



Katy Perry: I've found balance in my life

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EU visa-free travel for Kosovo enters into force

Israel's top court strikes down key govt legal reform

AFP | Jerusalem

Israel's top court ruled yesterday against a key component of the government's controversial legal overhaul, which challenged the powers of the judiciary and sparked mass protests.

A Supreme Court statement said eight of 15 justices had ruled against an amendment passed by parliament in July which scraps the "reasonableness" clause, used by the court to overturn government decisions which are deemed unconstitutional.

"This is due to the severe and unprecedented damage to the basic characteristics of the State of Israel as a democratic state," the statement said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had argued the sweeping judicial reform package presented a year ago was necessary to rebalance powers between judges and politicians.

But his detractors warn the multi-pronged package paved the way for authoritarian rule and could be used by Netanyahu to quash possible convictions against him, an accusation the premier denies.

Slammed

Justice Minister Yariv Levin slammed the judges for "taking into their hands all the powers, which in a democratic regime are divided in a balanced way between the three branches" of government.

Levin, the architect of the judicial overhaul, said on Telegram that the ruling "takes away from millions of citizens their voice".

Tens of thousands of demonstrators had rallied weekly against the government reforms, with protests only ending due to the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in October.

The "reasonableness" amendment, the only major part of the legal reform package to become law, was also one of its most contentious steps as it sought to curb judicial oversight of the government.

When Netanyahu's allies voted to scrap the reasonableness clause in July, opposition lawmakers stormed out of the chamber, shouting "shame".

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No end in sight

Israel army warns Gaza war will continue throughout 2024

● Artillery fire pounds Hamas-run Gaza Strip, killing at least 24 people: health ministry officials

● Fifteen dead bodies from same family recovered from rubble of bombed house in Jabalia

AFP | Jerusalem

Israel warned the Gaza war will continue throughout 2024 as unrelenting strikes killed dozens in the Palestinian territory and Hamas fired a rocket barrage at the stroke of midnight.

Israeli military spokesman Daniel Hagari said that some of the 300,000 army reservists would get a break from the war, in order to prepare for the "prolonged fighting" ahead.

"We will be required for additional tasks and warfare throughout this year," Hagari said as the conflict sparked by the October 7 Hamas attacks raged on.

Heavy artillery fire again pounded the Hamas-run Gaza Strip, killing at least 24 people, health ministry officials there said, with attacks including air strikes reported across the length of the besieged territory.

"It's the worst year of our lives," Sami Hamouda, 64, told AFP. "Every new day is like the previous one: bombings, death and mass killings."

"This New Year's Eve, there are only missiles and the remains of people," said 20-year-



A boy sits on the rubble of a building destroyed by Israeli bombardment in Rafah refugee camp, south of the Gaza Strip. AFP

old Hamdan Abu Arab, expressing hope that "2024 will be better".

The Gaza health ministry said 15 dead bodies from the same family were recovered Monday from the rubble of a bombed house in Jabalia, in the northern part of the territory.

Hagari said the Israeli army was "adapting the planning of the force deployment in Gaza" including reserve soldiers, as "the fighting will continue and they will still be required".

"Some of the reservists will return to their families and em-

a "response to the massacres of civilians". AFP journalists in Tel Aviv witnessed missile defence systems intercept rockets overhead as some revellers ran for cover and others kept up the party with a shrug.

'Hopeless'

Hagari said the Israeli army was "adapting the planning of the force deployment in Gaza" including reserve soldiers, as "the fighting will continue and they will still be required".

"We are exhausted... We were displaced five times during this war," said 29-year-old Bassam

Every new day is like the previous one: bombings, death and mass killings
 SAMI HAMOUDA, GAZA RESIDENT

Hana. "We hope things improve in 2024 and that we live just like any other human being."

Regional fears

The war in Gaza has also raised fears of a broader regional conflict, with hostilities flaring with mostly Iran-backed militant groups in nearby countries who say they are acting in support of Hamas.

Iranian news agency Tasnim said yesterday the Alborz warship had entered the Red Sea, a globally important waterway where a US-led maritime coalition has deployed to stop attacks from Yemen's Tehran-backed Houthi rebels.

The US military said Sunday that Navy helicopters had fired at rebel boats off Yemen that were attacking a cargo ship, with Yemeni sources reporting 10 rebels killed.

Late Sunday, the Israeli army said it had intercepted two "hostile aircraft" flying from Syria.

And yesterday, the military said it had struck Lebanon, where it has fought the Hezbollah militant group, in response to attempted drone launches.

Disaster strikes

Major Japan quake triggers tsunami waves, residents told to run

● At least four confirmed dead after 7.5-magnitude quake strikes: Japanese officials

● More than 50 quakes of 3.2 magnitude or more rock region on New Year's Day

AFP | Tokyo

At least four people have been confirmed dead after a major earthquake struck central Japan yesterday, triggering tsunami waves over a metre high, damaging homes and sparking a major blaze.

The 7.5-magnitude quake struck Ishikawa prefecture on the Sea of Japan side of the main island of Honshu at

4.10pm, local time, according to the US Geological Survey (USGS).

Japanese authorities put the magnitude at 7.6 and said that it was one of more than 50 quakes of 3.2 magnitude or more to rock the region on the New Year's Day holiday -- when families get together and visit shrines -- over several hours.

Television channels interrupted normal services with special programming, including a message from Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who urged people in vulnerable areas to "evacuate as soon as possible" to higher ground.

"We realise your home, your belongings are all precious to you, but your lives are important above everything else! Run to the highest ground possible," an alarmed presenter on broadcast NHK told viewers.

Waves at least 1.2 metres high



hit the port of Wajima, and a series of smaller tsunamis were reported elsewhere, including as far away as the northern island of Hokkaido.

Officials in Ishikawa prefec-

ments in the capital Tokyo some 300 kilometres away.

Tens of thousands of people were ordered to evacuate, according to the country's fire and disaster management agency, cited by Kyodo. About 1,000 people were staying at a military base, the defence ministry said.

Government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi said that there were reports that six people were in the rubble of collapsed buildings, but gave no further details.

Images on social media showed cars and houses in Ishikawa shaking violently and terrified people cowering in shops and train stations. Houses collapsed and huge cracks appeared in roads.

Around 33,500 households around the epicentre, in Toyama, Ishikawa and Niigata prefectures, were without power, local utilities said.



HM the King



HRH the CP, PM

HM the King, HRH the CP, PM greet Sudan leader

TDT | Manama

His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa sent a cable of congratulations yesterday to Sudan's Head of the Transitional Sovereignty Council, Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah Al Burhan Abd elrahman Al Burhan, on his country's Independence Day. His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, also sent a cable of congratulations to Al Burhan on Sudan's Independence Day.

Housing requests inquiry

TDT | Manama

MP Mahmoud Fardan has submitted a parliamentary question to Housing and Urban Planning Minister Amna bint Ahmed Al Rumaihi regarding the number of current housing requests across all governorates in the Kingdom, as well as the execution timelines and average age of these requests.

In his query, Fardan requested the following information:

- The total number of registered housing requests with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning as of the date of submission of this question in all regions of the Kingdom. This information should be presented in a detailed table categorising each type of request, and should include the requests for each year separately, along with their respective dates, divided by each housing complex in accordance with the attached sample tables.

- The average age of each housing request in each governorate, from the date of submission until its completion.



Mahmoud Fardan

- The ministry's projects for current and future requests aimed at meeting the housing demand.

- The properties owned by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning located in the Capital Governorate, allocated to meet the housing requests.

The submission of this parliamentary question indicates the concern of Deputy Fardan regarding the housing situation in Bahrain. The information sought will shed light on the current status of housing requests, the progress made in fulfilling them, and the ministry's plans for future housing projects.

MP seeks action on air quality

TDT | Manama

Air pollution in Bahrain is slated to spark a debate in Parliament, as MP Basma Abdulkarim Mubarak has raised a comprehensive question to Minister of Oil and Environment Dr Mohammed bin Mubarak bin Daina, focusing on several key aspects of the issue.

Monitoring

The MP from the eleventh constituency of the Northern Governorate has asked whether the ministry possesses accurate data on air pollution levels across the Kingdom. She has also asked where Bahrain stands on the latest international list of pollution-affected countries.

Questioning the causes of the concern, the MP further is seeking answers to the factors that contributed to the ranking, which is deemed alarming. She has also sought clarity

on the health impact of the issue and has asked whether the ministry has conducted studies assessing the direct impact of air pollution on citizens' health.

Roadmap for Improvement

To tackle the problem, the MP is seeking concrete plans to reduce pollution and elevate Bahrain's global ranking in the future.

The MP's question underscores the growing concern around air quality in Bahrain. The demand for comprehensive monitoring, detailed rankings, and tangible action plans suggests a commitment to tackling this vital public health issue.

The minister's response is eagerly awaited by those seeking clarity and decisive action towards cleaner air for the Kingdom's citizens.

She has also sought clarity

New homes for families

Housing and Urban Planning Ministry launches tender to provide 123 housing units in Al Buhair, Horat Sanad

● Residential units to be up to 220 square metres each, constructed to modern standards

● Initiative part of Government Land Development Programme, conducted with private sector

TDT | Manama

New homes will be built in Al Buhair and Horat Sanad as part of the Government Land Development Programme (GLDP).

This was announced yesterday by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, which has launched tenders to provide the 123 housing units, in partner-

ship with the private sector.

Seventy-six of the units will be in the Al Buhair region, while the remaining 47 will be in Horat Sanad.

The move is in line with the directives of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, to expand the GLDP and implement eight additional projects in partnership with the private sector in 2023 and 2024.

Housing and Urban Planning Minister Amna bint Ahmed Al Rumaihi stated that the provision of the new homes is based on the positive outcomes of the GLDP since its inception, citing the great success achieved by the "Suhail" project -- the pilot project of the GLDP -- in addition to the signing of the contracts to build 131 units in Salman City, in partnership with Delmon Gate real estate company.

Al Rumaihi stressed that the



Amna bint Ahmed Al Rumaihi

Al Buhair and Horat Sanad projects add to the gains of the GLDP in 2023.

She added that the tenders to provide the 123 housing units include the construction of residential units with building areas of up to 220 square metres, according to advanced building models that suit the needs of the Bahraini family, in addition to the implementation of infra-

structure works in the aforementioned sites.

She indicated that the acceleration in the pace of implementation of housing projects included in the GLDP is the outcome of the great demand by citizens for the various types of housing financing programme.

She noted that the programme provides more flexibility and diversity, as it enables the beneficiaries to select and purchase the units according to the financing amounts they receive from "Tas'heel" financial schemes or "Mazaya", the newly launched category, adding that the projects are implemented across various sites nationwide.

The Housing and Urban Planning Minister added that more projects will be implemented within the GLDP, in a way that enhances the gains of this programme and provides a base of diverse units for the beneficiaries of financing services.

HM King's economic advisor receives lawmaker



His Majesty the King's advisor for economic affairs Dr Hassan bin Abdulla Fakhro received MP Abdulla Khalifa Al Rumaihi. Dr Fakhro commended the important role played by the Council of Representatives in serving the nation and its citizens, as well as in consolidating the Kingdom's democratic process, within His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa's comprehensive development process. He wished MP Al Rumaihi every success in achieving national goals to serve the Kingdom and its people. Left, Dr Fakhro, right, with MP Al Rumaihi.

Shura chairman, Representatives Council speaker greet Kingdom's leadership

TDT | Manama

Shura Council chairman Ali bin Saleh Al Saleh extended his deepest congratulations to His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, on the New Year 2024.

Al Saleh prayed to Allah the Almighty to bless HM the King and HRH the Crown Prince and Prime Minister with abundant health and happiness.

The Shura chairman also extended congratulations to Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, wife of HM the King and Supreme



Ali bin Saleh Al Saleh



Ahmed bin Salman Al Musallam

Council for Women (SCW) president, on the same occasion, wishing HRH abundant health and happiness.

Al Saleh wished Bahrain continued progress and prosperity, under HM the King's leadership.

The Shura chairman also wished the Arab and Islamic nations, as

committed to serving Bahrain, as well as achieving the citizens' aspirations and meeting their needs. This is achieved through continuous constructive and effective cooperation with the government, coordination and integration with the Shura Council, strengthening Bahraini parliamentary diplomacy and building on previous achievements, as well as taking pride in the role played by the citizens in the decision-making process and the existing distinguished partnership between state departments and all civil society institutions, which will contribute to achieving the forecast goals, within the kingdom's comprehensive development process.

Shura Chairman affirms depth of Bahraini-Lebanese relations



Shura Council chairman Ali bin Saleh Al Saleh received at his office Lebanese Charge d'Affaires Mirna Khawly. Al Saleh highlighted the depth of Bahraini-Lebanese relations, and the advanced level they have reached across various fields. He stressed the need to continue bolstering bilateral cooperation to serve both countries' interests. Khawly expressed pride in the level reached by Bahraini-Lebanese relations, in light of the two countries' shared interest in constantly consolidating them. Left, Ali bin Saleh Al Saleh with Mirna Khawly during their meeting.

Saluting our brave Ministry of Interior teams



Teams of Ministry of Interior (MOI) personnel were out in force on New Year's Eve to ensure the safety and security of citizens and residents attending celebrations across the Kingdom.

Community police, traffic police, traffic enforcers, firefighters, medical staff and the Coast Guard all sacrificed spending time with their families ushering in 2024, in order to serve and protect the people on the special occasion.

As part of their efforts, traffic police and enforcers regulated the movement of pedestrians and vehicles, and secured roads leading to the various sites of the New Year's celebrations.

The MOI said on social media yesterday that it has taken all measures to maintain the safety and security of everyone.

The Daily Tribune salutes the Kingdom's brave MOI teams, thanks them for their dedication and service and wishes them a Happy New Year!

iGA launches household income and expenditure survey

● Survey to help understand household expenditures on goods, their contribution to the GDP, and their price changes

● It will support the development of governmental economic, social, and environmental policies and programmes

TDT | Manama

The Information and eGovernment Authority (iGA) has launched the Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2024.

The survey's aim is to gather data from a random sample of around 6,000 households, both Bahraini and non-Bahraini, and understand household expenditures on goods, identify the most commonly used goods and services contributing to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and observe the price changes of these goods, which reflect inflation rates and directly influence bank interest rates.

The survey also supports the development of governmental economic, social, and environmental policies and programmes.

The launch was announced

yesterday by iGA statistics and population registry deputy chief executive Duaa Alharban, who said that the survey will run from January to December 2024, in line with the directives of Interior Minister and Ministerial Committee for Information Communications and Technology (MCICT) chairman General Shaikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa.

Approximately 35 field researchers, who were carefully selected and have undergone extensive training, are conducting the survey.

Alharban underscored its role in improving government operations, enhancing the livelihoods of individuals and communities, and enabling government bodies to make informed decisions and develop aligned strategies and initiatives for both Bahraini and non-Bahraini families and to bolster social programmes.

She said that as part of a new approach, selected families will be contacted via the call center (17878070) for the visits to be scheduled at convenient times, facilitating better interaction and data accuracy, and building stronger trust in the process.

Researchers will conduct at least four visits to each household during the survey period to complete various forms on electronic tablets. This method aims to reduce errors and ensure greater data accuracy and reliability. The forms cover



Duaa Alharban
sources, expenditures on durable goods and services, and a daily expense record, which families will fill out directly via an electronic link or paper form.

Following the data collection, field supervisors will review the completed forms, which will then be analysed by a specialised team to reveal indicators such as average family income, expenditures, and size, all of which are crucial for policy and planning.

Alharban urged Bahraini and non-Bahraini families to cooperate to ensure the survey's success, pledging the highest standards of confidentiality and data security.

The iGA has been conducting this survey since 1974-1975, with the fifth one carried out in 2014-2015.

Youth centres e-services launched

TDT | Manama

A series of electronic services for youth empowerment centres has been launched by the Ministry of Youth Affairs' Support and Services Directorate.

These services include the annual plan, programmes and activities; support and care licenses and contracts; annual subsidy disbursement and estimated budgets for expenses and revenues; general assemblies and minutes of meetings and their holding; as well as government transactions and other services.

Youth Affairs Minister Rawan bint Najeeb Tawfiqi said that the ministry has recently launched many initiatives and programmes that contribute to organising youth empowerment centres administratively.

These initiatives include the launch of electronic services, offering digital transformation solutions, and improving the performance levels and admin-



Rawan bint Najeeb Tawfiqi

centers to use the new system, which aims to save effort and facilitate the process of completing transactions.

Tawfiqi noted that the ministry aims to permanently develop the work of youth empowerment centres by launching electronic services, tapping into modern technologies,

istrative processes of youth empowerment centers.

She highlighted the ministry's efforts in developing youth empowerment centres as well as their administrative and technical systems, to enhance their role as youth supporters, which coincides with the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports policies, supported by HM the King's humanitarian work and youth affairs representative His Highness Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

The minister emphasised that the youth empowerment centres in Bahrain's governorates are an ideal place to embrace the energies of young people, invest in their talents, and equip them with the skills and expertise they need to contribute to the Kingdom's development.

She affirmed the importance of youth empowerment centres in enhancing youth skills by providing social, cultural, intellectual, and sporting activities.

MP proposes temporary utility services for buildings under construction

TDT | Manama

MP Mohammed Al Ma'arifi has submitted a proposal to provide a temporary and limited-term electricity and water connection service for owners of buildings under construction, in order to meet the need for these services during the construction phase. According to the explanatory memorandum of the

proposal, the focus is on the government's efforts to facilitate the construction process for beneficiaries by temporarily providing electricity and water connections during the building phase.

This aims to eliminate the need for alternatives, some of which are illegal, such as tapping into neighbours' cables and other environmentally detrimental approaches. It also addresses the

inconvenience caused to neighbours by the noise generated by power generators used in such cases.

Additionally, the provision of temporary electrical cables by the Electricity and Water Authority would generate new revenue for the authority, both through fees and monthly bills paid by owners of these buildings for electricity usage, he stressed.

Fake company, real crime

Court cracks down on BD7M money laundering ring

TDT | Manama

In a swift move to safeguard the financial integrity of the nation, the High Criminal Court has delivered justice in a case involving a clandestine money laundering network.

Two individuals, a Bahraini citizen and an Arab accomplice, found themselves sentenced to prison terms – six years for the Bahraini and three for the Arab defendant – after orchestrating a scheme that siphoned over BD7million through illegal channels.

The saga began with an alarm raised by the National Financial Investigations Centre, flagging suspicious activity involving unlicensed public fund collection and suspected money laundering. The Public Prosecution swiftly initiated investigations, unearthing a web of deceit woven by the defendants.

In cahoots with foreign accomplices, the duo had established a shadow system, bypassing the legal financial framework and its necessary licenses. Their modus operandi? Collecting funds from unsus-



Representative image

pecting individuals, then funnelling them through complex banking transfers before finally disguising the ill-gotten gains as legitimate earnings of one of the defendant's companies.

This nefarious scheme threatened to erode the very foundations of a transparent financial system.

The Public Prosecution, a formidable adversary against financial misconduct, acted swiftly. Bank accounts were frozen, funds meticulously tracked, and witnesses brought forward to shed light on the murky op-

eration. The meticulous investigation yielded irrefutable evidence that the defendants had indeed formed a criminal network, amassing a staggering BD7,104,159.390 through their unauthorised activities.

Justice was served. The defendants, charged with laundering funds acquired through unlicensed collection, were held accountable for their actions. Their attempt to cloak their criminal proceeds in the garb of legitimacy proved futile in the face of a determined investi-



The defendants formed a criminal network through which they collected funds from the public and laundered the proceeds, amounting to BD7,104,159.390 in the period between 2019 and 2023

tigation and a resolute judicial system.

By delivering such a verdict, the High Criminal Court has sent a clear message to those tempted by the allure of ill-gotten gains – the cost of greed is a hefty one, measured not just in lost dinars but also in lost freedom.

Appeals Court reviews cyber fraud case



Representative image

scheme aimed at stealing their funds, prompting them to report the incident to the competent authorities.

The investigation progressed with the assistance of the electronic financial transactions company, which traced the transaction and identified the last individual who received the embezzled amount from a financial exchange.

Through security cameras, the suspect was apprehended. Subsequent investigations revealed that the suspect and an unidentified accomplice outside Bahrain were involved in defrauding victims abroad, with the suspect facilitating the transfer of funds in exchange for commissions.

TDT | Manama

The High Appeals Court has commenced the review of an electronic fraud appeal case, involving a convicted individual who was sentenced to five years in prison for his involvement in embezzling over BD2,500 from his victim through a text message scam.

The defendant had sent a text message to the victim, requesting them to update their personal information on a mobile application through an electronic link. Upon opening the link, the victim was prompted to enter their bank card number and details.

Subsequently, the victim received another message containing a link, which instructed them to click and enter a series of numbers for data verification. After entering their PIN, the victim received a bank notification stating that over BD1,000 had been withdrawn from their account. It was then revealed that the victim had fallen victim to a fraudulent

The crime was committed based on this agreement and assistance. Additionally, the defendant collaborated with another unidentified individual to unlawfully obtain the cash amounts owned by the victim, utilising fraudulent methods and entering data through a technological information medium.

Ministry lawsuit dismissed in land dispute

TDT | Manama

The High Administrative Court rejected a lawsuit filed by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce demanding a sum of BD9,000 from an investor.

The ministry claimed that the investor was a tenant of an industrial land in Al Maamir, with a lease period of six months and 15 days. However, the ministry failed to provide a copy of the lease agreement or any evidence proving the contractual relationship between the parties.

The court confirmed that the plaintiff did not submit the lease contract during the period of the claim, despite being instructed by the court to do so. The lawsuit lacked evidence supporting the existence of a contractual relationship between the parties, and the court ordered the plaintiff to bear the expenses and attorney fees.

The investor's lawyer stated that the ministry filed a lawsuit against his client, seeking to compel him to pay a total amount of BD9,000, representing the rent for the industrial land located in Al Maamir In-

dustrial Zone.

The ministry claimed that they had entered into a lease agreement in 1992 for a period of 25 years. However, the ministry unilaterally terminated the lease agreement without compensating the client, and demanded the rent after the contract's termination.

The lawyer argued that the plaintiff's claim is ambiguous, unrealistic, and lacks legal basis as it fails to clarify the method or mechanism used to calculate the mentioned amount.

He further explained that his client's company constructed all the buildings on the land, complying with all the terms and conditions of the lease agreement. They also established and equipped the necessary facilities to achieve the desired objectives.

However, on December 5, 2016, the client received a letter from the ministry stating the cancellation of the lease agreement, withdrawal of the land, and refusal to renew the contract without any valid reason or compensating the client for the substantial amounts spent on constructions and buildings.

Red Crescent Society holds board meeting

TDT | Manama

The Bahrain Red Crescent Society (BRCS) has provided relief and humanitarian assistance to the Palestine Red Crescent Society, the Libyan Red Crescent, and the Moroccan Red Crescent, in response to recent disasters and crises experienced by these countries.

These initiatives were discussed during the BRCS regular board of directors meeting, headed by chairman Lt-General Dr Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulla Al Khalifa.

BRCS first vice-chairman Ali bin Mohammed Murad and board members Taqi Mohammed Al Baharna, Dr Faisal Al Musawi, Hassan Ali Juma, Dr Fawzi Amin and Dr Kawthar Al Eid also attended, along with BRCS secretary general Mubarak Al Hadi. Also during the meeting, Dr Shaikh Mohamed praised the work of the late Khalil bin Mohammed Al Muraikhi, the BRCS's second vice-chairman, founding mem-



BRCS board members at their meeting

ber, and former financial secretary. Al Muraikhi, who recently passed away, was acknowledged for his significant contributions.

The chairman acknowledged the BRCS's impactful contributions to humanitarian and relief initiatives in the Kingdom. He emphasised the society's on-

going support for the organisation's efforts in aiding the needy both within and outside Bahrain, and further highlighted its effective role in extending relief assistance across diverse segments of society.

Additionally, Al Hadi outlined the BRCS social services com-

mittee's preparations for distributing in-kind and financial assistance in the upcoming holy month of Ramadan. He highlighted that the aid distribution is scheduled for February 2024, ensuring timely delivery to eligible recipients before the commencement of the holy month.

Southern Governorate honours radio competition winners



The Southern Governorate concluded the National Radio Competition that was held to mark the national celebrations in cooperation with the General Directorate of Media and Security Culture and Radio Bahrain. The competition attracted 6,000 entries through social media and the governorate app. The seven winners were honoured in the presence of the governorate official. Left, a winner receives his prize from an official.

EU visa-free travel for Kosovo enters into force

● Kosovars had awaited January 1 with great enthusiasm perceiving it as a "historic day"

● With average wages at slightly above 400 euro and youth unemployment over 20 percent Kosovo ranks among Europe's poorest countries.

AFP | Pristina

A long-awaited European Union's visa liberalisation scheme allowing Kosovo nationals to travel to Europe's borderless zone without a visa came into force yesterday with the first travellers hailing it as a great relief.

The new regime, which entered into force at midnight (2300 GMT Sunday), enables Kosovars into the passport-free Schengen zone without a visa for periods of up to 90 days in any 180-day period.

The reform is perceived in Pristina as another step towards full recognition and a boost for the ambition of the country that proclaimed independence



A man, one of twenty winners of a quiz organized by the government within a campaign to raise the awareness of the new visa scheme, holds his tote bag reading "Visa Liberalization for Kosovo #WithoutVisa" at Pristina's International Airport

in 2008 to join the European Union.

"This is a great relief ... feels good," businessman Rushit Sopi told AFP before boarding a Pristina-Vienna flight.

He was among 20 winners of a quiz organised by the government within a public awareness campaign over the scheme.

The 48-year-old owner of a company manufacturing doors and windows flying almost regularly to the EU for business.

"Each visa cost me 300 euros (\$331). When I last changed my passport, I calculated that the EU visas alone in it cost me 2,500 euros."

European embassies in Pris-

tina, notably those exposed to strong pressure to issue visas, such as the German consulate, had prepared for no visa D-Day.

German ambassador Jörn Rohde himself issued the last visas to Kosovars a few days ago stressing that the visa era was "finally closing".

He also invited locals to visit

his country for this summer's Euro football championship. - 'Second-class citizens' -

Kosovars had awaited January 1 with great enthusiasm perceiving it as a "historic day" as their country moves closer to the EU, local surveys showed.

But they also blamed both Brussels and Pristina for such a long delay in lifting the visa regime. Kosovo, population 1.8 million, was the last of the six countries in the Western Balkans to receive the waiver.

"Until now, Europe has treated us as second-class citizens," said engineer Agim Gosalci, 61.

"Our politicians are also responsible for such a long wait because one of the conditions for visa liberalisation was the fight against corruption and organised crime," translator Adelina Kasolli, 33, said.

With average wages at slightly above 400 euro and youth unemployment over 20 percent Kosovo ranks among Europe's poorest countries.

Emigration fears

For the past two months the government in Pristina has been conducting a campaign urging people not to misuse the freedom of travel by looking for jobs in the EU.

Prime Minister Albin Kurti led

the campaign himself travelling throughout the country to explain the new regime benefits.

"This day is important. A great injustice is being removed and a great right is being gained," he told the quiz winners at Pristina airport before they flew to Vienna.

The prime minister urged Kosovars "to respect the criteria, and wherever we travel, let's not forget that our home is Kosovo."

His deputy in charge of European integration, Besnik Bislami, warned against the possible abuse of the regime which could lead to EU restrictive measures that would "harm the entire country".

Many also fear that it could also result in even greater labour force shortages.

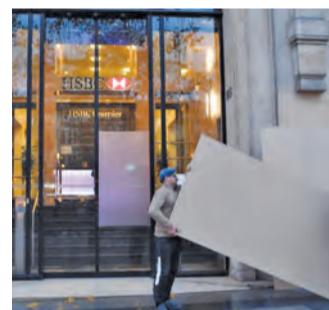
Around 18 percent of private sector employees will quit their jobs and try to emigrate this year, according to the Pristina-based Riinvest institute.

Sopi's business could also feel the impact but on Monday he was focused more on Vienna where he was taking his wife who had never travelled to an EU country.

"The decision (to lift visas) is more than welcome," said his wife Valdete. "We have family in Germany and Switzerland and it was time to visit them."

HSBC France retail bank sold to US fund Cerberus

Paris, France



Representative picture

After more than two years HSBC transferred on Monday for an undisclosed amount its retail banking network in France to My Money Group, controlled by US private equity fund Cerberus.

The operation will see HSBC France's nearly 250 retail branches with their 800,000 clients and 3,500 staff become CCF, a brand that HSBC shelved when it began operations in France some two decades ago.

The move is part of London-headquarters HSBC's efforts to simplify and refocus operations on its major region of Asia.

When announcing the planned sale in June 2021, HSBC said the transfer for a nominal one euro would see it incur a hefty charge.

But the rise in global interest rates complicated negotiations, with HSBC finally booking a charge of \$2.4 billion against third quarter 2022 over

the French unit. The terms of the final deal were not disclosed.

In a statement released Monday the groups said CCF would seek to cater to professionals.

My Money Group traces its history in France back more than a century, originally helping people finance their purchases of Citroen cars, then spending two decades under General Electric's control before the US conglomerate pulled out of finance activities. Cerberus acquired the group in 2018.

Sri Lanka raises taxes ahead of foreign debt deal

Colombo, Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka slapped a new 18 percent value added tax (VAT) on fuel, mobile phones and computers from yesterday to raise desperately needed revenue ahead of a foreign debt restructuring.

An earlier VAT of 15 percent on other consumer goods was also increased to 18 percent as the government sought to shore up its finances while Sri Lanka emerges from its worst economic crisis.

"In order to achieve economic stability, we must continue to forge ahead in this demanding path -- one that is not adorned with flowers but presents formidable challenges," President Ranil Wickremesinghe said in his New Year message.

Months of civil unrest sparked by the economic crisis forced the resignation of then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa when protesters stormed his residence in July 2022.



Representative picture

His successor Wickremesinghe has raised taxes and cut government subsidies to comply with an International Monetary Fund bailout and cracked down on anti-government protests.

The IMF rescue programme requires him to finalise by May a restructure of the island country's \$46 billion external debt after a government default in 2022.

The higher taxes kicked in as the government negotiated with its bilateral lenders and sovereign bond holders to reschedule repayments, a key condition of the IMF bailout.

Singapore economy grows 1.2% in 2023: PM Lee

Singapore, Singapore

Singapore's economy avoided a recession and expanded 1.2% in 2023, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said Sunday, warning however that geopolitical risks will weigh on next year's growth.

The affluent city-state's economic performance is often seen as a barometer of the global environment because of its reliance on international trade.

"We made 1.2% growth this year, avoiding a recession," Lee said in his New Year's message.

For next year, growth is projected to come in at 1.0-3.0% "but much will depend on the external environment," he added, pointing to the continuing war in Ukraine and Israel's conflict with Hamas.

The economy has been hurt by softer global demand for its exports, with the return of air travel after the Covid-19 pandemic boosting domestic growth.

"For some years to come, we



Lee Hsien

must expect the external environment to be less favourable to our security and prosperity. Geopolitical uncertainties will continue weighing on the global economy," he said.

"In our own region, there are tensions and risks over rival claims in the South China Sea, and because of the cross-Strait situation. These can affect confidence in the region, and hence our growth."

Maritime tensions have risen recently in the sea after China and the Philippines traded blame for a series of incidents in the area, including a collision between their vessels.

China's first domestically built cruise ship begins maiden voyage

Shanghai, China

China's first domestically built cruise ship set sail on its maiden voyage from Shanghai on Monday, a sign of the nation's growing prowess in sophisticated construction as it seeks self-sufficiency in key technologies.

The Adora Magic City left port on its first commercial cruise late afternoon, en route to South Korea and Japan.

Equipped with a mahjong lounge and hotpot restaurant, the luxury vessel is aimed squarely at China's expanding middle class and their appetite



China's first domestically built cruise ship "The Adora Magic City" sets sail on the maiden voyage in Shanghai

for international travel.

State media have hailed the 16-deck behemoth as a "major milestone for the country's shipbuilding industry" and a "crown jewel".

Its construction was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic, according to Lloyd's Register (LR), which provided marine services for the ship.

It is China's first foray into a sector dominated by European shipbuilders.

The country's first home-grown passenger jet, the C919, also made its debut outside mainland China last month.

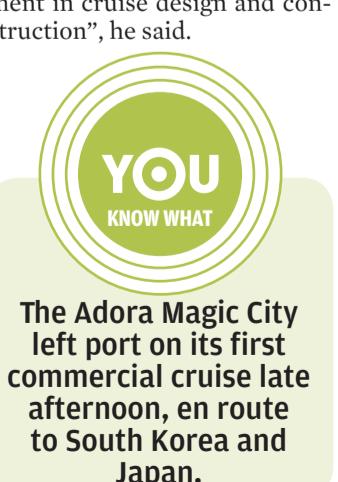
The complex projects are key to Beijing's decades-long ambitions to compete with European and US rivals and cut down China's reliance on foreign technology.

Many of Adora Magic City's components were provided by international suppliers.

But in the future, "China has the opportunity to build its own supply chain", Marco Scopaz, LR's on-site project manager, said in an article on Lloyd's website.

The Adora Magic City "marks the beginning of the country's inevitable and rapid develop-

ment in cruise design and construction", he said.



The Adora Magic City left port on its first commercial cruise late afternoon, en route to South Korea and Japan.



News in brief



Iranian warship
enters Red Sea:
media

Fireworks, war and quakes as world tumbles into 2024

AFP | New York, United States



The Arc de Triomphe illuminated for the New Year celebrations.



Priests perform rituals on the occasion of New Year's day at a temple near Sangam, the confluence of rivers Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati in Prayagraj



Fireworks explode over the Acropolis during New Year celebrations in Athens



Displaced Palestinian children stand next to a mural painting by artist Amal Abo in Rafah in the southern of Gaza Strip



An Israeli soldier carries a heavy shell past battle tanks deployed at a position along the border with the Gaza Strip and southern Israel



People stand next to large cracks in the pavement after evacuating into a street in the city of Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture

◆ Nobel peace laureate Muhammad Yunus was convicted yesterday of violating Bangladesh's labour laws in a case described by his supporters as politically motivated.

Nobel winner Yunus convicted in Bangladesh labour law case



UK warns
willing to take
'direct action' over
Red Sea attacks

Secretary Grant Shapps said yesterday that Britain is "willing to take direct action" against Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen who have repeatedly attacked vessels in the Red Sea. London's warning comes amid escalating tensions in the vital shipping lane, with US Navy helicopters firing Sunday on Houthi rebels who attempted to board a cargo ship. The rebels, who seized Yemen's capital Sanaa in 2014 and control much of the country including its Red Sea coastline, have reported 10 fighters dead or missing. The Houthi rebels -- who say they are acting in solidarity with Palestinians in the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza -- have repeatedly fired drones and missiles at passing ships in the seaway through which 12 percent of global trade passes. Hours after the latest incident, Shapps said Britain could step up its own military interventions. A British destroyer shot down a suspected Houthi attack drone in the Red Sea in mid-December.

SPOTLIGHT

Nearly 30,000 migrants crossed Channel to UK last year



Migrants are seen on the UK Border Force rubber dinghy, after they were picked up at sea while attempting to cross the English Channel, and brought to the Marina in Dover, southeast England

London, United Kingdom

Nearly 30,000 migrants crossed the Channel to Britain from mainland Europe in small boats in 2023, an annual drop of more than a third, government figures released yesterday showed.

However, the unauthorised arrivals of 29,437 people on the southeast English coast remains the second largest yearly tally since officials began publishing the numbers in 2018.

The perilous journeys across one of the world's busiest shipping lanes have become a huge political problem for the Conservative government, with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak pledging last year to "stop the

boats".

One of five key promises he made for 2023, the persistently high number of arrivals could haunt the Tory leader as he bids to win a general election due this year.

Sunak said last month there was no "firm date" for meeting his pledge.

The beleaguered leader will likely point to a 36 percent reduction in small-boat arrivals last year, after a record 45,000 migrants made the journey in 2022.

His ministers have claimed Britain's £480 million (\$610 million) agreement with France to increase efforts to stop the migrants is starting to pay off, alongside fast-track return deals struck with countries such as Albania.

N. Korea's Kim celebrates New Year's Eve with performance, daughter by side



North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un (2nd R) waving as he watches a large New Year's performance with his daughter, presumed to be named Ju Ae (C), and her mother Ri Sol Ju (L) at the May Day Stadium in Pyongyang

AFP | Seoul, South Korea

Sol Ju clapping and smiling beside her.

Kim responded to the roaring crowd with waves, and was seen kissing Ju Ae on the cheek at one point.

The performance marked the beginning of the new year, state-run KCNA reported, with bells "tolling solemnly..." at 00:00 on January 1 along with the ignition of the torch of celebration and the display of fireworks" in the sky over the capital city.

At the end of the performance, loud cheers of "Hurrah!" for Kim Jong Un rocked the venue again and firework were let off" a female narrator says over footage showing performers waving North Korean flags in celebration.

Xi says willing to work with US for stable relationship

AFP | Beijing, China

China's President Xi Jinping said yesterday he was willing to work with the United States to promote stable bilateral ties, exchanging congratulations with US counterpart on the anniversary of diplomatic relations, state media said.

Xi and US President Joe Biden met in San Francisco in November, vowing to improve communication in an effort to stop competition from spilling over into conflict.

And in an exchange of messages to mark the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between

Far-eastern Russia on 'alert' over tsunami risk

AFP | Moscow, Russia

urging people to move to higher ground.

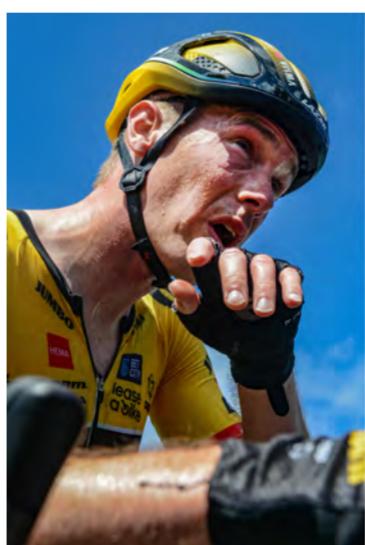
Russia's Sakhalin island and the Pacific city of Vladivostok were on "alert" yesterday to a possible tsunami risk after a major earthquake in Japan.

The alerts came after the powerful 7.5 earthquake in Japan prompted tsunami warnings, with Japanese authorities

Australian cycling champ charged over wife's death: media

● Hoskins, 32, rode in the Australian team that won the team pursuit event at the 2015 Track Cycling World Championships in France.

AFP | Sydney, Australia



Australian cyclist Rohan Dennis (L) from Jumbo Visma team after winning the stage two of the Tour Down Under UCI cycling event in Adelaide on January 19, 2023; and Australia's Melissa Hoskins (R) celebrating after winning with teammates the UCI Track Cycling World Championships in Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, near Paris



driving" and "driving without due care and endangering life".

"The driver is known to the woman," police said, without confirming his name.

Hoskins, 32, rode in the Australian team that won the team pursuit event at the 2015 Track Cycling World Championships in France.

"We send our thoughts to those

'How many lives?'

In Rome, Pope Francis prayed for the victims of conflicts around the globe, including the people of Sudan and the "martyred Rohingya" of Myanmar.

"At the end of a year, have the courage to ask how many lives have been torn apart in armed conflicts, how many deaths?" the 87-year-old pontiff said.

2023 was the hottest year since records began in 1880 and saw a spate of climate-fuelled disasters across the world.

It also saw the worst conflict in the Middle East in years.

With once-bustling Gaza City neighbourhoods reduced to rubble, there were few places in the Palestinian territory left to mark the new year -- and fewer loved ones to celebrate with.

"It was a black year full of tragedies," said 37-year-old Abed Akaiki, who fled the city with his wife and children to a UN shelter in southern Gaza.

"God willing this war will end, the new year will be a better one, and we will be able to return to our homes and rebuild them, or even live in a tent on the rubble,"

The United States promises global consequences.

Democrat Joe Biden, 81, and Republican Donald Trump, 77, appear set for a November rerun of their 2020 presidential contest.

Biden marked the new year by proclaiming optimism for the US economy.

He has at times appeared to show his age and even supporters worry about the toll of another bruising four years in office.

There are at least as many concerns about a Trump return.

He faces prosecution on several counts, and 2024 could determine whether the bombastic self-proclaimed billionaire goes to the Oval Office or jail.

Ukraine says foiled 'record' number of drone attacks on New Year's Eve



Russia's President Vladimir Putin meets with servicemen - representatives of branches of the Russian Armed Forces

AFP | Kyiv, Ukraine

he told AFP.

In Tel Aviv, Israel, 24-year-old Ran Stahl preferred to work at a wine bar during New Year's Eve, saying he didn't have the heart to celebrate.

"The minute I start dancing, the sadness and mourning come back," said Stahl, whose friend died at a trance music festival during Hamas's October 7 attack.

Some in Putin's Russia were also weary of conflict, this time in Ukraine.

"I would like the war to end, a new president and a return to normal life," said 55-year-old theatre decorator Zoya Karpova.

To the polls

In Denmark, popular Queen Margrethe II, Europe's longest-serving monarch, chose her New Year's Eve address to announce her coming abdication in favour of her son.

Pivotal elections are scheduled in 2024, including in Russia, Britain, the European Union, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa and Venezuela.

The United States promises global consequences.

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TOP 4 TWEETS

01



As @UN_MINUSMA completes its withdrawal today, I share my gratitude for the service of its personnel. The @UN is committed to continue working with the Malian people & transitional Government towards the restoration of constitutional order & the promotion of peace & security.

@antonio gutierrez

02



What do you think of the progress achieved by India in various sectors in the last 10 years? Share your feedback directly with me through the #JanMan Survey on the NaMo App! @narendramodi

03



Anew year brings a renewed sense of hope and opportunity. I wish you and your loved ones a happy, healthy, and prosperous 2024.

@SecBlinken

04



From today, the majority of foreign university students cannot bring family members to the UK. In 2024, we're already delivering for the British people.

@RishiSunak

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

CELEBS

celebs

Ariana Grande and Ethan Slater are living together in NYC

Celebretainment | Los Angeles

Ariana Grande and Ethan Slater are reportedly residing together in New York City.

The pop star, 30, and Broadway star, 31, still have their own homes, but they have been living under one roof as their romance heats up, insiders told TMZ.

One source told the outlet the pair "vibe together" and enjoy each other's company.

The 'Thank U, Next' hitmaker is due to head back to England next year to resume filming her pair of 'Wicked' films, whilst Ethan is starring in a stage production of 'Spamalot' back on Broadway.

It's unclear if Ethan will jet across the pond to be with his girlfriend in London.

Ariana split from her husband Dalton Gomez in January after two years of marriage before moving on with Ethan, who she has been working with on 'Wicked'.

Meanwhile, Ariana has been in the studio with producer Max Martin working on her follow-up to 2020's 'Positions'.

The singing sensation returned to music amid the SAG-AFTRA strike when filming was paused.

An insider told the New York Post's Page Six column: "Her priority has been Glinda [her character in 'Wicked'] for the past two years, and still is, as they haven't finished the film."

She still has no idea when the new music will be released. The source said: "She



Ariana Grande and Ethan Slater

doesn't know when she'll want to release" it "as she wants to be respectful of the timeline for 'Wicked,' and originally didn't want to do any music at all until after the films were released."

However, the insider added: "She works quickly and drops [in] instinctively whenever she feels ready... so who knows?"

What's more, Ariana and co-star Cynthia Erivo have created new songs with 'Wicked' creator Stephen Schwartz.

Getting to split Jon M. Chu's eagerly anticipated movie adaptation of the hit musical - in which Ariana portrays Glinda and Cynthia, 36, plays Elphaba - into two parts afforded the team "some room for exploration that has led to a couple of new songs."

Schwartz told RadioTimes.com: "The creative team, led by [director] Jon Chu, has been fantastic, and I have a great music team, many of whom came from the show originally.

Ariana split from her husband Dalton Gomez in January after two years of marriage before moving on with Ethan, who she has been working with on 'Wicked'

The source said: "She

Zac Efron stopped socialising while shooting The Iron Claw

Celebretainment | Los Angeles

Zac Efron "doesn't know" if he enjoyed working on 'The Iron Claw'.

The 36-year-old actor portrays wrestler Kevin Von Erich in the biographical sports drama and he spent so much time focusing on his physique, he cut out all socialising and having fun, and he is concerned he spent

too much time "narrowing [his] world".

He told The Rake magazine: "I didn't do any socialising during filming, I was fully committed to the gym."

"Wake up, ice bath, trying to find decent food, then training upwards of two hours per day."

"I was putting a lot into it, all different modalities of training."

"Feeling that was unique, I don't know if I was enjoying it or not, it takes you out of a place where you have the ability to socialise with friends or family or travel or have the legs under you to go out and have dinner - you don't have it in your."

"I sensed that it was narrowing my world to the point that I wasn't sure whether I was enjoying it or not."

"I can safely say I don't know whether I was enjoying the process."

Zac's determination to be in the right physical condition turned into an "obsession" - but he admitted that helped him get into character.

He explained: "I have always admired physical transformations for a role and I have had a couple of goes at it."

"In one way or another none of them were perfected on any level."

"For Kevin, I knew that if I was going to do this right and hold my head high, it was going to be the most physically gruelling workout and diet regimen I had ever embarked on."

Zac Efron



SUDOKU



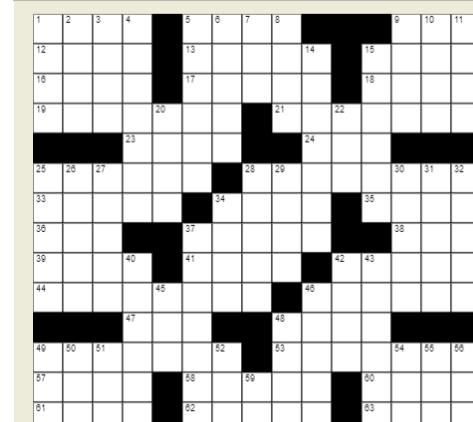
Yesterday's solution

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

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 the numbers from one to nine.

CROSSWORD



Across

1- Mature male European red deer; 5- "The Time Machine" race; 9- gloom of night...; 12- Natural balm; 13- Fluffy; 15- Man, in Milan; 16- Former name of Thailand; 17- Have a feeling about; 18- London jail; 19- Skin eruptions; 21- Comfortably familiar; 23- Electric fish; 24- Philosopher - zu; 25- Pie coverings; 28- Brisck conflict; 33- Ejects; 34- Augury; 35- "Orinoco Flow" singer; 36- Mimic; 37- Adhere closely; 38- Part of ETA; 39- Lab fluids; 41- Singing voice; 42- Nasal cavity; 44- Mosaic pieces; 46- Son of Jacob and Rachel; 47- Pro vote; 48- Po source; 49- Symbols; 53- Survive longer; 57- Stead; 58- One of the Aliens; 60- Gardner and others; 61- Close with force; 62- Smallest; 63- Banderole Puente; 64- High-pitched; 65- Crying shame; 66- Nights before;

Down

1- Briefcase closer; 2- Et (and other men); 3- Travel far and wide; 4- Storm; 5- Ford flops; 6- Silt deposit; 7- Have a title; 8- Not many words; 9- Flood survivor; 10- Melville tale; 11- Portray by an actor; 14- Shouting; 15- Horrid, in olden days; 20- Permits; 22- es Salaam; 25- Seashore; 26- Monetary unit of India; 27- Software buyers; 28- Strike hard; 29- Vegas game; 30- Mindlessly stupid; 31- Thick sweet liquid; 32- Grating; 34- Leaf with Sanscrit writing; 37- A chewy candy; 40- Sanctuary; 42- Rifle (through); 43- Set apart; 45- Shoe width; 46- Smartly trim; 48- Browned sliced bread; 49- Socialite Maxwell; 50- Factory; 51- Rhythm; 52- Dance move; 54- Tel; 55- Fill to surfeit; 56- General chicken; 59- Yes, in Yokohama;

Yesterday's solution

A	T	S	O	F	L	S	A	B	C	T	U	T
O	A	H	U	P	I	X	I	E	O	T	I	S
N	A	I	R	E	V	E	N	A	N	A	N	A
E	B	O	N	E	L	E	T	C	H	E	R	E
M	I	C	A	H	H	A	N	D	P	I	C	K
C	O	M	E	T	T	O	R	A	T	H	E	E
A	T	A	T	A	T	A	T	A	E	E	E	E
L	O	G	E	T	O	T	A	T	E	E	E	E
F	R	E	W	I	L	L	S	N	A	S	P	S
R	O	T	S	Z	A	N	Y	Y	E	A	Y	E
A	N	O	I	N	T	S	I	N	A	S	P	S
C	O	V	E	B	O	L	I	W	H	A	W	T
E	R	A	S	R	E	A	T	A	U	R	A	R
S	A	L	T	A	S	H	Y	Y	E	E	A	R

Katy Perry: I've found balance in my life

Celebretainment | Los Angeles

Katy Perry has found a "balanced" lifestyle.

The 39-year-old pop star has a three-year-old daughter called Daisy with actor Orlando Bloom, and Katy has revealed that she's managed to find a healthy work-life balance in recent years.

The 'Hot n Cold' hitmaker - who wrapped her Las Vegas residency earlier this year - told E! News: "I am very happy, Katy Perry

it's balanced. It's still a balanced life.

"We wrapped Vegas, we sang out a few things this year and we've got a big year next year."

Katy's daughter has even developed a love of Las Vegas.

She shared: "I say, 'Mommy goes singing,' and she understands. She's like, 'Tonight? You're going tonight?' And she loves Las Vegas. I tell you, I swear to you. She loves Las Vegas so much. She always wants to go to Vegas. We just have the best time."

Earlier this year, Katy revealed that she's prioritising her family life over her music career.

The chart-topping star told 'Good Morning America': "I haven't put any new material out since my darling Daisy."

"I think that I'm writing a lot and have written a lot from a place of love, because I'm feeling so much of it - so much unconditional love, that love you never knew existed."

Katy also urged her fans to remain patient with her.

Natalie Portman sees similarities in psychology and acting

Celebretainment | Los Angeles

patterns, behaviour."

In 'May December', Natalie plays Elizabeth, an actress preparing to play a real-life figure and she admitted playing someone based on a real person can feel "vampiric", even when she is trying to be empathetic.

She said: "That's a classic trope of literature and theatre. You read Chekhov, and he's questioning whether storytelling is stealing from people's lives.

"I think every artist with a heart and soul

questions themselves.

"Am I stealing from real people to feed my art - like a vampire? It can be vampiric, but

I think you can approach it in a way that's more generous, more about empathy and trying to imagine someone's life, as opposed to trying to steal someone's life."

The 42-year-old actress made her movie debut in 'Leon' when she was 12 and had her first Broadway role four years later in 'The Diary of Anne Frank' and she enjoys working in stage and screen in different ways.



Taraji P. Henson dumped her whole team after Empire



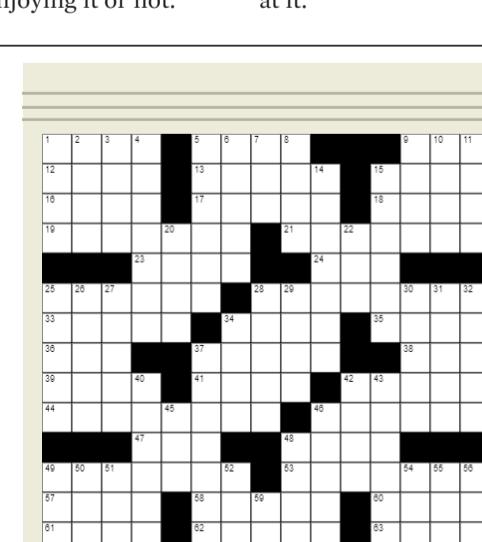
Celebretainment | Los Angeles

Taraji P. Henson fired her entire team after 'Empire'.

The 53-year-old actress was left frustrated that she had no work lined up after the huge success of the Netflix musical drama - in which she starred as Loretha 'Cookie' Lyon, née Holloway from 2015 to 2020 - and so she decided to get rid of the business people around her.

In a conversation with Variety's Angelique Jackson, she said: "Everybody had to go

"Where is my deal? Where's my commercial? Cookie was at the top of the fashion game. Where is my endorsement? What did you have set up for after this?"



Zac Efron

Classifieds

VACANCIES AVAILABLE

STYLE ARTIST GENTS SALON W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of BARBER- HAIRDRESSER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 34602487 or vsmidhun93@gmail.com

KOOHEJI CONTRACTORS W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of MASON ASST, suitably qualified applicants can contact 17786500 or careers@kcbahrain.com

PROTECTS SECURITY SERVICES has a vacancy for the occupation of SECURITY GUARD, suitably qualified applicants can contact 36094012 or hrd@dreamgroup.bh

NASSER SAEED AL-HAJRI CORPORATION W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of SCAFFOLDER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 17312220 or AHCGLOBE@BATELCO.COM.BH

ASB SECURITY SOLUTIONS W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of SECURITY GUARD, suitably qualified applicants can contact 35070603 or MAGICSHINE775@YAHOO.COM

AMBALI CLEANING AND CONTRACTING has a vacancy for the occupation of WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 39165508 or AMBALICLEANING@GMAIL.COM

MOHAMED ALI IDREES ALGHANEMI has a vacancy for the occupation of WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 33374488 or M-ALGANEIMI@HOTMAIL.COM

DAR ABU HUSSAIN BREAKFAST has a vacancy for the occupation of KITCHEN WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 39997757 or M.KHABBAZ92@GMAIL.COM

MR. CUT W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of BARBER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 39661894 or ABDUL33883621@GMAIL.COM

KOOHEJI CONTRACTORS W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of MASON ASST, suitably qualified applicants can contact 17786500 or careers@kcbahrain.com

LAUNDRY POINT has a vacancy for the occupation of WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 36525253 or ABDULLA86.K@GMAIL.COM

FADHEL ALI ABDULWAHAB ALTAWEEL (KHOKHA - 2060) has a vacancy for the occupation of SEAMAN, suitably qualified applicants can contact 36300065 or AYYS1976@HOTMAIL.COM

EVER WIN CONTRACTING CO W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of PROMOTER(COMMERCIAL SERVICES), suitably qualified applicants can contact 39471786 or FATIMA720@GMAIL.COM

Muhammad Aazan Fabrication Co W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 33510303 or aazanfabrication.bh@gmail.com

Mezzah Platters for cheese and fruits has a vacancy for the occupation of SALES WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 17600798 or AMEENA_ALGHANEM@HOTMAIL.COM

ARIZONE GENERAL TRADING CO. W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of TECHNICIAN, suitably qualified applicants can contact 34344545 or BH@ARIZONE.COM

PROTECTS SECURITY SERVICES has a vacancy for the occupation of SECURITY GUARD, suitably qualified applicants can contact 36094012 or hrd@dreamgroup.bh

NASSER SAEED AL-HAJRI CORPORATION W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of PIPE-FITTER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 17312220 or AHCGLOBE@BATELCO.COM.BH

Gardens of chocolate cafe has a vacancy for the occupation of WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 36666396 or FATIMA.ALSH2@GMAIL.COM

Cata Kitchen Appliances Co. W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of SECRETARY, suitably qualified applicants can contact 33319733 or a.alraeesi@kadi.bh

AL MAHARA TAILORING - Bahraini PARTNERSHIP CO. has a vacancy for the occupation of WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 17879166 or BURJMUHAMMAD786@GMAIL.COM

ANDROMEDA SERVICES CO BAHRAINI PARTNERSHIP COMPANY has a vacancy for the occupation of WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 35350765 or SAQLAINO0723@GMAIL.COM

KOOHEJI CONTRACTORS W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of MASON ASST, suitably qualified applicants can contact 17786500 or careers@kcbahrain.com

SUPER PAK INTERIOR CLEANING AND PACKAGING CO W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 33325063 or SARDARANWARAZEEM@GMAIL.COM

Orionstar Contracting Co. W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of SUPERVISOR, suitably qualified applicants can contact 17001211 or OLWYNP@GMAIL.COM

REPUTATION SALON - Bahraini partnership company has a vacancy for the occupation of BARBER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 35524917 or shafiqsyoed@gmail.com

THE DAILY BREAD BAKERY W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 17715021 or HELLO@WOOHOLDINGS.COM

M SAWAR MOTORCYCLE REPAIRING W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 38764458 or adilbaloch033@gmail.com

RENAD CAR AUTO SERVICE has a vacancy for the occupation of WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 33323381 or AHMADMOHD0200@GMAIL.COM

BLUE LAGON INTERIOR DECORATION W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 34180337 or MUSHTAQ11009@GMAIL.COM

AL KARAMI WORKSHOP W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of CARPENTER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 34180337 or MUSHTAQ11009@GMAIL.COM

ART STARS TRADING & CONTRACTING BAHRAINI PARTNERSHIP COMPANY has a vacancy for the occupation of DRIVER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 17683268 or MODERN@BATELCO.COM.BH

WADI ALQAMAR FOOD TRANSPORTATION W.L.L has a vacancy for the occupation of WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 33232734 or CH.MUHAMMADMUNAWAR23@GMAIL.COM

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contact 36494922 or Mahussein1973@gmail.com

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ART MARINE REPAIR MACHINERY CO W.L.L. has a vacancy for the occupation of WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 33485612 or RESHMARAWOOF786@GMAIL.COM

ANMAR GALLERY TRADING W.L.L. has a vacancy for the occupation of SALESMAN, suitably qualified applicants can contact 33098330 or ANMARGALLERY@GMAIL.COM

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REAL ROSE MARKETING AND PROMOTION W.L.L. has a vacancy for the occupation of WORKER, suitably qualified applicants can contact 33990391 or DAILYTASK999@GMAIL.COM

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NBA-best Celtics rout Wemby's Spurs for sixth win in a row



Boston's Jayson Tatum, at left driving to the hoop against San Antonio's Tre Jones

AFP | Los Angeles

Jayson Tatum scored 25 points and **Jaylen Brown** added 24 to lead the NBA-best Boston Celtics over San Antonio 134-101 on Sunday, stretching their win streak to six games.

Kristaps Porzingis added 14 points and a game-high nine rebounds for the Celtics, who improved to 26-6.

Boston also got 17 points from Derrick White, who spent five seasons with San Antonio before joining the Celtics in a 2022 trade. He heard chants of "White's an All-Star" from the Texas fans.

"I've got a lot of respect for the fans here, great memories here," White said. "I'm just thankful."

Boston outscored the Spurs 40-23 in the third quarter to pull away for good.

"Just had that mindset of third quarter is important and coming out ready to go," White said. "We finished the first half well and kept it going from there."

Tatum made 10-of-17 shots from the floor, 5-of-10 from 3-point range, while Brown

went 9-of-13 from the floor, hitting both 3-point attempts, and 4-of-6 from the free throw line.

French 19-year-old rookie star center Victor Wembanyama, the 7-foot-4 (2.24m) top pick of the 2023 NBA Draft, scored 21 points and grabbed seven rebounds for the host Spurs, who fell to 5-27.

Zion Williamson and Brandon Ingram each scored 26 points and the host New Orleans Pelicans avenged an In-Season Tournament (IST) semi-final loss by ripping the Los Angeles Lakers 129-109.

Ingram also contributed eight assists, five rebounds, three steals and two blocked shots while Williamson added six assists and four rebounds for the Pelicans, who improved to 19-14 with all five starters scoring in double figures.

A day after his 39th birthday, LeBron James led the Lakers with 34 points while adding eight assists and five rebounds. Anthony Davis netted 20 points with 10 rebounds for the Lakers, who humbled the Pelicans 133-89 on their way to the IST crown earlier this month.

Pregnant Kvitova puts tennis career on hold

AFP | Prague

Two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova said yesterday she was pregnant and putting her career on hold as the new season is due to start in Australia.

"On the first day of 2024

Journey to Asian Cup begins

Bahrain's senior men's national football team depart today for Dubai camp ahead of continental showcase

● BFA president Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa heads AFC Asian Cup delegation

● Nationals to be in Dubai until 11 January, to play two friendly games during this period

TDT | Manama

Bahrain's highly anticipated journey to the AFC Asian Cup begins today as the Kingdom's senior men's national football team depart for Dubai for their final training camp in the lead-up to the continental competition.

The tournament is scheduled to kick off on 12 January and continue until 10 February. It will be played in Doha with 24 national teams from across Asia taking part.

The Bahraini delegation travelling to the Emirates before going to Qatar is headed by Bahrain Football Association (BFA) president Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa. The deputy head is His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali bin Isa Al Khalifa.

Team manager Rashed Al Zayani and head coach Juan Antonio Pizzi from Argentina are among the top officials for the Kingdom's side, which also includes eight members of Pizzi's technical staff, 11 others on the administrative and support staff, and 10 accompanying



Bahrain's senior men's national football team...gearing up for chief continental test

media members.

The BFA confirmed yesterday the national team's official programme ahead of the AFC Asian Cup. Following their arrival today in Dubai, the Bahrainis will get right to work and then play an international friendly match against continental powerhouses Australia on Saturday. They then face African side Angola in an informal training match on 10 January, after which they depart for Doha the following day.

That will be just in time for the start of the tournament, in which Bahrain are in Group E for the preliminary round along with South Korea, Malaysia and Jordan.

Pizzi has named 26 players on the final list for the Dubai camp and the AFC Asian Cup. The players include goalkeepers Sayed Mohammed Jaafar, Ebrahim Lutfallah and Abdulkarim Al Fardan; defenders Amine Benadi, Sayed Mahdi Baqer, Waleed Al Hayyam, Ahmed Bughammar, Mohammed Adel, Hussain Al Aker and Abdulla Al Khalasi; midfielders Hazza Ali, Mohammed Abdulwahab, Moses Atede, Mohammed Hardan, Ebrahim Alwali, Mohammed Abdulqayoom, Jassim Al Shaikh, Jassim Khelaif, Mohammed Marhoon, Komail Al Aswad and Ebrahim Al Khattal; and forwards Ali Hassan Saeed, Ali Madan, Mahdi Humaidan, Abdulla Al Hashash and Abdulla Yusuf.

Kick off

The nationals kick off their campaign against the South Koreans on 15 January at 2.30pm, and then take on their Malaysian counterparts on 20 January at 5.30pm. They complete the prelimi-

naries against Jordan on 25 January at 2.30pm. All times are Bahrain.

Bahrain need to finish amongst the top two in their group to automatically advance to the knockout stage, or be one of four of the best-ranked third-placed teams from the six pools.

Group A features hosts Qatar, China, Tajikistan and Lebanon. Group B includes Australia, Uzbekistan, Syria and India. Group C is composed of Iran, the UAE, Hong Kong and Palestine. Group D comprises Japan, Indonesia, Iraq and Vietnam. And Group F features Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Kyrgyzstan and Oman.

Bahrain will be making their seventh appearance in the AFC Asian Cup, having qualified for the competition's sixth straight edition. Their first appearance came in 1988, and then also played in 2004, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019. Their best finish to date was fourth overall in the 2004 tournament held in China.

'Super nervous' Osaka wins comeback match at Brisbane International

● Naomi Osaka defeats Tamara Korpatsch 6-3, 7-6 (11/9) in an intense match

AFP | Brisbane

Former world number one and new mother Naomi Osaka said yesterday she was proud to have won her first match back after a long break, admitting she had been "super nervous".

The 26-year-old was on court at the Brisbane International for an hour and 47 minutes before finally seeing off gallant German Tamara Korpatsch 6-3, 7-6 (11/9) on Pat Rafter Arena.

"I was super nervous, but I was excited to be out there," said Osaka, a four-time Grand Slam champion who stepped away from tennis in September 2022, citing mental health concerns.

"I think it's better to have harder matches early because it will train me for what's to come."

"I know all the opponents I play aren't easy anyway, so it would be very 'out there' for me to think my first match would be a 6-1, 6-1 win."

"Looking back on the match now, honestly I'm very proud of myself. I feel like I played at a pretty good level."

After giving birth to a baby girl in July, Osaka rediscovered her love of the game and decided to return for the 2024 season



Japan's Naomi Osaka hits a return against Germany's Tamara Korpatsch

YOU KNOW WHAT
After giving birth to a baby girl in July, Osaka rediscovered her love of the game and decided to return for the 2024 season

take the first set relatively comfortably.

But it was a different story in the second set as Korpatsch lifted and Osaka began to feel the pressure.

Korpatsch broke Osaka's serve to start the second set and although the Japanese star broke straight back, she was no longer as settled against the tenacious German.

Osaka did break once more and was serving for the match at 5-4, but she was broken again and it went to a tiebreak, where both players had their chances.

Osaka squandered two match points and Korpatsch two set points before Osaka prevailed on her third opportunity with a powerful forehand down the line.

She said courtside that motherhood had changed her outlook on the game, and she had felt too isolated from fans and fellow players previously.

"The last couple of years that I played before I had my daughter I didn't return as much love as I was given," she said.

"So I really feel like that's what I want to do in this chapter. I just really appreciate people coming out and cheering for me."

"I would say she's (her daughter) helped me grow up so much so quickly," Osaka added.

"Off the court I'm more aware

I was super nervous, but I was excited to be out there. I think it's better to have harder matches early because it will train me for what's to come. I know all the opponents I play aren't easy anyway, so it would be very 'out there' for me to think my first match would be a 6-1, 6-1 win. Looking back on the match now, honestly I'm very proud of myself. I feel like I played at a pretty good level

NAOMI OSAKA

of people and I appreciate them a lot more, even my opponents and everything."

In the men's draw, world number eight and top seed Holger Rune came from a set down to defeat Australian Max Purcell.

The big serving Purcell took the opening set against a rusty looking Rune, but the Dane became increasingly assured as the match wore on and took charge to win 4-6, 6-4, 6-2.

Second seed Grigor Dimitrov was also recovered from losing the first set to defeat former world number one Andy Murray 4-6, 7-5, 6-2.

Earlier, Russia's Roman Safiullin ousted third seeded American Ben Shelton 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3 in a match lasting over two-and-a-half hours.

Japan call on Mitoma to help erase Asian Cup 'frustration'

AFP | Tokyo

Brighton winger Kaoru Mitoma was named in Japan's Asian Cup squad yesterday despite an ankle injury, as coach Hajime Moriyasu looks to erase the "frustration" of their 2019 final defeat.

Brighton coach Roberto De Zerbi said last week that Mitoma would be out for up to six weeks after hurting his ankle in a 1-1 draw with Crystal Palace on December 21.

But Moriyasu still included the player in his 26-man squad for the Asian Cup in Qatar, which kicks off on January 12.

"Given his current injury situation, I don't know if he will be ready to play in the first game or not," Moriyasu said of the 26-year-old.



Kaoru Mitoma

"But I have been told by the national team medical staff and his club medical staff that I will be able to use him early in the tournament when he comes back from injury."

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Winfred in high spirits

● Bahrain's reigning world champion is aiming high as she enters an Olympic year

TDT | Manama

Bahrain's reigning world champion Winfred Yavi is in high spirits as she enters this Olympic year.

Following a sensational 2023 in which she won multiple major accolades in the women's 3,000 metres steeplechase -- including her maiden world title, an Asian Games gold medal, her first-ever Diamond League crown and the year's world leading time -- the 24-year-old, who celebrated her birthday on New Year's Eve, now has her sights set on glory at the Paris Olympics.

She took to social media to share her aspirations for 2024, and she called on her supporters to rally behind her.

"As the new year dawns, I am elated by the journey ahead to the Olympics, a path that we tread together as #TeamYavi," Winfred wrote.

"Your support is my strength, and our collective hopes and dreams propel us forward."

"This New Year, let's embrace the spirit of unity and compassion that guides us through every challenge. Team Yavi, your belief is the wind beneath my wings."

"Happy New Year, and here's



Winfred Yavi celebrates her world title victory last year

to a year where every step counts and every heart is heard. Keep moving."

Hopeful

Winfred is one of Bahrain's leading hopefuls for a medal at this year's Olympic Games. At the previous Olympiad in Tokyo in 2021, she could not meet her goals, but is determined to do so this time around.

Winfred is also eyeing the steeplechase world record. She attempted to attack it last year,

This New Year, let's embrace the spirit of unity and compassion that guides us through every challenge. Team Yavi, your belief is the wind beneath my wings

WINFRED YAVI

and she came close, setting a

blistering mark of eight minutes 50.66 seconds to set a new Asian and Bahraini record, en route to claiming her Diamond Trophy.

It was also the second-fastest time in history, as she inched closer to Kenyan Beatrice Chepkoech's world mark of 8:44.32 set in 2018.

Aside from her steeplechase gold medal at the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, she secured a fantastic double after also winning gold in the women's 1,500m.



Winfred Yavi in action at last year's world championships

Winfred also set a new Asiad record in the steeplechase of 9:18.28 en route to her victory. She shattered the previous mark of 9:31.36, set by another former world champion of Bahrain, Ruth Jebet, in the 2014 edition in Incheon, South Korea.

Furthermore, Winfred successfully defended her steeplechase title from the 2018 Asiad in Jakarta, Indonesia, and captured the third Asian Games gold medal of her illustrious career.

Winfred continues to train ahead of this year's athletics season, which will lead up to the Paris Olympics, scheduled to take place in July and August.

Dominant Swiatek sends Poland into United Cup quarter-finals

● Swiatek crushes Sorribes Tormo 6-2, 6-1, Hurkacz falls to Davidovich Fokina

AFP | Perth

An irrepressible Iga Swiatek unleashed on Spain Monday as Poland booked a 2-1 win to move into the quarter-finals of the United Cup.

The world number one showed no mercy to Sara Sorribes Tormo in a 6-2, 6-1 singles victory before teaming with Hubert Hurkacz to clinch the tie with a 6-0, 6-0 mixed doubles thrashing in just 53 minutes.

Hurkacz was ambushed in the day's opening singles, losing 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 to Alejandro Davidovich Fokina.

The top-seeded Poles finished Group A play with a perfect 2-0 record and await a last-eight opponent.

Swiatek, who has lost only seven games in two singles matches to start her countdown to the Australian Open, said playing mixed doubles was good experience.

"It's lessons for the future and great practice," the 22-year-old said. "I hardly ever play mixed. You use different skills, it's about feeling the geometry of the court."



Poland's Iga Swiatek serves against Spain's Sara Sorribes Tormo during their women's singles match

Casper Ruud, with two consecutive singles victories, demonstrated improved volley skills, winning 12 of 13 net approaches in matches

Hurkacz credited his teammate with doing most of the hard yards.

"She carried me throughout the whole match, in every game she was making amazing shots," the world number nine said.

In Sydney, a sharp Casper Ruud won his second straight singles match before backing up in the mixed doubles to steer Norway past Croatia.

World number 24 Donna

Vekic ground past unheralded Malene Helgo 7-5, 3-6, 6-3 to give the Croats a winning start to the Group F tie.

But three-time Grand Slam finalist Ruud swept past Borna Coric 6-4, 6-1 in just 89 minutes to level proceedings, then partnered with Ulrike Eikeri to beat Vekic and Ivan Dodig 6-2, 3-6, 10-7.

It was a much-needed win for Norway, who lost to the Netherlands at the weekend.

"I'm motivated for the new year, I'm fresh and I'm ready," said world number 11 Ruud.

"Another great singles match. I'm very happy to start the new year that way."

The win followed a similarly dominant 6-3, 6-4 victory over Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor

It's lessons for the future and great practice. I hardly ever play mixed. You use different skills, it's about feeling the geometry of the court

IGA SWIATEK

on Saturday.

Ruud has dropped serve just once through the two matches, and was not broken on Monday.

He also won 12 of 13 net approaches and said he had been working hard to improve his volleys.

"I'll never be the guy who is all over the net, but I'm trying to come into the court a little more," he said.

Vekic needed two hours and 49 minutes to battle past Helgo, who played far better than her ranking of 539 suggested.

"She's a really good player and her ranking doesn't do her justice," said Vekic, a quarter-finalist at the Australian Open last year. "Finally my serve showed up in the third set, which made it easier."

The Alexander Zverev-led Germany meet France in Group D later Monday in Sydney, while the defending champions United States face Australia in Perth.

Anisimova makes winning return after long tennis break



Amanda Anisimova in action

AFP | Auckland

teens.

Anisimova spoke in the lead-up to the tournament of being better equipped mentally for the rigours of the professional circuit thanks to her break.

She withdrew completely from tennis for four months, before gradually resuming training in September.

But she revealed she nearly didn't take the court for her first-round match after waking up with "horrible" muscle spasms in her shoulder.

"I was just so upset because I had the wildcard for this tournament," she said.

"I really wanted to play for myself today but also for the tournament -- I was really appreciative of them giving me the opportunity."