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Honourable Lady offers support to disabled children with a fleet of buses

Muscat - Honourable Lady Sayyida Ahad Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, has offered her support to the Association for the Welfare of the Handicapped Children (AWHC) with a fleet of buses.

The buses will provide transport facilities to AWHC children as well as those wishing to join the association or benefit from its services.

The Honourable Lady's support aims to empower AWHC and enable it to continue its humanitarian activities. The fleet of buses will give the association's children easy access to AWHC's services and programmes.

The gesture also aims to alleviate the suffering of parents and spare them the hardship of transporting their children to and from AWHC centres.



Sayyida Hujaija Jaifer al Said, Chairperson of the association, treasured the Honourable Lady's keenness to give handicapped children access to services of the high standard that they deserve.

She pointed out that the support offered by the Honourable Lady "stems from constant concern for this segment of society; it is evidence of the care accorded by her to handicapped children to empower them to become active members of their communities and capable of handling challenging situations on their own in their personal lives".

Sayyida Hujaija added that board members and affiliates of the association are thankful and greatly appreciate the Honourable Lady's material and moral support.

ONA



SAYYID FAHD RECEIVES GCC SECRETARY-GENERAL

On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received Dr Naif Falah al Hajraf, GCC Secretary-General, on Wednesday to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty. The meeting reviewed the march of the GCC and views on regional and international developments. During the meeting, Sayyid Fahd affirmed that the GCC is the main pillar of security, stability and comprehensive development in the region (ONA)

CO₂ emissions fell by 16% during 2015-20

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In line with Oman's ambitions to become a low-carbon economy and reach net-zero emissions target by 2050, the sultanate's carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions per capita fell by 16 per cent during the 2015-2020 period, according to a new report.

In the GCC region, Oman recorded the second biggest reduction in per capita emissions from 2015 to 2020, only behind the UAE which managed to reduce its CO₂ emissions per capita by 35 per cent during the same period, according to the *EY MENA Climate Change Readiness Index* report.

The index measures the readiness of the six GCC countries as well as Egypt and Jordan across several criteria, including effectiveness of their adaptation and mitigation strategies and ability to finance and implement these strategies.

Citing the World Bank's 2019



estimates, the EY report ranked Oman as the ninth biggest generator of carbon emissions per capita in the world. Within the GCC region, however, Oman's carbon emissions per capita was lowest at 15.3 metric tonnes. This is compared to

Qatar's 32.5 metric tonnes emissions per capita, Kuwait's 22 metric tonnes, Bahrain's 20.3 metric tonnes, UAE's 19.3 metric tonnes and Saudi Arabia's 15.3 metric tonnes, as per the EY report.

Compared to 2015, the refer-

ence year for the Paris Climate Agreement, emissions per capita have fallen in five of the six GCC countries, as shown by the EY report. Qatar saw a small uptick in emissions per capita.

"Thanks to carbon capture and storage and significant reduc-

Carbon emissions in Oman stand at 95mn tonnes: EA

Muscat- The volume of carbon emissions in Oman currently stands at 95mn tonnes annually, according to H E Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Omari, Chairman of Environment Authority (EA).

Revealing details of Oman's progress on its net zero emissions target in an interview with Oman TV on Tuesday, H E Omari said, "The sultanate is working on an organised transition plan to reach carbon neutrality by the year 2050."

He added that the oppor-

tunities for renewable energy in Oman are "very promising, especially with the availability of clean green energy, which is a huge driver for many sectors".

H E Omari observed that the effect of climate change and pollution crosses borders because the environmental system is one. "For this reason, it is important for everyone shouldering the responsibility, whether individuals, society or institutions, to keep the planet in a state of balance."

particularly GCC members, have moved to tackle flaring, the burning of methane released from oil and gas reservoirs,' the EY report added.

The report highlights Oman's National Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation to Climate Change by 2040 and its exclusive support for sustainability focused startups in the Vision 2040 plan.

'Oman's national strategy is intended to be a catalyst to spur local climate action and facilitate the sultanate's shift from a fossil-fuel based economy,' the report said.

Oman's National Energy Strategy 2040 promises a 30 per cent share of renewable energy in the power generation mix by 2030.

'While Oman does not yet have a market for carbon emissions trading, there are preliminary explorations in the form of introduction of a credit system for energy efficient customers,' the report added.



SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT ON THE 74TH REPUBLIC DAY OF INDIA WITH TODAY'S ISSUE



Muscat Nights expected to attract 500,000 visitors



Germany agrees to deliver Leopard tanks to Ukraine

Indian expats in Oman can soon make UPI payments

Shaddad al Musalmey
New Delhi

Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) in the sultanate will soon be able to access the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) using their Oman mobile numbers for transactions, according to Indian officials.

UPI is an instant real-time payment system, which currently processes more peer-to-merchant (P2M) transactions than peer-to-peer (P2P) transactions, in terms of volume in India. The transaction is done through mobile phones in easy steps. No charges are applied for UPI transactions.

Dr Ausaf Sayeed, Secretary - Consular, Passport, Visa & Overseas Indian Affairs in India's Ministry of External affairs, informed *Muscat Daily* that the implementation process is currently underway. "We are all keen to launch the service. UPI-based remittance solutions will go a long way in facilitating the 653,000 Indians living in Oman



UPI-based remittances will allow the 653,000 Indians in Oman to send money back home seamlessly

DR AUSAF SAYEED

in sending money back home seamlessly," he said.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), NPCI International Payments Ltd of India (NIPL) and Central Bank of



We want to collaborate globally to enable retail digital payments as public good for the world

NEHAL SHAH

Oman (CBO) last year enabled the acceptance of Indian RuPay cards issued by banks in India at all OmanNet network ATMs, POS and E-commerce sites as well as reciprocal acceptance of Oman cards/mobile payment clearing and switching system in

the networks of NPCI in India.

Sayed added that the MoU between NPCI and CBO is a milestone in bilateral relations between India and Oman and will play an important role in strengthening people-to-people ties and benefiting both economies in many ways.

Nehal Shah, Business Development In-Charge at International Payments Limited Middle East and Africa, said, "Backed by best-in-class technology, we want to collaborate globally to enable retail digital payments as public good for the world. With UPI, India is the global leader in digital payments."

UPI processed 7.83bn financial transactions of over US\$154bn in December 2022, with a total of 74bn financial transactions in 2022, growing from 49bn in 2021. "UPI has been an enabler of digital payments in India and we are focused on its continuous evolution to include newer use cases to drive cash displacement," Shah added.



Bids invited for multi-level car park in Muttrah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to reduce traffic congestion, Muscat Municipality will construct a multi-storey car park in Muttrah.

An official of Muscat Municipality said, "The municipality has floated a tender for specialised companies to build a multi-storey car park in the Al Areen area of the wilayat of Muttrah with the aim of reducing traffic congestion, stimulating commercial activity and supporting domestic tourism."

The deadline for submission of bids is March 23.

Following the announce-

ment, Faisal al Balushi, owner of a bukhur shop in Muttrah Souq, said, "Muttrah is one of the most visited tourist destinations in the country, but the lanes are narrow and space in front of the corniche is limited. So people are often reluctant to come here because of the parking problem. A multi-storey car park will surely prevent the traffic chaos."

According to Mohammad Hussain, another shopkeeper in the souq, businesses often lose customers owing to the parking problem. "This is bad for us and the economy. A multi-level car park will solve the problem in the area."

Muscat Nights expected to attract 500,000 visitors

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Nights sites across the capital are witnessing a huge turnout and expected to attract more than 500,000 visitors over the 17-day period of the festival, according to Ahmed bin Mohammed al Hamidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality.

In an interview with Oman TV, Hamidi said, "The programmes and activities of Muscat Nights have been carefully selected. The municipality has contracted Italian, French and British troupes to present various artistic and musical performances."

He further said that the number of visitors to the four Muscat Nights venues is promising "and expected to cross the half million mark".

Hamidi informed that the municipality has "totally reconfigured" the heritage village by employing technology, which is managed by an Omani com-



(Supplied photos)

pany. "The company has used technology to present information about the governorates in an interesting way."

He added that Muscat

Nights offer a wide variety of activities, while emphasising that Omani heritage "must be preserved and displayed in a way that attracts visitors and

the target age group".

On future plans for Muscat Nights, Hamidi said, "In our annual agenda, prepared in cooperation with the concerned



The municipality has totally reconfigured the heritage village by employing technology. Omani heritage must be preserved and displayed in a way that attracts visitors

AHMED AL HAMIDI

authorities and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Muscat Municipality has a plan to hold events throughout the year in the governorate."



(Supplied photo)

Shinas Heritage Festival kicks off in N Batinah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Shinas Heritage Festival kicked off on Wednesday under the patronage of Mohammed Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of North Batinah.

The festival, organised by the Camel Racing Committee in the wilayat and supervised by the Department of Municipal Affairs in North Batinah Municipality, will run for four days.

Mohammed al Balushi, general supervisor of the festival and a member of the Camel Racing

Committee, said, "The event is being held at a camel racing field, and includes a variety of activities, including camel, horse and Saluki dog races."

He added that the festival is being held for the second time and includes a bedouin heritage village, activities showcasing rural and marine life, a shooting competition, a marathon, performances by traditional Omani groups, and poetry evenings.

"The festival aims to promote Omani tourism and preserve heritage," Balushi said.

Mohammed el Morabity, Corina Sommer win ODM

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Moroccan Mohammed el Morabity was crowned the Oman Desert Marathon (ODM) champion in the male category, while Switzerland's Corina Sommer took the women's title on the concluding day of the race on Tuesday in Bidiyah, North Sharqiyah.

Mohammed finished in a time of 14:13:15, while Corina clocked 19:39:28.

Following the race, Corina said, "The dunes during the course were beautiful. However, the night race was a bit scary. I was on my own and that made me go fast. It was my first night run in the desert."

Morocco's TGCC, comprising international champions Mohammed and Rachid el Morabity, took the honours in the team category. Saleh al Saidi was the first among the Omani runners with a finishing time of 15:31:30.

The eighth edition of the 165km desert run started on Saturday, January 21, from Al Wasil



Mohammed el Morabity and (inset) Corina Sommer (Supplied photos)

Fort with 42 competitors, and ended in Jawharat al Bidiyah Resort on Tuesday with 37 runners, after five quit during the race.

This year's race included a children's 2km run, a 5km run, and 10km race, which were organised on Day 1.

"The 165km run is usually divided into six stages, run over the span of one week, but this year it was divided into four stages: 47km, 55km, 42km night run on Day 3 and 21km on the final day," organisers stated.

Eighteen Omani runners participated in this year's edition, besides 24 international runners from Italy, Germany, Poland, the UK, Morocco, France, Spain, Belgium, Ukraine and Switzerland. A 67-year-old surgeon also took part in this year's race.

Cecile Bertin, a participant from France, said that she competed in ODM five years ago when there were hardly any Omani runners. "I am impressed with how the number of participants has increased and the qual-

ity of the runners."

David Sanchez from Spain said that ODM presented a new way of running, "very different from the years of knowledge I have in running mountain races; a fantastic way to change the trail environment".

For Albert Jorquera Mestres, another runner from Spain, it was his first desert race. "This was an opportunity to learn about a culture, new sensations and live the desert life, not visit as a tourist. I suffered but I had a great time.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Love, respect and treat your parents kindly

The social reality of our country is changing day by day, year after year. How we treat our parents is turning into one of the most serious issues of the nation. In recent times, many instances have come to light of children not showing gratitude to their fa-

thers and mothers.

The religion of Islam urges followers to treat parents with love and not disobey them. But we find that some people throw their parents into homes for the elderly when they become old and infirm. Many

who ill-treat their parents often receive the same ingratitude from their own children when they grow old.

I advise young people to review their priorities and change their behaviour before it's too late.

Sami Amer al Battashi
Via email

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MOH No: 44/2023

Forum focuses on employment, training for deaf

(Supplied photo)



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Vertex Business Solutions and Al Massa Marketing & CSR Management hosted the country's first-of-its-kind forum for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) on Wednesday to promote education and employment among such individuals.

The forum was held under the auspices of H E Sheikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosni, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Labour.

Held under a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Labour and support of The Zubair Corporation, Tanmia and Octal, it was the first event organised exclusively to encourage and support DHH individuals.

Held at Hormuz Grand Muscat, the forum was managed by DHH students, and included panel discussions on two topics - 'Employment opportunities

There are close to 15,000 DHH individuals in Oman. The forum is to help students who are about to finish their studies to find suitable jobs in their field

AHMED AL SAATI

available for the DHH' and 'Education for the DHH - Between reality and hope'.

The forum saw the participation of the public and private sectors, as well as academic institutions, and showcased success stories of several DHH individuals and corporate companies that support them.

According to Ahmed al Saati, Project Manager of Vertex Business Solutions, there are close to 15,000 DHH individuals in Oman as per the 2020 census.

"The forum is to help students who are about to finish their studies to find suitable jobs in their field. We are also receiving help from private companies. We will provide DHH individuals comprehensive training in the Omani sign language."

Hilal Omar al Siyabi, Chief Corporate Services Officer of The Zubair Corporation, said, "Our sponsorship of this event is a reflection of our commitment to support local communities and empower talented individuals in various artistic, cultural, sports and social fields, enhancing their skills in order to achieve their desired goals. The Zubair Corporation will continue to contribute meaningfully by helping similar initiatives that lead to the development of skills of people with special needs, especially the deaf and hard of hearing."

Speakers from 18 countries to take part in international debate competition

Our Correspondent
Muscat

More than 320 participants from 18 countries will take part in the 2nd Asian Arabic Debating Championship being held in Oman from January 29 to February 2.

The event will be organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Oman Debate Centre and Qatar Debate Centre.

Hilal bin Saif al Siyabi, Director General of Directorate of Youth in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Vice Chairman of the Main Committee of the championship, said, "The sultanate has the capability to host this youth cultural event. The increase in the number of participants from the first to the second edition of this event confirms the interest of Asian countries to participate in it."

He added, "The championship

aims to spread the culture of dialogue and debate among young people, develop educational activities at local, regional and international levels for the target group, and open channels of communication between university students in various countries of the Asian continent."

Abdulrahman bin Ibrahim al Subaie, Director of Programmes and Projects in Qatar Debate Centre, informed that 42 teams are participating in this edition of the championship, compared to 26 in the first. Participating teams represent 18 countries - Australia, Azerbaijan, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam and Yemen, besides Oman.

The championship will involve 75 referees and 50 young Omani volunteers helping conduct it.

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*Rates as on January 25 Source: xe.com	

BRIEFS

Oil rises on hopes of China demand increase

Oil prices rose on Wednesday over expectations of a strong rebound in demand from China, the world's largest crude importer, while an expected rise in US crude oil stockpiles limited further price upticks.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at US\$86.58 per barrel at 09.56am in London, a 0.52 per cent increase from the closing price of US\$86.13 a barrel in the previous trading session.

American benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at US\$80.42 per barrel at the same time, a 0.36 per cent gain after the previous session closed at US\$80.13 a barrel.

Although long-term lockdowns and strict restrictions restrained China's economic growth since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, experts are hopeful for an economic rebound as life is gradually normalizing in the world's second-largest oil consuming country.



Bank Muscat proposes 15% cash dividend for 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Muscat, the flagship financial institution in Oman, has proposed to distribute a 15 per cent dividend for the year 2022.

The meeting of Bank Muscat's board of directors, chaired by Sheikh Khalid bin Mustahail al Mashani, chairman, on Tuesday approved the bank's 2022 financial results and dividend payout, subject to the formal approval of the annual general meeting of shareholders and regulatory authorities.

The board has proposed a 15 per cent cash dividend for the year 2022. Bank Muscat shareholders would receive a cash dividend of 15bz per ordinary share aggregating to RO112.596mn on the bank's existing share capital.

The bank's capital adequacy ratio (CAR) after the cash dividend payout will be 21.25 per cent, which is well above the minimum regulatory requirement.

Bank Muscat posted a net profit of RO200.75mn for the year 2022 compared to RO189.63mn reported in 2021, an increase of 5.9 per cent.

The bank's net interest income from conventional banking and net income from Islamic fi-

ncing stood at RO344.86mn for the year ended December 31, 2022 compared to RO335.54mn for the same period in 2021, an increase of 2.8 per cent.

Non-interest income came at RO157.96mn for the year ended December 31, 2022 as compared to RO139.94mn for the same period in 2021, an increase of 12.9 per cent, mainly due to higher investment income.

Bank Muscat's operating ex-

penses for the full year 2022 increased by 8.3 per cent to RO207.30mn as compared to RO191.46mn for the same period in 2021.

The bank's net impairment for credit and other losses for the year ended December 31, 2022 marginally decreased to RO59.94mn as against RO60.22mn for the same period in 2021.

Bank Muscat's net loans and advances including Islamic financing receivables increased by 2.5 per cent to RO9.417bn as at December 31, 2022 as against RO9.191bn a year ago.

Customer deposits including Islamic customer deposits decreased by 1.5 per cent to RO8.647bn as at December 31, 2022 as against RO8.775bn a year ago.

Bank Muscat shareholders would receive a cash dividend of 15bz per ordinary share aggregating to RO112.596mn on the bank's existing share capital

Vodafone's special numbers auction raises RO100,000



Muscat - Under the patronage of H H Sayyid Kamil bin Fahad bin Mahmoud al Said, Secretary General of the General Secretariat to the Cabinet of Ministers, and in collaboration with the Telecom Regulatory Authority, Vodafone Oman hosted a first of its kind live auction of special gold and diamond numbers, successfully raising over RO100,000.

All proceeds will be donated to charitable associations and organisations, the company said in a press release.

Sayyid Fahad al Busaidi, chief corporate affairs official at Vodafone Oman, said, "This unique auction reinforced Vodafone's dedication to support initiatives that give back to society. The fantastic response we received, raising over RO100,000 for worthy causes, exceeded all our expectations. We had over 900 bidders competing to get their hands on 100 of our best numbers and we thank them all for their participation and generosity

that made our event a success."

Although not a new concept to the market, Vodafone certainly 'did a number of it' by hosting it live, while maintaining regulatory and data privacy

All proceeds will be donated to charitable organisations

processes, all the while showcasing its sector-leading digital capabilities and commitment to bringing new experiences to customers.

The public were invited to pre-register their interest in buying the gold and diamond numbers, which went up for sale during the event.

Bidders were then able to submit their silent offers through Mazadcom online auction platform.

Boeing reports loss for fourth quarter

New York, US - Boeing reported a fourth-quarter loss of US\$634mn on Wednesday as elevated operating and supply chain costs offset a December uptick in commercial plane deliveries.

The aviation giant, which has been beset in recent years with production problems and certification delays following the 737 MAX crashes, finished 2022 with positive free cashflow for the first time since 2018 as it reaffirmed 2023 targets.

Boeing's revenues rose 35 per cent to US\$20bn, but came in below analyst forecasts.

"We had a solid fourth quarter, and 2022 proved to be an important year in our recovery," said Boeing Chief Executive Dave Calhoun.

"Demand across our portfolio is strong, and we remain focused on driving stability in our opera-



tions and within the supply chain to meet our commitments in 2023 and beyond."

Boeing has said it expects to return to a level of financial strength comparable to its pre-pandemic state around the 2025-26 timeframe.

The company's turnaround has been aided by robust demand for commercial planes as airlines struggle to meet pent-up demand for flying and replace older planes with newer jets that burn less energy and release fewer carbon emissions.

AFP

US sues Google over ad market dominance

Washington, US - The US Justice Department sued Google on Tuesday for its dominance of the online advertising market, launching a fresh legal battle against the California-based tech giant.

The case was the second federal lawsuit against Google over alleged antitrust violations and the first since US President Joe Biden took office two years ago.

The earlier case targeted Google's world-dominating search engine and is expected to go to trial later this year.

In this latest suit, prosecutors took aim at Google's extremely profitable advertising business, asking that it be broken up to level the playing field for other companies.

Google's ad dealings generated more than US\$200bn in sales in 2021 and is parent company Alphabet's biggest money-maker by a wide margin.

The US said the revenue was



In this file photo, a worker walks along a path at Google's Bay View campus in Mountain View, California on June 27, 2022 (AFP)

unlawfully maintained by a monopoly that had "corrupted legitimate competition in the ad tech industry."

"Google has used anticompetitive, exclusionary, and unlawful means to eliminate or severely diminish any threat to its dominance over digital advertising technologies," the suit added.

The case was launched by the Department of Justice (DOJ) in conjunction with eight US states: California, Colorado, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Virginia.

Central to the case is Google's dominance of the ad tech business, the technology that companies rely on for their online

advertising needs.

The prosecutors said Google "now controls" both the buy and the sell side of the crucial sector, meaning website creators earn less and advertisers pay more, all while innovation is choked by the lack of rivals.

"In pursuit of outsized profits, Google has caused great harm to online publishers and advertisers and American consumers," said Deputy US Attorney General Lisa Monaco in a statement.

The federal case follows state lawsuits against Google that have alleged it illegally dominates the markets for online search, advertising technology and apps on the Android mobile platform.

"Google should be worried," Insider Intelligence analyst Evelyn Mitchell said.

"Advertising accounts for the vast majority of its revenues, and its ads business is as powerful as it is because of its scale and the

way its ad products are integrated," she added.

Google has denied it is a monopoly, saying rivals in the online ad market include Amazon, Facebook-owner Meta and Microsoft.

"Today's lawsuit from the DOJ attempts to pick winners and losers in the highly competitive advertising technology sector," a Google spokesperson said in an email.

The lawsuit "is doubling down on a flawed argument that would slow innovation, raise advertising fees, and make it harder for thousands of small businesses and publishers to grow," Google added.

The Computer & Communications Industry Association, a big tech lobby, said the lawsuit also failed to take into account offline rivals that include ads in newspapers and on television and radio.

AFP

German economy to avoid recession in 2023, says government

Berlin, Germany - Germany is set to narrowly escape a recession this year, the government said Wednesday, as Europe's biggest economy weathers the fallout from the Ukraine war better than expected.

Industrial powerhouse Germany is forecast to eke out growth of 0.2 per cent in 2023, the economy ministry said in its latest projections.

Back in October, when fears were running high about soaring energy costs in the wake of Russia's war in Ukraine, Berlin was bracing for a contraction of 0.4 per cent in 2023.

The more optimistic outlook

comes as massive government intervention has helped keep the lid on energy costs for households and businesses after Russia cut deliveries of natural gas last year.

As well as criss-crossing the globe to find alternative suppliers, the German government has unveiled a 200-billion-euro (US\$212bn) support package to cushion the energy crisis, including a cap on electricity and gas prices.

Mild winter weather and falling wholesale gas prices recently have further bolstered confidence that the expected downturn won't be as painful as



In this file photo pipe systems are seen at the industrial plant of the Nord Stream 1 Baltic Sea pipeline, Lubmin, northeastern Germany (AFP)

initially thought.

"The German economy as a whole has proved resilient," the ministry said in an annual re-

port.

"Consumers have also done their part by making major energy savings."

The German economy already defied predictions by dodging a contraction in the final quarter of 2022, official data showed last week.

Over the whole of 2022 output expanded by 1.9 per cent, the data showed, better than analysts had predicted.

Lower energy prices have also helped bring down inflation from a peak of 10.4 per cent in October, and the economy ministry expects the trend to continue.

For 2023, consumer price growth is now tipped to reach six per cent, down from an earlier estimate of seven per cent.

But Europe's top economy is not out of the woods yet, analysts said.

"Not falling off the cliff is one thing, staging a strong rebound, however, is a different matter," ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski said.

On the bright side, he said, Germany's export-oriented economy will likely benefit from China's relaxation of Covid curbs, while lower inflation could boost consumer spending at home.

But industrial production remains below pre-pandemic levels, and uncertainty lingers about energy security during

the winter of 2023-2024.

Households and companies also have yet to feel the full impact of higher borrowing costs resulting from the European Central Bank's interest rate rises as it moves to cool inflation, Brzeski said.

Germany also continues to grapple with a major shortage of skilled workers -- the country currently has two million vacancies and counting.

The ministry acknowledged in its report that many "uncertainties" hung over the German economy, including the ongoing fallout from the war in Ukraine.

AFP

Germany agrees to deliver Leopard tanks to help Ukraine repel invasion

Berlin, Germany - Berlin on Wednesday agreed to deliver powerful German-made Leopard tanks to help Ukraine repel Russia's invasion, a decision hailed by Kyiv and its allies but slammed by Moscow as 'extremely dangerous'.

"The first step on tanks has been taken," said Kyiv, urging its allies to now build a 'tank coalition'. "We need a lot of Leopards," the head of Ukraine's presidential administration Andriy Yermak said on social media.

Germany will provide a company of 14 Leopard 2 A6 tanks from its Bundeswehr stocks, government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit said. It is also granting approval for other European countries to send tanks from their own stocks to Ukraine, with the aim of quickly assembling 'two tank battalions with Leopard 2 tanks for Ukraine', he said.

"This decision follows our well-known line of supporting Ukraine to the best of our abilities," Chancellor Olaf Scholz said.

While scores of nations have pledged military hardware for Ukraine in recent weeks, Kyiv has been clamouring for the more sophisticated Leopard tanks, seen as key to punching through



This file photo shows soldiers on a Leopard 2 A7 during an educational practice in Munster, northern Germany, on May 20, 2019 (AFP)

enemy lines. Several other European countries, including Finland and Poland, have said they are ready to provide their stocks, but had required Berlin's approval to transfer the German-made armaments to a third party.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, who had vocally sought German approval to

send on the tanks, thanked Berlin for the decision and called it 'a big step towards stopping Russia'. "Together we are stronger," he said, as Britain and France also

welcomed the announcement. But Russia's ambassador to Germany Sergei Nechaev warned that the 'extremely dangerous decision takes the conflict

to a new level of confrontation, and contradicts statements by German politicians about the unwillingness of the German Federation to get involved in it'.

Soledar pullout

Scholz, who had faced fierce accusations of dithering over whether to send the tanks, is taking questions in the Bundestag German parliament.

The Leopard 2 is seen as one of the best-performing tank

44 tanks. The *Wall Street Journal* has meanwhile reported that Washington was leaning toward sending a significant number of M1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine.

The Kremlin warned on Wednesday that if Western countries supply Ukraine with heavy tanks they will be destroyed on the battlefield.

"These tanks burn like all the rest. They are just very expensive," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

The Kremlin's warning came as a Moscow-backed official said Russian forces had advanced in Bakhmut, a town in eastern Ukraine that Russia has been trying to capture for months.

The Ukrainian military also conceded to AFP that its troops had pulled out of battle-scarred Soledar, to the northeast of Bakhmut. Russian forces had claimed control of Soledar earlier this month.

And Denis Pushilin, Moscow's top official responsible for Donetsk, said its capture 'has now made it possible to block the enemy's supply routes and, in part, take under operational control areas' from which Ukrainians struck Russian positions.

AFP

Germany will provide a company of 14 Leopard 2 A6 tanks from its Bundeswehr stocks

models worldwide and is widely used across Europe, meaning spare parts and ammunition can be easily obtained.

Berlin will also offer to train Ukrainian forces to use the tanks in Germany, as well as providing logistics, ammunition and maintenance for the vehicles.

Germany did not specify the number of tanks in two battalions but for the Bundeswehr a battalion typically comprises of

Justin Bieber sells music rights to Hipgnosis Songs for \$200mn

New York, US - Pop juggernaut Justin Bieber has sold his music publishing and recording catalog shares to the Blackstone-backed Hipgnosis Songs Capital for \$200 million, the company said on Tuesday - marking the industry's latest blockbuster rights deal.

The sale has been rumoured for weeks, and sees the 28-year-old join a who's who of artists who have cashed out recently on their catalogs. Hipgnosis did not publicly disclose terms of the deal, but a source close to the matter told AFP it was worth around US\$200mn.

Contemporary stars including Justin Timberlake and Shakira have sold large stakes in their work - both also struck deals with Hipgnosis - but the move has mostly been seen among legacy artists like Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen.

The staggering sums - Springsteen's catalog went to Sony for a reported half billion dollars - are considered safe bets both for older artists getting their finances in order and investors who can count on consistent returns from time-tested music and the viability of streaming.

Younger catalogs are seen as riskier territory, but Bieber is among the best-selling artists ever, and now Hipgnosis has his share in some of the 21st century's biggest hits including 'Baby' and 'Sorry.'



The impact of Justin Bieber on global culture over the years has truly been remarkable. At only 28 years of age, he is one of a handful of defining artists of the streaming era

MERCK MERCURIADIS

Hipgnosis Songs Capital is a US\$1bn venture between financial giant Blackstone and the British Hipgnosis Song Management. Hipgnosis said they acquired Bieber's interest in his publishing copyrights to his 290-song back catalog - all of his music released prior to December 31, 2021.

Bieber's longtime home Universal will continue to administer the catalog, another source close

to the deal said, and still owns the artist's master recordings. Hipgnosis has acquired the artist's stake in his masters as well as his neighbouring rights - a royalty that sees its owner receive a payment every time a song is played publicly.

'Remarkable'

After the Canada native was discovered on YouTube as a teen, Bieber skyrocketed to global

fame, selling more than 150mn records.

He has charted eight number-one records on Billboard's top albums list, and his songs have streamed on Spotify alone more than 32bn times.

"The impact of Justin Bieber on global culture over the last 14 years has truly been remarkable," said Hipgnosis chief Merck Mercuriadis, a longtime music industry executive, in a statement.

"At only 28 years of age, he is one of a handful of defining artists of the streaming era that has revitalised the entire music industry, taking a loyal and worldwide audience with him on a journey from teen phenomenon to culturally important artist."

Bieber's health has suffered recently, with the star going on an indefinite touring hiatus after he revealed he'd been diagnosed with Ramsay Hunt Syndrome, a rare complication of shingles that for him caused partial facial paralysis.

Music catalogs have always changed hands, but the current publishing sales boom had escalated rapidly, with financial markets increasingly drawn to lucrative music portfolios as an asset class. Mercuriadis' Hipgnosis, which went public on the London Stock Exchange in 2018, has played a large part in publicising the spike in sales.

AFP



Israeli security forces gather at the site where a Palestinian man attempted to stab an Israeli soldier with a knife before being shot dead, near the Kdumim settlement, in the occupied West Bank, on Wednesday (AFP)

Israel forces kill Palestinian man in alleged knife attack

Nablus, Palestinian Territories - Israeli forces shot dead a Palestinian in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday, the Palestinian health ministry said, in what the army described as a 'stabbing attack'.

The ministry said that Arref Abdel Nasser Arref Lahlouh, 22, was killed 'by Israeli gunfire,' near the Palestinian city of Qalqilya.

The Israeli army said that Lahlouh 'attempted to carry out a stabbing attack' near the Jewish settlement of Kdumim.

"The assailant, armed with a knife, arrived at an IDF military post and attempted to stab an IDF soldier at the scene."

Lahlouh was 'neutralised by the soldiers in the area', the army added. Lahlouh is the 19th Palestinian killed in the West Bank this year, the majority of whom were shot dead by Israeli forces. Separately on Wednesday, soldiers entered the Shuafat refugee camp in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem to demolish the home of Udai Tamimi who fatally shot military policewoman Noa Lazar at a checkpoint in October.

Tamimi was killed by Israeli forces after a 10-day manhunt. He was carrying out another attack at a West Bank settlement when he was shot dead.

Israel regularly demolishes

the homes of individuals it blames for attacks on Israelis.

Human rights activists say the policy amounts to collective punishment, as it can render non-combatants, including children, homeless.

But Israel says the practice is effective in deterring some Palestinians from carrying out attacks. Last year, 150 Palestinians were killed in the West Bank, the highest annual toll since United Nations records began in 2005.

At least 26 Israelis and 200 Palestinians were killed across Israel and the Palestinian territories.

AFP

Iran slaps new sanctions on EU, UK in tit-for-tat move

Tehran, Iran - Iran on Wednesday imposed sanctions on 34 individuals and entities from the European Union and Britain in reaction to similar measures taken over Tehran's response to months-long protests.

The measures come two days after the EU and Britain slapped another round of sanctions on Iran, which has been rocked by protests since the September 16 death of Mahsa Amini.

Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian

Kurd, died in custody after being arrested for allegedly breaching the country's strict dress code.

The sanctions include financial measures, with the blocking of accounts and transactions in Iran's banking systems, as well as the 'prohibition of visa issuance and entry' to Iran, the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Tehran accuses the people and organisations of 'supporting terrorism and terrorist groups, instigating and encouragement

to terrorist acts and violence against Iranian people'.

It also accuses them of 'interference in the domestic affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and fomenting violence and unrest'.

Sanctions include 25 listed names from the EU, and nine from Britain.

France's Radio J, the group European Friends of Israel (EFI), and 22 individuals including six members of the European Parliament are among those targeted.

The list also includes the Swedish-Danish right-wing extremist Rasmus Paludan, who burned a copy of the Q'uran in Sweden on Saturday, sparking strong protests from the Muslim world. Iran had warned of a reciprocal action on Tuesday, a day after the EU imposed its fourth round of sanctions against the country since the protests started, placing 37 more officials and entities on an asset freeze and visa ban blacklist.

Britain on the same day sanctioned five more Iranian officials, broadening its blacklist to 50 individuals and organisations it considers to be involved in dealing with the protests.

The new list includes nine French nationals, among them Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo and the philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy. Also targeted are three members of the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*.

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New Zealand's Hipkins replaces Ardern as PM

Wellington, New Zealand - Hundreds gathered to applaud Jacinda Ardern as she left New Zealand's parliament to resign as prime minister on Wednesday, before Chris Hipkins was swiftly sworn in as her replacement.

Ardern said last week she no longer had 'enough in the tank' after steering the country through natural disasters, its worst-ever terror attack and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hipkins was sworn in by Governor-General Cindy Kiro during a ceremony in the capital Wellington, saying he was 'energised and excited by the challenges ahead'. "This is the biggest privilege and responsibility of my life," he said.

The 44-year-old is now tasked with reversing the government's sagging popularity, which has been hampered by a deteriorating economy and a resurgent conservative opposition.

Ardern made her last public appearance as prime minister earlier on Wednesday, walking out of the distinctive Beehive parliament building as hundreds of staff and onlookers broke into a spontaneous round of applause. Prince William was among the first to congratulate Ardern.

"Thank you Jacinda Ardern for your friendship, leadership and



New Zealand's new PM Chris Hipkins smiles as he is sworn in during a ceremony at The Government House in Wellington on Wednesday (AFP)

support over the years, not least at the time of my grandmother's death," he wrote on his official Twitter account.

Folk singer Yusuf/Cat Stevens, who played a concert in memory of the 51 people killed during the 2019 Christchurch mosque massacre, also praised Ardern.

On Twitter, he described Ardern as a 'supporter of the

peace train who kept New Zealanders together following the terror attack in Christchurch'.

Ardern was first elected as prime minister in 2017, before riding a wave of 'Jacindamania' to secure a second term with a landslide victory in 2020.

But her centre-left government has increasingly struggled over recent months as it battles

soaring inflation, a housing affordability crisis, and a looming recession.

After chairing his first cabinet meeting on Wednesday afternoon, Hipkins said it was an 'immensely proud moment' for him to take 'the baton of responsibility' from Ardern.

He singled out the cost of living as one of his most urgent priorities, but was coy when

pressed on other potential policy changes.

Ardern, a global figurehead of progressive politics, has been credited with raising New Zealand's profile on the world stage.

Hipkins said he would be building his own relationships, but he expected Ardern 'will put in a good word'.

AFP

North Korea locks down capital Pyongyang over 'respiratory illness'

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea has ordered a five-day lockdown in the capital over 'respiratory illness', a report said on Wednesday, in what appears to be the first citywide restrictions since the country declared victory over COVID-19 in August 2022.

Residents of Pyongyang have been ordered to stay in their homes from Wednesday to Sunday and must submit to multiple temperature checks each day, Seoul-based specialist site NK News reported, citing a government notice.

The notice did not mention COVID but said that the illnesses currently spreading in the capital included the common cold, the report said.

The government order comes a day after NK News, citing sources in Pyongyang, reported that people in the city appeared to be stocking up on goods in anticipation of a lockdown. It is unclear if other

areas have imposed similar lockdowns and state media has not announced any new measures.

Experts suggested that North Korea's largest city is likely dealing with the re-emergence of COVID.

"COVID is disappearing and reappearing depending on the temperature, not just in North Korea but around the world," said Go Myong-hyun, a researcher at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

The Korean peninsula is currently in the grip of what weather forecasters have described as a Siberian cold snap, with temperatures in Pyongyang dropping as low as -22 degrees Celsius (-7.6 Fahrenheit). "It was quite premature for North Korea to celebrate its victory over the virus... with the drop in temperature, COVID has re-emerged," Go told AFP.

AFP



People visit statues of North Korea's former leaders on Mansu Hill on the occasion of the Lunar New Year in Pyongyang on January 22 (AFP)

Eight missing after ship sinks between Japan, South Korea

Tokyo, Japan - Japan and South Korea's coast guards were searching on Wednesday for eight crew from a cargo ship that sank between the two countries, after 14 others were rescued.

"A total of 14 have been rescued," a spokesman for the Japanese coast guard told AFP.

"We don't know their condition and nationalities yet," he added, declining to be named.

He said six of the crew had been rescued by South Korea's coast guard, which was assisting the operation.

Eleven of those rescued so far were 'unconscious', the Jeju Coast Guard told AFP, adding that the rescued crew members were being transported to Japan's southwestern Nagasaki.

The Jin Tian sent a distress signal late on Tuesday evening from a position around 110km (68 miles) west of the remote



Coast guard forces searching for missing people after a cargo ship sank off South Korea's southern island of Jeju (AFP)

and uninhabited Danjo islands in far southwestern Japan.

Three private ships were in the area and helped pick up several of the stranded crew members, Japan's coast guard said.

A Japanese coast guard plane and two ships were at the scene,

with additional Japanese and South Korean vessels en route, officials from both countries said.

The ship's captain used a satellite phone to tell South Korean coast guard officials that he and the crew would abandon the sinking ship in the early hours of

Wednesday morning, the Jeju Coast Guard said. Japan's government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno confirmed that the country's coast guard was cooperating with South Korean authorities in the rescue mission.

AFP

Japan PM Fumio Kishida says considering trip to Ukraine

Tokyo, Japan - Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, whose country is hosting this year's Group of Seven meeting, said on Wednesday he is considering visiting Ukraine, after an invitation from President Volodymyr Zelensky.

"Nothing has been decided at this time regarding my visit to Ukraine," he told parliament.

"I will consider this in light of various circumstances and conditions," he added, without specifying further. Tokyo has worked in lockstep with its G7 allies to sanction Russia over its invasion of Ukraine and boost support to Kyiv, even taking the rare step of offering refuge to those fleeing the conflict.

While Kishida has spoken to Zelensky several times, they



Japan's PM Fumio Kishida (AFP)

have not met in person. The Ukrainian leader invited his Japanese counterpart to visit during a call on January 6. The trip would be the first time in the post-war period that a Japanese prime minister has visited a country during an active conflict.

Leaders of other G7 countries - the United States, Canada, Ger-

many, France, Italy and Britain - have met Zelensky in Kyiv or elsewhere, with the exception of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, whose predecessor met the Ukrainian leader. She has said she expects to visit Ukraine soon.

Japan will host the G7 summit in Hiroshima in May, and the conflict in Ukraine is expected to be high on the agenda. Kishida this month toured several G7 countries, but the Ukraine visit would pose security challenges that are reportedly giving some Japanese officials pause.

As travel by the prime minister has to be approved by parliament, officials are worried it may be difficult to keep the timing of the trip a secret, according to the Jiji press agency.

AFP

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Peaking at right time

Novak Djokovic thrashes Andrey Rublev to enter Australian Open semi-finals

Melbourne, Australia - Novak Djokovic said he "sent a message" at the Australian Open by thrashing Andrey Rublev on Wednesday to make the semi-finals and edge closer to a 22nd Grand Slam title.

The Serb was in the zone to blitz past the Russian fifth seed 6-1, 6-2, 6-4 on Rod Laver Arena.

Djokovic's quest to go level with great rival Rafael Nadal on a leading 22 major titles carries an air of inevitability.

The 35-year-old has struggled with a hamstring injury in the early rounds at Melbourne Park but was dominant during his fourth-round demolition of Alex de Minaur and was equally clinical against the outclassed Rublev.

"I cannot be happier with my tennis, honestly," Djokovic told an adoring Rod Laver Arena.

"I've been playing very solid from the back of the court and I really love playing in these conditions and this court."

Victory for the red-hot favourite propelled him into a 44th Grand Slam semi-final to close the gap on Roger Federer's all-time record of 46.

Anything other than a rampant win for Djokovic against unseeded Paul would amount to a massive up-set, albeit at a tournament that has seen numerous



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates his victory against Russia's Andrey Rublev in the Australian Open quarter-final on Wednesday (AFP)

I cannot be happier with my tennis, honestly. I've been playing very solid from the back of the court and I really love playing in these conditions and this court

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

shocks in the men's and women's draws.

Paul defeated his fellow American Ben Shelton 7-6 (8/6), 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 to reach his first major semi-final.

But former world number one Djokovic, who can return to the

top of the rankings if he wins the Australian Open for a record-extending 10th time, will be a whole new prospect.

Paul, ranked 35, and the Serb great have never played each other before.

"I saw him in the locker room

after I finished my match. He said, congrats," said the 25-year-old, adding they had practised together before.

Ominous Sabalenka

Aryna Sabalenka set up a semi-final with surprise-package Magda Linette after once again displaying the kind of form and fitness which has made her favourite for the women's title.

The Belarusian fifth seed defeated Croatia's Donna Vekic 6-3, 6-2 as she closes on a first Grand Slam title.

The match was closer than

the score suggested, but Sabalenka was in scintillating form - she is yet to drop a set in Melbourne and has won all nine matches in 2023.

It is a far cry from a year ago, when she struggled badly with her serve and was reduced to tears at an Australian Open warm-up tournament.

"It feels really special to be in the semi-finals here, it was a tough match," said 24-year-old Sabalenka, who was competing in her first Australian Open quarter-final.

AFP



Lazio's Felipe Anderson celebrates with Luis Alberto after scoring against AC Milan in their Italian Serie A match on Tuesday (AFP)

Lazio thump crumbling champions Milan to move up to third

Rome, Italy - Lazio shot into Serie A's Champions League places on Tuesday after hammering AC Milan 4-0 to leave the champions' title defence hanging by a thread.

Lazio breezed up to third on goal difference ahead of Inter Milan and Roma and a point behind second-placed AC Milan, who gave a disastrous display at the Stadio Olimpico in Rome.

Sergej Milinkovic-Savic put Lazio ahead after three minutes with a first-time finish, and by the time Mattia Zaccagni bundled in the hosts' second in the 38th-minute, they could have already been up by three.

Luis Alberto ended the match as a contest by smashing home a penalty midway through the second half his beautifully disguised pass set up Felipe Anderson to roll in a deserved fourth in the 75th minute.

"If we play like the we have in the last few matches, we can re-

ally go far," said Milinkovic-Savic, who thinks a title bid under Maurizio Sarri is a possibility in the future. "Why not? If we play like this against the champions, why can't we go for the league?"

Milan meanwhile are 12 points behind runaway league leaders Napoli at the season's halfway point and have lost their aura as the country's top team.

Three league matches without a win have allowed Napoli to skip away practically unopposed to a huge lead, while Milan have four teams breathing down their neck for second place.

Lazio are one of three sides trailing them by a single point while in-form Atalanta are a further two points back in sixth, as the race for the top four heats up.

Milan can also be happy that Juventus were docked 15 points for illicit transfer activity on Friday otherwise they would be trailing the Turin giants on goal difference.



Darsait Titans players celebrate with the D20 Championship trophy

Darsait Titans win Oman D20 title

Muscat, Oman: Darsait Titans beat Qurum Thunders by five wickets to win Oman Cricket's D20 Championship at Oman Cricket Academy Ground.

Put in to bat first, Thunders scored 189 thanks to substantial contributions from Kashyap Prajapati (45 of 30;6x4,1x6) and Aiyappa CR. Shoaib Khan (59 of 42;9x4).

Jan Shafiq (2/33) was the pick of the bowlers for Titans.

In reply, Titans could not get the start they wanted but the expertise of Zeeshan Maqsood (90 of 52; 6x4,7x6) took them over the line in the last over. Maqsood finished off the game with a six. He was well supported by Sahil Shaik, Karan Kannan and Ravindra L.

"It was a wicket I would like to bat on any day. I thank our ground staff enabling us with such magnificent facilities," said

Maqsood.

"I would dedicate this Man of the Match to my younger daughter and of course my family who have been supportive to me always," he added.

Maqsood accepted the Player of the Match award from Kiran Asher, while Kashyap Prajapati, the Player of the Tournament, received a cash award by Oman Cricket from Alkesh Joshi.



Diego Simeone

Simeone believes extra time should be scrapped

Madrid, Spain - Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone believes cup matches should go straight to penalties if teams are tied after 90 minutes, without playing extra time.

Presently in the majority of knock-out tournaments, a 30-minute additional period is played if the score is level.

"It is a situation in the game that we should go to directly, and not go to extra time, I think," Simeone told a news conference Wednesday.

"There is already a lot of playing time."

AFP

Late Kimmich stunner saves point for Bayern against Cologne

Munich, Germany - A 90th-minute equaliser from Bayern Munich midfielder Joshua Kimmich saved his side from a second loss of the season, as they drew 1-1 at home against a dogged Cologne on Tues-day.

Cologne, who put seven goals past Bremen on Saturday, picked up where they left off, pressing Bayern and winning a corner after just three minutes.

Cologne defender Julian Chabot kept the ball in the air from the corner, superbly finding an unmarked Ellyes Skhiri at the far post for the Tunisian international to tap in from close range.

The visitors almost doubled their lead after 29 minutes but Bayern keeper Yann Sommer pulled off a brilliant double save, keeping out Skhiri and Denis Huseinbasic.

Cologne kept wave after wave of Bayern attacks at bay and looked set for their first win at Bayern since 2009, but midfielder Kimmich scored pulled back a point for the hosts in the



Joshua Kimmich scores Bayern Munich's equaliser in their German Bundesliga match against FC Cologne in Munich on Tuesday (AFP)

last minute of regulation time.

A beaming Cologne manager Steffen Baumgart said he was "a little annoyed" about the late equaliser but was "completely satisfied with the performance we showed. We showed a very good team a very good performance."

Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann said his side "played a very

good game in the second half" but two draws in two games in 2023 "is too little for what we're going for."

"Unfortunately it was not enough in the end."

Kimmich tried to take the focus off coach Nagelsmann, telling German TV "it's not about tactics, it's about being ready."

AFP



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AN OPPORTUNITY CALLED INDIA

Ambassador’s message on the occasion of Republic Day of India

H E AMIT NARANG
Ambassador of India to Oman

Warmest greetings and good wishes to all Indians and friends of India in Oman on the occasion of the 74th Republic Day of India!

I take this opportunity to convey my gratitude to the Government and kind people of Oman for their continued support and cooperation. I also thank and commend the Indian community in Oman for the goodwill and respect they have earned in the Omani society and for their role in strengthening ties between India and Oman.

This Republic Day is special as India also holds the G20 Presidency, igniting hopes of re-kindling international cooperation to tackle the most important issues of our times.

India is honoured to have invited Sultanate of Oman as one of its special guests during its G-20 Presidency. This is not just a symbol of the time-tested friendship between India and Oman, but also opens up new possibilities for deepening cooperation between our two countries.

As we emerge from the pandemic and enter a new era - uncertain and promising at the same time - the world is looking for new opportunities.

In September 2022, as the news came in that India had surpassed the UK to become the fifth largest economy in the world, it didn't come as a surprise. Instead, there was a sound of inevitability to it. As the world goes

through a turbulent, uncertain time, India today is the lone bright spot on the horizon.

Ten years ago, the Indian GDP was the 11th largest in the world. It is the fifth largest now.

In another five years, India is expected to become the world's 3rd largest economy, surpassing Japan and Germany, and have the 3rd largest stock market by 2030.

Morgan Stanley predicts that India's GDP could more than double from US\$3.5tn today to surpass US\$7.5tn by 2031, and India's share of global exports will double. The Bombay Stock Exchange is expected to have a market capitalisation of US\$10tn in another ten years.

Morgan Stanley also estimates that from next year, India will be one of only three economies in the world to generate more than US\$400bn worth of economic output growth annually, rising to over US\$500bn each year after 2028.

The Indian story is important in the context of Oman. With solid fundamentals and wise leadership, Oman stands at the cusp of a new phase of socio-economic progress, a new take-off point towards His Majesty's salutory 'Vision 2040'.

For Oman, India presents not one or two but five distinct opportunities. An investment opportunity; a trading opportunity; a digital transformation opportunity; an energy transition opportunity; and a tourism opportunity.



First Opportunity: Investment

Oman is home to over 6,000 India-Oman joint ventures with an estimated investment of over US\$7.5bn.

As Oman now seeks to double down on the priorities of Oman Vision 2040, tapping investments from a capital-rich Indian corporate sector could provide it with the resources needed to make this vision a reality.

Likewise, a rising Indian economy with a pro-active Government policy of attracting FDI and promoting manufacturing, coupled with a massive domestic market with a very young demography, is a compelling case for Omani capital investments.

The world is making a beeline for India. Oman also seeks to scale up its engagement with the most dynamic economy in the world.

Second Opportunity: Trade

India today is an exporting powerhouse. India's merchandise exports crossed US\$400bn for the first time earlier this year. Renewed energy in discussions on FTAs has given new momentum to India's trade links with the world. A landmark India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) has galvanized India-GCC negotiations on a region-wide FTA.

India-Oman two-way trade in 2021-22 was nearly 90 per cent higher than the previous year, touching about US\$10bn. In the first six months of this financial year, the bilateral trade is already higher than the annual figures recorded in 2021, 2020, 2019, and 2018. India's massive consumer market offers a ready market for anything and everything that Oman produces.

India has also been a reliable supplier to Oman, and the recent instance of wheat supplies to counter the effects of ongoing conflict is a case in point. Expanding imports of good quality affordable products will enrich the Omani trade basket and benefit the Omani people. This is a low-hanging fruit.

Third Opportunity: Digital Transformation

In 2021, 40 per cent of all real-time digital payments worldwide took place in India; at 48bn transactions, it was three times that of China and more than six times that of the US, Canada, the UK, France, and Germany combined.

India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) processed payments worth more than US\$1tn in FY22, and in March 2022, India crossed the milestone of 5bn monthly transactions on this platform. India's digital transformation presents enormous potential for cooperation. In this context, the recent signing of a landmark MoU between the Central Bank of Oman and the National Payments Corporation of India has helped lay the foundation.

Fourth Opportunity: Energy Transition

As the world hurtles towards a climate catastrophe, India and Oman have taken bold steps to decarbonise their economies and build a green future. India is the only G-20 country to achieve its Paris targets on climate change before time. We have now taken on enhanced targets, in line with our commitment to mainstreaming sustainability and reducing carbon footprint.

Today India is a market leader in solar and wind energy, and Indian companies are scouting for opportunities worldwide to scale up. It is no surprise that the first company to invest in Green Hydrogen in Oman is Indian. This is in perfect synergy with Oman's ambitions to emerge as a Green Hydrogen powerhouse. India and Oman can write the next chapter of the global journey towards a cleaner future together.

Continued on [Page 12](#)



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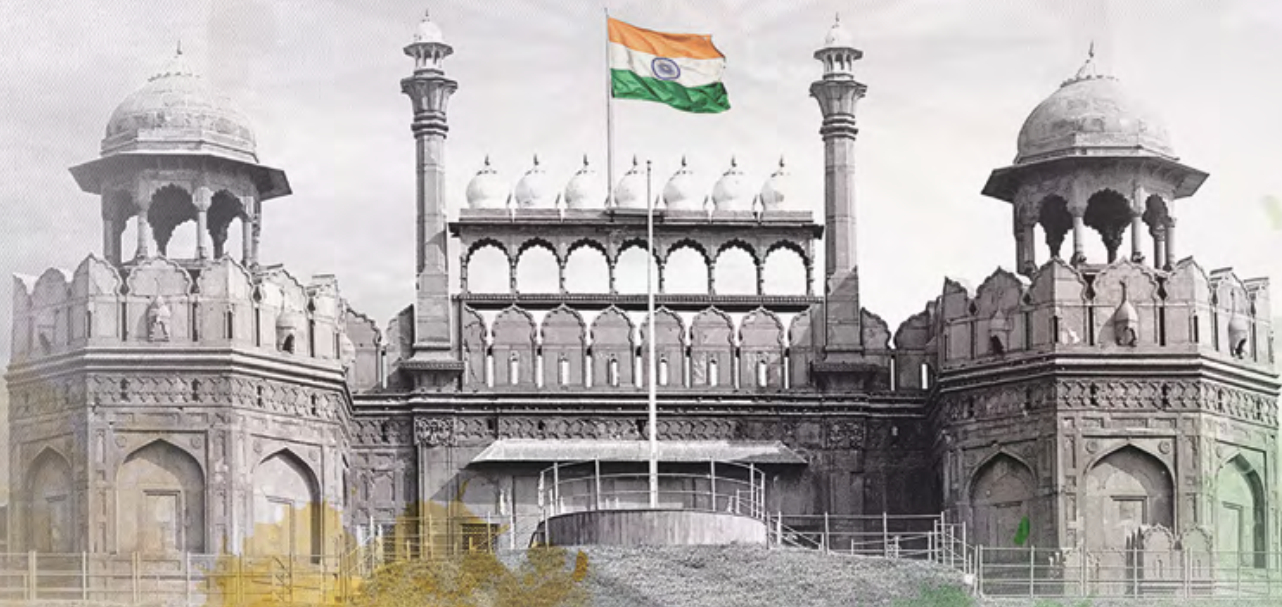
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The Path Ahead: India and G20

Our nation has entered the *Amrit Kaal*, a period marked by our transformative journey to development and social progress. It will also set the standards for a global developmental trajectory. India, now the fifth largest economy and a leading moral force in the international community, has also taken up the G20 Presidency. This has come at a time when challenges like rising inflation, geo-political tensions and climate crisis have created an urgent need for action-oriented and inclusive goals, which we should achieve in an accelerated manner. The natural question, then is - what does this presidency mean for India?

The Presidency of G20 - a group that accounts for 85 per cent of the world's GDP - has always been a position of great honour and greater responsibility. It brings with it the chance to turn challenges into opportunities, especially in areas where national and international efforts amalgamate. For instance, India's model of development has set the benchmark for social progress and inclusive growth globally. As the G20 Presidency, India will look to emerge as a bridge - a *setu* - between the developed and developing states for enhanced cooperation. Inspired from our Honourable Prime Minister's remarks at the Bali Summit, our Presidency will aim to be inclusive, ambitious, decisive and action-oriented. At the core of our efforts, lies our commitment to inclusive growth and accelerating progress on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in this Decade of Action. The



The essence of our Presidency can be found in the idea of - ‘One World, One Family, and One Future’

essence of our Presidency can be found in the idea of - ‘One World, One Family, and One Future’, highlighting our shared priorities, the need for collective action and unified goals.

The key priority areas for our presidency includes Mission ‘LiFE’ (Lifestyle for Environment), financing for SDGs, green energy transitions, food security and ensuring reliable supply chains for food and energy, and digital transformation, among others.

These cross-cutting priorities hold the potential to trigger actions that would benefit people

around the world. Last mile delivery of resources and services leveraging digital infrastructure can bolster inclusive recovery in a post pandemic world. In this respect, India's digital transformation across sectors, has set a global benchmark. From tech-enabled education to unified payment systems and digital health under Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, India has created an ecosystem for beneficiary identification and for transferring benefits seamlessly.

Another key element, central to our Presidency, is women-led development where we will strive to effect a paradigm shift in how the question of development and women is perceived. Women should be at the centre of development and we need to keep pushing this agenda until it becomes a norm. Reform of multilateral organisations and working towards ensuring financing for achieving SDGs are also important priorities. The constitu-

tion of a new working group on disaster risk reduction would be a unique contribution of our presidency. In this working group, we will aim to strengthen consensus over ways in which we collectively achieve disaster resilience at national and international levels.

The G20 Presidency is a unique opportunity to drive an action-oriented agenda to shape a world which is inclusive and sustainable, by building consensus for action. Our demographic strengths, our capacity for innovation and our diversity support help in our emergence as a global leader. By sharing our story of digital transformation through the G20 platform, India could pave the path to a global digital revolution. The world is closely watching as India takes on the reins of the G20 Presidency to shape our ‘One Future’.

AMITABH KANT
G20 Sherpa, India

Congratulations!

& Best Wishes
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INDIA'S G20 PRESIDENCY

NARENDRA MODI
Prime Minister of India

On December 1, 2022, India took over its G20 Presidency.

The previous 17 Presidencies of the G20 delivered significant results - for ensuring macro-economic stability, rationalising international taxation, relieving debt-burden on countries, among many other outcomes. We will benefit from these achievements, and build further upon them.

However, as India assumes this important mantle, I ask myself - can the G20 go further still?

Can we catalyse a fundamental mindset shift, to benefit humanity as a whole?

I believe we can.

Our mindsets are shaped by our circumstances. Through all of history, humanity lived in scarcity. We fought for limited resources, because our survival depended on denying them to others. Confrontation and competition - between ideas, ideologies and identities - became the norm.

Unfortunately, we remain trapped in the same zero-sum mindset even today. We see it when countries fight over terri-

tory or resources. We see it when supplies of essential goods are weaponised. We see it when vaccines are hoarded by a few, even as billions remain vulnerable.

Some may argue that confrontation and greed are just human nature. I disagree. If humans were inherently selfish, what would explain the lasting appeal of so many spiritual traditions that advocate the fundamental one-ness of us all?

One such tradition, popular in India, sees all living beings, and even inanimate things, as composed of the same five basic ele-



ments - the *panch-tatva* of earth, water, fire, air and space. Harmony among these elements - within us and between us - is essential for our physical, social and environmental well-being.

India's G20 Presidency will work to promote this universal sense of one-ness. Hence our theme - 'One Earth, One Family, One Future'.

This is not just a slogan. It takes into account recent changes in human circumstances, which we have collectively failed to appreciate.

Today, we have the means to produce enough to meet the basic needs of all people in the world.

Today, we do not need to fight for our survival - our era need not be one of war. Indeed, it must not be one!

Today, the greatest challenges we face - climate change, terrorism, and pandemics - can be solved not by fighting each other, but only by acting together.

Fortunately, today's technology also gives us the means to address problems on a humanity-wide scale. The massive virtual world that we inhabit today

As the mother of democracy, India's national consensus is forged not by diktat, but by blending millions of free voices into one harmonious melody

demonstrates the scalability of digital technologies.

Housing one-sixth of humanity, and with its immense diversity of languages, religions, customs and beliefs, India is a microcosm of the world.

With the oldest-known traditions of collective decision-making, India contributes to the foundational DNA of democracy. As the mother of democracy, India's national consensus is forged not by diktat, but by blending millions of free voices into one harmonious melody.

Today, India is the fastest growing large economy. Our citizen-centric governance model takes care of even our most marginalised citizens, while nurturing the creative genius of our talented youth.

We have tried to make national development not an exercise in top-down governance, but

rather a citizen-led 'people's movement'.

We have leveraged technology to create digital public goods that are open, inclusive and interoperable. These have delivered revolutionary progress in fields as varied as social protection, financial inclusion, and electronic payments.

For all these reasons, India's experiences can provide insights for possible global solutions.

During our G20 Presidency, we shall present India's experiences, learnings and models as possible templates for others, particularly the developing world.

Our G20 priorities will be shaped in consultation with not just our G20 partners, but also our fellow-travellers in the global South, whose voice often goes unheard.

Our priorities will focus on healing our 'One Earth', creating

harmony within our 'One Family' and giving hope for our 'One Future'.

For healing our planet, we will encourage sustainable and environment-friendly lifestyles, based on India's tradition of trusteeship towards nature.

For promoting harmony within the human family, we will seek to depoliticise the global supply of food, fertilisers and medical products, so that geopolitical tensions do not lead to humanitarian crises. As in our own families, those whose needs are the greatest must always be our first concern.

For imbuing hope in our future generations, we will encourage an honest conversation among the most powerful countries - on mitigating risks posed by weapons of mass destruction and enhancing global security.

India's G20 agenda will be inclusive, ambitious, action-oriented, and decisive.

Let us join together to make India's G20 Presidency a Presidency of healing, harmony and hope.

Let us work together to shape a new paradigm - of human-centric globalisation.

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to the government and
people of India on the
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An Opportunity

Continued from Page 09

Fifth Opportunity: Tourism

Incredible India - the tourism mega-store continues to attract Omanis in large numbers. But much less known is the fact that Incredible India is also a major outbound tourist generator. Over 26mn Indians leave the borders every year.

This Indian outbound tourism boom presents a massive opportunity for Oman. With just over two hours of flight time separating us and the vast cultural and culinary connection joining us, the immense natural beauty of Oman and its rich and friendly culture can be easily translated into doubling or quadrupling Indian tourists coming to Oman.

India has been a close friend of Oman in its Renaissance of the past 52 years. India is eager to partner with Oman to speed up its renewed renaissance in the next 52. India is an opportunity for the future. India is an opportunity for Oman.

An opportunity for India and Oman to jointly script a better, brighter future for our people.

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On June 11, 2022, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the headquarters of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe). It was a significant step in the operationalisation of reforms launched by the Government of India to promote private sector participation in India's space sector, providing access to space assets, data and facilities, which were hitherto entirely with the government entity, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). IN-SPACe is an independent single-window agency, which will permit and oversee activities of private enterprises in building and launching satellites, and providing space-based services. It will evolve suitable mechanisms for sharing of ISRO's technologies and expertise at no cost or at reasonable prices, to avoid reinventing the wheel. ISRO's capital-intensive, high technology facilities will be made available for use by private enterprises. In short, the Indian government will, through IN-SPACe, ensure a level playing field for private industry, with enabling policies and a friendly regulatory environment.

India's space industry has recorded remarkable successes over the past decades, in the face of a hostile external environment (sanctions, export controls, technology denials) for much of the period of its development. ISRO has developed end-to-end technologies for space-based services and applications in various sectors. It has indigenously developed sophisticated technologies of strategic importance. It designs, builds and launches satellites for high throughput communications, geo-imaging and high-resolution earth observation, and operates an independent Indian stand-alone navigation satellite system (NavIC). In scientific and developmental applications, the Indian space programme is, in some respects, ahead of that of some of the more advanced space-faring nations.

The global space industry today generates revenues of nearly US\$400bn. This figure is projected to grow to over US\$1tn by 2040 and US\$2.7tn by 2050. This growth will be driven by increasing demand for new automation technologies and miniaturisation, resulting in cost, time and quality benefits. Space technology is already widely accessible, and more sophisticated versions will further widen its reach, as new generation networks and enhanced satellite navigation services upgrade connectivity with faster communication and high-resolution images. In



Harnessing India's space technology potential

addition to Elon Musk's SpaceX and Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin, a flourishing private space industry has arisen, offering a range of space services.

India's share in the global space market is miniscule, despite rising demand. The reason is that ISRO has had a near-monopoly over the supply of these services, and its primary focus has been developmental and scientific applications for the use of the government and its agencies.

The demand for dedicated communication (Satcom) capacity, as well as Earth Observation (EO) applications is rising rapidly. Large corporates are willing to invest in their own satellite, thereby ensuring captive capacity for their future needs. New applications like inflight and maritime broadband connectivity, and government initiatives like Digital India and Bharatnet offer new opportunities for companies in the Indian

Satcom market. With growth in EO technology, mining companies can replace their field equipment with satellite-based analytical and monitoring tools.

As of now, Satcom services' demand in India is estimated at around US\$11bn. This does not reflect true demand, because of the supply-driven framework. ISRO's in-house capacity provides communication mainly to remote geographical areas and islands, which terrestrial cables cannot access economically. Imported satcom services are considerably more costly, thereby depressing demand. When the private sector manufactures and launches satellites, the market will move to a truly demand-driven situation. INSPACe will oversee the rollout of policies to enable privately-owned communication satellites and ground stations, with allotment of suitable orbital slots to them.

The first important step in commercialising launch vehicle production was taken with the award of a contract for manufacturing five Polar Satellite Launch Vehicles (PSLVs) to a consortium of the public sector undertaking Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and the private sector company Larsen & Toubro, for US\$103mn.

Earth observation data for satellite imagery is also an under-provided market, since regulations hitherto mandated that data requirement of customers should be sourced only through ISRO. Again, ISRO's capacity is almost fully utilised for the requirements of the government and its agencies. To meet the demand from other users, it imports and resells data, making it more expensive. The new policy will permit privately owned and operated space-based remote sensing systems for activities within and outside India.

The demand for geospatial data in India is projected to grow to nearly US\$12bn by 2029-30. The government has recently taken measures to nurture and develop the geospatial ecosystem of the country. It has lifted the requirement of licence or prior approval for the collection, generation, dissemination, storage and/or digitisation of geospatial data and maps. This will spur growth in downstream applications by significantly reducing the price of high-resolution data and its applications.

As the repository of space technologies, ISRO has a crucial role to play in sharing them with Indian industry. Indian entrepreneurs could also build technology partnerships with foreign companies willing to invest in bringing satellite technology to India.

ISRO has equipped IN-SPACe with a technical lab with state-of-the-art equipment for design, fabrication, integration and testing of satellites, which will be available to Indian companies. More modern facilities and infrastructure are to be made available to the space industry.

The use of space-based technologies in warfare, intelligence and defence has been highlighted by recent conflicts in West Asia and Ukraine. Space-based systems for defence communications, high-resolution imagery for target detection and other real-time information are important defence needs. The secrecy involved in defence applications means that these products have to be indigenously manufactured, serviced and upgraded. There may be opportunities for reputed Indian companies in this area.

There has already been a rapid growth in space start-ups and companies upgrading manufacturing capability in the space sector. An industry body, the Indian Space Association, has been formed to promote the interests of this nascent industry and for policy advocacy with the government and its agencies. This is an important role at this stage, when the government, ISRO and the private space industry are all seeking to evolve an optimal public-private partnership.

If the reforms progress as projected, the Indian space sector should generate - in domestic sales and exports - at least US\$50bn of revenues by 2025.

P S RAGHAVAN
The writer is a Distinguished Fellow of the Vivekananda International Foundation, and a former diplomat

Congratulating India on always setting an example for the world, with its abundant perseverance and will to succeed.

Happy 74th Republic Day

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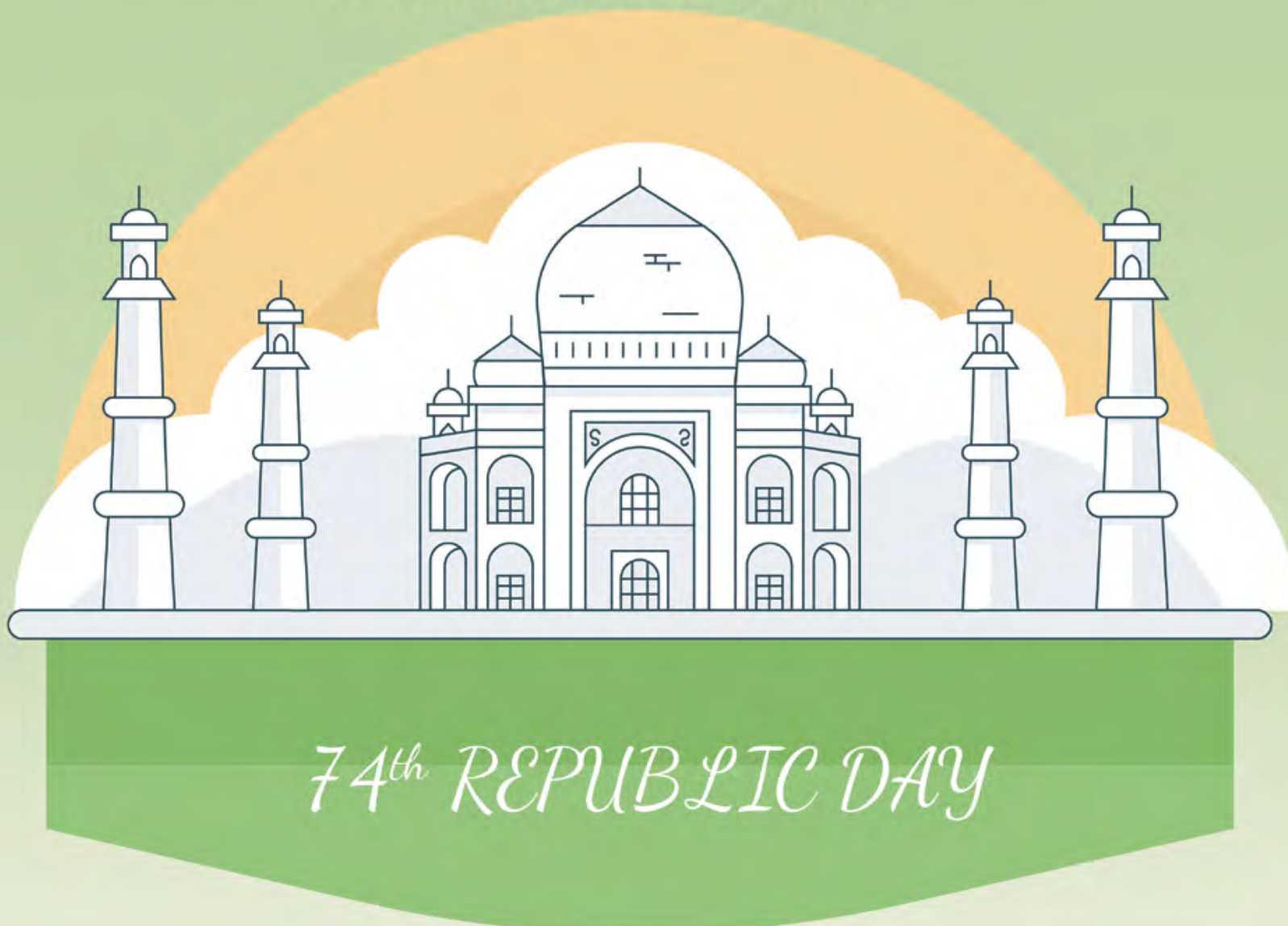
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Mission LiFE: India's action plan for the world to shun mindless consumerism



The human race is plundering Planet Earth at a pace that far outstrips its capacity and ability to support life. A recent study says that if the current rate of consumption were to continue, by 2050, humans would need two more planets, in addition to the Earth, to continue to exist. This means that we could be staring at major climatic crises in the years to come and our future generations may never get to experience the beauty of nature, the glaciers, the oceans, the snow and the rivers, that we

have been fortunate to see and experience.

In view of this danger lurking around, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 20 unveiled the action plan for Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), an India-led global mass movement that will nudge individuals and communities for action to protect and preserve the environment.

PM Modi had first given the mantra of LiFE to the world in 2021 at COP26 in Glasgow. On October 20 last year, 10 heads of states, including French President Emmanuel Macron, UK Prime Minister Liz Truss, Guyana

President Irfan Ali, Argentina President Alberto Fernandez, Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth, Madagascar President Andry Rajoelina, Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, Georgia Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili and Estonia Prime Minister Kaja Kallas extended support to the India-led LiFE movement.

Environment protection, as rightly stated by PM Modi, has for far too long been perceived as a policy issue by the general masses. There has been a perception that only national governments and international organisations can do something to protect the Earth and environment. But Mission LiFE makes environmental protection and conservation a participative process and recognises the importance of each effort - no matter how small or big - to save the environment both at the level of the individual and at the level of the community.

What threatens our existence more than anything else is the pace at which we are producing and consuming. The consumption pattern of the world is mindless and pays scant regard to the environment. Mission LiFE tries to remind the world that the mindset of 'use and throw' must immediately be replaced by 'reduce, reuse and recycle' so that our scarce resources are not overexploited and the world doesn't crumble under the weight of all the waste that it is generating by the second.

In India, the cultural ethos of limiting needs and treating the environment and its resources with reverence has produced very visible results. We constitute 17 per cent of the world's population, but our contribution to global carbon emissions is only four per cent. Against the developed world's carbon footprint of four tonnes per head, the carbon footprint of an average Indian counts to only 1.5 tonnes.

Despite not being part of the problem, with numerous global initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance, the One Sun One World One Grid initiative, and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, India has taken the lead in presenting and building solutions for the world by bringing the global community together. The need to build these global alliances to fight climate change stems from the understanding that only collective action can save the world from the vagaries of climate change that are increasingly becoming a reality and are rising in ferocity.

Mission LiFE stems from the thought that every little effort to protect the environment counts

and the world can benefit from India's ideas and experiences in this area. By working together with the United Nations in this regard, the prime minister has sought to ensure the message reaches far and wide. India-UN partnerships have already presented fruitful results for the world. An example of this, as the PM stated, has been seen in the celebration of International Yoga Day on June 21. The world is now benefiting from yoga on an unprecedented scale. The decision to celebrate 2023 as the International Year of Millets marks another golden chapter in the India-UN partnership which has numerous positives for the world to reap from.

In the same sequence of India offering knowledge from its religious and cultural ethos to the world, Mission LiFE aims to pull the world away from a 'mindless and destructive' consumerist approach towards a 'mindful and

Mission LiFE stems from the thought that every little effort to protect the environment counts and the world can benefit from India's ideas

deliberate utilisation' of resources. It is also, at the same time, an effort to prevent India from heading that way.

India is already working towards building a circular economy and moving towards a stage where all our energy requirements are met through the use of renewables. Our policies are all aligned towards ensuring sustainable development, where nature is not disregarded for development but where the most marginalised are not left to their destiny by denying them development.

Mission LiFE is a philosophy which shows how this can be made possible. It shows the power of small efforts to make big impacts. It believes in the individual's capacity to change the world. It is the mantra to reverse historical and cultural wrongs wrecked upon the environment. Mission LiFE is the call to action for citizens and governments to save the planet.

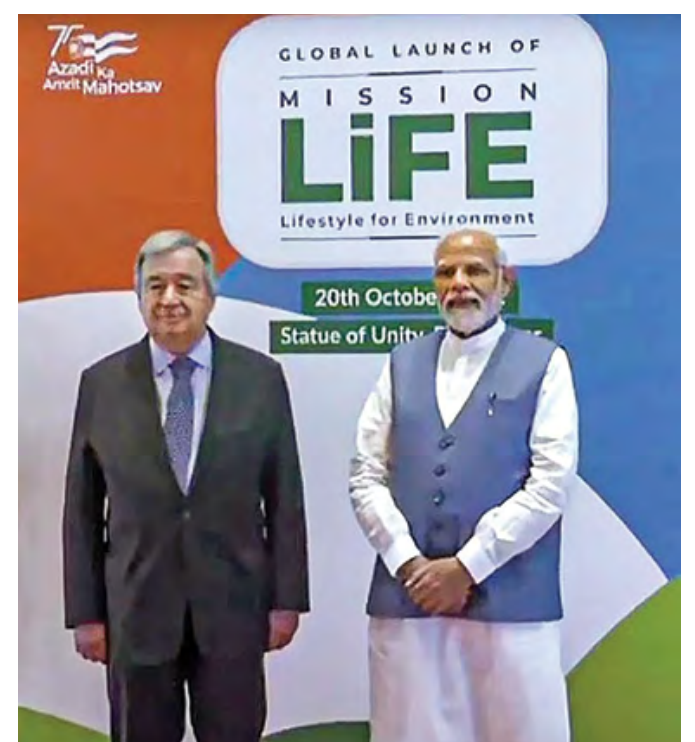
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