

Municipality announces Muscat Festival

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality has announced the much-anticipated Muscat Festival 2024, inviting specialised companies to participate in various tenders for the event.

The civic body called on companies registered with Tender Board to obtain further details from the e-tendering website.

Muscat Festival 2024 promises an array of activities. Key tender opportunities include supplying, installing and operating advertising screens, organising and running theatres in Qurum Natural Park, Naseem Park and Amerat Park, and designing and constructing these theatre arenas.

Additionally, tenders have also been floated for presentation of drone shows, organising entertainment activities, and conducting fireworks and the other events.

Interested companies must submit their bids via the e-tendering website. The deadline for purchasing tender documents is August 17, 2024 and bid submission closes on September 3, 2024.

Muscat Festival 2024 is expected to be a major attraction, offering a diverse range of cultural, entertainment and technological activities that celebrate Omani heritage and innovation.



Dhofar caves reveal oldest fishing community in Arabian Peninsula

Our Correspondent
Salalah

Archaeological excavations at Natif Caves in Hasik, Dhofar have unearthed evidence of the oldest fishing community in the Arabian Peninsula.

This was confirmed by findings of fish and turtle remains inside the caves, and a piece of rope that may be the oldest ever found. Made of plant fibre, the rope is estimated to be 9,000 years old.

Additionally, numerous flint tools, beads and frankincense beads were found.

French archaeological mission 'Arabian Seashores' has been conducting excavations along the Dhofar coast for the past ten years in collaboration with the Directorate General of Heritage and Tourism in the governorate.



A French archaeological mission has been conducting excavations in Natif Caves for the past ten years (Supplied photos)

The Natif Caves are among the most significant, spanning various historical periods, including the Late Paleolithic (9,500 - 11,000 BC), Neolithic (5,000 - 8,500 BC), Bronze Age

(3,000 - 5,000 BC) and the Islamic era.

Ali bin Muslim al Mahri, Head of Surveys and Archaeological Excavations Department at Directorate General of Her-

itage and Tourism in Dhofar, said, "The French mission is studying human remains from the Neolithic era and collecting all remnants left by humans since that period." The team has

found collections of sharp arrowheads made of flint and bone, and perforated sea shells used for adornment and jewellery.

Studies by French National Institute for Preventive Archaeological Research, headed by Dr Vincent Charpentier, focused on determining the age of geological deposits to link these to the estimated age of archaeological finds. Techniques such as analysis of catalytic radiation of quartz, carbon isotope and calcium deposit are used to establish the timeframe of settlements.

Mahri informed that the team found remains of the oldest hunter in the Arabian Peninsula, dating back 10,500 years. Shells discovered in the area suggest it was the first place where hunting was practised since the Stone

Age, indicating that the land extended further into the sea than it does today.

The excavation team found tools in the Natif Caves, including ones used for cutting, digging and scraping. Arrows and flint heads were used to hunt deer and other wild animals, alongside fishing tools made of fish bone. Beads and holes done in sea shells were used to make necklaces and bracelets, or to decorate clothes and hair. Bones of sardines, catfish and sharks were also found at the dig.

Mahri informed that there are several archaeological sites in Hasik which the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism plans to explore in the near future with the aim of uncovering further historical treasures and insights into the region's ancient communities.

Regional health ministers rally to prevent spread of polio in Gaza

Cairo, Egypt - Health ministers from across the Eastern Mediterranean Region have united to address the polio emergency in the occupied Palestinian territory. The urgent need for coordinated, collective regional action to combat circulating variant poliovirus type 2 in the Gaza Strip was the focus of the 11th meeting of the Regional Subcommittee on Polio Eradication and Outbreaks.

Dr Hanan Balkhy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, convened the meeting, held virtually on July 25.

Confirmation of poliovirus adds to the multiple threats faced by children in the Gaza Strip, who had access to robust routine vaccination services prior to the war - and raises concerns about the potential for widespread poliovirus transmission and paralytic polio, WHO stated.

While an estimated 99% of children in the occupied Palestinian territory received their third dose of polio vaccine in 2022, this fell to 89% in 2023 according to the latest routine immunisation estimates by WHO and the United Nations Children's Fund.

Reflecting on her recent visit to Gaza, Dr Hanan advocated joint



action to urgently halt further spread of polio. "I witnessed first-hand living conditions that are highly favourable for the spread of polio and other diseases. This is an important time for the subcommittee to come together to act swiftly and decisively to contain this outbreak for the children of Gaza."

In attendance at the meeting were health ministers from Member States of the Eastern Mediterranean Region, Global Polio Eradication Initiative partners and Unicef regional directors for the Middle East and North Africa and South Asia.

Offers of technical, logistic and laboratory support for ongoing testing of human and environmental samples from the Gaza Strip were pledged by Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Syria.



08 Security dilemmas intensify in NATO's eastern flank



16 Iconic filming locations become tourist attractions

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RAO wins World Music Competition

Edinburgh, Scotland – The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) Music Band has won first place in the World Music Competition for infantry and military bands held in Scotland. The RAO band also secured fifth place in a contest for musical instruments held in Dumbarton, competing against 128 teams from around the world.

Col Ahmed Salim al Shukairi, Director of the RAO Music Band, said, “Oman took the lead in the World Bagpipes and Drums Competition in Scotland, winning first place in the Infantry and Military Discipline event and fifth place in the musical instruments contest. These results offer

strong incentive for the RAO band in the upcoming World Music Competition in Glasgow.” On the occasion, Douglas MacAllister, Mayor of Glasgow,

said, “This is the 25th anniversary of the competition in Scotland, and we are proud to once again host this world-class musical event with bands from all over

the world, including the Royal Army of Oman, contesting the trophy. We were very impressed with the RAO band’s skills and outstanding performance.”

Low pressure system to bring rains from Tuesday

Muscat – The weather will be affected by a low pressure system originating in the Arabian Sea starting Tuesday, July 30, the Directorate General of Meteorology (MET) has stated.

In a statement, MET said the

latest forecasts and analyses from the National Multi Hazard Early Warning System indicate that Oman’s atmosphere will be impacted by an extension of a low pressure system beginning on the evening of July 30 and

lasting till August 2. During this period, cloud cover is anticipated over most governorates. There is likelihood of scattered rains of varying intensity, which may occasionally be accompanied by thunderstorms. These weather

conditions are expected to lead to overflowing wadis, potentially causing flooding in certain areas. Authorities have advised all to stay informed through official channels and take necessary precautions to ensure safety.

FRIDAY-SATURDAY VS SATURDAY-SUNDAY

Oman has always struck a balance between tradition and modernity in professional and family life. In recent times, a debate has emerged over the Friday-Saturday weekend. Should Oman shift to a Saturday-Sunday weekend, like the UAE has done and in alignment with the business schedule of most other countries? Here is what *Muscat Daily* readers said -

Ahmed Mahmoud
IT professional

Shifting to a Saturday-Sunday weekend could enhance Oman’s global business alignment, making it easier for companies to engage with international partners. This change could increase economic opportunities and foster stronger global relations, benefiting the nation’s economy.

Mohammad al Abri
Businessman

I do not agree with changing the weekend. Maintaining a Friday-Saturday weekend respects cultural and religious traditions, preserving Oman’s unique identity. This schedule allows citizens to observe Friday prayers and maintain a balanced work-life harmony rooted in local customs.

Sanjay Kumar
Chartered accountant

This is a tricky question. Changing the weekend may face resistance from those accustomed to the current schedule. It’s crucial to consider the potential impact on local businesses, education and community life, ensuring any change is carefully managed to minimise disruption. However, the Sunday off will benefit in the long term.

Nabeel al Balushi
Travel consultant

A Saturday-Sunday weekend could improve tourism by aligning with global travel patterns, making Oman more accessible to international tourists. This shift might boost the hospitality sector and contribute to economic diversification.

Amr A Baabood
Group CEO, OITE Group

Of course, Oman should have implemented the standard Saturday-Sunday weekend decades ago, but better late than never. We all know the logic of implementing the standard weekend; we just need to make the decision and join the rest of the world. Aligning with the global business week improves trade and eco-

nomics activities, as businesses and financial markets in Oman would operate on the same schedule as all other economies. Employees benefit from having weekends that align with international partners, leading to better communication and fewer delays in multinational projects. It will boost tourism, as it would be easier for international tourists to plan their trips. Students in Oman would have the same weekend as many international schools, which could be advantageous for academic collaborations and exchange programmes. Families with members working or studying abroad could find it easier to stay in touch and visit, as their weekends would align. There are plenty more significant economic, social and operational benefits for advancing in this way. There are no benefits/advantages with the current format.

Syed Mujtaba Ahmad
Businessman

YOUR SAY

Oman should not change weekends as the UAE is not a role model for everything. Friday is a holy day for Muslims, and Oman is a Muslim country that follows traditions. So, BIG NO to Saturday-Sunday weekends.

Madiha Mazhar
Housewife

I think Oman should keep the Friday-Saturday weekend. Being an Islamic country, Oman should profess the amalgamation of both Islamic and the worldly ways. Oman is cherished for its landscape, nature, culture and traditional values. Why become the usual when Oman is special?

Muhammad Toseef
Civil engineer

I would strongly appreciate a Saturday-Sunday weekend if implemented.

Basith
Engineer

I would support a shift to a Saturday-Sunday weekend. Since UAE changed its weekend, we are left with only four days to do business with companies in UAE. It’s the same scenario when we connect with Europe, US, China, India etc.

NEXT ON YOUR SAY

Are you excited about Oman’s participation in the Paris Olympics? In which sport is the Omani contingent most likely to win?

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram

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N Sharqiyah archaeological sites to be turned into tourist spots



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has decided to transform several archaeological sites in North Sharqiyah into tourist destinations.

The governorate, rich in historical and cultural heritage, has 25 registered archaeological sites, which reflect its deep historical significance.

Efforts are underway to leverage these sites for tourism and trade, officials informed.

Oman in general has been aggressively promoting its heritage sites for tourism purposes, which not only helped it spread awareness about the historical significance of this country; but also helped attract more tourists from around the region and outside.

This in turn helped hotel sec-

The governorate, rich in historical and cultural heritage, has 25 registered archaeological sites, and efforts are underway to leverage these sites for tourism



tor greatly benefit with reports of ever-increasing occupancy in the post-COVID period.

North Sharqiyah governorate offers 47 hotel facilities with a total of 1,044 rooms distributed across various wilayats. They include ten hotels, ten tourist camps, nine guest houses, 12 lodges, two rest houses and four hotel apartments.

Last year, hotel occupancy rates in this governorate ranged between 60% and 90% during the peak tourist season from October to March.

Mohammed bin Saif al Riyami, head of the Tourism Development Department in North Sharqiyah, said that preparations are in full swing for the upcoming winter tourist season.

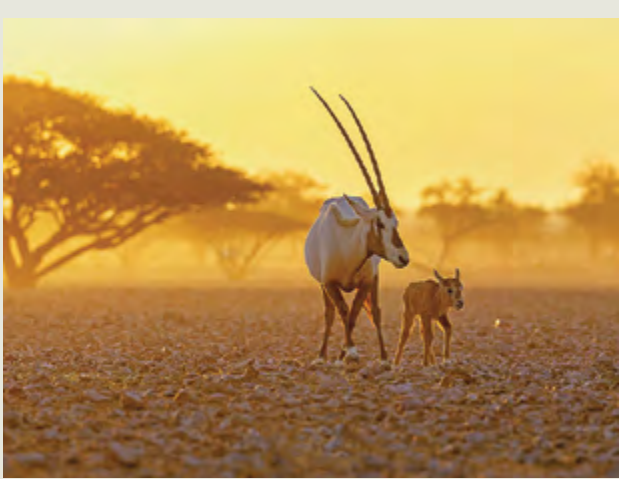
He highlighted the region's popular tourist attractions, including the Sharqiyah Sands, water-rich wadis, oases, sulphur springs in the wilayat of Dima Wa'al Taen, and the 'Hawar' waterfalls in Wadi Bani Khalid as the most visited places in the governorate.

It also has ancient mountain trails, numerous castles, forts,

popular markets, and historic neighbourhoods such as the villages of Al Manzafah and Al Qanater in the wilayat of Ibra, which offer tourists the opportunity to explore in classic cars.

Khamis bin Salem al Maskari, assistant director in the Department of Heritage, North Sharqiyah, pointed out some of the region's most prominent archaeological sites. These include Al Khashaba, Al Ghareen and Al Salili sites in the wilayat of Mudhaibi, and the Shanna site in the wilayat of Al Qabil. He noted that the Al Maysar and Samad sites in Mudhaibi are among the oldest, with their history dating back to the third millennium BC.

MHT is collaborating with other authorities to preserve these archaeological sites and uncover their treasures, officials informed.



EA announces new regulations for wild animals in captivity

Muscat - Dr Abdullah al Amri, chairman of the Environment Authority, has issued an administrative decision (no 150/2024) to regulate individual possession of wild animals in captivity.

The new regulations define wild mammals raised in designated centres or private pens, whether local or imported, as 'domesticated wild animals'. The species brought under the purview of the new decision are Arabian gazelle, Arabian sand gazelle, Nubian ibex, Arabian tahr, and Arabian oryx.

Possession or transfer of these animals requires a licence from the Environment Authority, it reminded.

To obtain a licence, an applicant must be an Omani national having suitable facilities for breeding according to the nature of each animal. They must also adhere to all conditions set forth in the regulations and pay the prescribed fees, the decision stated.

The authority will review licence applications and make a decision within 30 working days. If an application is re-

jected, the decision will be explained; and the applicant can appeal within 60 days, providing reasons and supporting documents for fresh approval.

Licensees are required to bear the transportation cost of these animals and they must obtain approval from the authority before any transfer or disposal. They must install microchips or ear tags on animals and avoid mixing them with other species for breeding purposes, EA stated. Furthermore, releasing these animals into the wild would require the authority's approval, and any birth or death must be reported.

'Specialists from the authority or an assigned company will conduct periodic inspections of the facilities where these animals are kept,' EA informed.

The decision aims to ensure proper management and conservation of wild animals in captivity, aligning with Oman's broader environmental and biodiversity goals.

It will come into effect after 180 days from July 29.



WHO delegation reviews Oman's healthcare system

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) welcomed a delegation of experts from the WHO's Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and its headquarters in Geneva on Sunday.

The visit of WHO experts to the sultanate has been scheduled to review Oman's healthcare system, an official release stated. 'It is part of a joint effort between the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization to conduct a comprehensive assessment of Oman's health system, one of the most advanced in the region.'

H E Dr Ahmed bin Salem al Mandhari, Undersecretary for Health Planning and Regulation Affairs; H E Dr Saeed bin Hareb al Lamki, Undersecretary for Health Affairs; Dr Fatima bint

Mohammed al Ajmi, chairperson of the Oman Medical Speciality Board; Dr Nasser bin Hammad al Azri, Director General of Human Resources at MoH; and other ministry officials were present in Sunday's meeting.

The assessment aims to identify Oman's strengths, address its weaknesses, evaluate its health policies, and propose recommendations to enhance the system's overall performance. The goal is to provide high-quality healthcare that meets the needs of the population.

The ministry, in collaboration with various relevant authorities, is committed to improving the quality of health services to ensure that the health system effectively responds to national and regional needs.

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Oman's bank credit up 3.2% in May, deposits jump 9.2%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Total outstanding credit extended by Oman's banking sector grew by 3.2% year-on-year to reach RO31.1bn at the end of May 2024, the latest statistics released by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) showed.

Of the total bank lending, credit to the sultanate's private sector grew by 3.1% year-on-year to reach RO26.1bn as of May 2024, the CBO said in its monthly statistical bulletin.

The shares of the non-financial corporate sector and household sector (mainly under personal loans) in total private sector credit stood at 45.4% and 45.3%, respectively. The share of financial corporations was 5.7%, and other sectors received the remaining 3.6% of total private sector credit.

The growth in total banking sector credit was mainly contributed by Islamic banking entities while conventional banks reported slow growth in lending. The combined balance sheet of conventional banks showed a year-on-year growth of just 1.3% in total outstanding credit as of end-May 2024.

The conventional banks' credit to the private sector increased by 1.1% to RO20.3bn, while their overall investments in securities went up by 20.8% to RO5.6bn. The conventional banks' investment in government develop-



Total assets of Islamic banks and windows grew by 17.4% on a year-on-year basis to RO7.6bn and constituted about 18.1% of the banking system's assets at the end of May 2024

ment bonds decreased by 9% to RO1.9bn, while their investments in foreign securities dramatically increased by 80.6% to RO2.2bn at the end of May 2024.

By contrast, Islamic banking entities provided total financing of RO6.4bn at the end of May 2024, recording a robust growth of 16.7% over that a year ago.

The total assets of Islamic banks and windows grew by 17.4% on a year-on-year basis to RO7.6bn and constituted about 18.1% of the banking system's assets at the end of May 2024.

Robust growth in deposits

The data issued by the central

bank indicated that total deposits held with the banking sector registered a robust year-on-year growth of 9.2% to RO30.0bn at the end of May 2024. Total private sector deposits grew even higher at a 14% rate to RO20.4bn.

In terms of the sector-wise composition of private sector deposits, the share of household deposits stood at 50.4%, followed by non-financial corporations at 29.4%, financial corporations at 17.4%, and other sectors at 2.8%.

Aggregate deposits held with Oman's conventional banks in-

creased by 7.1% year-on-year to RO23.9bn at end-May 2024. The government deposits with conventional banks witnessed a decrease of 3.8% to RO5.2bn. Deposits from public enterprises decreased 1.5% to RO1.7bn.

Private sector deposits, which accounted for 67.8% of total deposits with conventional banks, increased by 9.9% as of May 2024 to reach RO16.2bn.

Total deposits held with Islamic banks and windows surged by 23.5% to RO6bn as of May 2024.

Interest rates rise

According to the CBO's data, the weighted average interest rate on Omani rial deposits with conventional banks witnessed an increase from 2.242% at end-May 2023 to 2.627% at end-May 2024.

On the other hand, the weighted average lending rate increased from 5.443% a year ago to 5.621% in May 2024.

Meanwhile, the overnight Omani rial domestic inter-bank lending rate also rose to 5.501% in May 2024 from 5.295% a year ago, the data showed.

'This rise in interest rates is an outcome of the increase in the average repo rate for liquidity injection by the CBO to 6.0% from 5.726% a year ago, moving with US Federal Reserve,' the Central Bank of Oman said in its monthly bulletin.



Bank Muscat Money Market Fund's AUM jumps 170% in 2024

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Muscat Money Market Fund, Oman's first money market fund, on Sunday announced that its assets under management (AUM) have crossed RO155mn mark as on July 2, 2024, recording robust AUM growth of over 170% during 2024.

The fund continues to retain its top position as the largest open-ended mutual fund in Oman. At the end of Q2 2024, Bank Muscat Money Market Fund registered strong performance with net annualised return of 5.35%, according to a press statement.

The superior performance and growth in the fund's AUM are a testimony of the continued patronage of its investors. The fund continues to generate attractive returns higher than the typical alternatives available for short to medium term investment with relatively lower risk.

Investors can subscribe to the fund with a minimum subscrip-

tion amount as low as RO500 per transaction for both individuals and institutional investors. Moreover, the fund does not charge any subscription or redemption fees.

Bank Muscat Money Market Fund provides daily liquidity to its investors and the flexibility to redeem their investments quickly and conveniently. This ensures that investors have access to their funds as and when they need it. Further, investors have the flexibility to withdraw their investments, fully or partially, together with the returns and the total redemption proceeds are credited back into investors' bank account within two business days from the date of submission of the redemption request.

Bank Muscat Money Market Fund predominately invests in deposits and fixed-income instruments of leading financial institutions in Oman and the GCC region and its investments are primarily held in Omani rial and US dollar.

Red Sea shipping crisis worsens after Israel-Houthi attacks

Nik Martin

Maritime traffic through the Red Sea - the vital waterway carrying goods from Asia to Europe - had already fallen by nearly 80% when Yemen's Houthi rebels and Israel escalated their spillover conflict from the Gaza war last weekend.

The Iran-backed Houthi militia recently attacked the Israeli city of Tel Aviv from more than 2,000km to the south, killing one person. Israel retaliated a day later with its first-ever airstrikes on Yemen's port city of Hodeida, which the Houthis control, killing six people and wounding 83 others, the Health Ministry in Yemen said.

Last year, the Houthis began attacking ships in the Red Sea in response to Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza, forcing shipping lines to reroute their vessels via southern Africa.

Dozens of ships still ply Red Sea route

Despite the risk, some ships are still opting for the Red Sea route, with dozens of vessels still traversing the waterway that, at its narrowest point, is only 30km wide. The website marinetraffic.com showed more than a dozen ships moving along the Red Sea, with many more in the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea to the south of Yemen and Oman.

"It was larger, international container ships that were being targeted [by the Houthis]," Emily Stausboll, a senior shipping analyst at the Denmark-based Xaneta consultancy, told DW. "Smaller, regional vessels haven't been fired at to the same extent."

Stausboll said despite the risk of attack, smaller operators had decided they could still traverse the Red Sea "reasonably safely."



A US-led coalition is in the Middle East region to protect maritime trade from Houthi attacks, as seen in this image taken of a Houthi helicopter (DW)

Most shipping firms have rerouted their vessels to avoid drone attacks by Yemen-based Houthi rebels. But Israel's strike on the Red Sea port of Hodeida marks a major escalation that could further hurt maritime trade

China and Russia were also told privately by the Houthis that their vessels would not be touched, news agency Bloomberg reported in March. The attacks have also been less severe on shipping carrying commodities on bulk carriers and tankers, instead targeting container ships.

Hodeida attack

While Hodeida, which sits along the Red Sea in western Yemen, is not a major stop for international container ships, the facility is Yemen's principal port and a vital entry point for up to 80% of fuel imports, food and other humanitarian aid to the Arabian Penin-

sula's poorest country.

Completed in 1961 with help from the Soviet Union, Hodeida was seized by the Houthis in 2015 during Yemen's civil war and was attacked three years later by Saudi Arabia, which led the military campaign to restore the country's former, internationally recognised government. The United Nations later agreed on a package of \$50.52mn to repair damage to the port from the war.

Shipping costs remain elevated

The rerouted trade avoiding the Red Sea has meanwhile, caused congestion at ports in Asia and Europe and spiked shipping costs. Rerouting ships around South Africa's Cape of Good Hope takes up to two weeks longer than through the Suez Canal - the extra fuel alone is estimated to cost \$1mn per sailing, according to LSEG Shipping Research.

Container ship prices from the post-COVID supply chain issues helped spark inflation two years ago and there are concerns an escalation between Israel and the Houthis could have a further knock-on effect on consumer prices.

DW

UAE, Morocco finalise Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement

Rabat, Morocco - The United Arab Emirates and Morocco have finalised the terms of a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) that will launch a new chapter of mutually beneficial trade and investment ties between the two countries.

The conclusion of negotiations was confirmed by the signing of a joint statement by Dr Thani bin Ahmed al Zeyoudi, UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Trade, and Ryad Mezzour, Minister of Industry and Trade of the Kingdom of Morocco.

Upon implementation, the UAE-Morocco CEPA will facilitate the free flow of goods and services by reducing or removing tariffs, eliminating unnecessary barriers to trade, improving market access for services, enhancing customs harmonisation and establishing flexible rules of origin for goods.

It will also establish platforms for investment and private-sector collaboration in priority sectors such as renewable energy, tourism, infrastructure, mining, food security, transport, logistics, and ICT.

The two nations shared



The UAE-Morocco free trade agreement will facilitate the free flow of goods and services by reducing or removing tariffs and eliminating unnecessary barriers to trade (WAM)

\$1.3bn in non-oil trade in 2023, an increase of 30% on 2022 and 83% more than was recorded in 2019. The UAE is the largest Arab investor in Morocco with more than \$15bn invested in a variety of strategic projects.

Dr Zeyoudi welcomed the latest step in the UAE's foreign agenda. He said, "The UAE-Morocco Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement is a valuable addition to our CEPA programme. This agreement will

enable us to further develop areas of mutual benefit, particularly in sectors such as tourism, energy, manufacturing and agriculture, and generate long-term prosperity for both peoples. Morocco is one the largest and most competitive economies in Africa and we look forward to working in unison to create new opportunities for our private sectors."

Morocco is the sixth largest economy on the African continent. In 2023, its GDP was

\$152.4bn and is expected to grow by a further 3.5% in 2024. While agriculture remains the largest employer, the services sector is the largest contributor to GDP accounting for 54%, with the industrial sector contributing 23%.

The UAE's CEPA programme aims to increase the country's non-oil foreign trade to AED4tn by expanding relations with strategically important markets around the world.

WAM

Russia aims 38bcm gas exports to China in 2025

Moscow, Russia - Russia plans to increase its annual natural gas shipping capacity to 38bn cubic meters (bcm) to China next year, Russian Deputy Energy Minister Sergey Mochalnikov announced.

The country's natural gas deliveries to China via the Power of Siberia pipeline surpassed planned targets last

year, Mochalnikov said.

Russia exceeded the planned deliveries in 2023 by 800mn cubic meters and reached 22.7bcm, he said.

A total of 68bcm of natural gas has been shipped through the Power of Siberia pipeline since it became operational, Mochalnikov added.

With oil pipelines to China

operating at full capacity, he said that Russia is exploring increased maritime oil exports to the country from Black Sea and Baltic Sea ports.

Russia is ready to support companies in this regard, he added.

The Power of Siberia pipeline, built by Gazprom in Eastern Siberia between 2015

and 2019, transports natural gas from Russia's Yakutia region to China.

As exports to Europe, one of Russia's main energy markets, significantly reduced due to sanctions, the country aims to offset this decline by boosting exports to Asian markets, especially China.

Anadolu Agency

Trump vows US will be 'Bitcoin superpower'

Washington, US – US Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump laid out his plan Saturday to ensure that the US will be the crypto capital of the planet and the Bitcoin superpower of the world.

"If crypto is going to define the future, I want it mined, minted and made in the USA," he told the Bitcoin Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. "It is not going to be made anywhere else."

"Bitcoin is going to the moon and I want America to be the nation that leads the way," he added.

Trump said he is proud to be the first major party nominee in American history to accept donations in Bitcoin and crypto.

"This is (like) the steel industry 100 years ago," Trump said about Bitcoin. "In 15 years, Bitcoin has become the most valu-



Former US President Donald Trump made remarks at the Bitcoin Conference in Nashville, Tennessee on Saturday

able asset anywhere in the world, it is already bigger than Exxon-Mobil," he added, referring to the largest energy company in the US.

Trump described his reason for taking the podium at the much-anticipated conference by cryptocurrency enthusiasts in two words – "America First."

"If we don't do it, China and others will do it. So, let's do it first and let's do it right," said Trump. "We cannot let China dominate. I want the US to be first in technology, science, manufacturing, artificial intelligence (AI) and space."

While Bitcoin mining consumes a lot much energy, according to critics, Trump said the US will be producing more electricity in the future than its own total consumption.

Trump noted that around 175mn people are involved in

some form of Bitcoin and cryptocurrencies.

He criticised the US administration of Joe Biden for regulations on cryptocurrencies and the industry.

"In three and a half years, the current administration has waged a war on crypto and Bitcoin like nobody has seen before," he said. "They target your banks, they choke on your financial services, they block Americans from transferring their money to exchanges, they slander you as criminals."

He also criticised Vice President Kamala Harris, who has become the presumptive presidential candidate of Democrats after Biden withdrew from the race.

"Kamala is worse than Joe. She is a radical left lunatic," said Trump. "She is against crypto."

Trump also criticised the US

Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) because he said the market watchdog is "obliterating Bitcoin."

"The reason could not be more clear because Bitcoin stands for freedom, sovereignty and independence from government coercion," he said. "The Biden-Harris administration's repression of crypto and Bitcoin is wrong, and it is very bad for our country, and it is quite un-American," he added.

Trump argued that if the Republicans do not win the election, "the country will be in bad shape," adding, "We have to fight and we have to win."

"I pledge to the Bitcoin community the day that I take the oath of the office, Joe Biden-Kamala Harris' anti-crypto crusade will be over. It will end. It will be done," he added.

Anadolu Agency

US consumer sentiment at lowest level in 8 months

Washington, US – US consumer sentiment in July stood at its lowest level in eight months, according to the final results from the University of Michigan's consumer survey.

The index of consumer sentiment decreased 1.8 points to 66.4 in July, from 68.2 in June.

The preliminary estimate released two weeks ago showed the index at 66.0.

"July's reading was a statistically insignificant 1.8 index points below June, well under the margin of error," Surveys of Consumers Director Joanne Hsu said in a statement."

"Sentiment has lifted 33% above the June 2022 historic low, but it remains guarded as high prices continue to drag down attitudes, particularly for those with lower incomes," she added.

Hsu noted that continued election uncertainty is likely to generate volatility in economic attitudes in the months ahead.

Year-ahead inflation expectations, declined for the second consecutive month, falling to 2.9% in July, from 3.3% in June.

Long-run inflation expectations, meanwhile, came in at 3% ,unchanged from last month.



India actively taking steps to become global hub for manufacturing: Lazard

New Delhi, India – India has maintained its fastest economic growth and is actively taking steps to become a global manufacturing center, according to the global financial services firm Lazard.

In its latest report titled "Outlook on Emerging Markets," the global firm recognised India's strong demographic dividend, and said that the country will reap the benefit of its younger population, helping it to drive growth until 2060.

"With a young and growing labour force – nearly 80% of its population is under the age of 50 – and a rising middle class with real wage growth, India has a demographic dividend tailwind, in our view, and the country is projected to grow quickly until the 2060s," the report stated.

It said, "During his first two terms, Modi's governments have stabilised India's macroeconomy, integrated millions of people into the digital economy, and imple-

mented tax and other reforms."

The report further added that PM Modi's pledge to turn India into a developed country by 2047 will remain a key component of his third term. However, the report highlighted that India still faces significant challenges in the education and agriculture sectors.

Notably, India has been making efforts to strengthen its manufacturing sector, as seen in the Union Budget 2024-25.

To support the manufacturing sector, this year's budget provided an extension of the limit for Mudra loans from Rs1mn to Rs2mn. The government will provide financial support for setting up of 50 multi-product food irradiation units in the MSME sector. The government will facilitate the provision of a wide array of services to labour, including those for employment and skilling, as announced in the Union Budget 2024-25.

ANI

Sembcorp Salalah سيمبكورب صلالة				
MANAGEMENT DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS				
For six-month period ended 30 June 2024 (1H2024), the Company has recorded a profit after tax (PAT) of RO 11.40 million as compared to RO 10.59 million earned in corresponding period 2023 (1H2023). The profit after tax increased mainly due to higher capacity charge and lower net finance cost in 1H2024 as compared to 1H2023.				
Financial performance				
Key financial performance indicators are shown below:				
	1H2024	1H2023		
	RO million	RO million		
Revenue	41.39	39.36		
EBITDA	21.32	21.29		
PBIT	15.75	15.68		
Profit after tax	11.40	10.59		
1H2024 Profit after tax				
Profit after tax has increased from RO 10.59 million in 1H2023 to RO 11.40 million in 1H2024.				
A brief analysis and characteristics of the major components of the profit or loss is presented below:				
Revenue				
Power contributed 48% (excluding fuel charge), water 20% and fuel charge 32% to the total revenue. Revenue was increased by RO 2.04 million mainly due to increase in fixed capacity charge and fuel charge as compared to the corresponding period previous year. Fixed capacity charge increased due to tariff inflation index and leap year impact. Fuel charge revenue increased by RO 1.37 million mainly due to increase in gas price and increase in plant load factor. Fuel charge revenue is a pass through and is calculated based on consumption of natural gas as computed by the plant's contractual Fuel Demand Model. Actual heat rate is better than the contracted Fuel Demand Model.				
Cost of sales				
Cost of sales mainly comprises depreciation of property, plant and equipment, fuel cost, operations & maintenance (O&M) cost and Long-Term Service Agreement (LTSA) cost. Cost of sales increased by RO 1.89 million compared to the same period in 2023, mainly due to higher fuel cost, LTSA cost and O&M cost. The increase in fuel cost was in line with the increase in the fuel charge revenue. LTSA costs increased due to the increase in chargeable Factor Fired Hours and increase in inflation index. O&M costs increased due to increase in planned maintenance of the plant.				
Net finance cost				
Net finance cost decreased by RO 0.94 million in 1H2024 compared to 1H2023 due to the scheduled repayment of part of the term loan in line with the financing documents and higher finance income.				
Income tax expense				
Income tax expenses increased due to increase in profit for 1H2024 as compared to the corresponding period previous year.				
Business outlook				
We will remain focused on maximising shareholder returns through a continued watch on the financial and operational performance of the Company. The Company expects to achieve its targeted results for the financial year 2024.				
Statement of profit and loss and other comprehensive income for the six-month period ended 30 June 2024				
	Unaudited For three months period ended 30 June 2024	Unaudited For three months period ended 30 June 2023	Unaudited For six months period ended 30 June 2024	Unaudited For six months period ended 30 June 2023
	RO	RO	RO	RO
Revenue	22,015,164	21,335,091	41,393,931	39,357,218
Cost of sales	(13,175,176)	(12,632,783)	(25,424,956)	(23,534,024)
Gross profit	8,839,988	8,702,308	15,968,975	15,823,194
Administrative and general expenses	(160,059)	(144,134)	(380,818)	(306,829)
Other income	83,848	97,273	157,681	168,445
Profit before interest and tax	8,763,777	8,655,447	15,745,838	15,684,810
Finance income	160,928	180,100	416,274	405,161
Finance costs	(1,261,722)	(1,724,561)	(2,693,857)	(3,631,317)
Profit before income tax	7,662,983	7,110,986	13,468,255	12,458,654
Income tax expense	(1,198,787)	(1,068,502)	(2,071,435)	(1,872,506)
Profit after tax for the period	6,464,196	6,042,484	11,396,820	10,586,148
Other comprehensive income items that may be reclassified to profit or loss				
Fair value of cash flow hedge adjustments – gross	161,327	816,935	662,719	618,276
Reclassification to profit or loss - gross	(192,566)	(178,969)	(432,120)	(178,108)
Deferred tax asset on change in fair value of cash flow hedge	4,682	(95,697)	(34,590)	(66,025)
Other comprehensive income for the period	(26,557)	542,269	196,009	374,143
Total comprehensive income for the period	6,437,639	6,584,753	11,592,829	10,960,291
Earnings per share:				
Basic and diluted earnings per share	0.0068	0.0063	0.0119	0.0111
Statement of financial position as at 30 June 2024				
	Unaudited as at 30 June 2024	Unaudited as at 30 June 2023	Audited as at 31 December 2023	
	RO	RO	RO	
Assets				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	232,795,673	243,366,424	238,116,599	
Right of use assets	588,682	634,170	601,689	
Derivative financial instruments	107,923	223,450	-	
Total non-current assets	233,492,278	244,224,044	238,718,288	
Current assets				
Inventories	5,941,445	5,660,142	5,795,556	
Trade and other receivables	10,389,777	9,778,100	9,115,180	
Current portion of derivative financial instruments	434,725	622,247	456,508	
Bank deposits	12,685,979	20,900,492	17,615,780	
Cash and cash equivalents	5,694,568	4,092,040	1,326,499	
Total current assets	35,146,494	41,053,021	34,309,523	
Total assets	268,638,772	285,277,065	273,027,811	
Equity and Liabilities				
Equity				
Share capital	95,457,195	95,457,195	95,457,195	
Legal reserve	18,014,872	15,881,188	16,875,190	
Retained earnings	56,338,440	46,681,002	48,467,732	
Hedging reserve	445,853	718,840	249,844	
Total equity	170,256,360	158,738,225	161,049,961	
Liabilities				
Non-current liabilities				
Long term loans	38,653,414	61,849,112	50,787,450	
Long term lease liabilities	613,122	575,694	593,820	
Asset retirement obligation	838,197	805,414	811,813	
Deferred tax liabilities	24,558,380	24,800,227	24,644,492	
Deferred revenue	781,353	980,431	880,348	
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	137,837	
Total non-current liabilities	65,444,466	89,010,878	77,855,760	
Current liabilities				
Current portion of long term loans	23,517,264	25,973,449	23,517,264	
Trade and other payables	7,216,162	9,590,918	6,810,040	
Current tax payable	2,204,520	1,963,595	3,794,786	
Total current liabilities	32,937,946	37,527,962	34,122,090	
Total liabilities	98,382,412	126,538,840	111,977,850	
Total equity and liabilities	268,638,772	285,277,065	273,027,811	
Net assets per share	0.178	0.166	0.169	
Sembcorp Salalah Power & Water Company SAOG P.O. Box 1466, Salalah, Postal Code 211, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: +968 2323 8510; Fax: +968 2323 8512, www.sembcorpssalah.com.om				

Lulu celebrates Oman-India trade relations with exclusive promotion

Lulu, the leading hypermarket chain in Oman, has begun a new promotion to celebrate the finest flavours of India.

In collaboration with the Indian Embassy and APEDA, Lulu will be offering a wide selection of premium Indian Basmati rice, meat and poultry products at exceptional value on a wide range.

This event was inaugurated by H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman in the presence of senior delegates from APEDA, and Lulu Oman management at Lulu Baushar on July 23, a release stated.

Speaking at the inauguration, the Indian Ambassador emphasised on the importance of the historic and robust trade collaboration between Oman and India and hoped that initiatives like these will further the cause. India is acknowledged as an agricultural powerhouse with exports to over 200 countries.

"We are delighted on being a facilitator with APEDA, the apex body for export of agriculture, meat and poultry products from India to have aggregated more than 30 exhibitors for this event."

He even appreciated Lulu, the leading retailer with an unmatched presence in Oman and expressed confidence that this



event will help propagate the strength of the Indian produce to customers in Oman.

"We are very happy to associate with the Indian Embassy on

this unique initiative and are quite confident that this will provide a fillip to the agriculture and poultry sectors back in India," said Ananth A V - Director Oman &

India, Lulu Hypermarket. "This event is a wonderful example of how food can connect people across borders and will also offer Lulu customers a window to ex-

perience the quality of these products from India," he added. Basmati rice, known as the 'King of Rice', is a long-grain variety prized for its delicate aroma,

exquisite taste, and fluffy texture. Grown in the fertile areas of India, Basmati rice is cultivated using traditional methods that have been perfected for generations.

We are delighted on being a facilitator with APEDA, the apex body for export of agriculture, meat and poultry products from India, to have aggregated more than 30 exhibitors for this event

H E AMIT NARANG

Lulu will present a diverse selection of popular Indian Basmati rice brands during the event and customers can discover the perfect Basmati rice to elevate their everyday meals or create an unforgettable Indian feast.

This promotion also features a delightful selection of Indian poultry products. Renowned for their freshness and flavour, Indian meat and poultry offerings are a healthy and versatile protein source.

As part of this campaign, Lulu is showcasing a variety of products, perfect for creating classic Indian curries, biryanis, or tandoori favourites.



Sports Spark begins summer camp for kids

Muscat Governorate pursues to provide the best summer experiences for children to fill their vacation times.

The summer camp activities, accompanying the 'Sports Spark 2024' event, were launched at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. It will run until August 24, from 9am to 1pm, for children in the age group 6 to 14 years. The camp activities include a variety of recreational and educational activities and events. They include sports activities such as football, badminton, basketball, volleyball, and ninja challenge.

In addition to other games, such as electronic and board

games, arts and crafts, learning life skills, ninja challenges, and many more. These activities come within the framework of Muscat Governorate's keenness to encourage children to practice sports and physical activities, and offer an enjoyable and healthy experience for them during the summer vacation.

It gives them the opportunity to practice new sports and participate in inspiring educational activities. Also, friendships' forming and strengthening social relationships by participating in different sports teams.

Summer camp activities are being held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center.

SOHAR begins 2nd 'Maseer' programme to enrich minds of young innovators

SOHAR Port and Freezone's pioneering summer programme 'Maseer' 2024 has commenced, welcoming more than 350 students from the wilayats of Liwa and Suhar.

This year's three week-long initiative, conducted in partnership with Kidcity, aims to provide students in grades 5 to 11 with advanced technical knowledge tailored to meet the demands of tomorrow's burgeoning industries.

As the second edition of this programme, Maseer is set to foster development in innovative thinking, adaptability, and confidence, nurturing young minds to think outside the box and develop innovative solutions.

It will arm the youth of the nation with the tools and skills needed to navigate an ever-evolving technical landscape and enable students to excel both individually and as part of a team.

Building on the success of 2023's inaugural programme, which featured a diverse array of workshops covering essential



topics such as on cybersecurity, artificial intelligence (AI), cloud data, smart cities development, web development, Arduino programming, 3D computer-aided design (CAD), photography and photo editing and renewable energy solutions, this year's Maseer programme has been enhanced with even more specialised training workshops, led

by renowned experts in their respective fields.

Students will have the unique opportunity to apply their newfound knowledge by creating innovative projects and presentations, further honing their skills and pushing the boundaries of their creativity.

"Youth are agents of change and progress. Investing in their

future is not only a responsibility but a privilege," expressed Mohammed bin Ali Shezawi, Vice President of People and Support Services at SOHAR.

"Through the Maseer programme, we aim to nurture the next generation of innovators, problem-solvers and leaders who will shape the future of Oman. By equipping these tal-

ented students with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in an increasingly competitive job market and ever-evolving digital world, we are empowering Oman's youth to become the driving force behind our nation's success and prosperity."

Maseer programme is part and parcel of SOHAR's commitment to advancing social welfare and socio-economic community development centred on cultivating a culture of innovation and knowledge-sharing. By investing in education and vocational training through programmes such as Maseer, SOHAR aims to promote sustainable progress, support job creation, and enable the youth to reach their full potential.

As one of the fastest-growing ports in the world, SOHAR Port and Freezone continues to leverage on its strategic location and enhance its services, positioning itself as a key logistics hub within the region and across the world boasting container, liquids, dry and break-bulk terminals.

Amouage presents Wadi Dawkah frankincense oil at Harrods in London

Amouage, the Omani High Perfumery House, has introduced its special frankincense oil to the audience and attendees at the Harrods fragrance week in London.

The Wadi Dawkah Omani Frankincense Essential Oil was initially revealed by Amouage exclusively to industry professionals attending the World Perfumery Congress held in Geneva, Switzerland, in June.

'Now, the house unveiled the natural ingredient to a different and broader audience as part of Harrods fragrance week for members of the press and key partners', the company stated in a release.

The historic yet visionary London luxury department store, known for its grandeur and home to the Salon de Parfums, always

had the philosophy to curate an extensive and exclusive assortment of products from around the world.

It was the first time that Amouage provided a unique opportunity to experience the pure, raw, natural ingredient: The Wadi Dawkah Omani Frankincense Essential Oil. Offering a rare experience usually exclusive to perfume professionals, the audience was exposed to something unique in its purest form before it will be used by perfumers in their future and fine creations.

Amouage, known for creating some of the finest fragrances around the world, created the Wadi Dawkah Omani Frankincense Essential Oil in collaboration with the exclusive



ingredients partner dsm-firmenich. The essential oil has a unique olfactory profile that intends to inspire contemporary creations in fine perfumery,

blending tradition and innovation and building bridges between heritage and posterity.

The collaboration in synchronicity between dsm-fir-

menich and Amouage aims to make the Wadi Dawkah Omani Frankincense Essential Oil available in Amouage creations while it also holds the promise of

broader availability to other fine perfumery houses that share the house's values of excellence and authenticity.

The natural ingredient is one of the outcomes of a larger project in Oman's Southern region

The essential oil distilled from the first hand-harvest of frankincense resins from Wadi Dawkah was premiered in its purest form at one of the world's most famous, visionary, and iconic destinations for luxury

that has fallen under the patronage of Amouage since the end of 2022: The Wadi Dawkah UNESCO World Heritage Site. A protected sanctuary on whose

Dawkah Omani Frankincense Essential Oil is distilled.

The aim is now to establish the essential oil distillation unit on the site.

Edge of conflict: Security dilemmas intensifying in NATO's eastern flank

Istanbul, Turkey - The new security pact between Poland and Ukraine, alongside the US\$2bn military aid package from the US to Poland, significantly intensifies the defence landscape in Eastern Europe. Concurrently, China's military drills in Belarus, coinciding with the recent NATO summit, add layers of complexity to the geopolitical situation. These developments raise a critical question: Could the dangerous spillover effects of the war in Ukraine escalate into a wider conflict that might embrace the entire continent?

Security risks

NATO's bolstered presence in Eastern Europe, especially in Poland and the Baltic states, presents a paradox: On paper, it acts as a deterrent against Russian expansion for these nations, yet Moscow views it as a provocation. Poland's initiative to intercept Russian missiles and drones over Ukrainian airspace, while theoretically enhancing its security, actually puts it in a vulnerable position. Additionally, by training Ukrainian soldiers, Poland deepens its ties with Ukraine, possibly making itself a target for Russian reprisals. These developments necessitate Poland working closely with its allies to further strengthen its defences.

The US's US\$2bn military assistance loan to Poland underscores Washington's commitment to bolstering NATO's eastern flank. This funding is designed to modernise Poland's military capabilities, ostensibly preparing it for potential threats. However, it also signals to Russia that NATO is pushing



Soldiers move with tanks through the Vistula River with a portable military bridge during the DRAGON-24 NATO military defense drills on March 4, 2024 in Korzeniewo, Poland

Steps taken by Poland, NATO, and the EU underscore a determination to prevent the spread of war, but they also highlight a dangerous trend toward escalation

the envelope eastwards and ready for any potential conflict.

Poland's readiness for full-scale conflict has become a pressing concern, emphasised by Army Chief of Staff General

Wieslaw Kukula's recent statements. Amid escalating tensions, Warsaw has boosted its defence spending to over four per cent of its GDP this year in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Since February 2022, Poland has provided significant military aid to Ukraine, including tanks, fighter jets, combat helicopters, artillery systems, and air defence missile systems worth over US\$4.4bn, underscoring its commitment to securing its borders from Russian influence.

Amid Poland's efforts to reinforce defences and its deepening military ties with Ukraine, NATO's strategic focus on strengthening its eastern flank

gains urgency amidst tensions, which are further complicated by China's recent military manoeuvres near NATO's borders.

China's military exercises with Belarus near NATO's eastern frontier, aligned with the NATO summit on Ukraine, signal a stark warning from Beijing amid escalating tensions. This marks the first such drill since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, stirring apprehensions among NATO's Baltic members. This action in-

troduces added complexity to an already delicate security landscape, where errors could trigger unintended outcomes. The timing and location of these drills are strategically chosen to convey a political message, highlighting their purpose beyond mere military training, as analysts suggest. Amid increasing verbal confrontations from the transatlantic alliance directed at Beijing, China's involvement in drills with Belarus, a close ally of Russia,

serves as a forceful reminder of its military prowess and readiness to respond if necessary.

The broader implications

EU countries bordering Russia are all NATO members, and Russia would not want to see the war expanding to these borders. However, one must admit that Russia is the most prepared country for such a war in terms of military production capacity. The importance of NATO's Article 5 lies in its deterrence before it is put into practice; testing it would be a great risk for both sides and devastating for the world. That is why both sides are cautious while taking their steps very slowly.

Pentagon spokesman Major General Pat Ryder explained the US stance on restricting Ukraine from using long-range ATACMS missiles in Russia, emphasising the need to prevent unintended consequences and escalation that could extend the conflict beyond Ukraine's borders.

Does Europe face a challenge in navigating a world where the distinctions between allies and adversaries are increasingly ambiguous, balancing between preparing for war and tirelessly pursuing peace to render such preparation unnecessary?

As Europe braces for potential escalations, the line between an all-out regional war and broader European involvement becomes increasingly blurred. The steps taken by Poland, NATO, and the EU underscore a determination to prevent the spread of war, but they also highlight a dangerous trend toward escalation.

Anadolu Agency

Philippines' drug war victim receives shred of justice

Manila, The Philippines - At 51 years old, Mary Ann Domingo has finally fulfilled her lifelong dream of graduating from high school. However, she wishes her son, Gabriel, and husband, Luis, could have attended her graduation.

Past midnight on September 15, 2016, a group of 15 to 20 men, some police in uniform, and others in plain clothes wearing masks, burst into Domingo's home for what they claimed was a drug bust operation.

It was the height of the Philippines' anti-drug campaign launched by former President Rodrigo Duterte, and Luis was their target. Domingo said she and her children were dragged out into the street. But Gabriel, 19, refused to leave his father. The police shot and killed them both, claiming the two men had resisted arrest.

In June, four policemen involved in the incident were convicted of homicide by a court in Caloocan City, north of Manila. However, filing a case against the police for allegedly killing her husband and son came at a heavy price. For eight years, Domingo and her family have been constantly moving from threats as part of an informal witness protection programme loosely organised by religious groups and human rights organisations.

"We were exhausted," said Domingo, adding that, as witnesses to the killing, she and her family felt unsafe and fled their home. The scale of the drug-related killings left religious organisations scrambling to provide sanctuary for the dozens of fam-



Mary Ann Domingo holds a portrait of her husband and son (DW)

ilies of those killed.

"They were all so scared. They did not know where they could go or who they could trust. They just knew that they had to run," Jun Santiago, a Redemptorist Brother at the Baclaran Church, told DW.

Years searching for justice

Kristina Conti, secretary general of the National Union of People's Lawyers, has been Domingo's lawyer since 2018. She told DW how Domingo turned her grief into challenging the authorities. "It was groundbreaking for the family of those killed to sue the police. When we filed the case, there was a small shred of hope," said Conti. She added that despite occasional doubts whether the case would move forward, Domingo 'never wavered in her fight for justice'.

Conti said officials tried to cover up police responsibility in the drug war killings.

"We expected a cover-up and encountered it in many ways: in-

complete evidence, withheld documents, a shoddy investigation into the legitimacy of the police operations," she said.

Domingo's witness testimony was their strongest piece of evidence. To bolster her testimony, the bodies of Gabriel and Luis were exhumed for a post-mortem autopsy to determine the cause of death. The findings of the Philippines' premiere forensic pathologist, Dr Raquel Fortun, revealed that the men sustained multiple gunshots indicating an intent to kill.

Santiago was with Domingo during the exhumation and forensic autopsy.

"The forensic autopsy was necessary to gather more evidence, but it was incredibly traumatising for Mary Ann to see her son and husband like that," said Santiago.

On her graduation day, Domingo was surrounded by her family. Eight years ago, they had consoled each other when Gabriel and Luis were buried. DW

Deal inked to counter N Korea

Tokyo, Japan - The defence chiefs of Japan, the US and South Korea on Sunday signed a memorandum to counter North Korea's 'nuclear and missile threats' and other regional security challenges, Kyodo News reported.

The memorandum is aimed at institutionalising the trilateral defence cooperation to sustain policy consultations, information-sharing and joint exercises.

"By signing this memorandum, our trilateral cooperation ... has become more solidified and will not waver, even under changes in international circumstances," Japan's Defence Minister Minoru Kihara told reporters following his meeting with US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and South Korean Defence Minister Shin Won Sik in Tokyo.

The agreements in the memorandum on the Trilateral Security Cooperation Framework, which has already come into effect, in-



clude those on taking turns hosting ministerial meetings every year and closely sharing real-time information about North Korean missiles, according to Kihara.

The move comes amid rising tensions in the South China Sea amid clashes between Chinese and Philippine vessels. Tokyo, Washington and Seoul have been concerned about China's maritime claims in the South China

Sea, while calling for peace and stability over Taiwan, a self-ruled democratic island that Beijing sees as its 'break away' province.

The three ministers, in a joint press statement, also expressed 'grave concern over the increasing military and economic cooperation between North Korea and Russia, vowing to deter nuclear and missile threats posed by Pyongyang. In a thinly-clad reference

to China's assertiveness in the East and South China seas, they 'strongly' opposed any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the waters of the Indo-Pacific.

Earlier, the defence chiefs of South Korea and Japan also held bilateral talks. It was the first visit by South Korea's defence chief to Japan's Defence Ministry in 15 years.

Anadolu Agency

Turkey to deploy military in Somalia

Ankara, Turkey - The Turkish parliament approved a Presidential motion to deploy the military in Somalia for two years to support security against terrorism and other threats under the Turkey-Somalia defence cooperation agreement.

The motion, signed by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said Turkey has been providing training, assistance and advisory support in Somalia for more than 10 years to ensure security and stability and to help restructure that country's defence and security forces to combat terrorism.



The motion highlights that since 2009, the Turkish army has been actively supporting international efforts to combat

piracy, armed robbery and maritime terrorism in the Gulf of Aden, off the coast of Somalia (excluding Somali territorial wa-

ters), the Arabian Sea and adjacent regions.

The support is based on the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation and the UN Security Council resolution of December 16, 2008.

The mandate was most recently extended by the Turkish parliament on January 17 for another year.

The motion notes that Turkey will command Combined Task Force-151 for the seventh time starting in July.

Anadolu Agency



Attacks across Blue Line must stop: UN envoy

Washington, D.C., US - The UN special coordinator for the Middle East peace process on Sunday condemned an 'abhorrent rocket attack' on the northern part of the occupied Golan Heights.

"I urge all to exercise maximum restraint. The launching of rockets across the Blue Line must cease immediately. The Middle East is on the brink; the world and the region cannot afford another open conflict," Tor Wennesland wrote on X on Sunday.

Children continue to bear the burden of the 'horrific violence' plaguing the region, he added.

Meanwhile, the UN mission in Lebanon warned on Sunday of a 'wider conflagration' between Israel and Hezbollah following the deadly attack on the town of Majdal Shams in occupied Golan Heights.

In a joint statement, UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, and head of UN Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) General Aroldo Lazaro Saenz, condemned 'the death of civilians - young children and teenagers - in Majdal Shams'.

They urged 'the parties to exercise maximum restraint and to put a stop to the ongoing intensi-

fied exchanges of fire'.

"It could ignite a wider conflagration that would engulf the entire region in a catastrophe beyond belief," they added.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army killed 66 more Palestinians in attacks in the Gaza Strip, taking the overall death toll to 39,324 since last October 7, the Health Ministry in the enclave said on Sunday. A ministry statement added that some 90,830 other people have been injured in the assault.

"Israeli forces killed 66 people and injured 241 others in three 'massacres' against families in the last 24 hours," the ministry said.

"Many people are still trapped under rubble and on the roads as rescuers are unable to reach them," it added.

Flouting a UN Security Council resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire, Israel has faced international condemnation amid its continued brutal offensive on Gaza since an October 7, 2023 attack by Palestinian group Hamas.

Over nine months into the Israeli war, vast tracts of Gaza lie in ruins amid a crippling blockade of food, clean water and medicine.

Anadolu Agency

11 killed in missile strike on Golan Heights, claims Israel

Jerusalem - At least 11 people were killed and 37 others injured in a missile attack on the northern part of the occupied Golan Heights, the Israeli authorities claimed on Saturday.

While an Israeli army spokesperson accused Hezbollah of the attack, the Lebanese group denied responsibility.

"Our intelligence is clear. Hezbollah is responsible for the killing of innocent children in Majdal Shams," Israel's military spokesman Daniel Hagari said on Saturday, vowing a response.

Hezbollah, however, 'categorically denied' any role in the deadly attack, which comes amid heightened tensions between the two warring sides.

Israel's national ambulance service Magen David Adom said in a statement that 11 people were killed and 37 others injured due to the missile falling on the town of Majdal Shams in the northern Golan Heights.

It added that 17 of the injured are in 'serious' condition.

For its part, the Israeli army said in a statement that Israeli helicopters and army forces, in cooperation with Magen David Adom, are working to evacuate the dead and wounded from Majdal Shams.

Meanwhile, Israeli Channel 12 reported that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is following the operation in Majdal Shams.

Earlier, the Israeli army said that a missile, and not a drone, was fired at Majdal Shams.

"The Islamic Resistance in Lebanon categorically denies the claims made by some enemy media and various media platforms about targeting Majdal Shams," the Lebanese group



Israel's national ambulance service Magen David Adom said that 11 people were killed and 37 others injured due to the missile falling on the town of Majdal Shams in the northern Golan Heights

Hezbollah said in a statement.

Tensions have risen along Lebanon's border with Israel amid cross-border attacks between Hezbollah and Israeli forces as Tel Aviv presses ahead with its deadly offensive on the Gaza Strip, which has killed nearly 39,300 people since last October following a Hamas attack.

'Will pay heavy price'

Meanwhile, Israel PM Netanyahu threatened to make

Hezbollah pay a 'heavy price' for the missile attack.

Netanyahu's office said he spoke via telephone with Sheikh Mowafaq Tarif, the spiritual leader of the Druze community in Israel and told him that Tel Aviv 'will not overlook' the attack.

"Hezbollah will pay a heavy price which it has not paid up to now," said Netanyahu, without providing details.

Netanyahu decided earlier to expedite his return from Washington to Tel Aviv after the attack.

He was scheduled to return on Sunday.

Netanyahu has been since Monday on a visit to Washington, where he met President Joe Biden and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump. He also delivered a speech to the US Congress.

'Fabricated scenario'

Iran, meanwhile, has warned Israel against any 'new adventurism' against Lebanon.

In a statement on Sunday, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani referred to Hezbollah's statement denying its role in the attack and accused Israel of 'seeking to divert public opinion and global attention' from its crimes in the Gaza Strip, where it has killed more than 39,000 Palestinians

since October 7.

He termed the claims made by Israel regarding the Majdal Shams attack a 'fabricated scenario', adding that Tel Aviv 'lacks the minimum moral authority to judge and comment on the incident'.

Kanaani called on the international community, especially the UN Security Council, 'to support the stability and security of Lebanon and the region against the adventurism of the aggressive Zionist regime', referring to Israel.

He stressed that any 'foolish action' by Israel could 'pave the way for increased instability, insecurity, and the flames of war in the region', and said the responsibility for its consequences would rest with Israel.

Anadolu Agency

GRASSLAND DANCE



Locals perform Guozhuang dance on a grassland in Baiyu County, Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in southwest China on Saturday (Xinhua)

Shift in global power predicted

Baile Tusnad, Romania - Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban forecast on Saturday a shift of global power from West to Asia and Russia.

"In the next long decades, maybe centuries, Asia will be the dominant centre of the world," Orban said in a televised speech to ethnic Hungarians at a festival in Baile Tusnad, Romania.

He said China, India, Pakistan, and Indonesia will be the future big powers. "And we Westerners pushed the Russians into this bloc as well," he added.

Currently holding the rotating EU presidency, Hungary has sought closer ties with Beijing and Moscow, a stance that has caused friction within the 27-member bloc. Orban further stirred controversy with surprise visits to Kyiv, Moscow, and Beijing this month to discuss the war in Ukraine that continues for



Asia will be the dominant centre of the world. China, India, Pakistan, and Indonesia will be the future big powers

VIKTOR ORBAN

more than two years.

Contrasting the 'weakness' of the West with Russia's approach, Orban described Russia's role in global affairs as rational and predictable. He praised Russia's economic resilience in adapting to Western sanctions since the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Orban also touched on Russia's domestic policies, noting that its stringent anti-LGBTQ+ measures have enhanced its in-

ternational appeal.

On Ukraine's hopes for membership in the EU and the NATO defence alliance, he said: "Ukraine will never become a member of the EU or NATO because we Europeans do not have enough money for that." He argued that the EU should abandon its identity as a political project and focus instead on economic and defence issues.

Anadolu Agency

Iran: Khamenei formally endorses Masoud Pezeshkian as president

Tehran, Iran - Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei formally endorsed Masoud Pezeshkian as the country's new president on Sunday, weeks after his victory in the presidential election.

At a ceremony in Tehran, attended by top-ranking political and military leaders as well as foreign diplomats, the supreme leader handed over the signed decree to Pezeshkian.

The decree was read out by the head of Khamenei's office, stating that the election concluded with 'calmness and sobriety in difficult conditions', and that the new president is 'ready to as-

sume the great responsibility'.

The 69-year-old reformist lawmaker and cardiac surgeon defeated his conservative rival and former security body chief Saeed Jalili by more than three million votes in the second round of presidential on July 5.

He will succeed Ebrahim Raisi, who was killed in a helicopter crash on May 19 in northwestern Iran, along with seven others.

According to Article 110 of Iran's Constitution, the president-elect assumes office after his formal endorsement by the supreme leader, which will be followed by the inauguration ceremony in parliament.



Pezeshkian's inauguration and oath-taking ceremony will take place on Tuesday, with high-ranking representatives from many countries in attendance.

In his remarks after receiving the endorsement, Pezeshkian pledged to 'pursue justice' and stressed that 'the return of the country's dignity is possible only through unity and adherence to the law'.

"We must join hands to address the problems, needs, and concerns of the beloved people of our country," he said.

Khamenei, in his speech, urged the incoming government to 'work tirelessly' and noted that

economic issues are a priority.

He emphasised that strong ties with countries that have helped Iran in the economic arena should be prioritised, with a focus on neighbouring countries.

Khamenei also praised the Raisi government for its work internally and externally, as well as the diplomacy pursued by the late Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

Meanwhile, Pezeshkian named Mohammad Reza Aref, a veteran reformist politician, as his first vice president. He will replace Mohammad Mokhber who served under President Raisi.

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India, US express commitment to promote free Indo-Pacific

Tokyo, Japan - India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held a meeting with his US counterpart Antony Blinken in Tokyo on Sunday and expressed commitment to promoting a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

During the meeting, the two leaders discussed upcoming opportunities to strengthen collaboration between India and the US on shared priorities, according to the statement released by the US State Department.

In a statement, the US State Department said: "Secretary of State Antony J Blinken met with Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar

today in Tokyo. Secretary Blinken and External Affairs Minister Jaishankar affirmed the United States and India's commitment to promoting a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region."

"The Secretary and the External Affairs Minister discussed upcoming opportunities to deepen US-India collaboration on shared priorities. Secretary Blinken underscored the importance of realising a just and enduring peace for Ukraine consistent with the UN Charter," it added.

US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu and US



India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar meets with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in Tokyo on Sunday (ANI)

State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller were present in the meeting.

Jaishankar said that he and Blinken held talks on regional and global issues. Jaishankar

said that he looked forward to attending the Quad Foreign Ministers Meeting on Monday.

Taking to X, Jaishankar stated: "Great to catch up with @SecBlinken in Tokyo today. Our bilateral agenda progresses steadily. Also had a wide ranging discussion on regional and global issues. Look forward to attending the Quad FMM tomorrow."

Quad is a diplomatic partnership between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States committed to supporting an open, stable, and prosperous Indo-Pacific that is inclusive and resilient, according to Australia's Department of Foreign

Affairs and Trade.

Earlier in the day, Jaishankar unveiled the bust of Mahatma Gandhi at Freedom Plaza in Edogawa, Tokyo.

He attended the ceremony in the presence of Edogawa Mayor, Takeshi Saito, Sibi George, the Ambassador of India to Japan and other ministers, with a group of schoolchildren singing Gandhi's favourite prayer, 'Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram'.

In a post on X, Jaishankar stated: "Started my visit to Tokyo in Edogawa, unveiling bust of Gandhiji. Bapu's achievements continue to inspire us to this day and his mes-

sage of peace and non-violence is timeless. His principles are even more relevant today when the world sees so much conflict, tension and polarisation."

"Thank Mayor Takeshi Saito, Parliamentary Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Masahiro Komura, Member of Parliament Hideo Onishi, members of the Indian community and friends of India for joining us. Happy to learn from the Mayor that the Park, close to the heart of Indian community in Tokyo, would also be soon named as the Gandhi Park," he added.

He also met members of Indian community in Japan. ANI

China: At least 12 killed in landslide

Beijing, China - At least 12 people were killed in southern China's Hunan province when heavy rainfall due to Tropical Storm Gaemi triggered a landslide on Sunday.

The landslide near Hengyang city trapped 18 people, Chinese state broadcaster CCTV reported. Six injured survivors were rescued. The landslide destroyed a local guest-house in Yuelin village early in the morning local time, CCTV reported. Over 240 emergency workers had been dispatched to the scene, the broadcaster said, adding that rescue work was 'continuing urgently'.

A video of the aftermath posted by the state-run Beijing Youth Daily showed mud and debris making their way through a green hillside. An uprooted tree could also be seen lying outside a three-storey building. Chinese media did not directly link the mudslide to Typhoon Gaemi, which weakened into a storm after making landfall in China on Thursday.

However, the China Meteorological Administration said the rain was linked to the tropical storm. DW

Russia in 'final stages' of developing domestic strike systems, says Putin

Putin said such systems would be able to reach important Russian facilities in about 10 minutes

Moscow, Russia - President Vladimir Putin on Sunday said Russia is in the 'final stages' of developing domestic strike systems, warning of 'mirror measures' against plans to deploy US long-range missile systems in Germany.

"Today, the development of a number of such systems is in the final stages. We will take mirror measures for their deployment, taking into account the actions of the United States, their satellites in Europe and other regions of the world," Putin said in an address in the city of St Petersburg during a parade on the occasion of Navy Day. On July 10, Washington and Berlin announced in a joint statement that they will begin 'episodic deployments' of long-range missile capabilities in Germany in 2026.

Describing Washington and Berlin's statements on the de-



Russian President Vladimir Putin accused the US of escalating tensions in connection to the flights of Russian strategic aviation

Today, development of a number of such systems is in final stages. We will take mirror measures for their deployment, taking into account the actions of the US, their satellites in Europe and other regions

VLADIMIR PUTIN

ployment of American long-range missile systems in Germany as 'noteworthy', Putin said such systems would be able to reach important Russian facilities in 'about 10 minutes'.

Putin accused the US of escalating tensions in connection to the flights of Russian strategic

aviation, saying Moscow has not conducted air patrols 'far from its borders' since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

"Russia believed then that there was no longer any need for this: the world had changed, the Cold War was in the past. However, the United States did not re-

spond to this unilateral gesture of goodwill and continued patrolling near our borders," he said.

"Therefore, since 2007, we have resumed such flights. This was a response to the increased activity of US strategic and reconnaissance aviation in regions of the world that are sensitive for Russia. This measure is aimed, among other things, at ensuring security in the Asia-Pacific region."

Meanwhile, on Saturday, Russia claimed that its forces captured the key settlement of Lozovatskoye in Donetsk.

A statement by the Russian Defence Ministry claimed the army had taken control of several important locations on the front line, and liberated the settlement of Lozovatskoye in the Donetsk People's Republic. The statement also noted that during the past day, the Russian forces destroyed two Ukrainian electronic warfare stations, an aviation depot, and an ammunition depot.

It added that Russian air defence systems had shot down 10 US-made HIMARS missiles and 81 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), 37 of which were outside the 'special operation zone'.

The statement further claimed that to date, the Russian army has destroyed 630 Ukrainian aircraft, 278 helicopters, 28,545 UAVs, 556 air defence missile systems and 16,698 tanks and armoured vehicles.

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Anwar, Russia's Lavrov discuss Malaysia's bid to join BRICS

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Visiting Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Sunday met Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim to discuss a string of issues, mainly including Kuala Lumpur's bid to join the BRICS group of emerging economies.

Anwar received Lavrov at the Seri Perdana, the prime minister's office, in Putrajaya. Lavrov is on a two-day visit to Malaysia.

"This potential membership holds substantial promise for both nations and underscores our commitment to fostering robust

international collaboration," the Malaysian premier wrote on Facebook. "We also explored avenues to enhance bilateral cooperation, with a particular focus on strengthening ties in key areas such as investment and trade, science and technology, agriculture, defence and military, education, and tourism and culture."

In June, Anwar confirmed Malaysia's intention to join BRICS to Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

BRICS includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

The two also discussed the ongoing situation in Palestine. "Both Malaysia and Russia underscored the imperative need for a permanent ceasefire, immediate humanitarian relief, and the recognition of Palestine as a full member of the United Nations," Anwar said.

Regarding the conflict in Ukraine, which continues since February 2022, Malaysia reiterated its stance on dialogue and diplomatic efforts as path to a sustainable resolution.

Anadolu Agency

147 killed in Bangladesh protests: Minister

Dhaka, Bangladesh - In first remarks on death toll, Bangladesh Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan confirmed on Sunday that at least 147 people were killed during recent violence triggered by student protests over government job quotas.

Speaking to reporters in Dhaka, Asaduzzaman Khan said the deceased include students, police, activists, and people from various professions, adding that further investigation is underway to determine the total death toll. Independent estimates put the toll at more than 200.

Earlier in the day, the government restored mobile internet services after 10 days of blackout. Junior Minister for Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology Zunaid Ahmed Palak said the services would resume at 3pm local time (0900 GMT).

He said that since customers were not able to use the packages they had paid for, users will get a 5 GB data bonus for three days.

Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok



and YouTube, however, still remain restricted.

The government had shut mobile internet on July 17 and broadband service on July 18 amid escalating violence during the protests.

Broadband internet resumed on July 23, and a curfew imposed to handle the law and order situation has started to relax. Schools and other educational institutions remain closed.

Clashes started on July 15 be-

tween the police and student protesters demanding an end to a quota that reserved 30 per cent of government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in the 1971 war of independence.

In the wake of the chaos, the Supreme Court ordered the government to scale back job quotas. The 30 per cent quota for veterans' descendants was cut to five per cent, and quota for ethnic minorities, transgender people and disabled people was limited to

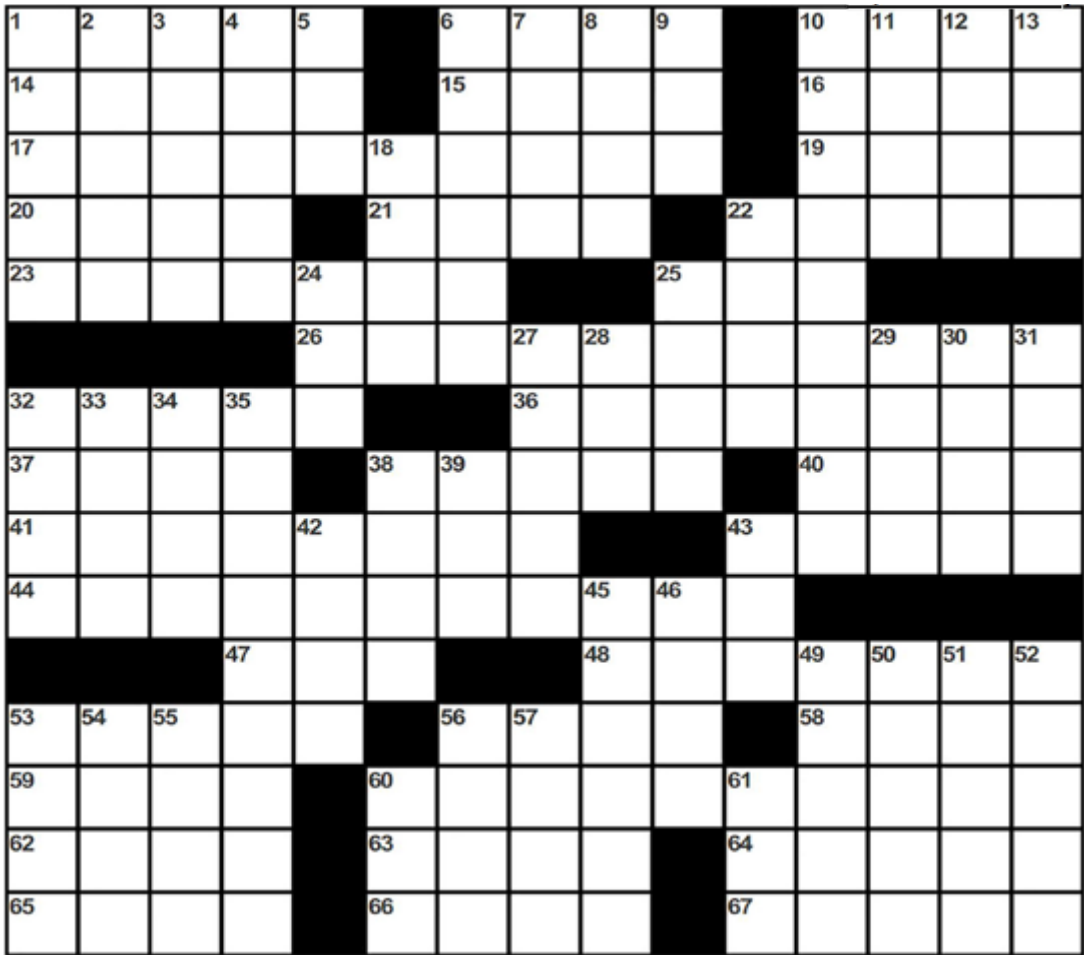
two per cent.

Amid escalating protests, clashes, and acts of vandalism related to the quota reform movement, law enforcement agencies across Bangladesh have launched a series of extensive raids, causing widespread apprehension among the population.

In Dhaka, law enforcers have adopted a strategic approach, dividing the city into designated zones for targeted operations.

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DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Literary miser Mamer
- 6) Saintly ring
- 10) Mansard overhang
- 14) Highly skilled
- 15) Partner of anon
- 16) Marvel Comics super-heroes
- 17) Joking, at the wrestling match?
- 19) Await action
- 20) Colorado ski mecca
- 21) Snow Queen in Disney's "Frozen"
- 22) Diver's dread, with
- 23) One-named guitarist in infomercials
- 25) _ capita
- 26) Being bossy with, at the wrestling match?
- 32) Clobbers with junk email
- 40) In_ (as found)
- 41) Dealers in homes
- 43) Allocates, with "out"
- 44) Persuading, at the wrestling match?
- 47) Go astray
- 48) Summons, as strength
- 53) Like sundial numerals
- 56) Reason to rent a tux
- 58) Nobelist Wiesel

- 59) Declare firmly
- 60) Saying mean things, at the wrestling match?
- 62) Desert "monster"
- 63) Gluck of opera
- 64) Oater "necktie"
- 65) Whirling water
- 66) Like thick vines
- 67) Key in
- DOWN
- 1) Soothing stuff
- 2) Suggestion box input
- 3) On the level
- 4) Turnover fruit
- 5) Poker champ Ungar
- 6) "Forget it!"
- 7) Hertz rival
- 8) Dunham of "Girls"
- 9) Alternative to .com or .net
- 10) Know-how
- 11) Grace conclusion
- 12) Sell by machine
- 13) Some linemen
- 18) Shakespearean king
- 22) Yogi or Boo-Boo
- 24) Toy rifle ammo
- 25) Sassy
- 27) Trick-taking card game
- 28) _-relief
- 29) "_ soup yet?"

- 30) Jot down
- 31) Bearded antelopes
- 32) FDR's mother
- 33) Place to dock
- 34) Garden of Eden evictee
- 35) Disappears, like snow in spring
- 38) Link up
- 39) Surgery sites, for short
- 42) Castor, to Pollux
- 43) Classic British sports cars
- 45) Post-accident reas-surance
- 46) Inject with Novocain
- 49) Grand_ National Park
- 50) George who created 1-Across
- 51) Dentist's order
- 52) "Like a Rock" singer Bob
- 53) Go ballistic
- 54) "The Art of Love" poet
- 55) Jell-O shaper
- 56) _ Alto, Calif.
- 57) Mountie's group
- 60) Happy hour locale
- 61) Suffix with serpent

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Welcome back to the world of the living. You've been working hard lately and haven't taken time out to do much of anything else. Play, of course, has been at the very bottom of your list. Well, it's time to make up for all that, starting tonight. Get in touch with your friends and family members. The Universe has arranged for all of you to be in the mood for love, laughter, and lots of hugs



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

That invitation to get out of the house and celebrate sounds good, doesn't it? So no matter what you're up to tomorrow morning, why not pretend that you have nothing but time and the luxury of sleeping in as late as you like? You might be tired, but you'll amble into work with a great big grin and a terrific attitude, and just about everyone will be tickled for you. Oh, go ahead. Party hearty.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

In your opinion, life is far too short to waste on organising and categorising. You'd much rather go out and play with interesting, unusual people and leave the scrubbing to others more comfortable with the task. At the moment, however, you're actually in the mood to clean, and as usual, you won't be doing it halfway. You might try to stop yourself before you wash the paint off the walls, though, unless you want to stay up all night painting too.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Here's another blessed day off from feeling as if you and you alone are responsible for everything that happens in and around your world. This makes two in a row, so you may begin to feel a bit spoiled, but that doesn't mean that you should let guilt creep into the equation. You've earned this, so enjoy it with the companion you've chosen to share in the good feelings.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

An authority figure who isn't exactly across the street is still reachable, and you know it. So whether you decide to consult with them via a long-distance call or an email, you can still reap the benefits of their experience if you're smart enough to back away from your pride long enough to ask. There's no shame in looking for advice. What's shameful is refusing to ask for it when you know that you need to.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

If anyone is fond of "just the facts," it's you. Embellishing those facts or adding details that have more to do with wishful thinking than the absolute truth just isn't your style. Mention all those things to anyone who approaches you now and insists that you give them your opinion on the story they're just dying to share. Otherwise, mention that you also won't be shy, or gentle, about letting them know what you really think.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You're still in the mood to deal with facts and figures, to talk things over in an unbiased, objective fashion, and take care of business in general. That's not your usual style, of course. You'd much rather play than work, and you've always put pleasure right at the top of your priority list. At the moment, however, you won't even recognize yourself, so don't be surprised if your loved ones are caught a bit off guard by all this.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

There's only so much you can do, and you can still only be in one place at a time. So when your family members and your best friends all insist on your time and attention at the same moment, you'll have a decision to make, and you'll need to make it quickly. Your only option is to figure out what your personal priorities are and act on them.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You come off as freewheeling, but when it comes right down to it you're as bound to duty and responsibility as any of your famously diligent friends. You don't advertise it for precisely the reason you won't be happy about letting it show now: there's always someone who wants to put you in a position of authority. At the moment, though, you won't be upset about that position. Honestly? You might even enjoy it.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Someone you love is acting as if you're the one and only priority in their life. And while you're not used to this, you're not about to argue about it. They've been working far too hard for far too long, and you're just glad to be seeing them. While you have their attention, of course, you might want to schedule one of those nice, long heart-to-heart chats. Make some coffee



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

It's time to start recognizing all of the attention you have been getting for what it truly is: praise and admiration! That cutie is not looking at the clock behind you; they're looking at you and wondering if you're single. Those complimentary emails you keep getting from your boss are not the kind of emails that they send to everyone else. You're someone they are watching with an eye toward the future. Recognize the impact you have on the world.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

If anyone deserves some quality time with strictly platonic acquaintances, the kind who want nothing more from you than a couple of good giggles and some intelligent, charming company, it's you, especially after what you've been dealing with lately. All those thoughts about what's important and what's not take the fun out of things. Now, however, it's time to put that behind you and remember what it was like to giggle. Ready or not!



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Who, in 2004, riding the prototype KTM 250-SXF four stroke, won the MX2 World Championship?

- A. Marc DeReuver
- B. Antonio Cairoli
- C. Tyla Rattray
- D. Ben Townley

2. In probability theory, a stochastic process is what kind?

- A. A guess, still to be proven
- B. Random
- C. Slow-moving
- D. Interrupted

3. Drakensberg is a name for an escarpment in what area??

- A. The Swiss Alps
- B. Southern Africa
- C. The Balkans
- D. The Maghreb

Answers: 1. D 2. B 3. B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

S	L	D	A
L	I	E	S
V	V	E	E
U	A	Qu	E

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

SOLUTION

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

E	6	7	L	5	1	8	Z	9
Z	5	L	4	9	8	1	E	6
9	1	8	E	6	Z	7	L	5
7	8	9	Z	E	5	L	6	1
L	Z	6	1	8	9	E	5	7
5	E	1	6	L	7	4	9	8
6	7	5	8	1	E	Z	9	L
8	9	Z	5	7	L	6	1	E
1	L	E	9	Z	6	5	7	8



India's new captain Suryakumar Yadav made a quick fire 58

Dream start for Suryakumar and Gambhir as India beat Sri Lanka

Pallekele, Sri Lanka - New head coach Gautam Gambhir and T20 captain Suryakumar Yadav enjoyed a winning start as India secured a 43-run victory over hosts Sri Lanka to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match Twenty20 series on Saturday.

With batting stalwart Virat Kohli, tests and One-Day International skipper Rohit Sharma and all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja quitting T20 internationals after India's T20 World Cup triumph last month, Yashasvi Jaiswal and new T20 vice-captain Shubman Gill opened the innings for the visitors in Pallekele.

Put into bat after Sri Lanka won the toss, India got off to a lightning start in the power-play with a 74-run opening stand between Jaiswal (40) and Gill (34). But they lost the pair as Dilshan Madushanka and Wanindu Hasaranga took

two wickets in two balls.

Suryakumar (58), who was appointed India's T20 captain last week ahead of all-rounder Hardik Pandya, led from the front, notching his 20th T20 fifty in just 22 deliveries before being trapped lbw by pacer Matheesha Pathirana.

Pathirana then struck in quick succession to dismiss Pandya (9) and Riyan Parag (7) with a searing yorker and lbw, respectively. Pathirana continued to shine with the ball as he sent Rishabh Pant packing when the wicket-keeper-batter was just one run shy of a half-century, to restrict India to a total of 213-7.

Sri Lanka's chase was off to a flier with an 84-run opening partnership between Pathum Nissanka (79) and Kusal Mendis (45). Arshdeep Singh provided India with a much-needed breakthrough by taking out Kusal.



Britain's George Russell and Lewis Hamilton in action at the Belgian Grand Prix on Sunday

HAMILTON WINS BELGIAN GP

Race winner George Russell of Mercedes disqualified for underweight car

Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium - Mercedes driver George Russell has been disqualified and lost his Belgian Grand Prix win on Sunday, after his car was found to be underweight, and his teammate Lewis Hamilton is promoted to first place.

Initially the car had been found to be compliant but the technical delegate's report said that the car had not been fully drained of fuel.

The car was weighed again on the FIA inside and outside scales with both showing the same result of 796.5 kilogrammes, 1.5 kilogrammes below the minimum weight required and all other drivers move up one place in the classification.

"During the hearing the team representatives confirmed that the measurement is correct and that all required procedures were performed correctly," the governing FIA said in their release.

"The team also acknowledged that there were no mitigating circumstances and that it was a genuine error by the team."

Russell had led Hamilton

home in a Mercedes one-two after he opted for a one-stop strategy.

The decision means that McLaren's Oscar Piastri finishes second with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc in third.

"We have to take our disqualification on the chin. We have clearly made a mistake and need to ensure we learn from it," Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff said.

"We will go away, evaluate what happened and understand what went wrong. To lose a one-two is frustrating and we can only apologise to George who drove such a strong race."

"Lewis is of course promoted to P1, he was the fastest guy on the two-stop and is a deserving winner."

The inherited win means Hamilton has now won the Belgian Grand Prix five times, drawing level with Ayrton Senna and one behind Michael Schumacher who holds the record with six wins at Spa.

Russell had appeared to have pulled off a remarkable victory



Lewis Hamilton

We will evaluate what happened and understand what went wrong. To lose a one-two is frustrating and we can only apologise to George who drove such a strong race.

TOTO WOLFF

from sixth on the grid, calling the strategy himself from the car, fending off a seven-time champion on tyres that were 15 laps fresher for five laps at the end off

the race.

Hamilton was closing in at nearly a second a lap in the final laps but, as so many other drivers found, overtaking was harder

than expected and he could never quite get close enough to challenge.

As Russell battled to hold off Hamilton in the final two or three laps, McLaren's Piastri closed in on the Mercedes to set up a grandstand finish, and the three cars crossed the line nose to tail.

Seven seconds behind them, Ferrari's Leclerc - who had been passed by Piastri with nine laps to go around the outside of the Les Combes chicane, spent the closing laps fending off Red Bull's Verstappen and the second McLaren of Lando Norris.

The three spent the final four laps nose to tail but Leclerc managed to hold his rivals at bay.

Behind Norris, Ferrari's Carlos Sainz passed Red Bull's Sergio Perez with five laps to go to raise further questions about Perez's future. Red Bull are expected to make a decision as to whether to drop him for the rest of the season over the forthcoming summer break - just two months after the Mexican signed a new two-year contract.

France beat Guinea; Spain and Japan reach quarters

Paris, France - Hosts France secured a second straight victory as Kiliann Sildillia struck for a 1-0 success over Guinea, while Spain and Japan reached the quarter-finals in the second matchday of the men's Olympic football tournament on Saturday

France struggled to find their feet in Bordeaux after their opening 3-0 Group A triumph over the United States but found a way past a solid Guinea team, who had two efforts disallowed in the first half, with Sildillia's brilliant 75th minute header.

Sildillia brought relief to French fans when he connected with Michael Olise's fine cross to send the crowd into raptures.

Spain clinched a spot in the quarter-finals with their second Group C win by beating the Dominican Republic 3-1, while Argentina defeated Iraq by the same scoreline in Group B.



Kiliann Sildillia of France celebrates his goal against Guinea

The United States scored three times in 30 minutes in a crushing 4-1 victory over Group A rivals New Zealand in Marseille, while Paraguay netted twice deep in stoppage time to beat Israel 4-2.

Also in Group D, Mali missed a late penalty and could not

avoid losing 1-0 to Japan, who have qualified for the last eight having also thrashed Paraguay 5-0 in their first game.

Uzbekistan crashed out of their first Olympics following a 1-0 loss to Egypt in Nantes after a goal by Ahmed Koka in their second Group C fixture.

Palestinian swimmer Yazan al Bawwab makes waves in Paris with big statement

Paris, France - Palestinian swimmer Yazan Al Bawwab's sole Olympic race lasted less than a minute but just being in the water was a statement in itself.

The 24-year-old pointed to a Palestinian flag on his chest as he explained what it meant to represent a homeland not just lacking a pool but struggling for basics like food and water.

"France does not recognise Palestine. Yet here I am with a flag on my chest," he said after finishing third in a 100 metres backstroke heat that proved to be his first and last swim of the Paris Games.

"I'm very, very happy ... to raise my flag, to have time just for Palestine, a lane just for Palestine. I think this is my message of peace."

"We're trying to get the world to know that we're human beings. I can play sports like every-



Yazan al Bawwab

body else," he told reporters.

France said in May that conditions were not right to officially recognise a Palestinian state and any decision must be more than symbolic or political posturing.

More than 39,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli offensive in Gaza, say local

health authorities. Israel launched its military action in response to a Hamas-led attack in southern Israel in October. About 1,200 people were killed and 250 were taken hostage in the Oct. 7 attack, according to Israeli tallies.

The only Israeli swimmer in

the 100 backstroke was in a later heat to Al Bawwab and their paths did not cross.

Al Bawwab, an aerospace engineer born in Saudi Arabia, educated in Canada and Britain, living in Dubai where he runs a furniture business and also half-Italian, said his father had been a homeless refugee in Italy before rebuilding his life.

"I look at people like my dad who came from nothing," he said. "I'm never complaining in the pool, I remember people in Gaza, people in Palestine that suffer properly. I don't mind if I'm waking up at 5am. It's not a problem."

The twice Olympian spoke of the consequences of conflict.

"A lot of people don't want us to be here. They don't want to see the flag. They don't want to hear my country's name," he said. "They don't want me to exist. They want me to leave."

FIFA rejects Argentina's complaint over VAR ruling

Buenos Aires, Argentina - FIFA, the world's football governing body, has rejected Argentina's complaints over a last-minute equaliser being ruled out in the Summer Olympics Paris 2024 'opening match against Morocco, the head of Argentina's soccer association (AFA) said on Saturday.

"The FIFA Disciplinary Committee rejected the protest filed

regarding the events that occurred in the match against Morocco," AFA President Claudio "Chiqui" Tapia said on X, saying he is seeking explanations for the ruling. Argentina lost Wednesday's match, the Paris Olympics' men's soccer opening game, with a final score of 2-1 to Morocco.

The match was initially suspended with a 2-2 draw as a

group of fans broke onto the pitch, and two hours later the video assistant referee (VAR) ruled out Argentina's final goal.

Organisers of the Paris Olympics said on Thursday they were working to determine what caused the fans to break onto the pitch.

"In defense of our rights, AFA will ask on what grounds the decision was made and evaluate

the relevant appeals," Tapia said.

Soccer commands a devoted following in Argentina, which has notched three World Cup victories - the latest against France in 2022.

Argentina also won the Americas' top continental league earlier this month, beating Colombia in another chaotic final in Miami and scoring a record 16th victory in the Copa America..



Referee Glenn Nyberg talks to Argentina players during their match against Morocco

TITMUS PASSES ACID TEST WITH FLYING COLOURS

Australian wins epic 400m battle to start gold quest of the Dolphins

PARIS, France - Arianne Titmus got Australia's women off to a golden start by winning a race of record breakers on a rocking opening night of the Paris Olympic swimming meet at the La Defense Arena on Saturday.

The Dolphins added another gold in the 4x100 metres freestyle relay, with Australia also taking two silvers from the four finals and with their reputation as a powerhouse of the pool as bright as ever.

Titmus set the tone by defending her 400 metres freestyle title in a huge battle with Canada's Summer McIntosh and American great Katie Ledecky.

Ledecky, gold medallist in Rio de Janeiro in 2016 and silver in Tokyo in 2021, had to settle for bronze as 17-year-old sensation McIntosh secured the silver and her first Olympic medal.

The race had been compared to the epic men's 200 freestyle "Race of the Century" showdown



Arianne Titmus (C) with Summer McIntosh (L) and Katie Ledecky during the medal ceremony

between American Michael Phelps, Australian Ian Thorpe and Dutch giant Pieter van den Hoogenband in 2004.

The crowd were up and hollering from the start, a massive contrast to the last Games held under pandemic restrictions, and even if the drama proved to be less than promised it remained a night to savour.

"My legs are a bit tired, but I'm just relieved more than anything. I probably felt the expectation and pressure for this race more than anything in my life to be honest," said Titmus.

"I'm just happy to get the result for myself and I feel so honoured to be a part of the race and be alongside legends like Katie.

"I look up to her so much as an

athlete and there's certainly not a rivalry beyond the races. I really respect her as a person and I hope that I put on a good show tonight and everyone enjoyed it."

Ledecky, now with 11 Olympic medals, had hoped to go faster but could not complain.

"We have a lot of respect for each other and we love competing against each other, it brings

My legs are a bit tired, but I'm just relieved more than anything, I probably felt the expectation and pressure for this race more than anything

ARIARNE TITMUS

the best out of each of us," she said.

"It's something special and something that we enjoy especially since we're the top three performers in that event."

Australia started with a silver when Elijah Winnington finished second to Germany's Lukas Maertens in a men's 400 metres

freestyle final stacked with champions. South Korea's world champion Kim Woo-min took the bronze.

"I was right at the front the whole time and still made it to the finish. That wasn't the case in the last few years. I let myself be beaten there. Not this time," said Maertens of his first Olympic gold.

After Titmus had celebrated, the Australian women added another gold.

The quartet of Mollie O'Callaghan, Shayna Jack, Emma McKeon and Meg Harris held off historic foes and runners-up United States in the 4x100 freestyle, while China took the bronze.



Vivian Kong

Kong wins gold in women's epee

Paris, France - Hong Kong's fencing queen Vivian Kong claimed her first Olympic gold medal in a nerve-wracking bout against local favourite Auriane Mallo-Breton of France in the women's epee at the Paris Games on Saturday.

Kong, who prevailed 13-12 in sudden death, was in floods of tears after coming back from six touches down.

Eszter Muhari of Hungary took bronze.

Oh Sanguk of South Korea won gold in the men's sabre individual event against Tunisia's Fares Ferjani with Italian Luigi Samele taking bronze.

It was a day full of upsets, with favourites Sun Yiwen of China and Hungary's Aron Szilagyi suffering shock eliminations.

Out of the six French fencers taking part in both events, Mallo-Breton was the only one to make it to the quarter-finals.

'Nadalcaraz' shine at Roland Garros

Paris, France - Rafa Nadal returned to his favourite stomping ground with young sidekick Carlos Alcaraz as Spain's new dream team took their first stride on the road to Olympic gold on Saturday.

The 38-year-old king of Roland Garros and the new 21-year-old prince of men's tennis, were roared on by a packed Court Philippe Chatrier crowd during a 7-6(4) 6-4 defeat of sixth-seeded Argentine pair Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni.

Alcaraz had played earlier, beating Lebanon's Hady Habib 6-3 6-1 in the singles on a rain-hit opening day of Olympics tennis in which only a handful of matches were completed.

Men's top seed Novak Djokovic thrashed Australian alternate Matthew Ebden 6-0 6-1 after women's favourite Iga Swiatek of Poland launched her bid for gold with a scrappy 6-2 7-5 win against Romania's Irina-Camelia Begu.

But the day's headline act was always going to be the opening chapter of the 'Nadalcaraz' story which will surely



Spain's Rafa Nadal and Carlos Alcaraz celebrate a point against Argentina's Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni

etch itself into the Parisian red clay over the coming days.

It was the first time 14-times French Open champion Nadal and Alcaraz, winner of four Grand Slams including this year's French Open and Wimbledon, had played together in

competition.

There were some misfires and Alcaraz admitted he was nervous playing with his idol, but they gelled quickly enough to subdue the skilful south American duo in front of Nadal's son Rafa Jr and the two

An unforgettable moment. I think for him too, to represent Spain in the Olympics is a combination that is difficult to beat

RAFAEL NADAL

daughters of Spain's King Felipe.

"An unforgettable moment for me, without a doubt," Nadal told reporters. "I think for him too, to come out here on this stage and play together representing Spain in the Olympic

Games is a combination that is difficult to beat."

Nadal's preparation was unusual in the extreme, the Spaniard having spent Friday night carrying the Olympic torch in a boat on a choppy River Seine in the rain at the opening ceremony.

There were also injury concerns ahead of what is likely to be his last dance at Roland Garros, but Nadal rolled back the years on the rectangle of red dirt he first conquered when Alcaraz was a two-year-old.

Nadal is due play Hungary's

Marton Fucsovics in a Sunday schedule featuring a whopping 68 matches, although the Spaniard, who won singles gold in 2008 and the doubles in 2016, said he would have to speak with his team.

Canadian football team loses points, coach banned

Paris, France - Canada were deducted six points in the Olympic women's soccer tournament and their head coach Bev Priestman banned for a year, global governing body FIFA said on Saturday, following a drone spying scandal that has tainted their gold medal defence.

The Canadian Soccer Association, which said it was exploring how it could appeal the six-point deduction, was also fined 200,000 Swiss francs (\$226,346) in a case that rocked the Paris Games.

Priestman, who has coached the team since 2020 and led them to the Olympic title in Tokyo a year later, and Canadian officials Joseph Lombardi and Jasmine Mander ave been banned from any soccer-related activity for one year for "offensive behaviour and violation of the principles of fair play", FIFA said.

New Zealand had complained



Bev Priestman

that Canadian staff flew drones over their training sessions before their opening fixture at the Olympics, which Canada won 2-1. Following FIFA's decision, the reigning Olympic champions will drop to minus three points in Group A, with two matches left to play and a mountain to climb if they are to move past the group stage.

The decision remains subject to a potential appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

"We feel terrible for the athletes on the Canadian Women's Olympic soccer team who as far as we understand played no role in this matter," said David Shoemaker, CEO and Secretary General of the Canadian Olympic Committee.

"In support of the athletes, together with Canada Soccer, we are exploring rights of appeal related to the six point deduction at this Olympic tournament."

North Korea stun Japan in table tennis mixed doubles

Paris, France - Japan's world number two table tennis mixed doubles team, Hina Hayata and Tomokazu Harimoto, were upset by North Korea's Ri Jong Sik and Kim Kum Yong 4-1 in the first round at the Paris Olympics, losing the chance to retain the country's gold medal.

The 49-minute match at the South Paris Arena ended in a shocking defeat for the Japanese pair, who were considered top contenders for the title and challengers to the Chinese team.

"They are far trickier oppo-

nents than many others. We saw them previously at some other events and they performed far better today compared to that," Harimoto said of the North Koreans who will face Sweden in the quarter-finals.

China's top-ranked mixed doubles team, Wang Chuqin and Sun Yingsha, easily advanced with a 4-0 victory over Egypt, setting the stage for what they hope will be a gold medal sweep. They next face Taiwan in the last eight.

Luxembourg's Ni Xialian, 61,



North Korea's Ri Jong Sik and Kim Kum Yong shocked Japan's Hina Hayata and Tomokazu Harimoto

the oldest athlete to compete in table tennis, beat Turkey's Sibel Altinkaya in the round of 64, continuing a record-breaking journey in her sixth Olympics.

French fans, cheering loudly for everyone but especially their home favourites, had a mixed day.

Despite Alexis Lebrun and Yuan Jia Nan's efforts, they lost 4-2 to the higher-ranked Taiwan team of Chen Szu-Yu and Lin Yun-Ju in the mixed doubles.

But home advantage might have helped 19-year-old French-

woman Prithika Pavade on Saturday as she returned to her second Olympics and advanced to the round of 32 in the women's singles by beating Iranian Neda Shahsavari 4-1.

The North Korean team have made fewer international appearances over the past three years compared to other players, leaving them as something of a mystery to their rivals.

Their tightly contested match with Japan saw the North Korea pair gaining momentum from the onset and maintaining a high

level of play throughout the second half.

Despite the setback, Hayata and Harimoto will continue to compete in more events at the Paris Games.

Their elimination is a blow to Japan's medal hopes and a boost for their rivals, including the dominant Chinese team.

Ni Xialian's former China teammate, the 58-year-old Zeng Zhiying, saw her Olympic debut representing Chile end earlier on Saturday as she lost 4-1 to Lebanon's Mariana Sahakia.

AL KHATRI ALL SET FOR DREAM DEBUT

Oman’s challenge in Paris Olympics to start with men’s trap event in shooting

Adil Al Balushi
Paris, France

Oman’s shooter Said al Khatri will begin Oman’s quest for glory at the Paris Olympic Games on Monday.

Al Khatri will begin his challenge in the preliminary qualification of the event at Châteauroux Shooting Center on Monday. Al Khatri will compete in group six alongside some of the top shooters across the world, including China’s Qi Ying, Brol Carenas Jean from Guam, Guerrero Sebastian from France, Fernandez Alberto from Spain and Lorenzo Eduardo from the Dominican Republic.

The qualifying rounds will run for two days and six shooters will advance to finals.

On the first day, the shooters will begin with 75 targets in the initial round and it will be divided into three rounds of 25 targets each. On the second day on Tuesday, 50 targets will be in total and will be divided into two rounds of 25 targets each.

Al Khatri completed his official training session on Sunday under the watchful eye of Italian coach Luca Marini. He com-



Oman's Said al Khatri with coach Luca Marini

pleted some positive training sessions in the couple of days ahead of the competitions at the Châteauroux Shooting Center.

He arrived earlier in France to train hard alongside other international shooters. Additionally, he participated in an external training camp in Italy for several days prior to the start of the Games.

This camp and the short training in Châteauroux will help the Omani shooter gain more confidence, adapt to the competition environment and become familiar with the weapons and varying weather conditions. This will raise his chances of achieving good scores in the qualifying rounds.

Marini, said that the qualifying

competitions will feature many shooters from various countries. “It is expected to be tough competition as everyone aims to secure a spot in the next stage. Olympic debutant Al Khatri will eye to set and break personal records besides improving his world ranking and earn additional points to enhance his international and regional presence in various championships.

Competing in the Olympics is a significant opportunity for him to gain valuable technical skills and experience. This participation will provide Al Khatri with more responsibility and confidence to compete in upcoming regional, continental and international championships,” Marini said.

Technical leaders meeting for Athletics

The technical meeting for athletics competitions will take place on Tuesday. The national athletics coach, Fahad Khalfan al Mashaykhi, will attend the meeting to represent Oman as athletes Ali al Balushi and Mazoon al Alawi will participate in the 100m event.

Swimmer Issa eyeing a positive performance in 100m freestyle

Paris, France - Swimmer Issa al Adawi, who is making his second attendance at the Olympics after Tokyo Games in 2020, is undergoing intensive training at Paris La Defense Arena in Paris. Issa will compete on Tuesday in the 100m freestyle event and the competition will begin at 1:15 PM (Oman time). The Omani swimmer will look to deliver a positive performance in his second Olympic appearance and achieve new records.



Issa al Adawi

Al Zubair Meets Sports Delegation

Sheikh Khalid Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), met the members of the sports delegation which is representing Oman at Paris 2024 Olympic Games on Saturday. At the beginning of the meeting, the Chairman of OOC congratulated all the athletes on their qualifications and attendance in the most prestigious sporting event in the world.

He urged them to gain the maximum technical benefit from this significant Olympic participation and to achieve the highest possible technical gains. He also encouraged them to double their efforts

The OOC Chairman congratulated all the athletes on their qualifications and attendance in the Olympics

and deliver high-level performances to honour Oman and raise the country’s flag high in this major sporting event.

OOC chairman met Oman’s ambassador

Sheikh Khalid Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of (OOC) and head of Oman’s delegation to the Paris Olympics met with HE Ambassador Ahmed Mo-

ammed al Oraisimi at Oman’s embassy headquarters in Paris. The meeting was attended by members of the official delegation and several officials from Oman’s embassy in France. Al Zubair praised all the facilities and services provided by H.E. the Ambassador and the members of Oman’s embassy in Paris over the past months ensuring the successful participation of Oman’s delegation in this major Olympic event. HE Ambassador expressed his happiness with Oman’s participation in Paris 2024 Olympic Games. He conveyed his best wishes to the sports delegation of Oman with his hopes to achieve the desired and advanced results at the Olympics.

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VIA DELL'AMORE



'PATH OF LOVE' REOPENS

Local authorities are keen to encourage responsible tourism on the route that winds between Italy’s Cinque Terre

Love is in the air as one of Italy’s most famous walking routes is set to re-open after more than a decade. Known as the most romantic walk in the world, the Via dell’Amore or ‘Path of Love’ is located in between Riomaggiore and Manarola. It closed back in 2012 after a landslide injured four tourists and caused the trail to need repairs. After extensive renovation, it reopened on July 27.

What is the Via dell’Amore?
The 1km long route winds around a string of five villages that make up the Cinque Terre UNESCO World Heritage Site. The paved pathway hugs the coast with stunning views of the landscape and sea. It was built during the modernisation of the railway line between Genoa and La Spezia at the beginning of the 20th century. Railroad workers needed a way to get between Riomaggiore and Manarola

while a tunnel was constructed. The footpath was carved out of the hard rock face overhanging the sea and legend is it became a meeting place for lovers from the two towns. The restoration project has contained the rocks above and below the pathway with steel mesh and planted 8,800 plants to reinforce the landscape. A monitoring system has also been installed so that warnings can be given in advance about any potential landslides.

Overtourism on the Via dell’Amore
Liguria’s Cinque Terre is made up of five villages famous for their jewel-toned buildings set into the cliffs above the sea. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is surrounded by a national park and around 2.4 million people visit every year to walk, boat or cycle their way through the picturesque surroundings. As one of the most famous stretches of the Cinque Terre coastline, the Via dell’Amore is massively popular with visitors. The string of seaside villages has been battling against mass tourism, last year introducing fines of up to 275 for visitors that block traffic or pedestrians by lingering for selfies.

Giovanni Toti, president of the Liguria Region, has said that the Via dell’Amore is a “jewel for our region, not just for those who visit”. Liguria is hoping to curb overtourism by introducing a booking system for those who want to walk the path. The number of visitors allowed on the path each hour is capped at 400 and walkers have to book their ticket online or purchase one at the park’s ticket booths. The booking site is currently being updated but last year tickets cost 5 and included entrance to the Castle of Riomaggiore. The Via dell’Amore is one of four sections of the Sentiero Azzuro or ‘Blue Path’. It is one of the most popular hiking trails in the Cinque Terre National Park and connects the five villages together.

Blue Path
The Blue Path starts from Riomaggiore making its way to Monterosso al Mare through Manarola, Corniglia and Vernazza. The route is around 12 kilometres long and reaches a maximum altitude of roughly 200 metres in the tiny village of Vernazza. You can walk the whole path in about five hours and it is split into four different sections. The Via dell’Amore is the first section of the route. The Cinque Terre National Park requires visitors to pay a fee to access some paths like this. Along the route, there are checkpoints for walkers to buy the Cinque Terre Trekking Card which allows you to use facilities within the park. It costs 7.50 for a day and 14.50 for two days. You can also buy a card that gives you access to the hiking trails and unlimited train travel on Cinque Terre Express trains between Levanto, Cinque Terre and La Spezia. It costs 18.20 for one day, 33 for two days and 47 for three days. Discounts are available for children, seniors and families. (Courtesy: euronews.com)



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CELLULOID CRUSH



One of the most popular reasons why tourists throng certain destinations worldwide is to see in reality the iconic locations where some of their favourite movies and tele-series were shot – as in Switzerland, Croatia, S Korea, et al

REEL TO REAL

What do Dubrovnik, Iseltwald, Waikato town of Matamata and Krong Siem Reap have in common? What could tie these places together even though they are located on different continents? Quite strangely, the common lures are the iconic portrayal of locations in these destinations on the small screen as well as the silver screen.

From *Game of Thrones*, to *Crash Landing on You*, from the *Lord of the Rings* movie series to the cult classic *Mortal Kombat*, travellers are visiting these locations to experience themselves the exhilaration of being in the same locations where iconic shots of their beloved movies and serials were taken.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, many viewers got an opportunity to binge watch their favourite shows and movies at home. The 'Hallyu wave' (Korean wave) stunned the viewers and searches for

reserves, has suddenly shot into the limelight not for its natural splendour but for being the backdrop for the popular HBO show *Game of Thrones*.

Suraj Shroff, manager (holidays) with Zahara Holidays in Muscat, Oman says, "Visitors often want to experience new, yet fun, places. Hence, the demand to visit Japan, Korea and Croatia has increased after COVID-19. Families visit them to feel a sense of belonging and recognition. There is an itinerary that has been created based on the places they have seen on screen.

The one location that seems to be on top of the list for those with a Schengen visa is Dubrovnik in Croatia, Shroff says, crediting travellers' interest in this location to the mega hit HBO show - *Game of Thrones*.

One such sought after location is the fictional place of 'King's Landing'.

Shot in the old town area of Dubrovnik, this UNESCO World Heritage site is a medieval architecture wonderland. Currently, a *Game of Thrones* prequel - *House of the Dragon* - is also being shot at the same location.

Switzerland

One location that has surprisingly become a popular location for Korean drama buffs is Iseltwald in Switzerland. This old village town had natural beauty all around but shot to unprecedented prominence when Korean drama *Crash Landing on You* scouted it and filmed one of the series' most iconic scenes on the wooden pier on Lake Brienz – the centrepiece of a riveting romantic scene in the show.

The demand of tourists to visit this pier has reached such a paramount level that the local government had to add a chargeable barricade with a US\$5.6 (RO2.16) selfie fee. The village now plans holiday season traffic controls in order to avoid being run over by tourists.

Adding a Bollywood angle to this European destination, many of the expats visit Switzerland for their 'Yash Raj' moment in the Swiss Alps. Dubbed as the 'The King of Romance' Yash Chopra was a beloved film director who brought Switzerland and its natural beauty to the main screen in India in the Hindi film *Dil-*



Korean Tourism Organisation uses #Jin's name to promote a Jeju island entertainment spot as 'Jin's pick'

wale *Dulhani Le Jayenge* (DDLJ) which became an all-time favourite. This resulted a whole generation of cinephiles and honeymooners wanting to visit the many famous locations to recreate a pose from the film. Seeing the surge of tourist from India, the Swiss government has erected a statue of Yash Chopra, at Interlaken.

New Zealand

The quaint little sleepy Waikato town

of Matamata is a hub of great prominence, thanks to the iconic movie *Lord of the Rings*. The economical boost that New Zealand has achieved has been paramount to their annual GDP. The Eagles at Wellington airport welcome visitors giving them a glimpse of 'Middle earth'.

The drive towards Matamata or Hobbiton to the movie nerds, is riddled with different location exits and visitors are spoiled for choice. Data proves that leisure visitors to New Zealand in-

creased by a drastic 40% post the first movie release. New Zealand's film industry now generates about US\$2.08bn in GDP annually, thanks to movies like *Mulan*, *King Kong* and even *Avatar*.

Cambodia

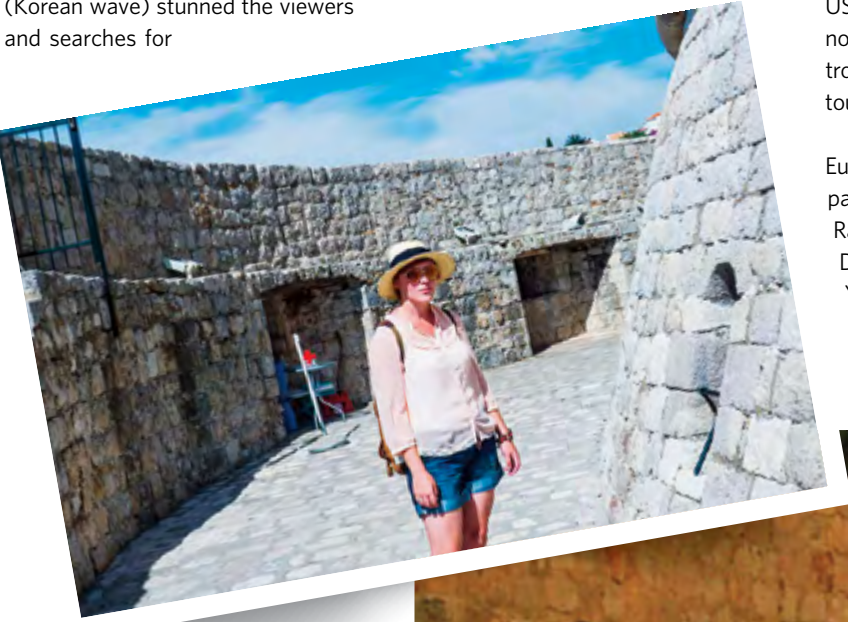
Neha Mankar, head of Club 7 Holidays, sharing a guest experience, disclosed that a group of 25, returning from a tourist location in Cambodia, had to make a halt midway to meet an infant's urgent request – an avid fan of *Mortal Kombat*, the kid simply wanted to strike martial arts poses at that popular spot. Hence, Mankar concludes, that nostalgia plays a very important factor in influencing one person's choice during leisure travel.

S Korea

An avid fan of the Korean boy band *BTS*, Tanvi Shirgaokar, an Indian expatriate, says she travelled twice to Korea just to see her idols in action. The first was a concert for which she purchased tickets and the second was a lucky win to meet her idols at a 'Fan Cafe'. KPop fans are often the primary source of 'emergency ticketing', travel agents in Muscat say.

Tanvi shares that she not only secured a 'fast track' visa appointment with the Embassy of Korea but also got timely assistance to complete all formalities for her trip not to miss out on her treasured trip to Seoul.

(Contributed by Nisha Joshi)



places like Busan, Seoul and Itaewon surged. The stunning visuals that comforted them amid the lockdown are now morphed as 'must visit' travel destinations.

Thus, looking at the demand of travellers wanting to visit these exotic locations, travel agents in Oman, too, are now updating their offerings with special offers and packages that serve these interests of many tourists. After all, most would love to return from travel with prized pictures of themselves at these dream destinations.

Croatia

Croatia, located between central and northeast Europe and known for its stunning beaches and bountiful nature



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