United Cup in Perth on Saturday with Zheng Qinwen stunning Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova as China beat the Czech Republic.

Swiatek led her top-seeded nation to the opening group win, crediting a calming few weeks away from the game after lifting the year-end women's championships last month in Mexico.

"It was peaceful for the first time, I was able to focus on practice and rest," Swiatek said after dominating Beatriz Haddad Maia 6-2, 6-2.

"I hope to be more dangerous this season -- I'll do my best," she said.

"I'm having such fun here and can concentrate on tennis," added the 22-year-old three-time French Open champion.

Swiatek said the victory over Haddad Maia showed off her recharged mental strength.

"I worked hard in the pre-season and gained a lot of confidence. I was able to play freely without any other thoughts to mess up my game."

Teammate Hubert Hurkacz secured the day's second win with a 6-7 (4/7), 6-2, 6-3 comeback over Thiago Seyboth Wild to put the tie out of reach.

Earlier, Zheng served up an upset 6-1, 2-6, 6-1 win over the seventh-ranked Wimbledon titleholder Vondrousova.

"It was just a normal match for me," said Zheng, the WTA's 2023 Most Improved Player who has risen to be world number 15.

"It doesn't matter who I face. I'm happy with the win and excited for my team," the 21-year-old added.

It followed teammate Zhang Zhizhen defeating Jiri Lehecka 5-7, 6-3, 6-4 in China's maiden appearance at the mixed teams tournament.

Zhang held his nerve against Lehecka in a heavy-hitting clash, with the world number 58 dictating from the baseline.

## Poisonous snake stops play at Australia tennis tournament

AFP | Brisbane

Dominic Thiem's Brisbane International qualifying match against Australian James McCabe was suspended for 40 minutes on Saturday after a poisonous snake slithered court-side.

McCabe had just wrapped up the first set 6-2 against the Austrian 2020 US Open champion when the reptile -- reportedly an eastern brown snake -- was spotted among electrical wires on the side of the court in front of spectators.



A video grab shows experts trying to remove the snake from the court

Play was halted until a snake catcher arrived and managed to tease it into a bag.

Eastern browns are capable of delivering a potent bite and their venom can result in progressive paralysis and uncontrollable bleeding, according to the website of the Australian Museum.

Australia is home to 20 of the world's 25 most venomous, but deaths from bites are rare.

Thiem eventually won the match to move within one victory of the main draw.