

HM IN SINGAPORE TO ENHANCE TIES



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq was received by Dr Mohamad Maliki bin Osman upon his arrival at Singapore Changi Airport on Wednesday (ONA)

Singapore - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq arrived in the Republic of Singapore on Wednesday on a three-day state visit.

His Majesty the Sultan was received upon arrival at Singapore Changi Airport by Dr Mohamad Maliki bin Osman, Minister in Prime Minister's Office and Head of the Mission of Honour, several Singaporean officials and members of the Sultanate of Oman's Embassy in Singapore.

The first country in southeast Asia to be visited by His Majesty the Sultan, Singapore and Oman seek to maximise the benefits of their close relations, including initiatives taken by both sides in various economic, political and cultural areas.

According to ONA, statistics indicate total Omani exports to Singapore in 2023 until the end of September was RO521.7mn, while imports amounted to RO54.6mn.

A high-ranking delegation is



accompanying His Majesty the Sultan on the visit, including Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan Mohammed al Nu'amani, Minister of Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamad bin

Said al Aafi, Head of Private Office, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Salim bin Nasser al Aafi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, Pankaj Khimji, Advisor for Foreign Trade and International Co-

operation in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai, Ambassador-at-Large in Foreign Ministry and Minister Plenipotentiary, and Anwar Ahmed Muqaibal, Charge d'affaires of the Sultanate of Oman's Embassy in the Republic of Singapore.



UAE PRESIDENT RECEIVES SAYYID THEYAZIN

Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of United Arab Emirates, received Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said at Al Shati Palace in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday. During the meeting, Sayyid Theyazin conveyed greetings and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq to Sheikh Mohammed and the people of the UAE. On his turn, the UAE President asked Sayyid Theyazin to convey his greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people. Their meeting reviewed the fraternal ties binding the two countries and discussed matters of mutual interest (ONA)

COP28 summit delivers landmark agreement to transition from fossil fuels

Dubai, UAE - Countries at COP28 in Dubai approved a roadmap on Wednesday for 'transitioning away from fossil fuels' - a first for a UN climate conference - but the deal still stopped short of a call for a 'phaseout' of oil, coal and gas.

COP28 concluded with a 'historic' agreement by 198 parties to deliver a new era of climate action. The parties - 197 countries and the EU - agreed on a landmark text named 'The UAE Consensus'.

Major commitments contained in the final negotiated text of 'The UAE Consensus' include an unprecedented reference to transitioning away from all fossil fuels to enable the world to reach net zero by 2050 and a significant



step forward in the next round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by encouraging economy-wide emission reduction targets.

Negotiators at COP28 also agreed on commitments to triple renewables capacity and double energy efficiency by 2030 and made progress in relation to adaptation and finance.

Reacting to the adoption of

the outcome document, UN chief António Guterres said mention of the world's leading contributor to climate change comes after many years in which the discussion on this issue was blocked. He stressed that the era of fossil fuels must end with justice and equity.

COP28 was scheduled to conclude on Tuesday, but intense overnight negotiations over whether the outcome would include a call to 'phasedown' or 'phaseout' planet heating fossil fuels like oil, gas and coal - the main sticking point which pit activists and climate-vulnerable countries against some larger nations - forced the conference into overtime.

Agencies

WHO fetes Oman for combating non-communicable diseases

Muscat - Oman received the 2023 Excellence Award from World Health Organization on Wednesday. The award was conferred on Oman, represented by the Ministry of Health, in recognition of the country's continuous efforts to combat non-communicable diseases.

The award represents a step forward in Oman's efforts to meet sustainable development goals. It also highlights the Ministry of Health's success in promoting different aspects of health as part of the Renewed Renaissance march.

It places Oman in the ranks of developed nations. The award was presented by Dr Jean



Jabour, Representative of WHO in the sultanate, and was received by Dr Badria Mohsen al

Rashidi, Director General of Primary Health Care in the Ministry of Health.

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Mental health - Early detection critical

3 deals inked at ‘Reconstruction Horizons’ forum

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The ‘Reconstruction Horizons’ forum in its second edition witnessed the signing of three investment agreements for development of real estate in the Governorate of North Batinah at a total cost exceeding RO11mn.

The forum for ‘Tourism and Real Estate Development’ was organised by the branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in North Batinah. One of the agreements clears the deck for a tourist entertainment project ‘Aquapark Resort’, on a land of 148,000sqm in the Wilayat of Suwaiq. The government has earmarked RO4.56mn for this water park project with avenues for multiple fun games, commercial activities, besides having event spaces, gates, shaded walking paths, green spaces, and seating areas for families and individuals.



An investment and development contract agreement was also signed at the Silver Jubilee Park in Sohar to establish a commercial tourism entertainment zone on an area of 12,500sqm

with an investment of RO3mn. The project includes a waterfront, restaurants, cafés, pedestrian paths, bicycle lanes, green spaces, fountains, a floating theatre, canopies and fences. A bal-

loon launching pad, bridges, and light and sound shows have also been incorporated in this project. The third deal is for a commercial entertainment project in the entertainment centre of Sohar, to

be undertaken at a total cost of RO3.5mn. This project will come up on a 20,000sqm area with facilities for entertainment games, a 6-D cinema, and commercial outlets.

Saeed bin Ali al Abri, chairman of the Board of Directors of the OCCI’s North Batinah branch, said that the second ‘Reconstruction Horizons’ forum reflects the continued keenness of the OCCI’s branch in developing the business sector, harnessing capabilities to serve the interests of private sector institutions, and intensifying activities.

The programmes of branch are focused at creating a business environment capable of contributing to attracting quality investments and the growth and prosperity of projects, he added.

The forum for ‘Tourism and Real Estate Development’ showcased the governorate’s unique historical and archaeological sites, besides highlighting the governorate’s strategic location close to the active markets in neighbouring countries.

During the forum, four working papers were presented on the economic indicators of Oman’s

tourism, investment in the tourism sector, the development of comprehensive tourism development and sustainable destinations in the Sultanate of Oman, and the role of events and activities in promoting tourism, in addition to the dialogue session that dealt with financing and marketing in the tourism sector.

The accompanying exhibition at the forum had 24 booths for a number of government and private institutions promoting the services they provide in the tourism and real estate development sectors. The exhibition offers an introduction to the governorate’s urban strategy, along with models of real estate projects by real estate developers.

The opening of the forum was sponsored by H H Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said, in the presence of Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of North Batinah, and a number of businessmen.

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OFM inaugurates animal feed plant in Mutrah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Flour Mills Company (OFM) on Wednesday inaugurated a animal feed production plant with a production capacity of 20 tonnes of animal feed per hour, in addition to a pre-mixing unit capable of producing six metric tonnes of pre-mix per hour.

The plant was inaugurated in the presence of H E Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, the Minister of Agricultural Wealth, Fisheries, and Water Resources.

This cutting-edge facility, the third of its kind established by OFM, exemplifies the company’s commitment to contribute to the



goals of Oman Vision 2040. The plant is strategically located in Muscat’s Mutrah area and aligns with the circular economy principles of utilising local

raw materials, fostering economic sustainability, and adhering to environmentally friendly practices.

“Its primary objective is to pro-

duce a diverse range of animal feed products that not only bolster the food security system but also add significant local value to cater to Oman’s food manufacturing needs,” an official from the company said.

Dignitaries from the Ministry of Agricultural and Fisheries Resources, along with representatives from various ministries, government entities, private sector companies specialising in food and animal feed production, and officials from OFM attended the inauguration ceremony.

Haitham bin Mohammed al Fanah, CEO of the Oman Flour Mills Company, underscored the plant’s significance in reinforcing the food security system and in-

tegrating production chains.

The Animal Feed Production Plant has been designed with a production capacity of 20 tonnes of animal feed per hour and featuring a pre-mixing unit capable of producing six metric tonnes of pre-mix per hour. The facility employs innovative technology, including robotic systems for packaging operations, to ensure efficiency, productivity, and a safe working environment.

Fanah highlighted the plant’s potential to adequately contribute to the sultanate’s mission to meet the needs for manufacturing animal feed, leveraging technological advancements and proximity to wheat mills.

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Over 100 initiatives emerge from Muscat Dialogue Sessions to support development

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Dialogue Sessions 2023 concluded on Wednesday in the presence of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Governor of Muscat.

The sessions were held in implementation of Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to support the development process with the involvement of community members.

The agenda of these sessions covered a variety of topics, including the humanisation of cities, the potential of transforming the entertainment into a full-scale industry, exploring invest-

Ideas presented by youth at the sessions will be transformed into real opportunities; implementation and design process for these have commenced

AHMED AL HUMAIDI

ment opportunities in Muscat governorate, and the significance of environmental volunteerism, innovation and technology.



The sessions that concluded on Wednesday resulted in 26 initiatives aimed at humanising cities and transforming entertain-

ment into an industry, seven initiatives in environmental volunteering, 29 initiatives to enhance investment opportunities, and 60

initiatives in technology and innovation.

Initiatives included developing public markets, beaches and na-

ture reserves, creating an electronic platform for environmental volunteering, establishing integrated tourist camps, and a factory for fish products.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, informed that ideas presented by the youth at the sessions will be transformed into real opportunities; implementation and design process for these have commenced.

Muscat Municipality is currently working on several projects, including merging Qurum Reserve with Qurum Park in coordination with Environment Authority. The project will see the

establishment of walking trails and a museum.

In the works is transformation of Hawiyat Najm in the wilayat of Quriyat into a destination for camping enthusiasts.

Humaidi also confirmed that the Muttrah Square project, which won the Bilarab bin Haitham Architectural Design Award, will start in the first quarter of 2024.

Humaidi described the Muscat Dialogue Sessions as a showcase of Muscat governorate's forward-thinking approach, leveraging the dynamism and creativity of its youth to shape a bright and sustainable future.

OMREN summit explores scope of innovation in higher education

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation's Oman Research and Education Network held the OMREN Technology Summit 2023 on Wednesday at Avani Muscat Hotel & Suites under the patronage of H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

It was attended by decision and policy makers, high-ranking officials, experts and researchers from Oman and abroad.

The summit is a gathering of OMREN with the global research and education community to exchange knowledge and success stories, identify solutions, explore business opportunities, discuss current challenges, improve services, and facilitate connections, collaborations and innovation.

The full-day event consisted of an impressive lineup of stellar speakers, case studies, panel discussions and diverse presentations aimed at providing access to a wealth of industry-leading knowledge, sharing best practices and experiences, spotlighting trends, and exchanging information with actionable takeaways.

The summit had three



keynote addresses - 'Promoting Entrepreneurship Culture in Higher Education Institutions' by Dr Maen al Qatamin, Founder and Chairman of EntreViable, 'Technology Localisation and Investment in Education' by Dr Nasser al Fanna, Director of Office of Technical Programmes at Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and 'The Role of Local and International Partnerships in Enhancing Research Productivity and Quality' by Dr Issa Salem al Shabibi, Assist Director of Department of Research and Innovation Programmes at Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The summit included three panel discussions, tilted 'Entrepreneurship and the Expected

Role of Higher Education Institutions', 'Pioneering Experiences in Implementing Modern Technologies in Education' and 'Scientific Research and Innovation: Opportunities and Challenges'.

At the summit, H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrooqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, described OMREN as one of the most prominent success stories of her ministry. There were effective and continuous cooperation efforts by the network's multilateral team at various stages of the network since its inception till it reached a global status.

H E Rahma added that OMREN is considered the bridge that connects the education sector to various fields of research and industry. The network is built on three pillars - connection, collaboration and innovation.

OMREN Technology Summit 2023 was sponsored by Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) and Oman Data Park.

OMREN is the official research and education network in the sultanate and the gateway to access similar global networks. It works to build research and local capabilities in various scientific fields in implementation of the national strategic objectives for research in the sultanate.

MTCIT grants 48 yacht, cruise ship permits to boost tourism

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In efforts to regulate the maritime sector and stimulate winter tourism, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has issued 48 permits for yachts and cruise ships since October.

A statement issued by MTCIT said, 'With the aim of regulating the maritime sector and coinciding with the winter tourism season, the ministry, represented by the Directorate General of Maritime Affairs, issued 48 permits for yachts and cruise ships since the beginning of October 2023.'

As many as 85,092 tourists arrived at Sultan Qaboos Tourist Port, Salalah Port and Khasab Port in 2022. This year, a total of 100,000 tourists are expected to arrive in 142 cruise ship visits at Omani ports.

According to Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) data,

Oman has welcomed more than 3.199mn tourists in 2023 - 41.2% more than 2022.

An official at MHT informed that the ministry is conducting a study with an international company on the readiness of Oman's ports to receive more cruise ships and private yachts.

MHT has also formed a team to discuss challenges and prepare programmes that will see cruise ships and yachts make more trips to the sultanate.

In the past few days, Salalah Port has seen a flurry of activity with thousands of passengers arriving on cruises to visit Dhofar. According to MHT data, Salalah Port received four cruise ships with 10,826 passengers in October alone.

The tourists visited the popular markets and heritage sites of Dhofar, including the Museum of the Land of Frankincense, Samharam Archaeological Park and souqs in Salalah.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tenders Document	Last date for submission of tenders	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)	Bidding Method
4604/2023/MOH /DGHSBR-4	Provision of Cleaning and Pest Control Services to Sunainah Health Center and Fayyad Health Center at Directorate General of health Services Al-Buraimi Governorate	26/ December / 2023	Before 10 am on Tuesday 23/ January /2024	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25/- Per set	Electronically via the Esnad system for electronic bidding

Notes :-

Tenders should be submitted on line on: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone:24402200, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

MARKET WATCH

MSX304,575.32

Sensex69,584.60

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

India	216.62
Pakistan	736.80
Bangladesh	285.79
Philippines	145.21
Sri Lanka	848.27

*Rates as on December 13

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Eurozone industrial output falls

Industrial production in the euro area dropped for the second consecutive month in October, more than the market expected, according to official data released on Wednesday.

The output decreased by 0.7% month-on-month in October, following an upwardly revised 1% decline in September, Eurostat data showed.

The market had expected the reading to go down 0.3% for the month.

The production of capital goods fell by 1.4%, while intermediate goods and non-durable consumer goods both decreased by 0.6% in the same period.

The production of durable consumer goods and energy grew 0.2% and 1.1%, respectively. In the EU, industrial production ticked down by 0.5% from a month earlier in October.

Abraj signs deal to provide drilling services in Block 12

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Abraj Energy Services, Oman's leading oil and gas services provider, has signed a strategic partnership agreement with TotalEnergies, a leading global multi-energy company, to provide drilling services within Block 12 concession area in the sultanate.

The partnership contract was signed on Wednesday by Eng Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services and Sergio Giorgi, TotalEnergies' Oman Country Chair.

The signing ceremony was attended by officials from Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals, senior executives from Abraj Energy Services and TotalEnergies, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), members of the Oman Energy Association (OPAL) and partner delegates.

This strategic contract between Abraj and TotalEnergies is poised to redefine industry standards, building on Abraj's extensive expertise in drilling and well services since 2006, and TotalEnergies' global and recognised expertise. The deal will ensure excellence in the execution of two key gas exploration wells in



The agreement was signed by Sergio Giorgi (left) and Eng Saif al Hamhami

Oman's Block 12.

With 16 years of experience serving the country's energy sector, Abraj, a pioneer in its field, commands a market share of 28% in drilling and 15% in key well services.

In a press statement, Hamhami said, "This strategic contract with TotalEnergies not only marks their operational entry into the Omani market as operators, but also underscores

Oman's role in attracting foreign investment and Abraj's competitive edge in delivering internationally recognised drilling and well maintenance services. This collaboration is set to enhance Oman's oil and gas potential, bolstering national energy security and economic growth."

Hamhami further said, "Abraj's growth is in line with Oman's national strategy, which aims for global market expansion

and the establishment of international standards in oil and gas services. Our considerable contributions to socio-economic development, high In-Country Value (ICV) index, Omanisation, and local skill enhancement underlie our dedication to Oman's progress."

TotalEnergies' Giorgi said, "We are excited to announce TotalEnergies' first operational contract in Oman, in partnership

with Abraj Energy Services. This shows our commitment to unlock more gas reserves that will play a pivotal role in the sultanate's future gas exports. Collaborating with Abraj, renowned for their excellence in the oil and gas sector, aligns perfectly with our strategic objectives and our commitment to supporting the growth of Oman's energy sector."

He also emphasised TotalEnergies' global leadership in energy, noting, "Present in over 130 countries, and since 1937 in Oman, TotalEnergies is committed to sustainable and innovative energy solutions. Our expertise in producing and marketing fuels, natural gas, and electricity is in line with our ambition to become the responsible energy major. This new operational contract with Abraj reflects our vision and is one more step in the deployment of our local strategy of growth, decarbonisation and diversification."

"We are confident that this partnership will not only propel Oman's energy sector forward but also contribute to its socio-economic development, mirroring our dedication to responsible energy practices and community support."

Fitch raises oil price forecasts

Muscat - Fitch Ratings revised up its oil price predictions for 2024 by \$5 a barrel, attributing to the supply cuts by OPEC+ oil producing countries led by Saudi Arabia and Russia.

The rating agency increased its 2023 price forecast to \$82 a barrel from \$80 a barrel for Brent and raised West Texas Intermediate (WTI) oil prices to \$78 a barrel from \$75 a barrel.

The agency forecast that Brent price would average \$85 a barrel in 2024, up from \$80 a barrel in its previous estimate, while the forecast price of WTI increased from \$70 a barrel to \$75 a barrel.

The increased Brent and WTI oil benchmark assumptions for 2024 are supported by OPEC+'s continued attempts to support oil prices, including the recent decision by several members to join Saudi Arabia and Russia in implementing additional cuts in Q1 2024, the agency said.

Recalling that OPEC+ official quotas would also be extended into 2024, the agency cited data by International Energy Agency (IEA) and warned that about 1.2mn barrels per day (bpd) market deficit was expected in the second half of 2023.

'OPEC+'s additional curtailments suggest that the deficit could persist in the first half of 2024, provided that compliance with production cuts remains strong,' it added.



Green Hydrogen Summit highlights supply chain tech

Muscat - The 3rd edition of Green Hydrogen Summit Oman 2023 (GHSO) kicked off on Wednesday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

Green Hydrogen Summit gathers industry leaders, policymakers, and innovators for collaborative discussions on the latest policies, legislation, and cutting-edge technology expediting the energy transition and advancing sustainable energy solutions.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Khamis Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

Numerous sessions during the summit covered key topics in clean energy and energy security. The inaugural session, titled 'Oman's Green Hydrogen Mission: From Vision to Action,' included representatives from the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and major Omani corporations operating in the energy field, along with the International Energy Agency.

Mohsin Hamad al Hadhrami, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, said, "Green hydrogen plays a crucial role in the energy transition, alongside its role in energy security and boosting the national economy. Therefore, in Oman,

we are working to accelerate the regulation and adoption of green hydrogen production projects, looking forward to producing one million tons by 2030.

"This summit provides an excellent opportunity for exchanging experiences and knowledge, attracting investment opportunities in the sector."

Moreover, the exhibition accompanying the summit includes 40 local and international companies that showcase the latest projects and modern technologies which are accelerating the rate of energy transformation and booting sustainable energy solutions.

ONA

OQGN presents environment-friendly wastewater treatment project at GHSO

Our Correspondent
Muscat

OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), the sole operator of Oman's gas transportation networks, presented an environmentally friendly wastewater treatment project in Nimr's employee housing during its participation as a platinum sponsor in the Green Hydrogen Summit in Oman 2023 (GHSO), which is held from December 12 to December 14 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center.

The company said that it installed a compact Japanese wastewater treatment unit, utilising bioengineering in multiple stage. This system efficiently treats water through biological processes in specially designed tanks, removing waste from sewage without the need for chemicals.

OQGN said it collaborated with three local small and medium-sized companies to successfully implement this project.

OQGN is committed to playing a pivotal role in the energy



OQGN is committed to playing a pivotal role in energy transition towards hydrogen

Leveraging its established expertise in natural gas infrastructure, OQGN is poised to significantly contribute to the hydrogen economy in Oman

transition towards hydrogen. This includes ensuring the safe, efficient, and reliable transportation, storage, and distribution of hydrogen. As Oman and the global community move towards cleaner energy to address climate change, hydrogen emerges

as a key player.

Leveraging its established expertise in natural gas infrastructure, OQGN is poised to significantly contribute to the hydrogen economy in Oman. This aligns with Hydrom's masterplan, positioning us as a strategic

partner in developing the hydrogen infrastructure.

OQGN's plan includes connecting hydrogen production sites to industrial plants and other end-users, providing a cost-effective transportation method and helping to reduce Oman's Levelized Cost of Hydrogen (LCOH).

OQGN is the exclusive owner and operator of Oman's Natural Gas Transmission Network, holding a natural monopoly over this critical infrastructure.

World Bank to increase MENA climate financing to \$10bn by 2025

Dubai, UAE - The World Bank has affirmed its plans to increase climate financing for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to \$10bn by 2025, according to Meskerem Brhane, Regional Director for Sustainable Development at the World Bank.

In a statement to the Emirates News Agency (WAM) at COP28, Brhane said, "In the last three years, from 2021 to 2023 alone, the World Bank has provided \$6.3bn in climate financing for MENA."

She added that the funding

supports both reducing net emissions and resilience projects, helping countries prepare for and respond to future natural disasters. "Last year, we provided \$800mn in climate-related financing to Morocco, Jordan and Lebanon."

Brhane stated that the World Bank had integrated climate into all its work across the MENA region and is on track to align 100% of new operations with the goals of the Paris Agreement.

She noted that the World Bank's MENA Climate Change



Meskerem Brhane

Roadmap, which runs from 2021-2025, focuses on four key areas: food systems, water security, energy transition, and sustainable finance.

Regarding the UAE's hosting of COP28, she said, "By hosting this event, the UAE signals its leadership in climate change, its ability to work with other countries to tackle global issues and its own ambition in this space."

The official added that the GCC countries can lead the global dialogue on energy transition and renewable energy deployment by further aligning

their growth pathways with global climate action and decarbonisation trends.

She noted, "The GCC is already ahead in developing green and blue hydrogen projects."

The World Bank official said that by embracing green growth strategies, the region's GDP could potentially grow to over \$13tn by 2050.

She also highlighted that private sector investment is crucial for the success of climate initiatives in GCC countries. "Significant investments will be needed to transform resource con-

sumption, energy production, manufacturing processes, and other economic systems to achieve climate objectives."

She mentioned that the World Bank published the Country Climate and Development Reports for MENA countries to identify the most serious climate risks for a country and its potential impact on the country's development. It also helps prioritise the most impactful actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and boost adaptation and resilience.

WAM

Saud Bahwan showcases Chery vehicles at exclusive event

Recently, Saud Bahwan Group organised an exclusive meet where several key opinion leaders and customers got a chance to experience Chery vehicles.

The event held at Oman Automobile Association was designed to showcase the latest range, uniquely highlighting the brand's commitment to high standards of quality, performance and a range of advanced features and technology. The vehicles included the Tiggo 8 Pro Max SUV, Tiggo 4 Pro SUV



and the Arizzo 6 Pro sedan.

Throughout the event, interesting modules like a brief introduction about Chery and the benefits of its partnership with Saud Bahwan Group; details about the product line-up and its strengths, test-drive activities, discussion session and more, offered several opportunities for these KOLs to know what makes Chery vehicles outstanding.

Recently, Kantar and Google jointly released the 2023 Chinese Global Brand Builders Top 50.

Chery is ranked as the best Chinese global brand builder in cars and 14th in the overall list and its brand power has achieved strong growth.

Chery Automobile took the first spot among all Chinese automotive brands in J.D. Power 2023 China Initial Quality StudySM(IQS).

In Oman, Chery will soon be launched by Saud Bahwan Group.

Ministry conducts training programme on VEX Robotics

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Department of Innovation and Scientific Olympiads, is conducting a special training programme on VEX Robotics at the Wyndham Garden Hotel Muscat.

VEX Robotics is educational robotics for everyone offering VEX solutions at all levels of both formal and informal education with accessible, scalable, and affordable solutions.

According to a press release, 15 trainees from the Scientific Olympiad Innovation Departments in the Ministry's General Diwan and the educational directorates in the governorates are taking part in this five-day training programme.

The programme stems out of the belief of the importance of developing and enhancing the capabilities and skills of specialists in the field of robotics and artificial intelligence.

This training programme aims to enhance the trainees' skills in the fields of designing and programming, and shed light on the innovative VEX robot technology, with a focus on an in-depth review of the global VEX competition, which will enhance the sultanate's participation at the global level. Trainees will also learn how to stimulate creativity



and encourage passion among students, which in turn enhances their role in promoting interactive learning and innovation in educational environments.

The programme was presented by the regional trainer for VEX Robotics for the Middle East and North Africa, Trainer Saleh Yassin. The programme course includes an introduction to the VEX International Robotics Competition listed in the Guinness Book of World Records.

Trainees undertake a number of advanced topics through designing, building, and programming the robot and at the end of the programme, trainees are tested on the global platform to receive approval of the first batch of pro-

gramming and robotics trainers in cooperation with VEX Company in the United States of America.

This training program comes as part of the Innovation Department's efforts to empower trainers with the skills and tools necessary to guide students towards the world of technology and engineering. This program constitutes a unique opportunity to exchange knowledge and build a cooperative communication network among trainees, which enhances positive interaction and innovation in the educational field.

About the programme, Ali al Muqbali from Buraimi governorate said, "The VEX Robotics training programme coincided with the end of the LEGO Robotics Competition, which is a continuation of the development path undertaken by the Department of Innovation and Scientific Olympiads in the field of robotics and artificial intelligence to add various new skills at the local level to reach the global level. Also, such programs are fun and interesting as they link the theoretical side with the practical side, and contribute to arousing students' passion for science, engineering, technology, and mathematics."

Ooredoo takes part in awareness campaign on organ donation



As Ooredoo continues to invest in the community, the company participated in a campaign to raise public awareness about the importance of organ donation and transplantation.

In collaboration with the Department of National Organ Transplantation Programme, and as part of its Goodwill Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Ooredoo will promote the vital work carried out by the National Organ Transplantation Programme.

The campaign includes tackling the common misconception about organ donation, diseases leading to organ failure, preventative measures and highlighting how this humanitarian act can be life-saving for organ failure patients.

The Department of the National Organ Transplantation Programme was established in January 2022, following a Ministerial Decree.

Organ donation and transplantation is a surgical procedure to transplant a healthy organ from a living or deceased donor for a patient with organ failure.

Organ donation is permitted and encouraged in Islam and hence, has changed and saved the lives of many patients who were suffering from organ failure in Oman.

Malabar Gold reaffirms commitment to ethical sourcing

One of the most significant challenges confronting the gold and diamond industry is the assurance of complete adherence to ethical and sustainable sourcing.

Accredited by the London Bullion Market Association (LBMA), Rand Refinery is one of the world's leading gold and silver refiners and the only referee status Refiner in the southern hemisphere, making significant contributions towards setting industry standards with their 100% traceable and certified 'RandPure' Gold.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 335 showrooms across 13 countries, has partnered with Rand Refinery, to procure 'RandPure' gold, positioning itself once again as a major proponent of responsible business practices in the jewellery trade.

Shamlal Ahamed, MD - International Operations of Malabar Gold & Diamonds, received the first shipment of RandPure gold from Rand Refinery CEO Praveen Baijnath, in the presence of Rand Refinery CFO, Dean Subramanian and other senior officials from Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

RandPure gold is 100% ethically sourced, with completely traceable origins. Procured exclusively from Rand Refinery's Securities Exchange listed



mines, the raw materials are processed in a segregated production line. Each RandPure gold batch carries a distinctive 'RandPure' mark & a 'Certificate of Assurance', providing customers with essential details about the raw material such as the country of origin, mining period, conflict-free nature, etc.

"Sustainability and responsible business practices have formed the core of our operations at Malabar Gold & Diamonds. Through our association with Rand Refinery and procurement of RandPure gold, we are reaffirming our commitment towards responsible and ethical sourcing by opting for gold that meets the strictest industry norms," Malabar Group chairman M P Ahamed.

CEO Of Rand Refinery Baijnath said, "We take our responsibilities very seriously. We have

a century-long tradition of putting people, products, and the planet first and are known to exercise the highest level of rigour, well beyond the LBMA requirements. Throughout our history, we have contributed to building a robust mine-to-market value chain in Africa."

"Our volume of due diligence puts pressure on suppliers to improve practices and is a deterrent to anyone that wants to

contaminate our supply chain," he continued.

The traceability of RandPure Gold is subjected to an annual audit that is in adherence to conflict zone regulations and guidance from reputable organizations like the World Gold Council, LBMA, and OECD. These guidelines including the Global Precious Metal Code encourage refineries to tackle human-rights violations, avoid

contribution to conflicts in volatile regions as well as adhere to high standards of internationally accepted environmental practices, Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) policies.

Shamlal Ahamed, MD-International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds said: "The significance of sustainability gains additional prominence in

the aftermath of COP 28, hosted by the UAE, where pivotal sustainability goals were established. The acquisition of RandPure gold serves as further evidence of our commitment as a conscientious jeweller, and the heightened levels of accountability associated with this pledge ensure our steadfast dedication to ethical sourcing."

"Through our partnership with Rand Refinery, we aspire to establish a commendable precedent within the industry, encouraging other organizations to play their role in reshaping the gold supply chain with increased transparency, accountability, and ethical standards," commented Malabar Group Vice-Chairman, Abdul Salam K P.

ESG (Environmental, Social & Governance) initiative has been the primary commitment of Malabar Group since its inception in 1993, with 5% of net profits set aside towards such initiatives in each country of operations. The principles of sustainability and responsibility are incorporated into its core business through practices such as responsible sourcing, zero tolerance on compliance, Anti-money Laundering (AML) & Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT), usage of FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) wood for packaging, LEED Gold certified offices and outlets.

Oman electricity transmission to launch Rabt-Phase 1 today

Under the patronage of H H Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, the Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) is going to inaugurate its strategic project Rabt - Phase 1, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center (OCEC) in Muscat on Thursday.

The event will be attended by their Highnesses, and Excellencies, as well as OETC's Board of Directors and the executive management of the company. Representatives from Nama Holding, along with delegates

from various government and private entities, as well as engineers, consultants, and contractors.

This project is considered one of the strategic and significant initiatives in the electricity sector, divided into two phases, with the first phase comprising five grid stations and 400kV overhead transmission lines with a length of 660km.

The project aims to achieve several objectives, including enhancing the sustainability, availability, and reliability of the



electricity transmission network throughout the Sultanate of Oman. Additionally, it aims to reduce operational costs, contribute to carbon emissions reduction, improve economic growth, and attract foreign investments, aligning with the national goals of Oman Vision 2040 to enhance developmental progress in all fields.

It is worth mentioning that OETC, a member of Nama Group, is the only company responsible for the transmission and control of electricity across

the sultanate's network. The electricity is transmitted from production stations to distributed load centers in the governorates.

The transmission network operates at a voltage of 132kV and above to cover most of the governorates in the sultanate, whether in the north or the south. Furthermore, OETC manages the interconnection lines between Oman and the GCC interconnection network, which operates at a voltage of 220kV.

Alfardan Motors launches new Maserati GranTurismo

Alfardan Motors, Oman's official Maserati importer-dealer, unveiled the latest iteration of one of the brand's icons, the new Maserati GranTurismo, marking a new chapter in a story that began 75 years ago with the Maserati A6 1500.

The GranTurismo coupé combines the high performance of a sports car comfortable for travelling long distances with a powerful internal combustion engine. It represents a benchmark, embodying the concept of 'The Others Just Travel'.

Hamdy Elshantoury, General Manager at Maserati Middle East and Africa, said, "The return of the icon, the new GranTurismo, marks a triumphant comeback for Maserati, blending heritage with innovation, embodying the Brand's commitment to luxury performance.

"More than a car, it is a lifestyle, designed to exceed expectations and setting a new standard in the automotive world."

Charly Dagher, Regional General Manager of Alfardan, said, "With the unveiling of the reimagined Maserati GranTurismo in Oman, a new chapter unfolds in Maserati's illustrious 75-year narrative. Long consid-



ered the DNA of Maserati, the iconic GranTurismo sets the pinnacle of timeless design and elegance.

"This updated marvel inte-

grates cutting-edge technology with captivating aesthetics, exceeding all expectations. Those with a passion for Maserati in Oman can now experience the formidable power of the Modena and Trofeo engines. And for those who look to the future, the forthcoming 100% electric Folgore variant promises a surge of excitement."

The GranTurismo versions Modena - equipped with the 3.0-liter V6 twin-turbo Nettuno engine with 360 kW (490 hp) embodying the essence of a

large touring sports car; and Trofeo - designed for maximum performance, its Nettuno engine delivers 404 kW (550 hp) without restricting comfort or suitability for travel - are now currently available through Alfardan Motors showroom in Oman. The fully electric version of the car, the GranTurismo Folgore - the first all-electric Maserati features an innovative 800-volt system with technologies derived from Formula E and delivers an output of 559 kW (760 hp), will be available later.

Fisheries Development Oman incorporates procedural tools for records management

Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) and its subsidiaries have officially incorporated procedural tools for records management in collaboration with the National Records and Archives Authority.

This is in accordance with the Document and Archives Law issued under a Royal Decree (No 2007/60), which aims to empower organisations to preserve and manage their records in accordance with the best administrative practices, ensuring efficient retrieval, preservation, in line with retention schedules.

Procedural tools ensure speed in referencing and the availability of records, in addition to, placing the documents within the context of their origin and compiling them into files based on relevant topics to protect them, and ensuring the preservation of the individuals and groups rights.

It also guarantees the adaptability and expansion of the classification system improvement and continual development.

FDO and its subsidiaries, in collaboration with the National Records and Archives Authority, have developed a document management system in accor-



dance with legal requirements. This system encompasses all types of documents that reflect the tasks and activities undertaken by the organisation. Additionally, it includes a classification system for these documents by assigning a single classification code to each record related to a specific subject in order to ensure the swift search and retrieval of records.

The system also includes records retention schedules, which determine the legal duration for preserving records and whether they should be disposed of or permanently stored by the National Records and Archives Authority. This will contribute to empowering Fisheries Development Oman and its subsidiaries to manage their records in accordance with best practices, to ensure quality and

effective business operations.

The procedural tools for records management were signed by Dr Hamad bin Mohammed al Dhawyani, the President of the National Records and Archives Authority.

On behalf of the Fisheries Development Oman and its subsidiaries, the signing was done by Nabil bin Salem al Bimani, the Group CEO; Badr bin Saeed al Naabi, the Chairman of Board of Directors of International Seafood Company (Simak); Mirdas bin Najib al Rawahi, the Chief Financial Officer of Al-Wusta Fishery Industries Company; Sasikumar Palath Kumran, the Chief Executive Officer of Oceanic Shrimp Aquaculture Company; and Al-Mu'tasim bin Mohammed al Bahlani, the Acting Chief Executive Officer of Blue Waters Company.

Sohar International joins Green Hydrogen Summit Oman as partner

In line with the sultanate's commitment to transitioning to a low-carbon economy, Sohar International has extended its support to the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman (GHSO) 2023 as 'Bank Partner'.

Assuming a multi-faceted role at the summit, Sohar International not only acted as the exclusive 'Bank Sponsor', but also participated in the workshops and the various discussions on the role of financial institutions in supporting the sultanate's vision and commitments relating to energy transition and moving the whole of Oman on its decarbonisation journey.

Recognised as the preeminent Green Hydrogen event in the MENA region, GHSO 2023, with the central theme 'Future of Energy - Green Hydrogen', began at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Tuesday.

The inauguration event was graced by the esteemed presence of H E Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, as the guest of honour.

The occasion also witnessed the attendance of prominent del-



egates from international governmental organisations. Representing Sohar International, Abdul Wahid al Murshidi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer, and Hanife Ymer, Head of the Environmental, Social, and Governance, attended the summit alongside several officials and dignitaries from the sultanate, government representatives from around the world, and the private sector.

Serving as a pivotal networking platform, GHSO 2023 successfully brought together influential global leaders in policy, finance, technology, and in-

dustry, setting the stage to advance green energy solutions.

Commenting on the bank's participation at the event, Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer at Sohar International said, "In alignment with Oman's commitment to achieving Net Zero Emissions by 2050, Sohar International has been an active participant in this endeavour, supporting initiatives that are geared towards building a sustainable future for the sultanate.

"Our active involvement in the GHSO 2023 signifies a concerted effort to not just drive the

conversation forward but also translate it into tangible actions. To achieve a low carbon economy, capital will need to be re-directed towards clean energy technologies. This is where the banking and financial services more broadly can play a critical role."

Musalmi added, "Guided by the overarching target of Oman's vision for a sustainable future, Sohar International will remain steadfast in the collaborative pursuit of fostering resilience and prosperity. In the green hydrogen area, we see Sohar International acting as 'ecosystem enablers'

whereby we not only are financiers of green hydrogen and broader energy transition solutions and opportunities, but that we also bring together local and international stakeholders across the energy value chain to support the transition. Further, events like the GHSO serve as crucial platforms for redefining perspectives and elucidating the transformative potential of sustainability in fueling progress and giving institutions a distinct competitive edge."

A key highlight of the event was Hanife Ymer, Head of the Environmental, Social, and Gov-

ernance, playing an active role in the panel discussion that covered the topic: 'Financing Green Hydrogen - Strategies and Solutions'. The session focused on the pivotal connection between financing and national incentives, key components in driving sustainable initiatives, including hydrogen projects, emphasizing the critical role of financial institutions in promoting sustainability.

This year's summit was attended by over 6,000 visitors and saw the participation of more than 500 companies from over 100 countries. The event garnered involvement from key entities such as the Sultanate's Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, and Hydrom. Numerous local and international companies, as well as distinguished speakers also participated in the event.

This event aligns with Sohar International's efforts to foster meaningful dialogues, particularly within the context of transitioning to a low carbon economy. It exemplifies the

bank's commitment to catalyzing positive change within the sustainability landscape, showcasing its proactive role as a thought leader in the realm of environmental, social, and governance. Sohar International will continue to position itself as the key financial partner of choice for sustainability-linked initiatives. The bank further fortified its presence in the sector by entering into strategic agreements with IFC and Fortescue Futures. These mandates, which focus on financing arrangements in relation to climate change and green hydrogen, not only underscore Sohar International's dedication to sustainability, but also lay the groundwork for enduring advancements or. Concurrently, the bank has been supporting SMEs, providing crucial assistance to help propel their efforts in transitioning to low carbon economy. Sohar International's participation in these national events highlights its critical role in advancing the national sustainability agenda, reaffirming the bank's dedication to fostering positive change on both the domestic and global fronts.

Gaza runs out of vaccinations for children: Health ministry

The ministry urged the UN health agencies to intervene to provide the needed vaccinations

Gaza, Palestine - The Gaza Health Ministry said on Wednesday that it has run out of vaccinations for Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip.

"Children's vaccinations completely ran out in the Gaza Strip," said the Gaza-based Health Ministry in a statement.

The ministry also said the lack of vaccinations will have catastrophic health consequences for the children and will cause diseases to spread, particularly among the displaced people in the crowded shelters across the enclave. It urged the UN health agencies 'to quickly intervene to provide the needed vaccinations and to ensure their arrival to all Gaza areas to prevent the catastrophe'.

The Gaza Strip continues to suffer from a severe shortage of all medicines and medical supplies as a result of the ongoing Israeli devastating war on Gaza.

Israel has bombarded the Gaza Strip from the air and land, imposed a siege, and mounted a ground offensive in retaliation for a cross-border attack by Hamas on October 7.

At least 18,412 Palestinians



The ministry said the lack of vaccinations will have catastrophic health consequences for the children (Anadolu Agency)

A major human catastrophe is unfolding in the Gaza Strip, and so far, the (UN) Security Council has failed to stop the violence

FILIPPO GRANDI

have been killed and 50,100 injured in the Israeli onslaught since then, according to Gaza's health authorities.

The Israeli death toll in the Hamas attack stands at 1,200, while around 139 hostages remain in captivity, according to official figures.

Call for sustained cease-fire

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi on Wednesday opened the Global

Refugee Forum with a call for an 'immediate and sustained humanitarian cease-fire'.

"A major human catastrophe is unfolding in the Gaza Strip, and so far, the (UN) Security Council has failed to stop the violence," Grandi said in Geneva, addressing the three-day forum.

Noting that the events happening since October 7 are 'outside the mandate of UNHCR', he said: "However, we foresee more civilian deaths and suffering, and also further displacement that

threatens the region."

"I cannot open the global refugee forum without first echoing the call of the United Nations Secretary-General (Antonio Guterres) for an immediate and sustained humanitarian cease-fire," he said.

The high commissioner also asked for the release of hostages and said the resumption of a genuine dialogue would bring a 'real peace and security to the people of Israel and Palestine'.

Italy, meanwhile, on Wednesday said the protection of civilians in Gaza is among the country's absolute priority.

Following his phone call with the Israeli counterpart Eli Cohen, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said on X: "I underlined how the protection of civilians

and the increase in humanitarian access to alleviate the suffering of the population in Gaza are absolute priorities for the Italian Government." Tajani also reiterated his country's solidarity with Israel against Hamas' cross-border attacks on October 7.

UNGA resolution

The UN General Assembly on Tuesday afternoon had adopted a resolution demanding an 'immediate humanitarian ceasefire' in Gaza.

Member states voted down two amendments, with 153 supporting the draft resolution, 10 against and 23 countries abstaining. The resolution demands an 'immediate humanitarian ceasefire', the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, and 'ensuring humanitarian access'.

Tuesday's session was a continuation of the tenth Emergency Special Session of the UN General Assembly that last met on October 26 amid the present crisis in Gaza, during which it adopted a resolution on the crisis, calling for an 'immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities'.

In his statement delivered at the special session, UN General Assembly President Dennis Francis underscored the urgency to bring to an end the suffering of innocent civilians.

He reiterated the demand for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

"We have one singular priority - only one - to save lives," he stressed. "Stop this violence now."

Agencies



'Israel begins pumping seawater into tunnels in Gaza'

Washington DC, US - Israel's military has begun pumping seawater into the tunnel network allegedly used by the Palestinian group, Hamas, in Gaza, according to a report that was published on Tuesday.

The Wall Street Journal, citing US officials briefed on Israeli military operations, said the move to flood the tunnels with water from the Mediterranean Sea is part of a broader strategy employed by Israel to destroy the tunnels.

The effort is reportedly in its infancy stage. The tunnel system extends for 300 miles and the use of thick blast doors is being assessed by the Israelis, according to US officials.

Initiating the flooding, a process expected to span several weeks, began concurrently with Israel's installation of two additional pumps to supplement the five pumps added in the previous month. Preliminary tests were conducted last month, said the US officials.

The move, which was first announced by the newspaper earlier this month, has drawn criticism, with some saying it

would create an environmental catastrophe and worsen the situation with fresh water in Gaza.

Several officials from the Biden administration have voiced concern and said using seawater might not be effective and could endanger Gaza's freshwater supply, according to the report. Israel believes the underground system has been key to Hamas operations on the battlefield.

The Israeli army, meanwhile, on Wednesday said 10 of its troops, including commanders, were killed in battles in the northern Gaza Strip in the past 24 hours. In a first statement, the military said eight soldiers were killed in battles in eastern Gaza City and three others seriously wounded.

Public broadcaster KAN said the troops killed included Lt. Col. Tomer Grinberg, 35, commander of the Golani Brigade's 13th Battalion, Maj. Roei Meldasi, 23, a company commander in the Golani Brigade's 13th Battalion, and Maj. Moshe Avram Bar On, 23, a company commander in the Golani Brigade's 51st Battalion.

Anadolu Agency

Israeli journalist calls on 'global powers' to intervene to end war

Istanbul, Turkey - There has to be a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war as soon as possible and some international powers should enter Gaza for it to happen, according to an Israeli journalist and author.

Gideon Levy came to the Turkish metropolis of Istanbul to attend TRT World Forum 2023, where he shared his views about the war with Anadolu.

Israeli media and international media outlets should not be put in the same equation in terms of how they reflect what has been going on in Gaza, said Levy, who writes for Israel's Haaretz daily.

Noting that the international media has transmitted images of Gaza to every home in Europe, Asia and Africa, he emphasised that they had acted fairly in this regard.

Levy pointed out that everyone should see what is happening in Gaza.

"This is the duty of everyone



Gideon Levy (Anadolu Agency)

in the world, to see injured children, to see homeless people, to see lifeless bodies, to see hospitals. Everyone has to see this," he said.

Comparing Israeli media with the rest, Levy said: "I cannot say the same for the Israeli media, which systematically, deliberately and voluntarily hid what was happening from Israeli viewers and readers."

"The Israelis don't see anything because they don't want to see."

Levy further drew attention

to the difficulty of reaching a peaceful and long-term solution in Gaza, where Israel's attacks continue.

"I think there should be a cease-fire as soon as possible. Some international forces should enter Gaza, at least for a short time."

Stressing that the blockade of Gaza must end, he said: "It is impossible to keep 2.3mn people in a cage for 16 years. This has to end right now."

Levy said he had been traveling with bodyguards for some time because he had taken opposing positions to the Israeli government's Gaza policy.

"I don't pay the price personally. It is the people of Gaza who pay the price."

He also underlined that there is a need for countries from different continents of the world that play an important role on a global scale.

Anadolu Agency

REDUCED TO RUBBLE



A girl collects items among the rubble of a building after an Israeli airstrike in the southern Gaza Strip city of Rafah, on Tuesday (Xinhua)

China, Vietnam agree to seek lasting resolution of maritime disputes

Hanoi, Vietnam - China and Vietnam reached agreements on seeking a lasting resolution of maritime disputes during a state visit to Vietnam by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

According to a joint statement issued on Wednesday, leaders of the two countries held an in-depth and candid exchange of views on maritime issues during the visit, with both sides stressing the need to better manage and actively

resolve maritime disputes, so as to safeguard peace and stability in the South China Sea and the region at large.

Both sides, said the statement, agreed to continue abiding by the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two parties and two countries, to persist in friendly consultations, to strengthen the government-level border negotiation delegations and their subsidiary working



China's President Xi Jinping

groups, and to actively seek a basic and long-term resolution which is mutually acceptable and conforms to the agreement on the basic principles guiding the settlement of sea-related matters between China and Vietnam as well as international law including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Both sides agreed to actively promote consultations on joint maritime development and ne-

gotiations on the delimitation of sea areas beyond the mouth of the Beibu Gulf, aiming to achieve substantive progress in these two areas at an early date, said the statement.

The two sides agreed to continue the comprehensive and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, and to conclude a substantive and effective Code of Conduct in the South China

Sea based on consensus through consultation, which is in line with international law including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, read the statement.

They also agreed to refrain from actions that could complicate the situation or escalate disputes, and jointly maintaining maritime stability.

During the two-day visit, Xi and Vietnamese leaders exchanged views on properly

handling maritime disputes on multiple occasions.

Maritime disputes are only part of Vietnam-China relations, and it is believed that the two sides can properly handle them in the spirit of mutual trust and mutual respect, said General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee Nguyen Phu Trong in a meeting with Xi on Tuesday.

Xinhua

Pope opposes repatriation of migrants to nations with human rights risks

Geneva, Switzerland - Pope Francis on Wednesday voiced hope that the current Global Refugee Forum in Geneva would revive the spirit of the 1951 Geneva Convention, which led to a UN treaty that defined who is a refugee.

Francis' remarks came in a written message read out to the forum by a representative of the Holy See.

In his message, the pontiff acknowledged the 114mn forcibly displaced people mainly

due to conflicts, as well as climate change and on the basis of religious beliefs, and added: "These factors have grown increasingly complex, yet our responses are not being adequately addressed."

These are 'urgent and pressing' challenges, he said, and urged: "Protecting and saving human lives must remain an utmost priority."

"No one should be repatriated to a country where they could face a severe human



Pope Francis' remarks came in a written message at Global Refugee Forum

rights violation or even death," he added.

Underlining the need for international cooperation and easing the pressure on refugee hosting countries, he said: "It is thus my sincere hope that this forum will work to revive both the spirit and the vision of the 1951 refugee convention, while at the same time seizing the opportunity to reaffirm the principles of solidarity."

"May this global forum set an example of multilateralism that

is relevant to our times," the pontiff added.

The three-day forum, which is set to conclude on Friday, is the largest quadrennial international meeting on refugee issues. Its purpose is to support the practical implementation of the objectives outlined in the Global Compact on Refugees, which include easing pressures on host countries, enhancing refugee self-reliance, increasing access to third-country solutions, and improving conditions

in countries of origin.

The gathering also allows states and stakeholders to make concrete commitments and contributions.

It is co-convened by five states - Colombia, France, Japan, Jordan, and Uganda - and co-hosted by the Government of Switzerland and UNHCR.

With refugee numbers rising due to armed conflicts, this year's forum will work to address a growing issue.

Anadolu Agency

Biden hosts Zelensky, reiterates need for Congress to approve Ukraine aid

Zelensky, on his 3rd trip to Washington, thanked the US for its support

Washington DC, US - US President Joe Biden on Tuesday hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the White House, where he reiterated the need for Congress to approve his administration's request for more money to help Ukraine defeat Russia.

Seated in the Oval Office alongside his Ukrainian counterpart and speaking before the press, Biden called the moment right now 'a real inflection point in history', adding that 'Congress needs to pass the supplemental funding for Ukraine before they break for the holiday recess'.

He said lawmakers on Capitol Hill failing to approve the over US\$60bn in assistance for Kyiv would mean giving Russia 'the greatest Christmas gift'.

"And because we've seen what happens when dictators don't pay the price for the damage and the death and the destruction they cause. They keep going, when no price is paid," he added, according to ABC News report.

Proposed as early as late October by Biden, the entirety of the supplemental budget request is still being blocked by Republicans in both the Senate and the House, with the GOP members



This file photo shows Joe Biden walking with Volodymyr Zelensky ahead of a session during the G7 Leaders' Summit in Hiroshima, Japan on May 21 (AFP)

We've seen what happens when dictators don't pay the price for the damage and the death and the destruction they cause. They keep going, when no price is paid

JOE BIDEN

conditioning the Ukraine aid on Democrats satisfying their demand for stepped-up measures on border security.

Zelensky, on his third trip to Washington since the Russia-Ukraine conflict broke out in February 2022, thanked the United States for its support and pleaded for the American people's confidence that Ukraine 'can win'.

The Ukrainian leader also alluded to an agreement reached between him and Biden during his last visit in Washington in September that the United States and Ukraine will collaborate on joint weapon production. "We'll discuss how to speed this

up," Zelensky said.

Before journalists were asked to be escorted out of the room so that Biden and Zelensky could start their formal bilateral talks, Biden informed them that he just signed another drawdown of weapons for Ukraine using his presidential authority.

As per Biden's direction, the Department of Defense will provide an additional package of weapons and equipment worth US\$200mn.

Before meeting Biden, Zelensky was on Capitol Hill, meeting with lawmakers to advocate for more aid to his country.

Meanwhile, in a statement, the White House said the meeting 'underscored the strong and abiding US support for Ukraine's fight for freedom'. "The leaders discussed Ukraine's self-defense against Russian aggression, including plans for the coming year," it said.

In the statement, White House said: "President Biden stressed that Russia will not outlast the collective support for Ukraine by a coalition of over fifty countries brought together by US leadership in defence of a rules-based international order based on a respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states."

50 injured in attack on Kyiv

Istanbul, Turkey - At least 50 people were injured on Wednesday in an overnight Russian missile attack on Ukraine's capital Kyiv, with the Ukrainian military claiming that it downed 10 missiles on their way to the capital.

"In total, 53 people were injured as a result of the enemy's night attack. 20 of them, including two children, were hospitalised. Doctors treated 33 victims on the spot, in particular 6 children," Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said on Telegram.

Earlier, Serhiy Popko, the head of the Kyiv City Military Administration, said on Telegram that 51 people were injured during the attack. Noting that about a dozen cases of falling debris were recorded due to the work of air defense systems in shooting down Russian missiles on their way to Kyiv, Popko said that those falling in the capital's Holosiivskiy district did not lead to any explosions.

Popko said that falling debris in the Darnytskyi district caused a fire at a nine-story residential building in the Desnianskyi district.

The Red Cross is working on the spot, and medical assistance is being provided to the injured, Popko further said.

He also said that blasts in the Dniproviskyi district shattered windows in two residential buildings.

Anadolu Agency

No visa requirement for foreign visitors to Kenya

Nairobi, Kenya - Foreign visitors to Kenya will not be required to have a visa beginning January 2024, President William Ruto announced on Tuesday during the celebration of Jamhuri Day, or Independence Day, held in Nairobi, the capital.

Ruto said all foreign nationals will enter the county without a visa from January next year, a move that is expected to boost tourism.

"Beginning January 2024, Kenya will be a visa-free country. It shall no longer be necessary for any person from any corner of the globe to carry the burden of applying for a visa to come to Kenya," Ruto said.

The Kenyan leader said that to implement the visa-free policy, the government has adopted a digital platform to ensure that all travelers to the country are identified in advance through an electronic platform.

An electronic travel authorisation will be granted to foreign



Kenya's President William Ruto

nationals visiting Kenya, Ruto said, adding that a visa-free regime aligns with his administration's quest to boost the growth of tourism and borderless commerce.

Kenya had earlier waived visa requirements for citizens from Indonesia, Senegal, and Congo, anchored on bilateral agreements to enhance the movement of tourists, investors, and skilled personnel.

President Ruto has advocated

for the abolition of visas for Africans visiting Kenya to realise the continent's integration agenda since taking over power in September 2022.

Kenya joins Rwanda which in November announced visa-free travel for all Africans.

During his speech at the 60th independence anniversary celebration, Ruto said his administration was committed to renewing key sectors of the economy.

Xinhua

IOC pledges over \$45mn at refugee forum

Geneva, Switzerland - The president of the International Olympic Committee on Wednesday pledged over \$45mn for displaced people at the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva.

Thomas Bach told the forum that he is pleased to announce the committee's new pledge for the next four years, adding: "We are committing over US\$45mn-benefiting approximately 500,000 displaced people."

According to Bach, the committee's efforts will improve access to safe sports, protection, and inclusion in 25 countries.

He also announced another pledge to support refugee athletes, saying: "I'm very happy to also announce that the International Olympic Committee and our Olympic Refugee Foundation are committing US\$50mn to support refugee athletes."

He added that the IOC Refugee Olympic Team will be led by a refugee athlete in the 2024 Paris Olympic Games for the first time.

"With far too many wars and



conflicts, displacing millions of people on a scale we have never seen before, the power of sport has never been more important," the president underscored.

The three-day forum, which concludes on Friday, is the largest quadrennial international meeting on refugee issues.

Its purpose is to support the practical implementation of the objectives outlined in the Global

According to the IOC president, the committee's efforts will improve access to safe sports, protection, and inclusion in 25 countries

Compact on Refugees, which include easing pressures on host countries, enhancing refugee self-reliance, increasing access to third-country solutions, and improving conditions in countries of origin.

The gathering also allows states and stakeholders to make concrete commitments and contributions.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA

Massive security breach in Lok Sabha

Two young men jumped into the House chamber and opened canisters that emitted a yellow gas

New Delhi - The Lower House of the Indian Parliament, Lok Sabha, witnessed a dramatic incident on Wednesday, when two people jumped from the visitors' gallery into the House chamber and opened canisters that emitted a yellow gas. The massive security breach took place on the anniversary of the 2001 Parliament attack.

The televised footage of the House proceedings showed members attempting to catch the intruders as they climbed from desk to desk, before they were caught by the MPs and taken out by the security personnel. The House was adjourned till 2pm.

Meanwhile, a man and a woman, identified as Neelam, 42, of Haryana's Hisar, and Amol Shinde, 25, of Maharashtra's Latur area, were detained by local police outside New Delhi's Transport Bhavan near the Parliament building, where they were protesting with yellow smoke.

The entire matter is being investigated thoroughly, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla told members after the House reconvened at 2pm. "Both of them have been nabbed and the materials with them have also been



A woman, who was protesting with colour smoke, is being detained by the police, outside the Parliament, in New Delhi on Wednesday (ANI)

Today's breach in Parliament, on the solemn anniversary of the 2001 attack, is an affront to our democratic values

ARVIND KEJRIWAL

seized. The two people outside the Parliament have also been arrested by police," he said. The entry of visitors inside the Parliament House complex has also been suspended.

Two persons, who entered

Lok Sabha have been identified as Sagar Sharma and Manoranjan. Sharma had come to the visitor's gallery as a guest of Mysuru Lok Sabha member Prathap Simha, as per the initial reports.

Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora and other senior officers visited the Parliament House complex to take stock of the situation.

Raising concerns over the security breach, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor claimed that intruders were apparently sponsored by a sitting MP of the ruling party.

He further demanded a detailed response from Union Home Minister Amit Shah. "The fact that these people (intruders) were apparently sponsored by a sitting MP of the ruling party...These people smuggled in smoke pistols, which shows there is a serious security lapse. Not only did they fire the pistols but also shouted some slogans inaudible to some of us. The new building does not seem to be configured very well when it comes to security in comparison with the arrangements in the old building," Tharoor said.

Terming the security breach in Parliament an 'affront to our democratic values', Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal demanded strict and swift action against the two men.

"Today's breach in Parliament, on the solemn anniversary of the 2001 attack, is an

affront to our democratic values. The security of our temple of democracy cannot be compromised," Kejriwal said in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

The incident happened when members were raising matters of urgent public importance. BJP MP Khagen Murmu was raising his issue and BJP's Rajendra Agrawal was in the chair.

"Suddenly two young men around 20 years old jumped into the House from the visitors' gallery and had canisters in their hand. These canisters were emitting yellow smoke. One of them was attempting to run towards the Speaker's chair. They were shouting some slogans. The smoke could have been poisonous. This is a serious breach of security especially on 13th December, the day when Parliament was attacked in 2001," Congress MP Karti Chidambaram said.

Samajwadi Party MP Dimple Yadav alleged a 'complete security lapse'.

"All those who come here - be it visitors or reporters - they don't carry tags. So, I think the government should pay attention to this. I think this is complete security lapse," she said. Agencies

Vishnu Deo Sai takes oath as CM of Chhattisgarh

Raipur, Chhattisgarh - Tribal leader and former Union Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Wednesday took oath as chief minister of Chhattisgarh at an event in Raipur which was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, senior BJP leaders and chief ministers of other states.

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan administered the oath of office to him at the Science College grounds in Raipur.

Meanwhile, Vijay Sharma and Arun Sao also took oaths as the Deputy Chief Ministers of the state.

Besides Modi and Amit Shah, BJP National President J P Nadda, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and other senior party leaders joined the swearing-in ceremony.

Former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel was also present during the swearing-in ceremony.

Vishnu Deo Sai's name was announced as the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh on Sunday



Chhattisgarh's new chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai (ANI)

afternoon after a key meeting of the BJP's newly-elected 54 MLAs in the state was held in Raipur. He won the Kunkuri Assembly seat with a total of 87,604 votes.

Sai is a prominent figure in the BJP and has held various positions, including being the former state chief and former union minister. Sai hails from the influential Sahu (Teli) community which has a sizeable presence in the Durg, Raipur and Bilaspur divisions. He served as state president of the party for Chhattisgarh from 2020 until 2022. He was the Union Minister of State for Mines, Steel in the first Modi cabinet.

He is highly regarded among tribal voters. The new chief minister started his political career as a village sarpanch. In 1989, he was elected as a 'panch' of Bagia village panchayat and the next year became the sarpanch unopposed.

In 1998, he was defeated in the assembly polls from Pathalgaoon seat. Vishnu Deo won four consecutive Lok Sabha elections from the Raigarh constituency from 1999 to 2014. He was not given a ticket in the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

Of the 90 assembly constituencies in Chhattisgarh, the BJP bagged 54 while the Congress won 35. ANI

Rajasthan CM-designate Bhajan Lal Sharma to take oath on December 15

New Delhi - Rajasthan Chief Minister-designate Bhajanlal Sharma, along with his two deputies will take the oath of office on Friday (December 15) at Albert Hall, Ramniwas Bagh, in Jaipur, state BJP chief CP Joshi said on Wednesday.

The party-picked legislators Diya Kumari and Prem Chand Bairwa will be sworn in as deputy chief ministers, and the former state minister Vasudev Devnani will take the oath of Assembly Speaker, said CP Joshi.

According to party sources, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Minister Amit Shah, and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh are also expected to attend the ceremony, with invitations extended to senior leaders and chief ministers from various states.

After days of suspense, the BJP on Tuesday picked Bhajanlal Sharma, a first-time MLA from the Sanganer assembly constituency, as the chief minister of Rajasthan.



Bhajanlal Sharma interacts with BJP national vice president Vasundhara Raje in Jaipur on Tuesday (ANI)

After days of suspense, the BJP on Tuesday picked Bhajanlal Sharma, a first-time MLA from the Sanganer constituency

Later, Sharma, accompanied by two deputy chief ministers, namely Prem Chand Bairwa and Diya Kumari, met Rajasthan Governor Kalraj Mishra in Jaipur and staked a claim to form the government.

Bhajanlal Sharma belongs to Rajasthan's eastern district, Bharatpur and is considered to

have strong backing from Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

He is at present the BJP's state general secretary and holds a master's degree in political science.

He won the Sanganer assembly seat by an impressive margin, securing 145,162 votes. ANI

We need safe, secure and resilient AI: Japan

New Delhi, India - Japan's Vice Minister for Policy Coordination, Ministry of External Affairs and Communications, Hiroshi Yoshida, on Wednesday called for a safe, secure and resilient Artificial Intelligence ecosystem and sought India's active participation in this regard.

"AI is a very important issue all over the world and it is changing our lives and society, and we need to work on AI risk mitigation...GPAI is very important and we also discussed in G7 and made a guiding principle for all AI actors regarding AI through the Hiroshima AI process," Yoshida said while speaking to ANI.

He emphasised the importance of responsible AI and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's



PM Narendra Modi greets Hiroshi Yoshida at the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence Summit, in New Delhi on Tuesday (ANI)

enthusiasm for AI policy, urging India's active involvement.

"AI has a great possibility, but it should be responsible AI. And we need safe, secure and resilient AI. Prime Minister Modi expressed his energy regarding

AI policy and so India is an advanced country in technology and this field. So we need India's active participation in discussion in the AI area as well," he said.

UK's Minister of AI and Intel-

lectual Property, Jonathan Camrose, while speaking to ANI, noted AI's potential for human prosperity but stressed the need for safety.

"To make so much possible for all of us, particularly in India, I see so many fascinating use cases, but to get there, it has to be safe," said Camrose, emphasising extensive collaboration with India and other countries.

The Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence summit, hosted in the national capital from December 12 to 14, brings together influential minds to discuss and collaborate on AI advancement.

Since its inception in June 2020, India has actively contributed to the Summit.

ANI

TRIBUTE TO FALLEN SOLDIERS



Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel pay tribute to the fallen Jawans on the 22nd anniversary of 2001 Parliament attack, at Parliament House, in New Delhi on Wednesday (ANI)

Hendricks, Markram shine in Proteas' win

Gqeberha, South Africa- Reeza Hendricks fell one short of an eighth fifty in his last 12 T20I innings but played a pivotal role in South Africa's victory in a rain-affected match in Gqeberha. After the first fixture in the series was washed out in Durban two days ago, South Africa's win now means they have an unassailable lead and India must win on Thursday in Johannesburg for a share of the spoils.

Hendricks, who did not get a game at last year's T20 World Cup and is South Africa's leading run-scorer in the format this year, underlined his claim on the opener's role with another authoritative knock. While Quinton de Kock, currently at the Abu Dhabi T20, will come into national contention for next year's tournament, Hendricks' latest efforts must secure him the other opener's spot.

Facing a tough chase of a revised target of 152 in 15 overs, Hendricks and Matthew Breetzke started briskly. They put on 42 in 16 balls before an over-eager Breetzke was run-out. Hendricks then combined with captain Aiden Markram to add 54 in five overs and by the time both were dismissed, South Africa needed 44 off the last six overs. Heinrich Klaasen fell shortly after and David Miller after that, but Tristan Stubbs and Andile Phehlukwayo secured the win with seven balls to spare.



Reeza Hendricks

Both attacks would have been pleased with the way their spinners went, especially South Africa. Tabraiz Shamsi had the most economical figures by any bowler with a return of 1 for 18 in four overs. That he bowled a large share of his overs to India's

half-centurions - Suryakumar Yadav and Rinku Singh - underlined how impressive his efforts were. After India were pegged back to 6 for 2, Suryakumar's 36-ball 56 and Rinku's unbeaten, career-best 68 off 39 took them to a competitive total.

They would have liked the opportunity to score a few more runs but rain cut their innings short with three balls to spare and Gerald Coetzee on a hat-trick. A 57-minute delay meant South Africa lost five overs from the chase but the match was completed without any further interruptions.

After finishing as the most successful first-powerplay bowler at the recent 50-over World Cup, Marco Jansen was back at it with the new ball in the shortest format. He found movement into the left-handed Yashasvi Jaiswal and beat the inside edge before banging in a short ball. Jaiswal could not get on top of the bounce as he tried to cut and hit it to David Miller at backward point, who took a diving catch to his left. Two balls later, exactly the same thing happened but with Tilak Varma attempting the shot. He sent it to Miller's right and though he went for the ball with both hands he could not hold on. Tilak went on to share in a 49-run third-wicket stand with Suryakumar and hit four fours and a six before Jansen took the catch that dismissed him for 29.

India lost both openers for ducks for only the second time in T20I history, and first since 2016, and it was up to stand-in captain Suryakumar to rebuild. He had luxury of watching for an over as Varma took Jansen apart in an 18-run third over and then got in

on the act with two fours and a six in Coetzee's 14-run fourth, including a signature flick for six over the wicketkeeper's head. Suryakumar continued on to whip Lizaad Williams over deep midwicket for six, send an Andile Phehlukwayo slower ball over short fine, sweep Tabraiz Shamsi through square and hit Jansen off his pads and over Heinrich Klaasen. He brought up 50 off 29 balls, put on 70 with Rinku, and was set to bat through but was deceived by a Shamsi googly and hit it to long-off to depart in the 14th over.

He'd already scored his first T20I fifty, off 30 balls, and kept India's run-rate between eight and nine runs an over but with only two boundaries between the 16th and 18th overs, he wanted to finish with a flourish. He hit the penultimate ball of Aiden Markram's last over over long-on and into the stands and then charged down the track to meet the last delivery and send the ball over Markram's head and into the press-box window. The media area at St George's Park is lower than at any of South Africa's other venues - so his effort was not so much impressive for height as it was for accuracy and power. The glass has not been broken at that venue too often, but Rinku sent a spiderweb shattering through it to make his case to the Indian selectors.

ESPNcricinfo



(L-R) Nidhin Mohan, Nobish and Aneermon of ABL Task

ABL Task, Earn Trust, Bangladesh CC win

Muscat - ABL Task beat Mani's CT in the B Division League powered by Al Ansari Group of Companies LLC on Friday.

Abdul Qadir was the top-scorer with 49 runs as Mani's CT made 163. Aneermon and Nobish picked three wickets each. In reply, Nidhin Mohan's scintillating 67 helped ABL Task reach the target with ease.

Earn Trust defeated Landmark Group by 57 runs in the C Division League.

Mustansar Hussain made a stroke-filled 89 as Earn Trust CT posted 185 in 20 overs.

Ajay Kumar picked up three wickets for Landmark Group.

In response, Landmark Group could only make 128 with Zaheer Abbas and Nilesh Gadekar picking two wickets each.

Bangladesh CC defeated Waves Engineering in the E Division League.

Batting first, Bangladesh CC made 123 in 20 overs. Mohammed Tayub picked four wickets for Waves Engg.

In response, Mohammed Tayub scored 44 but still fell

short by five runs.

Modern Muscat Mountains-B beat Arjaj International by one run in the G Division.

Brief scores : Mani's CT 163/10 in 29.3 overs (Abdul Qadir 49(48); Nobish 3/25, Aneermon 3/28) lost to ABL Task 166/3 in 26.2 overs (Nidhin Mohan 67(58) by 7 wickets.

Earn Trust CT 185/5 in 20 overs (Mustansar Hussain 89(49); Ajay Kumar 3/22) beat **Landmark Group** 128/7 in 20 overs (Fahim Uddin 40(39); Zaheer Abbas 2/17, Nilesh Gadekar 2/26) by 57 runs.

Bangladesh CC 123/10 in 19.2 overs (Shahid Hossain 33(20); Mohammed Tayub 4/20) beat **Waves Engineering** 118/7 in 20 overs (Mohammed Tayub 44(45); Ovaiddullah Khan 2/24) by 5 runs.

Modern Muscat Mountains-B 159/9 in 20 overs (Mohan Rajendran 41(36); Abdul Shakeer 4/30) beat **Arjaj International** 158/7 in 20 overs (Anoop Vinodia 45(37); Kashif Rasool 3/19) by 1 run.

CLASSIFIEDS

BIRTHDAY WISHES

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Happy Birthday Vidhathri!
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NAME CHANGE

We VISHAL KAMBLE (name of father as per the passport, holder of Indian passport No W6226036) and NEELAM VISHAL KAMBLE , (name of mother as per the passport, holder of Indian passport L8491861) having permanent address in Nr.Railway PowerHouse, BAGHANA,NEEMUCH (M.P)(complete postal address in India), and presently residing at the following address in WADI KABIR P.B. No 3168 P.C. 112 , Sultanate of Oman, hereby solemnly affirm and declare to change the name of our child Master SHARESHTH (name as per passport), holder of Indian Passport No T0691903) date of issue 28/01/2019 , issued at Muscat . The name of our child will be henceforth known as SHRESHTH VISHAL KAMBLE (new name) for all purposes. Any objection towards change of name of our minor child may please be communicated to Embassy of India, Muscat, Diplomatic Quarters, Al Khuwair, Po Box No 1727, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman.

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'NOT GOOD ENOUGH'

Manchester United out of Europe after 1-0 home defeat to Bayern Munich



Bayern Munich's Kingsley Coman celebrates after scoring against Manchester United on Tuesday

Manchester, England - Manchester United's quest for a Champions League last-16 spot came to an end with a 1-0 loss to group leaders Bayern Munich at Old Trafford on Tuesday.

Kingsley Coman's 70th-minute goal sealed the win for Bayern, leaving Erik ten Hag's team out of contention.

Needing a victory against Bayern and a draw in Copenhagen's match against Galatasaray, United's hopes vanished when neither scenario materialised. Despite a promising performance, particularly in the second half, the defeat left United in fourth place in their group, with just four points.

Ten Hag admitted to mistakes but praised his team's effort, acknowledging they didn't deserve to lose. However, United's underwhelming performance throughout the group stage, highlighted by conceding 15 goals, led to their elimination.

"We made mistakes. Today the performance was very good. We didn't deserve to lose but we lost the game."

"In the end, it's not good enough."

Bayern, already secure in their top spot, capitalized on a defensive lapse as Coman found space in United's penalty area to score. Harry Kane, reflecting on the game, praised Bayern's control and highlighted their ambition to go far in the competition.

"It was nice," Kane told TNT. "I felt like we controlled the game and had the better chances. We

were calm and we knew in the quick transitions we could hurt them.

"It is always tough when you are top and through already but we had a good motivation. It was nice to get the win today. We have enough ability to go far in this competition. That is the ambition, to go and win the Champions League."

The loss adds to United's woes, marking their sixth exit at the group stage and their first since 2020-21. Ten Hag's team faces a challenging season, marred by defeats and injuries, sitting sixth in the Premier League after a recent loss to Bournemouth. Despite their Champions League exit, Ten Hag emphasised the need to learn from the experience and carry forward their positive performances into the league.

Asked if he would look back on the team's Champions League campaign with regret Ten Hag said: "Not with regret. We didn't make it, but we have to accept it. We have to learn from it."

"We played some good football in the Champions League. We have to take some good performance into the Premier League."

United had just one shot on target, but several scoring chances, including a couple from Bruno Fernandes early in the second half.

The United captain launched one well over the bar from the edge of the box and the second just wide of the post.

Man United can turn attention to Premier League, says Ten Hag

Manchester, England - Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag said his team can now focus on improving their disappointing Premier League position after Champions League hopes came to a crashing end on Tuesday with their 1-0 loss to Bayern Munich.

The three-time European champions needed both to beat Bayern in their Champions League group stage finale and have Copenhagen's game against visiting Galatasaray end in a draw to advance to the last-16. Neither happened and United finished with four points from six games.

"There are still many things to play for and now we can focus, of course, on the Premier League



and this is the level we want to play, Champions League, so we have to give every effort to be in the top four and next year be back in Champions League," Ten Hag told reporters.

"And then of course, we have the FA Cup, so there are so many

things to play for." Kingsley Coman's 70th-minute goal lifted Bayern to victory against a United side that, even with nothing to lose, failed to create chances with just one shot on target.

"The big concern is that (Ras-

We have to give every effort to be in the top four and be back in Champions League. Then we have the FA Cup

ERIK TEN HAG

League campaign with five goals. "Bottom and rotten, in truth. They're just not very good," former Premier League striker Chris Sutton said on BBC Sport.

Ten Hag defended the single shot on target saying: "The game was like this for both sides: less chances. We did quite well, if not to say very well. We had our moments but just didn't take them."

Bayern manager Thomas Tuchel, whose team went unbeaten to finish top of Group A with 16 points, was asked if he felt for Ten Hag's predicament.

"Almost always I feel sympathy for the other coach but we try everything to win matches, but of course I have sympathy, he has a lot of key players injured for a decisive match," Tuchel said.

Arsenal finish group campaign with 1-1 draw against PSV

Eindhoven, Netherlands - Arsenal were held to a 1-1 draw away at Dutch league leaders PSV Eindhoven in the Champions League on Tuesday as both sides concluded their Group B campaign, having already secured berths in the last-16.

Eddie Nketiah's goal put Arsenal ahead just before halftime, but Yorbe Vertessen equalised for PSV early in the second half, finishing the match on level terms.

The Gunners, who had already secured first place in the group, finished with 13 points from their six matches with PSV on nine, ahead of third-placed RC Lens, who drop down to the Europa League.

Nketiah's first Champions League goal was teed up by a square pass from Reiss Nelson, whose run down the right and interchange of passes with Cedric opened up the home defence.

The Gunners, who had already secured first place in the group, finished with 13 points from their six matches with PSV on nine.



Arsenal's Eddie Nketiah (R) celebrates with Mohamed Elneny after scoring against PSV Eindhoven

Vertessen, who hit the upright with a 19th-minute header from Jordan Teze's cross, scored off the woodwork after his curling effort hit both posts before going in. The Belgian had made a strong run down the field before being picked out by Ricardo Pepi in a swift attacking move by the hosts.

Real Sociedad clinch top spot after draw against Inter Milan

Milan, Italy - Real Sociedad secured a historic top position in Champions League Group D after playing out a goalless draw against Inter Milan on Tuesday. The LaLiga side, already guaranteed a place in the last 16, finished atop the group with 12 points, the same as Inter, who settled for second place based on goal difference.

Despite dominating possession in an uneventful first half without a single shot on goal, Real Sociedad's Martin Zubimendi expressed elation about their achievement.

"This is sheer joy. You only have to look at all the fans that have come here," Real midfielder Martin Zubimendi told Movistar.

"At the beginning, this objective (winning the group) was a bit complicated but once we got going we achieved it. It's incredible."

Real dominated possession throughout an unexciting first half where they failed to record a single shot on goal. Inter, who had started with a counter-at-



Real Sociedad players celebrate after the match against Inter Milan

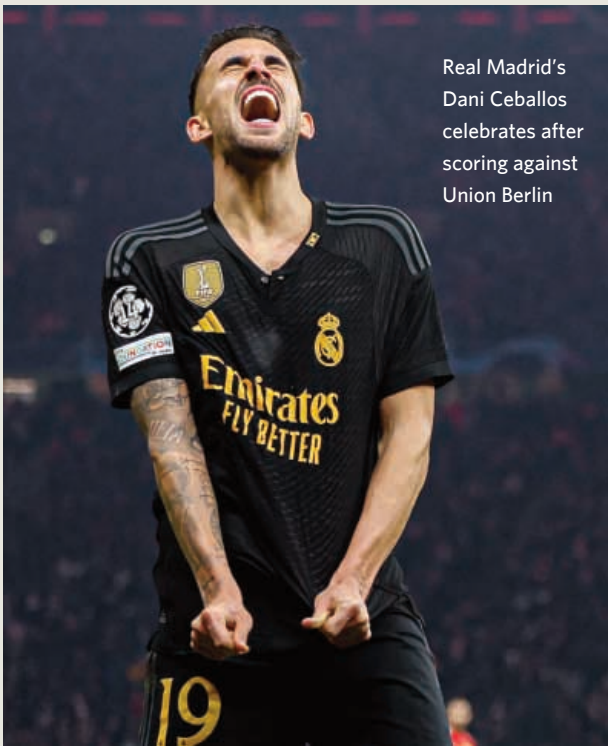
tacking game, squandered their single chance to open the scoring just before the break.

Simone Inzaghi's side looked more dangerous in the second half as Serie A top scorer Lautaro Martinez came on the pitch, but the Argentine was unable to capitalise on his chances in the box.

"We knew we had to play a slow game, with a lot of possession. We managed to do that, especially in the first half, but we

had to always be careful with the counter-attacks because one-on-one they have some lethal players," added Zubimendi, who was named man of the match.

Inter, focusing on counter-attacks, missed their opportunity to score just before halftime. While the Italian side intensified their attacks in the second half with Lautaro Martinez's inclusion, they couldn't convert chances into goals.



Real Madrid's Dani Ceballos celebrates after scoring against Union Berlin

Perfect Real beat Union Berlin 3-2

Berlin, Germany - Dani Ceballos scored an 89th-minute goal as Real Madrid clinched a dramatic 3-2 victory against Union Berlin in their final Champions League Group C encounter, to maintain their perfect run in the group stage.

The defeat confined the German side to the bottom of the table.

Union Berlin began strongly, with Real's goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga making a remarkable one-handed save within the first minute, denying Kevin Behrens from close quarters. Real responded with a close attempt from Joselu, whose header hit the crossbar in the 16th minute. Joselu missed another chance in the 43rd, followed by Luka Modric failing to convert a penalty just before halftime, stopped by Frederik Rønnow.

However, it was Union Berlin who struck first in stoppage time of the first half, with Kevin Volland capitalising on a defensive error by David Alaba to slot the ball home.

Union's hopes for a Europa League berth intensified the pressure on them, yet Ron-

now's impressive save in the 55th minute denied Rodrygo's close-range header. But Joselu found the net with a header six minutes later, and he doubled his tally in the 73rd minute with another header from a brilliant Fran Garcia assist.

Though Union found an equaliser through Alex Kral's low drive in the 85th minute, Dani Ceballos secured the win for Real Madrid in the 89th minute. Real topped the group with 18 points, while Napoli secured the second spot with 10 points.

Napoli progress

Napoli cruised into the Champions League knockout stages after securing a comfortable 2-0 victory over Sporting Braga, with both goals coming in the first half.

The Italian side finished second in Group C, securing their passage to the next round with 10 points, while Braga settled for third place with four points, securing a spot in the Europa League. Union Berlin, losing 3-2 to Real Madrid, ended the group stage at the bottom with two points.

TIGERS ON THE PROWL

Benzema, Kante on target as Al Ittihad cruise past Auckland City to book second-round meeting with Al Ahly

Jeddah - Al Ittihad sunk Auckland City amid an electric atmosphere created by a record crowd for a FIFA Club World Cup opening match. The Tigers will now play Al Ahly in the second round on Friday. Auckland defended resolutely to keep the deadlock intact until Romarinho made the breakthrough just before the half-hour, his fierce strike taking



Al Ittihad's N'Golo Kante celebrates with Hassan Kadash after scoring against Auckland City on Tuesday

a deflection off Nathan Lobo en route to the net.

"I'm really happy because, coming back from injury, I knew I could only play 45 minutes," Romarinho, who played closer to an hour, told FIFA post-game.

"I tried to do my best but, coming back from injury, you know you have to hold back a bit. But thank God it went well and we got the victory." "I think it took us a while to get going," said Igor Coronado. "But we found the

first goal, and that facilitated our style of play and took the pressure off."

N'Golo Kante then doubled the advantage with an exquisite first-time strike, before Muhannad Alshanqeeti cut the ball

across goal for Karim Benzema to tap home and become the first player to score in four editions of the tournament.

That dazzling spell of three goals inside 11 minutes might have suggested the floodgates would open. Yet Auckland City recovered their composure and performed admirably in the second period, emerging with dignity very much intact.

It is the Saudi hopefuls, however, who march on to face the champions of Africa in a mouth-watering clash of two Arab titans.

"It will be a good game," said Romarinho. "Without doubt it will be a tough game. But we believe in our side. We'll prepare well for the match.

"They like to play football, they mark tightly. We will have to stay really concentrated, get all the little things right to get the win."

"We know the Al Ahly team a little bit," added Igor Coronado. "They're very aggressive, they run a lot."



Italy and Juventus great Chiellini hangs up his boots

Columbus, US - Italian football stalwart Giorgio Chiellini declared his retirement from professional football on Tuesday through the social media platform X.

The 39-year-old, who concluded his MLS season with Los Angeles FC, made this decision after his team's defeat in the MLS Cup final against Columbus Crew on Saturday.

During his illustrious career, Chiellini represented Italy in 117 matches and captained the national team to victory in the Euro 2020 final against England at Wembley, securing the championship through a penalty shootout. Spending most of his club tenure at Juventus, he contributed significantly to their nine consecutive Serie A titles, as well as clinching five Coppa Italia trophies and five domestic Supercups. Chiellini also reached the UEFA Champions League final twice but ended up as the runner-up.

"You (football) have been the most beautiful and intense journey of my life," Chiellini, who played 425 league games for Juventus, scoring 27 goals, wrote on X.

"You have been my every-

thing. With you I have travelled a unique and unforgettable path. But now it is time to start new chapters, face new challenges and write further important and exciting pages of life."

Chiellini joined Juve in 2004 following four seasons at Livorno, where he began his professional career.

Chiellini represented Italy in 117 matches and captained them to victory in the Euro 2020 final against England

Beginning his professional career at Livorno, Chiellini moved to Juventus in 2004. The club issued a tribute, emphasizing Chiellini's significant impact as a player, a leader, and a captain throughout his 17-year tenure. Chiellini played a total of 561 games for Juventus, standing as the club's third most-capped player after Alessandro Del Piero and Gianluigi Buffon.

Cricket Australia expects Khawaja to abide by rules in Gaza support

Perth, Australia - Cricket Australia said on Wednesday that they backed Usman Khawaja's solidarity with Gaza but highlighted the need to comply with International Cricket Council (ICC) rules on messages displayed on gear. Khawaja showcased "Freedom is a human right" and "All lives are equal" on his boots in the colours of the Palestinian flag during Tuesday's training for the Pakistan test.

It's been reported that Khawaja intended to wear these boots in the upcoming match at Perth Stadium on Thursday. While supporting Khawaja's stance, Cricket Australia emphasized the significance of adhering to ICC regulations regarding such



Usman Khawaja

displays on cricket equipment.

"We support the right of our players to express personal opinions, but the ICC has rules in place which prohibit the display of personal messages which we expect the players to uphold," Cricket Australia said.

Haaland 'will be back on Thursday'

Manchester, United Kingdom - Erling Haaland will return to training on Thursday, manager Pep Guardiola said on Tuesday.

Haaland was absent from City's 2-1 win at Luton Town on Sunday with a foot injury, the first game the Premier League's top scorer has missed this season.

"He will be back on Thursday, day after tomorrow, and we see how he feels," Guardiola told a press conference.

"I cannot answer (if he will play on Saturday), I don't know right now. The next press conference I can be more precise about his condition."

City have won all five group games in the Champions League this season but in the Premier League the victory at Luton was



Erling Haaland

their first after four games without a win, and Guardiola was asked if he was happy with the performances despite results.

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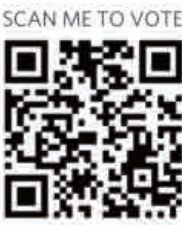
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WINTER PORRIDGE
Warm up your winter mornings with porridge - sweet or savoury



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IN TOWN
Romania National Day and BBF OQ seminar on Green Hydrogen



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ENTERTAINMENT
A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood

MENTAL HEALTH

MIND MATTERS



Early detection and intervention are critical in preventing the development of more severe mental health issues later in life. Therefore, it is essential to prioritise mental health care for young people and ensure they have access to the support they need during these critical periods of their lives

Mental health issues in Oman have been mounting lately while facilities to treat these are scarce. Dr Hassan Mirza, senior consultant and clinical lead, Adult ADHD Service, Department of Behavioural Medicine, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, shares some crucial insights in an exclusive interview. Excerpts:

Hubert Vaz

What is your understanding of the mental health scene in Oman?

Although Oman has been acknowledged for its advancements in public health, mental health services are scarce. This lack of services creates obstacles for individuals, particularly those living in rural regions, who require mental health care. This frequently leads to postponed treatment and prolonged periods of untreated mental illnesses.

The prevalence of common mental health disorders in Oman is similar to that of other countries. These disorders often include anxiety disorders, depression, and stress-related conditions, which are widely recognised as some of the most prevalent mental health issues worldwide.

Which age group in Oman is most vulnerable to mental disorders?

Mental disorder vulnerability can differ across various age groups and is influenced by a combination of biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors. In Oman, similar to many other countries, different age groups may face distinct challenges that contribute to their susceptibility to mental health issues. Adolescents and young adults, in particular, experience significant life transitions, such as starting college or entering the workforce, which can contribute to stress and anxiety.

Academic pressure, peer relationships, and identity formation are some of the issues that can significantly impact mental health in this age group. It's worth highlighting that 50% of mental health problems are established by the age of 14 and 75% by the age of 24. This means that early detection and intervention

trauma. These services provide immediate support, a listening ear, and sometimes professional guidance for individuals facing emotional challenges.

By providing a safe and confidential platform for people to express themselves, these services offer a crucial lifeline for those who may not have access to traditional mental health care. As such, they play a critical role in promoting mental wellness and ensuring that individuals get the help they need when they need it most.

How can students who face pressures of education ease their mental strain?

Students face a lot of pressure and stress related to their education, which can affect their mental health. To ease this burden, there are several things that students can do, such as practising good time management, taking breaks, and engaging in activities they enjoy. Additionally, schools can play a critical role in supporting students' mental health by providing access to psychological counselling and mental health resources.

Many schools already offer counselling services to students. However, there is a need for better psychological counselling in schools, particularly in areas where mental health services are scarce.

How can family members detect mental trauma in any member?

Family members can detect mental health difficulties by looking out for changes in mood, behaviour, personality, sleeping, and eating patterns. Encourage open communication and provide emotional support. Remember that everyone experiences mental health difficulties differently, and symptoms may vary from person to person. Seek professional help if necessary, and don't let the stigma surrounding mental health issues stop you from receiving the assistance and support you need.

What according to you is the need of the hour in Oman?

In Oman, the need of the hour is to focus on the following areas to promote mental health - increased awareness and education, access to affordable mental health services, integration of mental health into primary care, telehealth and digital solutions, workplace mental health initiatives, community support and connection, early intervention and prevention, tailored and culturally competent care, research and innovation, and policy and advocacy.

Can you comment about mental stress among expatriates, regarding job security, separation from family, etc?

Expatriates often encounter significant mental stress due to various factors such as job insecurity, financial instability, and separation from loved ones. The transient nature of assignments and economic uncertainties can lead to heightened anxiety, while the emotional strain of being away from family can intensify these challenges.

Establishing robust support systems, including mental health services and community networks, is crucial to address these concerns effectively. Employers can play a pivotal role in reducing stress by providing comprehensive preparation and ongoing support to their expatriate employees. Doing so can help ensure their employees have the resources and support they need to maintain their well-being while working abroad.

are critical in preventing the development of more severe mental health issues later in life. Therefore, it is essential to prioritise mental health care for young people and ensure they have access to the support they need during these critical periods of their lives.

Is there need for changing any cultural values to bring in more freedom and interaction in the family?

The issue of whether cultural values need to evolve to promote greater freedom, family interaction, female empowerment, and bridging the generation gap is multifaceted and context-specific. Cultural values are deeply rooted and can vary significantly across various societies. One way to address this challenge is by promoting open communication within families. When family members feel comfortable expressing themselves, it can enhance understanding and strengthen relationships, bridging the generational gap.

Do hotlines and online services serve any purpose in assisting people in distress?

Yes, access to hotlines and online mental health services is vital in assisting people who are in distress or those experiencing mental

cook-up



Some like it
HOT

PORRIDGE

Winter mornings are synonymous with hot porridge. Shurp up this healthy breakfast with many delightful toppings

Oatmeal porridge

- Ingredients
- 1 cup rolled oats
 - ¼ cup coconut milk
 - Honey or sugar (as per taste)
 - 1 banana - sliced
 - ½ cup mango chunks
 - 1 kiwi - sliced
 - ¼ cup pineapple chunks
 - 1tbsp coconut flakes

- Few raspberries /strawberries – sliced or full
- Nuts - optional

Method

Prepare the oatmeal according to package directions. Stir in the coconut milk and sweetener and divide the oatmeal into two bowls. Arrange the fresh fruit on top of the oatmeal and sprinkle with coconut flakes/nuts. Serve, topped with mint sprigs if desired.

Rice porridge

- Ingredients - Sweet
- 1 cup rice – any short grain variety
 - ½ cup coconut milk
 - 2tbsp sugar
 - 2-3 cardamoms
 - 1tbsp toasted cashews
 - 1tbsp raisins
 - A pinch of salt

Method

Cook the rice in a rice cooker or pressure cooker with three glasses of water – it should be slightly overcooked and standing in the remaining water.

To the same vessel, add the coconut milk and sugar and stir. Crush the cardamoms and add the powder along with a pinch of salt. Garnish with toasted cashews and raisins before serving in bowls. (In the sweet version, coconut milk



may be replaced with normal milk.

- Ingredients - Savoury
- 1 cup rice – any short grain variety
 - ½tsp salt
 - ½ cup chopped vegetables (carrot/peas/mushroom)
 - ½ cup shredded chicken
 - 1tsp butter
 - ½tsp crushed black pepper

Method

Cook the rice in a rice cooker or

pressure cooker with three glasses of water – it should be slightly overcooked and standing in the remaining water.

Add the salt and butter and stir. Steam the chopped vegetables and chicken and add to the rice. Stir and serve warm

(Note: For sweet/savoury versions, you can add any suitable ingredients or garnishes to suit your own taste)

WINNING RECIPE

Sweet Potato Fries

Shruti Sampat

(December 7 - Main ingredient Sweet Potato)

- Ingredients
- 400g sweet potato
 - 1tbsp garlic butter
 - 1tsp dried/fresh parsley - chopped
 - ½tsp salt
 - 1tsp crushed black pepper

Method

Wash the sweet potatoes well, cut off the tips and cut thick slices. Then cut them into thick fingers or wedges. (You may leave the skins on or peel them)

Now, take the wedges in a large bowl and add the garlic butter, salt, and pepper. Toss to coat well or do so with your fingers. Garlic butter may be replaced with olive oil. Place them on a rack in an air-fryer and cook for 10-12 minutes. Check and keep longer if they are not cooked through. Garnish with parsley and serve warm with ketchup or any dip.



My KITCHEN CREATIONS

Do you have a unique recipe? Here's your chance to share it with readers. The best recipe every week, using the given main ingredient, will be published here and receive food vouchers from:



MAIN INGREDIENT THIS WEEK
Sardines



Send in your recipes to: hubert.vaz@apexmedia.co.om with the title 'My Kitchen Creations', along with your name and mobile number.

NOTE: All recipes sent should be original and not sourced from the internet. All recipes must have a list of ingredients and method (No comments). All recipes must be accompanied by a photo taken in your own kitchen. Only recipes sent in by Monday, every week, will be considered. Unique recipes with limited ingredients stand a good chance

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take a break

IN TOWN

ROMANIA NATIONAL DAY



The Embassy of Romania hosted a reception to mark National Day of Romania



Photos: V K Shafeer

BBF OQ seminar



British Business Forum and OQ held a seminar on Green Hydrogen on Sunday



Photos: V K Shafeer

BOGGLER

A	S	B	S
M	C	Y	D
G	E	L	R
N	U	T	O

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

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

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS

1. How many breaths does an average human take each day?

A. 20,000
B. 21,000
C. 23,000
D. 24,000

2. What is the chemical symbol of Oxygen?

A. O
B. O2
C. O3
D. O4



3. What is the study of fossils called?

A. Fossilogy
B. Paleontology
C. Forensics
D. Petrology

Answers
3. B
2. A
1. C

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

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

**ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Your social life is abuzz right now, which is feeding you valuable positive energy from other people. This is a great day to be around as many people as you possibly can be, friends and strangers alike. Not only will it give you a nice break from your more solitary routine, but it will also open you up to starting new relationships or taking older ones in a new direction.

**TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20
Go ahead and follow your urge to let your more idealistic side take over your decision-making side right now. Letting your inner idealist out will be healthy for your self-esteem. It could also encourage new friends to get to know you even better. Everyone likes someone who leads with their heart. Plus, when you see the best in everything, you automatically see the best in yourself too.

**GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21
Your friends are going to be your greatest source of comfort and energy today, but that's nothing new. You all have similar ideas about what to do today, so get in touch with them as early in the day as possible to come up with a plan that everyone can contribute to. Get all of the boring stuff out of the way first. You can't let finishing work projects, doing homework, or running errands keep you from having fun with your favourite people. It might be tricky to juggle it all, but you can do it!

**CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22
You're going to get along really well with people left and right today. There will be like-minded folks everywhere you look. This is a good day to make plans to get to know one or two of these people better. Making plans will be easy, especially when a big chunk of your calendar suddenly opens up. If you have some free time coming up in the next few days, make the most of it.

**LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22
You can (and should) shut out pressures from the outside world right now. Too many people are demanding too many unreasonable things of you. So today, just curl up and enjoy being by yourself for a while. Lower the volume on your life, and some helpful introspection is bound to come your way.

**VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
If a friend or family member asks you to sacrifice some of your free time in the coming weeks, try to do what you can for them. They wouldn't ask this of you unless they really needed your help, and chances are you will get a lot out of being there for them. You should take it as a compliment that they came to you first.

**LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
There is a lot of vibrant energy coursing through you right now, but it's more the "start" kind than the "finish" kind. But this is not necessarily a bad thing. By initiating a lot of new things at once, you can make your life a lot more interesting without getting too overwhelmed. And it's okay if you don't actually get a lot done right now.

**SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Today is a good day for you to start anything new, from a new book to a new job to a new relationship. Possibility is a profound thing for you right now, and nothing will excite you more than a blank canvas upon which you can draw whatever you like. Your creativity is leading you to act in unexpected ways, but the people you meet today will find your unpredictability charming and unique.

**SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
At work or school, you need to be honest and understand your limitations. The people who have authority over you will appreciate and respect it. It can be tough on your ego to admit that you can't do something, but it is the only way to start learning a skill or piece of information that you lack.

**CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
No matter what you are debating doing right now, you aren't going to come to any conclusions today, so don't push yourself too hard. Instead, use this day to do some more research on your options. Go online and find out what other people who have been in your situation choose to do and how they feel about their decision.

**AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Don't be shy about protecting your secrets today, even if you have to plead the Fifth with inquisitive friends and family. Your business is your business, and other people can't help but meddle if they get the impression that you are looking for their input. No matter how well-intentioned they may be, they still have a different agenda.

**PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Even if you have ten different projects going on right now, you should make personal relationships your first priority today. One of the people who is always there for you needs your advice or your time, and you should juggle your schedule in any way you have to in order to give them what they need.

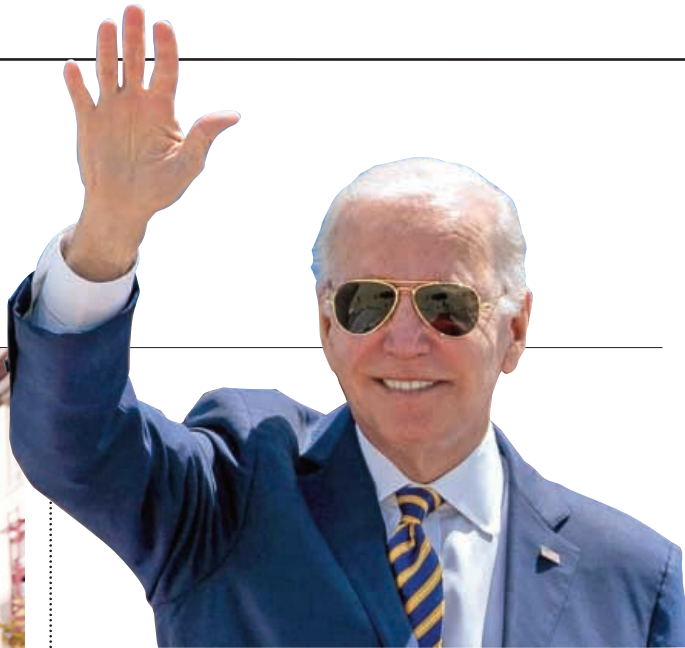
entertainment



MARVEL SETTLES SPIDER-MAN, DOCTOR STRANGE FEUD

It looks like Marvel won't be bringing its battle over the rights to *Spider-Man* and *Doctor Strange* into the new year. Attorneys for the company and the estate of Steve Ditko on Wednesday notified the court that they've reached an amicable settlement and expect a stipulation of dismissal with prejudice to be filed in the coming weeks.

This all started back in 2021, when Marvel filed a series of lawsuits in response to copyright termination notices from Larry Lieber and the estates of Gene Colan, Steve Ditko, Don Heck and Don Rico. A very long list of characters were at issue, including Iron Man, Captain America, Black Widow, Hulk and Thor. In June, all but one of the matters settled.



BIDEN BEGINS HOLLYWOOD FUNDRAISING TOUR

President Biden began a 2024 Hollywood fundraising blitz with a visit to Los Angeles this weekend, calling out former President Trump in a speaking engagement while plying his case for a second term.

After a summer of strikes and industry strife where they avoided the Hollywood limelight, Biden and the First Lady planned six fundraising events and meetings between the two of them in Southern California this weekend.

"This is an incredibly successful night," the president said at his first star-studded fundraiser kicking off the weekend on Friday night, joking that he didn't want to talk long because he was 'the only thing standing between you and Lenny Kravitz'.

RYAN O'NEAL PASSES AWAY

Ryan O'Neal, a leading star in Hollywood in the 1970s known for iconic films such as *Love Story* and *Paper Moon*, has died, according to a series of emotional posts from his son. He was 82.

On Friday, Patrick O'Neal shared on Instagram that his father had died "with his loving team by his side supporting him and loving him as he would us." Patrick described his father as 'my hero'.



MERYL STREEP BREAKS HER OWN RECORD

Meryl Streep has another shot at winning a Golden Globe for her turn in the third season of *Only Murders in the Building*. Check out her impressive record. She is now the most nominated actor in the history of the Golden Globes. After the nominations for the 81st Golden Globes were announced on Monday, Meryl secured another nomination for best performance by a supporting female actor for her role in Hulu's *Only Murders in the Building*, bringing her total count to an astounding 33.



ZAC EFRON PAYS TRIBUTE TO MATTHEW PERRY

Zac Efron has paid tribute to late *Friends* star Matthew Perry during a speech in Los Angeles. The actor, best known for starring in the *High School Musical* film series, was being honoured with a star on Hollywood's 'Walk of Fame'. He thanked Perry for motivating him to reach the next stage of his career after appearing together in the film *17 Again* in 2009. Efron also said he was 'eternally grateful' to *High School Musical* director Kenny Ortega and producer Bill Borden. "I still think about it everyday, I still sing the songs in the shower."

'ANIMAL' CONTINUES IN BEAST MODE

It's the 'beast mode' activated even on weekdays for *Animal* as the film is seeing very good stability in cinemas. Ever since the film has released, the collections have only exceeded expectations on a day-on-day basis. The first weekend of the film was fantastic. *Animal's* business now stands at Rs45,800,000 in India. As per the report, the film witnessed 19.86% Hindi occupancy and a similar response for Tamil shows as well.



COMING SOON



DUNKI

Dunki is a hilarious and heartwarming saga of a perilous journey, borders, friendships, nostalgia for home, and love that towers above it all.

Genre: Comedy
Starring: Boman Irani, Tapsee Pannu, Shah Rukh Khan
Language: Hindi
Release date: December 21

 **BOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW:**
THE ARCHIES (NETFLIX)
Genre: Musical
Starring: Agastya Nanda, Khushi Kapoor, Suhana Khan, Vedang Raina, Mihir Ahuja

The *Archies* is a Hindi teen musical comedy film directed by Zoya Akhtar who also produced the film with Reema Kagti under Tiger Baby Films and Sharad Devarajan under Graphic India. The film features the fictional music band produced by and related to Archie Comics, and marks the debut of some star kids - Agastya Nanda (Amitabh Bachchan's grandson), Khushi Kapoor (Sridevi's younger daughter), Suhana Khan (Shah Rukh Khan's daughter), besides Vedang Raina, Mihir Ahuja, Aditi Saigal and Yuvraj Menda.

It is impossible for film critics to view the film other than

through the prism of nepotism and much, much was expected from them in terms of looks, screen presence and, above all, talent. So, did the star kids deliver? You have to see this 'school annual day play' to realise that all the starkids proved to be utter flops. In fact, the other actors in the bunch - Vedang (as Reggie), Mihir (as Jughead), Aditi (as Ethel) and Yuvraj (as Dilton) with varied unsung backgrounds, did rather well, you bet!

The film adaptation of the popular comic series (which had been popular in India among school kids in the 70s and 80s, as the prime form of entertainment after school



hours) has been under development since March 2018. *The Archies* premiered at the 54th International Film Festival of

India on November 22 and was released on Netflix on December 7 much to the dismay of film critics who were expecting to

be pleasantly delighted. The storyline is set in the Anglo-Indian community in the 1960s, the period known for

several incidents including anti-war protests, civil rights movement in America, hippie culture and the music of the *Beatles* and Bob Dylan. And director Zoya Akhtar, who herself belongs to Gen X (born between the 1960s-1970s) was probably equally nostalgic about these popular comics when she made this film. However, people of her age group in Gen X are now in their 50s and 60s and too cut away to comprise her target audience and appreciate this bunch of quirky millennials with zero spark.

The storyline is about the kiddos aspiring to make the world a better place. It was the era when they believed that they could change the world. You see traces of rebellion, love and peace-making alongside

the generous scoops of rock 'n' roll in the community residing in Green Park in Riverdale, and the opening sequence seems rather silly in an attempt to establish the setting for the story.

While the starkids took the plunge in the celluloid world rather too early, we'd say, Zoya, probably failed miserably in getting out the best from them. And you'd agree when you see Suhana throwing her hands and limbs out in awkward gestures, like a cardboard puppet, which they expect the audience to swallow without burping.

Watch it only to satisfy your curiosity. Otherwise, it's worth skipping - don't ruin your childhood fantasies surrounding the popular comics.

Rating ★★★★★