

H M'S ANKARA VISIT FORGES STRONGER TIES

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik concluded his state visit to the Republic of Turkiye on Friday. A joint communique issued on His Majesty the Sultan's state visit underlined the deep-rooted ties between the two countries and their keenness to support cooperation in various fields of common interest, as well as boosting economic relations by augmenting the volume of trade exchange and encouraging joint investments.

The communique reads as follows: 'In response to an invitation by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the Republic of Turkiye, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik made a state visit to the Turkiye on November 28-29.

'This is the first visit of its kind at the leadership level, reflecting the importance of the historical relations and close ties between the two countries.

'The meetings held between the two leaders underlined the deep-rooted ties between the two countries and their keenness to support cooperation in various fields of common interest.

'The two sides discussed prospects for developing bilateral relations, especially in the political, economic, military and defence fields, in addition to science and technology, education, culture, energy and tourism.

'The two leaders stressed the importance of boosting the economic relations between the two countries by augmenting the volume of



trade exchange and encouraging joint investments. They also expressed their aspiration for the success of the 12th session of the Joint Economic Committee, scheduled to be held in Muscat in December 2024.

'During the visit, a number of agreements and memoranda of understanding were signed to consolidate the legal basis for bilateral relations and enhance cooperation in various fields.

'The two leaders also exchanged views on the regional and international developments. They also stressed the importance of coordinating stances to back regional security and stability.

'They also stressed their commitment to working together to back peacemaking efforts and address regional and international challenges.

'His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik extended an invitation to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to visit the Sultanate of Oman. President Erdogan welcomed and accepted the invitation, looking forward to continuing the dialogue and boosting cooperation between the two countries.

'At the end of the visit, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere appreciation to the Turkish President and people for the warm welcome and hospitality extended to him and his accompanying delegation.'

ONA



H M Sultan Haitham bin Tarik with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the Republic of Turkiye

TEN AGREEMENTS

\$500mn joint investment fund for food, industry, healthcare, new energy, and logistics sectors

Health cooperation pact for public health, hospital management, pharmaceutical industries and equipment

MoU for political consultations

Diplomatic studies MoU for exchange of expertise, educational materials, and training of diplomats

Investment promotion MoU in logistics, agriculture, food security and technology

MoU for livestock, fisheries, water management, rural and agricultural development

MoU for workforce development, vocational training, and support for employment policies

MoU on entrepreneurship, innovation, and exchange of expertise in SME growth

MoU on cooperation among central banks for payment systems, research, training, and information exchange

MoU to promote cultural exchange, joint exhibitions, and collaboration in arts, libraries, and digitisation

H M to visit Belgium on Monday

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will head to the Kingdom of Belgium on a state visit on Monday.

A statement was issued by the Diwan of Royal Court announcing the visit.

His Majesty the Sultan's visit comes on the invitation of King Philippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians, and is poised to promote relations between Oman and Belgium serving joint interests.



H M, President Erdogan highlight shared vision

Ankara - In a ceremonial event marking the signing of ten agreements between Oman and Turkiye, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan emphasised their shared vision for strengthening Oman-Turkiye relations.

His Majesty the Sultan expressed his satisfaction with the "constructive dialogue" during the visit, noting the historical ties between the two nations. "Our relations are a vital model of fruitful cooperation," he said, highlighting Turkish companies' contributions to Oman's infrastructure and Omani investments

in Turkiye.

He added, "We hope to expand commercial exchange and encourage joint economic projects through the newly launched joint investment fund."

His Majesty underlined the importance of cultural cooperation, stating it would enrich knowledge and strengthen interactions between peoples. He also reaffirmed Oman's commitment to peace and stability in the region, with particular support for a just solution to the Palestinian issue. "We are confident in Turkiye's strong backing for this legitimate cause and the country's endeavours to help achieve



justice and peace for all."

President Erdogan welcomed His Majesty the Sultan, describing the visit as a milestone in diplomatic relations. He thanked Oman for its solidarity following

would boost trade and cooperation in sectors like energy and defence. He revealed that Turkiye would begin importing liquefied natural gas from Oman in 2025, marking a significant step in energy collaboration.

Both leaders reiterated their commitment to addressing regional challenges through dialogue and cooperation. His Majesty extended an invitation for Erdogan to visit Oman. "Your visit to Oman would enhance our fraternal relations towards further progress and constructive cooperation benefiting the two friendly peoples," said His Majesty.

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H M honoured in Turkiye, bolstering ties

Ankara – His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan exchanged the highest orders of their respective nations during His Majesty’s state visit to Turkiye, signifying the deep-rooted friendship between Oman and Turkiye.

In a ceremony at the Presidential Complex in Ankara on Thursday, His Majesty the Sultan conferred Oman’s highest accolade, the Al Said Order, on President Erdogan. This gesture honoured the Turkish leader’s role in strengthening the bonds between the two nations. In return, President Erdogan awarded His Majesty the Order of the State, Turkiye’s most prestigious decoration, in recognition of the advanced relations and mutual respect shared by both countries.

Later, President Erdogan hosted an official dinner in honour of His Majesty the Sultan at the Presidential Complex. Before the dinner, the leaders ex-



changed commemorative gifts, underscoring the spirit of friendship.

As part of his visit, His Majesty the Sultan visited the Mausoleum of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkiye. In a message penned in the Visitors Book, His Majesty expressed Oman’s commitment to peace and conveyed his wishes for Turkiye’s continued stability and prosperity. During the visit, His Majesty also toured the adjoining museum, which features Ataturk’s personal belongings and artefacts from Turkiye’s modern history.

His Majesty’s itinerary also included a visit to the Nation’s Library at the Turkish Presidential Complex. He explored its extensive collection of over 4 million printed books and rare manuscripts. A special mini-exhibition of Omani-Turkish documents and publications was organised in honour of His Majesty’s visit.

Sayyid Theyazin to launch school performance evaluation system

Muscat - H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will preside over the launch ceremony of the National School Performance Evaluation System, organised by the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) in Muscat on Monday.

The launch of the system aligns with the authority’s responsibilities under Royal Decree No 9/2021, which mandates OAAAQA to establish a national system to ensure the quality of school education in Oman.

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Sayyid Fahd to lead Oman’s delegation at GCC Summit

Muscat - On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, H H Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, will depart on Sunday for Kuwait to head the Sultanate of Oman’s delegation to the 45th Supreme Council of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Summit.

Oman reiterated its continued commitment to supporting the success of the GCC, working diligently to promote integration and cooperation among member states to achieve the shared aspirations of the region’s peoples for progress and prosperity.

H H Sayyid Fahd will be accompanied by an official delegation, including several ministers and senior government officials.

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Dhahirah film fest from Dec 5 to celebrate regional cinema

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Dhahirah International Film Festival will take place from December 5 to 9 in the wilayat of Ibbi, showcasing a diverse range of cinematic talent from Oman, the Gulf, and the wider Arab world.

The Oman Film Society, in collaboration with the Dhahirah Governor’s Office, has organised the event to promote cinematic culture and highlight the artistic and historical heritage of the Dhahirah governorate.

Mohammed bin Abdullah al Ajmi, Chairman of the Oman Film Society and the festival, emphasised the Society’s commitment to fostering Oman’s film industry through events held across the country. “This festival provides a platform to promote Oman’s cinematic presence internationally and discover emerging talents in



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MOHAMMED AL AJMI



filmmaking, including writing, directing, and acting,” Ajmi said.

Ajmi highlighted Oman’s capacity to support filmmakers through its studios and facilities, which have been promoted under the society’s ‘Make Your

Film in Oman’ initiative. This programme, which won the 2024 Youth Excellence Award, aims to attract filmmakers and cinema enthusiasts from around the world.

Eng Jameel al Yaqoubi, Direc-

tor of the festival, revealed that 658 films were submitted for consideration, with 40 films making the final selection. These include 16 Omani films, 21 international films, and three films in a special category focused on the Dhahirah governorate.

Yaqoubi outlined the festival’s four main awards: Best International Documentary, Best Omani Documentary, Jury Award, and the Encouragement Award. The event will also feature a rich programme of screenings, workshops, and cultural activities.

The opening ceremony will take place on December 5 at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Ibbi. The fol-

lowing day, guests will tour Ibbi market and key archaeological sites before an evening session featuring artist Jassim al Nabhan and film screenings.

On December 7, the festival will honour the career of acclaimed Arab actress Hoda al Khatib alongside more screenings. The final day will include a youth cinema workshop for school students, a discussion session with directors, and the closing ceremony where the winning films will be announced.

The Dhahirah International Film Festival is part of ongoing efforts to position Oman as a hub for regional and international cinema while celebrating its cultural

Beaconhouse School, Oman Shines as Middle East Champions at the World Scholar’s Cup Tournament of Champions



The prestigious World Scholar’s Cup (WSC) ‘Tournament of Champions’ recently concluded at Yale University in the United States, which attracted participants from over 65 countries. This annual event highlighted exceptional talent in debate, collaborative writing, and creative problem-solving.

Following the regional round in Muscat and the Global round in Kuala Lumpur, we are proud to announce that Beaconhouse School competed in the ‘Tournament of Champions’ round, with a group of nine students in the senior division, who achieved remarkable success, earning 24 gold and 11 silver medals. Throughout the championship, these students showcased their expertise by engaging in rigorous academic competitions across a diverse range of topics, including science, literature, history, and current affairs.

Key highlights of the event included the ‘Scholar’s Bowl’, where teams competed to solve complex challenges, and the ‘Scholar’s Show’, which celebrated cultural performances and camaraderie among participants. Beaconhouse students were crowned as the ‘Middle East Champions’, with the team of Abdul Dayaan Kaleem, Mirza Arsalan Baig, and Umar Abdurrohman Husni bringing home the honours. Their outstanding performance against stiff competition, from teams round the world, is truly commendable.

Further to that, this team was placed 72nd in the highly competitive ‘Team Debate’ category and finished 7th place in the ‘Scholar’s Bowl’ event.

Abdul Dayaan Kaleem was also awarded the title ‘Champion Scholar’ for his performance in the ‘Scholar’s Challenge’ and achieved an overall 11th position in the individual global rankings.

WSC founder Daniel Berdichevsky expressed pride in the global community fostered through this event, describing it as “a celebration of curiosity, creativity, and teamwork.” Participants departed with a sense of inspiration, having formed enduring friendships that transcended geographical boundaries while embracing the tournament’s motto: “Learning never stops.”

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Oman Botanic Garden 90% complete

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Over 90% of the Oman Botanic Garden, a groundbreaking conservation initiative in Al Khoudh, Muscat, is complete. The project, the largest of its kind in the Arabian Peninsula and among the biggest in the world, is dedicated to showcasing Oman's native flora while promoting biodiversity and sustainability.

Eng Mohamed bin Mahmoud al Zadjali, Advisor to the Minister of Heritage and Tourism for Engineering Affairs and supervisor of the project, confirmed the progress during a recent Oman TV programme.

Spanning 500 hectares, the garden will feature 1,450 native plant species presented within carefully recreated habitats. "The Oman Botanic Garden includes two biomes representing the distinct northern and southern mountainous regions of Oman and six outdoor habitats, including wadis, sand deserts, and salt flats," Zadjali said.

Visitors can look forward to facilities such as amenity areas, interactive exhibits, a research centre, and a native plant nursery. Oman's first cable car will also be part of the garden, offering aerial views of its diverse ecosystems.

The Hajar Mountains Biome will replicate the northern region's agricultural terraces and rugged landscapes, while the Dhofar Mountains Biome will recreate the southern cloud forest environment, home to unique species like frankincense trees (*Boswellia sacra*).

Chosen for its rich geological heritage, the garden's site also features stones dating back to the Cretaceous period, over 70mn years ago. Additionally, more than 100,000 trees will be



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

90% complete

500 hectare size

1,450 native Omani plants

100,000 trees

50,000sqm solar power station

LEED Platinum certification for sustainability

6,100 tonnes of steel used for facade

4,000 glass panels used in facade

strategically planted to enhance the garden's natural appeal.

The project has achieved LEED Platinum certification, reflecting its commitment to sustainable design. Zadjali highlighted the 50,000sqm solar power station equipped with 11,000 solar panels that will generate 20,000kWh of energy for the garden. The structure's glass facade, built with over 6,100 tonnes

of steel and 4,000 glass panels, combines eco-conscious architecture with a modern aesthetic.

Laila Said al Harthy, Head of Botany and Conservation at the Oman Botanic Garden, emphasised the garden's role as a hub for research and conservation. Facilities such as a seed bank, herbarium, laboratories, and library will support academic study and research. "Field teams have worked extensively to collect and propagate native flora, creating a vital resource for researchers, students, and scholars," she said.

The garden also aims to engage the public through immersive exhibits and educational programmes, fostering awareness of Oman's biodiversity and the importance of conservation. Once complete, the Oman Botanic Garden promises to be a centrepiece of the nation's efforts to preserve its natural heritage for future generations.

Over 71,000 use Mwasalat's services during recent holiday

Muscat - The National Transport Company, Mwasalat, transported more than 65,400 passengers via its bus network and over 5,900 passengers on ferries during the National Day holiday.

According to data released by the company, November 22 marked the peak day for bus travel, with over 14,400 passengers recorded. Among them, 7,500 utilised Route A1, which connects Ruwi, Muscat International Airport, and Mabelah.

Ferry services were also in high demand, carrying over 5,900 passengers and 1,217 vehicles during the holiday period. The Shannah-Masirah route was the busiest, with more than 1,700 passengers using the service.

New Partnership to Enhance Local Products in the Construction Sector and Revive the Trade Relationship Between Sohar Cement and Tasnim Concrete Products



(Oman, Sohar) - xxx November 2024, Sohar Cement Company, a subsidiary of Raysut Cement Group, announced the revival of its trade relations with Tasnim Concrete Products to enhance cement production capabilities in the Sultanate of Oman and meet the increasing market demands, especially in North Al Batnah, particularly in Sohar, where the region is witnessing numerous developmental projects.

This initiative aims to bolster local products and increase local value in the Sultanate in line with both companies' efforts to support the national economy and achieve sustainable growth in this vital sector.

Through this partnership, the companies will work on developing joint projects focusing on high-quality cement pro-

duced by Sohar Cement, contributing to improving construction quality and reducing costs.

This step is expected to contribute to realizing the Sultanate's economic vision and enhancing reliance on local sources and industries, positively impacting the economy as a key driver of growth and development.

Dr. Hilal bin Saif Al-Dhamri, Acting CEO of Raysut Cement Group, stated that the alliance with Tasnim Concrete Products reflects both companies' commitment to enhancing growth and sustainability solutions. In this respect, we are setting a new standard for cement production not only to enhance product quality but also to align with the national goals for sustainable industrial development in the Sultanate

of Oman.

Haitham Al-Tal, Commercial Director of Raysut Cement Group, stated that this step reflects the partnership agreement's commitment to Sohar Cement's continuous expansion of its production capacity, improving product quality, adopting environmentally friendly practices, and increasing production to meet the rising demand in the construction and infrastructure sectors in Oman and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

Mohit Kimji, CEO of Tasnim Concrete Products, remarked that the partnership with Sohar Cement would enhance innovation in the cement sector and respond to the increasing demand for concrete products at a time when the Sultanate of Oman is experiencing rapid urban growth and implement-

ing numerous infrastructure projects.

The cooperation between the two companies is expected to enhance competitiveness in the cement industry in the Sultanate of Oman, allowing local producers to supply high-quality products and reduce dependence on imported cement. The partnership agreement also aims to elevate Oman's position as a key player in the cement market within the Gulf Cooperation Council and contribute to infrastructure projects in the region, residential projects, and other large-scale constructions, while enhancing knowledge transfer and innovation through the exchange of expertise and new technologies between the two companies and improving efficiency and sustainable practices across all their operations.

Fisheries adds RO144mn to GDP, records 13% growth

Our Correspondent
Duqm

Oman's fisheries sector has seen marked growth this year, with fish production increasing by 13% from January to July, according to H E Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources.

Speaking at the inauguration of a new fish canning and processing complex in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) on Thursday, H E Habsi announced that production reached 410,000 tonnes during the period, up from 364,000 tonnes in the same period last year. The value of fish production rose by 6%, from RO261mn to RO277mn, while the sector's contribution to the GDP at con-

stant prices increased by 12.1%, reaching RO143.9mn in the first half of 2024 compared to RO128.4mn in the same period last year.

The minister also highlighted that Oman exported 218,000 tonnes of fish worth RO97mn in the first nine months of the year to 71 countries, reflecting the sector's growing role in international markets.

Simak facility inauguration

The event marked the launch of the International Seafood Company's (Simak) state-of-the-art fish canning and processing complex in Duqm. A subsidiary of Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), the facility is set to produce over 100 million cans of tuna annually, along with sar-

dines and mackerel, positioning Oman as a major player in the global seafood industry.

The plant boasts the largest seafood processing capacity in the GCC, capable of handling over 30,000 tonnes of raw materials annually. The facility aims to meet domestic demand while enhancing Oman's reputation in international seafood markets.

Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidi, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), described the complex as a vital investment in Duqm's fisheries and food industries sector. "SEZAD has become a hub for investments in fisheries, and the authority continues to offer facilities to attract further development. There are plans to further expand the fisheries industries zone," he said

Oman climbs 57 places in UN's quality infrastructure index

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has climbed 57 places in the Quality Infrastructure for Sustainable Development Index (QI4SD) Index 2024, issued by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), reaching 60th place globally out of 155 countries. This marks a significant improvement from its 117th position in the 2022 edition of the QI4SD Index. The sultanate also ranked 6th in the Middle East.

The QI4SD Index evaluates key components of a country's quality infrastructure, including standards, metrology, standardisation, accreditation, conformity assessment, and national policies.

Commenting on the sharp improvement in Oman's ranking, H E Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) for Commerce and Industry, emphasised the Ministry's commitment to strengthening the sector of specifications and standards. He noted that this sector plays a critical role in enabling trade, industry, and investment in Oman.

In his statement to Oman News Agency, H E Masan highlighted that the improvement in the index reflects the success of the project to develop the national



Oman's improvement in the Quality Infrastructure for Sustainable Development Index is a result of implementing the strategic project to develop the national standards and metrology system

H E DR SALEH BIN SAID MASAN

tional system for specifications and standards, which began in early 2022. This initiative includes seven key projects, the most notable of which is the 'Hazm' electronic platform.

The Hazm platform provides

a range of conformity services and simplifies processes related to specifications and standards. It was designed to meet the needs of both the local market and consumers, and it facilitates the work of merchants. Other

important initiatives include the Omani Conformity System, the establishment of the Omani Accreditation Center, the Specifications Initiative Supporting Innovation, and the Regulation of Control over Precious Metals.

H E Masan added that the progress in Oman's ranking was the result of ongoing efforts to develop the national quality system, encourage innovation, streamline export and import processes, and reduce barriers to international trade. He emphasised that these efforts demonstrate the success of national policies aimed at improving the business environment, attracting foreign investment, and boosting the competitiveness of Omani products globally.

H E Masan also noted that MoCIIP is investing in the training and development of Omani professionals in the field of standardisation to ensure sustained progress. The Ministry is working to enhance digital systems, including the integration of artificial intelligence in standardisation processes. These initiatives will help speed up procedures, minimise human error, and conserve time and resources.

Moreover, MoCIIP is continually reviewing and updating policies and laws related to standardisation to keep pace with evolving regional and international market requirements, ultimately strengthening the global standing of Omani products.

Imad bin Khamis al-Shukaili, Director General of the General Directorate of Standards and Metrology at MoCIIP, said that

Oman's progress in the QI4SD Index is a result of implementing the strategic project to develop the national standards and metrology system. This project, he said, aligns with the priorities outlined in Oman Vision 2040 and the programmes of the 10th Five-Year Plan. He further explained that the project focused on digitising standardisation services, developing national laboratories, empowering private sector laboratories, and enhancing metrological capabilities.

Shukaili also highlighted the importance of the index as a tool for evaluating and improving national performance in quality-related areas. He pointed out that Oman's enhanced quality infrastructure will facilitate sustainable economic growth, increase the competitiveness of Omani products and services internationally, and support compliance with World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements.

In recent years, Oman has made significant strides in digitising standardization services, starting with the introduction of a unified electronic platform for conformity assessment. The country has also made improvements in the metrology sector by updating its quality management systems in laboratories and introducing advanced measurement technologies.

GPCA Forum to begin on Monday in Muscat

Muscat - Oman, represented by OQ Group, will host the 18th Annual Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA) Forum, which will commence on Monday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The event, spanning several days, underscores Oman's commitment to solidifying its position as a strategic hub for the petrochemical and chemical industries at both regional and global levels.

Ashraf Hamad al Mamari, Group CEO of OQ, said, "OQ Group is proud to host the 18th Annual Forum of the Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman. This milestone reflects our dedication to enhancing Oman's role as a strategic hub for the petrochemical industry on both regional and global fronts. The forum attracts participants from over 43 countries and includes more than 110 regional and global companies."

This year's GPCA Forum will feature the participation of several energy ministers, senior executives, and global leaders from the petrochemical and chemical sectors.

As a premier platform for the industry, the GPCA Forum facilitates discussions on key topics shaping the future of petrochemicals and chemicals. The 2024 edition will focus on sustainability, the future of energy, and how regional countries can contribute to achieving global goals in these areas.

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MEM signs new mining concession agreement

Muscat - The Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM) on Thursday signed a new mining concession agreement with Al Tamman Indsil FerroChrome Company for exploration and mining in concession area No. 22-D in the North Sharqiyah Governorate.

The concession area covers 790 square kilometers and is characterised by a set of ophiolite rocks that contain indicators of valuable ores, including copper and chromium.

Under the agreement, the company is required to carry out a comprehensive exploration programme during the first two years. This will include topographic and geophysical surveys using remote sensing techniques and the preparation of detailed geological maps for a significant portion of the area.

The programme also entails precise geochemical and physical analyses, as well as the implementation of an extensive drilling



campaign of up to 250 boreholes, each averaging 35 meters in depth.

The agreement was signed on behalf of the Government of Oman by H E Eng Salim Nasser al Afi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Dr Roman Lorf, acting on behalf of the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al Tamman Indsil FerroChrome Company.

The Minister of Energy and Minerals highlighted the significant development observed in the minerals sector, which has

been driven by MEM's approach over the past years. This approach focuses on achieving a balance between the expansion of mining activities and the economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

H E Afi emphasised that the ministry's efforts were reflected in the identification of concession areas that are offered for bidding in accordance with the principles of transparency and equal opportunity.

ONA

Omani trade delegation visits Saudi to strengthen bilateral trade, investment

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A trade delegation from the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) will visit Saudi Arabia on Sunday to explore opportunities for enhancing trade and investment exchanges between the private sectors of both nations. The mission aims to leverage expertise across various industrial sectors to foster deeper economic cooperation.

Eng Said bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the OCCI's North Batinah Branch and Head of the Omani trade delegation, explained that the primary objective of the visit is to identify new trade and investment opportunities between Oman and Saudi Arabia. He emphasised the importance of showcasing available investment prospects in North Batinah, highlighting the region's growing economic potential.

In a statement to the Oman



According to the NCSI data, total value of trade between Oman and Saudi Arabia by June 2024 amounted to RO1.014bn

News Agency, Abri said the delegation is focused on fostering strong partnerships with the

Saudi private sector and building bridges of cooperation to increase bilateral trade, particularly exports between the two countries.

The visit is part of a broader strategic plan developed by the OCCI's North Batinah branch to strengthen economic, trade, and investment ties between Oman and Saudi Arabia. The delegation includes a mix of business owners and representatives from small and medium-sized enter-

prises (SMEs), underlining Oman's commitment to diversifying its economic relations.

Abri also highlighted the significance of the Rub' al Khali (Empty Quarter) port, which directly links the two countries, in facilitating cross-border trade. According to recent data, the value of goods imported through the port reached RO159.678mn by the end of June 2024, with a total weight exceeding 324mn kg.

Tejarah Talks to hold discussion on AI and drones

Muscat - In a world increasingly shaped by technology, artificial intelligence and drones are redefining industries and economies. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) these innovations are opening new frontiers - enhancing efficiency, driving growth and tackling some of society's most pressing challenges. Yet, as with any great leap forward, they also raise questions about ethics, privacy and regulation.

In the wake of the fourth industrial revolution, the MENA region is poised to become a global leader in AI and drone technology. The numbers speak for themselves - the regional AI market, valued at nearly \$12bn in



Jamal al Asmi

2023 is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 44.8% from 2024 to 2030. Meanwhile, the region's drone sector is projected to grow from \$2bn in 2024 to \$6bn by 2030.

In Oman, AI and drones are already making their mark. AI-driven systems are streamlining

operations in sectors such as logistics, while drones are finding applications in agriculture, offering solutions for precision farming that reduce water consumption and boost crop yields. Globally, drones have been instrumental in disaster management, providing real-time mapping and search-and-rescue capabilities in the aftermath of earthquakes and floods.

But the rapid adoption of AI-powered drones also raises important considerations. How can data privacy be safeguarded in increasingly connected systems? And what frameworks are needed to guide the responsible use of autonomous technologies

in diverse applications? To explore these issues and opportunities, Tejarah Talks presents its final session of 2024: AI & Drones - Where Are They Taking Us? The event, taking place at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre, 7:30pm on December 10, promises an in-depth and thought-provoking discussion about Oman's role in this technological transformation.

Moderating the evening session is Jamal al Asmi, Executive Producer, RealityCG who remarked, "AI and drones are reshaping the way we live, work and do business. In fact, these technologies not only promise to streamline sectors at the heart of

Oman Vision 2040 but also drive sustainable growth and economic diversification."

Joining Asmi will be Eng Mubarak al Farsi, Senior Airworthiness Inspector, Civil Aviation Authority who will address how Oman's regulatory frameworks are evolving to manage the rapid rise of drones. Haidar al Lawati, Senior Manager, Artificial Intelligence, Oman Data Park will offer insights into how AI is transforming industries across the country and Said Abdul Ghafoor Saifudeen, CEO, Star Drones, will share his perspective on how drone technology is driving change in Omani agriculture, logistics and beyond.

China's industrial profits exceed \$814bn in October

Beijing, China - Major industrial enterprises in China recorded combined profits exceeding 5.86tn yuan (\$814bn) from January to October, marking a 4.3% year-on-year decline, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). October profits fell 10%, improving from a 27.1% drop in September.

The National Bureau of Statistics reported that over 60% of industrial sectors saw improved profitability in October. High-tech manufacturing led the gains, with profits rising 12.9% year on year, including significant growth in wearable smart devices

(73.3%) and lithium-ion batteries (39.4%). Equipment manufacturing also rebounded, posting a 4.5% profit increase, according to Xinhua News Agency.

Raw materials and consumer goods manufacturing benefited from supportive policies, with notable profit jumps in the steel sector (80.1%) and textile and apparel industries (44.3%).

The National Bureau of Statistics called for sustained policy efforts to consolidate economic recovery and drive steady industrial profit growth.

Agencies



OPEC+ meeting on oil output curbs postponed to Dec 5: Reports

Vienna, Austria – The OPEC+ coalition is set to hold its next meeting on December 5, likely in a virtual format instead of at its Vienna headquarters, as initially planned, as per media reports.

Delegates have indicated that no invitations or logistical arrangements for an in-person gathering have been made, signaling a shift online for the third consecutive time.

The alliance, comprising 23 nations led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, has increasingly opted for virtual sessions since the Covid-19 pandemic, with only two meetings in Vienna since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine strained relations with European countries.

Currently, crude prices hover around \$75 per barrel, a level insufficient for many OPEC members to meet budgetary needs. Saudi Arabia, in particular, requires prices closer to \$100 per barrel to support its ambitious economic reforms, according to the International Monetary Fund.

OPEC+ has delayed its plan to gradually restore 2.2mn barrels per day of production twice already, pushing the timeline to January 2024 from the original start in October.

The decision to extend or modify this plan will likely dominate the discussions, the reports said.

Oil prices have dropped 15% since July, driven by weak demand from China and rising U.S. supplies.

This decline further intensifies the challenges faced by the coalition, which is already managing three distinct production cut agreements – a formal cap restricting output to 39.725mn barrels per day, a voluntary reduction of 1.7mn bpd through 2025, and an additional 2.2mn bpd cut that is scheduled to begin phasing out in December.

(Source: Investing.com)

Eurozone's inflation rises to 2.3%

Brussels, Belgium – Annual inflation in the eurozone edged higher in November, matching expectations, while Germany reported its worst retail sales drop in two years, signalling broader economic challenges for the region.

Eurozone inflation rose to 2.3% year-on-year in November, up from 2% in October, according to preliminary data released by Eurostat on Friday.

The figure aligns with market expectations and reflects the anticipated narrowing of the deflationary impact of energy prices.

While the annual increase marks a slight departure from the European Central Bank's (ECB) target, the monthly data shows a more optimistic trend. Consumer prices in the eurozone fell by 0.3% in November compared to October, the steepest monthly decline since January 2024.

This drop supports hopes that disinflation is continuing, potentially paving the way for further rate cuts by the ECB. Energy prices, a major factor in inflation dynamics, remained 1.9% lower year-on-year in November. However, this decline was less pronounced than the 4.6% and 6.1% drops seen in October and September, respectively, as the base effect from last year's energy price spikes fades.

On a monthly basis, energy prices rose by 0.6%. Excluding energy, the annual inflation rate held steady at 2.7%, while the core inflation measure, which excludes both energy and food prices, ticked up to 2.8% year-on-year, compared to 2.7% in October.

Monthly core inflation declined by 0.4%, suggesting that underlying price pressures may be easing. Services prices—a



While annual increase in inflation marks a slight departure from European Central Bank's target, monthly data shows a more optimistic trend. Consumer prices in the eurozone fell by 0.3% in November compared to October

"sticky" inflationary component—rose 3.9% year-on-year but fell by 0.9% compared to October, offering a glimmer of hope for the inflation outlook.

Implications for ECB

The November inflation data is unlikely to alter the ECB's current policy trajectory. The decline in monthly core inflation and services prices supports the argument that disinflationary forces remain intact. This trend provides the ECB with further justification to lower interest rates at its December meeting, especially as economic activity weakens across the eurozone.

The latest Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) surveys show that the eurozone's private sector activity contracted in November, highlighting deteriorating economic momentum.

Eurozone Composite PMI fell to 48.1 in November, down from the neutral 50.0 registered in October, signaling the sharpest contraction since January and

missing market expectations for an unchanged reading.

Moreover, while the manufacturing sector remains mired in a deep slump, the services sector is no longer propping up the economy. For the first time in 10 months, the services sector slipped into contraction, with its PMI dropping to 49.2 from 51.6 in October.

"The market appears to have settled on a 25bp cut in December, particularly after Schnabel's standout hawkish commentary wiped out the remaining bets on 50bps this week. The economy is not falling off a cliff just yet and there is uncertainty about where the neutral rate is, so there is no pressing need to start frontloading cuts," said Kyle Chapman, forex market analyst

at Ballinger Group.

Germany, the eurozone's largest economy, continues to face a sharp downturn in consumer spending.

Data from the Federal Statistical Office revealed that retail sales fell by 1.5% month-on-month in October 2024, following an upwardly revised 1.6% rise in September. The October decline significantly exceeded market expectations of a 0.3% drop and marked the steepest monthly contraction in two years.

The weak retail performance underscores a worsening consumer outlook in Germany, adding to concerns about broader economic fragility in the region.

(Source: Euronews.com)

India's quarterly GDP growth slows to 5.4%

New Delhi, India – India's economy grew by 5.4% in real terms in the July-September quarter of the current financial year 2024-25, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's official data showed on Friday.

The quarterly growth was quite lower than the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) forecast of 7%.

Real GDP in Q2 of 2024-25 is estimated at 44.1tn rupees, against 41.86tn rupees in Q2 of 2023-24, showing a moderate growth rate of 5.4%. Last year same quarter, India grew by 8.1%. Indian economy grew 6.7% in the April-June quarter, lower than RBI's 7.1% forecast.

The RBI has pegged India's 2024-25 GDP growth at 7.2%. IMF and World have pegged it at 7%. Many global rating agencies and multilateral organizations have also revised their growth forecasts for India upwards.

In its latest monetary policy review meeting in October, RBI pegged Q2 growth forecast at



Reserve Bank of India has pegged India's 2024-25 GDP growth at 7.2%, while the IMF and the World Bank have pegged it at 7%

7%; Q3 at 7.4%; and Q4 at 7.4%. Real GDP growth for Q1 of next financial year 2025-26 is projected at 7.3%.

The Economic Survey tabled in Parliament earlier this year "conservatively" projected India's real

GDP growth at 6.5-7% for 2024-25, acknowledging that market expectations are higher. Real GDP growth is the reported economic growth adjusted for inflation.

S&P Global Ratings on Monday retained India's GDP forecast for the current financial year 2024-25 at 6.8% while cutting economic growth forecasts for the next two years.

The Reserve Bank of India last week said that the weakness witnessed in the Indian economy, particularly in the recent quarter, is behind us.

The slack in speed in the Indian economy observed in the second

quarter of 2024-25 (July-September) is behind us as private consumption is back to being the driver of domestic demand with festival spending lighting up real activity in October-December, RBI had said in its latest monthly bulletin.

The RBI asserted that the medium-term outlook remains bullish.

India's GDP grew by an impressive 8.2% during the financial year 2023-24, continuing to be the fastest-growing major economy. The economy grew by 7.2% in 2022-23 and 8.7% in 2021-22. ANI

Is Trump 2.0 bullish or bearish for economy?

Vahid Karaahmetovic

As Donald Trump reclaims the presidency, the economic implications of his second term, often referred to as "Trump 2.0," spark vigorous debate.

In a Monday note, Yardeni Research highlights the many moving parts shaping this administration's economic policies and their potential impact on the Roaring 2020s, an era of remarkable growth and resilience for the US economy and stock market.

The backdrop for this analysis is extraordinary. Despite major challenges, including a pandemic, geopolitical crises, and aggressive Federal Reserve rate hikes, US real GDP and the S&P 500 have both reached record highs. Federal spending, which remains heavily stimulative, has been a significant driver. Since 2022, government outlays on healthcare, Medicare, and Social Security rose by \$623bn to a record \$3.3tn.

"There was a big drop in government spending on income security by \$806bn to \$0.7tn, but that was almost completely offset by a \$139 billion increase in defense spending to a record \$0.9 trillion and, even more significantly, by a \$510bn increase in net interest outlays to a record \$0.9tn," Yardeni explains.

Under Trump 2.0, fiscal policy could remain expansionary or turn restrictive. Tax reforms, a hallmark of Trump's first term, are set to deepen. The corporate tax rate may drop further to 15%, with additional cuts to individual taxes on tips, overtime, and Social Security.

While these measures could



Under Trump 2.0, fiscal policy could remain expansionary or turn restrictive. Tax reforms, a hallmark of Trump's first term, are set to deepen

widen the federal deficit, Trump's administration aims to counterbalance them through deregulation and higher tariffs, potentially raising \$400bn to \$800 billion in revenues.

"That's assuming that these higher tariffs don't reduce imports significantly or start a global trade war," Yardeni emphasises.

Deregulation is another key element. Reducing the federal government's size may shrink payroll employment but could lower operational costs for businesses. However, contentious policies like deportation may reduce the labor force, creating inflationary pressures unless offset by productivity gains.

Energy policies aimed at boosting oil and gas production could keep energy prices in check.

The administration also faces risks, particularly from "Bond Vigilantes." If fiscal policies appear unsustainable, bond yields could surge, undermining economic momentum.

Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell has warned that fiscal policies must address the unsustainable path of federal debt, a challenge that Trump's team will need to navigate carefully.

Despite these complexities, Yardeni Research remains cautiously optimistic. They project that Trump 2.0 might boost productivity, sustain economic growth, and keep inflation in check. The administration's success in balancing fiscal discipline with growth-oriented policies will be key.

"Our base case for the remainder of the decade, with Trump 2.0 running Washington over the next four years, remains the Roaring 2020s," the market research firm said.

(Source: Investing.com)

Afghanistan wants to build global economic relations through Islamic finance, halal trade

Istanbul, Turkey – Afghanistan wants to build and strengthen effective economic and trade relations with neighbouring countries, the region and the world through Islamic finance and halal (lawful) trade, the Afghan minister of industry and commerce said Wednesday.

Nooruddin Azizi said at the World Halal Summit in Istanbul that the objectives include strengthening the agricultural sector, developing infrastructure, supporting the domestic industry, maintaining financial

stability, encouraging domestic and foreign investment and providing benefits to all stakeholders.

The four-day summit in Istanbul, of which Anadolu is the global communication partner, hosts seminars focused on halal-related topics to raise awareness.

Azizi said the summit is one of the largest trade events in the Islamic world and noted it is a platform to cement global halal trade. He underlined that the halal industry, halal trade and

halal products are not only serving for Islamic world or Muslims, but also all of humanity.

"As an Islamic country, Afghanistan, with its commitment to the halal industry and trade, has actively participated in this event with a delegation of officials from the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and the private sector," he said, noting that over time, the world will appreciate the advantages of the halal industry and trade even more.

Stating that local and inter-

national investors can safely invest in Afghanistan, Azizi said, "Afghanistan and Türkiye, as two Muslim and brotherly countries, have maintained very good relations in economic, cultural and social fields throughout history.

"In this context, Afghanistan aims to introduce halal products and services to global markets and attract foreign investment, especially from Türkiye, a friendly and brotherly country."

Anadolu Agency

Jeep Wrangler 2.0L turbo shines at Bousher test drive

Jeep enthusiasts and off-road adventurers recently gathered at the Bousher Sands to experience the exceptional performance of the 2024 Jeep Wrangler, hosted by MHD Automobiles. This exclusive test drive event provided a unique opportunity to explore the capabilities of the Wrangler's 2.0L Turbo variants in a scenic urban setting.

The event showcased the 2.0L turbocharged inline four-cylinder engine available in the Wrangler Sport and Sahara trims. With an impressive 270 horsepower and 400 Nm of torque, this engine delivers a perfect balance of power and efficiency. Paired with a smooth eight-speed automatic transmission, it effortlessly combines city driving comfort with rugged off-road performance.

Participants were impressed by the engine's responsiveness, which redefined perceptions of turbocharged engines, proving the Wrangler's dominance in challenging terrains.

A Word from the CEO
Speaking about the new Wrangler and the success of the event, Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD Automobiles, said, "The 2024 Jeep Wrangler continues to set new benchmarks in performance and efficiency with its innovative 2.0L Turbo engine. Events like the Bousher Test Drive let customers experience Jeep's unmatched power, versatility, and enduring legacy firsthand. We're proud to offer a vehicle



that embodies freedom and adventure." With the off-roading season in full swing, the 2024 Jeep Wrangler is the perfect companion for outdoor enthusiasts. Starting from just RO16,495 for the Sport 2-Door variant, the

lineup offers trims to suit every adventure:

- 2-Door Variants: 2.0L Sport, 3.6L Rubicon
- 4-Door Variants: 2.0L Sport, 2.0L Sahara City, 3.6L Rubicon, 6.4L Rubicon 392

Available in bold exterior colours

like Firecracker Red, Hydro Blue, and High Velocity, the Wrangler combines iconic style with rugged capability. The 2024 Wrangler introduces enhancements such as a refreshed seven-slot grille, integrated trail-ready stealth an-

tenna, and upgraded wheel designs. Inside, the state-of-the-art Uconnect 5 system features a 12.3-inch touchscreen, wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, and water-fording-tested power seats, ensuring both functionality and comfort.

Safety remains a top priority, with over 85 advanced features, including adaptive cruise control, forward collision warning, and enhanced side-impact protection.

The 2024 Jeep Wrangler Rubicon models are equipped with the all-new Dana 44 HD full-float rear axle, offering exceptional strength and a towing capacity of up to 2,267kg. This heavy-duty axle, combined with off-road features like the Rock-Trac transfer case and Tru-Lok front and rear lockers, sets a new standard for off-road performance. The Wrangler's robust body-on-frame design and advanced suspension system ensure unmatched capability both on and off the road.

MHD Automobiles invites all adventure seekers to experience the 2024 Jeep Wrangler.

To serve customers better, the MHD Automobiles showroom is now open on Saturdays from 10 am to 7 pm, providing greater flexibility for those wishing to explore the latest models firsthand during the weekend.

MHD Automobiles is the authorised distributor of Stellantis brands in Oman, known for delivering outstanding service and premium vehicles that redefine the driving experience.



Sohar University holds Global Outreach training programme for MBA students from Zambia

Sohar University, represented by Al-Masar Training Institute, hosted a delegation from the University of Lusaka, Zambia, as part of the prestigious Global Outreach Executive Training Programme integrated into their Executive MBA curriculum.

Twenty-five candidates participated in the programme, which was held from November 17 to 24. The programme offered a rich blend of educational, cultural, and field activities, providing participants with an in-depth understanding of Oman's economic and cultural landscape.

The journey began in Muscat with a visit to the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, where the delegation explored Oman's entrepreneurial support initiatives. This was followed by a cultural tour of Muttrah Souq and the Royal Opera House, showcasing the nation's rich heritage.

In Sohar, the delegation visited Sohar University to learn

about its distinguished academic programs and initiatives to foster innovation and entrepreneurship. They also toured Intaj Sohar Advance Manufacturing company, a leading industrial company, as well as Sohar Port and Freezone, gaining insights into Oman's advanced infrastructure and promising investment opportunities. The visit concluded with a business dinner aimed at strengthening networking opportunities between the participants and local business leaders.

The training programme was complemented by a series of workshops on critical topics, including innovation, strategic planning, leadership, entrepreneurship, and investment opportunities in Oman.

Dr Omar al Mazroui, Manager of Al-Masar Training Institute, highlighted that the programme reflects Sohar University's commitment to fostering international knowledge and cultural exchange.

Sohar International partners with Al Noor for skill development of 50 visually impaired individuals

Sohar International, Oman's best bank, has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Al Noor Association for the Blind in Sohar to sponsor specialised training programmes aimed at enhancing the soft skills of 50 visually impaired individuals. The MoU was signed by Mazin Mahmood al Raisi, Chief Marketing Officer at Sohar International, and Mahmood Amor al Alawi, Financial and Administrative Affairs Manager representing Al Noor Association for the Blind in Sohar.

This initiative underscores Sohar International's steadfast commitment to impactful Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) endeavors that drive meaningful change. By prioritizing social inclusion and community empowerment, the bank continues to champion initiatives that deliver sustainable, long-term benefits and contribute to the well-being of society.

Mazin Mahmood al Raisi said,



"At Sohar International, we are committed to fostering initiatives that empower individuals and drive inclusivity across all sectors of society. Our partnership with Al Noor Association for the Blind reflects our strategic focus on impactful CSR endeavours that break down barriers and enable individuals to realize their full potential. "This programme not only enhances participants' personal growth but also prepares them to enter the workforce, equipping them with essential skills to navigate the professional world with

confidence. By bridging challenges and opportunities, this initiative aligns with our mission to create lasting value and advance Oman's national priorities of accessibility and integration. Through such comprehensive support, we are fostering a resilient and dynamic workforce ready to contribute meaningfully to society."

Every aspect of the programme has been thoughtfully curated to cater to the unique needs of visually impaired individuals.

Nepal embassy organises first-ever special camp on social security services in Oman

The Embassy of Nepal, Muscat, organised a special camp for social security enrolment, consular services and labour awareness at the embassy premises from 09:00 hrs to 18:00 hrs on Friday.

The special services camp commenced with the lighting of traditional Panas lamp by H E Dornath Aryal, Ambassador of Nepal to the Sultanate of Oman. Speaking at the event, H E Aryal highlighted various aspects of the Social Security Fund (SSF), and those initiatives taken by the government of Nepal.

He, thanked the SSF team, embassy staff and representatives of Oman-based Nepali organisations and volunteers for their encouraging participation.

Bibek Panthee, Deputy Executive Director of the SSF, highlighted the procedures and benefits of the scheme.

A three-member team from the SSF, Kathmandu comprising Bibek Panthee, Deputy Executive Director; Radhika Niraula, Assistant Director and Rajesh Chapa-gain, IT officer, visited Oman for



the special event.

A separate desk was set up to provide Labour and Consular Services at the camp. Bishesh Kumar Sah, Second Secretary and Govinda Prasad Acharya, Labour Attache' coordinated the event.

Around 215 Nepalis received the services from from the two-day camp. Such events will be conducted again for those who

could not avail the services.

The Embassy found that most of the participants were unaware of the Social Security System scheme and expressed happiness for the information and services provided in Oman itself. They also requested the embassy to continue such services and to provide work permits from the embassy itself.

The embassy also conducted

passport-consular services camps during weekends to facilitate the Nepali community members who find it difficult to come to the embassy on a week day. But this camp was special due to social security related services. The special services camp was the first-ever camp on the social security enrolment and regularisation services provided in a foreign land.

Modern Exchange celebrates Children's Day with young learners

Modern Exchange, leading remittance and money exchange company in Oman, marked International Children's Day with a meaningful act of kindness by distributing toys to the children at Middle East Nursery. The event brought smiles to young and highlighted Modern Exchange's deep connection to the well-being of children and their futures.

Children's Day is celebrated around the world to honour the joys, innocence, and potential of childhood. It serves as a reminder of the collective respon-

sibility society holds to protect and nurture the younger generation. At the Middle East Nursery, the atmosphere was vibrant and filled with laughter, as Modern Exchange's team engaged with the children and shared gifts that symbolise love, care, and the promise of a bright future.

Lijo John, General Manager of Modern Exchange, expressed the company's commitment to the cause, saying, "Children are at the heart of everything we do. Most of our customers remit money to support their children's education and dreams, and we



take that responsibility seriously. By celebrating Children's Day, we are reminded of the importance of investing in the future generation and ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive."

The event also reflects Modern Exchange's broader mission to uplift communities through meaningful contributions. The company recognises that education is a cornerstone for building a better future and is committed to supporting initiatives that promote learning and development for children.

Modern Exchange, known for its extensive network of 45 branches and reliable remittance services, has always prioritised community engagement and support. Through remittance, money exchange and heartfelt initiatives, the company continues to demonstrate its dedication to making a difference in the lives of its customers and their loved ones.

By observing Children's Day, Modern Exchange reaffirms its role in shaping a world where every child can grow, learn, and dream.

WORLD AIDS DAY

Positive Vision Association advocates rights of people living with HIV

As part of the 2024 World AIDS Day celebrations under the theme 'Take the Rights Path: Protect Everyone's Rights', Positive Vision Association highlighted the importance of protecting human rights as a fundamental factor in advancing the response to HIV/AIDS.

This year's theme emphasizes the world's ability to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030, provided there is a focus on human rights, empowering local communities, and ensuring access to healthcare for everyone, especially the most marginalised and excluded groups.

The association believes that any violation of rights poses a barrier to achieving health goals, thereby threatening the progress made in combating the virus. Therefore, the association calls for joint efforts to protect the rights of those affected, pro-

mote equality, and eliminate societal stigma as part of its strategy to address HIV/AIDS.

Positive Vision Association reaffirms its commitment to supporting people living with HIV/AIDS and fostering community awareness on the challenges and prevention of the virus. This commitment is central to the association's efforts in combating stigma, promoting inclusivity, and ensuring the protection of everyone's rights.

Nashia Nasib, President of Positive Vision Association, highlighted the association's commitment to ending AIDS in Oman through a human rights-centred approach. "We believe that ending AIDS in Oman requires comprehensive support for human rights and ensuring access to essential information and services for all. Through our partnerships and awareness initia-



tives, we are striving for a community free from stigma and discrimination, where health and dignity are prioritised," she stated.

Nashia emphasised that addressing stigma and discrimination involves not only awareness but also ensuring legal protections for people living with HIV/AIDS. She also revealed the association's plans for next

year, which includes mapping of the existing laws related to HIV/AIDS in Oman, particularly those impacting health and employment. This initiative aims to identify legal gaps and barriers faced by individuals living with HIV/AIDS.

"We are collaborating with counselors and stakeholders to reform laws where necessary and to advocate for new ones. Our goal is to outline existing laws to educate and empower people living with HIV/AIDS, ensuring they know their rights. By fostering dialogue with stakeholders, we aim to build a legal and social framework that supports health equity and inclusivity for all."

Throughout 2024 and 2025, Positive Vision Association will be actively engaging in various activities to promote awareness about HIV/AIDS prevention.

These initiatives will focus on educational campaigns, community outreach programmes, and collaborative efforts with both local and international partners. Additionally, they are working towards establishing a dedicated hotline in partnership with Omantel to provide accessible support and information on HIV/AIDS to be launched during this month.

Positive Vision Association is dedicated to raising awareness about HIV/AIDS, the dangers of drugs, and other psychotropic substances within the community. Our mission is to promote a positive vision within Omani society, reduce stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV and drug users, and provide support to their families and the community at large, both physically, socially, and psychologically.

Oman CCED Student Awards honours two students for research

The 9th anniversary of the Oman CCED Student Awards for the Advancement of Post-Graduate Education was celebrated at Muscat University to honour Elham Khalfan Said Alnadabi, a Master of Science student at Sultan Qaboos University, and Abdulmajeed Alwahaibi, a Master of Science candidate at the University of Leeds, for their pioneering academic research.

Launched in 2016, the Awards were created to inspire young Omani students by surfacing academic role models and bolstering the foundation for a knowledge-driven economy.

Since then, CC Energy Development (CCED), has curated the annual nomination and selection process, encouraging post-graduate students to create transformative knowledge and drive innovation in critical areas such as digital transformation and sustainability.

"For nine years, the CCED Student Awards have celebrated those who create knowledge, not just consume it. These students are shaping Oman's future by driving innovation and addressing real-world challenges," said



Walter Simpson, Managing Director of CC Energy Development. "We aim to equip the next generation of Omani talent with the practical experience needed to become architects of tomorrow's solutions."

As part of their recognition, the 2024 Award Winners will participate in a paid three-month internship with CCED Oman. During this time, they will gain firsthand experience and con-

tribute to key initiatives in sustainability, digital innovation, and green technologies, bridging the gap between academic research and real-world applications in Oman's energy sector. The winners join a distinguished network of over twenty alumni who have advanced to leadership roles in many of Oman's top institutions. Reflecting on the milestone, Simpson noted, "This alumni network is proof of the enduring

impact of the CCED Student Awards in shaping Oman's future."

The Awards hosted this year by Dr Hayat Harati, Director, Research and Innovation, Muscat University, align with Oman's national vision for a knowledge-driven economy and Net Zero by 2050, fostering a pipeline of talent capable of addressing evolving global challenges.

Over the past nine years, the program has played a vital role in empowering students to transition from traditional learning to becoming innovators and contributors to Oman's sustainable development.

The achievements of Alnadabi and Alwahaibi underscore the transformative power of post-graduate education in creating a new generation of thinkers and innovators. Their success highlights the importance of fostering a society that values knowledge creation as a cornerstone of progress. As the awards mark their 9th year, they reaffirm their mission to celebrate and support Oman's next generation of knowledge creators and leaders.



ISG celebrates 34th annual athletic meet

Indian School Al Ghubra (ISG) conducted its 34th annual athletic meet on November 25 at the ROP Stadium in Wattayah, in the heart of Muscat.

The evening was filled with great zeal and excitement amidst thrills, shrills and cheers. The proceedings of this auspicious day commenced with the arrival of chief guest Ali Anwar al Balushi, a famous Omani sprinter; guest of honour Mazoon Khalfan Saleh al Alawi, Oman's sprinting star on the Olympic Stage and the special guest Ali Abdullah Ali al Marzuqi, vice president of the Oman Athletic Association.

Hanisha Manish Chawla,

sports captain - girls, welcomed the gathering.

The meet started with a March Past by the students of the four houses - Muscat, Nizwa, Sohar and Sur - from classes 9 to 12. Leading the March Past were Rabeeu al Zaman, sports captain - boys and Hanisha Chawla.

It was followed by a peace run by the sporting champions who represented the school in various national and international meets.

The chief guest declared the athletic meet open after Hanisha Chawla rendered the oath.

The air was charged with the spirit of competition as athletes showcased their prowess in a kaleidoscope of events, with fer-

vour across diverse categories. Beyond the competitive edge, Sports Day fosters a sense of camaraderie, where participants forge bonds that extend beyond the track. The drill displays were a joy to behold.

The sporting enthusiasts captivated the spectators with their synchronised movements coupled with the skillful use of the prop while following the rhythmic beats. The Inter-House Neuro Muscular Coordination Movements' competition by the four houses showcased their exercise routine that proved their mettle.

The Overall Trophy as well as the first prize in the March Past was won by Muscat House.



Leelangika portrays 'prakriti' through Indian classical dance

Leelangika, a popular Muscat-based dance group, recently presented their latest production - Prakriti - conceptualised by its founder Jhumpa Chakraborty.

The production - staged in the Oman Hall of the College of Banking and Financial Studies - was a breathtaking display of the vibrant energy and deep cultural roots of the Indian classical dance, Kathak.

Shatha Abbas, the founding member of Dar Al Atta and an illustrious businessperson, was the chief guest of the evening.

The enthralling evening began with a performance dedicated to the Almighty to invoke blessings. This was followed by the students of Leelangika performing Kathak's fundamental dances based on different beats of music

which featured teentaal, jhaptaal and dhamartaal. These performances showcased vividly the elaborate footwork, expressive gestures, and complex rhythmic structures of Kathak.

Prakriti, the production title, can be translated as the primal nature of intelligence by which the Universe exists and functions. Using this metaphor as the

theme, Leelangika showcased a variety of Kathak performances inspired by nature's various elements, including space, air, water, fire, and earth.

Each performance took the audience on a visual and emotional journey. The intricate footwork, vibrant costumes, and powerful narratives intertwining visual artistry with music res-

onated profoundly. The event, showcasing the extraordinary talents of Jhumpa Chakraborty and her students, left attendees mesmerised with its beautiful, moving, and powerful showcase of Kathak through various performances.

The performers of Prakriti were Sunaira, Arya, Aaheli, Anika, Vivaan, Vishwaditi, Karen,

Zaira, Kanyana, Ahona, Suhana, Pehel, Yagya, Nayan, Rihana, Raina, Juana, Diya, Dishita, Rupsa, Maheeka, Shrabosti, Dilna, Anu, Sunita, Dona, Mahua and the guru, Jhumpa.

The script for the production was compiled by Rahul Kar while Tapas Chakraborty managed the dramatic stage lighting that enhanced the visual appeal of each

performance.

"This production not only demonstrates the skills and artistic expression of my students but also highlights the importance of preserving and promoting Kathak as a vital cultural heritage," said Jhumpa. "The event also aims to foster cultural appreciation and engagement within the diverse community of Muscat."

Nigeria: Dozens dead or missing after boat capsizes in river

Niger, Nigeria - At least 27 people died on Friday after a boat capsized in the Niger River in central Nigeria. More than 100 others - mostly women - are still missing, authorities said.

Some 200 passengers were taking the boat across the river - which acts as a border between the states of Kogi and Niger - to a food market when it capsized, Ibrahim Audu, the Niger State Emergency Management Agency spokesperson said. None of the passengers were wearing life jackets.

The final toll is likely to increase, Kogi state authorities warned, as local divers were still looking for the missing and no survivor was found 12 hours after the incident.

Overcrowded boat

"It's not clear what caused the accident," Sandra Musa, spokesperson of the Kogi State Emergency Management Agency said. "It could be from turbulence



The river is a key method of transportation for many people in rural Nigeria

or from the boat hitting a snag. Boat operators don't usually have life jackets, so none of the bodies recovered had life jackets on," she said. Musa added that the age of the boat might have played a role.

Local media reported that the boat was overcrowded.

The Niger River reaches a width of more than 600 metres (almost 2,000 feet) in this part of its course. Authorities said rescuers had trouble finding the location of the boat for several hours after the incident occurred.

Drownings from overloaded, capsized boats are common in remote parts of Nigeria where there is a lack of good roads for transport.

Hundreds of people have been killed in similar incidents in recent years.

In June 2023, over 100 people died when a boat carrying around 250 people sank in the state of Kwara.

DW

North Korea's Kim vows to 'invariably support' Russia in its war against Ukraine

Ankara, Turkey - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed his country will 'invariably support' Russia in its war against Ukraine, state-run media reported on Saturday.

According to the Korean Central News Agency, Kim met with visiting Russian Defence Minister Andrei Belousov in Pyongyang on Friday and praised the growing ties between the two countries in all sectors including defence.

"The recent counterattack against Ukraine by the Russian government and army is a timely and effective measure to inform the US, the West and Ukraine, which are resorting to reckless military adventurism, of the gravity of the situation and the will of Russia to take tough counteraction," Kim said.

Kim said he supports Russia's policy to defend its 'sovereignty and territorial integrity' from the 'imperialists' moves for hegemony'.

He also expressed his will to further expand and develop the relations between the two countries in all fields, including politics, economy and military affairs, under the agreement reached at the North Korea-Russia Pyongyang summit in June this year.

Belousov's visit to Pyongyang came amid claims by the US, South Korea, and Ukraine that North Korea has sent thousands of troops to Russia to assist Moscow in its fight against Ukraine.

However, neither Pyongyang nor Moscow have confirmed or denied the claims.

In June, Pyongyang and Moscow signed a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement that requires them to provide military assistance to



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un

Kim Jong Un expressed his will to further expand and develop the relations between the two countries in all fields, including politics, economy and military affairs, under the agreement reached in June

one another in the event of third-party aggression.

Last week, South Korea's spy agency claimed that North Korea had supplied Russia with additional self-propelled howitzers and rocket launchers.

'Expanding' cooperation

Military cooperation with North Korea is 'expanding', according to Andrey Belousov, who met with North Korean counterpart No Kwang Chol in Pyongyang on Friday.

"We look forward to close

and fruitful cooperation with our Korean comrades," Russian TASS news agency quoted Belousov as saying. Moscow is 'committed to implementing' all agreements reached with Pyongyang, he added.

The Russian defence chief arrived in Pyongyang following North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui's recent visit to Moscow, where she met with both her counterpart and President Vladimir Putin.

During her trip, Choe pledged that Pyongyang would 'powerfully support and assist

the Russian army' until its victory in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Japan's Defence Ministry said that China and Russia conducted a joint aerial patrol near the country, local media reported on Saturday.

The ministry said that they detected 10 aircraft as two Chinese and two Russian bombers staged a joint long-distance flight over the Sea of Japan, also referred to as the East Sea, on Friday afternoon, according to NHK News.

"There was no violation of Japan's airspace," the ministry said, adding that its military scrambled fighter jets to respond to the series of flights.

The statement came after South Korea on Friday said that militaries of China and Russia conducted a joint aerial patrol over the sea.

Anadolu Agency

Kosovo claims 'terrorist act' after power plant canal blast

Pristina, Kosovo - An explosion damaged a canal supplying water to Kosovo's two main coal-fired power plants on Friday, leading Prime Minister Albin Kurti to accuse neighbour and rival Serbia of being behind what he called a 'terrorist act'.

"This is a criminal and terrorist attack aimed at damaging our critical infrastructure", Kurti said in a press conference.

"The attack was carried out by professionals. We believe it comes from gangs directed by Serbia", Kurti said, without giving more details. Serbian officials are yet to publicly comment on the allegations.

The explosion occurred near the town of Zubin Potok. It damaged a canal that supplies water to two power plants

What do we know about the blast?

The explosion occurred in Kosovo's troubled northern region near the town of Zubin Potok. It damaged a canal that supplies water to the cooling systems at two power plants.

These plants generate most of Kosovo's electricity.

The Prime Minister said if the damage was not repaired, part of Kosovo would be without electricity by Saturday morning.

While Kurti did not mention the extent of the damage, pictures published by local media

grenades were thrown at a police station and municipality building in northern Kosovo where there is a larger Serbian population. Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008 after nearly a decade of conflict. However, Serbia has refused to acknowledge it as a country and most Serbians living in Kosovo still view Belgrade as their capital.

Reactions to the blast

The European Union's Ambassador to Kosovo, Aivo Orav, condemned the attack, which he said was 'depriving considerable parts of Kosovo from water supply'.

The US also condemned the attack. "We have offered our full support to the government of Kosovo to ensure that those responsible for this criminal attack are identified and held accountable," the US embassy in Kosovo said in a statement.

DW

PATTAYA FIREWORKS FESTIVAL IN THAILAND



Fireworks explode in the sky during the two-day Pattaya Fireworks Festival which ended on Saturday (Xinhua)

Over 3 years, Taliban overhaul Afghanistan's education system

Kabul, Afghanistan - "The Taliban have made fundamental changes to the country's school and university curricula over the past three years," Afghan human rights organisation Rawadari reported. The organisation, which was founded by the former head of Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission Shahrzad Akbar, documents human rights violations in the country.

The Islamist Taliban rulers have banned girls from attending school beyond sixth grade and women from going to university. They have also removed all topics related to human rights and women's rights from school and university curricula, saying issues re-

lated to equality, liberty, elections and democracy contradict Taliban ideology.

They are not stopping there. Inclusive and non-discriminatory educational approaches, which are particularly important in Afghanistan due to its many ethnic and religious minorities, are also being scrapped.

A Taliban takeover of classrooms

"Teaching in different mother tongues and covering subjects relating to religion, culture and history has been severely restricted for students from these minorities," Rawadari said. "Access to literacy and vocational training programmes has also been severely restricted for girls



Afghan girls may no longer attend school beyond sixth grade

with disabilities."

"The Taliban have removed a lot of content from school textbooks," said Sardar Mohammad Rahimi, who served as Afghanistan's deputy minister

of education until the Taliban took over in August 2021.

"The Taliban do not yet have the capacity to create new content," Rahimi, who now lives in French exile and works as a vis-

iting professor at INALCO University in Paris, told DW. "They lack both the experts and the technical means to completely redesign and publish curricula. It would take them around five

years to fundamentally transform the education system."

Many Afghan intellectuals and academics have left the country since the Taliban takeover. The Islamist rulers have also dismissed numerous lecturers and professors from schools and universities over the last three years. They have mainly been replaced by religious school graduates who follow the Taliban's ideology.

"The Taliban are currently focusing on expanding their religious schools, the madrassas; this is a dangerous development," Rahimi said.

Rejection of human rights

Madrassas, or religious schools, exist in many Islamic countries.

In Afghanistan, these schools are controlled by the Taliban. Their aim is to promote a strict interpretation of Islam and ensure theirs is the view of Islam passed to the next generation.

The Taliban follow an extremely conservative interpretation of Sunni Islam, which calls for the application of Sharia, or Islamic law, in all areas of life. It also propagates a rigid social order. The Taliban reject women's rights, human rights and regard the Western world as a harmful influence on Islamic society. Since coming back to power in 2021, the Taliban have reversed progress made over the last two decades regarding Afghan women's rights.

DW

Russia strikes Aleppo amid rebel takeover

Syria’s military announced that ‘armed terrorist organisations’ had taken over ‘large parts’ of Aleppo

Idlib, Syria - Russian and Syrian jets on Saturday flew bombing raids on a suburb of Syria’s second city of Aleppo after insurgents took control of most of the city in a surprise offensive, a war monitor and military sources say.

The strikes come as an alliance of rebel factions led by the Islamist militant organisation Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) has penetrated far into the city, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Syria’s military announced on Saturday that it had made a ‘temporary troop withdrawal’ to prepare a counteroffensive and that dozens of soldiers had been killed in fighting in Aleppo and Idlib in the past few days.

A statement said ‘armed terrorist organisations’ had taken over ‘large parts’ of Aleppo.

Syrian military sources say towns and villages in the surrounding area also came under air attack from Russian and Syrian forces after the rebels carried out their sweep in the region since Wednesday, forcing around 14,000 people to leave their homes, according to the United Nations.

Russian forces have been fighting at the side of troops loyal to Syrian President Bashar Assad since September 2015 in a bid to quell an uprising by an assortment of rebel forces that followed a government crackdown on mostly peaceful pro-democracy protests in 2011.



Anti-government fighters pose for a picture in front of the landmark Aleppo citadel early on Saturday

Significant escalation

The recent eruption of fighting comes after a period in which Syria’s civil war was seen to have been widely contained.

Assad, with the help of his allies Russia and Iran, has succeeded in bringing some two-thirds of the country back

under government control in the past few years, with Idlib, southwest of Aleppo, remaining as the last rebel stronghold.

According to Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman, the rebels took control of most parts of Aleppo without any major resistance on the part of government forces, who have

reportedly withdrawn to a suburb. “There has been no fighting, not a single shot was fired, as regime forces withdrew,” he told the AFP news agency.

The Observatory said 301 people had been killed in fighting, including 28 civilians.

The rebels say the offensive comes in response to recent ar-

tillery shelling by government forces targeting civilian areas.

HTS, considered one of the most powerful armed militias in northwestern Syria, is led by al-Qaeda’s former Syria branch.

It controls large areas of the Idlib region, as well as parts of neighbouring Aleppo, Hama and Latakia provinces.

Meanwhile, Anadolu Agency reported that armed groups opposed to the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad made swift advances in the eastern and southeastern regions of Idlib, capturing more than 50 villages from regime forces.

Despite the ‘De-escalation Zones’ Agreement reached dur-

ing the Astana talks, the Syrian regime had captured these villages in 2019 following intense attacks.

The armed groups also seized control of much of Aleppo’s city centre.

The groups, which entered Aleppo’s city centre on Friday, seized control of many neighbourhoods in the area.

Reaching Sadallah al-Jabiri Square, a central location in the city, the groups advanced further, taking over a significant portion of Aleppo.

In a short period, the opposition forces also seized the gover-

Russian forces have been fighting at the side of troops loyal to Syrian President Bashar Assad since September 2015 to quell an uprising by an assortment of rebel forces

nor’s office, the police headquarters, and Aleppo Citadel, a symbolic landmark of the city.

After capturing Abu al-Duhur military airport, the armed groups confiscated ammunition and military vehicles left behind by regime forces.

Agencies



The demand is to stop the export of F-35 parts to Israel

Dutch prosecutors push to block F-35 exports to Israel

The Hague, The Netherlands - The chief prosecutor of the Dutch Supreme Court has requested approval of a Court of Appeals decision to stop exporting F-35 fighter jet parts to Israel, according to an official statement on Friday.

The Netherlands’ Supreme Court said that the decision by the Court of Appeals on February 12, which had halted the export of F-35 parts due to concerns that Israel was using them to violate international law, must now be approved.

Citing international agreements to which the Netherlands is a party, Attorney General Paul Vlas argued that the export of military materials should be banned if there is a clear risk of misuse. The Supreme Court’s decision is expected soon.

Human rights groups, including Oxfam Novib, PAX, and The Rights Forum, filed a lawsuit against the Dutch government, demanding it stop the export of F-35 parts to Israel.

On December 15, a Dutch

court rejected their request, claiming that the government was not obligated to halt the sales. The NGOs appealed, and on January 22, the Court of Appeals overturned the initial ruling.

On February 12, the Court of Appeals ordered the government to block all exports of F-35 parts to Israel over fears they were being used in violations of international law in Gaza.

Since October 2023, Israel has launched a brutal offensive in Gaza, killing nearly 44,300 people, most of them women and children, and injuring nearly 105,000.

Last week, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, accusing them of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza.

Israel also faces a genocide case at the International Court of Justice for its deadly actions in Gaza.

Anadolu Agency

Israeli army claims intercepting drone from east

Jerusalem - The Israeli army claimed on Saturday that its naval forces intercepted a drone launched from the east over the Mediterranean Sea before it could enter Israeli airspace.

In a statement, the army said: “A navy missile ship recently intercepted a drone over the Mediterranean Sea that was en route to Israeli territory from the east.” The statement added that no alarms were activated, as the incident occurred outside Israeli airspace.

This was the second interception of a drone from the east in the past several hours.

Earlier on Saturday, the army said: “The Air Force intercepted a suspicious aerial target (a drone) en route from the east toward Israeli territory,” clarifying that the interception took place



The Israeli army frequently uses ‘the east’ to refer to Iraq

before the target entered Israeli territory.

While the army did not specify the source of the drones, it frequently uses ‘the east’ to refer to Iraq.

In recent months, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq has claimed responsibility for launching drone attacks on Israel, including strikes targeting Eilat.

On November 18, Israeli au-

thorities reported 65 drone attacks originating from Iraq since the beginning of the month, with an increase in such incidents over the past three months.

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq has stated that its attacks are carried out in support of Palestinian resistance in Gaza.

The Israeli army also claimed on Saturday that it carried out airstrikes targeting a ‘military infrastructure used by the Lebanese group Hezbollah for transferring weapons’ near border crossings between Syria and Lebanon.

In a statement, the Israeli army spokesman Avichay Adraee said the Israeli forces ‘attacked military infrastructure in Syria near the border crossings between Syria and Lebanon, which were actively used by

Hezbollah to transport weapons’.

Israel carried out the attack despite the ongoing Israel-Lebanon ceasefire which began on Wednesday and ended over 14 months of fighting between the Israeli army and Hezbollah.

Under the ceasefire terms, Israel is to withdraw its forces south of the Blue Line, the de facto border, in a phased manner, while the Lebanese army is tasked with deploying its forces in southern Lebanon within 60 days.

The conflict has taken a heavy toll, with more than 3,960 people killed, over 16,500 injured, and more than one million displaced in Israeli attacks on Lebanon since October last year, according to Lebanese health authorities.

Anadolu Agency

PNC criticises efforts to grant immunity to Israeli war criminals

Istanbul/Gaza - The Palestinian National Council (PNC) has condemned on Saturday efforts to grant diplomatic immunity to ‘Israeli war criminals’.

In a statement, PNC President Rawhi Fattouh denounced the ‘horrific massacres carried out by the occupation, which claimed the lives of over 100 martyrs in Beit Lahia, northern Gaza’.

He called for ‘immediate international intervention to rescue two million people from famine and ethnic cleansing’.

Fattouh criticised ‘attempts by some nations to shield Israeli war criminals’ in the wake of the International Criminal Court’s (ICC) decision, describing them as ‘a reflection of extreme racism and support for an unprecedented apartheid system’.

These actions, he said, ‘only embolden the occupation to persist with its blockade and crimes’.

On Friday, 100 Palestinians were killed in Israeli attacks in Jabalia and Beit Lahia, according



In a statement, Palestinian National Council President Rawhi Fattouh denounced the ‘horrific massacres carried out by the occupation, which claimed the lives of over 100 martyrs in Beit Lahia, northern Gaza’

to Palestinian sources.

French Prime Minister Michel Barnier, addressing the general assembly of the parliament, re-

entered the ICC arrest warrants issued for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant.

proceedings discontinued.

In a document posted on the ICC website, requested the dismissal of Israel’s appeal as the decision is not subject to appeal as of now, though an appeal could potentially be filed at a later stage in the legal process.

Israel on Wednesday filed a direct appeal before the Appeals Chamber to the Pre-Trial Chamber I’s ‘decision on Israel’s challenge to the jurisdiction of the Court pursuant to article 19(2) of the Rome Statute’.

Saying that the court’s decision is not appealable, Khan said the decision tells Israel that it cannot file a challenge to jurisdiction before the court has made a decision under Article 58 of the Rome Statute, but also holds that such a challenge could potentially be made once that condition is satisfied.

He said: “The Decision is not a decision ‘with respect to jurisdiction’ and it is therefore not directly appealable under article 82(1)(a) of the Statute.”

Anadolu Agency



French farmers to protest over income issues

Paris, France - French farmers' groups on Friday called for nationwide protests next month to address income and pricing issues in the agricultural sector.

The demonstrations will mark the final phase of a broader campaign targeting trade agreements, administrative simplification, and farmer incomes, Le Monde reported.

Arnaud Rousseau, head of the National Federation of Farmers' Unions (FNSEA), announced the planned actions, set for December 9-10, emphasising the need to highlight income disparities and pricing negotiations with distributors at the start of the commercial relationship season.

"We will take action nationwide to focus on incomes and the relationship with the pricing of our products. Our aim is to conclude this cycle of protests with a meeting with the prime minister," Rousseau told RMC radio.

The agricultural unions are pressing for tangible results, with Rousseau underlining the need for concrete outcomes from their talks with government officials.

Separately, French Agriculture Minister Annie Genevard is scheduled to meet with the FNSEA, Young Farmers (JA), and other agricultural unions, including the Farmers' Defense

Movement and Rural Coordination. Discussions will focus on measures to ease the administrative burden on farmers, the Agriculture Ministry said.

The Confederation Paysanne, another major agricultural union, also called for better incomes and administrative reforms but has refrained from opposing regulatory standards and their enforcement. The union will meet with officials 'in the coming days'.

Talks between the EU and South American trade bloc Mercosur countries on a free trade agreement started back in 2000 and went through on and off phases.

The parties agreed on a comprehensive agreement covering issues such as tariffs, rules of origin, technical barriers to trade, and intellectual property, among others.

The EU and Mercosur were planning to reduce high tariffs on agricultural products, and Mercosur countries would easily sell products such as meat, chicken, and sugar to the EU.

The agreement, however, was never signed nor ratified, and never entered into force.

French farmers argue that the EU-Mercosur agreement is part of a broader trend threatening rural livelihoods in France.

Anadolu Agency

ChatGPT turns 2: Evolution of groundbreaking AI chatbot

Istanbul, Turkey - ChatGPT, OpenAI's groundbreaking Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbot, marked its second anniversary on Saturday, with the tool becoming a global phenomenon, transforming industries and redefining how AI integrates into daily life and workspaces.

Launched on November 30, 2022, ChatGPT quickly rose to prominence, reaching one million users within five days and surpassing 100mn in just two months - a milestone that outpaced the growth of other major tech platforms.

As of October 2024, ChatGPT had more than 180mn active users and recorded over four billion monthly website visits in the last month, placing it among the top 10 most-visited websites globally according to Semrush, a company tracking websites.

The tool's influence extends worldwide, with the US accounting for 14% of users, followed by India at 8% and then Kenya and Brazil, according to Semrush.

On the other hand, survey data from Boston Consulting Group on September 2024 shows 45% of Indians reporting the use of ChatGPT, followed by Morocco and the United Arab Emirates with 38% and 34% respectively.

Meanwhile, data from web analytics tool Similarweb highlights its diverse audience: 54.66% male and 45.34% female, with 25-34-year-olds forming almost one-third of the user base followed by the 18-24 group.

Education and professional fields have embraced ChatGPT and similar AI tools.

Microsoft's 2024 Work Trend Index revealed that 75% of global knowledge workers now use generative AI, while a GovTech survey reported that 58%



of students relied on such tools during the 2022-23 academic year.

In addition, LinkedIn witnessed a 142-fold increase in AI-related skills added to profiles in 2024. Lastly, ChatGPT was also recognised as the most widely used AI tool in 2024 by developers.

Launched on November 30, 2022, ChatGPT rose to prominence, reaching one million users within five days and surpassing 100mn in just two months - outpacing the growth of other tech platforms

Technology behind ChatGPT

ChatGPT operates using OpenAI's Generative Pre-trained Transformer (GPT) framework, a type of large language model (LLM) designed for natural language processing. These models analyse massive datasets to generate human-like responses through supervised and reinforcement learning, including refinement based on human feedback.

However, the technology they

used to train the chatbot has faced criticism.

Ethical concerns include *Time* magazine's reporting of outsourced Kenyan workers earning less than US\$2 per hour to label harmful content during development. Additionally, copyright infringement and dataset bias remain contentious. *The New*

model, offering premium features such as extended usage and advanced tools.

In March 2023, OpenAI unveiled GPT-4 for its ChatGPT Plus subscribers. This version offered significant upgrades, including real-time web searches and computational functions.

In May 2024, GPT-4o debuted with multimodal capabilities, processing text, images, audio and video. Its faster, budget-friendly counterpart, GPT-4o Mini, launched in July 2024, replacing GPT-3.5.

September 2024 saw the introduction of the experimental o1 and o1-mini models, promising enhanced speed and scalability.

To improve accessibility, OpenAI also introduced mobile apps for iOS in May 2023 and Android in July 2023, further broadening its user base.

Ownership, key figures

ChatGPT is the flagship product of OpenAI, an AI research organisation founded in December 2015.

OpenAI operates under a dual-entity structure, the non-profit OpenAI, Inc. and its for-

profit subsidiary, OpenAI Global, LLC.

Microsoft has been a key partner since 2019, investing US\$13bn and holding approximately 49% equity. Additionally, its Azure platform provides critical infrastructure for ChatGPT's operations.

OpenAI's leadership includes CEO Sam Altman, who co-founded the company alongside Elon Musk, Greg Brockman and others. Musk left the board in 2018, and Altman's position was briefly jeopardised in November 2023 due to a board dispute, but he was reinstated after negotiations restructured OpenAI's governance.

OpenAI's valuation has surged to US\$157bn, cementing its dominance in the AI sector.

Competition, industry impact

ChatGPT's success has spurred a wave of competition, with AI products such as Gemini, Claude, Llama, Ernie and Grok entering the market. Microsoft integrated OpenAI's technology into its Copilot AI-powered digital assistant, initially based on GPT-4.

OpenAI's API, made available to developers in March 2023, has fuelled the creation of numerous AI tools across industries, cementing ChatGPT's role as a foundational technology. As of January 2024, 92% of Fortune 500 companies were reportedly building products using OpenAI technologies, the company said.

The adoption of ChatGPT reflects a growing reliance on AI tools in education, business and personal use. From coding and content creation to customer service and research, ChatGPT has reshaped how individuals and organisations approach problem-solving.

Anadolu Agency



9 killed due to floods in Thailand

Bangkok, Thailand - At least nine people were killed and hundreds of thousands affected due to floods in eight provinces of Thailand, local media reported on Saturday.

Thai Meteorological Department said that heavy rainfall caused floods in Nakhon Si

Thammarat, Phatthalung, Songkhla, Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Krabi, Trang, and Satun province, according to Thai Enquirer. So far, more than 553,000 households have been affected across the eight provinces, it said.

In the Phatthalung province,

some 102,494 households were affected in 557 villages while one person was killed.

Eight deaths were reported in Pattani, Yala and Songkhla provinces. Meteorological Department warned that more rain is expected in the southern region which could continue until

early December.

In neighbouring Malaysia, devastating floods in several northern provinces killed three people and displaced more than 100,000 people over the past three days, according to state-run Bernama news agency.

Anadolu Agency

Most in Germany favour ban on social media like in Australia: Poll

Berlin, Germany - A large majority of German citizens are in favour of banning social media use for under-16s, as is soon to happen in Australia under a new law, a survey published on Saturday has shown.

The support for the ban reflects the view of most of the some 2,000 people surveyed that social media is likely or certain to have a harmful impact on children and adolescents.

What did the survey show?

According to the YouGov poll, seen by the dpa news agency, some 77% of respondents said they would either 'fully' or 'somewhat' support similar legislation in Germany.

Altogether 13% of those surveyed said they would either 'fully' or 'somewhat' oppose a

ban, with the remaining respondents saying they didn't know.

An even higher percentage - 82% - were 'absolutely certain' or 'somewhat certain' that social media use is in some way bad for children and teenagers.

Some of those regarded the content on social media platforms as responsible for the harmful effect and others were more concerned that social media can be addictive.

Some 52% believe that both factors play an equal role, according to the survey.

However, 9% were either sure or rather sure that social media were in no way detrimental to the well-being of young people.

The law in Australia, which was passed on Friday with the support of all major parties, will make social media platforms liable for fines of up to 49.5mn

Australian dollars (US\$32mn) if they allow children younger than 16 to hold accounts. Tech companies such as TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit, X and Instagram will be responsible for ensuring verification, and there will be no penalties for parents or users.

However, the legislation is short on details about possible methods for enforcing the ban, which is to go into force in a year.

Before then, various methods to enforce the measure will be trialled. Some companies that have platforms promoting education, messaging, gaming and mental health will be exempted under the law.

Critics of the law have expressed concerns that the ban will isolate teenagers from established online social networks and cause them to seek out online spaces that are unregulated and possibly more detrimental to their welfare.

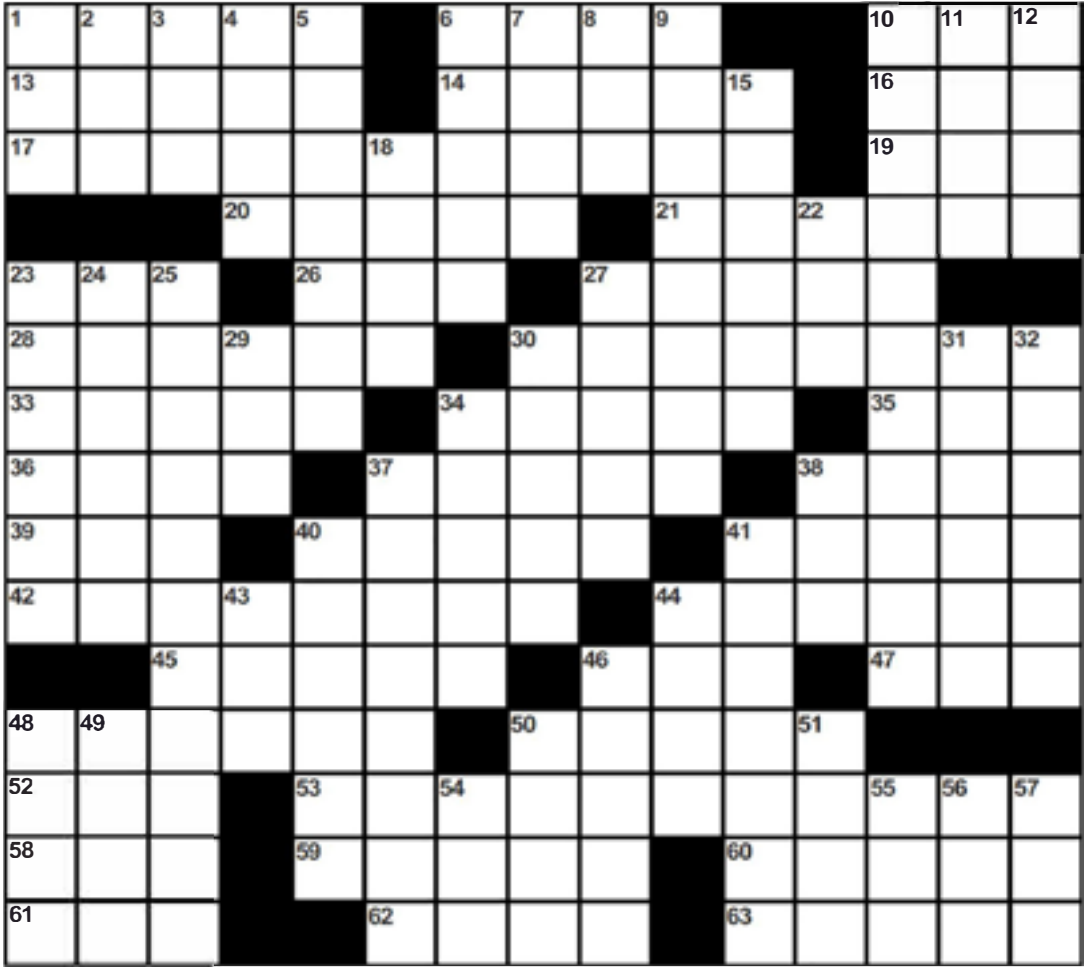
DW

INDIA-SINGAPORE BILATERAL EXERCISE



Indian Army personnel and Singapore Armed Forces take part in a bilateral exercise, at Devlali Field Firing Ranges in Nashik, India on Saturday (ANI)

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Book of maps
- 6) "You_ a mouthful!"
- 10) Scoundrel
- 13) New moon, e.g.
- 14) Chips in
- 16) Mine find
- 17) Swiss soldier's do-all
- 19) Time div.
- 20) They may be clear or threatening
- 21) Blocks for metalworkers
- 23) Dash
- 26) Begley and Sullivan
- 27) Not at all emotional
- 28) Solar-system mobile
- 30) Verse makers
- 33) Brighton baby buggies
- 34) Euripidean tragedy
- 35) Letter after sigma
- 36) "... who?"
- 37) Exposed
- 38) Film crew member
- 39) One for the off-road
- 40) More pure, as silver
- 41) Straight-billed game bird
- 42) Incomplete components
- 44) Evening repast
- 45) Backside

- 46) Newspaper div.
- 7) Bro, for one
- 48) Connect to electricity, as an appliance
- 50) Pelt hunter's tools
- 52) Unagi, at a sushi bar
- 53) Lovers of high-fidelity sound
- 58) Guy's opposite
- 59) Hideouts
- 60) Dickens' Heep
- 61) CIA employee
- 62) Cleaning cabinet supplies
- 63) Make a new attempt
- DOWN**
- 1) Smartphone software, briefly
- 2) Even if, briefly
- 3) Lancelot du_ of "Camelot"
- 4) Does something appealing?
- 5) Hiders' companions
- 6) "Land_!"
- 7) Coulter and Curry
- 8) "Lord, is _?" (Last Supper question)
- 9) Like skim milk
- 10) Newspaper features
- 11) Husk

- 12) Animal shelters
- 15) Mexican missus
- 18) Like a neatnik
- 22) Seven, on a grandfather clock
- 23) Comes to light
- 24) Text mistakes
- 25) How some approach big decisions
- 27) Exodus commemoration
- 29) Ambulance initials
- 30) French mothers
- 31) Taiwan's capital
- 32) "Outstanding!"
- 34) Hairy-chested
- 37) Occurring twice a year
- 38) Econ. measure for a country
- 40) Decorative knob
- 41) Gunpowder ingredient (Var.)
- 43) Children's game
- 44) Bathroom bar
- 46) Anti-vampire device
- 48) Coatrack parts
- 49) Move like a kangaroo
- 50) Get bushed
- 51) "Your majesty"
- 54) Handyman's letters
- 55) On, as an old lamp
- 56) Ring bearer, often
- 57) Not outgoing

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

While your tendency is to be all things to all people, make it a point to please yourself at this moment. You are centered, balanced, and a tangible force of love. Others are attracted to your inner harmony. Allow your grace to carry you through your day. Flirt, but only with the ones who really catch your eye. Visit friends, but only the ones that please you the most. You can make friends and influence people with a wave of your hand. All you need to do is make the gesture.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Everyone loves you right now and wants to bask in your glow. People are eager to vote for you or ask you out on a date. For the moment, the world revolves around you. You even impress yourself as several of your pet projects come to fruition. Try to capitalize on your success as much as possible and you'll reap the rewards for weeks to come. If only every day was this easy!



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You can expect to attract some interesting attention right now. Someone nearby is definitely drawn to you. Make sure you're interested too before switching the light from red to green. Some unexpected circumstances bring about other delightful surprises, so stay on your toes. Avoid giving mixed signals that could result in a big misunderstanding. Above all, don't say yes when you mean no.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

It's just a flesh wound, but it still may sting just a bit. Apply a few bandages and hope for the best. Certain circumstances may be out of your control, but at least you know that things will heal quickly and won't leave a scar. Count on your inner resources to get through the day. Spend a little time and money on pampering yourself, but be sure to keep one foot in reality. Call up an old friend tonight and share your thoughts.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You find yourself on an emotional roller coaster today, even though you can't remember buying the ticket or even driving to the amusement park. Your gut pushes you toward unusual or unpredictable behavior. It's not a bad thing to act on your instincts, just a modus operandi to which you may be unaccustomed. Work on getting your feelings in check before you subject your friends and family members to these sudden changes.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Try to keep petty drama and other unwanted intrusions out of the way as much as possible. Now is a good time to pay attention to your inner workings for a while. If you're feeling frustrated about something, do whatever is necessary to cleanse yourself of that negative energy. Tonight, make sure you give something (or someone) your best shot. The gesture will mean a lot.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Your physical health depends on your emotional health, and vice versa. More than ever, you're aware of yourself as an integrated system of separate parts. Two obvious game plans emerge from this point. The first is to keep your attitude positive whatever happens. The second is to live comfortably in your body. If you're not already an expert at doing these things, you could easily become one.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Just when you were about to give up, you see a tiny ray of sunshine peeking through the clouds. Somebody makes your day by offering an unsolicited and life-changing opinion. You are suddenly curious about everything and everyone. Outsiders have authority in areas where established leaders dare not go. Consider taking up the profession of reporter or journalist. This could be the scoop of your life. Don't let a single thought escape your notice.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You get a welcome breather from the nonstop action today. You don't know whether you're coming or going, but that's not the least of it. You see the best and worst sides of the people in your life, adding to your confusion about what to do. Following an impulse saves the day, although a more confusing issue remains obscured. It might be best to avoid making any major decision until this fog lifts.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

The issues aren't laid out in black and white. You may have the urge to be impulsive. Wait it out. Weigh all factors with care before making a big decision. Wanting to do something is a powerful motivation, but it's not the only justification. Patience is the key to a successful outcome. Tonight, a family member provides some much-needed perspective. Don't be afraid to get a second opinion before making the final choice.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

How do you deal with someone with an inappropriately sized ego? Ah, a question for the ages. This is a good time to take a thorough inventory of your inner resources. Sometimes the best thing to do is laugh it off. If that proves impossible, try polite confrontation. If it's just too massive a roadblock, you might have to think about falling back or possibly retreating. Don't worry. By tomorrow that beastly ego should shrink back to a manageable size.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Nobody notices when you make a dramatic entrance, which is frustrating if you need to garner a certain someone's attention. Use this opportunity to rewrite that scene and replay it again. It's sure to go over much better the second time around. Once your inner diva has gotten enough applause, pamper yourself. Get a professional massage or indulge in your favorite food.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. What type of speech includes the words "for", "and", "nor", "but", "or", "yet", and "so"?

- A. Conjunction
- B. Verb
- C. Noun
- D. Adjective

02. In 2014, how many colours are there on the New Zealand flag?

- A. 1
- B. 5
- C. 3
- D. 4

03. Which of these scientists has been quoted as saying "God does not play dice"?

- A. Einstein
- B. Newton
- C. Archimedes
- D. Galileo

Answers: 1.A 2.C 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

T	L	A	N
M	I	L	W
L	S	O	E
B	G	B	U

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

SOLUTION
20-25 words: Excellent,
15-20 words: Very good,
10-15 words: Good,
5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

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

WORD BUILDER



You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

'WE WILL BE BACK'

Guardiola backs his players to turn things around as Man City take on Liverpool

Manchester, England - With Manchester City mired in a six-game winless slump and facing one of their biggest challenges this season at Liverpool this weekend, manager Pep Guardiola said the onus was on him to prove he can right the ship.

A loss at Anfield on Sunday would leave Guardiola's men 11 points adrift of the leaders in the Premier League title race, but the Spaniard said he was thinking big picture rather than the potential ramifications of one game.

"Of course, I am thinking what I can do to help them (the players) but in the long career as a player and a manager you live these situations," said Guardiola, who recently signed a two-year contract extension.

"When you live it - accept it and challenge it. No complaining, no blaming, no pointing the figure or running from your responsibility. If you don't win, you're in trouble, I know that," he added.

"The moment I feel I am not positive for the club, another one (manager) will come but I want the opportunity to try it and I want to rebuild the team in many

aspects from now on until the end of the season and the next seasons. I ask for that challenge and this opportunity to do it," he continued, in an answer that stretched for nearly four minutes.

"I know what we need, what we have to do. We don't have the consistency we had right now but which team during 10 years in the world has been consistent, tell me one. They don't exist - not in NBA, tennis, golf. It proves how we are as sportsmen and competitors. It is easiest when you have 10, 12 games in a row and everyone is fit and in their prime. I have to prove myself now. I have to find a solution and a way to do it and I am trying every day."

City have been stung by injuries to key players but Guardiola kept his cards close to his chest about who might be fit to play on Sunday, saying: "We will see."

A 4-0 rout by Tottenham Hotspur at The Etihad last weekend marked their third successive Premier League loss and a defeat at Anfield would be their first four-game losing streak in the top flight since 2007. It would also



Pep Guardiola

We don't have the consistency we had right now but which team during 10 years in the world has been consistent, tell me one

PEP GUARDIOLA

surpass their total number of losses from the whole 2023-24 season. City fans can take comfort in the fact that their side have climbed back from deficits of eight points or more to win the league four times with Guardiola at the helm.

While a defeat on Sunday

would make City's title hopes "more difficult," Guardiola said, the Spaniard reiterated that he was not thinking of trophies.

"In the situation we're in, it's not realistic to think about big targets. The situation is to think about the next game and getting the momentum to continue and

that will come back," he said.

"I have learned all my life to move forward in the good moments and the bad moments. It's how many times you stand up when again and again you fall.

"We will be back, I know that. I don't know when, that is the truth."



Ruben Amorim

Manchester United will have 'no excuses' against Everton

Manchester, England - While Manchester United have little time to prepare for Ruben Amorim's first Premier League game at Old Trafford, the new boss insisted there will be "no excuses" if his team do not beat Everton on Sunday.

While their Merseyside opponents will have had a full week to prepare since their scoreless draw with Brentford last Saturday, United were in action on Thursday in a breathless 3-2 Europa League win over Bodo/Glimt, their second game in five days.

"It is what it is," Amorim said of the challenging schedule. "We will rotate players and we will be ready. (Against Bodo/Glimt) we have to use four subs to manage the fitness, not the game. We manage the fitness.

"We have to do it. We already know that it will be like that so no excuse. We should be ready for Sunday and we have to win."

Southampton hold highflying Brighton

Brighton, England - Kaoru Mitoma's first-half header for Brighton & Hove Albion was cancelled out by a Flynn Downes strike just before the hour as the Seagulls drew 1-1 at home with bottom side Southampton on Friday to move up to second in the Premier League table.

Brighton are level on 23 points with champions Manchester City. Liverpool are eight points ahead.

The visitors made Joe Lumley their third starting goalkeeper of the season and he was immediately under pressure as the home side started strongly. Mitoma had the first good chance of the game as Brighton broke out from defence at pace in the seventh minute, but with Lumley well off his line, the Japanese winger dragged his shot just wide.

Two minutes later Georgino cut across the penalty area from right to left, but he too arrowed his shot just wide, and he came



Southampton's Flynn Downes celebrates after scoring against Brighton

even closer in the 16th minute, again cutting in off the wing before smacking his shot off the far post. Lumley's clean sheet on his Premier League debut lasted only 29 minutes when he was finally beaten by Mitoma's well-placed header from a bouncing Tariq Lamptey cross.

Rejuvenated in the second half, Southampton equalised in the 59th minute after Adam Armstrong had two shots blocked in quick succession but midfielder Downes made no mistake with the rebound from the second effort, slamming it home.

Eight minutes later Saints had a Cameron Archer goal controversially ruled out for offside after Adam Armstrong was ruled to have interfered when he flicked his heel at the ball as it passed behind him while in an offside position, allowing Brighton to grab the point they needed to move to second in the standings.

We have to be more consistent, says Brighton coach Hurzeler

Brighton, England - Brighton & Hove Albion moved up to second in the Premier League after a 1-1 draw to bottom side Southampton on Friday, but despite their high position, coach Fabian Hurzeler was disappointed with his side and urged them to raise their game.

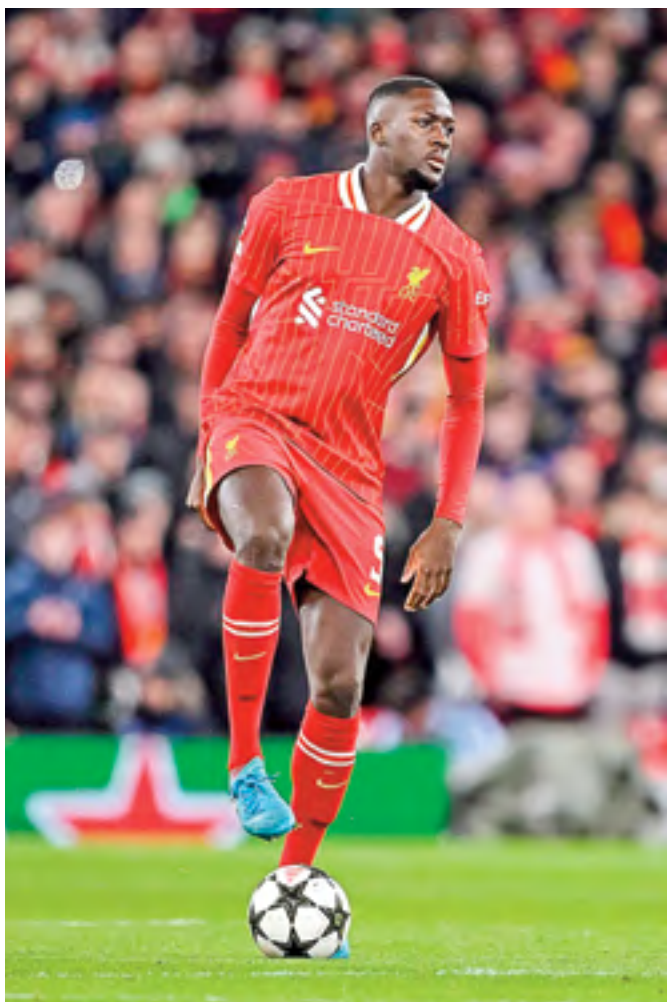
"Disappointment is part of football. Negative experiences are part of the process and we didn't deserve more



Fabian Hurzeler

today, so we have to keep improving, keep pushing and try to be better in the next game," said the 31-year-old. "We have to be more consistent over the 90 minutes - be more ruthless with the chances we have because I think in the first half we had enough chances to win the game and we didn't take them. Then we were not clear enough, not consistent enough to defend or concede a goal," he added.

The American coach kicked off the season with an impressive unbeaten run in August, with wins over Manchester United, Tottenham Hotspur, Newcastle United and even champions Manchester City.



Ibrahima Konate

Konate injury a big blow for Liverpool

Liverpool, England - Liverpool suffered a setback on Friday as central defender Ibrahima Konate confirmed he has suffered an injury, days before the Merseyside club's Premier League home meeting with champions Manchester City.

France international Konate, who has been superb at the heart of a Liverpool defence that has conceded only eight Premier League goals in 12 games, appeared to hurt his knee in a 2-0 victory over Real Madrid in the Champions League on Wednesday.

According to reports in British media, the 25-year-old could be sidelined for five to six weeks due to the injury.

"So frustrating to pick up this injury right at the end of a great game on Wednesday night," Konate wrote in a post on Instagram.

"Now we start the recovery process but one thing I promise is I will come back and be the best I can be once again. Thank you for the amazing support at Anfield."

Liverpool are also without first-choice goalkeeper Alisson, attacker Diogo Jota and left-back Konstantinos Tsimikas.

The Premier League leaders can go 11 points clear on Sunday if they can beat City, who have been struggling in recent weeks and are winless in six matches across all competitions.

Leicester appoint Van Nistelrooy as manager

Leicester, England - Leicester City have appointed Ruud van Nistelrooy as manager to replace the sacked Steve Cooper on a contract until June 2027, the Premier League club announced on Friday.

Cooper departed with the Foxes hovering two points above the relegation zone, and the club moved quickly to appoint Van Nistelrooy, who had been assistant manager at Manchester United and took interim charge when Erik ten Hag was fired last month. "I'm proud, I'm excited. Everybody that I speak to about Leicester City Football Club is enthusiastic," Dutchman Van Nistelrooy said in a statement.

"They have great stories about the quality of the people working at the club, the supporters and, of



Ruud van Nistelrooy

course, the recent history of the club is impressive."

Leicester enjoyed a stunning Premier League title success in 2015-2016 but were relegated in 2023 before coming straight back up under Enzo Maresca, who then left to join Chelsea. Former Nottingham Forest boss

Cooper was appointed in June. Leicester surprisingly sacked Cooper on Sunday after 157 days in charge following a 2-1 loss at home to Chelsea that left them 16th on 10 points, just above the relegation zone.

Friday's announcement comes two weeks after Van Nis-

telrooy left his role as interim coach at United, where he led the side to three victories and a draw in all competitions.

The 48-year-old moved on from Old Trafford after the arrival of Ruben Amorim as United's new permanent manager despite the Dutchman expressing interest in remaining at the club.

"Ruud's experience, knowledge and winning mentality will undoubtedly bring great value to us and we look forward to supporting him in achieving success for our fans and our club," said Leicester Chairman Aiyawatt Srivaddhanaprabha.

The former United striker also played for PSV Eindhoven and Real Madrid, scoring 349 goals at club level and 35 in 70 appearances for the Netherlands.



Vinicius Junior

Minor who racially abused Vinicius gets one-year stadium ban

Madrid, Spain - A minor who racially abused Real Madrid forward Vinicius Junior during a Spanish league game against Rayo Vallecano last season has been handed a one-year stadium ban and has also been fined, the club said on Friday.

The minor accepted the punishment imposed by the Juvenile Prosecutor's Office. He was imposed an undisclosed fine by the State Commission against Violence, Racism, Xenophobia and Intolerance in Sport.

"The minor who made racist insults towards our player Vinicius Junior... has apologised and expressed his regret for his behaviour in a letter of apology," Real Madrid said in a statement.

"As a result of the out-of-court settlement, he agreed to carry out the socio-educational activities proposed to him by the Juvenile Public Prosecutor's Office and to refrain from entering stadiums where official competitions are held for a period of one year."

SILVA HAS LAS LAUGH

Wolves loanee's winner helps Las Palmas stun Barca

Barcelona, Spain - LaLiga leaders Barcelona's 125th anniversary celebrations were spoiled by Las Palmas who claimed a shock 2-1 victory on Saturday after Fabio Silva scored the winner to extend the hosts' winless league run to three games.

In a game dominated by Barca, who had 70% of possession and peppered the goal with almost 30 shots, it was Las Palmas who made their few chances count to claim a famous triumph.

Barca remain on 34 points and lead second-placed Real Madrid by four but their rivals now have two games in hand, while the victory moved Las Palmas up to 14th

I think when we don't score the goals, the team struggles a little bit and this is what we have to change. So we have to defend better as a team, not only the last four...

HANSI FLICK

place on 15 points.

"I think when we don't score the goals, the team struggles a little bit and this is what we have to change," Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said.

"... if we don't score a goal, then maybe it's possible for us to

keep a clean sheet. So we have to defend better as a team, not only the last four or the defensive players, but the whole team and we can do it better."

Las Palmas constantly found space in Barca's box in the opening stages of the first half at Es-



Fabio Silva of Las Palmas celebrates after scoring against Barcelona on Saturday

tadi Olimpic Lluís Companys but could not find the breakthrough despite creating a couple of chances that led to some goal-mouth action.

Barcelona also lost full back Alejandro Balde to injury in the first half, with the 21-year-old taken off on a golf cart.

The Catalans struggled to find a way past the Las Palmas de-

fence although on the stroke of halftime Raphinha made a counter-attacking run but saw his shot come off the crossbar.

Las Palmas struck the opening goal early in the second half when a sublime passing move that started with goalkeeper Jasper Cillessen finished when another former Barca player Sandro Ramirez scored from the edge of

the box.

However, second-half substitutions, including the introduction of newly-crowned Golden Boy Lamine Yamal, helped Barca dominate and they equalised just after the hour when Pedri found Raphinha in a pocket of space near the edge of the box.

The quick-footed Brazil winger turned and fired a low, left-foot

shot past Cillessen to make it 1-1 for his ninth league goal of the season.

Las Palmas were not deterred, though, and took the lead once more when Wolverhampton Wanderers loanee Silva broke through the offside trap to latch onto a pass from Javi Muñoz and pulled the trigger to beat keeper Inaki Peña.

Saudi Arabia poised to host 2034 World Cup as bid gets top rating

Zurich, Switzerland - Saudi Arabia's 2034 World Cup bid received a higher technical score from FIFA than the 2026 joint bid by the United States, Canada and Mexico even though the Middle East nation has yet to construct several stadiums proposed for the tournament.

FIFA released its bid evaluation report and said the 2034 bid received an overall average score of 4.2 out of 5 even though eight stadiums are still to be built.

All venues -- including the

planned 92,760-seater King Salman International Stadium in Riyadh -- will not be completed until 2032 but three new stadiums are expected to be finished for the Asian Cup which kicks off in January 2027.

Meanwhile, the 2026 bid scored 4.0 having initially proposed 23 stadiums - all of which were already built. Eventually, 16 host cities for the 2026 World Cup were announced, with many venues being existing NFL stadiums.

"The (Saudi) bid includes some ambitious stadium projects integrated into unique locations, including the Prince Mohammed bin Salman Stadium located within the Qiddiya development and NEOM Stadium located within 'The Line' development," FIFA's report said.

FIFA added that although Saudi Arabia's "one-of-a-kind" stadium projects have a lot of potential, the "proposed configuration and location" would "require a reimagining of operations, with

Stadiums alone account for 35 per cent of the overall score awarded to bids and FIFA said the level of risk in the 2026 bid was low

some associated unknowns or challenges at this moment in

time".

NEOM, a Red Sea urban and industrial development nearly the size of Belgium due to house nearly nine million people, is central to the prince's Vision 2030 plan to create new engines of economic growth beyond oil.

But some of the schemes have had to be scaled back due to rising costs, including 'The Line', a futuristic city between mirrored walls extending 170 km (106 miles) into the desert within NEOM.

"Consequently, should the bid be successful, it would be imperative to closely monitor and support these projects from initiation to completion," FIFA added.

Stadiums alone account for 35 per cent of the overall score awarded to bids and FIFA said the level of risk in the 2026 bid was low. However, the Saudi bid had a medium level of risk.

"Due to the overall scale of the stadium projects, as well as the novel designs and configura-

tions proposed in some cases, there is an elevated risk profile," FIFA said.

However, they added that the risk was mitigated as Saudi Arabia have a strong team in place and ample time to deliver on the projects.

Ahead of the World Cup vote next month, Minister of Sports, Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki al Faisal, said FIFA's score reflects Saudi Arabia's commitment to grow the game and their "rapid transformation".

Swiatek accepts one-month ban after failing doping test, says ITIA

London, England - World number two and five-times Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek has accepted a one-month suspension after testing positive for banned substance trimetazidine (TMZ), the International Tennis Integrity Agency said on Thursday.

Swiatek tested positive in an out-of-competition sample in August but the ITIA, which runs tennis's anti-doping programme, accepted that it was caused by contamination of her medication melatonin, which was manufactured and sold over the counter in her native Poland.

Swiatek said she had been taking it for jet lag and sleep issues and as there was no significant fault or negligence, the ITIA ruled it was "the lowest end of the range" and offered the reigning French Open champion a one-month suspension which the 23-year-old accepted.

"The player was provisionally suspended from Sept. 12 until Oct. 4, missing three tournaments, which counts towards the sanction, leaving eight days remaining," the ITIA said in a state-



Iga Swiatek

ment."

She also forfeited prize money from the Cincinnati Open, the tournament directly following the test.

Swiatek, who had pulled out of tournaments in Asia in September citing personal matters and fatigue, described the ordeal of testing positive as the "worst experience of my life".

She was world number one when she failed the test and having skipped the Asian swing, Aryna Sabalenka leapfrogged her

in the world rankings to eventually end the year as number one.

"In the last 2.5 months I was subject to strict ITIA proceedings, which confirmed my innocence," Swiatek said on Instagram. "The only positive doping test in my career, showing unbelievably low level of a banned substance I've never heard about before, put everything I've worked so hard for my entire life into question."

"Both me and my team had to deal with tremendous stress and anxiety. Now everything has

been carefully explained, and with a clean slate I can go back to what I love most."

Swiatek, whose anti-doping violation was not made public at the time, had her provisional suspension lifted after providing samples of her melatonin product to the WADA-accredited SMRTL laboratory in Salt Lake City which confirmed detecting low doses of TMZ in both opened and sealed containers of the product.

The provisional suspension was lifted on Oct. 4 and the case forwarded to an Independent Tribunal.

Swiatek is not the first world number one to fail a doping test this year after Italy's Jannik Sinner, the men's top-ranked player, also tested positive for anabolic agent clostebol.

However, Sinner was cleared of wrongdoing by an independent tribunal ahead of the U.S. Open, which he went on to win. The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) against the tribunal's finding of "no fault or negligence".

Working with Murray 'exciting for tennis', says Djokovic

Novak Djokovic described his decision to team up with recently retired rival Andy Murray as a surprise to everyone but said he could not be more excited by the prospect of the two former world number ones working together.

Murray agreed to join Djokovic's team last week and will coach the 24-times Grand Slam champion at the Australian Open next year.

"I was going through a process of thinking about next season in the last couple of months, and trying to figure out what I need at this stage of my career," Djokovic told Sky Sports on Friday.

"I stopped with my coach Goran Ivanisevic, that I was very successful with for many years, in March. So I took about six months to really think about if I (actually) need a coach, and if yes, who that's going to be and the profile of the coach."

The 37-year-old said he and his team considered various candidates for the job but the



Novak Djokovic (R) with Andy Murray

requirements were strict.

"We were going through different names and I realised the perfect coach for me at this point would be someone that has been through the experiences that I'm going through, possibly a multiple Grand Slam winner, former No.1," Djokovic said. "I was thinking about different people and then Andy Murray discussion appeared on the table with me and my team. (I decided) to give him a call

and see how it goes.

"It caught him a little bit off guard as well because he wasn't expecting it, so we connected really fast and he accepted after a few days."

Djokovic will be targeting a record-extending 11th Australian Open crown under twice Wimbledon winner and three times Grand Slam champion Murray's guidance when the first major of the year begins on January 12.



PAI XI's Vinukumar CG scored 59 off 57 balls

Braveheart beat Bravos, PAI XI win

Muscat - Braveheart XI beat Bravos XI by six wickets in Oman Cricket's Intermediate Division League. Jeet Shah scored a composed 61 for Braveheart while Amir Mehmood took three wickets for 20 runs.

In A Division League 2024-25 powered by Khimji Ramdas LLC, PAI XI beat Design Group by 45 runs while in G Division League Dollar Car Rental beat Khedmah & Wasel Exchange by 39 runs.

Brief Scores : Bravos XI 129/10 in 29.3 overs (Gustav Burger 40(36) - 4x4;6x1; Amir Mehmood 3/20) lost to Brave-

heart XI 130/4 in 31 overs (Jeet Shah 61(104) - 4x5; Saumya Sampat 2/22) by 6 wickets.

PAI XI 162/9 in 30 overs (Vinukumar CG 59(57) - 4x5;6x2; Vignesh Kumar 2/27) beat Design Group 117/10 in 27.1 overs (Waseem Abbas 26(24) - 4x2,6x1 ; Ali Muhammed 3/30) by 45 runs.

Dollar Car Rental 142/6 in 20 overs (Aniket PG 34(15) - 4x2;6x1; Muhd Yousaf 3/19) beat Khedmah & Wasel Exchange 103/10 in 16.2 overs (Durga Prasad 22(17) - 4x4; Sharif Pindook 3/30) by 39 runs.

JANSEN STARS IN PROTEAS' BIG WIN

South Africa break Sri Lanka's resistance to win first Test

Durban, South Africa - South Africa's lanky speedster Marco Jansen took the last two wickets as the hosts won the first Test against Sri Lanka by 233 runs on Saturday but had to toil hard to break down stubborn resistance to prevail before tea on the fourth day at Kingsmead.

Jansen finished with match figures of 11-86 - the second best in Test history in Durban - as Sri Lanka were dismissed for 282 to hand South Africa a fourth straight Test win and keep up hopes of a place in the 2025 World Test Championship final.

However, Sri Lanka went some way to restoring their own confidence ahead of next week's second Test after being rolled over for 42 in the first innings, their lowest ever Test score.

Dinesh Chandimal scored an impressive 83 and Dhananjaya da Silva a brisk 59 off 81 balls in a much better batting display on Saturday, even if the match-winning target of 516 looked near impossible.

Resuming from their overnight score of 103-5, the tourists put on 93 runs in the



South Africa's Marco Jansen celebrates the wicket of Sri Lanka's Kusal Mendes

Jansen finished with figures of 11-86 - the second best in Test history in Durban - as Sri Lanka were dismissed for 282 to hand South Africa a fourth straight Test win and keep up hopes of a place in WTC final

opening 90 minutes before captain Da Silva chipped a slower delivery from spinner Keshav Maharaj to Tristan Stubbs at mid-wicket.

South Africa would have been hoping to run through the last

five wickets when play started but it proved much harder than anticipated on a hot day with significant humidity.

There was another 75 runs added for the seventh wicket before Chandimal fended a delivery from Gerald Coetzee that popped straight back to the bowler.

Vishwa Fernando lasted only five balls before a healthy edge off Maharaj saw him depart and then the dangerous Kusal Mendes was caught behind off Jansen for 48.

Jansen, appropriately, secured the win in a Test in which he was the star performer by bowling Asitha Fernando.

"I never thought I would get 10 wickets. It is a dream and that is what we work for. The second innings we felt the wicket was low

and slow and a bit flatter," said Jansen.

Victory for South Africa followed Test success over West Indies in Guyana in August and Bangladesh in a two-test series in October.

South Africa will have a strong chance of competing in the WTC final at Lord's in June if they win the second Test against Sri Lanka and then two tests versus Pakistan at home at the end of the year and in early January.

The second Test against Sri Lanka starts in Gqeberha on Thursday.

Brook's 171 puts England in control of Christchurch Test

Christchurch, New Zealand - England took charge of the first test against New Zealand on Saturday, riding Harry Brook's 171 to a first-innings lead of 151 before reducing the Black Caps to 155 for six at close of play on day three in Christchurch.

New Zealand openers Tom Latham and Devon Conway departed cheaply before tea, and the crisis deepened when Kane Williamson and Tom Blundell were dismissed in successive balls in the final session with the hosts still in arrears.

Williamson offered hope with an innings of 61 but it all but disappeared when Chris Woakes, belying his reputation as a bowler who struggles outside England, trapped him in front and then had Blundell caught behind off a nick for a golden duck. Glenn Phillips fended off the hat-trick ball but followed his teammates off the field in the last 20 minutes of play when he was dismissed lbw for 19 by Brydon Carse.

Daryl Mitchell, unbeaten on 31, and debutant all-rounder



England's Harry Brook celebrates his century against New Zealand

Nathan Smith, who had scored one not out, were at the crease at stumps with New Zealand just four runs ahead.

"I had a lot of luck, didn't I? Thankfully I cashed in," said Brook. "We're in an amazing position to go on and win the game."

The Black Caps will have a long, hard look at their fielding as they reflect on their poor position after five dropped catches helped Brook to his match-turning tally.

England skipper Ben Stokes also benefited from a few as he provided the glue for a series of partnerships that pushed the visitors to 499 in response to New Zealand's 348.

Brook had resumed on 132 with England 319-5 and the 25-year-old played with great freedom and some style as he and Stokes put on 159 for the sixth wicket.

Defying the new ball, Brook

punched his 13th four through covers to move past the 150 mark before blasting a huge six on to a grandstand roof.

By the time he got an edge on a Matt Henry delivery and was caught behind, Brook had hit 15 fours and three sixes in his 197-ball knock to take his batting average in three tests in New Zealand to 100.

Henry (4-84) also finally dismissed Stokes for 80 but England's tail wagged hard with Gus Atkinson adding 48 runs off 36 balls and Carse an unbeaten 33 from 24.

Woakes (3-39) had failed to take a wicket in the first innings but wasted no time in removing Latham for one before Carse (3-22) and Atkinson combined to send back Conway for eight.

Williamson became the first New Zealander to accumulate 9,000 test runs on his way to his 61, a rare highlight on a largely dismal day for the home fans.

"Fielding's something we pride ourselves on and that's the part that hurts," said Henry.



Josh Hazlewood

Australia's Hazlewood out of second Test against India

Melbourne, Australia - Australia fast bowler Josh Hazlewood has been ruled out of the second Test against India in Adelaide with a low grade side injury in a further blow to the hosts.

Hazlewood took five wickets in the first Test in Perth where Australia were thrashed by 295 runs to fall 1-0 behind in the five-match series.

Crickets Australia said Sean Abbott and Brendan Doggett had been brought into the squad for the day-night Test at Adelaide Oval which starts Dec. 6,

although Scott Boland is Hazlewood's most likely replacement.

Australia have another injury concern for all-rounder Mitchell Marsh who pulled up sore after bowling 17 overs in Perth.

Uncapped all-rounder Beau Webster was called into the squad two days ago as cover for Marsh.

Australia are already without regular all-rounder Cameron Green, who was ruled out of the series after opting to have surgery on a stress fracture in his lumbar spine.

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How did you get interested in birds of Oman?

It all started with photography and then I evolved to filming documentaries and writing books on birds. So, my relationship with photography started many years ago, when in the 90s I set up a commercial and industrial photography studio in Ruwi. In those days, there was no digital photography and we produced our work mainly using medium format. The studio's main camera was a Mamiya RB67, a camera I had to travel to buy. Most of our studio lights were bought and shipped from India.

Fast forward to around 2010, I was crossing the Sharqiya Sands when we stopped for a coffee break under a few palm trees irrigated by an underground well. A medium sized bird perched on the fence and I quickly changed my lens and captured my first photograph of a Barn Owl. That was my first encounter with an owl, at midday. Later of course I managed to photograph many owls.

From that day onward, I concentrated my photography on birds and wildlife in general. It was like I found my niche, my calling. Then I began to strive to spend much time in the great outdoors, photographing and recording my observations. Simultaneously, I started reading and learning about ornithology.

In 2016, I left my day job and applied to pursue a Masters Degree in Wildlife Documentary Production in the UK. Thanks to technology, I was interviewed by the University of Salford while I was birding near the Thai border with Myanmar. While at the university, I filmed and produced three documentaries on birds in Oman and later made another longer documentary on the effects of a cyclone on birdlife in Dhofar.

I had also worked on my first book about birds, which was published in 2016. Later during COVID times, I worked on smaller books for younger readers. I had been a writer for much of my working life, so this felt like a natural progression and one which I enjoy thoroughly.

Photography, writing and filming takes a lot of time, how do you manage the three interests?

These interests intersect but they demand some form of discipline, in the sense that they require you to wake up early. I tend to do much of the writing in the very early hours of the morning so that I can be in the field by sunrise. I am again in the field by late afternoon. But this is not a daily routine, to accommodate another equally important step.

BOOK ON BIRDS

CALL FROM THE SKIES



Nasser al Kindi, an avid nature lover, wildlife photographer-filmmaker and writer on Friday launched his new book *101 birds of Oman*, a treasured project - the fruit of over10 years of labour - committing part of the proceeds of sale towards the Let's Read campaign. He shot a photo of a barn owl in the Sharqiyah sands 15 years ago, and that's where his fascination for birds began and finally turned to a 'calling', he tells **Hubert Vaz** in an exclusive interview. Excerpts:

Today's cameras allow us to take many frames per second (fps). While this is a welcome technology, it does mean that you go back to your studio with huge files and a large number of images; sometimes thousands of images. So, in addition to photographing and filming, I spend days culling images and post-processing the selected ones. These selected photos are then catalogued, archived and backed up.

This is an important step. As a writer, I am particularly interested in photographs that capture a profile of the bird as well as some of its most important field markings. There are other elements that go in the selection process, such as lighting, background and above all the posture of the head and eye contact. The latter means that the head of the bird is turned towards the camera at an angle of around 30 to 45 degrees.

Could you describe your latest book 101 Birds of Oman and how it came about?

101 Birds of Oman provides photos and descriptions of 101 birds. The photos were taken in the span of around ten or more years. The descriptions are written in an easy-to-follow manner, so that they are accessible to people not familiar to birding jargon.

The book also has an introduction that furnishes important information about birds in Oman and outlines how the book was written and the photos compiled. It is important to note that all photos were taken in the field without the use of any form of baiting or calls etc. I simply roam around the country at different seasons, following migration and transiting periods. Some photos were taken from my car, others were captured with me crawling on my belly, with camouflage over me. Sometimes, the camouflage is a simple bed sheet or table cloth, in colours that match the surroundings. For example, I photograph shore birds by following this simple tactic - I watch where they feed, park my car, and start crawling towards them with camouflage over me. Often, the birds might fly away, but 20 minutes or so later they come back and feed oblivious to my presence.

I have over the years developed a number of tactics to approach birds and get closer to them without them feeling frightened by my presence. Last week, for example, I photographed a Common Redstart feeding near sulphur water in the Empty Quarter while I was on foot. It was so comfortable with my presence and eventually so curious that it came too close for my camera to lock focus. But I gave it its space and time and it started posing for the camera atop tiny plants and shrubs, while I was flat on my belly, with the camera and large lens mounted on a ground pod.

It is in moments like these and encounters as such that I feel one with nature. I am in total silence, eyes focused, head clear of pre-occupations, and then nature plays its chorus of beautiful tunes.

Can you tell us about the bird habitats in Oman and how favourable they are for birds?

There are a number of important habitats in Oman. In fact, we know of at least 33 important bird and biodiversity habitats designated by Birdlife International. There are also at least 18 potential RAMSAR sites, that is the Convention on Wetlands.

And we do not have to go far to see and enjoy watching birdlife. Muscat, for example, boasts a great number of birding sites, such as Qurum Nature Reserve (Qurum Park) and the khors (wadi and sea water bays) along the road from the coastal road from Ghubrah to Seeb. There is also Quriyat, a great habitat to watch birds. By far, the greatest two areas for birding in Oman are Fins and Barr al Hikman on one side and the coastal plains of Dhofar on the other. The unique weather patterns of Dhofar allow for migration throughout the year.

Do you think this book can be kept in school/college libraries for young researchers? Are you working towards that?

Absolutely. Indeed, I am often asked by schools to present birdlife to their students and pupils. At the moment, I am working on a number of projects, amongst them some intended to younger readers. I am also co-authoring a book on wildlife, which will hopefully see the light soon, when we find a sponsor to help us print the book.

There is also a huge community of travellers coming to Oman to see birds. Sometimes, I stop to chat, mainly because I am curious how they have reached that particular place about which very few people know. Last month, while travelling to Salalah by road, I stopped a few kilometres from the main road. I do not know of many people that know that place. There, I found the birders who have flown all the way from Spain to watch birds in Oman. They told me that they had come to know about this place while reading many field reports on the Internet.



Nasser al Kindi

FEATHERY FRIENDS

- My favourite bird of Oman: Owl
- The rarest bird of Oman: Many migrant birds are rarely encountered
- Best bird sighting venue: Film and Barr al Hikman
- Best time of year to spot birds: Winter
- What you love most about bird behaviour? There's so much we can learn from birds - their tenacity, perseverance, focus and care for their families.
- What you dislike about birds? Nothing
- What would you tell people who keep birds in cages as pets? Kahlil Gibran (Gibran Khalil Gibran) said, 'A caged bulbul does not weave a nest so as not to pass on enslavement to its chicks.'
- Do you like ostriches? Sure...all creatures have a right to live freely.
- Do you understand the chirps/cries of birds? I recognise the callings of some and still learning those of others.
- Do you dream about birds? Hahaha...I do not think I should admit that.



Hidden casualties

AS THE ENVIRONMENT SUFFERS SEVERE DAMAGE IN THE MIDDLE EAST DUE TO THE CURRENT CONFLICT, EXPERTS BELIEVE URGENT RESTORATION AND CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION MAY HELP US AVOID ITS LASTING IMPACT

Observance of the International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict earlier in November highlighted the often-overlooked toll war exacts on nature. While war casualties are typically counted in human lives and destroyed cities, nature endures profound and silent damage.

The 2023-24 conflict in the Middle East exemplifies this destruction, with severe and widespread environmental impacts across the region. Hezbollah rocket attacks ignited wildfires that consumed over 2,500 acres in northern Israel, devastating habitats, worsening air pollution, and straining envi-

compassing both visible and underlying effects.

"There's been a lot of damage to ecosystems, natural forests, and shrublands on both sides of the border, both in the north and in the south," he explained. He described how fires have ravaged forested areas in northern Israel due to missile strikes, while in southern Lebanon, military actions have led to significant damage, including the intentional destruction of vegetation used as natural camouflage for Hezbollah hideouts. "The natural vegetation and ecosystems have been impacted quite severely due to the

the diversion of vital resources away from critical global issues. "One of the main things is all of the budget, lost time, and energies that get directed towards political violence." He pointed out the immediate environmental hazards, such as untreated sewage and accumulated waste.

"People are breathing it in, and it's on the ground. It will linger unless thorough cleaning is done," Garb emphasised. He noted that even in stable times, these regions struggled to allocate enough resources for critical environmental challenges such as biodiversity loss, climate

and emissions resulting from military operations. "With all the tanks, aircraft, and heavy machinery, the military is using enormous amounts of fuel, releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere," he noted.

"While globally, the impact might not be noticeable, regionally, it's undoubtedly contributing to air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions," he said, further noting hazards from fuel leaks. "People care less about pollution during warfare, and leaks from petrol tanks, along with waste from feeding soldiers, can lead to serious pollution. This waste can have a chain reaction, attracting rodents and impacting local ecosystems," he explained.

Addressing infrastructure damage, Price described Gaza's dire situation. "The desalination plant that provides drinking water was out of service, so people had to rely on bottled water, which caused plastic pollution," he explained. He also mentioned that damaged sewage treatment facilities caused untreated sewage to flow through streets and into the Mediterranean Sea, further polluting the environment and endangering public health. "These facilities normally provide essential services, but when they're damaged, it takes time and risk to repair them, and crews are often unable to work safely during the conflict," he added, emphasising the cascading impact on daily life and health.

widespread problem," Garb noted.

Price discussed fires near the Israel-Lebanon border, highlighting the dual threat they pose to human health and ecosystems. "The smoke from these fires contains dangerous particles, impacting health," he said, noting that many residents in northern Israel have been forced to evacuate. The ecological damage could take years to repair. "It may take five, ten, or even 15 years for vegetation to grow back, depending on the severity of the fires. Ecosystem recovery is a slow process," Price added, emphasizing the need for strategic planning, including replanting fire-resistant vegetation.

Price acknowledged the immense challenges of addressing

environmental damage in an active war zone while discussing potential solutions. "It's hard to carry out environmental recovery work during a military operation because it's simply too dangerous," he said. However, he expressed hope for post-conflict restoration efforts, which he views as essential. "Once the fighting ends, we can work on reforestation, restoring wetlands, and landscape planning to encourage natural regeneration," he said.

Garb emphasized the lasting environmental impact of damaged tree cover and neglected agricultural land. When asked about solutions, Garb stressed the urgent need to end the conflict: "It's very simplistic and sweeping, but you stop the war.

Both sides need to focus on the real pressing long-term issues that are not going away," he said. "The sooner we face them and devote time to them, the better."

Price underscored the interconnected nature of environmental challenges, suggesting they could inspire cooperation between opposing sides. "Despite the mistrust, there are still ways both sides work under the radar," he said, referring to shared resources such as the Mediterranean Sea. "Pollution doesn't recognize borders, and untreated sewage from Gaza could easily wash up on Israeli beaches, so there's an interest in cross-border cooperation when it comes to environmental protection," he concluded.



ronmental management efforts. In Lebanon, military operations have destroyed 11,000 acres of forest and 2,000 acres of farmland. In Gaza, nearly 39mn tonnes of debris have polluted the environment, damaged wastewater treatment systems, tainted water supplies, and deepened the food security crisis.

The United Nations Environment Program reports that over the past 60 years, at least 40% of internal conflicts have been linked to natural resource exploitation, including oil, timber, fertile land, and water.

Professor Colin Price of Tel Aviv University's School of Geosciences detailed the extensive environmental damage from the 2023 Middle East conflict, en-

Pollution doesn't recognise borders, and untreated sewage from Gaza could easily wash up on Israeli beaches, so there's an interest in cross-border cooperation when it comes to environmental protection

COLIN PRICE

war," Price emphasised.

Yaakov Garb, a professor of interdisciplinary environmental research at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, discussed the significant but often overlooked environmental consequences of the ongoing conflict, especially

change, and food security. "Before the war, they barely had the budgets and attention span for those things. After the war, certainly not," he added.

In addition to immediate ecosystem damage, Price highlighted the significant pollution

Garb, who has extensive experience addressing contamination issues globally, including in the West Bank and Gaza, detailed the types of pollution war can create. "When one building burns down, it releases all kinds of harmful substances. You burn the plastic, there are batteries inside, and almost everything you can think of—especially plastics and electronics—releases nasty substances when burned in an uncontrolled way," he explained.

He described the far-reaching impact of explosions and fires, which disperse fine particles over extensive areas.

"These particles come from industrial facilities, factories with chemicals, and storage places with heavy metals. It's a

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