

Omani team rescues woman alive seven days after quake

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In one of the most miraculous rescues following the earthquake in Turkey, a search and rescue team of Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) pulled out a woman alive from the rubble of a building in Antakya on Monday morning.

On Monday evening, CDAA tweeted its team had rescued another quake victim in Antakya.

The 60-year-old woman survived being trapped for seven days when the team from Oman rescued her.

A statement issued by CDAA said, 'After extensive search operations in several areas affected by the earthquake, which resulted in the recovery of a number bodies, the National Search and Rescue Team pulled a woman out from underneath the rubble of a collapsed building in Turkey. She received necessary treatment from the medical team and was transferred to a hospital for further treatment.'

Speaking to *Muscat Daily* from Turkey, Lt Ali al Farsi, a member of CDAA's Search and Rescue



(Supplied photo)

Aftershocks continue, there is outage of water and electricity, and extreme cold. Accessibility is also an issue; many roads have been destroyed

LT ALI AL FARSI

Team, said, "The team conducts many search operations and continues to recover bodies from collapsed and earthquake-af-

ected buildings. The team also provides medical care and is still searching for missing persons alive under the rubble."

Lt Farsi added that the team has been facing challenges in its search and rescue operations. "We are still experiencing aftershocks, there is outage of water and electricity, and extreme cold. Accessibility is also an issue as many roads have been destroyed."

He affirmed the team's commitment to safety precautions and continuing the job.

In the midst of destruction and despair, miraculous tales of survival continue to emerge. "Is the world there?" asked 70-year-old Menekse Tabak as she was pulled out from the concrete in the southern city of Kahramanmaraş to applause and cries praising God, on Saturday.

In the city of Antakya, a two-month-old baby was found alive 128 hours after the quake, state news agency Anadolu reported.

A two-year-old girl, a six-month pregnant woman, and a four-year-old and her father were among those rescued five days after the quake, Turkish media reported.

With hopes of finding more survivors in the rubble fast fading, the combined death toll in Turkey and neighbouring Syria from last Monday's 7.8 magnitude quake rose above 37,000 and looked set to increase.

The rescue phase is "coming to a close", with the focus now switching to providing shelter, food and schooling, United Nations aid chief Martin Griffiths said during a visit to Aleppo in northern Syria on Monday. See also [Page 09](#)



(Supplied photo)

826 publishers to present 533,063 titles at book fair starting Feb 22

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The 27th edition of Muscat International Book Fair will host 826 publishing houses from 32 countries, the Ministry of Information stated at a press conference on Monday.

The Main Committee of the fair announced that the event will be held from February 22 to March 4. "A total of 533,063 titles and publications will be presented, off which 5,900 are new publications, 204,411 non-Arabic and 260,614 Arabic books," said Ahmed Saud al Rawahi, Director of Muscat International Book Fair.

Addressing the press conference, H E Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Culture in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Vice-Chairman of the Organising Committee of the fair, informed that the Governorate of South Batinah will be the guest of honour this year.

"Various cultural and arts events will be held alongside the book fair. We will also use artificial intelligence in this edition to analyse data and information about visitors and accompanying programmes," H E Sayyid Said added.

"There will be 165 cultural

There will be 165 cultural events and 166 children's activities. The fair will include a Bahraini cultural week

H E SAYYID SAID
AL BUSAIDI

events and 166 children's activities. The fair will include a Bahraini cultural week. We hope it will be successful and continues in the future editions."

Mohammed bin Said bin Mohammed al Balushi, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Information and Chairman of the Media Committee of the fair, said, "The event will include media activities and a daily cultural bulletin. For this, a group of media professionals have been invited to participate."

He added that Muscat International Book Fair does not follow a policy of banning publications, unless it affects Omani values. "However, publications that affect the national principles and values are not welcome, just as society itself does not welcome these publications."

04

OPWP plans three new wind power projects

Muttrah has highest 4G coverage: TRA

Muscat - The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has announced that the wilayat of Muttrah saw the highest 4G service coverage rate in 2022, while Saham boasted of the highest data download speed for mobile broadband services.

The assessment was the outcome of a field survey conducted



by TRA to measure the quality of telecommunication services in Oman's wilayats in 2022.

The survey covered 11 wilayats - Daba, Saham, Barka, Muttrah, Mudhaibi, Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, Bahla, Yanqul, Mahadha, Duqm and Taqah.

TRA stated that such surveys are carried out using specialised

measurement tools and approved methodologies with the objective of raising user experiences. 'These seek to raise beneficiaries' level of awareness and enhancing competition in the sector.' Key indicators covered level of coverage, speed of data downloads and percentage of successful calls.

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ABM students donate for quake victims

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Students, their parents and teachers of Ahmad bin Majid Private School have shown compassion and support for the victims of the earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria last week by responding to a student-led call to donate household items and food supplies for the victims.

It was a school-wide effort where parents, teachers, students and the management came together.

'The response has been overwhelming. Various items of clothing and household articles poured in over the weekend, brought in by empathetic parents and students who wished to alleviate at least a little bit of the suffering of the hapless victims,' a statement said.

The mission of Ahmad bin Majid Private School is not just

'The response has been overwhelming. Various items of clothing and household articles poured in over the weekend, brought in by empathetic parents and students'

the transference of knowledge, but building leadership skills, while inculcating core values such as understanding and empathy in students.

Najim al Timami, Chairman of the Board, said, "The Board's commitment to stand with the global community and help our brothers and sisters in this time of need is unwavering. We are proud to see our children and families immediately take action

without hesitation."

This collection drive has empowered student leaders to take the lead as they collected, categorised, packed and delivered items to be sent to earthquake affected areas. This real-life experience has given ABM students the chance to support the community and fulfil their role as global citizens.

In this time of irreparable loss that the people of Turkey and Syria have experienced, ABM feels humbled to be able to contribute towards this noble cause. 'Our hopes and prayers are with the victims of this catastrophic natural disaster,' the board stated.

The items donated include 400 blankets and 20+ large boxes filled with clothing, baby products like diapers, powder milk and other items, which will be sent to Oman Charity Organization to be despatched to Turkey and Syria.

5th edition of Canines for a Cause attracts hundreds

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Almost 300 canines and their owners took part in the fifth edition of the Canines for a Cause charity event at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, on Saturday. The popular event was last held in 2019 and made a successful comeback after the pandemic.

The event was organised by Canadian Jebel K9 in collaboration with media partner HiFM. Prizes and ribbons were awarded to several dogs in various categories, including Best Dressed Dog, Loveliest Lady Dog, Handsome Hound, Most Outrageous Dog, Gorgeous Golden Oldie and Best Rescuer.

The event also shed light on local rescue groups to help raise awareness for animal welfare across Oman.

Speaking about the occasion, Alfa Vold, Founder and Managing Partner of Canadian Jebel K9 and Jebel 5 Star Pet Resort, and organiser of Canines for a Cause, said, "At our last event, we welcomed over 1,000 participants and over 400 dogs. After being placed on hold since 2019 due to pandemic restrictions, this year marks the fifth edition which witnessed a massive response from dog lovers."

Mustasim al Zadjali, a dog owner, said, "I have attended this event for two years and am happy to bring my Alsatian Paco here. He is three years old and is



I'm so happy with this platform for pets and parents to meet and let their dogs socialise and have some fun

PAULA DASGUPTA

a very gentle boy. Such events help dogs socialise and get over depression."

Kithmini D'Silva, another dog lover, said, "Our Ziggy is part of our family. Bringing Ziggy here is

more like a get-together. This event helps canines experience other dogs and enjoy the day."

Paula Dasgupta, whose pet won a category, said, "Hazel enjoys such gatherings and outper-

forms herself every time. This time around, she claimed the first place in the Dress-Up Relay competition. I'm so happy with this platform for pets and parents to meet and let their dogs socialise and have some fun."

Some of the other entertaining competitions were Best Trick, Rocket Recall, How High Can You Fly Jumping Competition, Musical Hoops, Bone Appetite, Paw-casso and Find the Treat.

Proceeds from ticket sales will go to Child Care Centre and Animal Rescue in Oman.

On the occasion, Nabil al Zadjali, owner of Canadian Jebel K9 and Jebel 5 Star Pet Resort, said, "Dogs need to socialise and such an event is excellent for that. It is also an educational event and one gets to enjoy several activities with their dogs."

Oman takes part in world govts' meet

Dubai - The sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Finance, is taking part in deliberations of the ninth edition of the World Government Summit in Dubai, UAE.

Oman's delegation is led by H E Sultan Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance. The World Government Summit 2023 is being

held under the theme 'Shaping Future Governments.'

The three-day summit brings thought leaders, global experts and decision makers from around the globe to share and contribute to the development of tools, policies and models that are essential in shaping future governments.

World Government Summit

2023 is hosting a set of interactive dialogue sessions within six main themes, including Accelerating Development and Governance, Future of Societies and Healthcare, Exploring the Frontiers, Governing Economic Resilience and Connectivity, Global City Design and Sustainability, and Prioritising Learning and

Work.

This edition of the summit is also hosting several forums and dialogues aiming to discuss the most important global trends in various vital sectors that contribute to the development of government work and future policies and strategies.

ONA



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ANNOUNCEMENT

The Directorate General of Khoula Hospital invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 09:30 am Tuesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/DGK H-3/539/2023	Supply, Installation and End-user Training of Ortho Drill, Battery Operated for Main OT and Hand Surgery at Khoula Hospital	2/February/2023	07/March/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent Grade	R.O 25/=

Notes:-

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose Electronic Bank Guarantee issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- 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



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Send your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

Oman to rebuild Unesco world heritage Bait al Ajaib in Zanzibar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) awarded a tender to rebuild Bait al Ajaib - House of Wonders - in Zanzibar on Monday, as part of its programme to restore and rehabilitate several historical monuments of Omani architectural heritage in Zanzibar.

A landmark building dating back to 1883, Bait al Ajaib is a Unesco World Heritage Site in Stone Town, Zanzibar, a part of which collapsed in December 2020 during renovation works.

The agreement was signed by H E Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi,



(Supplied photos)

Undersecretary for Heritage in MHT, and Simai Mohammed Said, Zanzibar's Minister of Tourism and Heritage.

The agreement was signed in the presence of H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, the Consul General of Oman in

Zanzibar and the Ambassador of Tanzania to Oman.

The scope of the tender includes rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating the house in coordination with the Government of Zanzibar and the Unesco World Heritage Centre.

The work includes rebuilding the house using the traditional materials used in the construc-

tion originally on the directives and guidelines of the Unesco World Heritage Centre and its advisory bodies.

'The house will be a joint centre showcasing the common history and enhance interaction in cultural, social, economic and tourism fields between the two countries,' MHT stated.

Owing to its long history of re-

lations and shared culture and heritage with Zanzibar, Oman committed to renovate Bait al Ajaib following Royal Orders of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

The House of Wonders was once the most modern building in East Africa; it was the first building to have electricity and an elevator. With a mix of elements of European style and Zanzibari tradition, the building boasts of cast iron columns, elaborate door carvings and open central courtyards coming together for a unique architectural achievement.

Just next to it is the Palace Museum, built by the second sultan of Zanzibar - Sayyid Barghash bin Said al Busaidi - in 1883. It is an opulent palace with beautiful marble flooring, coral stonewalls and silver decorations.

Sahim initiative helps employ 5,000 jobseekers in 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Sahim initiative of the Ministry of Labour (MoL), launched in April 2022, has successfully employed 5,000 jobseekers under a temporary contract work system in government agencies in various governorates.

According to the ministry, the initiative encourages jobseekers to use their skills, abilities and practical experiences to develop the economy, open up new vistas for investments, and gain better competitive advantage.

"The Sahim initiative creates job opportunities in the public sector and a forward-looking generation of youth who are motivated to pursue career excellence and willing to achieve institutional objectives. It also provides jobseekers an opportunity to gain skills and expertise, learn about the labour market, and gain practical experiences which give them a competitive advantage over other candidates," said Abdulrahman Muhammad al Alawi from the Training Support Centre of MoL.

The initiative supports the principle of decentralisation and contributes to the development process in governorates. "Participants in the initiative have privileges, including special medical insurance from Dhofar Insurance Company, concessional Islamic finance from Bank Nizwa, and special offers from Vodafone," Alawi added.

Alia Hamad al Mashaikhi, a technician in the Ministry of Interior and one of the beneficiaries, said that the initiative provided her with an opportunity



The Sahim initiative creates job opportunities in the public sector and a forward-looking generation of youth who are motivated to pursue career excellence and willing to achieve institutional objectives

ABDULRAHMAN
AL ALAWI

to learn, engage in the work environment, and gain new experiences through teamwork and communication with other employees. "There is need to intensify training for beneficiaries to improve their job skills before they are recruited."

Another beneficiary, Nasser Abdullah al Sinawi, an accountant in the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said, "Sahim has contributed to developing our job skills and how to employ these in the work environment. We hope the ministry launches more employment initiatives to qualify and employ Omani youth."

MAFWR to buy wheat from farmers at RO500/tn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has signed an agreement with Oman Flour Mills Company to purchase wheat crop from Omani farmers following the 2022/2023 harvest season.

An official of MAFWR said, "Under the agreement, the ministry will buy one tonne of wheat for RO500 from Omani farmers. This step aims to enhance food security and support farmers."

The official added that the ministry accords much attention and exerts efforts to enhance the production of wheat crop in cooperation with several international, regional and local organisations and research centres. "This is done through programmes to develop local wheat cultivars and also by importing samples to be tested in the sultanate," the official said.

He informed that the area under wheat cultivation has doubled from the previous season and exceeds 5,000 acres, while



productivity is expected to exceed 5,000 tonnes this season.

The total area under wheat cultivation in the 2020/2021 season was 2,449 acres - a 19.6 per cent growth over the previous season.

Wheat production increased 19 per cent in Oman in the 2020/2021 agricultural season to 2,649 tonnes.

"The ministry has provided six new harvesters to support wheat farmers through the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund," the MAFWR official said.

MAFWR uses drones to check spread of locusts

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) is conducting field experiments to use drones to control desert locusts at breeding sites before these spread to other places.

An official at MAFWR said, "The ministry, in cooperation with the Desert Locust Control Authority in Al Wusta, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and relevant government agencies, is conducting trials



(Supplied photo)

using drones to explore and monitor desert locusts."

He added that the initiative is part of an early warning system and strategy being developed to control desert locusts before

these spread to other areas.

According to the MAFWR official, the initiative aims to check the spread of locusts in remote areas and prevent loss of agricultural crops.

AUCTION NOTICE



ASYAD Ports & Terminals L.L.C, hereby announces the following auction (in closed envelopes) to auction the below listed used tugboat:

Auction No	Auction Title	Date for Inspection	Date for Receiving Bids (Sealed Envelopes)	Inspection Location	Security Deposit / Bid Bond
APT/AUC-TION/001/2023	Auction for used (Tugboats) 02 Nos.	20th Feb 2023 to 6th March 2023	12th March 2023	Muscat state, Port Sultan Qaboos	100 /- OMR

Tugboat Type	Inspection Site
Tugboat Al Qabil, Engine power 1560 X2, RPM 1000, Model year 1987 Spain.	Port Sultan Qaboos, Mutrah
Tugboat Sur, Engine power 1200 X2, RPM 1650, Model year 1981 Singapore.	Port Sultan Qaboos, Mutrah

General Terms & Conditions:

- Interested bidders or individuals who would like to inspect the Tugboat, should obtain bidding form by email: tenders@asyadterminalsduqm.om
- Inspection time between 8:00 AM to 15:00 PM (Sunday to Thursday) as per the mentioned date above.
- Successful bidder is obligated to transfer the ownership & transfer the tugboats outside the Port at his cost.
- Bids to be submitted in sealed envelope with red wax, with auction number and title addressed to "Procurement Manager" ASYAD Port & Terminals. The envelope should not mark with any reference to the bidder details. All bidders are required to submit the bids to the main office of ASYAD Ports & Terminals Muscat office, Ghala, Jabal Shames building during the company official working hours from 7:00 AM to 15:00 PM on the assigned date mentioned above.
- Interested Bidders must deposit an amount of 100/- Omani Rials to company bank account as following.
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Account name ASYAD Ports & Terminals
Account No. 5101-067543-001
Ghala Corporate Branch
- Successful bidder is obligated to pay the full auctioned value of the Tugboat within a maximum period of 07 working days from the date awarding notification. Failing to pay the outstanding amount within the specified period, the bidder shall be disqualified.
- Successful bidder is obliged to transfer the ownership of the tugboats after paying the auctioned value in full within a maximum period of 30 days from the date of payment and carry the necessary arrangement to transfer the tugboats outside the port within 20 days from ownership transfer. Failing in transferring the ownership in the specified period, will result in paying penalty 300/- OMR charge as a daily space rent at site.

For any further inquiries related to the auction or Tugboat Inspection, please contact auction coordinator during official working hours (Sunday to Thursday) in Muscat, mobile no. : 92884733. Or send clarification email to tenders@asyadterminalsduqm.om

Notes:

- * Tugboats are sold as they are in the current condition.
- * ASYAD Ports & Terminals reserves the right to cancel or postpone the auction without justifiable reasons.
- * ASYAD Ports & Terminals reserves the right to sale the tugboats either partially or in full to the auctioned Tugboat without any justifiable reasons.

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Sultan Qaboos University Announcement College of Arts and Social Sciences

College of Arts and Social Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University announces the start of registration for Arabic for Non-Native Speakers Program for the academic year 2023/2024.

To register, please send your CV, a copy of the General Education Diploma and the passport to the email: arabic.dept@squ.edu.om

Admission requirements:

- The applicant must be a non-Arabic speaker.
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- The applicant must have a General Education Diploma (General Secondary Education) or its equivalent.

Deadline for registration: April 31, 2023

For more information:

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*Rates as on February 13
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

US agency revises up oil price forecast for 2023

The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) slightly revised up its 2023 forecast for global crude oil prices, citing the revisions in China's demand after relaxing COVID-19 restrictions.

In the February Short-Term Energy Outlook (STEO), the EIA revised up the price of Brent crude for 2023 to an average of US\$83.63 per barrel. In the report released in January, this figure was US\$83.10 per barrel.

The American benchmark, West Texas Intermediate (WTI), is expected to average US\$77.84 a barrel in 2023. In the report released in January, this figure was US\$77.18. According to the EIA, the revisions are the result of the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions in China, increasing forecasted oil demand growth.

OPWP plans 3 new wind power projects

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), a member of Nama Group and single procurer of new power and water production capacity in the sultanate, is planning to develop three new wind energy-based independent power projects (IPPs) with commercial operations target by 2026. OPWP has floated two request for proposals (RFP) tenders seeking commercial and financial consultancy and legal consultancy services for the development of these new wind IPPs.

'In line with Oman's vision to diversify fuel sources through the use of clean energy for power generation, OPWP wishes to initiate the procurement process for three wind projects (Duqm Wind IPP, Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Wind IPP and Harweel Wind IPP),' OPWP said in the tender announcement.

The target schedule commercial operation date is Q2 2026 for Duqm Wind IPP and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Wind IPP and Q4 2026 for Harweel Wind IPP, according to OPWP.

'OPWP is seeking proposals



Photo for illustrative purpose only

from interested bidders to provide commercial and financial consultancy services and legal consultancy services for the development of the projects and to advise on the competitive tendering of the projects,' the company added.

The tender documents are available for purchase in an electronic format through OPWP website till February 25, 2023. The submission date of RFP for the provision of commercial and financial consultancy services is March 22, 2023, while the submission date of RFP for the provision of legal consultancy

services is March 23, 2023, according to OPWP.

Oman's government adopted a fuel diversification policy few years ago, which requires that renewable energy projects contribute at least 10 per cent of electricity generation output by 2025.

OPWP is focusing to expand its power generation capacities through solar and wind independent power projects (IPPs). One of the objectives of Oman's National Energy Strategy is to derive at least 30 per cent of electricity from renewable energy projects by 2030.



OQ signs deal to sell 20% of Abraj shares to Saudi Omani Investment Company

Muscat - OQ Group, represented by its upstream-sector, and Abraj Energy Services signed an agreement with Saudi Omani Investment Company (SOIC) under which SOIC buys 20 per cent of Abraj's shares that are being offered in an initial public offering (IPO).

This step comes as part of the joint economic and investment cooperation between Oman and Saudi Arabia. The agreement reflects the efforts exerted by Oman Investment Authority to attract foreign investments in various production and service sectors, as well as the plans of OQ Group to expand the shareholders'

ownership in some of its assets.

The signing of this anchor investment agreement reflects the regional growth strategy adopted by OQ Group and its commitment to attract foreign direct investment, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

This investment agreement also demonstrates SOIC's confidence in Abraj's future as a financially resilient and high-growth business with enormous potential to grow regionally. The agreement signed with strategic investors would increase the confidence of other segments of corporate and individual investors

to invest in Oman.

OQ's agreement with SOIC would accelerate and strengthen the business scope of Abraj as a quality oilfield services provider that enhances in-country value and supports the development of Oman's capital markets.

According to Abraj's IPO prospectus approved by the Capital Market Authority, the shares of Abraj will be listed for trading at the Muscat Stock Exchange on or around March 14, 2023. Abraj intends to offer 49 per cent of its share capital, equal to 377,398,000 shares for public subscription.

ONA



CBO's Sharia Supervisory Authority holds meeting

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The High Sharia Supervisory Authority of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) held its first meeting of this year on Monday at the CBO headquarters.

The meeting was chaired by Sheikh Dr Kahlan bin Nabhan al Kharoosi and attended by all the members, according to a statement issued by the CBO.

The authority held detailed deliberations on various issues presented to it, which included, among others, Sharia aspects relating to Islamic banking business and the review of different matters related to Islamic liquidity management project. In light of the discussions, the High Sharia Supervisory Authority provided its Sharia opinion and recommendations.

The High Sharia Supervisory

Authority was also briefed on the actions taken, with regard to issues discussed in its previous meeting. In the meeting, Sheikh Dr Kahlan bin Nabhan al Kharoosi and Sheikh Dr Abdullatif bin Mahmood al Mahmood were re-elected as the chairman and deputy chairman of the CBO's High Sharia Supervisory Authority, respectively, for another term of four years up to December 2026.

Residences at Mandarin Oriental gets Integrated Tourism Complex status

Muscat - Eagle Hills Muscat, a partnership between Eagle Hills and Izz International, announced that Oman's first luxury branded residences, The Residences at Mandarin Oriental, has been approved as an Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC).

ITCs are opening up Oman's real estate sector, as they allow foreign investors to own freehold property and granted a residence visa based on this ownership. These complexes are gaining popularity due to their luxurious facilities, better security and prime locations.

As an ITC, The Residences at Mandarin Oriental will welcome international buyers and expatriates, offering them inspired community living in the heart of Muscat.

The development introduces a new concept of luxury living



to the sultanate, providing the first branded offering in the heart of Muscat. The project is aligned with Oman's 2040 Tourism Strategy of attracting 11.6mn visitors and raising the tourism sector's GDP contribution to over 6 per cent by 2040.

The 156 exclusive Residences at Mandarin Oriental offer one to three-bedroom luxury apartments and four-bedroom penthouses. Residents will benefit from outstanding facilities including 24-hour concierge, a private drop-off

area, valet parking, an exclusive residents-only lounge, an expansive beachfront and a waterfront sanctuary boasting multiple retail and food and beverage outlets.

Mandarin Oriental hotel will be open by the end of 2023, and it's located in Shati Al Qurum. As an Integrated Tourism Complex, Eagle Hills is committed to delivering potential buyers with a high quality, branded experience that will redefine Oman's luxury property landscape.

Eagle Hills is an Abu Dhabi-based private real estate investment and development company focused on the development of new city hubs in high-growth international markets. With a focus on developing large-scale real estate projects, Eagle Hills designs and builds mixed-use facilities.

On climate, most corporations talk more, act less

Paris, France - The world's biggest and richest companies are failing to deliver on their climate pledges, according to an in-depth analysis released Monday that calls on governments to crack down on corporate greenwashing.

Under growing pressure from shareholders, governments and consumers, companies are racing to roll out strategies to reduce the carbon emissions of their operations, along with their products and services.

Twenty-four multinationals examined have all endorsed the Paris treaty target of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius, and aligned themselves with UN-backed campaigns to ensure that business plays its part in decarbonising the global economy.

Staying under that critical temperature threshold will require slashing global greenhouse

gas emissions 45 per cent by 2030, and reaching "net zero" - with any residual emissions balanced by removals - by mid-century, the UN's IPCC science advisory panel has said.

But the 2030 pledges of the 22 companies that made them would only slice 15 per cent off their collective emissions, the report found.

And net zero targets adopted by all 24 multinationals - if met - would barely remove a third of their current emissions.

"The overwhelming majority of these corporations are simply not delivering the goods they promised," the 2023 Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor concluded.

Climate think tanks Carbon Market Watch and NewClimate Institute did a deep-dive into sectors ranging from the auto, shipping and aviation industries, to retail fashion, high tech and



food, to steel and cement. No oil or gas companies were included.

Vague 'net zero' pledges

With combined earnings of more than US\$3tn, the two dozen companies under the microscope account for some four per-

cent of all global emissions - two billion tonnes of CO2 or its equivalent each year.

Analysts assessed the integrity of each corporation's climate plan, looking at the accuracy of self-reported emissions, targets set for reducing them, progress to date, and how

heavily pledges depend on questionable compensation schemes known as carbon offsets.

"At a time when corporations need to come clear about their climate impact and shrink their carbon footprint, many are exploiting vague and misleading 'net zero' pledges to greenwash

their brands while continuing with business as usual," said Carbon Market Watch executive director Sabine Frank.

Earning the best overall marks was shipping giant Maersk, whose plan for erasing its carbon footprint by 2040 was deemed to have "reasonable integrity".

The climate plans of eight corporate giants - including Apple, Google, Microsoft and steel conglomerate ArcelorMittal - were judged to have "moderate integrity".

Swedish fast-fashion retail giant H&M, also in this tranche, has very ambitious emissions reduction targets, but parts of its green strategy could undermine them, the report found. "The company's plans to switch to biomass and renewable electricity credits (RECs) in the supply chain could severely undermine those targets," NewClimate Institutes's Silke Moolijk told AFP.

Biomass is associated with deforestation and CO2 emissions, and the purchase of RECs "allows companies to report emission reductions that are not real," according to a recent study in Nature Climate Change.

Junk carbon credits

When asked to comment, H&M "welcomed" the new report and outlined steps it is taking to achieve its "100 per cent renewable electricity goal for our and our supplier's operations", but sidestepped the question of biomass and RECs.

The climate claims of another 11 companies were found to have "low integrity," and four - American Airlines, Samsung Electronics, retail food giant Carrefour, and JBS, the largest meat processing company in the world - were all tagged with "very low integrity".

AFP

EU lifts 2023 growth forecast as eurozone skirts recession

Brussels, Belgium – Europe's economy will grow more than previously forecast this year as it avoids a winter recession, with inflation expected to ease as gas prices have fallen, the European Commission said Monday.

The 20-nation eurozone's economy is now expected to expand by 0.9 per cent instead of 0.3 per cent, as "favourable developments" helped the single-currency area weather the fallout of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the European Union's executive arm said.

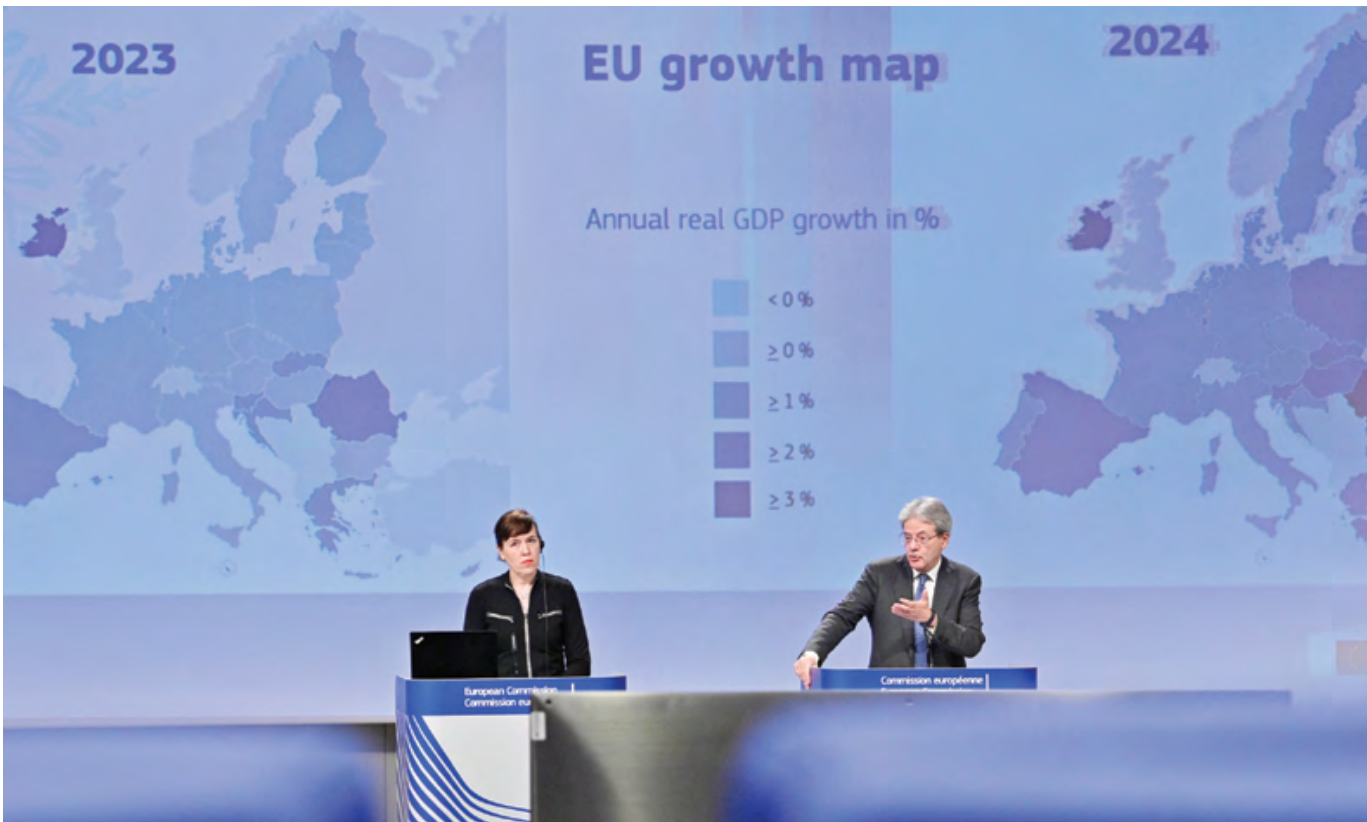
The eurozone and the wider 27-nation EU are now expected to "narrowly avoid" a technical recession – two straight quarters of economic contraction – this winter, the commission said.

"These are quite outstanding outturns, proving the remarkable resilience of the EU economy to the headwinds unleashed by Russia's war against Ukraine and in particular the energy crisis," said the EU's economy commissioner, Paolo Gentiloni.

Inflation is now expected to reach 5.6 per cent in the eurozone in 2023 – down from a previous forecast of 6.1 per cent – as oil and gas prices have eased after soaring when the conflict broke out a year ago.

After consumer prices jumped to a record high of 10.6 per cent in October, they have slowed for three straight months, suggesting that "the peak is now behind us", the commission said.

'Doesn't mean good'
The European Central Bank launched a series of interest rate



European Commissioner for Economy Paolo Gentiloni (right) gives a press conference at the EU headquarters in Brussels on Monday (AFP)

hikes last year in efforts to control inflation.

European nations, which were heavily reliant on Russian energy before the war, have scrambled to diversify their supply sources as Moscow slashed deliveries.

EU governments rolled out relief measures to cushion consumers and businesses from surging prices, and rushed to fill up storage facilities.

A milder winter enabled consumption to fall.

Wholesale gas prices have dropped below pre-war levels, the commission said.

"In addition, the EU labour market has continued to perform

strongly, with the unemployment rate remaining at its all-time low," it added.

The commission also raised its growth forecast for the EU bloc to 0.8 per cent.

Germany, Europe's biggest economy, is now expected to avoid a recession and eke out growth of 0.2 per cent this year.

Gentiloni warned that "better than expected doesn't mean good".

'Main risk': war

This year's forecast for both areas is down from 3.5 per cent growth in 2022.

"Europeans still face a difficult

period ahead, with growth still expected to slow and inflation set to relinquish its grip on purchasing power only gradually," Gentiloni said.

"That's why we must show the same resolve and ambition as we did over the past three years when it comes to tackling with common responses the challenges we face today," he said.

The commission has opened a debate on relaxing the bloc's state aid rules and creating a "sovereignty fund" in the face of high energy prices and competition from subsidies US and Chinese green tech programmes.

Consumers and business still face high energy costs while core inflation, which excludes energy and unprocessed foods, was still rising last month, the commission said.

As inflationary pressures persist, the ECB's "monetary tightening is set to continue, weighing on business activity and exerting a drag on investment", it said.

The European Commission left the eurozone growth forecast for 2024 unchanged at 1.5 per cent. It predicted that inflation next year would be at 2.5 per cent, still above the ECB's target of two per cent.

AFP

Russia's gas exports fall in 2022 but oil up

Moscow, Russia – Russia reduced gas production at the end of 2022 to 673.8bn cubic meters (bnbcm) and exports by 25.1 per cent to 184.4bnbcm, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said in the article for the Energy Policy magazine.

"Gas production in 2022 amounted to 673.8bn cubic meters. Exports decreased by 25.1 per cent to 184.4bn cubic meters," he said. In 2021, gas production in Russia amounted to 762.8bnbcm, falling by 11.66 per cent.

The decline in production and exports, according to Novak, is due to European countries' refusal to purchase Russian gas, as well as sabotage at the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 gas pipelines.

"At the same time, during the year, gas supplies to China were actively increased. The daily records for transit of Russian gas through the Power of Siberia gas pipeline were surpassed on a regular basis. As a result, gas shipments to China via the Power of Siberia climbed by 48 per cent to a record-breaking 15.4bn cubic meters," he noted.

Novak stated that expanding liquefied natural gas (LNG) production is vital for Russia. Last year, LNG shipments grew by 7.9 per cent to 45.7bn cubic meters and since the global gas market is becoming global, liquefied gas will become increasingly in demand in the future, he added.

On the other hand, Russia increased oil exports by 7.6 per cent year-on-year to 242mn



The decline in gas production and exports is due to European countries' refusal to purchase Russian gas

ALEXANDER NOVAK

tonnes by the end of 2022, while oil production grew by two per cent to 535.2mn tonnes, Novak said in the article.

"According to the results of 2022, oil production in Russia amounted to 535.2mn tonnes, which is two per cent more than in the previous year. Exports grew by 7.6 per cent to 242mn tonnes. Refining almost reached 272mn tonnes, which is 3 per cent lower than last year," Novak said. According to him, the upgrade of refineries in Russia led to a surge in production of motor gasoline and diesel fuel by 4.4 per cent (up to 42.6mn tonnes) and 6 per cent (up to 85mn tonnes), respectively.

TASS

Rising panic over blocked imports in economic crisis-hit Pakistan

Islamabad, Pakistan – Pakistan business chiefs are clamouring for the cash-strapped government to allow manufacturing materials stuck at the key port of Karachi into the country, warning that a failure to lift a ban on imports will leave millions jobless.

Faced with critically low US-dollar reserves, the government has banned all but essential food and medicine imports until a life-line bailout is agreed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Industries such as steel, textiles and pharmaceuticals are barely functioning, forcing thousands of factories to close and deepening unemployment.

The steel industry has warned of severe supply-chain issues caused by a shortage of scrap metal, which is melted down and turned into steel bars. In the past few weeks, the bars have reached record prices.

"We directly feed materials to the construction industry which is linked to some 45 downstream industries," said Wajid Bukhari, head of Pakistan's Large Scale Steel Producers Association. "This whole cycle is going to be jammed."

Smaller factories have already shut after exhausting stocks, while some larger plants are just days from closing, he said.

With an import bill of around US\$150mn a month, the steel industry says its operations directly and indirectly affect several million jobs.

Latest data from the central bank said foreign exchange reserves had plunged to just US\$2.9bn – enough for less than three weeks of imports.

"This situation triggers fears



People buy vegetables at a market in Karachi on February 10, 2023 (AFP)

the construction industry will close down very soon, plunging thousands of labourers into unemployment," the Constructors Association of Pakistan said, echoing calls for steel and machinery to be exempted from the import ban.

'Grinding halt'

Years of financial mismanagement and political instability have damaged Pakistan's economy – exacerbated by a global energy crisis and devastating floods that submerged a third of the country.

Alongside a shortage of raw materials, soaring inflation, rising fuel costs and a plummeting rupee have battered manufacturing industries.

An IMF delegation left Pakistan on Friday after urgent talks to revive a stalled loan programme ended with no deal, leaving lingering uncertainty for business leaders.

The textile and garment industry is responsible for around 60 per cent of Pakistan's exports and employs about 35mn people, processing items such as

towels, underwear and linen for major brands across the world.

"The textile industry should be prioritised," said Shahid Sattar, secretary general of the All Pakistan Textile Association.

"We are the mainstay of the country's exports," he told AFP.

"If you don't have exports, how will you shore up your foreign exchange reserves? Then consequently, how will the economy recover?"

After floods devastated domestic cotton crops last summer the sector is importing a significant amount of raw fabric.

Factory owners appealed to the finance minister last month for "direct intervention" to unjam the backlog, which also affects dyes, buttons and zippers.

"The textile industry has more or less come to a grinding halt in Pakistan. We don't have raw materials to operate our mills," Sattar said.

Around 30 per cent of the textile mills have shut down operations completely, while the rest are working at less than 40 per cent capacity.

Tauqeer ul Haq, the head of

the Pakistan Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association, said 40 medicine factories were on the brink of closure because of a lack of key ingredients.

Fuelling poverty

Pakistani economist Kaiser Bengali said the supply-chain crisis was "feeding inflation and also hitting the government's revenues".

It is also escalating unemployment and fuelling poverty, with a large proportion of construction and factory workers in Pakistan paid daily.

"On average during regular production, workers are paid for around 25 days (per month) but now they are getting wages for 10 to 15 days. While some companies have even suspended their production and workers will only get paid once manufacturing resumes," Bengali told AFP.

Nasir Iqbal, an economist at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, said export bans like the one currently in place "can never be a sustainable solution".

AFP

ANNOUNCEMENT OF TENDER

The Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C)invites following tender:

Tender No	Description	Tender Price (R.O)	Grade	Last Date of Buying	Last Date of Submission
Tanweer - 05/2023	Management of Diesel Power Plants. For Rural Areas Electricity Company	2500/=	Professional local and International Companies	07/03/2023	28/03/2023

The Conditions:

- Collection of Tender:** Interested and Specialized local and International Companies and Registered Establishments may obtain the Tender documents from Procurement & Contracts Department, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. The fees for the tenders shall be deposited on Tanweer account 0423010783090041 – Bank Muscat and for more information please contact via email address i.e. tender.purchase@tanweer.nama.om , or call us on phone number: **24250824**.
- Bank Guarantee:** The Tenderer should enclose original bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC (Tanweer).
- Offers Submission:**
 - Original bids along Cover letter shall be placed by bidders inside the red waxed Tender's envelopes as communicated to bidders by Tanweer. Such documents must be serialized according to the numbers of the tender items.
 - Tender bids shall be provided separately on a CD Rooms, along with original cover letters in each envelop. Bids and cover letters shall bear the bidder's official seal and must be signed in either blue or red ink, but not black. A true soft copy of the bids shall be provided on a CD in an inner envelope marked "Copy". Bids who do not comply with these requirements will be overlooked.
 - Bidders shall write the following details on the cover of CD:
 - Tender name and number.
 - Tenders to be Addressed to the **Chairman of Major Tender Committee**.
 - Prequalification / Technical Proposal / Commercial Proposal / Bid Bond.
- Submission Location:** The Completed bids in CD should be deposited in the Tender Box at Tanweer Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 12:00 PM on the last date of submission.
- Tender Price (R.O):** 5% VAT is inclusive.
- Rural Areas Electricity Company without mentioning the reason is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender and not bond to refund tender purchase fees if you are not qualified to participate the tender.

For more information please call: 80077787

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INFINITI QX50 - technology efficient

The highly rated Infiniti QX50 has been created to meet the needs of today's premium car buyers and to deliver ultimate levels of comfort, design and technology. Its key features include ample space, engine power and efficiency rolled into one unique vehicle.

Infiniti QX50, the premium mid-size SUV which delivers the promise of a premium motoring experience boasts of world-first technologies, stand-out design and unrivalled interior space, a press release said.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman said, "Infiniti QX50 crossover embodies everything the brand stands for - beautiful design, advanced technology, and empowering performance."

Infiniti QX50 provides the highest level of versatility, efficiency, and performance in luxury mid-size crossovers. The VC-turbo engine delivers the strong and convincing performance of a V6 and the fuel economy of a 4-cylinder engine, which allows users to harness the exhilarating performance of 268hp and 380nm at 4,400rpm



of torque.

The appearance of the Infiniti QX50 highlights the influence of human artistry in the design process to emphasise the car's premium quality with intelligent packaging and deep character lines with Infiniti signature design cues.

The VC-turbo engine is the world's first production-ready variable compression ratio engine, transforming on demand. A breakthrough in combustion engine design, the 2ltr VC-turbo engine adjusts its compression

ratio to optimize power and efficiency.

A multi-link system continuously raises or lowers the pistons' reach to transform the compression ratio. High compression ratios aid efficiency, while low ratios enable greater power and torque. The VC-turbo offers any compression ratio between 8:1 (for performance) and 14:1 (for efficiency), maximising driver control.

The engine delivers 268hp (200kw) and (380nm) and fuel economy of 14.1 km/l combined, front-wheel drive; 13.6 km/l combined, all-wheel drive). Front-wheel drive models offer a 35% improvement in fuel efficiency over the previous V6 gasoline qx50; all-wheel drive models offer a 30% improvement.

The engine is paired with a continuously-variable transmission (cvt), for seamless power delivery. Its infinite number of gears perfectly matches the engine's ability to transform.



Khedmah and OpenSooq to sell advertising vouchers

In line with its commitment to nurture digital initiatives across all its operations, the leading bill payment and collections company in the sultanate, Oman Investment and Finance Company (Khedmah), recently joined hands with OpenSooq, the leading online classifieds marketplace in the MENA region, to make OpenSooq's vouchers more easily accessible to individuals through Khedmah's expansive network of 68

branches.

The agreement allows customers to purchase OpenSooq's vouchers directly through their Khedmah app, or at any of the 68 branches across the sultanate, a press release said.

Saud Ahmed al Siyabi, CEO at Khedmah, expressed his gratitude towards this agreement, as it will serve to enhance overall customer experience through simplifying voucher purchase, and allowing a hassle-free experience, especially since OpenSooq is one of the leading online classifieds marketplaces in the region.

Anas Elayyan, general manager at OpenSooq, commented about how this contributes to the country's digitalisation efforts, and expressed his pleasure with this signing. Elayyan added that this partnership reflects OpenSooq's efforts to maximise its reach to help connect buyers and sellers across

the sultanate in a seamless experience. The vouchers will allow the customers to buy value-added services on OpenSooq that will help them promote their listings, increase the views, and hence maximize leads generated through OpenSooq to sell faster.

OpenSooq currently operates across many different sectors, including automotive, real estate, services, jobs, among many other sectors.

OOMCO introduces customers to innovative initiatives



Committed to continuously adopting a customer-centric mind-set, Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) recently held an event bringing together its commercial customers to introduce innovation-related initiatives and latest company updates.

The event also provided the fuel marketing company with an opportunity to gauge the satisfaction of its partners, while putting in place the latest industry trends and best practices across all its operations for an elevated customer experience on-and-off the pump, a press release said.

OOMCO has been supplying quality fuels and providing tailored, innovative solutions to commercial companies across various sectors, making it a leader in the competitive fuel marketing industry.

Tarik Mohammed al Junaidi, CEO, OOMCO, said, "One of the themes for this event was based on our gratitude to our customers. Having a customer-centric approach is paramount in business-to-business practices, which transcends to our retail operations. Meanwhile, we have continuously collated valuable feedback to spearhead innovation and transform the customer experience, which were other key themes during the event. By creating reliable, smart and innovative solutions, we have managed to make our business more efficient, cost-effective and sustainable."

Serving a wide variety of customer segments, OOMCO aims to have the largest market share in the sales of lubricants in Oman. Meanwhile, it has become an important player in the wider region as well, including in KSA, Tanzania, and Egypt. As part of its non-fuel growth and retail transformation process, the company has signed franchise agreements with leading food and beverage brands, and tied-up with food delivery providers and internationally renowned logistics companies.

Ooredoo announces pre-order of Galaxy S23

Ooredoo has announced that the new Samsung Galaxy S23 Series comprising the Galaxy S23 Ultra, Galaxy S23+, and Galaxy S23, is now available for pre-order for customers across Oman until May 17.

Equipped with new standard-setting innovations such as the ultimate 200MP Adaptive Pixel Sensor that captures epic moments with incredible precision, and a powerful processor that unleashes a premium gaming experience, the new devices feature a striking design that advances Samsung's sustainability commitment with more components made using recycled materials than any other Samsung Galaxy smartphone, a press release said.

"At Samsung, we remain

committed to the region and powering the digital age with cutting-edge technology. The new Galaxy S23 Series continues our proud tradition of innovation, anchored on our values of sustainability and the betterment of society, making this our most powerful Galaxy yet," said Doohee Lee, president, Samsung Gulf Electronics.

"We are excited to work with Ooredoo in this journey as they take our mission forward of making Samsung devices more widely accessible to the mainstream audience across Oman.

"We are excited by the epic prospects of the new Galaxy Series and look forward to an overwhelming response from customers."

OFA celebrates success of Corporate Games 2023

The Omani French Friendship Association held its first Corporate Games event on February 11 and it was a resounding success.

The programme, which was designed to strengthen cultural ties between companies and the French community in Oman, brought together 120 employees from different Omani and French companies for a day of fun and camaraderie, a press release said.

The companies participating were Oman Arab Bank, Khimji Ramdas, Omantel, Premium Motors - the 4 sponsors of the event - and JCDecaux, Credit Oman, Al Ansari Trading Enterprise, Apave, and LFIM. The event was hosted at the French International School of Muscat and organised by SportsMania Oman.

The events included mini football and basketball tournaments, shooting contests, tug of war, relay race, and games for



kids.

"The response to our Corporate Games programme has been overwhelmingly positive," said Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of Oman Arab Bank and President

of OFA.

Bechir Chehab, managing director of JCDecaux and treasurer of OFA, added, "Our employees had a great time participating in these activities and really enjoyed the opportunity to bond with their colleagues. The camaraderie and teamwork on display were truly inspiring, and we're confident that these relationships will translate into improved

productivity and morale in the workplace."

H E Veronique Aulagnon, French Ambassador, presented the trophies and medals to the winners.

Roundtable marks Bank Nizwa 10th anniversary

Bank Nizwa has consistently set new benchmarks and established itself as the fastest-growing bank in the country. To celebrate its decade-long success, the bank recently hosted a distinguished media roundtable to commemorate its 10th anniversary. The event was attended by renowned journalists from various media outlets, who were given the chance to engage in meaningful discussions with the bank's CEO, Khaled al Kayed and other top executives from Bank Nizwa, a press release said.

This provided valuable insights into the bank's strategies, operations and plans for the future, further solidifying Bank Nizwa's position as a leader in the industry.

Kayed said, "Celebrating our 10th anniversary is both, an exciting and humbling experience, as we reflect on the numerous achievements of Bank Nizwa during this time. Our commitment to Islamic finance goes beyond being a prominent player and industry leader, it allows us to make a positive impact on people's lives and uphold the



trust of our valued customers. At Bank Nizwa, we remain dedicated to maintaining the highest standards of excellence, integrity, and transparency, values that have been crucial to our success."

Kayed highlighted the remarkable journey of Bank Nizwa since its establishment. He emphasised how the bank has

strategically aligned its growth with that of conventional banking, while also contributing to the overall enhancement of the banking ecosystem in Oman. The total market share of Bank Nizwa stands at 24% in the Islamic Banking sector according to the Central Bank of Oman's recent report. Bank Nizwa has recorded a positive trajectory of

growth as reflected in its financial results in the last quarter of 2022.

As a testament to its progress, Bank Nizwa has turned in a commendable financial performance by registering a 20 per cent growth in net profit. The bank's total assets also increased by 6 per cent, reaching 1.486 billions Omani Rials in December 2022 from 1,405 million Omani Riyals in December 2021. The gross financing portfolio improved by 10 per cent to 1,242 million Omani Rials, whilst the total customer deposit portfolio rose by 7 per cent to 1,189 million Omani Rials. The bank's operating income witnessed a growth of 18 per cent.

Bank Nizwa has driven significant expansion and development in the Islamic banking sector. The bank recognises the importance of maintaining sustainable business practices and is focused on increasing margins through responsible decision-making. Additionally, Bank Nizwa is committed to diversifying its income streams by exploring new products, clients, and segments.



Oman Air Cargo shows its 'Journey to Success'

Oman Air, the national airline of the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the introduction of its first freighter by the end of 2023, while celebrating outstanding 2022 results at its annual cargo workshop, under the theme 'Journey to Success'.

The two-day event, which was held at Hormuz Grand, Muscat, brought together employees and stakeholders from across the company's global network, to celebrate its accomplishments in the past year and discuss future strategies. Attendees engaged in a series of presentations and discussions led by senior executives, as well as visiting the state of the art Cargo

Terminal at Muscat International Airport. An awards ceremony was also held for the top performers of 2022, a press release said.

Oman Air CEO, Eng Abdulaziz al Raisi, stated, "In spite of a challenging environment, Oman Air Cargo continues to deliver numbers ahead of its budget. In 2021, our revenues were 86% above target. In 2022, we achieved another 44% increase, exceeding our budget revenue by 37%, as well as a 36% increase in the amount of cargo transported compared to the previous year. This underscores the success of our many policies to ensure we remain ahead of the curve in an

ever-changing industry and meet the growing demand for air cargo."

He added, "In 2023, we are keeping up the momentum. We look forward to introducing our first ever freighter and we will also be launching several new markets. This will offer exciting new opportunities for our guests and cargo alike, while continuing to unlock Oman's potential as a global logistics hub in line with Oman's 2040 Vision."

Jaffar al Lawati, vice president, Commercial Cargo, added, "The workshop was a valuable platform for us to engage with some of our most important global air cargo partners."

Bank Muscat gives special offers for new borrowers

In response to the positive feedback from customers, Bank Muscat has invited all customers to take advantage of the extension on discounted offers on Baituna and Personal Finance for first time borrowers till March 31.

The bank's special offer featuring highly-competitive interest rates starting at just 4.25 per cent for Baituna home loans and 4.5 per cent on personal loans is available to Omani employees of government and quasi-government institutions as well as Tier 1 companies with salaries of RO500 or more. Also, the bank offers reduced interest rates on short term personal loans starting at just 4 per cent for 12 months, a press release said.

Bank Muscat is keen to follow up on the latest developments in the sector to meet the needs of customers and address feedback on the bank's various services. Customers who wish to benefit from the current offer on Baituna home financing can easily apply for home finance by visiting any of the Bank's Baituna Sales Cen-



tres in Qurm, Maabelah, Barka, Sohar, Saham, Sur, Ibra, Nizwa, Ibri, Buraimi and Salalah or any Bank Muscat branch in Oman.

Financing up to RO500,000 and for a period up to 25 years is available to customers to construct or purchase new homes as well as to buy land for residential construction. Baituna is one of the best home finance options in Oman thanks to its fast processing, documentation and prompt disbursement of financing.

Similarly, those would like to apply for personal loans can visit

their nearest Bank Muscat branch with the required documents including a salary transfer letter from their employer and their ID cards.

Financing up to RO200,000 is available to customers based on fulfillment of the eligibility criteria and the bank is well known for its speedy processing of applications and loan disbursements.

Bank Muscat offers a wide choice of financing products, considering the different needs of customers.



ISC Deccani Wing hosts 'Jashn e Deccan'

The Deccani Wing of Indian Social Club organised their annual flagship event Jashn e Deccan at the Oman hall at CBFS college recently.

Jashn e Deccan celebrates the culture and traditions of the

people of Hyderabad and surrounding areas, a press release said.

This year's event featured renowned Sufi singer Adil Husaini who regaled the crowd with popular and feet tapping

qawwalis and songs.

During the event he also dedicated a section to famous Hyderabad poets Maqdoom Mohiuddin by singing his evergreen song 'Ek chameli ke mandwe tale' and other rendi-

tions.

S M Wasifuddin, convenor of Deccani Wing welcomed the guests while Ismail Baig, co-convenor, spoke about the event and its relevance, he also gave a brief history of the wing.

Bahraini golfer tops 27th edition of Assarain Golf Classic at GGC

Nasser Yaqoob, of Bahrain, overcame a stiff competition from a strong field to emerge champion at the Assarain Golf Classic.

The 27th edition of the Assarain Golf Classic was held at the Ghala Golf Club (GGC) on February 3 and 4 with the participation of over 130 golfers.

Nasser said, "The Assarain Golf Classic is a fantastic tournament and it feels great to win a competition of this stature. I would like to thank my playing partners over the last few days. It was a pleasure to be in this event and again I would like to thank the sponsor Assarain Group of Companies."

Khalil al Wahaibi, general manager of Ghala Golf Club, who managed the event, said, "The atmosphere was electric from the first day. I was truly amazed by the participation and overall feel of the 2023 Assarain Golf Classic. We were oversub-



scribed and had to have a cut off for players as we unfortunately could not fit all of them in.

OGC chairman, Mundhir al

Barwani was the guest of honour at the ceremony held on the final day that was graced by a host of dignitaries. The Assarain Classic

ended with its tradition of raffling off a Hublot watch which was won by Ahmed al Balushi.

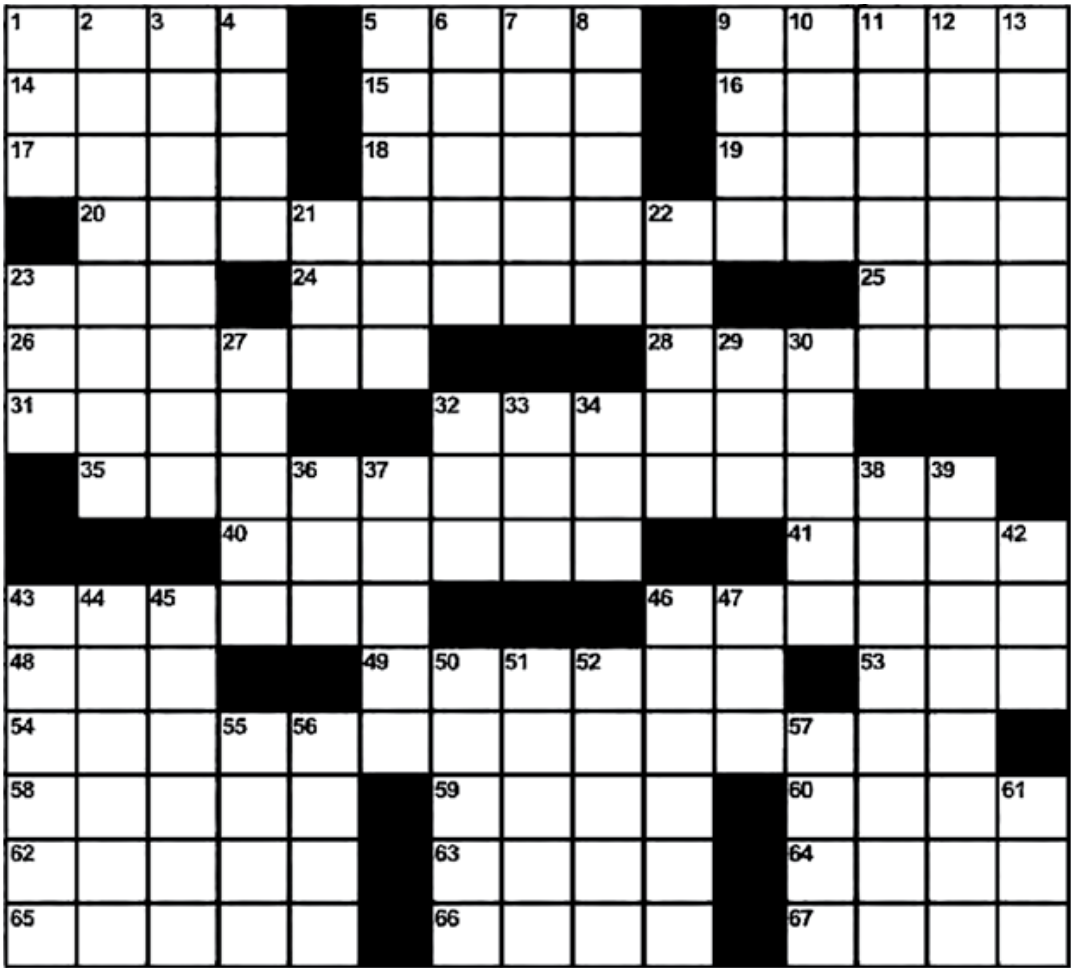
Wahaibi said, "I would like to

congratulate all the winners in the respective categories and would like to thank all the participants. With the success of the

2023 event, we are committed to making the Assarain Golf Classic Tournament bigger and better in the coming years while

maintaining our strong professional standards of hosting one of the oldest golf tournaments in the sultanate."

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Ceremonial elegance
5) Sign away
9) Mirrors' partner
14) White House office
15) Angle between branch and trunk
16) By-and-by
17) Legendary singer Horne
18) Source of misery
19) Minor actor
20) Noted New Year's orchestra
23) Not scheduled for duty
24) Word with "weapon" or "injection"
25) Very small
26) Fuse again
28) Things to uphold
31) Jim at the bar
32) Disney head, once
35) New Year's event in Times Square
40) Be stealthy
41) Trouble's partner
43) Computer key
46) Kitchen item

48) One for the off-road
49) Library visitor
53) B-movie lead pumper
54) New Year's party occurrence
58) Cancel
59) Sublease
60) Stylishly elegant
62) Deed
63) Freedom from hardship
64) Basketball necessity
65) Bawl out
66) Something shady?
67) European volcano

DOWN

1) D.C. insider
2) Stuff to the gills
3) Combat ship
4) Work's antithesis
5) Sent a wire
6) Word-for-word
7) Entertainer Shore
8) "... and Her Men" (Ingrid Bergman film)
9) Snow conveyance
10) Singer Priest
11) Capital of Canada
12) Corny bit

13) Cleans the slate
21) "... in the Family"
22) Dress type
23) Crystal ball, for example
27) Behave theatrically
29) Socially emerging young woman, briefly
30) Muse of lyric poetry
32) Immature newt
33) Japanese statesman
34) Seller of sea shells
36) "The _ and the Pendulum"
37) "Carmen" or "Norma"
38) It has a big payoff
39) Something that binds
42) Word before up, out or down
43) Tickets, slangily
44) Pertaining to a certain culture
45) Primitive camp structure
46) Small sofa
47) Paid athlete, in short
50) Heron
51) Nigh, in poesy

52) Like a blockhead
55) Think (over)
56) Argued

57) Feel pain
61) Financial auditor's designation

NOTE PAD

ETC FIRST UMBEL
AHA ONICE TARS
RIG VENTAL IRATE
WRITERSBLOCKS
ITERATE PAUSED
GYRO DROP PHON
PTA EROS ANA
TEACHERSPET
ONAFICED EARS
NAPA ORSO ROAR
OMEGAS UNDERDO
DOCTORS ORDERS
ALEUT LITRE LOT
RECTO ENEMY SIR
TAKIN OKRAS ETA

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Of course you already know that you can't obey every single impulsive idea you get, but the big questions plaguing you today are how to know when to go with your latest whim, and how you know when to stick to your previously made plans. This confusion might verge on the edge of frustration today, when you see so many different opportunities lying at your feet. But if that happens, you know what to do. Stick with the plan and don't add any more stimulation to your life right now.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

The phrase "no guts, no glory" will have special significance for you today. You will have to step up and show what you're made of in order to get the acclaim that you know you deserve. Sometimes you have to take the high road and avoid confrontation. Then again, sometimes the confrontation gives you so much satisfaction that you're glad you took the lower road. Fight for what is yours and don't let other people get in your way. You're just as capable as they are. Remind them of that fact.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Travel is at the top of your mind right now, and it wouldn't take much to convince you to travel far distances. Overseas destinations are particularly appealing! If this level of travel isn't exactly in your budget right now, use your creativity to feed this wanderlust. Pick up an epic novel that takes place in an exotic locale or rent a documentary movie about one of your "must see" spots. After all, you don't have to board an airplane to take yourself new places!

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

There's going to be some big props coming your way today, but you have to avoid falling into the trap of believing your own good press. Don't be pompous about your success, because the fame you have now might not be with you later. Taking anything for granted is unwise now, especially the people you care about. Make an effort to get in touch with a friend you haven't seen in a while. They need to know that they're still important in your life.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Karma is definitely on your side right now, so you can expect some valuable payback for all the good deeds you've performed in the recent past. Don't brag about this windfall, though. It will only send the wrong message about who you are to the world. Humility is part of who you are. You're learning more about how to use these wonderful victorious moments to feed your self-esteem in a healthy way, and it will start bringing very important people to your side.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your humility is definitely a valuable asset, but today you can't be too shy to step up and take credit for something. Just because you're worried that someone else will be jealous or angry doesn't mean you should turn down praise. If someone else feels more deserving of the acclaim than you, that's their problem. You can't suffer because they're irrational or insecure. You earned this, and you have also earned the right to bask in the glow. Enjoy the applause.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Just because you're not exactly up to date on what's going on with controversial issues doesn't mean that you don't have a right to an opinion. Education doesn't just come from books and schools. Knowledge can come from everyday interactions with others. So speak up and say what you think about something. Sure, you should be prepared to be schooled on one or two things, but so what? Being proven wrong isn't so bad as long as you learn something in the process.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

It might take more effort than you feel like putting out there, but you need to try to be active with people today. You don't have to be a social butterfly, exactly, but you do need to make a concerted effort to connect with a handful of interesting people. Joining a group is the easiest way to get a shot of social energy. You could really use it right now, whether you know it or not. If you're in a meeting, speak up more than you usually would. Remind people that you are someone who should be heard.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Be prepared to deal with interruptions today because there could be many. Unfortunately, not everyone you'll be dealing with has a good grip on the concept of priorities. While you've been good and have everything you need in order, they haven't organized their projects at all and will be scrambling to come up with results at the last minute. And guess who they're going to call for help? That's right, you! Do what you can to put the responsibility right back where it belongs: in their lap.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You know that person in your life who is spontaneous, fun-loving, and always acting on impulse? Well, the charm of their capriciousness is going to wear a bit thin for you today. They are becoming less and less appealing with every event they flake out on. What you crave right now, especially in your personal relationships, is reliability. Make a date with someone who might not have the most thrilling personality on earth. As long as you know that they will show up on time, they're the one for you.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your comments to close friends definitely have weight, but you can't feel responsible for the healthiness of their egos. In other words, don't beat yourself up if you're unable to cheer up a blue friend with one pep talk. All they ask of you is support and understanding, not the answer to all their woes. Put yourself in their shoes and you'll be able to easily understand that knowing just the right thing to say isn't always required. Your presence, plain and simple, is often enough.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Today you should make sure you do something active! When your blood is pumping all of those endorphins around your body, your mind starts to see things in a much more positive light and you start to feel great. Avoid doing anything too routine today. It will only make you feel bogged down and sluggish. Mix things up and try not to eat on the go. Grabbing something to eat on the way to somewhere else will put you in a grouchy mood.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. The British conquest of which country began in 1824 in response to its attempt to invade India, and from 1886 to 1937 was administered as a province of British India when it became a separate, self-governing colony?
- A. Burma
B. Thailand
C. Indonesia
D. Malaya
02. Which film is the story of Willie Stark (played by Broderick Crawford) who starts with well meaning ambition to enter politics, is corrupted by power on his way to becoming a US state governor, and is assassinated?
- A. The Struggle
B. The Grapes Of Wrath
C. Mr Deeds Goes To Washington
D. All The King's Men
03. What does the acronym FAST refer to in astronomy?
- A. An Earth-based radio telescope
B. A moving space telescope
C. Search for intelligent extraterrestrial communications
D. Satellite technology
- Answers: 1. A 2. D 3. A

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

I	U	T	A
D	R	R	O
I	E	G	Y
I	V	E	L

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

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

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

Earthquake toll rises above 37,000



Turkish soldiers patrol next to collapsed buildings in Kahramanmaraş on Monday, as rescue teams continue to search for victims and survivors (AFP)

Seven days after the quake, a handful of people were still being pulled from the rubble

Kahramanmaraş, Turkey - The toll from last week’s earthquake in Turkey and Syria rose above 37,000 on Monday, as rescue teams started to wind down the search for survivors and the aid effort shifted to hundreds of thousands of people made homeless.

Seven days after the 7.8-magnitude tremor, Turkish media reported a handful of people were still being pulled from the rubble

as excavators dug through ruined cities.

The confirmed death toll rose over 37,000 as officials and medics said 31,643 people had died in Turkey and 5,714 in Syria after the February 6 earthquake, the fifth deadliest since the start of the 21st century.

The United Nations has decried the failure to ship desperately needed aid to war-torn regions of Syria and warned that

the toll is set to rise even higher as experts caution that hopes for finding people alive dim with each passing day.

“Send any stuff you can because there are millions of people here and they all need to be fed,” Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu appealed to Turks late on Sunday.

In Kahramanmaraş, close to the epicentre, 30,000 tents have been installed, 48,000 people are sheltering in schools and another 11,500 in sports halls, he said.

While hundreds of rescue teams were still working, efforts had ended in seven parts of the province, he added.

Lack of aid in northern Syria

In Antakya, clean-up teams started to evacuate rubble and erect basic toilets as the telephone network started to come back in parts of the town, an AFP reporter said.

The city was patrolled by a strong police and military presence which authorities deployed to prevent looting following several incidents over the weekend.

Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay late on Sunday said 108,000 buildings were damaged across the quake-hit zone with 1.2mn people being housed in student accommodation and 400,000 people evacuated from

the affected region.

Aid packages, mainly clothes, were opened and spread across the streets in Hatay province, according to NTV. One video showed aid workers throwing clothes randomly into a crowd as people tried to grab whatever they could.

A convoy with supplies for northwest Syria arrived via Turkey, but the UN’s relief chief Martin Griffiths said more was needed for millions whose homes were destroyed.

“We have so far failed the people in northwest Syria. They rightly feel abandoned. Looking for international help that hasn’t arrived,” Griffiths said on Twitter.

In many areas, rescue teams said they lacked sensors and advanced equipment, leaving them reduced to carefully searching the rubble with shovels or only their hands.

“If we had this kind of equipment, we would have saved hundreds of lives, if not more,” said Alaa Mubarak, head of civil defence in Jableh, northwest Syria.

Supplies have been slow to arrive in Syria, where years of conflict have ravaged the healthcare system, and parts of the country remain under the control of rebels battling the government of President Bashar al-Assad, which is under Western sanctions.

AFP

Saudi to send its 1st woman into space

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia will send its first ever woman astronaut on a space mission later this year, state media has reported, in the latest move to revamp the kingdom’s ultra-conservative image.

Rayyana Barnawi will join fellow Saudi male astronaut Ali Al-Qarni on a mission to the International Space Station (ISS) ‘during the second quarter of 2023’, the official Saudi Press Agency said on Sunday.

The astronauts ‘will join the crew of the AX-2 space mission’ and the space flight will ‘launch from the USA’, the agency said.

The oil-rich country will be following in the footsteps of the neighbouring United Arab Emirates which in 2019 became the first Arab country to send one of its citizens into space.

At the time, astronaut Hazzaa al-Mansoori spent eight days on the ISS. Another fellow Emirati, Sultan al-Neyadi, will also make a voyage later this month.

Nicknamed the ‘Sultan of Space’, 41-year-old Neyadi will become the first Arab astronaut to spend six months in space when he blasts off for the ISS aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket.

Gulf monarchies have been seeking to diversify their energy-reliant economies through a plethora of projects.

AFP

Failure in enforcing hijab rules: Iran cop reprimanded

Tehran, Iran - An Iranian police officer has been reprimanded after he did not enforce the country’s dress code requiring women to cover their hair, local media reported on Monday.

A video was widely shared on social media in recent days, showing a police officer in the western province of Kermanshah telling a woman that he did not consider the hijab, or headscarf, to be compulsory for women.

“This lady wants to go out in this outfit... it’s none of my business,” the officer is heard saying in response to a woman asking him to confront another woman for not wearing the hijab.

“After a thorough investigation... the officer was summoned... and received the necessary warnings and training,” the Tasnim news agency said on Monday, citing a statement from the police of Kermanshah province.

The incident comes against the backdrop of a nationwide protest movement triggered by the September 16 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old ethnic Kurd who had been arrested for an alleged breach of the same dress code for women.

Hundreds of people, including security personnel, have been killed and thousands arrested during the protests, which the authorities often describe as ‘riots’.

Since the start of the protests, women have increasingly been seen without the hijab in public places, in many cases without eliciting a reaction from the police.

AFP

Israel strikes Gaza, one killed in West Bank raid

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories - Israel struck a Hamas base in Gaza on Monday in response to a rocket fired from the enclave, while one Palestinian died during what the army called a West Bank raid targeting suspects.

The latest unrest comes amid a significance escalation in Israeli-Palestinian violence, with dozens killed in recent weeks.

The Palestinian health ministry said Amir Ihab Bustami, 21, was killed in a pre-dawn Israeli army raid in Nablus in the north of the occupied West Bank, the scene of repeated clashes. The army said it had apprehended two men, Abdul Kamel Jouri and Osama Taweel, who had allegedly shot dead the Israeli soldier Ido Baruch in October. Three others were also arrested, the army said.

The Israeli army said it had collected intelligence for months

Overnight, forces arrived at hideout apartment and an exchange of fire was instigated between the forces and the wanted suspects

ISRAELI ARMY

trying to ‘locate a hideout apartment where the assailants were hiding’. “Overnight, the forces arrived at the hideout apartment and an exchange of fire was instigated between the forces and the wanted suspects,” it added.

Separately, in Gaza, the army said it had struck before dawn ‘an underground complex containing raw materials used for the manufacturing of rockets belonging to the Hamas organisation’.



Palestinians inspect a damaged wedding Photography studio following Israeli strikes in Gaza City on Monday (AFP)

It said the strikes were ‘a response’ to Saturday’s rocket.

Ayman Shamalakh, a gas station owner in the coastal territory, told AFP the strikes hit a nearby events hall, causing glass to shatter in the area, and added that ‘as for the hall, it was completely destroyed’.

Following the Israeli strikes, air raid sirens sounded in communities near the Gaza border, the

military said.

Since the start of the year, the conflict has now claimed the lives of 47 Palestinian adults and children.

Nine Israeli civilians, including three children, and one Ukrainian civilian have been killed over the same period, according to an AFP tally based on official sources from both sides.

In a move likely to further inflame tensions, Israel’s security cabinet late on Sunday announced it would legalise nine West Bank Jewish settlements in response to fatal Palestinian attacks in annexed east Jerusalem.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s hardline government also announced a beefed-up security presence in east Jerusalem, the scene of two recent deadly attacks targeting civilians.

AFP

Thousands protest outside Israel parliament against judicial reforms

Jerusalem - Thousands of Israelis protested outside parliament on Monday against the government’s controversial judicial reform plan, which aims to give lawmakers substantially more control over the supreme court.

The measures, which were inching towards approval through a series of preliminary votes inside the chamber, have provoked widespread criticism and charges that they would give the legislative branch nearly unchecked authority.

Outside Israel’s parliament, the Knesset, thousands rallied, waving Israeli flags and placards that read ‘Save Israel democracy’ and ‘The whole world is watching’. President Isaac Herzog, in a rare national address late on



Israeli protesters rally outside the Knesset (parliament) in Jerusalem on Monday against controversial legal reforms (AFP)

Sunday focused on the reform plan, warned that Israel was ‘on the verge of legal and social collapse’.

Herzog, who holds a largely

ceremonial role, urged Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s hardline right-wing government to pause the legislative process and hold talks with the opposi-

tion in hopes of reaching a compromise.

“I am appealing to you with a request not to introduce the bill for its first reading,” Herzog said.

But the committee tasked with reviewing Justice Minister Yariv Levin’s proposal was approving sections of the legislation on Monday and a first reading of the bill could be held later in the day.

Three plenum votes are required before a bill becomes law.

Netanyahu and his allies say the reforms are necessary to correct a power imbalance between elected representatives and the nation’s top court.

His government wants to give the government de facto control over supreme court nominees, a role currently held by a mixed

panel of politicians, judges and bar association members.

Levin’s plan would also give parliament the power to override supreme court decisions through a simple majority vote.

Critics, including supreme court president Esther Hayut, have condemned the bill as an assault on the independence of Israel’s judiciary.

Some of Netanyahu’s critics have also tied the reform plan to his ongoing corruption trial, arguing he is seeking to undermine a judicial system he has accused of targeting him unfairly for political reasons.

Netanyahu has denied the corruption charges.

The veteran leader, who reclaimed power last year after

spending 14 months in opposition, has also firmly rejected any link between the justice minister’s proposal and his own trial.

Reacting to Herzog’s proposal, Levin told Israeli media that he was ‘prepared and wishes to engage in genuine dialogue with the members of the opposition’ on ways to improve the judiciary.

But he rejected any ‘linkage... between dialogue and moving forward with the legislative process’. He warned that agreeing to work with the opposition should not ‘become a means for foot-dragging in order to delay and to prevent a substantive and meaningful reform to the justice system’.

AFP

Speculation grows as US warplane shoots down new mystery object

Washington, US - A US warplane shot down a new flying object near the Canadian border on Sunday, the latest of three mysterious devices spotted since military radar settings were cranked up in the wake of the downing of a suspected Chinese spy balloon.

Jittery Americans have been watching the skies as the mysterious incursions unfolded against a backdrop of acute tensions with China - although only the first object has so far been attributed to Beijing.

On Sunday the Pentagon said that it does not yet know what the other three objects - one shot down Friday over Alaska, one Saturday over Canada's Yukon territory, and the most recent one Sunday over Lake Huron - are.

But it said that the object downed on Sunday had been tracked for nearly a day and did not resemble the alleged Chinese surveillance balloon that was destroyed off the Atlantic coast on February 4 after traversing the country.

President Joe Biden ordered a F-16 fighter to shoot down the latest object 'out of abundance of caution', a senior administration official said.

The object was described by the official as an octagonal structure with strings hanging off it.

Drifting at about 20,000 feet (6,000 metres) over Michigan, it could have posed a hazard to civil aviation, the official said.

US Northern Command Commander General Glen VanHerck told reporters that after aircraft were sent up to inspect the newest object, they concluded



US officials restricted the airspace over Lake Michigan on Sunday citing a potential new threat to national security, as the US and Canada responded to a series of recent air intrusions (AFP)

What we are seeing is very, very small objects that produce a very, very low radar cross section. I will let the intel community and the counterintelligence community figure that out

GLEN VANHERCK

that there was no indication of any threat, the same with the previous objects.

"What we are seeing is very, very small objects that produce a very, very low radar cross section," he said.

He declined to describe the shape or size of the objects, but

said they were traveling very slowly, around the speed of the wind.

Speculation as to what the objects may be has ignited in recent days.

"I will let the intel community and the counterintelligence community figure that out," Van-

Herck told reporters when asked if it was possible the objects are aliens or extra-terrestrials.

"I haven't ruled out anything at this point."

Mysterious objects

The objects shot down since Friday were detected after US air defense adjusted radar settings to scan for smaller and slower-moving objects, said Assistant Secretary of Defense Melissa Dalton.

"In light of the People's Republic of China balloon that we took down last Saturday, we have been more closely scrutin-

ising our airspace at these altitudes, including enhancing our radar, which may at least partly explain the increase in objects that we've detected over the past week," she told reporters.

She said they are aware that there are objects drifting at such altitudes operated in the air by research institutes and private companies. "But because we had not been able to definitively assess what these recent objects are, the president wanted to act out of an abundance of caution to protect our security and interests," she said.

Currently operations are un-

derway to recover all four objects, said Dalton.

Canadian officials described the shot down over Canada's far northwest on Saturday as small and cylindrical, roughly the size of a Volkswagen car.

Recovery teams backed by a Canadian CP-140 patrol aircraft were continuing their search on Sunday for debris in the Yukon, officials said.

US teams were struggling with Arctic conditions as they searched near Deadhorse, Alaska, where the second object was shot down on Friday.

AFP

China accuses US of sending balloons into its airspace

Beijing, China - China accused the United States on Monday of flying balloons over its territory, hitting back against Washington's claims that Beijing has been sending alleged surveillance aircraft.

Relations between the United States and China have further soured after Washington shot down an alleged Chinese espionage device in early February, which Beijing has insisted was for civilian purposes.

A number of other such devices have since been shot down over the US and Canada, though Beijing has only admitted that the first was one of its own.

Over the weekend, Chinese state-affiliated media reported that an unidentified flying object had been spotted off the country's east coast - and that the military was preparing to shoot it down.

Beijing on Monday declined to comment on that report, only referring journalists to the defence ministry, which did not respond to requests for comment from AFP. But it did accuse the United States of sending more than 10 balloons into its airspace since January 2022.

"It's not uncommon as well for the US to illegally enter the airspace of other countries," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said during a briefing. "Since last year alone, US balloons have illegally flown above China more than 10 times."

AFP

Philippine coastguard accuses Chinese ship of using 'laser light'

Manila, Philippines - A Chinese security vessel shone a 'military-grade laser light' at a Philippine patrol boat in the disputed South China Sea, temporarily blinding crew members, the Philippine coastguard said on Monday.

The incident happened on February 6 nearly 20km (12 miles) from Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands, where Philippine marines are stationed, the Philippine Coast Guard said in a statement.

There has been a series of maritime incidents between the Philippines and China, which claims sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea and has ignored an international court ruling that its claims have no legal basis.

Days before this latest inci-



A Chinese coast guard vessel shining a 'laser light' at a Philippine coast guard boat in the disputed South China Sea on Monday (AFP)

dent, the United States and the Philippines agreed to resume joint patrols in the sea, and struck a deal to give US troops access to another four military bases in the Southeast Asian country.

The Philippine coastguard patrol boat was supporting a 'rotation and resupply mission' last week for the marines, who live in a derelict navy ship grounded on the shoal to assert Manila's territorial claims.

The Chinese coastguard vessel shone a 'military-grade' green laser light twice at the Philippine ship, 'causing temporary blindness to her crew at the bridge', the statement said.

The Chinese vessel also made 'dangerous manoeuvres' by coming within about 140 metres of the Philippine boat.

"The deliberate blocking of the Philippine government ships to deliver food and supplies to our military personnel... is a blatant disregard for, and a clear violation of, Philippine sovereign rights in this part of the West Philippine Sea," the Philippine Coast Guard said.

Manila refers to waters immediately to its west as the West Philippine Sea.

AFP

Cyprus ex-foreign minister Nikos Christodoulides elected president

Nicosia, Cyprus - Cyprus voters on Sunday elected the former foreign minister Nikos Christodoulides as the next president of the small EU member state, vowing after his win to form a government with 'broad social acceptance'.

Christodoulides, 49, won 51.92 per cent to defeat fellow diplomat Andreas Mavroyiannis, 66, who took 48.08 per cent, the government election service in the south of the divided Mediterranean island announced. The vote on Sunday, a runoff after an inconclusive first round last week, means Christodoulides will succeed two-term conservative President Nicos Anastasiades.

Widely tapped as the election favourite during the campaign, the former top diplomat is seen as likely to take a hard line on moribund UN-backed talks on ending the island's decades-old division. "The current state of affairs is only worsening," Christodoulides said after results were announced. "That is why... we have a specific plan for how we will seek to break the impasse."

Christodoulides, who takes up the post on March 1, said he would begin work to select his cabinet, vowing to form a gender-balanced government.

Christodoulides, who defected from the conservative ruling DISY party to run as an independent, scored 32.0 per cent a week ago, against 29.6 per cent for Mavroyiannis, who also ran as an independent, backed by the communist AKEL party.

Mavroyiannis conceded de-



Nikos Christodoulides gestures to supporters during a proclamation ceremony at Eleftheria stadium in Nicosia late on Sunday (AFP)

The current state of affairs is only worsening... We will seek to break the impasse

CHRISTODOULIDES

feat and congratulated his rival. He told reporters: "Tonight a journey has ended... I regret we couldn't achieve the change that Cyprus needed."

Rising prices

Voter turnout was 72.4 per cent with over 405,000 citizens casting a ballot, a fraction higher than in the first round.

Top concerns for many voters are the cost of living crisis, irregular immigration and the

island's almost half-century of division between the Greek-speaking south and a Turkish-occupied breakaway statelet in the north recognised only by Ankara.

But many disaffected voters simply looked for 'the least worst candidate' - a characteristic in most elections, but more so in this one', said Andreas Theophanous of the Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs. UN-backed talks on the future of the divided island, frozen for nearly six years, will be key on the new leader's agenda.

Cyprus has been divided since 1974, when Turkish forces occupied its northern third in response to a Greek-sponsored coup, but voters appeared split over whether the division was a priority in the election.

AFP

Rights groups condemn closure of Cambodian news outlet

Phnom Penh, Cambodia - A handful of protesters gathered in Phnom Penh on Monday to condemn the shutdown of one of Cambodia's last independent media outlets, with rights groups also slamming the portal's closure just months before national elections.

Prime Minister Hun Sen - among the world's longest-serving leaders - ordered the shuttering of online Khmer- and English-language outlet Voice of Democracy (VOD) on Sunday over what he said was an erroneous report about his eldest son. Sitting in the meeting room at VOD, journalist Khan Leakhena burst into tears as management halted broadcast-



Supporters of online media outlet Voice of Democracy (VOD) hold placards in front of VOD office in Phnom Penh on Monday (AFP)

ing at 10am following the revocation of the outlet's licence.

"I have been here since I was an intern," she said. "I do not

want to cry, but I am so shocked."

"Shutting down VOD is like shutting down the voice of the people," she added.

Outside the outlet's offices, protester Prum Chantha said: "It's only VOD that speaks about the truth... The government must not shut them down."

"They are cracking down (on VOD) so that other media outlets don't dare to rise up, to speak the truth," she added. "Other media outlets will be scared - this is a threat." A dozen police officers blocked the road as information ministry officials delivered the closure notice.

In the now-empty VOD studio, 10th Sothoeuth, media director of the Cambodian Centre for Independent Media which oversees VOD, told reporters: "For now we will stay silent."

AFP

INDIA

BJP brought peace in Tripura, says Modi

This was the PM’s second visit within a week to the state which is set to go to polls on February 16

Agartala, India - With the Assembly polls round the corner in Tripura, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while addressing a public rally in Agartala on Monday, hit out at the Congress-Left alliance, saying that they have pushed the state to the brink of destruction.

“The first condition for development is rule of law and order. The Communist rule had pushed Tripura to the brink of destruction. The people of Tripura can never forget the chaotic situation wherein cadres had taken hostage every aspect of life. The Left had treated the people of Tripura as slaves and themselves as kings,” PM Modi said, adding that only the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) brought peace and established rule of law in Tripura. The PM further said that the opposition alliance in the state will never develop Tripura.

“I want to remind the people of Tripura about one thing, the Left and the Congress can never develop Tripura. They want the people of Tripura to remain poor. They have only one agenda - filling their coffers,” PM Modi said.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the public meeting ahead of Tripura Assembly elections, in Agartala on Monday (ANI)

This was the PM’s second visit within a week to the state which is set to go to polls on February 16. The votes will be

counted on March 2. Modi, while exuding his confidence to win the election by a huge margin said that his party

does the politics of ‘badlav’, not ‘badla’.

“BJP does politics of change, not revenge. We do politics of

public interest and national interest. That’s why this time BJP is coming back with more votes than last time,” the PM said.

The Communists ruled Tripura for three decades and killed political opponents before every election

NARENDRA MODI

He further came down heavily on the CPI(M) and accused it of ‘killing’ political opponents before every election.

“Communists ruled Tripura for three decades and killed political opponents before every election. BJP’s government in Tripura has been working day and night to fill the pit dug during the last 25-30 years of communist rule,” the PM said.

Highlighting the BJP government’s key schemes for the state, Modi said that under its regime, Tripura got a Buddhist university, National Forensic Sciences University, dental college and cancer hospital.

“PM Kisan Samman Nidhi is another example of a double-engine government. Till now we have granted Tripura’s farmers

over Rs 500 crore. The same is with our efforts towards MSP (minimum support price). We’ve brought the poor, including the Vishwakarmas, into the banking and finance system. There’s no family in Tripura which hasn’t benefitted from BJP policies,” he added.

The prime minister further said that the state’s capital has become the gateway for international trade in the North East and will become the largest market for international trade in the region after getting connected to the port city through the Maitri bridge.

“After landing at Tripura airport, people are surprised by the kind of modern infrastructure. New highways and rural roads are being constructed, new railway lines are being laid out in Tripura,” Modi said.

“The people of Tripura have already announced that they want a government of ‘Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas’ with an absolute majority,” he added. Last week, BJP National President JP Nadda and Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha released the party’s poll manifesto. ANI

Top court dismisses plea against J&K delimitation

New Delhi, India - The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a plea challenging the government’s decision to constitute the delimitation commission for redrawing the Assembly and Lok Sabha constituencies in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

A bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and AS Oka said that it has not ruled upon the validity of the Jammu and Kashmir Re-organisation Act, 2019 which is pending before the apex court in the batch of petitions challenging abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution of India.

Pronouncing the verdict, Justice Oka said: “We have dismissed the petitions. We have given the rider that the issue of the Re-organisation Act is pending before this Court and we have not said anything on the merits of the same.”

The top court on December



1, had reserved the judgement after hearing all the parties in the case.

The Centre and Election Commission of India had defended the decision to conduct the delimitation exercise which extended the number of Assembly seats in Jammu and Kashmir.

The apex court order came on a plea of two Srinagar residents Haji Abdul Gani Khan and Dr Mohammad Ayub Mattoo saying that contrary to the scheme of the Constitution, this delimitation exercise

was carried out and alteration of boundaries and inclusion of extended areas could not be done.

The challenge is about the delimitation pursuant to the notifications of March 6, 2020, and March 3, 2021.

The plea sought a declaration that the increase in the number of seats from 107 to 114 (including 24 seats in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir in Jammu and Kashmir) is ultra vires the Constitutional Provisions such as Articles 81, 82, 170, 330, and 332 and Statutory Provisions, particularly under Section 63 of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019.

It asked that “while Article 170 of the Constitution of India provides that the next delimitation in the country will be taken up after 2026 then why has the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir been singled out?” ANI

G20 members plan to bring collective SOP on crypto: FM Nirmala Sitharaman

New Delhi, India - On a query posed over crypto mining in Lok Sabha, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said under India’s Presidency, G20 members are working together to bring a collective standard operating procedure on it.

While replying to a query from DMK MP T Sumathy, the finance minister said: “At the moment, they (cryptocurrencies) are largely unregulated in India; whether it is mining or the asset or whether it is the transaction, we recognise that it is completely driven by technology and a standalone country’s effort to control and regulate is not going to be effective.”

Pointing out that ‘China is tracking down crypto miners and India could be an alternate destination if regulation is certain and infra is provided’, the MP asked how the govern-



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks in Lok Sabha during the Budget Session of Parliament, in New Delhi on Monday (ANI)

There is an evolving consensus and that’s why we are raising this issue in G20. We want to have a discussion

NIRMALA SITHARAMAN

ment was planning to regulate crypto mining in India.

Sitharaman said: “There is an evolving consensus and that’s why we are raising this issue in the G20. We want to have a detailed discussion over the issue so that a standard operating procedure emerges in the G20.

“We can have a coherent,

comprehensive and all-country-working-together kind of approach to bring some regulations, whether it is mining or transacting. All these could be looked into with comprehension,” she said.

On Saturday, during a joint conference of the finance ministry and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the finance minister said that crypto is 99 per cent technology.

It is ‘under discussion with G20 nations’, to achieve a standard operating procedure that will be effective while following a regulatory framework, she added.

Addressing a press meet after the customary post-Budget meeting with the RBI, she said: “If regulation has to happen, then a different country alone cannot do anything. Everyone has to follow a path to remain effective.” ANI

Flights grounded, power cut as storm lashes New Zealand

Wellington, New Zealand - Tens of thousands of homes in New Zealand were without power and hundreds of flights were cancelled on Monday as a tropical storm lashed the north of the country.

A state of emergency was declared in five regions on the North Island, covering almost one-third of New Zealand’s entire population of 5.1mn.

Although the storm was downgraded from a cyclone before it made landfall, high winds and torrential rains have already toppled trees, damaged roads and downed power lines. Wellington-based Prime Minister Chris Hipkins was among thousands stuck in the northern city of Auckland after the wild weather grounded flights.

“Things will get worse be-

fore they get better,” Hipkins told New Zealanders in a press conference on Monday, calling for them to ‘be prepared, stay inside if you can’.

He said the government had considered declaring a national state of emergency for only the third time in the country’s history - but it was not yet necessary. The government announced an aid package of 11.5 mn New Zealand dollars (US\$7.25mn) to help recovery efforts.

Police said one person was missing aboard a boat, which issued a distress call early on Monday near Great Barrier Island. Winds of up to 140kph battered the Northland region, while Auckland’s harbour bridge was rocked by gusts of 110kph.

AFP

‘Ukraine consuming huge amount of munitions’

Brussels, Belgium - NATO needs ‘to ramp up production’ of ammunition as Ukraine’s rate of usage is far outstripping current capacities and draining stockpiles, the defence alliance’s chief Jens Stoltenberg said on Monday.

“The war in Ukraine is consuming an enormous amount of munitions, and depleting allied stockpiles,” Stoltenberg told journalists. “The current rate of Ukraine’s ammunition expenditure is many times higher than our current rate of production. This puts our defence industries under strain.”

Stoltenberg admitted that NATO was facing a ‘problem’ as current waiting times for large-calibre ammunition have grown from 12 to 28 months.

But he insisted he was confident steps taken so far meant NATO members were ‘on the path that will enable us both to



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg addresses a press conference ahead of a NATO defence ministers’ meeting in Brussels on Monday (AFP)

continue to support Ukraine, but also to replenish our own stocks’.

Ukraine’s Western backers - who have supplied billions of dollars of arms - will meet on Tuesday in Brussels to discuss Kyiv’s weapons demands as Stoltenberg said Russian President Vladimir Putin is ‘launching

new offensives’.

The NATO chief said there was an ongoing discussion among allies about Ukraine’s demands for modern fighter jets to be sent to the battlefield.

But he said a key focus was on making sure the necessary amounts of weaponry flowed to

Kyiv’s forces on time and that allies made good on commitments already made on heavy guns and armoured vehicles.

“It is clear that we are in a race of logistics,” Stoltenberg said.

“Key capabilities like ammunition, fuel, and spare parts must reach Ukraine before Russia can seize the initiative on the battlefield. Speed will save lives.”

US NATO ambassador Julianne Smith said the alliance was looking to work ‘hand in glove’ with industry to ramp up output and slash production times. “This is absolutely essential to ensure that we can keep supporting Ukraine while also ensuring that we collectively can protect every inch of allied territory,” she said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky made a powerful plea during a trip to London, Paris and Brussels last week for NATO members to

send fighter planes to Kyiv.

Zelensky won a commitment to train pilots from Britain but did not get any firm promises that his forces will get Western planes.

Diplomats from several NATO allies said they did not expect there to be any firm announcement from Tuesday’s meeting on supplying jets, but that momentum was building.

The United States - by far the biggest supplier of arms so far to Ukraine - is seen as key as it could greenlight sending the widely used F-16 fighters.

“The United States remains committed to getting Ukraine what they need,” Smith said.

“We leave that to each sovereign nation to determine how they want to provide assistance and what type of assistance for Ukraine that is left in the hands of each individual capital.” AFP

BARCA CRUISING

Pedri guides Barcelona past Villarreal to 11-point lead in Spanish league

Barcelona, Spain - Pedri's strike earned Barcelona a battling 1-0 win over Villarreal on Sunday to move 11 points clear of second-placed Real Madrid at the top of La Liga.

The champions, who won the Club World Cup on Saturday, face Elche in midweek to try and bite back into the growing gap.

Earlier Memphis Depay scored his first Atletico Madrid goal as Diego Simeone's side beat Celta Vigo 1-0 to consolidate their position in fourth.

Barcelona rode their luck in a gripping clash at Estadio de la Ceramica but held off a Yellow Submarine onslaught to continue marching towards their goal of winning the title for the first time since 2019.

Defender Ronald Araujo in particular made a number of superb blocks and interceptions to help protect Barcelona's slim advantage until the end, locking in

another clean sheet.

Barcelona have shut out opponents 16 times in 21 league games this season, conceding just seven goals.

"The truth is we are working really hard (defensively)," Araujo told Movistar.

"We had to correct this from last season, when teams scored a lot of goals against us, and it was hard for us to keep clean sheets.

"We're doing well at the back and the midfielders aren't leaving spaces, the forwards too. It's the fruit of (our) work."

La Liga top scorer Robert Lewandowski missed two big chances for Barcelona.

However the Polish international, La Liga's top scorer, made up for it with a cushioned pass for Pedri to open the scoring after 18 minutes.

Barcelona fashioned a superb team move, finished off by the 20-year-old midfielder for his



Barcelona's Pedri scores against Villarreal in their Spanish League match at La Ceramica stadium in Vilareal on Sunday (AFP)

There's a lot of points left (to play for). The run is extraordinary but we can improve things. We are efficient and very solid, to win these games which are really hard

XAVI HERNANDEZ

fourth goal in seven games across all competitions. Jose Luis Morales should have levelled for Villarreal but did not connect well with a volley and later fired wide when through on goal.

The hosts, who beat Real Madrid in January, were willing to attack the leaders and it led to an

entertaining battle which ebbed and flowed from end to end.

The Catalans face Manchester United in the Europa League next, on Thursday.

"There's a lot of points left (to play for), there's so long to go," said Barca coach Xavi. "The run is extraordinary but we can im-

prove things. We are efficient and very solid, to win these games which are really hard."

Earlier Simeone's Atletico, down to 10 men after Stefan Savic's red card, were outplayed by Celta but Depay reacted quickly to spin and bury a loose ball in the 89th minute.

Premier League promises crackdown on 'tragedy chanting' by supporters

London, United Kingdom - The Premier League said clamping down on supporters chanting about tragic incidents is a priority after both Leeds and Manchester United fans taunted their rivals on Sunday.

United ran out 2-0 winners at Elland Road but the match was soured by supporters trading chants about the Munich air dis-

aster, which killed eight United players in 1958, and the death of two Leeds fans in Istanbul in 2000.

"The Premier League condemns the chanting heard during today's match between Leeds United and Manchester United," the league said in a statement.

"The League is treating the issue of tragedy chanting as a

priority and as a matter of urgency."

There have previously been calls from Liverpool fans for the Premier League to take action on chanting about the 1989 Hillsborough disaster.

In a joint statement after the match, Leeds and Manchester United said:

"Both clubs strongly condemn

chanting from both sets of fans regarding historic tragedies at today's game.

"Such behaviour is completely unacceptable and we will continue to work together with our respective fan groups and the Premier League and other authorities on eradicating it from football."

AFP



Aston Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez (R) collides with Manchester City's Erling Haaland (AFP)

Guardiola hopeful Haaland will be fit for Arsenal showdown

Manchester, United Kingdom - Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola admitted Erling Haaland is a doubt for Wednesday's top-of-the-table clash against Arsenal after coming off at half-time in a 3-1 win over Aston Villa.

City shrugged off the uncertainty caused by a series of Premier League charges to close to within three points of Arsenal at the top of the table.

But victory came at a cost as the Premier League's leading goalscorer appeared to pick up a thigh injury as he clashed with Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez.

"Haaland had a knock, he was uncomfortable," said Guardiola. "At 3-0 we don't want to take risks.

"We'll see and assess in the next days. If he is not ready, we play another one. Hopefully he's ready but we will see."

A cloud is hanging over the English champions after the Premier League hit the club with more than 100 charges alleging breaches of financial rules dating as far back as 2009.

If found guilty, City could face a severe points deduction

or even relegation from the top flight.

But Guardiola came out swinging in defence of the club's hierarchy as he pointed the finger at jealous rivals for the accusations and his players followed him with a show of defiance on the field.

Rodri, Ilkay Gundogan and

We'll see and assess in the next days. If he is not ready, we play another one

PEP GUARDIOLA

Riyad Mahrez all struck before half-time at the Etihad to edge ominously into Arsenal's rear-view mirror.

The Gunners still have a game in hand, but City will now move to the top of the table should they win at the Emirates in midweek.

Arsenal's 1-1 draw at home to Brentford on Saturday opened the door for City and unlike last weekend, when the defending champions missed

the chance to pounce with defeat away to Tottenham, this time they made no mistake.

Guardiola also learned his lesson from an experimental line-up at Spurs.

Ruben Dias, Aymeric Laporte, Kevin De Bruyne and Gundogan were restored to the starting line-up and City looked much more like their old selves.

The City support made their feelings known before kick-off as the Premier League anthem was booed and a banner raised saluting the lawyer the club have hired to defend the charges.

Just four minutes in they had something to cheer as Rodri rose highest to power home a header from Mahrez's corner.

Haaland created the second as his pace beat Martinez to De Bruyne's ball over the top and he picked out Gundogan at the far post for a simple finish.

Jack Grealish then lured Jacob Ramsey into a clumsy challenge to win a penalty, which Mahrez slotted home as Haaland surprisingly stepped aside.

That decision was perhaps explained by Haaland's withdrawal at the break.



Napoli's Victor Osimhen (L) celebrates with Khvicha Kvaratskhelia (R) after scoring against Cremonese (AFP)

Napoli march on with Kvaratskhelia and Osimhen, Juve beat Fiorentina

Milan, Italy - Napoli continued their march towards a first Serie A title in over three decades with Sunday's 3-0 win over rock-bottom Cremonese which provisionally moved the runaway league leaders 16 points clear.

A 33-year wait for the league crown looks closer to ending with each passing week and once again Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and Victor Osimhen were the key men for Luciano Spalletti's flamboyant team at the Stadio Maradona.

Winger wizard Kvaratskhelia set Napoli on their way with a delightful individual effort in the 22nd minute on his 22nd birthday before Osimhen's league-

leading 17th goal of the season midway through the second half and an Elif Elmas strike 11 minutes from the end.

Thanks to a sixth straight league win Napoli will be at least 13 points ahead of Inter Milan come Tuesday morning, their closest rivals travelling to crisis club Sampdoria for the final match of this round of fixtures on Monday night.

"The city is making sure that we're always on the case, we all want to win," Spalletti told DAZN.

"We need to take it one match at a time... we can't think it's already done and start thinking about other things, or think

everything's going to look after itself.

"We need to take care of everything ourselves."

Cremonese meanwhile are still yet to win in their first Serie A season since 1996 and look certain to go straight back down despite another committed performance under recently-appointed coach Davide Ballardini.

The away side, who knocked Napoli out of the Italian Cup on the same ground last month, started well but as soon as Kvaratskhelia weaved into the box and drilled home his ninth league goal of his debut Serie A campaign the game was up.

AFP

MOUNTING TROUBLES

Injuries and poor form leave PSG in crisis before Bayern tie

Paris, France - Paris Saint-Germain head into the first leg of their crunch Champions League last-16 tie against Bayern Munich this week unsure about the injured Kylian Mbappe, with concerns over the fitness of Lionel Messi, and in crisis after suffering damaging back-to-back defeats. The pressure is firmly on coach Christophe Galtier, given that these big European matches are what define every season for PSG in the Qatar era and their worrying habit of imploding on such occasions. Galtier's brief is to do what all his predecessors - most recently Mauricio Pochettino - have failed to do and win the Champions League after PSG persuaded Mbappe to sign a new contract and stay in the French capital last year rather than join Real Madrid. They had just gone out in the last 16 for the fourth time in six seasons, the nature of their collapse against Real as spectacular as previous exits at the same stage against Barcelona in 2017 and Manchester United in 2019. In past years they have been hampered by injuries at inopportune moments, with metatarsal fractures striking down Neymar ahead of a tie against Real in 2018 and ruling him out of both



(From L) Paris Saint-Germain's Lionel Messi, Marco Verratti, Gianluigi Donnarumma, Kylian Mbappe and Neymar take part in a training session on Monday (AFP)

legs of the United debacle a year later. The Brazilian was also hampered by injury against the Spanish giants last season, but this season it is the other two members of PSG's all-star attack who have been hit by what French media have started to call their Champions League "jinx".

Mbappe is in the middle of a three-week spell out with a thigh injury, meaning he will not play in the first leg but should be fine for the return in Munich on March 8. But Mbappe has made a faster-than-expected return to training. He trained on Sunday and on Monday was seen in the part of training which is open to

the media, participating in an exercise with Lionel Messi, Neymar, Sergio Ramos, goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma, Marco Verratti, Achraf Hakimi and Marquinhos. Messi missed Saturday's 3-1 defeat in Monaco with an apparently minor hamstring complaint, but it remains to be seen if the

35-year-old Argentine will be on top form for Tuesday's showdown. World Cup hangover The post-World Cup hangover that PSG must have dreaded during their outstanding start to the season has not just impacted the fitness of the players who

dominated the final in Doha in December. Galtier's team have appeared laboured and have been regularly outfought by domestic opponents while losing four times in 10 games in 2023. They simply could not cope with Marseille's high-energy pressing game as they went out

of the French Cup in the last 16 last midweek. "We lost the midfield battle. We can't afford to come out second best in so many challenges in such a game," admitted Galtier. Yet his side fared no better on Saturday in Monaco, provoking an angry reaction from supporters who had unveiled banners with messages for the team such as "Wake Up". The coach could lament the stomach bug that ripped through his squad on the morning of the Monaco game, but it was another defeat which laid bare the lack of balance in his squad.

The pressure is firmly on coach Christophe Galtier, given that these big European matches are what define every season for PSG in the Qatar era

The drop off in quality up front when any of Mbappe, Messi or Neymar are missing is enormous, and brings into focus the club's decision to allow Pablo Sarabia to leave in January and not bring in a replacement - they failed to complete the paperwork to sign Hakim Ziyech on loan from Chelsea. Their midfield sorely lacks physicality and the defence is overly-reliant on the ageing Sergio Ramos, with a lack of depth forcing Galtier to move away from playing a three-man defence and exposing his inability to find an alternative.

India-Australia third Test shifted to new venue

New Delhi, India - The third Test between India and Australia has been moved out of the northern town of Dharamsala because of the state of the outfield, India's cricket board said on Monday. The central Indian city of Indore will now host the match, which starts on March 1, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said. "Owing to harsh winter conditions in the region, the outfield lacks sufficient grass density and will need some time to develop fully," BCCI secretary Jay Shah said in a statement. India lead the four-Test series

1-0 after hammering the visitors by an innings and 132 runs inside three days in the opener in Nagpur. The second match begins in Delhi on Friday. The Indian Express newspaper reported that the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association Stadium had relaid the entire outfield in Dharamsala. After their defeat in the first Test of the series, Australian coach Andrew McDonald said it would be a challenge to tackle "extreme spin" in all four matches. AFP

India's top star Mandhana fetches \$410,000 at first Women's Premier League auction

Mumbai, India - Several of the world's top women cricketers earned hundreds of thousands of dollars for their services in the inaugural Women's Premier League auction on Monday, with India's attacking batter Smriti Mandhana leading the way on \$410,000. The left-handed 26-year-old was the first lot on the block at the sale in Mumbai, and was the object of a bidding war. Nita Ambani, who is the wife of Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani and owns the Mumbai Indians franchise, placed several



Smriti Mandhana

bids for her services before the Royal Challengers Bangalore prevailed. The money-spinning Indian Premier League has transformed the fortunes of cricket globally, and the women's version could rapidly become one of the world's biggest money-spinners in women's sport. Australian all-rounder Ash Gardner was the second most expensive player in the first batch of sales, with Gujarat Giants paying \$387,000 for her. Royal Challengers Bangalore also bagged Ellyse Perry of Aus-

tralia for \$205,000 and Sophie Devine of New Zealand for her base price of \$60,000. England's Sophie Ecclestone went to UP Warriorz for \$220,000. The franchise rights for the five women's teams were auctioned off in January for \$572.5 million, while media rights for the first five seasons of the new league were sold to Viacom18 for \$116.7 million. The two deals made the WPL the second most valuable women's league after the WNBA women's basketball league, according to local media reports.

India win over Pakistan inspired by 'extraordinary' Kohli, says Rodrigues

Cape Town, South - Jemimah Rodrigues revealed Sunday that India's victory over arch-rivals Pakistan at the Women's T20 World Cup was inspired by "extraordinary" superstar Virat Kohli. Rodrigues hit an undefeated 53 off 38 deliveries to steer her side to a seven-wicket win in Cape Town as India chased down their 150-run target with six balls to spare. Matchwinner Rodrigues admitted that memories of Kohli's blistering 82 not out off 53 balls in India's four-wicket victory against Pakistan in the Men's T20 World Cup last year had been inspirational. "India v Pakistan matches are always a little bit more special - we spoke about it in the team meeting," said the 22-year-old. "Growing up we always watched these matches. I remember watching the match at the MCG where Virat Kohli



India's Jemimah Rodrigues celebrates after scoring a half-century against Pakistan in Cape Town on Sunday (AFP)

played such an extraordinary knock. "We did speak about it but we also just wanted to go out there and put our first win on the board. We just wanted to go out, play the same cricket and with

the same intensity as usual." Rodrigues came into the World Cup on the back of a worrying run of form which had seen her hit just one score over 30 in her last 10 T20 international innings.

But on Sunday she was the star of the show, ably supported by 19-year-old wicketkeeper Richa Ghosh who made 31 not out. "This innings means a lot to me - I hadn't been getting scores for a long time," Rodrigues told a news conference. "As a batter when you're not getting scores, it's definitely not an enjoyable time. I was working really hard in the nets, I knew I was ticking all the boxes, putting in the effort and going to the gym. "It was very tough but when it mattered the most, it came, so it was very special for me." Sunday's win was India's 11th in 14 T20 meetings with their regional rivals. However, Pakistan put up a competitive total of 149-4 after winning the toss with captain Bismah Maroof hitting an undefeated 68. Ayesha Naseem, 18, made 43 not out off 25 balls.



Sri Lanka's Harshitha Samarawickrama celebrates after Sri Lanka's win against Bangladesh on Monday (AFP)

Harshitha half-century leads Sri Lanka to second victory at T20 World Cup

Cape Town, South Africa - Harshitha Samarawickrama made a composed half-century to guide Sri Lanka to a seven-wicket win over Bangladesh at Newlands in Cape Town on Sunday for their second successive victory at the Women's T20 World Cup. Left-handed opening batter Harshitha made 69 not out and

shared an unbeaten 105-run partnership with Nilakshi de Silva (41 not out). They enabled Sri Lanka to survive an early scare in pursuit of a modest Bangladesh total of 126 for eight. "I'm very happy about our performance," said Sri Lanka skipper Chamari Athapaththu who made 68 in the opening win

over South Africa but fell for 15 on Sunday. "We don't depend on one or batters. We have been working on our batting the last couple of months." Sri Lanka, who beat the hosts on the same Newlands pitch on Friday, were rattled when 18-year-old medium-pace bowler Marufa Akter took three wickets without conceding a run.



Matteo Jorgenson of the US is all smiles after winning the third stage of the Tour of Oman on Monday (AFP)

Jorgenson wins Tour of Oman Stage 3

Muscat - Young American Matteo Jorgenson (Movistar) saw off the challenge of the chasing pack with a powerful uphill sprint at Jabal Haat to claim victory and the overall lead in the Tour of Oman on Monday.

The 23-year-old climber made the most of the steepest sections leading to an unprecedented finish in Al Hamra to edge out another young rising talent, Belgium's Mauri Vansevenant (Soudal Quick-Step), and France's Geoffrey Bouchard (AG2R Citroën).

Heading into the stage, it always seemed likely that the race would be decided by the 4.6km haul to the finish, and so it proved. Jorgenson was the first to gain any meaningful traction on an acceleration, but he was unable to open a gap – although it did break up the front group, with Sunday's winner Jesus Herrada left behind.

With 300 metres to go,

Jorgenson timed his sprint for the line perfectly and this turn of pace secured victory. Vansevenant had to settle for second and Bouchard for third.

Jorgenson said, "It is a super special moment, it really is. A huge moment, a relief. Those things start to cross your mind; maybe I am not the type of ride that can win, but today I proved that to myself. It was mostly about legs; that climb was steep at moments, and I wanted to test everyone. It took a second or so for the others to get back to me so I knew I had the legs. We made it to the sprint, and I didn't look back. The team did well, we stayed in front all day. All in all, just a really nice day!"

Stage 3 pushed the riders to their limits with a series of climbs and descents starting from Al Khobar and twisting through the foothills of Jabal Al Akhdar past the towns of Samail, Izki and the outskirts of Nizwa.

PODIUM FINISH

Al Zubair, Stolz and Konrad finish third in the first race of the Asian Le Mans Series in Dubai

Dubai (UAE) - Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair, Germany's Luca Stolz and Austrian Martin Konrad wrapped up their first appearances together in the Asian Le Mans Series by finishing third and seventh in the two four-hour races at the Dubai Autodrome at the weekend.

Driving the Al Manar Racing by Haupt Racing Team Mercedes AMG GT3 under the Omani national flag, Al Zubair took the hot seat for the final session of the second race on Sunday to guide the GT3 to seventh place, after the trio had rounded off the podium places in race one on Saturday evening.

Al Zubair said: "We had a good qualifying with P2 for both races. On Saturday, we converted P2 into P3 in the race. So that was a podium finish on our first race in Asian Le Mans. That was amazing.

"For the second race fortunes did not go on our side. It was great until the final hour. Unfortunately, we messed up something with the drive time. I drove a little less than the minimum, 45 minutes, and we had to come back to the pits. Because of that, we also had a drive-through penalty as well. I had to do the double stint. Finishing seventh is decent out of 24 but, knowing that we should have been on the podium, I am not really happy with the result to be honest. Hopefully next week we come back stronger in Abu Dhabi."

The weekend's action started strongly for the HRT Team in the first of two practice sessions on the 5.39km, 16-turn Dubai Autodrome circuit on Friday.

The Mercedes ran for 35 laps and clocked the second fastest lap in the GT class of 1min



Al Faisal al Zubair, Luca Stolz and Martin Konrad occupy third place on the podium in the first four-hour race at the Dubai Autodrome



Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair in action

58.324sec. Victory in the session went to the Getspeed Mercedes of Raffaele Marciello, Fabian Schiller and Florian Scholze.

The Getspeed Mercedes again topped the times in the second practice stint with a fastest run of 1min 58.105sec. Al Zubair's HRT car came home in sixth with a best tour of 1min 59.068sec.

Al Zubair added: "Practice went off quite well. Martin (Konrad) was quite strong from the start, our bronze driver. We were all quite happy with Martin's performance, myself and Lucas. We knew we had a good package."

But the HRT crew saved their best performances for the qualifying session on Saturday morn-

We had a good qualifying with P2 for both races. On Saturday, we converted P2 into P3 in the race. So that was a podium finish on our first race in Asian Le Mans.

AL FAISAL AL ZUBAIR

ing and a fastest lap of 1min 58.016sec by Konrad enabled them to line up in second place on the grid for the evening's first four-hour race. Pole position went to the Walkenhorst Motorsport BMW M4, crewed for the weekend by Chandler Hull, Nicky Catsburg and Thomas Merrill.

The Walkenhorst Motorsport BMW won the first race from pole position after finishing 112 laps 15.126 seconds in front of the Getspeed Mercedes. Al Zubair, Stolz and Konrad rounded off the podium finishers with an excellent third place out of the 22 fin-

ishers in the GT class.

The HPT crew were also in good form during Sunday morning's warm-up stint and set the second quickest lap in the session behind the TF Sport Aston Martin of John Hartshorne, Jonathan Adam and Henrique Chaves.

Konrad lined up in second on the grid for the start of the second of the weekend's four-hour races. The team held a top four place for long periods, but dropped back to seventh after the timing mix-up and the drive-through penalty and maintained the position to the finish.

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a white sleeveless top and purple patterned pants, is smiling and looking down at a smartphone she is holding with both hands. She is standing in a kitchen with various cooking utensils hanging on the wall behind her. A laptop is open on a wooden table in front of her. The background is slightly blurred, focusing on the woman.

The logo for OMAN'S 1st EXCHANGE, featuring a gold laurel wreath surrounding a central shield. Inside the shield, the word "OMAN'S" is at the top, a large "1" is in the middle, and the word "EXCHANGE" is at the bottom.

PURSHOTTAM KANJI
EXCHANGE

A stylized logo icon for Purshottam Kanji Exchange, featuring a white silhouette of a person in a dynamic pose, possibly a dancer or athlete, against a dark background.

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Scottie Scheffler celebrates with the trophy after the final round of the Phoenix Open in Scottsdale, Arizona on Sunday (AFP)

Scheffler wins PGA Phoenix Open to reclaim World No 1 spot

Phoenix, United States - Scottie Scheffler outdueled Canada's Nick Taylor down the back nine Sunday to repeat as PGA Phoenix Open champion and overtake Rory McIlroy for the world number one ranking.

It was the 26-year-old American's first title since capturing last year's Masters and returned him to the rankings summit he surrendered to Northern Ireland's McIlroy last October.

"It feels pretty good," Scheffler said.

Scheffler fired a six-under-par 65 in Sunday's final round to

complete 72 holes at TPC Scottsdale on 19-under 265 and defeat Taylor by two strokes for the \$3.6 million top prize and his fifth career PGA title.

"I'm just proud of how I fought," Scheffler said. "I didn't have my best stuff. I grinded it out today."

"I wasn't hitting it good off the tee. My irons didn't feel as sharp. But I played a great round of golf."

Spain's third-ranked Jon Rahm, who also had a chance to become world number one with a victory, settled for third on 270 after a closing 68.





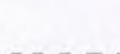
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WHAT IS ENDOMETRIOSIS?



DR ANURADHA DHANASHEKARAN
Specialist Obstetrics & Gynecologist
Aster Al Raffah Hospital, Sohar

Endometriosis is a common but an 'underdiagnosed reproductive health condition' that affects many women's quality of life, yet it often goes undiagnosed for years.

It is a condition in which the tissue that normally lines the inside of the uterus grows outside of it. This tissue, called the endometrium, reacts to the menstrual cycle just as it would if it were inside the uterus. Each month, the tissue builds up and then sheds, but unlike the endometrium inside the uterus, the tissue outside of it has nowhere to go. This can cause pain, inflammation, and scarring in the reproductive organs and surrounding tissue. The depth of the endometriotic tissue is the one which decides the severity

Symptoms
The most common symptoms of endometriosis include:
Chronic pelvic pain: This is the most common symptom of endometriosis and can be severe, especially during menstrual periods.
Heavy menstrual bleeding:

Some women with endometriosis experience heavy bleeding with clots.
Painful intercourse: Endometriosis can cause pain during sexual activity.
Infertility: Endometriosis can also cause infertility, making it difficult for pregnancy.

Diagnosis/treatment
Diagnosing endometriosis can be difficult, as its symptoms are similar to those of many other conditions. A doctor will perform a physical exam, and imaging tests, such as an ultrasound or MRI, to diagnose endometriosis. However, the gold standard would be a laparoscopy to diagnose as well as classify the severity of the disease and treat it.

Treatment for endometriosis depends on the severity of the condition and the symptoms that a woman is experiencing. Options are a wide range including medication, such as hormonal birth control or pain relief medication, as well as surgery to remove the endometrial tissue. The treatment also depends on what the women wants whether just a symptom relief or infertility

treatment.

Why early diagnosis is important
Early diagnosis of endometriosis is important because the longer the condition goes undiagnosed and untreated, the more damage it can cause to the reproductive organs and surrounding tissue. This can result in long-term pain, infertility, and other problems.

How to protect oneself from endometriosis
Unfortunately, there is no way to completely prevent endometriosis, nor pinpoint a particular reason for its occurrence. However, if you are experiencing symptoms such as chronic pelvic pain, heavy menstrual bleeding, or infertility, it is important to see a doctor as soon as possible, because early diagnosis can offer a better choice of treatment options.

If you are experiencing symptoms of endometriosis, it is advisable to go for an early diagnosis. Endometriosis is treatable and a range of treatment options are available at Aster Al Raffah Hospital, Sohar.

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VANDANA CHAWLA

UNDERSTANDING SUGAR

ON THE OCCASION OF VALENTINE'S DAY, AS PEOPLE EXCHANGE SWEETS AND SWEETER GREETINGS, IT'S IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND SUGAR AND ITS SWAY OVER US



Sugar is something that we all love, in any form it may be. Some say, they crave for it, need to have it after every meal, some start craving at certain times of the day and some say, it just makes them happy, while on the contrary, we have people saying it is their biggest enemy.

Let's understand more on this substance called 'sugar'. To begin with, sugar is a simple carbohydrate and an umbrella term for many types of simple carbohydrates, including white table sugar. Also called sucrose, this is the most common sweetener used in sweet desserts and baked goods.

There are two types of sugars found in foods

Natural Sugars - These are naturally occurring sugars, naturally found in foods. These sugars come from natural fruits, veggies, milk and dairy and also some spices.

Added sugars - Any form of sugar or caloric sweetener added to foods to make it sweet is added sugar. Table sugar such as white sugar or brown sugar, honey, and some caloric sweeteners like, high fructose corn syrup, all come under the category of 'added sugar'.

Foods containing natural sugars contain nutrients that keep our body healthy, provide energy at a stable rate, and thus keep our metabolism stable. Fruits, in addition to giving natural sugar fructose, also offer essential nutrients such as potassium, vitamin A, C, folate, etc.

Foods with natural sugar, be it fruits or dairy, when taken in its natural form, are digested and processed slowly and thereby release energy gradually, thus keeping metabolism stable.

Is sugar bad
Sugar, as such, is not bad. The body

uses the carbohydrates from food and converts most of it into glucose (sugar), which, in turn, is used as a source of energy. Hence, removing natural sugar and other carbohydrates from our diet, like, fruits, dairy products and grains is not a healthy choice.

Tips and cautions

- Go for fresh foods.
- Eating small, balanced meals, with high fibre, keeps sugar cravings under control.
- Eating a bit of what you are craving for will be satisfying
- Consider healthy options like, plain yogurt with fresh fruits added, whenever cravings begin.
- Finally drink water, it curbs sugar craving and boosts metabolism.

Are 'added sugars' harmful? Continue reading the series on sugar.

(Vandana Chawla is an Online Nutrition Expert and a Registered Nutritionist-UKVRN)

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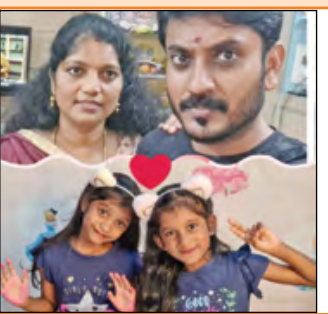
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VALENTINES DAY WISHES



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VALENTINE'S DAY

SAINT VALENTINE'S DAY IS NOW CELEBRATED WORLDWIDE BUT TRADITIONS DIFFER IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES, OFTEN HAVING NOTHING AT ALL TO DO WITH ROMANCE

TIME FOR 'sweet nothings'

February is considered by many as the 'month of love' and it's time for people around the globe, as well as in Oman, to express their love and admiration for those who hold a special place in their hearts. And Valentine's Day (February 14) is the most appropriate day to do so.

While in Europe it's all about couples cosying up, in the United States it is as much about schoolchildren celebrating friendship while in Japan women give chocolates to their bosses. In Oman, however, people use this opportunity to trade gifts and greetings, not just to the person they love but also among friends, family members, as well as anyone who is special in some way.

Evident from shop window decor in many hypermarkets, malls and shopping arcades in Muscat, lovers have a whole variety to choose from in the form of gifts, from flowers and chocolates to soft toys, trinkets and

jewellery. Special discounts and offers can be seen around town as well as hotels and restaurants have organised Valentine's dinners and staycations, too, to mark the day, all of which also indicate that the pagan festival has

now become a marketing ploy. From a romantic observance, Valentine's Day has over the centuries evolved into a more friendly celebration, though the focus has always been on young lovers and those

seeking to express their secret emotions. In England the exchange of messages known as 'Valentines' on February 14 developed with the rise of the postal serv-

held on January 25 and celebrates a fourth-century Welsh princess called Saint Dwynwen. Unlucky in love, broken-hearted Dwynwen sought solace in religion and became a nun, praying for others to find true love.

The celebration took a commercial turn in the mid-19th century in the US, with the invention of mass-produced greeting cards. Promoters quickly got the idea to extend the tradition beyond lovers, with schoolchildren now expected to bring a Valentine card for every one of their classmates.

The Japanese Valentine tradition began after World War II when confectionery makers thought up the wheeze of having women offer chocolates to their bosses and boyfriends on February 14.

A half-century later, the practice has become an annual ritual, with millions of Japanese women giving pralines or ganaches to show affection, friendship or professional respect. (Photos: V K Shafeer)



HAVE A HEALTHY HEART



DR VENKATESH KUMAR B
Specialist Cardiologist
Badr Al Samaa Hospital,
Nizwa

Coronary (ischemic) heart disease is the most commonly-diagnosed heart disease worldwide. It's estimated around 200 million people are living with coronary heart disease. Its prevalence is growing more rapidly among the younger population, especially heart attack, due to a host of reasons including ignorance.

On the occasion of Valentine's Day, let's take a check of the risk factors and cautions for a healthy heart:

- Modifiable risk factors
- High blood pressure,
- Bad cholesterol (LDL)
- Diabetes
- Smoking/passive smoking
- Obesity
- Unhealthy diet
- Physical inactivity
- Non-modifiable risk factors
- Age - above 40 years
- Gender - men

- Family history of heart disease

Control factors

- Once you have crossed 30 years, it is advisable to check your blood pressure at least once a year, even if it is normal. Borderline cases may check more frequently.
- Measure your cholesterol as a complete lipid profile in which your bad cholesterol (LDL/TGL) should be less and good cholesterol (HDL) should be high.
- Diabetes is one of a major risk factor which accelerates atherosclerosis (plaque formation) which leads to heart attack. In Diabetics, atherosclerosis progresses 3 to 4 times faster than normal individuals. It is, therefore, important to keep your blood sugar level under control with periodic monitoring.
- Smoking adds up to the tur-

moil in heart attack. In smokers, elasticity and flexibility of blood vessels declines, leading to heart attack. This effect is seen even in 'passive smokers' (those exposed to cigarette smoke).

- Obesity has become a global issue. Maintain your BMI (Body Mass Index - ideal height-weight ratio) - the normal range is between 18.5 to 24.9.
- Unhealthy diet represents imbalanced diet. Taking excess carbohydrates, fats in food leads to weight gain and increase in bad cholesterol which, in turn, increases risk of getting a heart attack. In particular, late night heavy dinners add to the risks.
- Lack of regular exercise can lead to weight gain, posing risks for diabetes, hypertension, accumulation of bad cholesterol and reduction of good cholesterol. Regular exercise increases good cholesterol.

Non-modifiable risk factors, like age above 40 years, especially in men with a family history of heart disease, when combined with other risk factors (mentioned above) increases the chance of getting a heart attack.

So, be aware and check your risks for a heart attack. Even a single risk factor can prove fatal. Check before you get checked. Let this Valentine's Day be a game changer. Have a healthy heart!



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