



Sayyid Badr receives solidarity calls from Iraqi, Jordanian FMs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Bussaidi, Foreign Minister, spoke with his counterparts from Iraq and Jordan on Wednesday. Speaking with Fuad Hussein, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Iraq, H E Sayyid Badr reviewed the growing rela-

tions between the two countries. They also touched on key developments and underlined the two countries' consistent visions that back all means of maintaining regional and global security, stability and peace. Hussein expressed his country's solidarity with Oman over



Iraq's Fuad Hussein and Jordan's Ayman Safadi also reviewed with H E Sayyid Badr the growing ties between their countries and Oman

the gun attack that took place in the vicinity of a mosque in Wadi Kabir. He also extended Iraq's condolences over the death of some civilians and the martyrdom of a serviceman. On his part, Ayman Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates in Jordan, expressed his country's solidarity

with Oman for the shooting on Monday night. He also extended his country's condolences to Oman. During the call, the two ministers underscored the distinguished relations between Oman and Jordan. They also underlined the ongoing fruitful cooperation between the two countries in various fields.

OVER 225,000 TO BENEFIT FROM MATERNITY LEAVE INSURANCE

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Social Protection Fund (SPF) announced on Wednesday that the sultanate's maternity leave insurance programme will commence on July 19. The programme will benefit 225,981 individuals, including 160,886 Omanis. The announcement was made during a media briefing attended by representatives of Unicef, World Health Organization (WHO), International Labour Organization, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Social Development. The insurance programme is a significant step towards enhancing social welfare and supporting mothers in the sultanate. It aims to protect the rights of working women and ensure their well-being during maternity. International recommendations on maternity protection have been incorporated into the Social Protection Law. Key aspects of the insurance programme include safeguarding

working women and their children from health risks associated with maternity; providing financial support during maternity, paternity and care leaves; and ensuring economic security during these periods. Employers are required to contribute 1% of the employee's basic daily wage to the maternity leave fund. The insurance covers all Omanis employed across various sectors, including those under temporary and training contracts, as well as retired workers. It also covers non-Omani workers within the state's administrative units and the private sector. The benefits comprise maternity leave allowance, paternity leave allowance and childcare leave, besides maternity leave allowance for those no longer in service but eligible for job security allowance. The media briefing featured eight working papers addressing different aspects of maternity protection and support mechanisms. These papers covered topics such as the social protec-



Oman's commitment to the well-being of Omani and non-Omani workers places it at the forefront of the region in its inclusiveness and investments

SUMAIRA CHOWDHURY

tion system, sustainable population development, family welfare, WHO recommendations on postpartum care, and the crucial role of early life stages in child development. UN praise for Oman The United Nations, represented by Unicef, UNFPA and WHO, praised Oman for its new mater-

nity leave insurance programme. "I commend Oman for its commitment to the well-being of Omani and non-Omani workers, an achievement that places it at the forefront of the region in its inclusiveness and investments," said Sumaira Chowdhury, Unicef Representative in Oman. The UNFPA GCC office highlighted the fact that 'reproductive health is the basis for equal economic and social participation, and prioritising reproductive health, including maternity and paternity leave, can improve productivity, reduce absenteeism, and enhance the economic empowerment of women and society'. Dr Jean Jabbour, WHO Representative in Oman, stressed the importance of a mother's presence in the early months of a child's life. He said, "This early period is crucial in shaping the child's health, emotional and social future. Paid maternity leave ensures mothers have enough time to rest and care for their newborns, and is linked to higher rates of breastfeeding initiation and continuation."

H M gets call from Belgian King

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq received a phone call from Philippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians, on Wednesday. During the call, the two discussed areas of bilateral cooperation between the two friendly countries and ways to advance these in various fields, in addition to exchanging views on developments in the region. The Belgian King conveyed his country's solidarity with the sultanate following the gun attack in Muscat on Monday night, praising the measures taken by the competent authorities. His Majesty the Sultan thanked the Belgian King for his noble and kind gesture.

Majlis A'Shura condemns Wadi Kabir shooting

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Majlis A'Shura strongly condemned the gun attack in Wadi Kabir on Monday night, expressing sorrow over the tragic loss of lives and injuries sustained. In a statement, the shura extended heartfelt condolences to the families of the five deceased individuals and sympathies to the family of Royal Oman Police officer Youssef al Nadabi. The attack also resulted in injuries to 28 individuals of various nationalities, including ROP and Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority personnel who were performing their duties. The statement included

prayers for the deceased, invoking mercy and forgiveness from God, and wished a swift recovery for all those injured. It acknowledged and appreciated the efforts of Oman's security and military agencies, as well as the contributions of citizens and residents in containing the situation, praising their collective national efforts. The shura expressed dismay at the shooting, emphasising that such actions, regardless of their motives, are unacceptable on Omani soil. The statement concluded with a prayer for the ongoing safety and stability of Oman under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

RO19mn investment in Buraimi Industrial City in first half of 2024

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The volume of investments in Buraimi Industrial City in the first six months of 2024 totalled more than RO19mn, with the overall investment volume in the facility reaching RO277mn. The workforce consisted of 1,674 individuals, including 365 Omanis and 1,309 expatriate workers, achieving Omanisation rate of 22%. Highlighting significant growth in the number of projects, investments and leased areas, Saeed bin Abdullah al Balushi, Director General of Buraimi In-



dustrial City, informed that the number of investments increased to 362 projects, with an additional 115 third-party pro-

jects by mid-2024, taking the total to 477 projects. Leased area in the city expanded to 1,879,101sqm.

During the first half of 2024, 15 projects were set up - covering approximately 87,000sqm - including industrial, commercial and service sectors, reflecting project diversity. Balushi also spoke about incentives provided by the facility for new contracts signed in 2024, including 100% exemption from rental fees for 24 months and 50% exemption for the subsequent 36 months. These measures aim to support the national economy by generating job opportunities for citizens and enhancing local production, thereby contributing to the overall GDP.

'Lasting peace is foundation of sustainable development'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Dr Said al Saqri, Minister of Economy and Chair of Arab Forum for Sustainable Development 2024, delivered a compelling speech at the opening of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development at the United Nations headquarters on Tuesday. The address underscored Oman's dedication to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and promoting

peace, social prosperity and economic stability at national, regional and international levels. On the sidelines of the forum, H E Saqri met Dennis Francis, President of the UN General Assembly at its 78th session. Francis commended Oman's policy of fostering peace and encouraging dialogue. "Oman, under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, is a beacon of peace, promoting dialogue and understanding, and consolidating the



H E Dr Said al Saqri with Dennis Francis in New York on Tuesday

principles of coexistence," Francis stated. He further highlighted Oman's ambition to elevate its development to the ranks of developed countries by building a modern state, shaping human capabilities, and focusing on creating a knowledge-based society. Saqri stressed on Oman's strategic role in fostering regional peace and stability through impartial and independent policies. He underscored Oman's participation in mediation efforts be-

tween Iran and the United States, besides supporting international organisations that promote peace and provide humanitarian aid to conflict-affected areas. "Oman believes that lasting peace is the foundation of sustainable development," Saqri stated. At the national level, Oman is committed to improving the quality of life for its citizens by investing in education, health, infrastructure and economic activities, he added.



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Drones used to document Oman's majestic legacy

Visitors upset over high airfares to Salalah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With the arrival of khareef, Dhofar has turned into a lush green oasis, offering a refreshing escape for GCC tourists from the scorching summer heat. Last year, over 1mn visitors flocked to the governorate, drawn by its unique charm and favourable weather.

However, the excitement of khareef is marred by soaring airfares, leaving many potential visitors in Muscat frustrated. Despite the Ministry of Transport, Communication and Information Technology's appeal to airlines to keep fares reasonable, travellers say prices of the two national airlines - Oman Air and SalamAir - have significantly increased. Ticket prices are a major deterrent for tourists hoping to visit Salalah during the peak season.

Muscat resident Salem Mohammad expressed his disappointment saying, "I wanted to take my family for a weekend visit to Salalah, but I was quoted ticket prices of over RO70 per head. For a family of five, it's just not affordable."

His disappointment is shared by many who feel that the focus during khareef should not solely be profits.

Iqbal Mansoor Khan is dismayed by the high ticket prices.



(Supplied photo)

The high ticket prices could have a long-term impact on Dhofar's tourism industry, which heavily relies on the influx of visitors during khareef

IQBAL MANSOOR KHAN

"While the demand for flights to Salalah remains high, the high airfares risk discouraging tourists from visiting."

He noted that this could have a long-term impact on Dhofar's tourism industry, which heavily relies on the influx of visitors during khareef. "Authorities must find a balance between

In the last few days, I have received close to 200 queries from groups ranging from eight to 20 travellers, but they back out because of high airfares

MOHAMMAD SHARIF

the economy and accessibility, ensuring that khareef continues to be for everyone."

Mohammad Sharif, Managing Director of Pink Stone Travel and Tourism, said, "There is huge demand for Salalah this time of the year, continuing till August. This is the perfect time for businesses, as Salalah remains quiet the rest of the year. In the last few days, I have received close to 200 queries from groups ranging from eight to 20 travellers, but they back out because of high airfares."

According to an official at Global Travel Company, the high ticket prices are a result of demand and supply. "This is the only time of the year when airlines flying this sector, travel agents and hotels can make a substantial profit. It's a short season and everyone tries to capitalise on it."

The travel agencies informed that Muscat-Salalah return fares are about RO120 for SalamAir and RO165 for Oman Air. The same tickets cost from RO65 to RO70 offseason.

Earlier this year, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology fixed economy class return airfares on the Muscat-Salalah route for citizens at RO64; RO35 one way throughout the year. For khareef, return fare was fixed at RO54.



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PODC/SCM/008/2024	PODC Muscat Office Interior Design and Fit-out works	24 th July 2024	06 th August 2024	Only Specialized Companies	30/- Non-Refundable	Via Email

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Tourism gets a boost with development of Thowarah, Kasfa springs in South Batinah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

South Batinah has completed the development of two important tourist sites - Ain al Thowarah and Ain al Kasfa - aimed at bolstering domestic tourism.

According to Khalifa Saleh al Busaidi, Wali of Nakhal, Ain al Thowarah has been upgraded with amenities, including entertainment activities, children's play areas, cafes and ample parking. "Renowned for its hot springs, the site near Nakhal Fort attracts numerous local and international visitors annually. The ingenuity of the local agricultural



(Supplied photo)

practices are adapted to the surrounding falaj irrigation systems," he said.

Additionally, Ain al Kasfa in

Rustaq, known for its therapeutic sulphur-rich hot springs, has undergone a RO400,000 development initiative encom-

passing 14 distinct projects. These enhancements include swimming pools, dining establishments, expanded parking facilities and a heritage market, all designed to enrich the visitor experience and elevate the site's appeal to tourists.

For 2024, South Batinah Municipality has announced several development projects in Nakhal, including improvements to the wilayat's entrance, paving internal roads and establishing two parks in residential neighbourhoods.

According to the latest data for 2023, South Batinah has 233 tourist facilities.

OFM opens registration for farmers to buy wheat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Flour Mills (OFM) - in coordination with Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources - has announced the opening of registration for interested farmers to sell their 2024/2025 season wheat harvest.

Open to farmers from all governorates, the move is aimed at empowering them to avail the wheat purchase programme subsidy. The registration process will continue till October 31, 2024 via

www.omaniibur.com

The announcement is in line with OFM's efforts to enhance food security and encourage Omani farmers to grow wheat.

OFM purchases wheat harvested from local farmers annually to contribute to boosting wheat production and introduce Omani wheat to local and regional markets.

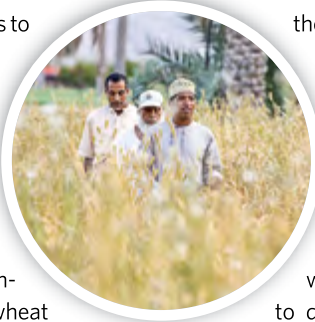
OFM urged farmers to adhere to the quality standards in pro-

ducing and harvesting their crop. The company supports farmers by purchasing different varieties of Omani wheat through the wheat purchase subsidy programme in co-operation with the ministry, in order to expand cultivation of wheat locally, as well as contribute to developing Omani wheat products.

OFM purchased 10,000 tonnes of wheat in 2024, recording a

growth of 100% compared to 2023. Wheat was purchased from 95 farmers, compared to 65 in 2023 - up 45% - reflecting the company's contribution to promoting wheat cultivation in the sultanate as part of its strategy to boost food security.

"The increase in the quantity of local wheat sold to OFM this season reflects the level of demand for Omani wheat, which is highly accepted by consumers in local and regional markets due to its high quality," the company stated following the 2023-2024 harvest season.



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Students develop machine to assist farmers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Four students of University of Technology and Applied Sciences Muscat have developed a machine to improve efficiency of date harvesting.

The team of Moataz Abdullah al Muqbali, Ayoub al Nadabi, Suleiman al Wahaibi and Ahmed al Daghaishi was inspired by the sultanate's initiative to plant a million date trees.

In 2021, Oman Investment Authority took over the management of the Million Palm Trees Plantation Project, which now has 11 farms spread in different governorates - two farms in Dakhliyah (Nizwa and Samail), three in Dahirah (Ibri), one in North Sharqiyah (Ibra), one in South Sharqiyah (Al Kamil), two in Buraimi (Al Sunainah), and two

farms in Dhofar (Sheleem and Maqshan).

Explaining their motivation, team leader Muqbali, said, "We decided to develop this machine because farmers involved in the Million Palm Trees Plantation Project traditionally harvest dates manually, which is labour-intensive and time-consuming. We aim to streamline the collection process with our machine, ensuring it's both efficient and safe, thereby boosting productivity while reducing human effort."

The machine's key components include columns for height adjustment, an electric saw powered by a battery, a hydraulic motor, a collection basket, and a handle for easy manoeuvrability.

Highlighting the challenges the team encountered while developing the machine, Muqbali said, "One of the main hurdles

The team (in blue) that developed the machine (inset) to improve efficiency of date harvesting on a farm visit

Financial constraints and need of proper guidance from experts and companies also posed obstacles. The team persevered to complete a prototype and are now focused on finetuning the machine for optimal results. The team aims to secure a patent and eventually commercialise the innovation.

The team is grateful to Dr Mohammed al Saidi, its supervisor, for his unwavering support throughout the project, and Nakheel Oman Company for facilitating visits to various farms, enabling it to gather insights and information, and discuss the project with specialists.

"Omani youth should believe in their ideas, work diligently towards their goals, and not be discouraged by challenges. Success requires sustained effort and belief in one's vision," Muqbali said.

We aim to streamline the date collection process with our machine, ensuring it's both efficient and safe

MOATAZ AL MUQBALI

was the unavailability of data on date farms and cultivation practices, which are not well documented and region specific. This led to a prolonged period of research to gather all the necessary information for our project."

Tourism booms in Jabal Akhdar with 84,869 visitors

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The wilayat of Jabal Akhdar in Dakhliyah received 84,869 visitors in the first half of 2024, up from 79,034 in the same period in 2023, marking a 7.37% increase.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information, among the visitors this year, 34,125 were Omanis. The tourists from Gulf countries included 3,012 Saudis, 566 Emiratis, 563 Kuwaitis, 306 Bahrainis and 279 Qataris. Tourists from other Arab countries totalled 3,700, while foreign visitors numbered 42,318.

To further bolster tourism, Jabal Akhdar Summer Activities will commence on Thursday and continue until September 14. These activities will be held at DusitD2 Naseem Resort and

Jabal Akhdar Hotel, featuring cultural, social, sports, entertainment and heritage events. The summer activities programme is part of the governorate's strategy to boost local

tourism and showcase Jabal Akhdar's natural and cultural attractions.

The summer activities programme aims to promote environmentally friendly agricultural

tourism, offering unique experiences to attract tourists and boost the local economy. These diversified tourism offerings are created to enhance Jabal Akhdar's status as a primary destination for cultural and agri-tourism. Additionally, the programme aims to support local farmers by helping market their produce.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is encouraging investment in Jabal Akhdar, especially in tourist resorts, hotels, rest houses and guest houses. Its initiatives are designed to stimulate tourism and ensure the local community benefits from tourism activities.

Rahab Farm: Leading date farming revolution

Our Correspondent
Salalah

Rahab Farm in the wilayat of Shalim, Hallaniyat Islands in Dhofar, is a pioneering date farming project. It contributes significantly to food security, economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability.

Part of Nakheel Oman Development Company (NODC), the farm is committed to boosting the date palm sector through the adoption of cutting-edge agricultural technologies and scientific advancements.

Shabib bin Ali al Mahrouqi, Senior Specialist for Agricultural Support Services at NODC, informed that the farm - 25km from Marmul Airport - is spread over 6sqkm and has 40,000 date

palm trees of al fard and khalas varieties.

In a significant stride towards environmental stewardship, the farm embarked on a carbon neutrality initiative by planting 30,000 lemon trees on 96 hectares in 2023. This initiative - in collaboration with Petroleum Development Oman and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources - aims to increase Oman's lemon productivity by 38%.

Elaborating on the farm's sustainable water management practices, which rely on groundwater as the primary water source, Mahrouqi said modern irrigation techniques, integrated with sensor technology, ensure precise water delivery to plants to optimise productivity and efficiency.



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Chinese technology sets off alarm bells

Berlin, Germany - On July 11, the German Interior Ministry (BMI) announced that by the end of 2026 components made by Chinese technology companies Huawei and ZTE 'must no longer be used' in building up the country's next-generation 5G mobile networks. Already existing components, the BMI decided, 'must be replaced by the end of 2029'.

The German government considers 5G networks 'critical infrastructure' because they are crucial for the energy sector, transportation, health care and financial services.

The ban comes as Chinese technology firms are increasingly viewed with suspicions for their allegedly too close ties to the government in Beijing. Especially Beijing's drive to make companies like Huawei and ZTE world leaders in high-tech sectors makes Western governments wary of giving them too much influence on their national infrastructures.

Wind power market new battlefield

Another German-Chinese collaboration has caused a stir in this



Germany will phase out components made by China's Huawei and ZTE from its 5G wireless network over the next five years

respect. Luxcara - an independent asset manager based in Hamburg, Germany, - announced it had contracted Chinese company Ming Yang to build the turbines for a wind project off the German coast.

The decision for Ming Yang was based on an extensive due

diligence exercise, covering the supply chain, ESG [environmental, social, and governance] compliance aligned with the EU taxonomy and cyber security supported by independent experts from renowned international advisors,' the company said in a statement on July 2.

Energy supply is also considered critical infrastructure in Germany, as the country strives to generate 80% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2035.

Wind power is expected to be a significant part of the future electricity mix. Official German data show that in the first three

months of this year, 38.5% of all electricity produced in Germany came from wind power. No other renewable energy source has grown so significantly.

Lars Haugwitz, senior consultant at Luxcara, says Luxcara "chose the most powerful turbines" for their Waterkant wind

park project. "Ming Yang was the only company that could meet the delivery time by 2028 with an 18.5-megawatt unit," he told DW, adding that the decision was based on a thorough review of all the offers they'd received during the international tender.

With a little help from Beijing

To date, Danish company Vestas and German-Spanish manufacturer Siemens Gamesa have dominated offshore wind power in Europe. However, other German wind farm operators are now also considering Chinese companies as suppliers.

According to German business daily *Handelsblatt*, energy giant RWE is among them, with the newspaper citing limited supply of wind turbines in Europe and high demand as reasons.

In a statement, the Germany-based utility said it has no Chinese suppliers in its wind portfolio so far and was planning to continue working with established European suppliers. However, a company spokesperson told DW that the offshore industry needs to understand "what

products Asian suppliers can offer and whether they meet the requirements in terms of technology, quality, safety and cost-effectiveness".

Data leaks a security risk?

There are several reasons why companies from Asia are often leading in new technologies, says Michael Tanten, managing director of Pure ISM, a company focused on data security in the renewable energy sector. They were 'mostly economic', he told DW, with "faster availability of the equipment" being the main one. Tanten sees another reason for mistrust toward Chinese suppliers: data security.

"Manufacturers usually operate their own control centers to monitor the wind farms they build. As long as these control centers aren't located in Germany, there is always a risk of unwanted influence on operations from abroad," he said, adding that he isn't aware of any Chinese manufacturer currently planning or intending to set up its own control center in Germany. DW

RAK Energy Summit to be held in November

Ras al Khaimah, UAE - Ras al Khaimah (RAK) Municipality announced the participation of the UAE Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, EDF and Ledvance as big sponsors at the RAK Energy Summit, to be hosted by Ras al Khaimah Municipality under the patronage of Sheikh Saud bin Saqr al Qasimi, UAE Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Ras al Khaimah.

The event, in its second edition slated to be held on November 27 and 28, is expected to provide a platform for dialogue and collaboration among thought leaders, trailblazers, and decision-makers from both government and private sectors under the theme 'Create and Contribute to the Sustainable Energy Goals of the Future'.

"The UAE is a pioneer in de-

veloping and adopting the latest sustainability practices and solutions that support its transition to clean energy," said Suhail al Mazrouei, UAE's Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, underlining that the RAK Energy Summit supports the objectives of the UAE Energy Strategy 2050, that calls for increasing the share of clean energy capacity in the total energy mix and tripling the share of re-

newable energy by 2030.

"The summit is an ideal opportunity for stakeholders to network, form partnerships, and develop sustainable energy solutions that can further cement the UAE's position as a global driver of energy security and climate action," he added.

The summit's agenda includes critical topics for the energy transition. WAM



European stocks open lower amid tech decline

Brussels, Belgium - European stocks opened lower for the third consecutive session on Wednesday, driven by a decline in the technology sector. The Stoxx 600 index dropped 0.3%, with the tech sub-index falling 1.9%.

Dutch semiconductor company ASML saw a significant decrease, with shares falling 5.3% after its supply of chip-making equipment missed third-quarter sales forecasts.

Additionally, investors are weighing the potential impact of stricter US trade regulations. Other semiconductor stocks also experienced losses, including ASM International and BE Semiconductor, both of which saw their shares decline by more than 2%.

Conversely, Adidas shares jumped 4.5% after the German sportswear manufacturer raised its full-year profit forecast following better-than-expected second-quarter results. Similarly, Puma, a competitor of Adidas, saw its shares rise by 2.5%.

Inflation at 2.5%

The eurozone's annual consumer inflation rate in June eased to 2.5% as initially estimated, according to a second reading released on Wednesday. The figure was down from 2.6% in May, Eurostat data showed.

Core inflation, excluding volatile food and energy prices, was stable at 2.9% in June compared to the prior month.

The cost of energy rose 0.2%

year-on-year in June, down from a 0.3% hike in May, while food inflation dipped to a three-year low of 1.6% in June, versus 1.9%.

Annual inflation in the EU also cooled to 2.6% in the month.

The lowest annual rates were seen in Finland (0.5%), Italy (0.9%), and Lithuania (1.0%), while the highest were recorded in Belgium (5.4%), Romania (5.3%), Spain and Hungary (both 3.6%). On a monthly basis, the eurozone's consumer price index rose 0.2% in May, matching the flash reading.

The eurozone/euro area, or EA19, represents member states that use the single currency - the euro - while the EU27 includes all member countries of the bloc.

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Economic buzz in Madinah's date market

Madinah, Saudi Arabia - The central date market in Madinah is experiencing a remarkable economic boom during the rhubab (semi-ripe dates) harvest season, which starts in the first quarter of June each year. 29,000 palm farms in the region supply this bustling market.

What sets the date market in Madinah apart is the wide variety of rhubab types available. Madinah and its governorates are renowned for their diverse selection, such as Rotana, Rabbi, Heiliah, and other unique varieties.

High temperatures influence the ripening speed of rhubab, initiating the harvesting process that lasts until the end of July.

Following this, the date harvesting begins and continues



until the end of August, after which farmers display their dates in the market. Some of the most famous types on display include Ajwa dates, Safawi dates, Amber dates, Medjool dates, Barni dates, and various other varieties.

The Madinah branch of the

Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture actively monitors the central date market to maintain quality standards. They oversee technical and health requirements, ensuring the products meet the necessary standards.

SPA

OCI, MoHERI collaborate for third year in a row to unveil SHE STEMS

Oman Cables Industry (OCI), the leading cable solutions provider in the Sultanate of Oman, announced the launch of the third edition of the SHE STEMS programme, 'SHE STEMS 3.0' in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI).

Building on the success of previous editions, OCI's 2024 SHE STEMS initiative reinforces its commitment to advancing gender diversity in the manufacturing and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) sectors as part of achieving its social ambition.

OCI announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in partnership with the ministry to further solidify this collaboration. This partnership between MoHERI and SHE STEMS 3.0 aligns with Oman's Vision 2040 that focuses on developing a progressive, inclusive, and diversified economy.

H E Dr Rahma Ibrahim al Mahrooqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation of the Sultanate of Oman, said, "The partnership with Oman Cables Industry for the launch of the third edition of the SHE STEMS programme is a significant boost towards creating a future where innovation knows no boundaries. Our combined efforts provide Omani women with the tools required to excel in STEM fields and perfectly align with Oman's Vision 2040. The SHE STEMS programme high-



lights our ongoing commitment to creating a diverse and resilient economy, driving technological advancement, innovation, and equal opportunities."

Participants are required to undergo rigorous pre-selection assessments in English and mathematics, ensuring they are well-suited for the challenges that await them. Successful candidates receive a monthly allowance from OCI and benefit from training and coaching provided by the Modern Gulf Institute (MGI), a leader in leadership and management development.

The programme is open to

powering Omani women in key industrial sectors.

"With over 2000 candidates already applied, the eagerness of Omani women to join the manufacturing industry is clear. In the 2024 programme, we are introducing a special module on Artificial Intelligence (AI) to develop foundational knowledge and leverage its capabilities to reach new professional goals," Aydogdu informed.

"This edition will provide participants with a cutting-edge understanding of AI technologies, allowing them to explore this rapidly advancing field. This re-

The partnership for the third edition of SHE STEMS is a significant boost towards creating a future where innovation knows no boundaries

H E DR RAHMA IBRAHIM AL MAHROOQI

unemployed Omani women, aged 24-30, who hold a bachelor's degree in engineering and are willing to undergo pre-selection assessments in English and mathematics. OCI continues its partnership with a headhunter consulting company to assist graduates in job placement and soft skills development, ensuring a seamless transition into the workforce.

From his side, Erkan Aydogdu, CEO of Oman Cables Industry, said, "We are proud to launch the third edition of the SHE STEMS programme, demonstrating our commitment to em-

fects our dedication to preparing graduates for both traditional industries and cutting-edge technology. The programme underscores our social ambitions and our profound belief that Omani women and the next generations will play a vital role in shaping the nation's future," Aydogdu added.

OCI's consistent efforts to bring about a sustainable change within the realm of inclusive growth and development in the STEM and Manufacturing industry is the hallmark of the company's visionary future-focused approach.

Sharjah Summer Promotions 2024 continues to attract massive visitors

The 21st edition of Sharjah Summer Promotions 2024 continues to sprinkle joy across the emirate's cities and regions, the event organisers said.

Organised by the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) together with the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA), this shopping and tourist extravaganza offers a packed schedule of special deals, promotional discounts, fantastic activities and fun events that cater to the visitors and residents of the emirate to enhance their summer experience.

Shopping malls across Sharjah have seen a notable increase in visitor turnout, accompanied by a significant uptick in shopping activity, since the commencement of Sharjah Summer Promotions on July 1.

Visitors have shown strong engagement with the series of events and activities staged by shopping centres as part of this year's exceptional edition. This includes valuable prizes, gifts and rewards offered by the Sharjah Chamber alongside the participating shopping malls and retail stores.

Beyond the grand prizes, visitors can take advantage of major discounts, with up to 75% off on a diverse range of products and services, in addition to special promotional deals on hotel accommodations and dining experiences.

Traditional Emirati folk art performances of Al-Ayala and Al-Yula dances are attracting heritage enthusiasts

Traditional Emirati folk art performances of Al-Ayala and Al-Yula dances are also on display, attracting heritage enthusiasts and visitors of different nationalities.

This year's edition will also feature an extensive schedule of raffle draws with valuable prizes that will be held throughout the upcoming weeks. There will be a grand raffle on July 20 at 06 Mall awarding 10 gold bars, 4 hotel stays, and 11 shopping vouchers.

Sharjah Summer Promotions will feature Al Dhaid Date Festival from July 25 to 28. This is a key event which celebrates the cultural value of the palm tree in the authentic Emirati heritage with an array of traditional activities.

Eager shoppers can anticipate more exciting surprises during this period, including a plethora of shopping vouchers to be offered by the Sharjah Cooperative Society. City Centre Al Zahia will also host a raffle for shopping vouchers on July 27, followed by additional raffles at Suyoh Mall on August 3.

Charm Thai at Crowne Plaza Muscat to host exquisite Royal Feast on July 19

Charm Thai at Crowne Plaza Muscat OCEC is set to host two extraordinary culinary events this July: A Royal Feast Menu on July 19 and a Grape Pairing Menu on July 25.

"These special events promise to deliver an unparalleled dining experience, showcasing the finest in Thai cuisine," the management stated.

Charm Thai at Crowne Plaza Muscat OCEC is a gastronomic oasis that invites food enthusiasts to embark on an authentic Thai culinary adventure.

The award-winning Charm Thai restaurant offers a captivating journey through the rich and diverse flavours of Thailand, promising to immerse foodies in a consummate gastronomic experience.

Royal Feast Menu

The hotel management informed that on July 19, Charm Thai will host a Royal Feast Menu that promises an extraordinary family-style dining experience. Guests will be treated to a variety of traditional Thai dishes, starting with an array of delight-



ful starters, it assured.

The menu includes Goong Sa-Rong, which features crisp-fried prawns wrapped in yellow noodles, and Jang Ron Pla, red curry marinated hammour cakes with coconut flakes. Additionally, Tung Thong offers root vegetable money bags with shiitake mushrooms, Saku Sai Gai provides steamed sago seed with minced chicken, and Nua Yang Nam Jim presents chargrilled beef striploin with e-san sauce.

For the main course, diners can savour Ped Obb Nam Pong, a 24-hour Thai herb marinated and slow-roasted whole duck. This exquisite dish is complemented by several delectable sides, including Chu-Chee Goong Nang, red curry jumbo prawns with Kaffir lime, and Gai Phad Mad Ma-Moung, wok-fried chicken and cashew nuts.

Also, on offer are Phad Ka-Na Hed Hom, stir-fried broccoli and shiitake mushrooms in oyster

sauce, Phad Thai Goong Yai, stir-fried rice noodles with prawns, tamarind sauce, and roasted nuts, and Kao Suay, steamed jasmine rice. The meal concludes with a delightful dessert of Thai exotic fruit salad and Thai sticky rice with sweet mango and coconut rice balls.

Grape Pairing Menu

On July 25, Charm Thai will offer a sophisticated Grape Pairing Menu, designed to highlight the

harmony between exquisite Thai dishes and grapes/beverages. The evening will begin with Goong Thod Phuket, a crisp-fried jumbo prawn wrapped in rice vermicelli served on a Thai spiced exotic fruit salsa, paired with Spain.

The second course features Aok Ped Yang, char-grilled marinated duck breast served on a bed of King Asparagus and drizzled with Tamarind sauce, paired with New Zealand. This is followed by Gai Tom Kra-Ti, a tender chicken breast stewed in coconut milk and young galangal, paired with Australia.

For the main course, guests can choose between Nua Ko-Rat Yang Prick Thai, char-grilled Angus beef with green curry baby potatoes and Isaan dressing, or Pla Thod Prick Gaeng, crisp-fried seabass fillet served with creamy red curry sauce on a bed of som tum. Both dishes are paired with New Zealand. The dessert, Mamuang Nam Dok Mai-Katisod, a brule'd coconut and mango galette served with coconut gelato, is paired with a refreshing Mango Cooler.

Oman holds workshop on 'tax procedures' for SMEs

In order to enhance the tax awareness and support SMEs, the Tax Authority in cooperation with the SMEs General Authority, organised a workshop entitled 'Procedures and Laws for SMEs', which was held at the Al-Hosn Hall in the headquarters of the Tax Authority.

The workshop discussed several topics, which include the



methods of dealing with accounting matters for VAT, excise tax and income tax, the method of preparing the tax returns and registration obligations, besides having a discussion on financial reports.

The workshop concluded with an interactive session to respond to the questions and inquiries of the attendees regarding the tax

procedures and laws. Also, practical solutions to the challenges faced by SMEs in the field of taxation were provided.

The importance of this workshop comes in enabling entrepreneurs to understand their tax duties, by making tax procedures as a key pillar for achieving sustainable economic development.

'Support for far-right rises in Europe'

Recent EP elections in early June saw far-right parties gain votes across multiple countries

Berlin, Germany - Ulrich Battis, a constitutional law expert and far-right specialist at Berlin Humboldt University, has warned that ignoring public concerns about the refugee crisis is leading to increased support for far-right and populist parties in Europe.

Recent European Parliament (EP) elections in early June saw far-right parties gain votes across multiple countries, while ruling parties experienced losses.

Battis commented on the rise of far-right sentiment in Europe and Germany to an Anadolu correspondent.

Concerns in election results

Battis explained that the electorate in all EU member states has expressed concerns over the rising number of refugees through their voting behaviour. He noted, however, that describing this shift as a move towards the right may be inaccurate.

Battis pointed out that parties supporting the previous European Commission have maintained a majority to form the next



Commission. 'Overall, I don't see a major shift post-elections,' he said.

Addressing whether far-right parties will shape EU Parliament activities, Battis said: 'I don't believe they will directly shape proceedings by gaining a majority, though they will undoubtedly impact decision-making mechanism.' He said recent French elections showed other parties tactically uniting, thus limiting far-right influence.

The parties have realised that

some issues, such as climate protection, are less important to citizens than others, such as the refugee issue, he noted.

Battis criticised the EU's refugee policy as a 'complete disaster', arguing that past decisions have not addressed public concerns, thereby increasing dissatisfaction.

He emphasised the importance of listening to the majority's views on refugee issues. Highlighting the vote loss of the Green parties in Germany and other Eu-

ropean countries, Battis remarked on the necessity for the German government to consider public sentiment to avoid losing future elections.

He emphasised the German government plans to address social issues, such as welfare and child support as it realised it would not be reelected if it continues their ignorance of public demands.

'Dangerous mix'

Looking ahead to the state elec-

tions in Thuringia, Saxony, and Brandenburg in eastern Germany in September, Battis predicted strong performances for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance for Understanding and Justice which split from the Left Party. Calling these a 'dangerous mix', he warned that these elections could significantly shift political dynamics if these parties gain majorities.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that we are facing a situation like

in Germany in 1932-1933, when right-wing and far-left parties had a majority in the parliament. We are not there, but the situation in the three eastern states is dramatic," Battis said.

Battis also noted the rise of far-right leader Marine Le Pen in France, and underlined that although her party secured the most votes it ranked third in the number of seats in parliament, which he said may increase voter dissatisfaction.

Anadolu Agency

Cyanide kills 6 foreigners in Bangkok

Bangkok, Thailand - The six foreigners who were found dead at the Grand Hyatt Erwan Hotel in the Thai capital Bangkok on Tuesday died of cyanide poisoning, Thai police said on Wednesday.

The police also said one of the victims was the suspect in the case. "We would like to confirm that one of the six dead caused this incident using cyanide," Nopasil Poonsawas, deputy commander of investigations at Bangkok's Metropolitan Police Bureau said. "We are confident one of the six conducted the crime."

Police said traces of cyanide were found during the autopsies of the bodies as well as on the drinking cups and a teapot in the room. "We can assume that the six died from cyanide," Chulalongkorn Hospital's Kornkiat Vongpaisarnsin told reporters, adding that results of further tests would be available on Friday.

The US Federal Bureau of Investigation assisted police with the investigation, they said. Two of the victims were US nationals.

"We found cyanide in the teacups, all six cups we found cyanide," said Trirong Phiwpan, Commander of Thai police evidence office.

DW

Nepal PM to take vote of confidence

Kathmandu, Nepal - Nepal's newly appointed Prime Minister, K P Sharma Oli is set to take a vote of confidence on July 21, a week after he took over charge of the office.

Oli, 72, the chairman of the CPN-UML (Communist Party of Nepal - Unified Marxist Leninist), was appointed Prime Minister by President Ram Chandra Paudel on July 14 after his predecessor Pushpa Kamal Dahal lost a vote of confidence in parliament.

Oli was sworn in as the Prime Minister for his fourth term on July 15. According to CPN-UML Chief Whip Mahesh Bartaula, Prime Minister Oli has informed the Parliament Secretariat about it stating that an early vote of confidence would help him work comfortably.

"As per the constitution, a Prime Minister is mandated to take the vote of confidence within 30 days of formal appointment over the post. Prime Minister Oli will be taking the vote of confidence on Sunday (July 21) because it would give me more confidence and allow him to work



Nepal's newly appointed Prime Minister, K P Sharma Oli is set to take a vote of confidence on July 21

Prime Minister Oli has informed the Parliament Secretariat that an early vote of confidence would help him work comfortably

properly," Bartaula confirmed to ANI over phone.

On July 12 this month, Nepal President Ram Chandra Paudel called on political parties in the Nepal Parliament to stake claim for the Prime Minister after Pushpa Kamal Dahal lost a trust motion. The President had called for the claim of stake as per Article 76(2) of the Constitution.

On the same day, Oli staked

claim for the prime ministerial post, he and Nepali Congress party President Sher Bahadur Deuba jointly signed an application for the President to appoint the UML chief as the country's new PM on Friday evening.

Oli, backed by the Nepali Congress had on Friday submitted the signatures of 165 lawmakers claiming majority support.

ANI

China suspends arms control consultations with the US

Beijing, China - Angry over US arms sales to Taiwan, China on Wednesday said it has decided to suspend consultations with Washington over arms control and non-proliferation, state media reported.

"The US has ignored China's firm opposition and repeated representations, continuing to sell arms to Taiwan, and engaging in a series of negative actions that seriously harm China's core interests and undermine mutual political trust," Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian told reporters in Beijing.

"These acts have severely damaged the political atmosphere necessary for the continuation of arms control consultations," said Lin, adding Beijing has decided to suspend the consultations over arms control and non-proliferation.

Since assuming power in 2021, the Biden administration has made at least 16 arms sales



to Taiwan. Lin blamed Washington for the 'current situation'.

"China is willing to maintain communication with the US on international arms control issues based on mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and cooperation for mutual benefit," said the spokesman.

"However, the US must respect China's core interests and create the necessary conditions for dialogue and exchange between the two sides," said Lin.

On the latest visa restrictions

imposed by the US on Chinese officials, Lin said Beijing will adopt reciprocal visa restrictions on American officials 'who fabricate lies and promote sanctions against' the world's second largest economy that 'harm' its interests.

Washington last week announced it will be imposing visa restrictions on Chinese officials 'due to continuing human rights violations against minority groups'.

Anadolu Agency

German leaders congratulate Angela Merkel on her 70th birthday

Berlin, Germany - Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel celebrated her 70th birthday away from the public gaze and surrounded only by those closest to her on Wednesday.

Merkel became chancellor in 2005, remaining in office for 16 years, and was the first woman to hold the job.

"The former Chancellor Dr Merkel will spend her birthday in private," a spokeswoman for Merkel told the German press agency DPA.

"Even during her active political time, the former Chancellor generally did not answer private inquiries," the spokeswoman added.

"Her attitude to inquiries of

this kind has not changed since she left office."

Praise from fellow politicians

Several politicians congratulated conservative Merkel, including Chancellor Olaf Scholz, her successor from the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD).

He referred to Merkel's work around the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, when she became involved in East Germany's growing democracy movement.

"Angela Merkel can look back on an impressive political career. She began with a rousing victory for democracy in East Germany and German unity, which still moves me today. She worked



Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel

tirelessly for the country. Happy birthday!" Scholz tweeted.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier praised her as

a 'role model and a hallmark of our democracy'.

"The special thing about this anniversary is that your 70 years

Several politicians congratulated conservative Angela Merkel, including Chancellor Olaf Scholz, her successor from the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD)

of life can be divided into exactly two halves," he said.

"The first 35 years until the fall of the Berlin Wall and the second 35 years in the freedom you longed for," Steinmeier, vice chancellor and foreign minister under Merkel, wrote in a birthday message.

The current leader of Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party, Friedrich Merz, offered his congratulations.

"For around three decades you have shaped our country's politics and taken on responsibility: in the CDU, in parliament and in the government," Merz posted on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock also tweeted a message of admiration.

"Dear Ms Merkel, for 16 years you stood for the unity of Europe with humanity and perseverance

- always with the deepest conviction for democracy and international law. And you opened more doors for women of my generation," the post read. "All the best from the bottom of my heart!"

The tributes also included former political rival Gerhard Schröder, who Merkel replaced as chancellor after Germany's 2005 general election.

"Of all political opponents, she is a special one. After all, she won," said Schröder, who also told German news magazine Stern that he liked Merkel's 'typical North German charm', and her ability to be ironic and self-deprecating.

DW

French President Macron formally accepts PM Attal’s resignation

Paris, France - French President Emmanuel Macron has formally accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Gabriel Attal.

According to a press release from the Elysee Palace, the French presidential office, Macron has asked Attal to continue running the caretaker government until the appointment of the next government.

The development comes ahead of the Olympics that is due to start in France from next week.

In the recent parliamentary elections in France, the left-wing coalition New Popular Front (NFP) emerged as the largest bloc, but the infighting among the member-parties had meant that they have failed to build consensus and put forward the name of their prime ministerial candidate.

The NFP, a cluster of several parties including from the far-left France Unbowed party to the more moderate Socialists and the Ecologists - won 182 seats in



French PM Gabriel Attal and President Emmanuel Macron

the National Assembly, making it the largest group but well short of the 289 required for an absolute majority.

The bloc, however failed to put up a name for the prime minister’s post. A per custom, the French president appoints a prime minister from the largest group in parliament but there is still no clarity on which party from the NFP it would be.

In a July 16 press release from the Elysee Palace, Macron said: “In order for this period to end as

quickly as possible, it is up to the republican forces to work together to build a rally around projects and actions in the service of French women and men.”

In the parliamentary run off elections last week, Macron’s Ensemble (ENS) alliance won 163 seats took second place.

Marine Le Pen’s far-right National Rally (RN) and its allies were relegated to third place with 143 seats.

Attal had immediately after the elections offered to resign but Macron had refused to accept his resignation and asked him to remain as a caretaker until a new cabinet is appointed.

Meanwhile, French lawmakers are set to meet on Thursday to elect the president of the National Assembly, in two votes requiring a majority of the 577-seat body, CNN reported. If the first two votes don’t elect someone, the candidate with the largest support in parliament will be selected in a third vote.

ANI

Former rivals endorse Donald Trump at Republican convention

Washington, D.C., US - Donald Trump returned to the Republican National Convention on Tuesday as his former opponents for the US presidency lined up to shower him with praise.

While Trump made no formal remarks, his appearance was more laid back than his dramatic post-assassination attempt entrance the day before.

Former rivals turned supporters

One-time UN ambassador Nikki Haley told the crowd in Wisconsin that a ‘unified Republican Party is essential for saving’ the nation. “I’ll start by making one thing perfectly clear. Donald Trump has my strong endorsement,” Haley told the crowd at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on Tuesday.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis said ‘let’s send Joe Biden back to his basement, and let’s send Donald Trump back to the White House’, to loud applause.

Businessman Vivek Ramaswamy, who had also vied for the Republican nomination, meanwhile said: “Donald Trump is the president who will actually unite this country, not through empty words, but through action.”



Former US President Donald Trump has been feted as a hero for surviving Saturday’s attack at a campaign rally

One-time UN ambassador Nikki Haley told the crowd in Wisconsin that a ‘unified Republican Party is essential for saving’ the nation

VP pick Vance to address delegates

Trump, still swearing a white bandage over his ear, has been feted as a hero for surviving Saturday’s attack at a campaign rally.

Wednesday will see running mate JD Vance address the 2,400 Republican delegates in attendance.

A one-time harsh critic of Trump, Senator Vance has become an unwavering supporter of the former president and a rising star in the Republican party.

Preparing for ‘Trump presidency’

With the Republicans leading in the polls, Europe has gone into planning mode as to how to deal with a second Trump presidency.

Conservative German lawmaker Jens Spahn told DW that ‘we should not make the same mistake again. Last time he became president no one really had a network with his team. No one really knew what [was] going on’.

He conceded that there was even some common ground with Trump, such as countering the

rising influence of China on the world stage.

‘Follow-on attacks’

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), meanwhile, have issued a bulletin warning law enforcement agencies across the country of possible ‘follow-on or retaliatory’ attacks in the wake of the attempted assassination of Donald Trump.

A joint bulletin issued on Monday night by the DHS and FBI urged vigilance at upcoming

election-related events, citing concerns about ‘follow-on or retaliatory’ attacks, according to ABC News.

The warning, issued as the Republican National Convention begins in Milwaukee, urged people to be vigilant and report any suspicious behaviour.

The bulletin expressed concern over potential violence at upcoming events related to the 2024 presidential election, citing threats from members of online communities.

“The FBI and DHS remain concerned... particularly given that individuals in some online communities have threatened, encouraged, or referenced acts of violence in response to the attempted assassination,” the bulletin said.

The warning came days after

Trump narrowly escaped an assassination attempt at a rally in Pennsylvania on Saturday.

The gunman, Thomas Matthew Crooks, 20, was shot and killed by the Secret Service at the scene. Trump was left bloodied but survived the attack.

Federal authorities are still investigating the shooter’s motives, noting that the ‘resonance of divisive topics in public discourse’ may be contributing to the threat environment.

The bulletin warned that lone actors or small groups might continue to target political rallies and campaign events.

The bulletin acknowledged the difficulty in detecting such threats, given the ‘highly personal nature of radicalisation and mobilisation to violence’.

Agencies



Paris Mayor swims in the Seine River ahead of Olympics

Paris, France - Anne Hidalgo, the mayor of French capital Paris, swam in the Seine River on Wednesday to show its water is clean enough to host outdoor swimming events for the Paris Olympics later this month.

During the Paris Games triathlon and marathon, participants are supposed to swim in the Seine, where swimming for more than a century has been illegal. Donning a wet suit and goggles, Hidalgo declared the river ‘exquisite’, if a bit cold.

was finally ready for the games.

Should heavy rain affect the Seine’s flow during the Games, the organisers said the swimming event will be cancelled in the triathlon and the marathon swimming competition will be moved to the Vaires-sur-Marne Nautical Stadium in the greater Paris region.

Efforts to clean the Seine up

“On the eve of the Games, when the Seine will play a key role, this event represents the demonstration of the efforts made by the city and the state to improve the quality of the Seine’s waters and the ecological state of the river,” Hidalgo’s office said in a statement on Tuesday.

At least US\$1.5bn (1.4bn) has been spent to clean the long-polluted river.

The Seine, however, has continued to be a cause for concern, showing the presence of sewage water above authorised levels in repeated tests until earlier this month, when samples began to show the river

Hidalgo’s controversial swim

Hidalgo was going to swim in the river last month but she postponed her plans after reports suggested the presence of faecal matter 10 times higher than the authorised limit.

Her long-awaited dip in the Seine prompted a meme fest, where people online shared an AI-generated image of her looking like the character Dobby from the Harry Potter series.

A group even called for a protest using the hashtag #j e c h i e d a n s l a S e i n e (#IshitintheSeine) and threatened to defecate in the river on the day Hidalgo was set to swim.

President Emmanuel Macron had also planned to take part in the event and bathe in Seine, but later had to cancel, with political crisis looming due to his call for snap elections.

DW

Is Von der Leyen’s EU majority stable enough for a second term?

Strasbourg, France - Ursula von der Leyen won only half the battle when EU leaders endorsed her for a second term as president of the European Commission in June. Now, she still needs to win over a majority of the European Parliament’s 720 lawmakers on Thursday.

She is pitching herself as an experienced leader and could benefit from a desire in the European Union for a steady hand at a time when war rages in Ukraine and Donald Trump’s possible return to the White House in November elections could shake up global relations.

Von der Leyen’s conservative political grouping, the European People’s Party (EPP), has 188 seats, the Socialists and Liberals have 155, and the liberal Renew group has 75. This is far more

than the 361 voted needed to get a second five-year term.

On paper, it would seem that she could gather the required numbers from within the coalition. “I am not a mathematician, but I think, with the three centre forces that are supporting Ursula von der Leyen and that form part of a package deal, we have the numbers,” EPP spokesperson Pedro Lopez said last week.

Neither the politicians nor the experts DW spoke with believe that it will be as easy as Lopez implied. There’s no guarantee everyone in the coalition will vote for Von der Leyen. “It’s going to be tight,” said Julien Huez, a Brussels-based EU expert.

Since the vote is secret, it is important for Von der Leyen to talk personally with parliamentarians, who can vote based on



European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen

their constituents’ interests without fear of repercussions if they stray from the party line.

While members of the European Parliament (MEPs) cannot

Harris, for instance, has called on Irish MEPs to back Von der Leyen in the interest of getting a key European Commission post for Ireland.

The 27-member Commission has a commissioner from each member state, and some positions are more influential than others.

“I’ve no doubt that President von der Leyen will want to talk to MEPs. That would be an appropriate thing to do, and, certainly, I’ll be engaging with Irish MEPs on the basis that we have now put forward Michael McGrath to be our commissioner,” Harris said, according to Irish public broadcaster RTE.

Should Von der Leyen fail to secure 361 votes, the EU could plunge into a crisis at a time when anxieties are high and alternative candidates with suffi-

cient blocwide backing seem non-existent.

Shift to the right?

Von der Leyen barely scraped through with the same coalition in 2019 when she was elected with a tiny margin of nine votes.

This time around, several politicians within the multiparty coalition have already said they would not vote for her. Others have warned she must steer clear of cooperating with the far-right European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group - the third largest in the European Parliament.

The Socialists and Liberals are watching Von der Leyen closely following an overture to Italian Prime Minister Georgia Meloni, who heads the ECR.

Ahead of the European elec-

tions last month, Von der Leyen opened the door to an alliance with Meloni. The move irked her major allies, who threatened to withdraw their support if she leaned further to the right.

After the election, the EPP indicated that there would not be a formal deal with Meloni, but there is a chance Von der Leyen will offer Italy concessions on immigration policy in her speech on Thursday. The wording of any such promise, and for that matter on the ongoing Gaza conflict, will be monitored by Socialists, Liberals and Greens.

The Greens lost 18 seats in June’s European election, but even with a lowered tally of 53 seats, they believe they are poised to play a significant role in the EU parliament.

DW



Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and PM Benjamin Netanyahu

‘Netanyahu puts difficulties to prisoner swap deal with Hamas’

Jerusalem - Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant accused Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday of putting difficulties to efforts aimed at reaching a prisoner swap agreement with Hamas.

“If a deal is not signed in the next two weeks, the fate of the hostages is sealed,” Gallant said during a close meeting cited by Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronoth.

He said conditions for a deal with Hamas have matured, but Netanyahu is putting difficulties in order not to lose his coalition members Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich.

Far-right National Security Minister Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Smotrich have threatened to bring down Netanyahu’s coalition government in case of any deal with Hamas.

According to the newspaper, Mossad chief David Barnea, head of Shin Bet security service Ronan Bar and army Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi believe that ‘Israel would have difficulty reaching agreements under

Netanyahu’s new conditions’.

Indirect talks between Israel and Hamas mediated by the US, Qatar and Egypt have so far failed to agree on a permanent ceasefire that allows a prisoner swap between Israelis and Palestinians.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army killed 81 more Palestinians in attacks in the Gaza Strip, taking the overall death toll to 38,794 since last October 7, the Health Ministry in the enclave said on Wednesday.

A ministry statement added that some 89,166 other people have been injured in the assault.

“Israeli forces killed 81 people and injured 198 others in two ‘massacres’ against families in the last 24 hours,” the ministry said.

On Wednesday, the Israeli army also detained 15 more Palestinians, including three women and a boy, during incursions across the occupied West Bank, according to prisoners’ rights groups.

Anadolu Agency

Israeli settlers restrict Palestinians’ access to water in West Bank

Around 120 Palestinian families are obstructed from accessing the El-Auja water source



Istanbul/Ramallah - In the West Bank city of Jericho, illegal Israeli settlers have increasingly obstructed around 120 Palestinian families from accessing the El-Auja water source, impacting their ability to water livestock and maintain their agricultural practices.

Approximately three months ago, one of the illegal Israeli settlers who usurped Palestinian land established an ‘illegal settlement’ near the Al-Auja water source. Palestinians in the area reported that an Israeli settler who owns a flock of sheep has taken over the region and is obstructing access to irrigation water to displace the local Palestinians.

The Al-Auja spring, a crucial water resource in the eastern West Bank’s Jordan Valley, is not only vital for local agriculture but also serves as a tourist spot during the summer months due to its abundant water supply.

However, recent reports indicated that illegal Israeli settlers have been impeding Palestinian access to this resource, targeting livestock and limiting their ability to graze. Approximately 451,000 Israelis in the occupied West Bank, and about 230,000 in East Jerusalem are usurping Palestinian territories. According to international law, these West Bank and East Jerusalem settlements are illegal.

Local official Mohammed Rashid expressed deep concern over the situation, highlighting

Recent reports indicated that illegal Israeli settlers have been impeding Palestinian access to Al-Auja water resource, targeting livestock and limiting their ability to graze

the challenges faced by the Palestinian families who have lived in the area for decades.

Rashid explained that the settlers’ actions are designed to force Palestinians out of their land and disrupt their way of life.

He noted that settlers have

been blocking access to the water source, especially during the times when Palestinians water their sheep, and that these actions are often supported by Israeli soldiers and police.

Rashid criticised the Israeli authorities for their inaction and al-

leged complicity, saying that settlers often receive support from Israeli security forces.

He described instances where settlers have engaged in provocative actions, and police responses to Palestinian complaints have been ineffective.

The situation has forced many Palestinians to rely on expensive and cumbersome water tankers, Rashid said. Since October 7, 2023, 63 attacks have been reported on Palestinian water sources by Israeli settlers.

Anadolu Agency

Documentary exposes Australia’s treatment of indigenous children

Canberra, Australia - An investigative documentary aired by a local broadcaster shines a spotlight on Australia’s treatment of children from the indigenous communities.

CCTV footage shows indigenous children being placed in isolation cells in a state of distress. One video features a 14-year-old Indigenous girl, referred to as Sam, being put into an isolation cell at a Cairns watch house. The First Nations girl from Cairns city in Queensland, who has severe intellectual disabilities, struggles with police and tries to escape

until her arm is caught in the door.

Sam, whose name has been changed for the documentary, was placed in isolation after being found throwing toilet paper at a CCTV camera. Her grandmother says Sam has the mental capacity of a kindergarten child and the language skills of a three-year-old and has been deemed unfit to stand trial in court.

Footage obtained from a year-long investigation by SBS and Guardian Australia shows Sam, then 13, becoming increasingly distressed after being brought to



the cell and trying to escape multiple times. On her fourth attempt, her arm was caught in the door, causing her to scream in pain. She was later taken to a hospital and placed in leg shackles, with police records indicating concerns that her arm was broken. Two months later, Sam was arrested again and placed back into isolation.

The investigation highlights long-standing human rights concerns about the treatment of children in Queensland’s police watch houses. These facilities, often attached to police stations,

are intended to hold adult offenders for short periods, particularly when they are drunk or disorderly. However, children as young as 11 are being held there for extended periods, sometimes alongside adults.

Police squads targeting child offenders, such as Taskforce Guardian in Queensland, have arrested more than 1,400 children over the past year. Last year, the Queensland government amended the state’s Human Rights Act to permit holding children in watch houses.

Anadolu Agency

AUTO SHOW IN INDONESIA



Visitors look at vehicles displayed during media preview of the GAIKINDO Indonesia International Auto Show (GIAS) 2024 in Tangerang of Banten province, Indonesia, on Wednesday. The show will be open to the public from Thursday till July 28 (Xinhua)

Iran rejects involvement in plot to assassinate Trump

Tehran, Iran - Iran on Wednesday strongly denied reports in the US media implicating Tehran in a plot to assassinate former US President Donald Trump.

US broadcasters CNN and NBC reported on Tuesday that the US Secret Service had recently boosted security around Trump after receiving intelligence from an unnamed ‘human source’ that the current Republican Presidential Candidate was the target of a potential Iranian plot.

CNN said there was ‘no indication’ the alleged plot was linked to Saturday’s shooting at a Trump campaign rally in Pennsylvania, in which the former president was shot in the ear.

Tehran’s reaction

Nevertheless, Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said on Wednesday that Iran

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said that Iran strongly rejects any involvement in the recent attack against Trump

‘strongly rejects any involvement in the recent armed attack against Trump’.

A spokesman for Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations called accusations of previous plots to kill the former president ‘unsubstantiated and malicious’.

Tehran has vowed revenge for the 2020 killing of Revolutionary

Guards commander Qasem Soleimani in a US drone strike outside Baghdad airport in neighbouring Iraq, for which it holds Trump responsible as US President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces at the time.

Foreign ministry spokesman Kanani said that Iran remains ‘determined to pursue legal action against Trump for his direct role in the crime of assassinating’ General Soleimani.

The UN mission spokesman said that Trump ‘must be prosecuted and punished in a court of law’, stressing it ‘has chosen the legal path to bring him to justice’.

A spokesman for the US Secret Service said the agency constantly receives new information about threats and reacts to them accordingly, but declined to comment on the reports. DW

LUKA SHOW GOES ON

Modric appointed Real Madrid captain after extending contract

Madrid, Spain - Croatian midfielder Luka Modric has signed a one-year contract extension with Real Madrid which will keep him at the Bernabeu until 2025, the LaLiga club said on Wednesday.

The 38-year-old Ballon d'Or winner in 2018 won a sixth Champions League crown as well as a fourth LaLiga title with Real last season.

Modric's previous contract expired at the end of the 2023-24 season but the Croatian told fans he would return next season when they were celebrating their Champions League triumph which extended Real's record to 15 European Cups.

No player has won more titles with Real Madrid than Modric, who has lifted 26 trophies since he joined the Spanish giants in 2012.

Modric's journey with Real Madrid, which began when he joined from Tottenham Hotspur, has been nothing short of remarkable. Despite facing challenges and seemingly losing prominence in the team during the early parts of the last season, the Croatian maestro proved his worth with stellar performances in the latter half, reaffirming his indispensable role in the squad.



Luka Modric won a sixth Champions League crown with Real Madrid last season

I'd like to keep playing forever but there probably will come a time when I must hang up my boots. I'll keep playing on, but I don't know for how much longer

LUKA MODRIC

The veteran star was widely expected to retire, especially after his long-time midfield partner Toni Kroos, 34, announced his retirement at the end of the season.

Modric also had no plans to hang up his boots on the international stage despite Croatia's early exit from the recently concluded European Championship, where they were eliminated after the group stage.

"I'd like to keep playing forever but there probably will come a time when I must hang up my boots. I'll keep playing on, but I don't know for how much longer," said Modric, who has 178 caps for Croatia.

The announcement of extension also marks a significant transition, as Modric assumes the role of club captain following Nacho Fernandez's departure as a free agent this summer.

Modric is one of only five players to have won 6 European Cups and has the most titles in the history of Real.

Besides breaking the long-standing duopoly of Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi on the Ballon d'Or, he also won the FIFA Player of the Year Award and was named UEFA Player of the Year in 2018.



Jaime Lozano

Mexico sack coach Lozano after dismal show at Copa

Mexico City, Mexico - Jaime Lozano has been sacked as Mexico head coach following their Copa America group-stage exit, the country's football federation (FMF) said on Tuesday.

Lozano had been offered the chance to continue as an assistant until the 2026 World Cup before returning to the role of head coach until 2030 but the 45-year-old rejected the proposal, FMF added.

Mexico will co-host the 2026 World Cup with Canada and the United States.

"Following the Copa America, the FMF has begun an analysis to determine mistakes, and successes and evaluate areas for improvement in the process," it said in a statement.

"Jaime Lozano was offered a contract until 2030 in which, during the period 2024-2026, he will accompany a more experienced manager towards our World Cup. Lozano has informed us that he does not wish to continue."

Chelsea's Fofana appalled by racist video posted by teammate Fernandez

London, England - Chelsea defender Wesley Fofana has described a video posted on social media by his club team mate Enzo Fernandez as "uninhibited racism".

The video, posted by Argentina international Fernandez on his Instagram account, featured a song sung by some of the Argentina squad about France's players.

The 23-year-old midfielder later apologised for the video where Argentina players were celebrating winning the Copa America after beating Colombia 1-0 in Sunday's final.

"The song included highly offensive language and there is absolutely no excuse for these words," Fernandez said on Instagram.

"I stand against discrimination in all forms and apologise for getting caught up in the euphoria of our celebrations. That video, that moment, those words, do not reflect my beliefs or my character."

The French Football Federation (FFF) said the video included an alleged "racist and discriminatory" chant and that it would file



Wesley Fofana with Enzo Fernandez

The song included highly offensive language and there is absolutely no excuse for these words

ENZO FERNANDEZ

a complaint to global soccer's governing body FIFA.

"Faced with the seriousness of these shocking remarks, contrary to the values of sport and human rights, the president of the FFF decided to directly appeal to his Argentinian counterpart and FIFA and to file a legal complaint for racially offensive and discriminatory remarks," the FFF said.

France international Fofana commented on the video on social media platform X, writing: "Football in 2024: uninhibited racism." The comment was accompanied by a clip from the video.

FIFA and the Argentinian Football Association did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Hard Rock Stadium hit back at CONMEBOL after Copa mayhem

New York, US - Hard Rock Stadium said it exceeded South American football governing body CONMEBOL's security recommendations for the Copa America after chaos engulfed Sunday's final.

More than two dozen people were arrested and hundreds more were locked out in sweltering conditions after ticketless fans tried to force their way into the stadium in Miami Gardens for the match between Argentina and Colombia.

CONMEBOL pointed blame at Hard Rock Stadium, saying on Monday that the facility did not take into account its recommendations for the final of South America's most important national team tournament.

"Hard Rock Stadium implemented, and in many cases exceeded, CONMEBOL's security recommendations throughout the tournament and the Final," Hard Rock Stadium said in its statement on Tuesday.

The stadium, the home of the National Football League's Miami Dolphins, has hosted some of sport's biggest events including the Super Bowl just



Ticketless fans try to force their way into Hard Rock Stadium before the Copa America final on Sunday

four years ago.

"We will evaluate the protocols and processes in place across all aspects of stadium operations," the statement read.

"We remain grateful for the law enforcement officers and stadium staff who worked to prioritize the safety of all attendees despite the unprecedented scale of aggressive and unlawful behavior on display from a subset of unruly fans."

On a chaotic evening, the match was delayed by more than

an hour and the Colombian federation president and his son were arrested after an altercation at the stadium following the game.

With the United States preparing to co-host the World Cup in two years, Miami-Dade County said it would review security protocol for the quadrennial tournament.

Hard Rock Stadium set to host seven matches of the 2026 World Cup including the bronze medal game.

Algeria's Aouar joins Benzema at Al Ittihad

Algeria midfielder Houssem Aouar has completed a permanent transfer from AS Roma to Karim Benzema's Al Ittihad, the Saudi Pro League club said on Tuesday.

The Algeria international has signed a four-year deal to become Laurent Blanc's first signing. "Welcome Aouar," Al Ittihad posted on X.

The former Olympique Lyonnais player will join N'Golo Kante and Fabinho in the Al Ittihad

midfield. The 26-year-old played one game for France - a friendly against Ukraine in 2020 - before switching allegiance last year to Algeria, where his parents were born.

Aouar signed a five-year contract with Roma in June 2023, making 25 appearances for the Giallorossi and scoring four goals.

However, he struggled for regular action following Jose Mourinho's dismissal in January.

Before that, he impressed for Lyon, with his final season at the club being played under Blanc, who he has now reunited with his former manager.

Southampton sign Downes

Southampton have completed the permanent signing of midfielder Flynn Downes from West Ham United on a four-year contract, the promoted Premier League side said on Tuesday.

The 25-year-old spent last season on loan at St Mary's, playing a pivotal role in the team's promotion via the Championship playoffs. He made 37 appearances, scored twice and provided three assists in all competitions. British media reported Southampton had agreed to pay around 18 million pounds (\$23 million) to sign Downes.

"We're thrilled to bring Flynn back. It was a big priority for us this summer and to get it done

early in pre-season is also really important for us," manager Russell Martin said.

"He was such an influential player for us last season, both on and off the pitch. He's a brilliant character, he's aggressive and physical in his play, technically excellent with the ball and a fantastic athlete too."

Downes returns to the Premier League after making 21 top-flight appearances for West Ham in the 2022-23 season.



Houssem Aouar (R) with Karim Benzema

GOLDEN TICKET TO RICHES

Lucrative rewards await Arab medallists at Paris Olympics

Cairo, Egypt - Tareg Hamed went from being a hard-working student athlete to a national hero and millionaire after landing Saudi Arabia's second ever Olympic silver medal in the karate competition in Tokyo three years ago.

Olympic medals remain a rarity for athletes from the Arab world but those who do manage to get onto the podium can expect lavish rewards, from luxury cars to land grants as well as a healthy boost to their bank balances.

Even as the sporting world debates the decision by World Athletics to award \$50,000 to track and field gold medallists at the Paris Olympics, athletes from the region can be sure of much bigger paydays if they can snare a title in France.

In Tokyo, Hamed missed out on claiming his country's first gold medal in controversial circumstances when he knocked out his opponent with an illegal high kick in the final and was disqualified.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman told Hamed he was a gold medallist in his country's eyes and the fighter was rewarded with the full 5 million riyal (\$1.33 million) prize promised to Olympic title winners.

Offering huge financial incen-



Tareg Hamed (R) of Saudi Arabia missed out on gold in Tokyo in controversial circumstances but Saudi Arabia rewarded him with the full 5 million riyal prize promised to Olympic title winners

Even as the sporting world debates the decision by World Athletics to award \$50,000 to track and field gold medallists at Paris Olympics, athletes from the region can be sure of much bigger paydays

tives to medal winners is not unknown elsewhere - Hong Kong fencer Cheung Ka Long banked HK\$5 million (\$640,311) for his Tokyo gold - but bestowing honours on champions has a long history in the Arab world.

Olympic medallists can expect streets, schools and bridges to be

named after them and it is not just oil-rich Gulf nations that offer lavish gifts and monetary rewards.

In Algeria, it is customary for the country's president to honour Olympic champions with gifts from ranging from luxury cars to apartments.

The winner of a gold medal in Morocco receives two million dirhams (\$200,000)

Egypt's National Olympic Committee, in agreement with their sponsors, has raised the value of a gold medal to five million Egyptian pounds (\$105,218) for Paris.

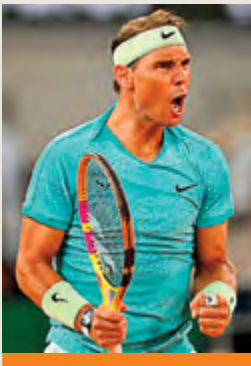
Nadal beats Borg's son Leo at Bastad

Former world number one Rafael Nadal marked his return to singles tennis with a 6-3 6-4 win over Leo Borg, the son of Swedish great Bjorn Borg, to reach the last 16 in Bastad as he continues his preparations for the Paris Olympics.

Nadal's last singles match was his first-round defeat by Alexander Zverev at the French Open in May.

The 38-year-old, a record 14-times French Open winner, then skipped Wimbledon to prepare for the Olympic tennis tournaments, which will take place at Roland Garros.

On Tuesday, Nadal claimed his eighth win of the season on the ATP Tour in an hour and 25 minutes, defeating 21-year-old Borg to set up a



For me, it has been a huge honour to play against the son of one of the biggest legends in the history of our sport

RAFAEL NADAL

Salah-inspired Elgendy eyes modern pentathlon gold

Cairo, Egypt - When Ahmed Elgendy met Mohamed Salah in January, he was given a pep talk and posed for a picture with the Egyptian soccer star while wearing the modern pentathlon silver medal that he earned at the Tokyo Olympics.

Yet the 24-year-old dreams of taking another photo with Salah after the upcoming Paris Olympics, but this time he hopes to don a gold medal as he seeks to etch his name deeper into Egypt's sporting history.

"Salah is a role model for all of us. Having a conversation with him, not just taking a photo, is a very big thing," Elgendy told Reuters.

"We talked about the Olympics and preparations; it was a very good meeting."

Elgendy was a relative unknown when he made history in Tokyo, becoming the first African to win an Olympic modern pentathlon medal.

A late rally in the men's individual event saw him finish just behind gold medallist Joe Choong of Britain.

Since then, he has been beset by injuries, including a shoulder injury that forced him out of the semi-finals of the Pentathlon World Championships last month.

However, after an intensive rehabilitation program, he has



Ahmed Elgendy (R) with Mohamed Salah

been declared fit and hopes deliver a gold medal in Paris.

"Things are different now compared to Tokyo; I'm more experienced and confident.

Over the past three years, I've participated in only seven championships due to my shoulder injuries, yet I won medals in five of them," Elgendy said.

"My primary target is to win gold, but I will also be happy if I win a silver or bronze as it will mark a second successive Olympic medal."

Modern pentathlon athletes will face an added challenge in Paris with a riding contest in both the semi-finals and the final. In Tokyo, this event was part of a

single-round format.

In the equestrian competition, riders are allocated random horses just 20 minutes before the start. The horse-riding contest will be scrapped altogether from the 2028 Los Angeles Games, making way for obstacle racing.

"There is a bigger risk now with regards to horse riding; it's a bigger challenge. We hope things will go smoothly," Elgendy added.

Elgendy, currently ranked fourth in the world, is aware he is under pressure as Egypt's primary hope of glory in Paris. He has also been selected as Egypt's flag-bearer during the opening ceremony.

meeting with British fifth seed Cameron Norrie on Thursday.

"For me, it has been a huge honour to play against the son of one of the biggest legends in the history of our sport," said Nadal, who won his first round doubles match in the competition alongside Norway's Casper Ruud on Monday.

"I think he played quite well, he has a great future in front. I wish him all the very best. I haven't been playing a lot of tennis for the past few months."

Mcllroy faces stiff challenge in bid to end major drought

Troon, Scotland - The list of potential winners of this week's British Open at Royal Troon is a long one as Rory Mcllroy begins his latest bid to end a decade-long major title drought.

Mcllroy's misery continued in last month's U.S. Open where he agonisingly finished second - one shot behind American Bryson DeChambeau - after bogeying three of his last four holes.

The pain of that loss took Mcllroy a few days to process but, as he prepares for Thursday's opening round, he is feeling no added pressure in his quest to claim a fifth career major.

"I know that I'm in a good spot," the Northern Irish world number two told reporters on Tuesday after playing his first practice round of the week.

"If I think about 2015 through 2020, that five-year stretch, I seldom had a realistic chance to win a major championship in that five-year period. S



Rory Mcllroy

o I'd much rather have these close calls. It means that I'm getting closer."

Mcllroy, who has not won a major since the 2014 PGA Championship, spoke about how he dealt with the U.S. Open.

"I went from being very disappointed and dejected to trying to focus on the positives to then

wanting to learn from the negatives and then getting to the point where you become enthusiastic and motivated to go again," said the 35-year-old.

"It's funny how your mindset can go from 'I don't want to see a golf course for a month' to four days later being 'I can't wait to get another shot at it.'"

Carapaz wins Tour de France stage 17

Saint-Paul-Trois-Chateaux, France - Richard Carapaz of EF Education-EasyPost climbed solo to victory on stage 17 of the Tour de France, a 178km ride from Saint-Paul-Trois-chateaux to Superdevoluy on Wednesday.

Carapaz, who has also won stages on the Giro d'Italia and Vuelta a Espana, finished 37 seconds ahead of Jayco Alula's Simon Yates to claim his first win on the Tour de France, with Movistar's Enric Mas third, nearly a minute behind.

The 31-year-old Ecuadorian also became the first Ecuadorian to win a stage at the Tour.

"This means everything to me. We have been trying it since the beginning. This was our first goal - to get a stage win," Carapaz said.

"Today was so difficult with attack after attack until eventually there was a big group. It's going to be a day I will remember for my life.

"I had to wait for the right moment and made the most of it.



Richard Carapaz celebrates winning stage 17 of the Tour de France

We studied the course this morning with our sports director and I knew what I had to do. It's a great victory."

His attack in the mountains, about 13km from the finish, helped the Olympic champion breeze to victory but there was a battle in the general classification behind him as Slovenia's Tadej

Pogacar retained his yellow jersey. Pogacar attacked towards the end of the stage, forcing rivals Jonas Vingegaard and Remco Evenepoel to respond.

Evenepoel, who is third in the overall standings, attacked on the climb to pull ahead of Pogacar and second-placed Jonas Vingegaard to cross the line first

among the contenders.

Pogacar, meanwhile, waited for the right opportunity and attacked in the final 300 metres to extend his lead by two more seconds in the general classification.

"I don't even know myself why I tried today, but I got two more seconds ahead of Jonas and I'm happy with that," Pogacar said.

OMAN BAGS GLOBAL ICC DEVELOPMENT AWARD



Oman's Cricket4Her project aims to redefine the landscape of women's cricket in the country

Muscat - Oman was one of the six nations to have been crowned global winners of the prestigious ICC Development Awards on Tuesday. Besides Oman, the other nations awarded by the International Cricket Council (ICC) were Mexico, the Netherlands, UAE, Nepal and Scotland.

The awards acknowledge the world-leading programmes delivered by ICC Members to grow the game and Oman won the 100% Cricket Female Cricket Initiative of the Year Award.

The six global winners were selected by an esteemed panel, from a shortlist of regional awardees, which spanned 21 emerging nations. The ICC acknowledged Oman Cricket's groundbreaking initiatives and outstanding performances during the last calendar year.

Launched in 2002, the ICC Development Awards casts light



on the world-leading work being carried out in ICC Associate Member countries to grow the game globally, whether through innovative development programmes or through inspiring efforts on the field of play.

Oman Cricket (OC) women's cricket initiative came through their Cricket4Her programme, which provides unique participation opportunities for women

We are elated by this achievement. We would like to thank the ICC for this recognition. It will put us on a pedestal from which we can take women's cricket to greater heights.

PANKAJ KHI MJ

and girls and a valuable pathway through to competitive cricket.

Oman's Cricket4Her project aims to redefine the landscape of women's cricket in the country by cultivating an environment that encourages talent development, skill enhancement, and the empowerment of women cricketers.

The programme has already had a significant impact in the country through regular school sessions and both softball and hardball cricket tournaments, where 16 teams participated in

softball tournaments and 9 teams have transitioned to playing competitive hardball cricket league, providing not only a unique platform for participation, but also a valuable pathway for young women and girls through to competitive cricket.

Speaking after the ICC announcement, Oman Cricket Chairman Pankaj Khimji said: "We are elated by this achievement. We would like to thank the ICC for this recognition. It will put us on a pedestal from which we can take women's cricket to

greater heights.

"It goes without saying that if the coaches and the team behind the initiative did not have the passion and commitment to make it happen, we would not have been able to attract these female cricketers, let alone making them stay, embrace the game and go on to play tournaments."

"We hope that we are able to take this to the next level, adding more schools, colleges and girls from local communities. Harnessing the family factor into cricket is going to be the major success factor for cricket in Oman."

ICC General Manager - Development, William Glenwright said: "The ICC Development Awards has a long-standing history of recognising the groundbreaking work being done by ICC Members to grow the game in emerging nations."



Ben Owen

Cricket project scores big in Mexican prisons

Cricket is slowly finding its feet in Mexico and driving the growth of the game is an award-winning project involving prisoners across the Latin American country.

The governing International Cricket Council announced its development awards on Wednesday recognising "groundbreaking initiatives and outstanding performances" by its associate members.

from each of the 32 states, according to the Mexican board.

"One prisoner shared that she likes to play cricket because it serves as therapy for her," MCA secretary Craig White said. "Another inmate said that she too wants to keep playing cricket after being released and would like to teach the sport to other women."

While it helped the inmates to adapt to their surroundings,

The Mexico Cricket Association (MCA) bagged the ICC Development Initiative of the Year award for two projects, including its cricket-in-prison programme.

"It is first and foremost a truly meaningful recognition at the highest level," MCA chairman Ben Owen said... it highlights the power of cricket as a force for social change as well as raising our profile enormously which should open even more doors in the future."

The MCA partnered with Mexico's sports secretariat to launch the project last year and both are encouraged by the response.

Hundreds of inmates play modified versions of the game weekly and MCA is planning a national prison competition later this year featuring teams

It highlights the power of cricket as a force for social change as well as raising our profile enormously which should open even more doors in the future

BEN OWEN

the secretariat believed it taught them a much-needed lesson. "What (the secretariat) likes about cricket and why they chose it for inclusion in prisons is how the decision of the umpire is always accepted and they believe this concept can help prisoners to respect rules," added White.

Wood takes Anderson's place in England team for second West Indies Test

Fast bowler Mark Wood has been named in place of James Anderson in an otherwise unchanged England lineup for the second Test against the West Indies at Trent Bridge, the country's cricket board (ECB) announced on Tuesday.

Wood returned to the squad after Anderson retired from Tests following the first match at Lord's where England won by an innings and 114 runs inside three days.

Wood, who has 108 wickets in 34 Tests, last played for England during their tour of India earlier this year.

The 34-year-old will team up with fellow fast bowlers Chris Woakes and Gus Atkinson, who picked up 12 wickets on his debut.

The second Test of the three-



Mark Wood

match series begins on Thursday.

ENGLAND TEAM

Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Ben Stokes (captain), Jamie Smith (wicketkeeper), Chris Woakes, Gus Atkinson, Mark Wood, Shoaib Bashir.

Suryakumar set to lead India in T20Is against Sri Lanka

Suryakumar Yadav is set to be appointed India's new T20I captain ahead of Hardik Pandya, the incumbent vice-captain of the side, for the upcoming tour of Sri Lanka.

Suryakumar will take over from Rohit Sharma, who retired from T20Is, along with Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja, after leading India to T20 World Cup glory in the Caribbean last month.

Though Hardik was Rohit's deputy at the T20 World Cup and is a more experienced captain - he has led India in three ODIs and 16 T20Is, apart from leading Gujarat Titans and Mumbai Indians in the IPL - it is understood fitness concerns and workload management may have tipped the scales against him.

Hardik had suffered an ankle injury during the 50-over World Cup at home last October-



Suryakumar Yadav

November and was out of action until the start of IPL 2024, when he returned to lead Mumbai. Hardik has featured in just

46 of the 79 T20Is India have played since the start of 2022.

Suryakumar, meanwhile, has previously captained Mumbai

in the domestic circuit. More recently, he led India to a 4-1 series win over Australia in the T20I series last November, followed by a 1-1 series scoreline in

South Africa. Suryakumar is also among the first names in a first-choice India XI in the format.

The T20Is in Sri Lanka will be India's first assignment under new coach Gautam Gambhir, who takes over from Rahul Dravid after the T20 World Cup.

It's also seen as the first step towards building for the next T20 World Cup which India is set to co-host in 2026.

A young Indian squad, led by Shubman Gill, just returned from Zimbabwe earlier in the week after completing a 4-1 T20I series win. The squad included just three players from the side that won the World Cup.

It is understood that the selectors will meet on Wednesday to finalise the touring party. Along with three T20Is, the tour will feature three ODIs.

New Zealand look to senior players to shine in Williamson's absence

New Zealand's senior players must step up to compensate for the loss of Kane Williamson when the former skipper opts out of part of the home summer, batsman Tom Latham said.

Latham spoke to reporters on Wednesday as New Zealand Cricket released its summer schedule, which starts with a three-Test series against England in November before white-ball series against Sri Lanka and

Pakistan. Williamson gave up the white-ball captaincy after New Zealand crashed out of the T20 World Cup group phase. He plans to spend January playing T20 franchise cricket in South Africa rather than representing the Black Caps as he would usually do.

Latham, Williamson's long-serving deputy, said he felt a greater responsibility to step up and lead. "I think we've seen over



Kane Williamson

many years now at times we haven't had those senior guys whether (because) they're playing in the IPL (Indian Premier League) or having a rest," said the 32-year-old.

"From my point of view it gives me an opportunity as a senior player to step up and lead as well. But also other guys that haven't necessarily had those opportunities in the past to step up as well in different leadership

roles.

Though often filling in as skipper, Latham missed out on the full-time Test captaincy when Williamson stepped down, the role going to fast bowler Tim Southee instead.

New Zealand have yet to decide on a replacement for Williamson for the white-ball roles but Latham's record in T20s may count against him if selectors opt for a single captain

for both the short-format teams.

Latham was not in New Zealand's T20 World Cup squad and his last T20I was over a year ago. The three-match series against England, which starts in Christchurch on Nov. 28, will be the only Test cricket played in New Zealand in the home summer amid concerns the longest format is being suffocated by the growing number of global T20 leagues.



14
FINGER FOOD
Try these recipes for spicy finger food and have a blast



15
IN TOWN
ISC Kerala Wing Summer Camp and Ladies Punjabi Wing bowling



16
ENTERTAINMENT
A peek into tinsel town, in Hollywood and Bollywood

Majestic legacy

Omani lensman documents over 400 archaeological sites in Oman using drones



I photographed numerous castles, forts, and some UNESCO-listed Omani sites over 300 years old, including Bahla Fort, Al Khutm, Al Ayn, the Land of Frankincense, and the ancient city of Qalhat. I also created short videos documenting these historical landmarks

NASSER DARWISH AL AZRI

DRONE PHOTOGRAPHY

Mohammed Taha

Haitham bin Nasser Darwish al Azri, 33, a photographer from Wilayat of Manah, in Dakhliyah governorate, has embarked on a groundbreaking project titled 'Oman A Majestic Legacy', utilising drones, to document archaeological sites in Oman.

The project has received official approval and logistical support from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, underscoring its significance in promoting national development through innovative initiatives led by Omani youth.

In an interview with Muscat Daily, Azri said the initiative aims to meticulously document and showcase over 430 archaeological and tourist sites across the Sultanate of Oman. Azri's goal is to provide a fresh and comprehensive perspective on Oman's rich historical and cultural heritage.

He elaborated on the project's scope, stating, "The cornerstone of the project is a forthcoming book that presents archaeological monuments and ancient neighbourhoods in a groundbreaking format. This publication will feature high-quality photographs of these sites, complemented by an interactive map highlighting all tourist destinations throughout Oman.

This map aims to facilitate navigation and enhance accessibility for tourists and enthusiasts alike."

He emphasised the project's dual objective of boosting tourism and attracting foreign investment in Oman's tourism sector, aligning with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

"By showcasing Omani archaeological sites in a progressive and visually appealing manner, we aim to stimulate interest among a diverse audience, including local, Arab, and international

the country's cultural identity.

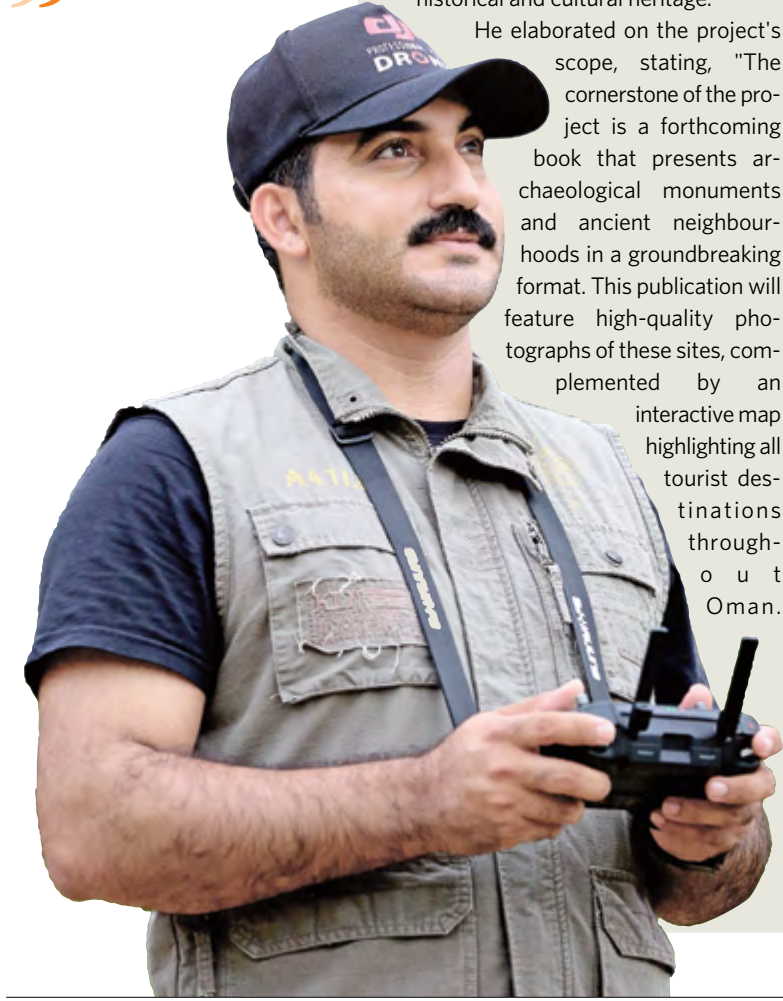
Azri said he faced a lot of challenges since the project's inception in 2020, including logistical hurdles involving travelling across different governorates to capture these sites. "Before photographing each heritage site, extensive research was conducted to understand its historical significance," he said, highlighting the project's scholarly approach to heritage preservation.

roads were rugged, and the weather fluctuated between intense heat and rainy spells. However, with patience and determination, I overcame these obstacles.

Azri expressed the hope for financial support to achieve the project's ambitious goals by 2026, emphasising its broader impact beyond artistic documentation. This project is an investment in our national identity and a vital



Harat al Busaid, in Adam



visitors," Azri said.

The project's logo, described as a representation of Oman's map, integrates a camera lens and a pen, symbolising the meticulous documentation and preservation of Oman's cultural heritage. The choice of colours and design elements draws inspiration from Oman Vision 2040, reinforcing the project's commitment to safeguarding

"I photographed numerous castles, forts, and some UNESCO-listed Omani sites over 300 years old, including Bahla Fort, Al Khutm, Al Ayn, the Land of Frankincense, and the ancient city of Qalhat. I also created short videos documenting these historical landmarks.

Reflecting on the challenges, he said, "I knew that reaching these locations wasn't straightforward. Some

contribution to preserving Oman's cultural memory for future generations, he said.

"The 'Oman A Majestic Legacy' project stands as a testament to Omani ingenuity and dedication in showcasing and safeguarding the sultanate's cultural heritage, poised to leave a lasting legacy for years to come," he added.



ابدأ يومك بلذة!



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cook-up

Fiery finger food

When you want to start your party with a blast, the best way to do so is by bringing in fiery finger food that tickle many a palate



Cocktail Meatballs

- Ingredients**
- 400g lean ground beef
 - 1 large egg
 - 1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
 - ½ cup breadcrumbs
 - ½ onion - grated
 - 1 clove garlic - grated
 - 1tbsp Dijon mustard
 - 2tsp Worcestershire sauce
 - 1tsp paprika
 - Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
 - ¼ cup ketchup
 - 2tbsp light brown sugar
 - Sliced scallions - for garnish

Method

Preheat the oven to 220° C. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Combine the beef, egg, cheese, breadcrumbs, onion, garlic, 2tsp mustard, Worcestershire sauce, paprika, 1tsp salt and a few grinds of pepper in a medium bowl. Mix with your hands until combined. Form into 3cm size meatballs and arrange on the prepared baking sheet.

Mix the ketchup, brown sugar and remaining 1tsp mustard in a small bowl and brush on the meatballs. Bake until lightly browned and cooked through, about 15 minutes. Transfer to a platter and top with scallions.

Spicy Chicken Wings

- Ingredients**
- 12-15 chicken wings
 - 2tbsp thick curds
 - 2tsp ginger garlic paste
 - ¼ tsp turmeric powder
 - 2tsp red chilli powder
 - 1tsp garam masala
 - 2tsp soya sauce
 - Juice of half lemon
 - 1tsp salt
 - 2tsp olive oil

Method

Trim the chicken wings to even sizes. Mix all the ingredients, except olive oil, to form a smooth paste and marinate the chicken wings, coating evenly. Set aside in refrigerator for one hour. Before cooking, drizzle the olive oil and mix lightly. Place the marinated wings on a baking tray in oven and bake for 15-20 minutes at 180° C until golden brown, with slightly charred corners. Remove and serve warm with any suitable dip.



FUN WITH FOOD

Who is the franchisee owner of Papa Johns Oman?

- A. Al Majid Jawad
- B. Majid al Lawati

Email your answers to hubert.vaz@apexmedia.com with your name and telephone number. The first two correct answers will win Food Vouchers from Papa Johns.

WINNERS - JULY 11

- 1. Rupraja Rajandra Babu
 - 2. Veeraraghavan Soundarrajan
- (There are 29 Papa John's outlets in Oman)



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4	Cuplock Vertical 1 Mt	1700
5	Cuplock Vertical 2 Mt	2300
6	Telescopic Leg -2mtr	300
7	Cup Lock Ledger 1.3 Mtr	20
8	Cup Lock Ledger 1.8 Mtr	1800
9	Cup Lock Ledger 1.6 Mtr	1500
10	Cup Lock Ledger 1.2 Mtr	7500
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12	Adjustable Props 2.4 -3.9 Mtr	2200
13	Universal Jack 75 Cm	3500
14	Cup Lock Standard 0.80 Mtr	750
15	Adjustable U Head 760 Mm	3500
16	Cup Lock Ledger 1 Mtr	6200
17	Cup Lock Ledger 1.5 Mtr	1200
18	Cup Lock Standard 2.5 Mtr	1600
19	Cup Lock Standard 1.3 Mtr	3000
20	Stirrup Heads	8300
21	Ms Channel 100 X50 X6 Mtr	1800

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IN TOWN

Summer Camp



ISC Kerala Wing conducted a summer camp for school children



Photos: V K Shafier

Ladies Bowling Meet



ISC Punjabi Ladies Wing held its annual Bowling Tournament last week

Photos: V K Shafier

BOGGLER

M	S	R	L
P	P	S	O
P	E	L	R
I	A	A	R

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

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

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS

1. How many keys are there on a piano?
A. 60
B. 66
C. 72
D. 88

2. Which is the only metal in liquid form at room temperature?
A. Titanium
B. Mercury
C. Platinum
D. Gallium

3. In which year did the Titanic sink?



A. 1910
B. 1912
C. 1915
D. 1918

Answers
3. B
2. B
1. D

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

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You're in the mood to work hard now. Really, really hard. As fiery as you are when you get an idea set in your mind, you definitely don't take kindly to anyone who gets between you and your goal. Of course, your first impulse will be to enlist everyone who comes along. But if that's not possible, then you can warn them to stay away.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You're in charge of creature comforts, from pillows to chocolate to fine wine to sweet music. In a nutshell, you appreciate quality, so much so that it's tough for you to refrain from being obviously bored when you're not around it, and that's just when it comes to things. When a rare and extraordinary person comes along, getting to know them better isn't just an option.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Most of the world is in the mood to mingle now, which is usually exactly the same mood you're in. Strangely enough, though, you're not feeling that way at the moment. You're thinking about how nice it might be to spend some quiet time either completely alone or with just one quality person.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You just can't stop that stream of quick, witty, entertaining conversation from pouring out of your mouth, can you? Your loved ones will be more than pleased. They'll want to call an informal meeting of your friends, family, and assorted loved ones. At your place, of course. And tonight, no less.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

It's time to turn your fiery attention toward money matters, and if anyone can be fiery and attentive, it's you. Don't let anyone coerce you into giving them a single dime if you're not completely comfortable with why you're signing it over. Spend a little bit of time now and work it all out on paper to avoid major potholes.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Once every month, for at least a day or so, we all have no choice but to reveal exactly what we're feeling. The Universe absolutely insists on it, and won't allow it to be any other way. It's your turn now, so if you're feeling something, forget about fighting it. If you have a secret that you would like to keep, distance yourself from some people.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Even though you're definitely the most sociable of all creatures, you're just not in the mood to mingle right now. That's going to come as quite a shock to your loved ones, all of whom are used to prying you away from any party well after everyone else has said their goodbyes. It's okay. Think of this as your chance to rest, relax, and rejuvenate.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

If you weren't satisfied with yesterday's selection of new people to interview for the position of new best friend or long-term lover, not to worry. The heavens have arranged a whole new lineup to come along today. Once again, the only thing you really have to do to win this game is show up, so don't you dare stay home. Get dressed and get out there.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You're not known for doing anything "just a little." As far as the rest of the world knows, that mostly pertains to fun things, but in truth, you can't do anything "just a little." At this particular moment, while some folks might feel a tinge of conscience, if you don't know how to stop it, you'll feel a very big pang of guilt.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Cleaning and organizing have you completely captivated. You can't think of anything you'd rather do than alphabetize your spice cabinet. Once everything is exactly where you want it to be, though, you might want to turn your attention to one other activity briefly. Isn't there someone out there who's been trying for days now to entice you into spending a few minutes alone with them?



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You're the kind of person who just can't settle for anything less than the whole shebang. That's the way you are on a daily basis, but the way you're feeling now, let's just say that you won't even be able to fake being satisfied if you're not. And that will be true for just about any department of life. When it comes down to the issue of love, you seek genuine connections.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

If anyone has seen you alone for the past day or so, it's quite surprising. You're in the mood to be part of a couple, a very close couple, and if there's anything you can do to keep your guest list pared down to one, you'll do it. Needless to say, your best bet is to get what you need, make your apologies to anyone who's expecting you, and stick as close as you can to home. You definitely won't get any arguments from your companion.

entertainment

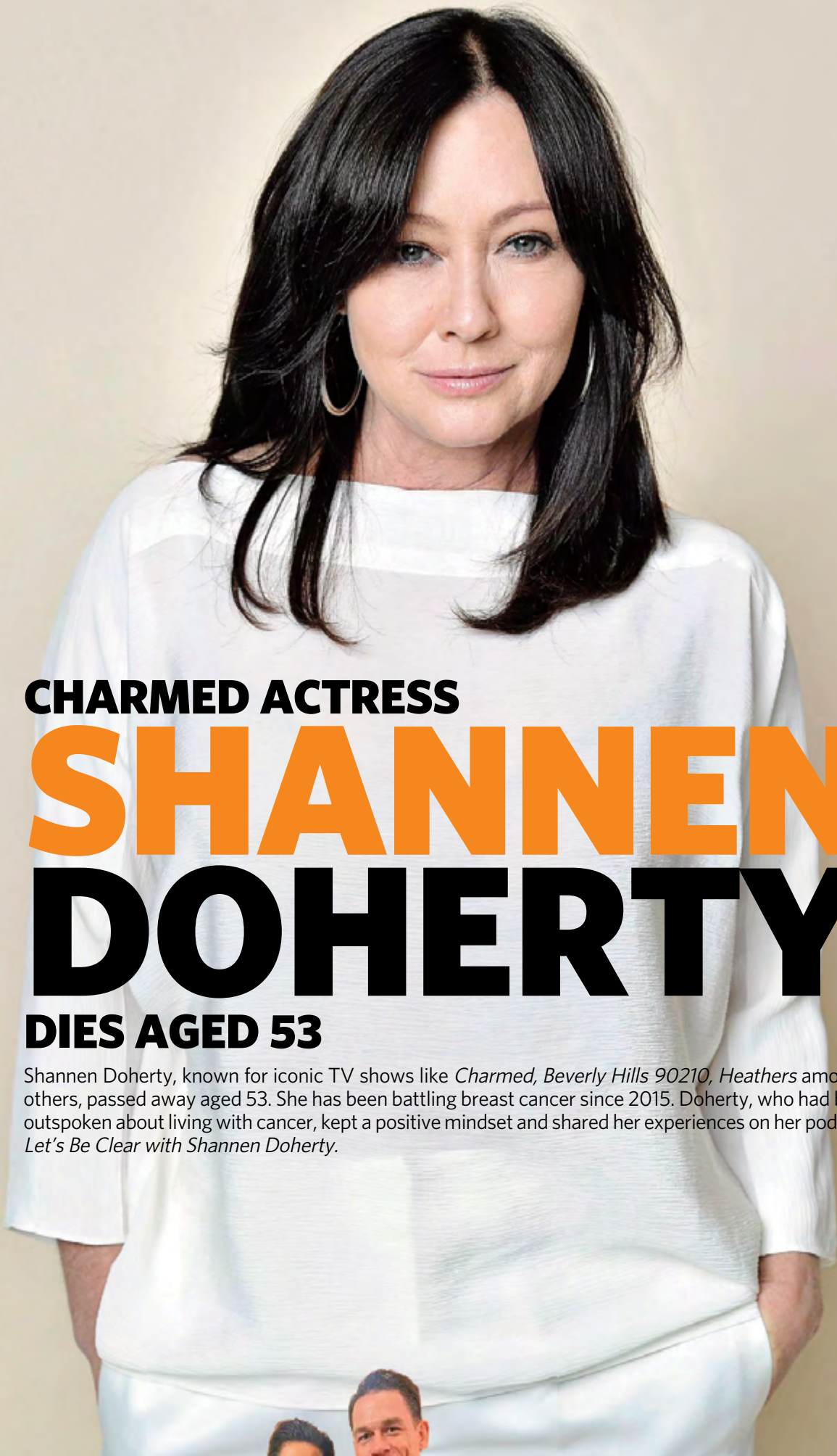


CHARMED ACTRESS

SHANNEN DOHERTY

DIES AGED 53

Shannen Doherty, known for iconic TV shows like *Charmed*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Heathers* amongst others, passed away aged 53. She has been battling breast cancer since 2015. Doherty, who had been outspoken about living with cancer, kept a positive mindset and shared her experiences on her podcast, *Let's Be Clear with Shannen Doherty*.



FITNESS 'GURU' RICHARD SIMMONS DIES

Famous fitness couch and lifestyle guru Richard Simmons, died at the age of 76. He became well-known in the 1970s and 1980s after starting gyms and posting many fitness videos making exercise easy for all. Wearing his trademark mini shorts and tank tops, he was an icon in the fitness industry. Popular amongst senior ladies, his commentary on exercise was laced with comic joy and body positivity.



JIN DELIGHTS FANS IN OLYMPIC TORCH RALLY

Global K-pop heartthrob Jin, of BTS, carried the torch for the Paris Olympics 2024 while huge crowds of fans cheered and swooned on the sidelines. The K-pop singer became the first torch-bearer in the Louvre section of the torch relay for the mega-sporting event on July 14. The Korean singer-songwriter, in a white tracksuit, led the Louvre Museum section of the relay in Paris, creating a first-of-its-kind sensation in Olympic torch relay history.

Kardashian sisters rock India wear

Kim and Khloe Kardashian attended the Anant Ambani - Radhika Merchant wedding in Mumbai, India. Whilst there, they enjoyed auto rides, gorged on Indian sweets and even dressed up in Indian attire, winning hearts. The sisters also served food to the needy along with lifestyle coach Jay Shetty and his wife at the local ISKON Temple.



JOHN CENA HAS 'FAN' MOMENT WITH SRK

WWE mega star John Cena experienced his own fan moment when he met with iconic superstar of Bollywood, Shah Rukh Khan. Cena has always been a fan of the actor and the duo set the stage on fire by dancing to Indian beats at the lavish Ambani wedding in Mumbai, India.



WHATS ON

Genre
Comedy

Starring:
Tripti Dimri,
Ammy Virk, Vicky
Kaushal

Language:
Hindi



BAD NEWZ

Bad Newz is a bizarre, rare comedy about heteropaternal superfecundation! A twist of fate leads to Saloni Bagga's twin pregnancy being fathered by both Akhil Chadha and Gurbir Pannu, setting off a chaotic rivalry for her love and their children. As Akhil and Gurbir vie for Saloni's affections, chaos ensues.

Supernatural sensation



KOREAN MOVIE REVIEW:
EXHUMA

Genre: Horror Starring: Choi Min-sik, Kim Go-eun, Yoo Hae-jin, Lee Do-hyun

With Lee Do hyun (of *The Good Bad Mother* fame) and Kim Go-eun (of *Little Women* fame) as the lead in a Korean film, one can be forgiven to believe it will have romantic overtones. You could not be more wrong.

Exhuma - a South Korean su-

pernatural horror film - written and directed by Jang Jae-hyun, is replete with nail-biting mystery, occult practices and horror sequences that make the audience sit on edge all through. The film had premiered in the Forum section at the 74th Berlin International Film Festival in February, and after limited screening in

Oman recently, is now available on OTT platforms such as Apple+, VIKI) and expected to be on Netflix soon.

The film, which follows familiar Korean movie tropes in the first half but quickly delves into deeper themes, unfolds in an intriguing manner, gradually revealing hidden information about both, North and South Korea, along with the past influence and rule of Japan over Korea, while maintaining a gripping mystery throughout.

The film follows two shaman

siblings, Hwa-rim (Kim Go-eun) and Bong-gil (Lee Do-hyun), who are summoned to aid a wealthy Korean immigrant family allegedly plagued by a malevolent force targeting their new-born son. They are joined by veteran geomancer Sang-deok (Choi Min-sik) and his Christian apprentice Yeong-geun (Yoo Hae-jin) setting the stage for layers and layers of horrifying truths waiting to be unravelled.

The generational curse plaguing the male heirs acts as a cliched patriarchal trope. Yet, the haunting realisation of an innocent new-born crying as he hears the wails of his ancestors, sets the stage of familial discontent



and deculturation.

As the film unfolds, the colonisation of Japan and the dash of supernatural makes for an edge of the seat thriller. Without giving out spoilers, one can be forgiven for thinking twice before spotting a fox at any camping ground.

The film's sound effects were excellent, winning the Baeksang Arts Awards for Technical Achievement - Kim Byung In (Sound). The haunting melodies in one of the most iconic sequences with the chanting and the beats feel as if it is vibrating under your skin. A good watch, horrorbuffs!

Rating ★★★★★

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