

Oman calls for unity at OIC summit

Banjul, Gambia - The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, participated in the 15th summit of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) held in the Gambian capital Banjul on Saturday.

The two-day conference, themed ‘Enhancing Unity and Solidarity through Dialogue for Sustainable Development’, brought together representatives from across the Islamic world.

Oman’s delegation was led by H E Dr Mohammed bin Saeed al Maamari, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs. Emphasising the importance of the summit’s theme in his address, H E Maamari said, “‘Enhancing Unity and Solidarity through Dialogue for Sustainable Development’ comes at the right time. It calls on all of us in the Islamic world to deepen cooperation and strengthen the ties that unite us in our common endeavour to achieve a prosperous present and a sustainable future.”

He acknowledged the challenges facing the world today, including conflicts, climate change, sectarian and religious divisions, and gaps in digital access, food



(Supplied photo)



Oman has repeatedly warned of escalation in light of the international community’s failure to stop this senseless war and deter Israel from violating international law

H E DR MOHAMMED AL MAAMARI

and medicine. He emphasised the urgent need to address these issues impartially and through constructive international cooperation.

H E Maamari highlighted the responsibilities of the Islamic world in combating extremism, terrorism, discrimination and Islamophobia, while promoting

tolerance and coexistence globally.

Addressing the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, he noted that the region’s instability is the

result of brutal Israeli aggression in Gaza. “Oman has repeatedly warned of escalation in light of the international community’s failure to stop this senseless war and deter Israel from violating international law,” he said.

He reiterated Oman’s firm support for Palestine, stressing the sultanate’s commitment to peace and justice. “Oman emphasises its unwavering stance and support for the cause at regional and international meetings. We have initiated dialogue

with various countries to stop the war and presented our case before the International Court of Justice regarding Israeli violations in Palestine,” H E Maamari stated.

The conference addressed various topics, including the state of Islamic societies in non-member countries, combating hate speech and Islamophobia, and the economic, humanitarian and cultural challenges facing the Islamic world.

H E Maamari concluded his

speech by urging a renewed commitment to shared values. “An awakened conscience is enough to remind us that we are part of this vast world, working for our fellow humans wherever they are. Awakening the human conscience means resetting our moral compass to build a world of justice, mercy and peace.”

He called for enhanced empathy and compassion among people, reminding the gathering that the “present is the foundation of the future”.



(Supplied photo)

Foundation stone of first H₂ refueling station laid

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Shell Development Oman (Oman Shell) celebrated the foundation stone laying of the first green hydrogen station in Oman on Sunday.

The event was held under the patronage of H E Salem bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Part of the ‘Green Hydrogen for Mobility’ project, the hydrogen refueling station is located near Muscat International Airport.

The station is expected to contribute to enhancing sustainable efforts, and achieve clean and environmental mobility in Oman, with its opening

expected before the end of the year.

The station is expected to produce Oman’s first green H₂ molecules with on-site production capacity of 130kg of H₂ per day. The station will include a 120kW solar energy system to power the site’s facilities, five fast- charging electric vehicle points, a water recycling system designed to utilise wastewater for landscape irrigation, and a vapour recovery system designed to reduce up to 99% of hydrocarbon emissions.

The station will become the first Shell station in the world to have a H₂ production plant on site. This will allow maximum energy efficiency and for Oman Shell to be a pace setter in the

H₂ industry in the sultanate.

Oman Shell signed an agreement with Oman Airports in 2022 to give it 15 H₂ cars and build a H₂ station near the airport.

In August last year, Hydrogen Systems – an innovation-driven leader in the H₂ technology sector based in Saudi Arabia – was awarded a contract by Oman Shell to design, develop and instal Oman’s first H₂ refueling station.

Under the contract, Hydrogen Systems is responsible for the detailed engineering, procurement, quality assurance and control (Factory Acceptance Test) of electrolyzers, compression, storage, chilling and dispensing.

Oman Post ranks 1st globally in express mail services

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman ranked first in the world in express mail services (EMS) in 2023 among 192 member states of the Universal Postal Union.

This is the second consecutive year Oman Post has been recognised for best performance in EMS. It also claimed second place in EMS customer service in 2023 among 28 countries in the annual results released by the International Bureau of Universal Postal Union (UPU).

These accolades are bestowed annually by UPU to recognise postal operators for their exceptional performance in EMS, catering to UPU members. Oman Post’s remarkable strides in courier services signify its evolution into a globally renowned service provider.

Badr bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Chairman of Board of Directors of Oman Post and Asyad Express, lauded the company’s achievement in retaining the top position in EMS performance. “This success is testament to the effectiveness of the company’s business development strategies and



(Supplied photo)

This success is testament to the effectiveness of the company’s business development strategies and unwavering commitment to excellence, reliability and quality

BADR BIN MOHAMMED AL NADABI

its unwavering commitment to excellence, reliability and quality.”

Sheikh Ibrahim bin Sultan al Hosani, Acting CEO of Oman Post and Asyad Express, elaborated on the significance of this accomplishment, highlighting the culmination of the com-

pany’s transformative journey and institutional excellence. He reiterated Oman Post’s dedication to improving its solutions and products to set new benchmarks in the industry.

The company’s success is attributed to its ability to provide

modern and competitive solutions tailored to meet evolving global demands while ensuring customer satisfaction across diverse segments.

The EMS offered by Oman Post adheres to the highest international standards, enabling swift delivery of letters and parcels abroad within three to ten days. Additionally, it offers the convenience of sending and receiving packages from post offices, homes or workplaces, thereby enhancing the overall customer experience.



Stellar wins sixth SAS 48 Hackathon



Petra’s guardians are turning to ancient solutions

Israel orders closure of Al Jazeera operations

Tel Aviv, Israel - Israel’s cabinet voted unanimously on Sunday to close Qatari television network Al Jazeera’s operations in Israel.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s cabinet vote came after Israel’s parliament passed a law allowing the temporary closure of foreign broadcasters considered to be a threat to national security during the war against Hamas in Gaza.

Following the vote, Israel’s communication minister Shlomo Karhi ordered the seizure of Al Jazeera’s broadcasting equipment, with which it has had a long-running feud.

The head of Al Jazeera in Israel



and the Palestinian territories described the Israeli government decision as “dangerous” and motivated by politics rather than professional considerations.

Al Jazeera’s legal team was preparing a response, Walid Omary told Reuters, in anticipation of a possible court appeal

against the decision.

“We condemn and denounce this criminal act by Israel that violates the human right to access information,” Al Jazeera said in a statement on X.

Concealing the truth

Hamas slammed Israel’s decision to shut down Al Jazeera in the country as a ‘blatant violation of press freedom’ and an effort to hide the ‘truth’ of the Gaza war.

The group described the decision as a ‘repressive and retaliatory measure against the professional role of Al Jazeera in exposing the crimes and violations’ in Gaza. It ‘represents the

culmination of the declared war against journalists... aimed at concealing the truth’.

Rafah attack ‘very soon’

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant has said that military action in Rafah in southern Gaza could happen very soon, in light of what he claims is Hamas’ disinterest in a deal.

“We recognise alarming signs that Hamas actually does not intend to follow any agreement with us. This means action in Rafah and the entire Gaza Strip in the near future,” he added.

Agencies

17% increase in passengers at Oman airports in 2024

Muscat - The number of passengers passing through Omani airports increased 16.8% by the end of March 2024 to 3,840,354 passengers, compared to 3,287,015 during the same period in 2023.

Preliminary statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicate that Muscat International Airport handled 3,482,325 passengers, an increase of 17.7%. The airport saw 25,204 flights, up 13.8% in 2024 till March end. These included 23,237 international flights, carrying 3,232,76 passengers, and 1,967 domestic flights, carrying

250,249 passengers.

Indian nationals topped the list of passengers at Muscat International Airport in this period, with 79,810 arrivals and 77,646 departures. This was followed by Pakistani nationals - 24,097 arrivals and 20,191 departures - and Bangladeshis - 14,469 arrivals and 20,909 departures.

Salalah Airport served 325,035 passengers, an increase of 6.7%, on 2,288 flights, up 4.8%. The airport handled 1,218 international flights, carrying 162,651 passengers, and 1,070 domestic flights, carrying 162,384 passengers.



Leave sooner, drive slower, live longer

In an effort to enhance road safety and discipline among motorcyclists, Royal Oman Police has issued a decision to set up specialised driving schools for motorbikes. The decision stipulates stringent requirements for setting up motorbike driving schools, including Omani nationality of the applicant with a good reputation and no criminal convictions. The training bikes must be used solely for instructional purposes, fitted with driving instruction plates. Will this decision help reduce traffic accidents? What else do we need to do to reduce motorbike related traffic violations? Here is what readers of *Muscat Daily* said -

Vinod Kumar
Private sector employee

The decision by ROP to establish specialised driving schools for motorbikes marks a significant step towards improving road safety and discipline among motorcyclists in Oman. By setting stringent requirements for the establishment of these schools, such as the requirement for the applicant to be of Omani nationality with a clean record, ROP aims to ensure that only qualified and reputable individuals are entrusted with the responsibility of training new motorcyclists.

Anwar al Balushi
Businessman

I welcome the move and support it. The mandate that training bikes are used exclusively for instructional purposes and fitted with driving instruction plates underscores the

commitment to providing safe and controlled environments for motorbike training. If anyone violates these clauses, the licence must be cancelled.

Salim Busaidi
Entrepreneur

This is a good initiative. Alongside formal training and education, robust enforcement of traffic laws and regulations is essential to control reckless behaviour. This includes increasing police presence and implementing measures such as fines and penalties for traffic violations. There must also be public awareness campaigns emphasising the importance of safe riding practices, wearing protective gear and adhering to speed limits.

Salman al Abri
Driver and tour guide

This is an excellent move from ROP.



(Image for illustrative purpose)

Some of the other ways to reduce traffic accidents include investing in road infrastructure and implementing safety measures specifically tailored to accommodate motorbikes, such as dedicated lanes and improved signage. Such measures can further enhance road safety for all road users.

Sahaya Vijay
QA/QC engineer

It's a good lead by ROP to direct setting up driving school for motorcycles. Additionally, kindly provide a special track for cycles, battery-operated cycles and motorcycles. Safety

rules and guidelines should be taught to everyone who operates four wheelers and two wheelers. Strict fines and punishment may be imposed for rule violations. Use of cell-phones while driving bikes should be strictly prohibited. And the use of public transport may be encouraged

to save Earth from air pollution.

Aijaz Khan
Educator and entrepreneur

In view of increasing accidents involving motorbikes, ROP's decision to set up driving schools across the sultanate is a good step. This would help young drivers take driving seriously resulting in enhanced road safety. Regular checks on motorbikes, particularly below 70cc, will further reduce road accidents.

Ofelia V Hassan
Lecturer

Aside from having driving schools for motorbikes, it is high time to allocate specific bike lanes with appropriate signs. Age limits should also be considered when issuing permits for motorbike driving. If seat belts are mandatory for driving cars, safety gear such as helmets should be enforced among motorbike users.

Sayed Murthala Mohamed Muheez
Accountant

Implement stringent licensing requirements. Enforce regular safety training programmes. Enhance road infrastructure for safer motorcycling. Increase public awareness campaigns on road safety. Introduce strict penalties for traffic violations. Provide incentives for safe driving practices. Improve emergency response systems for accidents.

NEXT ON YOUR SAY

Despite efforts of authorities for the safety of hikers, unfortunate accidents resulting in serious injuries and even death continue to occur. What measures should be taken to enhance safety of hikers and reduce outdoor accidents in recreational areas?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om You can also log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue.

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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400 experts to delve into advancements in civil defence operations

Our Correspondent Muscat

Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority will hold the second edition of 'Oman Civil Defence and Ambulance Conference and Exhibition' on Monday.

Themed 'Security and Safety of Establishments', the event aims to serve as a crucial platform for exchange of insights and presentation of innovations in civil defence and ambulance services.

To be held under the patronage of Lt Gen Hassan Mohsin al Shuraiki, Inspector of Police and Customs, the conference aims to showcase the latest research findings and best practices in civil defence and ambulance operations. It will also feature cutting-edge equipment, services and technologies designed to mitigate risks and safeguard lives and property.

The event will bring together approximately 20 speakers and 25 exhibitors, engaging nearly 400 participants from the sultanate and abroad. Experts, specialists and academics in the field of security and safety will share insights and experiences, fostering a collaborative environment for learning and advancement.

In addition, the conference will include three scientific workshops covering essential topics such as first aid, public security and safety, and safety protocols in adventure tourism activities. These workshops aim to equip attendees with practical knowledge and skills for handling emergencies effectively.

The event is poised to enhance the preparedness and resilience of establishments, contributing to the broader goal of ensuring community safety and security.

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Stellar wins sixth SAS 48 Hackathon

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Stellar team secured first place at the sixth edition of the SAS 48 Hackathon, which concluded on Saturday.

Themed 'Green Tech', the event featured 21 teams with 117 competitors and was organised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology (MTCIT).

Team Therwa won second place with their 'Food Waste Management App', while Un-trash AI took third place for a project that assists waste management companies in dealing with full waste containers.

The winning team Stellar, comprised of Ibtihaj al Bahri (en-



trepreneur), Shaima al Hatmiyah (civil and environmental engineer), Asila Mubarak al Waeli (graphic and digital designer), Said Abdul Ghafoor al Balushi (founder of Modern Star Businesses Company), and Dr Aziza al Zadjali (co-founder of Modern Star Company), impressed the judges with their innovative solar

panel cleaning technology.

"We are proud of winning the first place with our project called Stellar," said Balushi. He explained that their project focuses

on improving the efficiency of solar panels through a self-cleaning technology driven by smart systems.

The team developed a spe-

cialised layer that automatically removes dust and dirt, maintaining optimal performance. "This layer utilises advanced materials like nanotechnology for anti-dust coatings," he added.

Balushi emphasised the significance of their project in enhancing solar energy utilisation sustainably and cost-effectively. The concept was inspired by the need to reduce dust accumulation on solar panels, which can hinder their performance.

The team's coatings autonomously repel dust and dirt, reducing maintenance needs and aligning with Oman's sustainability goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040. Regarding the SAS 48 Hackathon, Balushi noted that the event targeted en-

trepreneurs and experts in logistics, agriculture and food, renewable energy, the environment, and other sectors.

Looking ahead, Balushi highlighted the importance of aligning the project with Oman's Vision 2040 for sustainable productivity. He also stressed the need for financial support to bring the project to market, both locally and internationally.

Hamoud al Hamdan, Director of the Technical Environment Development Department at MTCIT, said, "We are proud of all the participants and supporters who made the sixth edition of SAS 48 a success. The 21 teams worked to transform their ideas into prototypes, enhancing green technology in Oman."

Student company develops natural insect, flea solution

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Protex, a student company from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Musannah, is in the spotlight for producing a natural solution to eliminate fleas and insects affecting animals.

Their product - developed through meticulous laboratory testing at internationally accredited SGS laboratories - has proven to be more effective than conventional chemical treatments. SGS laboratories is a world-leading testing, inspection and certification company, and its testing confirmed that while some chemical products on the market require up to half an hour to eliminate insects, Protex's solution achieves this in a shorter timeframe, without compromising animal well-being.

Said bin Hamad al Shafi'i, Executive Director of Protex, re-



vealed that the company was established on October 3, 2023, with eight students from diverse fields of study at the university.

The team undertook extensive research, studies, and experiments under the supervision of the Research Center for Animal Production in the wilayat of Barka, South Batinah.

Recognising the adverse effects of chemical-based products on animals and the environment, the team endeavoured to create a safe and sustainable alternative.

Omar bin Juma al Jahdhami, a quality control technician at Protex, revealed that manufacturing is currently underway at the University in Musannah.

The product is undergoing certification processes to meet the standards set by the Directorate General of Standards and Metrology at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion.

Once certified, Protex aims to distribute its product through commercial outlets and veterinary clinics across Oman.

EA to sow 4mn wild seeds in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) has launched a campaign to plant 4mn wild tree seeds across the mountains of Dhofar governorate.

This initiative is part of a broader effort to plant 10mn wild trees in Oman and promote sustainable development in the region.

According to an EA official, the campaign began on May 5 and will continue throughout June and July, targeting areas such as Sadah, Mirbat, Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve, and other mountainous regions in the governorate.

The campaign aims to cultivate various wild seeds, including sidr, sammar, and wild fig. It aligns with the national goal of planting 10mn trees by 2030.

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Fees of Tender Documents	290 RO		
Tender Document Sales End Date	22/5/2024		
Last Date for Bid Submission	12/6/2024		
Grade	Excellent,First		
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Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.			
The Tenderers must acknowledge commitment to the bid.			
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BRIEFS

UAE's Sharjah announces new gas discovery

The Sharjah Petroleum Council announced Saturday the discovery of new gas reserves at Al-Hadiba field near Al-Sajaa Industrial Area in Sharjah, Emirates News Agency reported.

The statement said that the gas field carries "economically viable quantities." The new reserves were discovered upon the Sharjah National Oil Corporation's efforts of drilling a well over the last few months. In the next few days, tests will be conducted to confirm the exact quantity of the gas and to gauge the potential for development of the newly discovered gas field.

The Hadiba field represents the fifth onshore gas field in Sharjah, complementing existing fields such as Al-Saja'a, Kahif, Mahani, and Muayed, which have been repurposed into gas storage facilities.

This expansion of Sharjah's gas portfolio underscores the emirate's commitment to leveraging its natural resources for sustainable energy development.

DHL Express to invest over €32mn in new gateway facility at Muscat airport

Our Correspondent
Muscat

DHL Express, the world's leading logistics provider, celebrated the groundbreaking ceremony of its new state-of-the-art gateway facility at the Muscat International Airport on Sunday. The ceremony was held under the patronage of H E Eng Saeed bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transportation, Communications and Information Technology.

H E Eng Omar bin Hamdan bin Hamoud al-Ismaili, Executive President of the Transportation Regulatory Authority, Sheikh Aimen bin Ahmed al Hosani, Chief Executive Officer of the Oman Airports Management Company, Nour Suliman, Chief Executive Officer of DHL Express MENA, and Moustafa Osman, Country Manager, DHL Oman were also among the distinguished attendees.

The ceremony marked a significant milestone in DHL's commitment to strengthening its footprint and service offerings in Oman.

The new facility, representing an investment of more than €30mn (approximately RO12.4mn) over 20 years, will serve as a comprehensive logistics hub encompassing a service centre, gateway for import and export shipments, customs clearance capabilities, and a dedicated



DHL Express Gateway will serve as a comprehensive logistics hub and cater to over 4,200 customers in Oman, processing 2,400 shipments per hour

country office for DHL Express Oman.

"This groundbreaking ceremony represents a new chapter in our commitment to the sultanate," Nour Suliman, CEO of DHL Express MENA, said in a press statement. "Our new, ultra-modern facility signifies our unwavering confidence in Oman's economic potential and our dedication to providing world-class

logistics solutions that will empower businesses of all sizes in the country to flourish in the global marketplace."

Spanning a plot size of 12,621 sqm and featuring an expansive built-up area of 8,074 sqm, the new gateway will cater to the growing needs of over 4,200 DHL customers in Oman. It will boast a processing capacity of 2,400 shipments per hour, en-

suring fast and efficient handling of both domestic and international shipments.

The new DHL Express Gateway will be equipped with several cutting-edge features to ascertain efficient operations. At its core lies an intelligent country-wide distribution centre featuring an intelligent bi-directional conveyor system that can seamlessly process up to 3,000 shipments per hour. In-house customs clearance, bonded storage, and a direct vehicle loading facility will further streamline processing, while a logistics fulfilment and storage centre will offer tailored solutions for select customers.

MSX, Crowe Oman to organise ESG reporting workshop

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) and Crowe Oman, a leading audit and advisory firm, will conduct a collaborative two-day workshop on MSX - ESG 30 Metrics. The workshop will be held on May 7th and 8th at the Novotel Hotel.

This timely workshop has been designed to equip participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the evolving landscape of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) reporting.

Launched in September 2023, the Muscat Stock Exchange guidelines mandate sustainability reporting for the listed companies in Oman, with voluntary disclosure encouraged in 2024 and mandatory compliance by March 2025.

The workshop caters to participants seeking to bridge the gap between their existing ESG knowledge and the practical application of reporting on their company's sustainability performance. The workshop agenda delves into overcoming challenges associated with ESG reporting, including greenhouse gas emission identification and calculation.

Participants will benefit from firsthand insights and practical guidance on implementing effective ESG reporting strategies.

The workshop will also feature introductory remarks from the CEO of the MSX, underscoring the importance of ESG reporting within the Omani market, in alignment with the net-zero emissions ambition of Oman's Vision 2040.

Participants will leave equipped with a range of valuable skills, including understanding the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards for sustainability reporting; navigating the ESG disclosure requirements of the MSX; measuring and reporting on environmental, social, and governance performance indicators; and communicating their company's sustainability journey and alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The workshop aims to foster confidence in quantifying greenhouse gas emissions and reporting on key ESG factors for the MSX and will be attended by a variety of professionals from the fields of sustainability reporting; commercial and supply chain management; chief financial officers; finance managers; and internal auditors.

Carefully designed to align with the latest IFRS, Sustainability Standards (S1 and S2), and GRI standards, the workshop provides participants with a comprehensive understanding of ESG reporting best practices.



INTERVIEW

'Green hydrogen will play a major role in energy transition'

Gulam Ali Khan
Muscat

Stephen Crolius, a former Climate Advisor at the Clinton Foundation, is the President and Co-founder of the global energy transition consulting firm Carbon-Neutral Consulting. His company provides consulting services in the fields of decarbonisation, green hydrogen and ammonia, renewable energy, and transport electrification. As a thought leader, Crolius focuses on sustainable and low-carbon fuel sources, such as green hydrogen and ammonia, renewable energy, and clean transportation. In an exclusive interview with Muscat Daily, Crolius shared his insights and views on the role of green hydrogen in the global energy transition and Oman's leading position and potential on the global green hydrogen map.

How significant is the role of green hydrogen and ammonia in the global transition towards sustainable energy sources? In your view, what makes green hydrogen and ammonia more attractive as sustainable fuels compared to other alternatives?

Green hydrogen and ammonia have highly significant roles to play in the energy transition. Since the advent of the Industrial Revolution, fossil fuels have been the major form of primary energy employed by human society. With the shift away from fossil fuels necessitated by the climate crisis, it is necessary to turn to the sun as a major form of primary energy. The most practical methods of turning sunlight into usable energy - photovoltaics, wind, and biomass - all involve conversion of primary energy into electricity. Electricity is a valuable and versatile form of energy, but it is limited in the degree to which it can be stored on a massive scale and trans-

ported over great distances.

Converting electricity into energy-rich chemicals allows both of these limitations to be overcome. The simplest form of conversion involves extracting hydrogen from water. Molecular hydrogen, however, brings its own set of storage and transportation challenges. One method of overcoming these challenges is to convert hydrogen into simple derivative molecules such as methane or methanol. Ammonia is an especially attractive derivative molecule because it does not contain any carbon atoms, and therefore does not produce carbon dioxide as a byproduct of any downstream energy extraction process. It is also the case that hydrogen derivatives can often meet the need in other settings where a fuel must be used rather than electricity, such as certain transportation applications and industrial processes.

What challenges do producers globally currently face in scaling up the production and distribution of green hydrogen?

The primary challenge for green hydrogen producers comes from competitive economics. It is not yet clear where the green hydrogen production costs will eventually settle vs. those of legacy energy commodities such as natural gas. What is clear is that the first generation of green hydrogen plants and related infrastructure will yield product costs that are higher than those of its legacy competitors. This means that green hydrogen producers must build investment cases that rely on non-traditional elements, such as carbon taxes, government subsidies and incentives, and voluntary procurement programmes of customer companies. Country-by-country and bloc-by-bloc, progress is being made, but only as a result of the great creativity and commitment of green hydrogen players.



Oman is already positioning itself as a serious player in emerging global markets for green hydrogen and ammonia. Several countries in the Gulf region - notably Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in addition to Oman - are unquestionably among the global leaders in the push for sustainable energy

Stephen Crolius

What do you say about Oman's ambitious plans to develop large-scale green hydrogen and ammonia projects? What lessons can Oman learn from existing producers to become a more competitive producer of green hydrogen and ammonia?

Oman is already positioning itself as a serious player in emerging global markets for green hydrogen and ammonia. The hydrogen space within the energy transition is at a very early stage of development, with the first

large-scale production facilities just reaching final investment decisions. The opportunity for Oman, therefore, is not to learn from existing producers, but rather to learn with them.

Two examples from Oman's current portfolio of hydrogen projects are representative of the country's activities in this regard. The first is the Amnah Consortium's decision, announced in January, to devote the hydrogen that will be produced at its planned installation in Duqm to the

in-country production of green steel. The second is an announcement made in March of Hydrom's MOU with Germany's VNG that will focus on development of a green fuel value chain between Oman and Germany. In both cases, Omani companies will participate in the projects as partners, and in so doing will position themselves on the cutting edge of global clean energy development.

To what extent can the planned green hydrogen projects in the Gulf countries contribute to the global push for sustainable energy?

Several countries in the Gulf region and broader Middle East - notably Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt, in addition to Oman - are unquestionably among the global leaders in the push for sustainable energy. The common denominators across these countries are an abundance of renewable energy resources; favorable geographic placement for servicing of markets in Europe and Asia; and extensive experience with large-scale development of energy infrastructure.

What potential does green hydrogen hold for decarbonising hard-to-abate sectors, such as transportation, heavy industry, and power generation?

The common theme running through the hard-to-abate sectors is the need for energy and/or material inputs that take forms other than electricity. In the transportation cases, the need is for chemical fuels that allow large quantities of energy to be stored at high volumetric and gravimetric densities.

In the case of industrial and chemical processes, the need is often for substances that embody both energy and specific chemical properties that allow them to react with other molecules. Hydrogen and its derivatives perform very well on both of

these dimensions, bringing both high energy density and desirable forms of chemical reactivity.

One other consideration that informs the potential that green hydrogen and its derivatives hold for the hard-to-abate sectors is that there are no other ready alternatives that can fill the needed functions. Hydrogen's essential properties including its abundance, chemical reactivity, and susceptibility to simple, inexpensive production put it in a class by itself among the Earth's chemical elements.

What are your views on the potential of green hydrogen as a maritime fuel, particularly in light of Oman's strategic location and maritime transport links?

Hydrogen itself is likely to have a limited role in the maritime sector because it is difficult to store. It can be stored as a gas, but even at high levels of compression, its very low energy density does not fit the needs of energy-hungry vessel propulsion. It can also be liquefied, but the extreme cryogenics involved in reaching the temperature of liquefaction themselves involve parasitic consumption of large amounts of energy.

Hydrogen also embodies safety hazards that can be managed, but at the cost of added ship-board complexity. These challenges with hydrogen in its elemental form create an opening in the maritime sector for methanol and ammonia. Both fuels have properties that are close enough to those of current maritime fuels that ships can be deployed with fuels systems and engines that are only modestly different from those in use today.

Oman is well-positioned to participate in the emerging maritime green fuel economy, for example by investing in ammonia bunkering facilities in the Sohar Port and Freezone.



Global social media ad spend likely to hit \$220bn this year

Muscat – Over the past six years, brands and companies worldwide have spent nearly one trillion dollars on social media ads, turning it into the second-largest revenue stream in the digital advertising industry. Although the total spending on social media ads is expected to hit an all-time high of \$220bn this year, the annual growth rate is far from what it used to be.

According to data presented by OnlyAccounts.io, global social media ad spending is expected to grow by 6% in 2024, or six times less than at the market peak three years ago.

In a press release, OnlyAccounts.io said that social media ads have an enormous impact on purchasing decisions among younger generations. Last year, more than 75% of Gen Zers and 50% of Millennials decided to buy a product or a service after seeing it on social media platforms. Although companies and brands continue pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into this type of advertising, the entire market seems to have lost quite a bit of momentum from previous years.

According to Statista Market Insights, in 2020, when companies and brands switched to digital advertising due to COVID-19 lockdowns, total ad spending in

the social media space amounted to \$132.8bn, or 36% more than a year before. A year later, at the market's peak, brands and companies spent \$181bn on social media ads, or 37% more than in 2020.

However, after years of double-digit growth, 2022 brought the first slowdown. While the total ad spending increased to \$190bn that year, the annual ad spending growth rate dropped seven times to 4.7%. Although

Although brands and companies are expected to spend a whopping \$740bn on digital ads in 2024, the highest annual figure so far, all market segments will see a considerable ad spending slowdown

this figure slightly recovered to 9.3% last year, Statista expects 2024 to bring another slowdown which will continue in the next five years.

Statistics show brands and companies will spend nearly \$220bn on social media ads in

2024, or 6.1% more than last year. By 2028, the annual growth rate will drop to only 3.4%, or one-tenth of the growth rates seen at the market peak.

Spending slowdown hits digital advertising industry

The Statista survey also showed that the ad spending slowdown in the social media space only reflects a trend that has caught up with the entire digital advertising industry. Although brands and companies are expected to spend a whopping \$740bn on digital ads in 2024, the highest annual figure so far, all market segments will see a considerable ad spending slowdown.

For example, total ad spending in the search advertising segment will grow by 9.8% to \$306bn in 2024, down from an 11% growth rate reported last year. By 2028, the annual growth rate in this segment of the digital advertising market will drop to 7.1%.

The banner advertising market's annual ad spending growth rate will fall from 7.8% to 5.1% in this period. However, statistics show that video and audio advertising segments will see the biggest decline, with their growth rates falling from 8.3% to 5.3% and 9.8% to 3% in the next four years, respectively.

FAO reports marginal increase in global food prices for April

Rome, Italy – The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) announced that the benchmark for world food commodity prices edged higher in April, as rising meat prices and modest upticks for vegetable oils and cereals more than offset decreases for sugar and dairy products.

The FAO Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in the international prices of a set of globally-traded food commodities, averaged 119.1 points in April, up 0.3% from its revised March level, while down 9.6% from its year-earlier level.

The FAO Cereal Price Index rose 0.3% from March, ending a three-month declining trajectory.

FAO pointed to an increase in corn export prices affected by high demand amid increasing logistical disruptions, while the FAO overall rice price index fell by 1.8%.

The FAO Vegetable Oil Price Index also increased by 0.3% from March, reaching a 13-month-high, as higher quotations for sunflower and rapeseed oil offset slightly lower prices for palm and soy oil.



The FAO Meat Price Index increased by 1.6% in April from the previous month, as international poultry, bovine and ovine meat prices all rose.

The FAO Sugar Price Index declined 4.4% from March to stand 14.7 percent below its April 2023 level.

The FAO Dairy Price Index decreased marginally, by 0.3%, ending six consecutive months of increases, led by sluggish spot import demand for skim milk powder and by lower world cheese prices, impacted by the strengthening of the United

States dollar. World butter prices, by contrast, increased amid steady import demand.

FAO also released a new Cereal Supply and Demand Brief, slightly raising its forecast for the world total cereal production in 2023 to 2,846mn tonnes, a 1.2% increase from the previous year. The revision primarily reflects new information from Myanmar and Pakistan.

The forecast for world cereal utilisation was increased to 2,829mn tonnes, mostly reflecting higher than previously anticipated feed use of maize and

barley. Global maize utilization is now expected to rise 1.6% over the year, while that for wheat rises by 1.9% and that for rice dips mildly.

World cereal stocks are forecast to end the 2024 seasons at 890mn tonnes, a 2.1% increase from the outset of the year, pointing to a worldwide cereal stocks-to-use ratio of 30.9%.

FAO also adjusted its forecast for global wheat production in 2024, now standing at 791mn tonnes, less than previously expected but still marking an increase of 0.5% from 2023.



Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG

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DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

In its meeting held on 29th April 2024, the Board of Directors approved the Company's unaudited financial results for the period ended 31st March 2024.

SUMMARY FINANCIALS

In OMR'000	Quarter		2024	3 Months		
	Q1/24	Q1/23		2024	2023	
Revenue	121,623	122,791	(1%)	121,623	122,791	(1%)
Gross profit	8,444	8,234	3%	8,444	8,234	3%
Add: Other income	1,090	1,060	3%	1,090	1,060	3%
Less: Selling, distribution and administrative expenses	(7,706)	(7,412)	4%	(7,706)	(7,412)	4%
Less: Financing and taxation	(1,001)	(899)	13%	(1,001)	(899)	13%
Profit and comprehensive income	827	993	(17%)	827	993	(17%)

■ Three Months Revenue was OMR 121,623 million, 1% lower than the same period last year reflecting lower volumes in the period.

■ Three Months Gross Profit was OMR 8,444 million, 3% higher than the same period last year.

■ Three Months Profit and Comprehensive Income was OMR 0,827 million 17% lower than the same period in 2023 due to lower revenues and higher costs.

BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Mobility Business continued its commitment to ensuring customer satisfaction at every site, visit, and day through our dedicated team of champions and our site offerings, while maintaining our focus on achieving Goal Zero.

While the overall demand for fuel remains flat, the business concentrated and targeted its efforts towards our differentiated offers, experiencing growth in our premium offering Shell V-Power as well as in our Non-Fuel Retailing segment. We've seen improvements as a result of our winter season offerings. Additionally, excitement surrounds the launch of our new and improved Shell V-Power formulation, now capable of cleaning up to 100% of critical engine components. Our Non-fuel business experienced growth in Shell Select following developments in our offerings at sites, including customized food, coffee, and beverages to meet our customers' mobility needs. To cement these achievements, Shell Oman Marketing recently won the prestigious 'Oman's Most Trusted Brand Awards 2023' in the Fuel Stations category.

The **Fleet Solutions Business** remained focused on developing new customer prospects, mainly in the construction and oil & gas industries, while addressing existing customer needs through the acceleration of its digitalization journey. The business remained committed to its delivery premises, operational excellence, and leveraging the Cards Management System to provide better security and transactional control.

Lubricants Business despite facing challenges in the supply chain, the Lubricants Business has consistently met the demand for lubricants in Oman and export markets, experiencing growth in both Direct and Indirect channels across Business-to-Business (B2B) and Business-to-Customer (B2C) segments. Furthermore, Shell Oman Marketing recently won the prestigious 'Oman's Most Trusted Brand Awards 2023' in the Lubricants category.

The local business secured new contracts with key players across various industries and achieved multiple successes through its assigned distributor in Oman. Additionally, Shell Oman Marketing successfully hosted its 1st Shell All Star event, in partnership with Oman Trading Establishment LLC (OTE), attracting a diverse audience from the B2C sector. Q1 witnessed the contract signing between Shell Oman marketing Co. and Eclipsa, the new B2C distributor in Yemen.

The plant has maintained a high On-Time In-Full (OTIF) delivery rate of 97%, which exceeds industry norms.

Customer Operations witnessed a strong start to the year, marked by consistent high CS (Customer Satisfaction Index) scores, reflecting the business's commitment to excellence and customer satisfaction. The business continued driving forward profitability and to continue serving its customers safely and reliably as commercially feasible.

As part of the business's commitment to addressing existing customer needs, the Help & Support website will soon feature a comprehensive FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section, offering future enhancements such as Live Chat, Answer Bot, and 24/7 FAQ email responses.

In parallel, the Commercial Fuel Shell Market Hub 2.0 project is set to alter the e-commerce experience. This upgraded version will empower customers to manage their day-to-day business with Shell effortlessly, whether they're on a PC, tablet, or mobile device. From managing orders to tracking account activities and accessing valuable training tools, these advancements underscore the Fleet Solutions Business's dedication to driving value for its customers and staying at the forefront of industry innovation.

Aviation Business continued its focus on retaining and winning new key contracts at Muscat International Airport and Salalah Airport. The business continues to apply efficiency and cost optimization solutions to its operations to improve profitability and to continue serving its customers safely and reliably as commercially feasible.

In Q1, the **Commercial Fuels Business** faced challenges predominantly stemming from the scarcity of infrastructure projects within the competitive Business-to-Business (B2B) market. Nevertheless, the company remains committed to ensuring uninterrupted continuity of supply to its customers.

The **Marine Business** continues to serve its customers at the key ports, leveraging its global expertise to ensure the successful delivery of bunkering solutions to its marine customers. The company's focus remains on strengthening its position and exploring new business opportunities to expand its footprint across all major ports in the Sultanate while remaining fully committed to the highest HSE, Ethics & Compliance, and operational excellence standards.

HEALTH, SAFETY, SECURITY AND ENVIRONMENT (HSSE)

The health and safety of people, customers and community is a top priority for Shell Oman Marketing Company. In Q1 the Company ended the quarter with Zero Recordable Incidents and Zero Loss of Primary Containment (LOPCs), a testament to its commitment to HSSE.

In the first quarter, we rolled out the approved HSSE strategy to all employees and partners, where the three priorities of Care, Competence and Compliance strengthen alignment between SOM's core values, goals and strategies, and help guide the workforce to apply these principles to improve workplace and contractor safety, prevent and mitigate incidents and safeguard people and the environment in the communities in which we operate. During the holy month of Ramadan, Shell Oman Marketing focused on HSSE, employee welfare, and fatigue management.

The company continued its endeavor to build the competency of our frontlines through numerous awareness and training sessions. In the first quarter, we completed the Tier 2 Emergency Response Exercise in collaboration with internal and external stakeholders. This exercise aims to test our preparedness and knowledge to handle such a situation. Moreover, the organization launched a health campaign to encourage people to enhance their physical health and organized several health sessions including health checkups, fatigue management and blood donation.

As in the environmental area, we have completed numerous compliance activities including soil and groundwater compliance with environmental regulations. Track waste management performance and monitor ambient air emissions at the MAJ facilities. Furthermore, incorporating data used in the carbon footprint to monitor the net emissions of the SOM process.

Furthermore, the organization launched the Worker Welfare Implementation Plan, starting with a gap assessment activities, to improve the wellbeing of people working with or through Shell Oman Marketing.

STRATEGY & ENERGY TRANSITION

The strategy highlights the importance of building a strong and resilient business by putting customers at its centre, providing Shell's products, services and solutions to customers to support their journey to net zero. This also includes partnering with other stakeholders where we aim to deliver value through our integrated assets and supply chains, optimising value and managing risk for Shell and customers as we produce, buy, trade, transport and sell energy products and solutions across the Sultanate. This is a strategy that combines our financial strength and discipline with a sustainable and purposeful approach to capitalize on the opportunities that are arising for us in the energy transition and the Oman economy. The company is proud of the fact that our values and goals are aligned with Oman's Vision 2040, and the government's announcement on its net zero emissions target by 2050.

The company is developing its comprehensive approach to emission-reduction roadmap and initiatives for its major operated facilities and assets. Meanwhile, various agreements have been negotiated with key potential partners in energy transition related initiatives such as EV and smart solutions as well as petroleum waste recycling, which will be announced in the coming quarters. This highlights the company's consistent endeavour for continuous business development as well as create local content and in-country value agenda across its clusters of businesses, including in its energy transition journey.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

As a responsible corporate citizen, Shell Oman Marketing Company continued to build on its strategic corporate social responsibility themes which are Environment, Health, and Community Skills & Enterprise Development. This is done through the delivery of its planned initiatives as well as regularly addressing requests from local entities and charitable organizations.

The company continued to proactively collaborate with important stakeholders and partners to deliver its social aspiration through different initiatives and programs including kicking off the EVPro program in partnership with the Youth Center. The program aims to enhance the youth's understanding of sustainability concepts as well as provide them with training and development in e-mobility and the latest technologies in Electric Vehicle (EV) charging.

We will continue playing our role and contributing to Powering Lives, in line with Shell's Powering Progress strategy, Oman Vision 2040 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Walid Hadi
Chairman, Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG
Muscat, April 29, 2024

Unaudited Financial Statements for the 3 months ended 31 March 2024

	STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE 3 MONTHS ENDED 31 MARCH 2024		
	Unaudited 3 months ended 31 Mar 2024 OMR'000	Unaudited 3 months ended 31 Mar 2023 OMR'000	Audited 12 months ended 31 Dec 2023 OMR'000
Revenue	121,623	122,791	519,466
Cost of sales	(113,179)	(114,557)	(483,995)
Gross profit	8,444	8,234	35,471
Other income	1,090	1,060	4,188
Selling, distribution and administrative expenses	(7,706)	(7,412)	(32,411)
Operating profit	1,828	1,882	7,248
Interest expense	(767)	(702)	(2,963)
Interest income	3	5	14
Profit before income tax	1,064	1,185	4,299
Income tax expense	(237)	(192)	(696)
Profit and comprehensive income for the period	827	993	3,603
Basic and diluted earnings per share (OMR)	0.008	0.010	0.036

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AT 31 MARCH 2024

	Unaudited At 31 Mar 2024 OMR'000	Unaudited At 31 Mar 2023 OMR'000	Audited At 31 Dec 2023 OMR'000
ASSETS			
Non-current assets			
Property, plant and equipment	62,754	60,442	63,888
Right-of-use assets	39,512	38,196	39,816
Intangible assets	136	173	150
Deferred tax assets	504	237	358
Total non-current assets	102,906	99,048	104,212
Current assets			
Inventories	5,792	9,583	7,364
Receivables and prepayments	52,704	50,159	52,194
Cash at bank and in hand	11,053	6,561	3,997
Total current assets	69,549	66,303	63,555
Total assets	172,455	165,351	167,767
EQUITY			
Share capital	10,000	10,000	10,000
Legal reserve	3,587	3,587	3,587
Retained earnings	37,149	37,312	39,922
Total equity	50,736	50,899	53,509
LIABILITIES			
Non-current liabilities			
Long-term lease liabilities	37,842	35,794	37,397
Employee terminal benefits	155	192	150
Total non-current liabilities	37,997	35,986	37,547
Current liabilities			
Short-term loans	29,000	13,000	15,000
Short-term lease liabilities	2,839	2,777	3,081
Payables and accruals	50,518	61,165	67,658
Income tax payable	1,018	1,504	935
Provisions	47	20	37
Total current liabilities	83,722	78,466	76,711
Total liabilities	121,719	114,452	114,258
Total equity and liabilities	172,455	165,351	167,767
Net assets per share (OMR)	0.507	0.509	0.535

* The complete financial statements are available from the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).
* The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder on request, in either Arabic or English, within 7 days of receipt of the request. The request should be sent to the Chief Financial Officer at the address shown above.

India has become key market for tech giants: Apple CEO

New Delhi, India – India has become a key market for global tech giants, with a burgeoning developer base attracting significant attention. Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, expressed his contentment with India's growing developer community, underlining Apple's holistic approach covering everything from developer support to market strategies and operational efficiency.

India's Minister of State for Electronics and Technology, Rajeev Chandrasekhar tweeted that the CEO of Apple, Tim Cook said, "We have been very pleased that there is a rapidly growing base of developers in India. Apple is working all of the entire ecosystem from developer to the market to operations, the whole thing."

Cook lauded Apple India's double-digit revenue growth, marking a new March quarter record. He described India as an "incredibly exciting market" and a major focus for the company.

"We did grow strong by



Tim Cook

double-digit, and so we were very, very pleased with that. It was a new March quarter revenue record for us. As you know, as I've said before, I see it as an incredibly exciting market and it's a major focus for us," said Cook on Apple's performance in India.

India has become a top priority for global tech companies due to its large talent pool, low operating costs, and stable environment for supply chains. In

this continuously evolving era of global geopolitical power India has emerged as a beacon for global tech corporations. In 2023, revenue growth rates for Apple, Microsoft, and Meta in India outpaced their global expansion rates.

"From a pragmatic point of view, you need to produce there (India) to be competitive, and so, yes, the two things are linked from that point of view, but we have both operational things going on and we have to go to market and initiatives going on," he added.

Apple's efforts to expand its presence in India include strengthening distribution channels and nurturing the developer community. Apple supported over a million developer jobs in India in 2023, with plans for further expansion.

Moreover, Apple's achievement of setting a six-month revenue record in India and other emerging markets underscores the country's significance in the tech landscape.

ANI

'Mandvi to Muscat' lecture series comes to end

The eight-month long landmark lecture series 'Mandvi to Muscat: Indian Community and the Shared History of India and Oman' organised by the Embassy of India, Muscat, drew to a close on May 1, with a final lecture by Prof Dr Calvin Allen from the US, the noted authority on the subject.

Dr Allen's lecture provided a panoramic view of the rich history of the Indian diaspora in Oman, spanning from prehistoric times to the modern era. From ancient trade routes to contemporary collaborations, Dr Allen elucidated the cultural exchanges, people-to-people ties, and socio-economic interactions that have shaped the close bond between India and Oman.

In addition, Harshendu Shah traced the evolution of Indian schools in Oman and Kiran Asher, Pravasi Bharatiya Samman awardee presented a detailed narrative of Oman's Hindu temples, highlighting the inclusive ethos of Omani society.

Dr P Mohammad Ali, recipient of the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman award, shared poignant anecdotes from his inspiring journey during the modern renaissance in Oman, while Dharmin Ved offered insights into the illustrious history of the Ved family, adding to the stories of deep-rooted people-to-people



connections between India and Oman.

More than 300 people attended the event held at the Mahajan Recreation Centre in Al Wadi Al Kabir including dignitaries, scholars and prominent members from Omani, Indian and Indian-Omani communities.

Dr B R Mani, Director-General of the National Museum, New Delhi; Jamal al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Mu-

seum of Oman; Sayyid Nooh bin Mohammed al Busaidi, Chairman of Oman Historical Association; and Pankaj Khimji, Advisor for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce graced the occasion with their presence.

In his address, H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, underscored the significance of the 'Mandvi to Muscat' series in re-

vitalising awareness about the contributions of the Indian community in strengthening India-Oman ties.

He noted that all the papers presented during the lecture series will be compiled and published into a book.

The lecture series was inaugurated by India's Minister of State for External Affairs V Muralidharan on October 19, 2023 and the event on May 1 marked

the conclusion of an eight-month journey, offering rich insights into the historical connections between India and Oman.

The lecture series saw the participation of distinguished academics, historians and anthropologists based in Oman, India, the US and the UAE including Dr M Redha Bhacker, noted scholar from Oman; Dr Chaya Goswami, historian of western Indian ocean from India; Sanjeev

Sanyal, Member of Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council; Prof James Onley, Historian from the American University Sharjah; Dr Sandhya Rao Mehta, Associate Professor at Sultan Qaboos University; and Swagath Pani, an Anthropologist Historian based in the US.

Additionally, family histories of Ratansi Purushottam, Khimji Ramdas, Naranjee Hirjee, Lakhoo Ved, Toprani, and Shah Nagar-

das families were narrated by the latest generations of these houses. From the more modern times, experiences of Dr Syed Mohammed Rafay from Bihar and Dr Mohamed Ali from Kerala were presented.

As a unique initiative, the 'Mandvi to Muscat' lecture series has made a meaningful contribution to promoting a better understanding of the history of the Indian community in Oman.



Oman Switzerland Friendship Association holds AGM, elects new board members

The Oman Switzerland Friendship Association on April 24 held its Annual General Meeting and discussed the activities of the association during the past year, including a highly successful Business Forum in Lucerne, Switzerland and approved the

audited financials for the year ending 2023.

It was an election year for the next three-year term. Six of the seven board members were re-elected, being Hani al Zubair, Luca Decarli, Mohammed Abdullah al Kharusi, Dr Anka Kaest-

ner, Said bin Saif al Maskery and Lateef Shahdad. The final board member was the newly elected Ziyana Saud al Mudhaffer, who replaced Khalid Said al Wahaibi after the latter stepped down for this term. The newly elected board will meet soon to discuss

the plans for 2024.

Association chairman Hani al Zubair thanked the members for their continued support, and also thanked His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and his Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their guidance and support.

Sohar International branch, Islamic centre open in Duqm

In alignment with the bank's ongoing organic expansion strategy to serve customers and achieve further financial inclusion, Sohar International, the fastest-growing bank in Oman, is pleased to announce the commencement of operations at its premium Sohar International branch and Sohar Islamic service centre located in the wilayat of Duqm.

The new service points are fully equipped to offer a superior banking experience to customers across all segments. Strategically situated to provide convenience, the Sohar International branch and Sohar Islamic service centre boast a prime location, spacious facilities, and ample parking, ensuring easy access for customers.

Staffed by a team of seasoned professionals, the new service points are committed to delivering efficient, responsive, and tailored banking services that meet

the diverse needs of our valued clientele.

The new state-of-the-art service points feature a 24-hour digital lobby equipped with fully functional ATMs and CDMs, enhancing accessibility and convenience for customers at all times.

Abdul Qadir al Sumali, Chief Retail and Premier Banking Officer at Sohar International, underscored the strategic significance of expanding operations into Duqm. "This expansion reaffirms our steadfast dedication to delivering inclusive and innovative banking solutions tailored to diverse customer needs. We are excited to extend our premium services to the Duqm community, ensuring convenient access for valued customers in the wilaiyat and neighbouring areas. The comprehensive suite of banking services and products at our new branch encompasses

account opening, card issuance, and financing facilities," he said.

In line with its customer-centric approach, Sohar International emphasises the importance of human interaction alongside digitalisation. By increasing its branch footprint, the bank aims to strengthen relationships with customers, recognising the enduring value of personalised service.

Abdul Wahid al Murshidi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer at Sohar International, emphasised the institution's commitment to setting new benchmarks and fostering innovation within the Omani banking sector. "A state-of-the-art facility, the Duqm service centre is designed to provide a premium banking experience to all its customers. The new service centre will uphold the bank's fundamental values of customer-centricity and efficiency."

Rising Stars Music Concert of Dar Al Atta'a enthralls Muscat audience

The Let's Read Programme of Dar Al Atta'a, held in collaboration with Play Tunes Institute of Music on April 27, created a fabulous children's music concert to raise funds for the Maktabati Mobile Library Programme.

The Al Bustan Ritz Carlton Hotel Auditorium generously hosted the very first Rising Stars Music Concert featuring young, talented musicians, vocalists and dancers living in Oman.

Jane Jaffer MBE, founder of the Let's Read Programme, which promotes the love of reading to children in Oman, said, "We contacted schools and music teachers across the capital to find talented young students willing to perform at the concert. Becoming a musician takes talent, skill and dedication.

"Performing on a stage in front of a large audience takes courage. We hope the concert will motivate and encourage students to practise and become inspired by the Rising Stars. Funds raised from the concert will help Let's Read purchase books for our Maktabati Mobile Library

Programme.

"For the past ten years, Maktabati has been visiting schools, festivals and fairs across the country, giving children good reading experiences and access to good books. A child that reads is a child that succeeds."

Thanae Pachyannaki and her fantastic team of professional musicians, music teachers, sound engineers and lighting specialists at Tunes Trading and Services, said, "This was a spectacular event with such talented young artists and we are so proud to have been a part of it! Our Institutes follow the London College of Music and Trinity College of London examination boards for music and the National Association of teachers of Dancing syllabi. However, we cater to both serious candidates as well as leisure performers that just want to enjoy playing."

Thanae had the daunting task of viewing hundreds of video auditions and making the selection. There was an incredible amount of talent to choose from! Rehearsals followed with



the 110 students that had been selected, many of whom were students of the Classic Music and Arts Institute in Qurum, Play Tunes Institute in Azaiba and other music institutes in the area.

As the students and their families and friends filed into the auditorium, the Tunes Philhar-

monic Orchestra started the show with a resounding performance. It was important for the students to see professional musicians in action and live music performed on stage.

Then the superb compere for the show, Ayman Imad Sultan, introduced the first performer and the entertainment began.

The young performers were nervous to perform in a professional environment in front of a large audience.

Charlotte Archer and Dana Al Balushi, from Cheltenham School, said, "When we first saw the stage, we were so nervous. However, during rehearsals Thanae gave us some great tips

to help us relax. Being onstage and performing was such a thrill, and the audience was great.

"It was such an exciting experience!"

The audience erupted in applause as the duet sang and dancers performed on stage.

Ileana Tudor, from BSM, said, "I have been training with the

Classic Music and Arts Institute since I was seven years old. During the pandemic I started composing my own music. The Rising Stars Concert brought people together to support a beautiful cause, to promote and encourage children's education and well-being.

"I would like to thank the Let's Read Organization, Tunes Institute and the Al Bustan Palace Hotel for giving me the opportunity to perform the premiere of my song 'You will be the death of me.'"

The evening's entertainment consisted of a varied programme ranging from classical pieces composed by Tchaikovsky and Mozart performed by individual pianists, classical guitarists and drummers, to popular songs from Tangled, Taylor Swift and Carrie Underwood sung by individual vocalists and duets.

Loay al Maskari's fingers simply flew over the keys as he played *Ronda All Turca* by Mozart. More than thirty children from the Royal Flight Choir sang a song for world peace.

BankDhofar to organise women's leadership forum

BankDhofar is organising the Omani Women's Leadership Forum at Al Bustan Palace Ritz-Carlton Hotel on May 8.

The event will be held under the patronage of Sayyida Maani bint Abdullah al Busaidi, Director General of Family Development and President of the Child Protection Committee at the Ministry of Social Development, in line with supporting the government's directions aimed at empowering Omani women in various sectors, especially the economic and the financial sectors.

The forum will address several topics, like women in financial sector, Diversity and inclusion at work place, as well as guiding women on how to develop their talent and enhance skills to transform them into projects on the ground with optimal utilisation of media to promote their brand or project.

Céline Schillinger, a global Engagement Influencer, is a prominent speakers at the forum. She is one of the leading women in France who was awarded the



National Order of Merit by the French government for her innovative initiatives in the business world. Schillinger, a TEDx speaker currently works as a

consultant in leading organisation, enabling institutional transformation, and enhancing the value of work. She has written a book on engagement Leadership,

which was published in 2022. BankDhofar supports government initiatives and directions that are in line with Oman Vision 2040, especially in the employ-

ment field and digital transformation, as the bank contributed to providing job opportunities for citizens, and was able to employ more than 250 Omani Talents in recent months, which contributed to raising the Omanisation rate to 92%.

As for the digital transformation sector, the bank is constantly investing in digital transformation and technology to enrich the banking experience for customers and provide them with the best services.

It has expanded its digital channels by providing customers with the opportunity to open bank accounts through smart phones and other digital channels, which enable them to complete their banking transactions with complete ease.

Easily and conveniently at the right time and place, which led to an increase in the total number of transactions via digital channels in 2023 by about 85.5%, in addition to an increase in the value of completed transactions by 55.3%.



SQU Accounting League gets support from National Finance

Committed to empowering the next generation of leaders and change-makers, National Finance, the leading finance company in Oman, proudly sponsored the SQU League, a thrilling competition showcasing the accounting acumen of Sultan Qaboos University students.

Twenty participating teams contended to master a series of challenging accounting tasks and questions. The event culminated in a closing ceremony celebrating the students' remarkable skills and talent.

During the ceremony, the winning teams were honoured in

the presence of a number of students and faculty members at the College of Economics and Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University.

National Finance's support for student-driven initiatives underscores the company's keen understanding of the importance of nurturing the next generation of finance professionals.

By sponsoring events like the SQU Accounting League, the company aims to provide students with vital platforms to showcase their talents, refine their skills, and pave the way for successful careers.

Arabian Travel Market begins today; over 41,000 attendees expected

The organisers of Arabian Travel Market 2024 (ATM) and representatives from the exhibition's strategic partners have outlined their plans for the event, which will run from Monday to Thursday at the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC).

Due to adverse weather conditions and to ensure the safety of all participants and invited guests, the scheduled ATM press conference had to be cancelled. All partners, which include the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET), Emirates, IHG Hotels & Resorts, and Al Rais Travel, have underscored their commitment to the show and the opportunities it affords.

The 31st edition of ATM is poised to welcome over 2,300 exhibitors and representatives from more than 165 countries, with 41,000 attendees expected under the theme 'Empowering Innovation: Transforming Travel Through Entrepreneurship', spotlighting a pivotal area for the travel and tourism industry.

From startups to established brands, ATM 2024 will highlight how innovators are enhancing customer experiences, driving efficiencies and accelerating progress towards a net-zero fu-



Prominent participants are (L-R) Mohamed al Rais, Issam Kazim, Haitham Matta and Adnan Kazim

A dedicated India summit will take place on the opening day of ATM, highlighting a recent outbound travel boom from the market

ture for the industry. Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market added: "ATM 2024 is gearing up for an exciting lineup spread across two stages, with the Global Stage returning alongside the new Future Stage. The conference agenda will feature

key industry speakers from around the world and address the emerging trends that are fueling the travel and tourism sector's growth."

Curtis added, "An eagerly awaited addition to ATM 2024 is the new Entrepreneurship-focused summit, which will delve into the role of travel start-ups in the Middle East economy, spotlighting their pioneering approaches. As entrepreneurship and innovation take centre stage, the exciting ATM Start-Up Pitch Battle, in partnership with Emirates Group's Intelak provides the perfect platform to celebrate the immense potential for innovators in the region and for brands to present their industry solutions."

The number of participating

hotel brands for ATM 2024 has increased by 21% year-on-year, with a 58% rise in new Travel Technology products showcased. Several new destinations will be introduced at ATM 2024, including China, Macao, Kenya, Guatemala, and Columbia, while returning countries include Spain and France, among many others. Upticks across all key verticals with year-on-year growth across all regions participation including ME 28%, Asia and Europe 34%, and Africa 26%.

A dedicated India summit will take place on the opening day of ATM, highlighting a recent outbound travel boom from the market. Titled 'Unlocking the True Potential of Inbound Indian Travellers,' the summit will explore the dynamics of India.



Ninth School Theatre Festival comes to end

The Ministry of Education (MoE), represented by the Vocational Guidance and Students Counseling Center, concluded on Thursday, the activities of the ninth school theatre festival 'Culture and Empowerment'.

Seven plays from the various educational directorates participated, at the theatre of the Directorate-General of Education in Muscat at Dohat al Adab School.

The closing ceremony is held under the patronage of H E Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth for Sports, in

the presence of H E Prof Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, Advisors, Directors-General at the Ministry, and at the participating governorates, theatre artists, specialists in theatrical criticism, and students.

The distinguished artist Murai al Halyan, a theatrical, television and radio artist from the United Arab Emirates, head of the jury in the theater competition, said, "The participation of a large number of school students in this theatre heralds the future of the

theatrical movement in the Sultanate of Oman, which creates a generation aware of one of the human arts."

Qasim al Riyami, senior theatrical activity specialist at the Nizwa Cultural Center, said, "School theatre is an enrichment of the cultural aspect that enables students to move towards the world of art and acting. I witnessed a number of theatrical performances by these students that can be built upon and participated in the performances of civil troupes and performances."

Khimji Ramdas ICT forms partnership with Tatweer Cyber Security

In a significant move set to transform the cybersecurity infrastructure across the Sultanate of Oman, Khimji Ramdas ICT (KR ICT), a frontrunner in cybersecurity solutions, announced a strategic alliance with Tatweer Cyber Security (TCS).

This partnership with TCS - a cutting-edge SOC service provider specialising in authentication, identity management, secure content, professional security services, training, and computer forensics - marks a pivotal development in the national effort to fortify digital defences against escalating cyber threats.

KR ICT, known for its robust cybersecurity offerings, combines forces with TCS, whose specialties include authentication, identity management, secure content, professional



security services, training, and computer forensics. This collaboration aims to integrate TCS's state-of-the-art SOC capabilities with KR ICT's strategic approach to cybersecurity, delivering a comprehensive security framework unparalleled in the region.

"We are thrilled to partner

with Tatweer Cyber Security," said Meenal Madavi, Business Head of Khimji Ramdas ICT. "This collaboration comes at a critical time when the need for innovative and resilient cybersecurity solutions is at its peak. TCS's cutting-edge SOC, equipped with advanced tech-

nologies and managed by a team of expert professionals, complements our strategy to provide end-to-end security solutions that meet the complex demands of today's threat landscape."

Nasr al Nabhani, CEO of Tatweer Cyber Security, added, "Joining forces with Khimji Ram-

das ICT represents a strategic milestone in our mission to elevate cybersecurity standards across Oman and the region. Together, we are poised to deliver a suite of scalable solutions that not only address current security challenges but also anticipate future threats, thereby enhancing

protection for our clients' digital assets."

The partnership between KR ICT and TCS is expected to set new benchmarks for cybersecurity in Oman, emphasising their shared commitment to securing enterprises against the ever-evolving threats of the digital

world. The alliance also aims to foster innovation, promote local talent, and support the national agenda for a safer cyber environment. Enterprises across Oman can look forward to accessing a range of enhanced cybersecurity services, tailored to protect their critical infrastructure.



Naila Kiani on Sunday summited Makalu, the world's fifth-tallest mountain, located in Nepal

Naila becomes first Pakistani woman to summit 11 peaks above 8,000m

Karachi, Pakistan - Pakistan's Naila Kiani on Sunday summited Makalu, the world's fifth-tallest mountain, located in Nepal, making her the first Pakistani woman to scale 11 peaks above 8,000 metres (26,247 feet).

"After a challenging climb through the night, Kiani has achieved another historic milestone by successfully summiting Makalu, the 5th highest peak in

the world at 8,485 metres, today (Sunday) at approximately 9:35am Nepal time (8:50am Pakistan time)," the Alpine Club of Pakistan, the country's official mountaineering organisation, said in a statement.

This 'remarkable' feat, it added, also makes her the first Pakistani woman to have summited this 'incredibly difficult

mountain'.

She now holds the record as the fastest Pakistani, among both men and women, to have summited 11 of the 14 peaks above 8,000 metres accomplished in under three years.

"Naila is grateful for all the prayers and wishes, and she gives special thanks to everyone. She also thanks Sherpa Gelgen Dai from Imagine Nepal, who

has supported Naila every step of the way, making this achievement possible,' the statement added.

In August 2022, Kiani became the first Pakistani mother to summit K2, the world's second-tallest mountain.

A banker by profession, she currently lives in the United Arab Emirates.

Anadolu Agency

'Largest' edition of Arabian Travel Market opens today

Dubai, UAE- Arabian Travel Market (ATM), the leading global event for the travel and tourism sector, will return to the Dubai World Trade Centre this week for its 31st edition.

Taking place from May 6 to 9, over 41,000 attendees are expected to visit the annual trade show, which will feature 2,300 exhibitors from 165 countries.

This year, ATM is centred on the theme 'Empowering Innovation - Transforming Travel through Entrepreneurship', spotlighting the pivotal role of start-ups and entrepreneurs in shaping the sector's future. This focus will provide a platform for industry leaders and policymakers worldwide to empower the travel and tourism community to harness entrepreneurship and identify opportunities for growth.

A four-day conference programme will deliver over 50 informative sessions from more than 200 high-profile speakers who will address attendees across the Global Stage and the new Future Stage. Issam Abdulrahman Kazim, the chief executive officer, Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing, will deliver the 'Global Stage Welcome: The Gateway to Global Insights' keynote speech, outlining Dubai's tourism goals and plans for the coming years. Later on Monday, ministers from the GCC and beyond will take to the stage to discuss the key strategies to support and develop tourism in the region at the



Taking place from May 6 to 9, over 41,000 attendees are expected to visit the annual trade show, which will feature 2,300 exhibitors from 165 countries

Following the unprecedented success of our 30th edition in 2023, exhibitor participation has increased by 26% this year, making ATM 2024 the largest in event's history

DANIELLE CURTIS

'Ministerial Debate: Streamlining Tourism within the GCC'.

ATM will also host the 'Market Insights Summit on the Global Stage' on the opening day, exploring the potential of China, India and Latin America as they emerge as key players in global tourism. The panel for the summit includes Basmah Al-Mayman, the regional director for the

Middle East, UN Tourism; Guy Hutchinson, the president, Middle East & Africa, Hilton; Julia Simpson, the CEO & president, World Travel and Tourism Council; and Jan Gerrit Koehling, the partner, Roland Berger.

The 'Future Stage' will officially launch on Monday with a focus on the 'Trends Shaping the Future of Hospitality in the Mid-

dle East', led by senior representatives from IHG Hotels and Resorts, Marriot International, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, Banyan Tree Dubai, Mastercard and Silkhaus. Other sessions in the 'Future Stage' include 'The New Age of Island Tourism', which explores how islands in the Middle East are offering new opportunities for tourism, and the 'Global Economic Disruptions Affecting the Future of Travel' session.

Speaking ahead of launch day, Danielle Curtis, the exhibition director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said: "Following the unprecedented success of our 30th edition in 2023, exhibitor

participation has increased by a remarkable 26 per cent this year, making ATM 2024 the largest in the event's history.

"This notable growth underscores ATM's reputation as an unmissable event for the global travel and tourism community, offering unrivalled business and networking opportunities for attendees and exhibitors across a wide range of travel sectors and verticals."

Growth has been achieved across all show verticals, including regional year-on-year upticks for the Middle East (28%), Asia (34%), Europe (34%) and Africa (26%).

WAM

Japan PM Kishida wraps up visit to South America

Tokyo, Japan - Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida wrapped up a landmark visit to South America, pledging to work together with regional countries to tackle global challenges including climate change, economic disparity, and poverty, Japanese media reported on Sunday.

At a press conference on Saturday before concluding his trip, Kishida said Japan will offer 'diverse and inclusive co-operation' tailored to each country, including those in Central and South America.

"Latin America is rich in natural resources, such as minerals, energy, and food, while having a large young population. Many of its countries have great potential," he was quoted as saying by Tokyo-based Kyodo News.

Kishida, on the last leg of a six-day visit that also took him to France, also spoke at a ceremony on Saturday in Sao Paulo, Brazil on Japan's policies toward Latin America and the Caribbean as Tokyo seeks to deepen relations with Global South, a term referring to emerging and developing nations.

On Friday, he held bilateral talks with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Paraguayan President Santiago Pena. It was his first visit to South America since he took office in October 2021.

Kishida said Japan has decided to provide funds to a



Japanese PM Fumio Kishida

programme aimed at preserving Brazil's Amazon rainforest, seen as the 'lungs of the Earth', while helping Caribbean islands vulnerable to global warming prepare for natural disasters.

Stressing the environment and human rights, he added that his country will continue to promote 'high-quality' infrastructure and other sustainable economic cooperation projects by taking into consideration the conditions in recipient nations. Japanese companies have set up more than 1,000 new offices in the Latin American region over the past 10 years, he added.

On Saturday in Sao Paulo, Kishida also met with a group of people who moved to Brazil from Japan after surviving the US atomic bombing of Hiroshima in 1945 towards the end of World War II, including a 100-year-old man.

Anadolu Agency

EARLY HARVEST



Farmers harvesting early season rice at a field in Beishan village, Qionghai City of south China's Hainan Province on Saturday (Xinhua)

'Little Russian Island': London's role in Russia's 1917 revolution

London, UK - In the annals of history, London often takes centre stage for its role in shaping global events. But one lesser-known chapter in the city's history is its contribution to the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Before what would become a pivotal moment of upheaval that set the stage for the emergence of the Soviet Union and, later, the Cold War that dominated the 20th century's latter half, many prominent Russian political figures and revolutionaries would gather in London's East End, commonly referred to as the 'Little Russian Island' in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The city had served as a safe haven for dissidents fleeing persecution in Russia, among them leading figures in the revolution like Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, and Georgy Plekhanov.

Lenin, one of the central figures in the Russian Revolution and the then-leader of the Bolshevik Party, spent a considerable amount of time in London, where Karl Marx penned *Das Kapital*, laying the foundations of Lenin's political ideology.



Vladimir Lenin lived in London for 15 years

The Spark

In his book *The Spark That Lit the Revolution*, researcher Robert Henderson provides an opportunity for an in-depth examination of Lenin's time in London.

Lenin lived in London between 1902 and 1917, during which time he published revolutionary literature, organised Bolshevik factions, and maintained contact with other revolutionaries.

In 1903, a small group of po-

litical activists led by Lenin and Trotsky in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party converged in London for a fateful congress that would change the course of history.

This gathering marked the birth of the ideological schism that divided the Russian revolutionary movement into two rival factions: the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.

Anadolu Agency

Accept deal with Hamas: Hostages' families

The families of Israeli hostages held in the Gaza Strip raised the demand to PM Benjamin Netanyahu

Jerusalem - The families of Israeli hostages held in the Gaza Strip demanded on Sunday that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accept a swap deal with the Palestinian resistance group Hamas.

"It is your duty to ignore any political pressure," said hostages' families in a brief letter sent to Netanyahu, according to the daily Yedioth Ahronoth.

"History will not forgive you if you waste the opportunity to bring them home," they added.

Netanyahu reportedly faces growing pressure not to accept a deal that would lead to ending the war in Gaza and cancelling plans for a military offensive into Rafah. Israel's opposition accuses Netanyahu of trying to sabotage a hostage swap deal with Hamas.

Tel Aviv believes 134 Israelis are being held in Gaza, while Israel is holding some 9,000 Palestinians in its jails.

A previous deal last November saw the release of 81 Israelis and 24 foreigners in exchange for 240 Palestinians, including 71 women and 169 children. The US, Qatar, and Egypt have tried to broker an agreement to release the remaining Israeli captives.

Hamas 'still keen' for deal

Meanwhile, Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh on Sunday accused Netanyahu of undermining efforts to reach a ceasefire deal in the Gaza Strip.

"Hamas is still keen on reaching an agreement that ends the aggression, guarantees Israeli

Hamas is still keen on reaching an agreement that ends the aggression, guarantees Israeli troop withdrawal, and achieves a serious prisoner exchange deal

ISMAIL HANIYEH

troop withdrawal, and achieves a serious prisoner exchange deal," Haniyeh said in a statement.

"The world has become a hostage to an extremist government, which has a huge number

of political problems and crimes committed in Gaza," he added, in reference to Netanyahu's government. Haniyeh accused the Israeli premier of 'inventing justifications' to continue his offen-

sive on the Gaza Strip. Early on Sunday, Netanyahu rejected calls to end the Gaza offensive in return for a hostage swap deal with Hamas, claiming that ending the war now would keep the Palestinian group in power. Hamas held talks in Egypt on Sunday for a Gaza ceasefire and hostage swap with Israel.

'Positive progress'

However, Egyptian state media said on Sunday that 'positive progress' has been made in ne-

gotiations between Israel and Hamas to reach a ceasefire agreement in Gaza, but warned against believing reported details of a possible deal.

"A high-level source confirmed that there is positive progress in negotiations regarding reaching a ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip," reported Egyptian Al Qahera News.

But the unnamed source added: "What has been published about the terms of the agreement in the media is inac-

curate." The source confirmed that 'the Egyptian security delegation is continuing its consultations with all parties', adding that 'the return of the displaced Palestinians to the northern Gaza Strip is among the terms of the agreement'. Media reports said earlier that negotiations between the two sides had hit a 'dead end', with the Israeli PM insisting on invading the southern city of Rafah despite international warnings of the danger this would pose to the some 1.5mn dis-

placed civilians there.

Death toll in Gaza nears 34700

At least 34,683 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's ongoing offensive on the Gaza Strip since last October, the Health Ministry in the besieged enclave said on Sunday.

A ministry statement added that 78,018 other people have also been injured in the onslaught. "Israeli attacks killed 29 people and injured 110 others in the last 24 hours," the statement said. "Many people are still trapped under rubble and on the roads as rescuers are unable to reach them," it added.

Israel has waged an unrelenting offensive on the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack by the Palestinian group Hamas last October 7 which killed some 1,200 people.

Tel Aviv has also imposed a crippling blockade on the Gaza Strip, leaving its population, particularly residents of northern Gaza, on the verge of starvation.

More than six months into the Israeli war, vast swathes of Gaza lay in ruins, pushing 85 per cent of the enclave's population into internal displacement amid a crippling blockade of food, clean water and medicine, according to the UN. Israel stands accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice. An interim ruling in January ordered Tel Aviv to stop genocidal acts and take measures to guarantee that humanitarian assistance is provided to civilians in Gaza.

Anadolu Agency

BJP wants to finish reservation: Rahul

Nagarkurnool, India - India's main opposition leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday accused the ruling party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi of being against the decades old reservation policy for the downtrodden.

Addressing an election rally in Nagarkurnool in the southern Indian state of Telangana, the Gandhi scion launched a scathing attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) calling it against the reservation of people from the lower strata of society.

"BJP wants to finish reservation... They have always been against reservation," said Rahul Gandhi, the leader of the century old Congress party.

"Their senior leaders say that reservation should end. RSS top leader said reservation should be done with," Rahul Gandhi went on.

RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) is a rightwing, Hindu nationalist volunteer organisation



Rahul Gandhi

of India, which backs the BJP.

Country's Home Minister Amit Shah, who is also campaigning for the ongoing general elections, slammed both the Congress and the Bharat Rashtira Samithi formerly known as Telangana Rashtira Samithi in that southern state and said that both the parties are afraid of the All India Majlis-E-Itehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) chief Asaduddin Owaisi.

AIMIM is a prominent southern Indian party, whose chief is contesting from Hyderabad.

Kenya floods claim 228 lives as cyclone approaches

Nairobi, Kenya - Kenya's death toll from devastating floods sweeping across the country has climbed to 228, as authorities brace for the approaching tropical Cyclone Hidaya, which threatens to exacerbate the crisis.

With heavy rainfall and strong winds expected to intensify in the coming days, the government on Sunday urged citizens to exercise extreme caution and prepare for potential evacuation efforts.

"We mourn the loss of nine lives in the past 24 hours, including seven adults and two children, bringing the total flood-related death toll to 228, across the country. The government conveys its heartfelt condolences to friends and families who have lost their loved ones," Isaac Mwaura, Kenya's government spokesperson, said.

He added: "Tragically, the ongoing flooding has resulted in the injury of 164 Kenyans while 72 persons are currently reported missing. Furthermore, approximately 212,630 persons, from



Heavy rainfall and strong winds are expected to intensify in the coming days

42,526 households have been displaced."

The government noted that regrettably, the tragedy extends beyond flooding, with a devastating mudslide in Mai Mahiu claiming the lives of 52 individuals, leaving dozens of others injured, and 51 persons reported missing. Search and rescue/retrieval

operations persist in the affected areas, with 151 Kenya Defence Forces personnel and 400 National Youth Service officers deployed to assist in recovery efforts.

The worst-hit counties, including Homa Bay, Kajiado, Nakuru, Mandera, and Nairobi, grapple with extensive flooding, causing

significant disruptions to daily life and economic activities.

In response to the escalating risk, the government says it continues to implement a 24-hour evacuation notice issued on May 2, prioritising the safety of citizens residing near high-risk dams and water reservoirs.

Amid the ongoing crisis,

Amid the ongoing crisis, Kenya is preparing for the impending arrival of tropical cyclone Hidaya, which is expected to bring heavy rainfall and strong winds to coastal regions

Kenya is preparing for the impending arrival of tropical cyclone Hidaya, which is expected to bring heavy rainfall and strong winds to coastal regions on Sunday evening, including Kwale, Mombasa, Kilifi, and Lamu.

Fishermen and other ocean users have been advised to exercise extreme caution, as small boats and crafts may become unstable in the face of fresh to strong breezes.

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Scores arrested as pro-Palestine protests continue on US campuses

New York, US - Protests continue at colleges and universities across the US over Israel's war on the Gaza Strip, with arrests reported on Saturday by two more schools.

At least 25 protesters were arrested at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville for trespassing following police intervention to disperse a pro-Palestine encampment on campus.

"A pro-Palestinian protest on (university) Grounds came to an end on Saturday after University, local and state police cleared the area following multiple and repeated violations of several University policies, including the use of tents and amplified sound. Subsequent violent conduct along with failure to follow law-

enforcement directions led to the declaration of an unlawful assembly," the university said.

"Before Saturday's standoff with law enforcement, which resulted in 25 arrests as of Saturday evening, the demonstration that began on Tuesday had been peaceful and complied with University policies," it added.

Separately, as many as 50 people were arrested at the Art Institute of Chicago, according to the school.

"Today, a group of individuals, including some SAIC (School of the Art Institute of Chicago) students, began a protest in the museum's North Garden, and as it progressed, protesters surrounded and shoved a security



officer and stole their keys to the museum, blocked emergency exits, and barricaded gates. The protest also began to escalate on Michigan Avenue outside of the museum."

The university offered the demonstrators an alternative location to continue their protest on campus, but they rejected it, according to the statement.

"During multiple rounds of negotiations, SAIC student protesters were promised amnesty from academic sanction and trespassing charges if they agreed to relocate. The School also agreed to meet with a student group to discuss their demands. After approximately five hours, an agreement could not be

reached." The arrests and crackdowns come amid a wave of US university student protests in support of Palestine that began last month, over six months into the Israeli offensive.

Meanwhile, nearly four in 10 Americans said the US is doing too much to support Israel in the onslaught in the Gaza Strip.

An April 25 - 30 survey of 2,260 adults by US News Ipsos revealed that Americans are divided on the US' Israel policies.

The survey revealed that 38% said the US was doing too much to support Israel, 20% saw too little US support for Israel and 40% said Washington's backing is about right.

Anadolu Agency

Not limited to arrest of 3, says Canadian PM on Nijjar killing

Toronto, Canada - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Sunday that the investigation into the killing of India-designated terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar is 'not limited' to the arrest of three Indian nationals and is ongoing.

Trudeau said that it is important because 'Canada is a rule-of-law country'.

The Canada PM's remarks came days after three Indian nationals were arrested for their alleged involvement in the killing of Nijjar.

The Canadian police on Saturday released photographs of all three persons arrested in the last year's killing of Nijjar amid an ongoing probe into the alleged connections of the Indian government.

The police have not given any evidence of any link to India, as was being speculated in Canadian media. India has repeatedly denied the allegations, terming them 'absurd and motivated'.

Giving an address at the Sikh Foundation of Canada's Centennial Gala event held at the Royal Ontario Museum on Sunday, Trudeau began by acknowledging the arrests made in connection to the case, emphasising that the investigation remains ongoing.



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

The investigation remains ongoing, as does a separate and distinct investigation, not limited to the involvement of the three people arrested yesterday

JUSTIN TRUDEAU

"I need to begin, somewhat awkwardly perhaps, but importantly, to acknowledge the arrests that were made in relation to the murder of Nijjar. As the

RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) stated, the investigation remains ongoing, as does a separate and distinct investigation, not limited to the in-

volvement of the three people arrested yesterday," he said.

He highlighted Canada's status as a rule-of-law country with a robust and independent justice system. "This is important because Canada is a rule-of-law country with a strong and independent justice system, as well as a fundamental commitment to protecting all its citizens. I know that many Canadians, particularly members of the Sikh community, are feeling uneasy

and perhaps even frightened right now," Trudeau added.

Trudeau also reassured that every Canadian has the fundamental right to live safely and free from discrimination and violence. He urged them to 'remain calm... remain steadfast in our commitment to our democratic principles and our system of justice. This is who we are and what we do as Canadians'.

A day ago, India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said Canada has been issuing visas to people with links to organised crime despite warnings from New Delhi. Jaishankar said some people in Canada, with 'pro-Pakistan leanings', have organised themselves politically and taken the shape of an influential political lobby.

He said he saw reports that three people have been arrested, and, the Canadian police have conducted 'some investigation'.

Nijjar, who was designated a terrorist by India's National Investigation Agency in 2020, was shot and killed as he came out of a Gurdwara in Surrey in June last year.

On June 18, 2023, the Surrey RCMP received a report of a shooting at the Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara in Surrey.

ANI

At least 56 killed due to torrential rains in Brazil

Brasilia, Brazil - At least 56 people were killed due to torrential rains, followed by floods and mudslides in Brazil, forcing thousands of people out of their homes, reported Al Jazeera citing the government.

Rescue operations are underway as emergency responders race against time to locate survivors trapped amidst the debris of collapsed homes, bridges, and roads.

The surge in water levels in the state of Rio Grande do Sul is straining dams and threatening the metropolis of Porto Alegre, the country's civil defence agency said, according to Al Jazeera.

Governor Eduardo Leite declared a state of emergency as the region grapples with the aftermath of the catastrophic weather event.

"We are dealing with the worst disaster in (our) history," Governor Leite lamented, acknowledging the grim reality that the death toll is expected to rise further as rescue efforts continue, as reported by Al Jazeera.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva pledged full support to the affected region, assuring that 'there will be no lack of

human or material resources' to alleviate the suffering caused by the extreme weather conditions.

Forecasters have issued warnings of further peril, as the state's main Guaiba river is anticipated to reach alarming levels, exacerbating the existing crisis. Entire communities have been cut off, with infrastructure severely compromised by the relentless downpour.

The dire situation has prompted authorities to urge residents to evacuate from high-risk areas near rivers and hillsides susceptible to mudslides. Access to basic amenities such as drinking water has been disrupted, leaving hundreds of thousands without essential services.

The catastrophic floods and mudslides are part of a pattern of extreme weather events plaguing South America's largest country.

Experts attribute the heightened frequency of such disasters to the impacts of climate change, which have been exacerbated by a recent cold front sweeping across the south and southeast regions.

ANI

N Korea slams attempt to seek successor to UN panel

Ankara, Turkey - An irate North Korea on Sunday decried US and 'other countries' for seeking a successor to the defunct UN monitoring panel that enforced sanctions against Pyongyang, warning that such an attempt is doomed to 'self-destruction'.

In a statement, North Korean Ambassador to the UN Kim Song condemned arch-rival South Korea, Japan, US, and 47 other countries for jointly calling for 'objective' and 'independent' analysis of the enforcement of the sanctions on his country.

The mandate of the panel of experts ended last month due to Russia vetoing its renewal. Washington last month said it will work with Seoul to explore 'creative' and 'out-of-the-box' ways to find an alternative to the expert panel, even outside of the UN system.

In a statement carried by the



North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency, the North Korean envoy said that the end of the monitoring panel is a 'judgment made by history on an illegal, plot-breeding organisation' and called the panel a tool for the US and other Western countries to 'stamp out a sovereign state's right to existence'.

"The hostile forces may set up second and third expert panels in

the future, but they are all bound to meet self-destruction with the passage of time," he further said.

"If the US and its followers persistently pursue the anachronistic hostile policy toward the DPRK (North Korea), instead of drawing a lesson from the recent case, they will face a more miserable strategic defeat," he warned.

Anadolu Agency

ENJOYING A ROUGH RIDE



Tourists enjoy river rafting on the waters of Beas River, in Manali, India, on Sunday (ANI)

Campaigning ends ahead of presidential election in Chad

Kigali, Rwanda - Campaigning ended in Chad on Saturday ahead of Monday's presidential election to end a three-year transition to democratic rule in the West African nation.

More than eight million Chadians are eligible to vote, according to the National Election Management Agency (ANGE).

Oloy Hassan, general rapporteur of the ANGE, assured over the weekend that all necessary measures have been taken to guarantee the presidential election's smooth conduct. Results are expected on May 21.

Ten candidates are contesting in the presidential election, including Higher Education Minister Lydie Beassemda, the only female contender.

But, the race is expected to mainly be between General Mahamat Idriss Deby, the transitional president, and Prime Minister Succes Masra.

Deby seized power in 2021

after the death of his father, Idriss Deby Itno, who died on the front-line of a war against rebels after ruling for 30 years.

The younger Deby had pledged to hand over power to an elected government after 18 months - a deadline that was missed - before postponing elections to this year.

He is running on the ticket of the ruling Patriotic Salvation Movement (MPS) party, founded by his father, after a new constitution adopted following a December referendum allowed him to seek election.

Deby also enjoys the backing of a coalition of over 200 other parties.

Masra, head of the Transformers party, returned to the country in November 2023 after a year in exile that followed an agreement signed in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, in which the military government guaranteed him free ex-



ercise of political activities.

Masra was a fierce critic of Deby until he was appointed prime minister of the transitional government in January this year.

He, along with other opposition politicians, fled into exile in

the aftermath of deadly protests in October 2022 against the extension of military rule.

Masra is the main hope of the opposition, although some critics have dismissed his candidacy as a 'sham' after he accepted a deal

to serve in the transitional government. During the campaigning period, Masra promised to increase access to electricity, water, and ensure security for all.

Expressing confidence in his chances of winning the vote,

Ten candidates are contesting. But, the race is mainly between General Mahamat Idriss Deby, the transitional president, and PM Succes Masra

Masra called on supporters to act as 'watchdogs' and secure the ballots at the polling stations to 'avoid anything that could create suspicions of lack of transparency'. Albert Pahimi Padacke, the first transitional prime minister and Masra's predecessor, is another serious contender in the race.

Padacke campaigned on the promise to ensure security and reform the justice system.

He emerged second with

more than 10 per cent in the last presidential election in 2021.

Some opposition parties and civil society groups have called for a boycott of the vote, claiming Deby could influence the outcome of the poll.

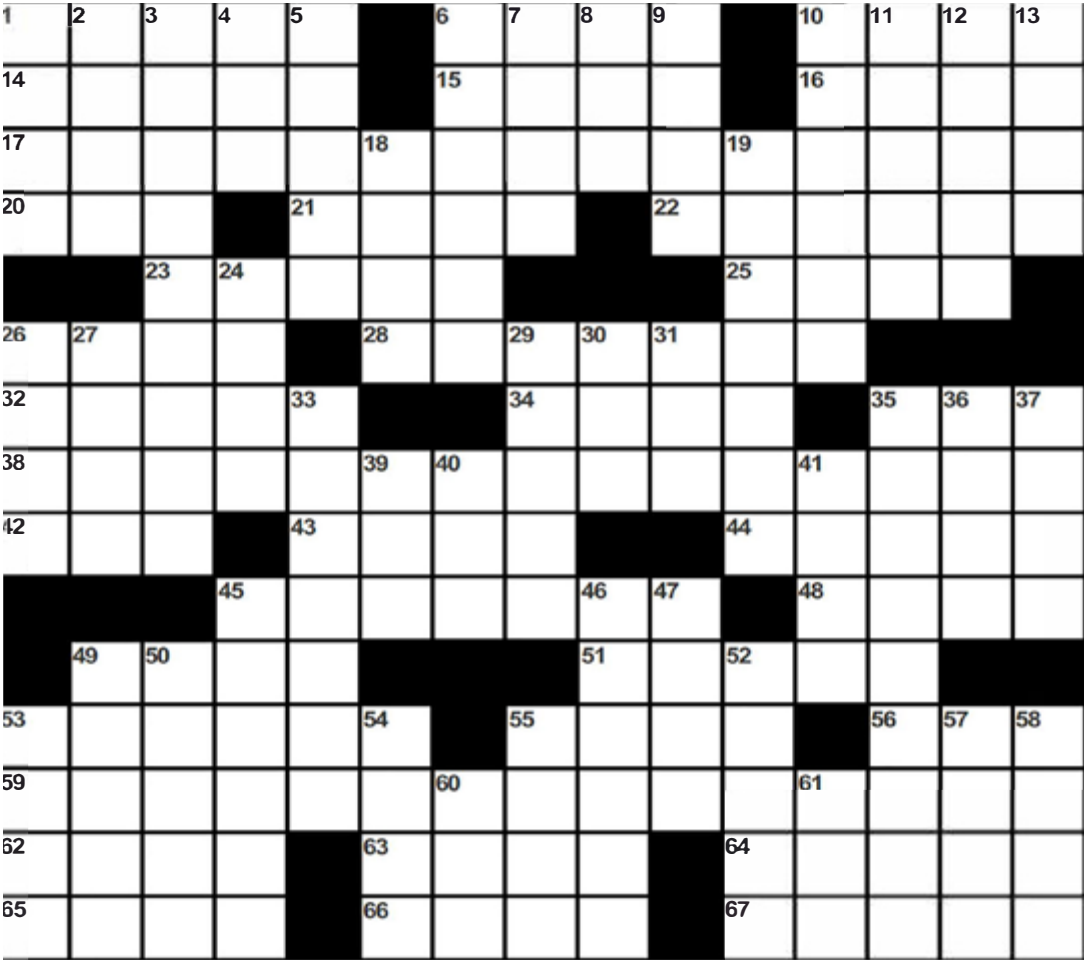
The International Federation for Human Rights, the Chadian League for Human Rights, and the Chadian Association for the Promotion of Human Rights released a joint statement expressing concern over the human rights situation in the country and credibility of the election.

They cautioned that the election was being held in a 'toxic context marked by mistrust in electoral institutions and the multiplication of human rights violations.'

But Hassan, the electoral official, said the ANGE was 'acting as an independent body, aims to organise free, transparent and credible elections'.

Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) More impolite
- 6) Peter's cottontail?
- 10) Seance noises
- 14) Japanese port
- 15) What a nurse provides
- 16) Cornell of university fame
- 17) The majors
- 20) Small salamander
- 21) News tidbit
- 22) Steep slopes
- 23) Enthusiasm
- 25) Harp and Bass
- 26) Fairy-tale giant
- 28) Synthetic
- 32) Gets dimmer
- 34) Settle comfortably, as into a chair
- 35) Regal emblem
- 38) Hardly a short film
- 42) Guileful
- 43) Abu Dhabi honcho
- 44) Put into office
- 45) Ones with iron hands
- 48) Gets under the skin of
- 49) Racket part
- 51) Biblical king
- 53) Unimportant facts

- 55) Trunk of a tree
- 56) Sales agent
- 59) A place without restrictions
- 62) Jazz singing
- 63) Healing houseplant
- 64) Pop stars?
- 65) Candidates, in brief
- 66) Fancy wheels
- 67) Inferior wheat
- DOWN**
- 1) Prizefighter's wear
- 2) Amer. military fliers
- 3) Malicious
- 4) Barely achieve (with "out")
- 5) Extremely zealous
- 6) Eyeball coat
- 7) Like the eye of a storm
- 8) Web address
- 9) Golf pegs
- 10) Entertain lavishly
- 11) Cloudless sky's hue
- 12) Gets ready for surgery
- 13) Talk back
- 18) Supercollider collider
- 19) College world
- 24) Rural dance
- 26) Kills, slangily

- 27) Caesar's France
- 29) The "N" of UNCF
- 30) "Welcome" bearer
- 31) Burning result
- 33) Don't get up?
- 35) Fifth gear, often
- 36) Moranis of "Ghost-busters"
- 37) Casino actions
- 39) Maximum limits?
- 40) A small drink of liquor
- 41) Bit of this and a bit of that
- 45) Golf course holes?
- 46) Oar holders
- 47) Unload, on Wall Street
- 49) EL (Spanish painter)
- 50) Qatari money
- 52) Jockey's controls
- 53) Cooking meas.
- 54) First of all?
- 55) Where to speak your piece online
- 57) And others, in a bibliography
- 58) "Hey, Mac!"
- 60) By way of
- 61) Janitor's implement

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You'll have to do a bit of selling today either for yourself or a project you want other people to help with. If all you do is focus on what you want out of them, folks may find you a bit insensitive. But if you focus on what's in it for them, you can grab their attention and get them on board. Put yourself in their position and think how they would think. Keep communication simple and straightforward, and there's a better chance you will communicate in a positive way.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Expect to get a few double takes from people wherever you go today. You are feeling extremely good on the inside, and it shows on the outside. Your intense positive energy is amplifying your appeal and getting you noticed. This is the perfect day to make a move on someone you're interested in or to turn up the heat in an existing relationship. Your partner will be at your mercy, ready to do whatever you want. Be careful with all of this power!



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Put your fantastic observational skills to good use today. They could help you save lots of money. It's time to adopt some of the money-saving ideas that a friend or family member has recommended, even if they don't sound easy or particularly enjoyable. Any discomfort you feel today will be worth it in the long run. And if you are looking for good ways to spend your money, an interesting investment opportunity could appear. Do your research before you commit.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

An innocent mix-up between a few of your friends is starting to snowball, and if you aren't careful you could get caught up in the avalanche. Try not to give the impression that you've chosen sides, even if you feel strongly that one person is in the right. You have to seem objective whether you feel that way or not. It's best to keep yourself as detached as possible and let them figure out how to come to terms.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Expect to get a few double takes from people wherever you go today. You are feeling extremely good on the inside, and it shows on the outside. Your intense positive energy is amplifying your appeal and getting you noticed. This is the perfect day to make a move on someone you're interested in or to turn up the heat in an existing relationship. Your partner will be at your mercy, ready to do whatever you want. Be careful with all of this power!



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Comparing yourself to other people isn't always a healthy endeavor. It can create unnecessary insecurity. But today, you might want to look around at the people who are similar to you and observe how they handle things you're struggling with. Their unique approach will be educational and perhaps inspiring. Your peers can show you that even though things won't seem possible, they can come to be if you persevere. Just keep going, and when you need inspiration, look to them.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Changing your mind about something might be called for today when you hear a convincing counterpoint. But don't switch gears right away. Give this issue some serious thought as the day continues. Hold off on defending your thoughts and converting to the other side. Revising your outlook is an intelligent and responsible thing to do from time to time, but you shouldn't do it too reflexively.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You may have already made up your mind about a certain person, but why not consider changing your opinion today? You should never close yourself off to the possibility that people can change, because they do. You have, haven't you? Set aside any negative feelings and make the best of the situation by thinking the best about this person. Life is too short to be judgmental about others. Give them the benefit of the doubt and you'll be rewarded.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Keep an eye out for any unfamiliar phone numbers or email addresses today and save them for later. One of them could represent a person or organization that is the start of something major for your future. Building connections with other people and other groups should be a big priority for you now, and the good news is that it won't be difficult. You're feeling social and open to unusual experiences, which makes you ready to widen your horizons.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Today, it may feel as if you're missing out on the joke or a bit late to the party, but so what? You can't always be in perfect sync with everyone even if you want to be. Live with this disconnect and let it pass. It will go away soon enough, so don't worry. You can't let this feeling shake your confidence, or you could get distracted from some important things you have to do today. Look on the bright side: by being out of step, you're getting a fresh perspective.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

It's time to pay more attention to the cautious and conservative voice inside you today, especially if it's telling you to walk away from something new and mysterious. It's a bad idea to get involved in anything you're not totally sure about, such as investments, major purchases, or social events where big drama could occur. You might think you can handle more risk right now, but you don't know what you're in for.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Luck will be on your side all day long, and it could even affect your financial situation! Fortune will help little things add up to big things, so put some money in your savings account. Start a short conversation with a cute person you've been trying to get to know better. Do extra crunches at the gym. The Universe will take any small seeds you plant today and nurture them into a positive force in your life.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The mountainous Kyrgyz Republic borders which of these countries?

- A. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam
- B. The Republic of Lithuania
- C. The Republic of Kazakhstan
- D. The Russian Federation

2. The rumba was originally danced where?

- A. Canada
- B. Spain
- C. Cuba
- D. Greece

3. Which player made a comeback to international tennis in 2006 after 4 years?

- A. Steffi Graf
- B. Martina Hingis
- C. Gabriela Sabatini
- D. Kim Clijsters

Answers: 1. C, 2. C, 3. B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	U	K	T
A	C	C	M
O	R	B	A
E	M	A	R

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

6	2	8	4	5	8	1	9
1	8	5	1	9	6	2	4
9	1	4	8	2	1	8	5
8	5	2	6	1	4	9	1
4	9	1	2	1	5	4	6
4	6	1	9	8	5	2	1
5	9	1	4	4	1	6	8
2	4	6	8	8	9	1	1
1	1	6	9	6	2	9	4

REAL SUPREMACY

Los Blancos win 36th LaLiga title

Madrid, Spain - Real Madrid claimed a record-extending 36th LaLiga title on Saturday after Girona's 4-2 thrashing of local rivals Barcelona left Carlo Ancelotti's side with an unassailable lead in the standings.

With four games left, Real Madrid moved to 87 points on top of the standings after their second-string players earned a 3-0 over relegation threatened Cadiz earlier on Saturday, 13 ahead of Girona in second and 14 clear of third-placed Barcelona.

Ancelotti made 10 changes to the team who earned Real a 2-2 draw in their Champions League semi-final at Bayern Munich on Tuesday, resting key players like Vinicius Jr, Rodrygo, Antonio Ruediger and Toni Kroos ahead of the return leg at the Spanish capital on Wednesday.

Ancelotti's second-string players proved they were up to the task as they secured three points for Real with goals from Brahim Diaz, Jude Bellingham and Joselu.

Xavi Hernandez's side were the only one left who could prevent their bitter rivals Real lifting the title, but their faint hopes were extinguished in Girona as they fell to their second league defeat in three matches.

It was an afternoon of celebration for Girona too as the win secured them a spot in Europe for the first time after they qualified



Real Madrid players celebrate a goal against Cadiz on Saturday

for next season's Champions League. A brace from substitute Portu helped Girona to humble their Catalan rivals for the second time this season. Girona had also beaten Barca away in December by the same score.

Real Madrid now can turn their attention to a LaLiga-Champions

League double as they get ready to host Bayern Munich in the semi-final return leg on Wednesday after snatching a 2-2 draw in Germany last week.

"It's obviously a contained joy, because the most important game of the season (Bayern) is also very close, but we have to be

happy," Ancelotti told Movistar Plus+ on Saturday, before knowing the Barca result.

"Those games (Cadiz) are difficult to prepare for, because you have Wednesday on your mind. But so far it's been spectacular, our team was steady, with hardly any mistakes. The advantage we

have is well deserved."

The LaLiga title crowned a remarkable domestic campaign despite major knee injuries sustained by keeper Thibaut Courtois and defenders Eder Militao and David Alaba early in the season, in addition to a big hole left up-front after forward Karim

Benzema joined Saudi Arabia's Al Ittihad. To overcome such obstacles, 64-year-old Ancelotti had to prove once again that he is much more than just a manager who knows how to bring out the best in his players, both the young and experienced.

His tactical nous was instru-



It's obviously a contained joy, because the most important game of the season (Bayern) is also very close, but we have to be happy

CARLO ANCELOTTI

mental in fixing Real's problems, including improvising midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni as a centre back alongside Antonio Ruediger and changing the system to deploy Jude Bellingham as an attacking midfielder, with freedom to get forward and support Vinicius Jr and Rodrygo up front.

Bellingham scored 15 goals in his first 16 games and he, Vinicius and Rodrygo have netted 41 of Real's 74 league goals.

At the back, German international Ruediger had arguably enjoyed the best season of his career at age 31, leading a rock-solid Real Madrid defence which conceded only 22 goals in 34 league games, way ahead of LaLiga's second-best Athletic Bilbao with 33.

"A big part (of Real success) was achieved when we started to defend better, with a collective commitment," Ancelotti said.

"The effort put by the players up front was great, but the injuries early in the season helped us to realise that it wasn't about individuals but putting on a collective effort, and we did great."



Jude Bellingham

Bellingham crowns superb debut season

Madrid, Spain - Jude Bellingham has taken Real Madrid by storm in a sparkling debut LaLiga campaign, exceeding sky-high expectations to help his team claim a record-extending 36th Spanish league title.

"It's Bellingham's league" has become a common phrase among football fans and pundits in Spain and that is proof of his stunning start with the Spanish giants. The England midfielder's impact at the age of 20 after he was signed from Borussia Dortmund last June can be measured by a raft of individual awards.

He was named LaLiga's player of the month in August and October, and is the only man to win the award more than once this season.

Bellingham also picked up the 2023 Golden Boy and Kopa awards before becoming the first player to win the Breakthrough of the Year prize at this year's Laureus awards.

Following Real's failure to sign Kylian Mbappe or Harry Kane, coach Carlo Ancelotti had to improvise and saw in Bellingham the potential to be much more than a goalscorer.

The Italian changed his lineup from the traditional 4-3-3 formation he and Zinedine Zidane deployed to win five Champions League titles, giving Bellingham freedom to get forward. That unleashed a hidden beast, with Bellingham scoring an astonishing 15 goals in his first 16 games, surpassing Cristiano Ronaldo and Alfredo Di Stefano.

Riquelme goal hands Atletico win at Mallorca

Mallorca, Spain - Atletico Madrid closed in on a Champions League spot after winger Rodrigo Riquelme's early strike earned his side a 1-0 win at Mallorca in LaLiga on Saturday.

With four games remaining, Diego Simeone's side are fourth in the standings on 67 points, six ahead fifth-placed Athletic Bilbao.

Runaway leaders Real Madrid claimed a record-extending 36th LaLiga title earlier on Saturday after Girona fought-back to beat Barcelona 4-2, a result that left Carlo Ancelotti's side with an unassailable lead in the stand-



Atletico Madrid's Rodrigo Riquelme celebrates after scoring against Mallorca on Saturday

There was an end-of-the-season feel at Son Moix stadium with both teams lacking urgency, with the only stand out moment being Riquelme's goal

ings.

Real beat lowly Cadiz earlier on Saturday and hold a 13-point advantage over second-placed Girona while Barcelona dropped

to third with 73 points.

There was an end-of-the-season feel at a half-empty Son Moix stadium with both teams lacking urgency in a lackluster match, with the only stand out moment being Riquelme's fine individual effort in the fifth minute which secured the win for the visitors.

Riquelme pounced on a loose ball in the edge of the box and cleared two defenders before unleashing an unstoppable strike just inside the right post.

"It was very important to win", Atletico defender Axel Witsel told Movistar Plus+.

Inter manager Inzaghi 'don't want to lose a single player'

Sassuolo, Italy - Inter Milan manager Simone Inzaghi hopes he can keep his Serie A title winning squad intact for next season.

The champions suffered only their second league defeat of the season on Saturday, once again falling to Sassuolo who had also beaten them at the San Siro in September.

The two losses to Sassuolo were the only blips suffered by Inter, who wrapped up the Serie A title last month with five matches to spare.

"I already told the club that I want to go into next season with all the players I had this term, not losing a single one," Inzaghi told Sky Sports Italia.

Inzaghi, however, does want to expand the roster to provide more options for rotating players.

"Considering all the games we need to play and the length of the season, we do need a bigger squad," he said, adding that the club had relatively few injuries this season and that might not be the case next time.



Simone Inzaghi

Against Sassuolo, Inter lacked their usual aggressiveness.

"We started sluggish and didn't have the right approach to the game," Inzaghi said.

"I'm sorry for the defeat, but credit must be given to Sassuolo for the match of great effort and sacrifice."

Inzaghi admitted that the celebrations to mark their 20th

league title could have affected the team's performance.

"This is the Scudetto of joy, a deserved victory that allowed us to crown this three-year process and we got to celebrate ...with our fans," Inzaghi said.

"It's right to enjoy it but there are still three games to go and we have to focus. It hurts to lose, and it should hurt."



Borussia Dortmund's Marco Reus celebrates after the match

Reus, Moukoko on target as Dortmund crush Augsburg

Dortmund, Germany- Borussia Dortmund demolished Augsburg 5-1 in the Bundesliga on Saturday in a perfect dress rehearsal ahead of next week's Champions League semi-final return leg at Paris St Germain.

Dortmund, who face PSG on Tuesday after their 1-0 first leg win in Germany earlier this week, enjoyed a whirlwind start with three goals in the first 29 minutes.

Yousseoufa Moukoko struck either side of Donyell Malen's 20th minute goal to quickly put

the game to bed.

Augsburg cut the deficit in the 32nd minute with Ruben Vargas but the visitors restored their three-goal cushion with Marco Reus, who will leave the club after 12 years at the end of the season, in the 34th. He then delivered his second assist of the evening for Felix Nmecha to make it 5-1 in the 64th.

Dortmund, who have secured a Champions League spot for next season, are in fifth place on 60 points, three behind fourth-placed RB Leipzig.

GOAL MACHINE!

Haaland scores four as Man City thrash Wolves

Manchester, England - Manchester City's Erling Haaland struck four times as they remained on course to win a fourth successive Premier League title with a 5-1 thrashing of Wolverhampton Wanderers on Saturday.

Hours after Arsenal's 3-0 win over Bournemouth, Pep Guardiola's men responded with a resounding victory that pulled them to within a point of the North Londoners at the top of the standings, but with a game in hand. Arsenal have 83 points with two fixtures remaining in one of the tightest title races in years, while City have 82, but three games to play.

"Nine (more) points, we will be champions. Seven points, six points, three points, Arsenal will win the Premier League," Guardiola said.

Haaland - who boosted his league scoring lead to 25 with the first four-goal haul of his career - converted from the penalty spot in the 12th minute after Rayan Ait-Nouri's late tackle took Josko Gvardiol down in the box. The 23-year-old Norwegian doubled City's lead in the 35th when he soared high to head home at the far post from Rodri's cross.

"That's a beautiful goal. My father (Alf-Inge Haaland, who



Manchester City's Erling Haaland scores against Wolverhampton Wanderers on Saturday

played for City) is going to be happy with that one," Haaland told Sky Sports. "A nice celebration, I enjoyed that one."

"Not bad, 25 goals this season. We keep going."

Haaland converted again from the spot just before halftime after he was clipped from behind by Nelson Semedo in the area. Hwang Hee-chan pulled one back for Wolves in the 53rd with the visitors' only shot on target.

But a minute later, Haaland smothered any hopes of a comeback with his fourth.

The goal-scoring machine -- who missed nearly two months earlier this season with a foot injury but seems to be finding form again at the perfect time -- controlled a diagonal pass in the air from Phil Foden before slicing inside and curling a shot into the far corner.

"He was injured, to get back to best form you need time," Guardiola said. "But happy for his performance, for his exceptional goals, in the penalties as well because we know how some days it is not easy... really pleased for him."

Substitute Julian Alvarez completed City's scoring in the 85th minute.

Wolves, whose manager Gary O'Neil was serving a touchline ban, looked nothing like the team that edged City 2-1 earlier in the season. "I thought we damaged ourselves mostly," said O'Neil, whose squad are 11th in the standings. "If you make errors against these guys, they'll punish you. We made too many errors and Manchester City were very clinical."



Jurgen Klopp

Liverpool 2.0 doesn't stop after I leave: Klopp

Liverpool, England - Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp is confident that the Premier League club is well set up to continue improving once he has handed over the reins to his successor at the end of the season.

Klopp, who announced in January that he would leave the Merseyside outfit after nine years in charge, is expected to be replaced by Dutchman Arne Slot.

Slot will inherit a team that is already in the early stages of a makeover, with Liverpool having signed Alexis Mac Allister, Dominik Szoboszlai, Ryan Gravenberch and Wataru

It's too much. It's a 24/7 job. Yes, there are more important things in life, but if you really care then it's 24/7

JURGEN KLOPP

PSV win Dutch league title

Eindhoven, Netherlands - PSV Eindhoven ended a six-year wait to secure a 25th Dutch league title on Sunday with defender Olivier Boscagli scoring at both ends in a 4-2 victory over Sparta Rotterdam at a jubilant Philips Stadion.

Needing a point to make sure after a dominant campaign in which they have lost only once in 32 games, PSV fell behind early but rallied to defeat mid-table Sparta.

Metinho put the visitors ahead before an own goal from Said Bakari and a second via Johan Bakayoko swung the contest in PSV's favour. When Boscagli put the ball into his own net it was 2-2 and there were some nerves in Eindhoven. But his superb volley from a free-kick at the right end of the pitch made up for the error before Jordan Teze added a fourth goal.

"We scored the most goals, conceded the fewest goals and created the most chances. We



PSV Eindhoven players celebrate after winning the Dutch league title

have shown that we are the best in the Eredivisie, very simple," right-back Teze, 24, told Dutch TV station NOS. "Six years ago I was watching (from the stands) like everyone else. I hoped then that I would one day be able to experience such a moment myself."

It is a first league title for

coach Peter Bosz and has been achieved in style with 28 wins in 32 games so far.

PSV stay on course to match the record points tally in a Dutch topflight campaign which stands at 93 by Ajax in 1972, a figure adjusted as two points were awarded for a win back then.

Verstappen charges to Sprint win over Leclerc and Perez in Miami

Miami, US - Max Verstappen converted pole position into victory during Saturday's Sprint race at the Miami Grand Prix, leading home Ferrari rival Charles Leclerc and Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez in an action-packed encounter.

Verstappen defended his lead at the start and overcame an early safety car period before building up a comfortable advantage at the head of the field, as Leclerc settled for second and Perez fought back against fast starter Daniel Ricciardo to finish third.

Ricciardo brilliantly fended off the other Ferrari of Carlos Sainz and Oscar Piastri - who was the sole McLaren finisher after Lando Norris retired on the first lap - to claim fourth, with Haas's Nico Hulkenberg seventh and RB's Yuki Tsunoda inheriting the final point when Lewis Hamilton took a post-race penalty.

Later, Verstappen claimed

pole position, to start from the front of the grid for the sixth straight race this season.

The pole, Verstappen's seventh in a row going back to last



Max Verstappen

year in Abu Dhabi, adds to what has so far been a perfect weekend for the Dutchman, who topped the timesheets in the only practice session and sprint qualifying on Friday then winning the sprint race.

French great Alain Prost, with

Williams in 1993, was the last driver to take the first six poles of a season.

"I don't know what it is, every single year we come here, I find it extremely difficult to be consistent with the car feeling, the tyre feeling over one lap," said Verstappen, who will start on pole in Miami for the first time. "Again today, it was about finding that balance."

"I think we did OK. It wasn't the most enjoyable lap of my career because of how slippery it is and you're not very confident on the lap."

"But we are on pole, and that's the most important thing."

Verstappen was joined on the front row by Ferrari's Leclerc, who was also second in the sprint.

Ferrari's Carlos Sainz, the only driver other than Verstappen to win a race this season, will start third alongside the second Red Bull of Sergio Perez.

Endo this season.

"Of course, it's not perfect as if it was we'd have five or six points more and would still be fighting for the league," Klopp told Sky Sports in an interview. "But if you rewind to the start of the season, I called it Liverpool 2.0... Liverpool 2.0 doesn't stop after I leave. It's just the start of another project with a really good squad."

The German manager added that he would not have been able to perform his job at 100% had he stayed on for another year.

"For that, you really need to be full of energy. Eighty percent is not enough. That's the truth. It's too much. It's a 24/7 job. Yes, there are more important things in life, but if you really care then it's 24/7."

Swiatek beats Sabalenka in marathon final to win Madrid Open title

Madrid, Spain - World number one Iga Swiatek edged Aryna Sabalenka 7-5 4-6 7-6(7) in a gripping and gruelling Madrid Open final to win the title for the first time on Saturday in what was a repeat of last year's summit clash at the WTA 1000 clay-court tournament.

Sabalenka had won the 2023 final in three sets but it was Swiatek who triumphed this time after saving three championship points to secure her 20th career title and deny the Belarusian a third title on the red clay of the Spanish capital.

The match was the first contest of the season between the

top two in the women's rankings and it lived up to expectations, going down as the longest encounter between the two Grand Slam champions at three hours and 11 minutes.

Victory improved Swiatek's record over her Belarusian rival to 7-3 as the three-times French Open champion bagged the only major claycourt title that was missing on her glittering resume.

"Aryna, to many more finals! It's always a challenge playing you. Thanks for always motivating me and forcing me to be a better player," Swiatek said at the trophy presentation.

In the opening set, Sabalenka



Iga Swiatek celebrates with the Madrid Open trophy

It's always a challenge playing you (Aryna Sabalenka). Thanks for always motivating me and forcing me to be a better player

IGA SWIATEK

used her powerful forehand to great effect, firing winners past Swiatek that had the crowd roaring their approval, but the Belarusian struggled to convert break points against the world number

one. In response, Swiatek was more measured in her approach to constructing points and made the break at 5-5 before serving out the set, clinching it when Sabalenka's return popped up off the netcord and set up an easy winner for the Pole.

Sabalenka raised her intensity in the second set and took a 2-0 lead and nearly went 3-0 up but her first double fault of the match opened the door for Swiatek to get on the board before she broke again to put the set back on serve.

But this time, at 5-4, Sabalenka did not lose her focus as the Belarusian smashed a fore-

hand winner down the line to force a decider and go the distance for the fifth time in six matches at the tournament.

Although the top seeds traded breaks in the final set, there was little to separate the pair until Sabalenka had match points. However, Swiatek held her nerve when she served to stay in the contest, saving two match points en route to forcing the tiebreak. Swiatek also had a match point snatched away from her before she clinched victory on her second opportunity when Sabalenka's return went long and the Pole fell to the ground in relief and exhaustion.



A JADEJA SPECIAL

Indian allrounder shines with bat and ball as Chennai beat Punjab

Dharamsala, India - Punjab Kings showcased their very best and worst selves all in the course of about 45 minutes. In the end the bad outweighed the good as they lost to Chennai Super Kings by 28 runs.

Sam Curran's men had dominated proceedings right from the toss. A target of 168 should've been well within their reach, especially when they strung together a period of play where they hit six boundaries in 18 balls between the fifth and the seventh overs.

The equation at that point was 112 off 78 with eight wickets in hand. This was not the time to collapse but collapse they did, losing both their set batters, their captain and their finisher. They tumbled from 62 for 2 to 78 for 7.

It all began with CSK ticking every box they shouldn't tick in a batting innings in T20 cricket. They lost a wicket in the powerplay. Ajinkya Rahane's poor IPL continued with his fifth score of 15 or less. Then just as they were recovering - backing up overs that went for 19 and 9 runs - they lost three wickets in 11 balls, including their top-scorer Ruturaj Gaikwad (32 off 21) and their spin-hitter Shivam Dube (0 off 1). Then just as they were recovering



Ravindra Jadeja scored 43 runs off 26 balls and then took three wickets for 20 runs

from that - backing up overs that went for 11 and 9 runs - they lost another wicket. Ravindra Jadeja, batting at No. 6, was in during the ninth over and made sure to stay there almost through to finish. His 43 off 26 balls was crucial to the total CSK ended up with.

Chahar's masterclass
Rahul Chahar was once again at

the forefront of the PBKS bowling performance, even though he was facing a line-up full of left-handers. He coped by trusting his googly and by staying out of their hitting arcs. These are defensive skills and they are proving more and more valuable. Fifteen of the legspinner's 24 deliveries arrived outside the batter's off stump, or even wider, and fetched him all

three of his wickets.

Harshal Patel gave up 181 runs in his first four games of this season. That's also how many Harshal has given up over his last seven games this season. He's also picked up 13 wickets along the way. He's become a bowler transformed - or so it seems. Really though, a death overs specialist runs the risk of splits like

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these. It's the difference between executing what you want perfectly and missing your mark by a few inches. Harshal secured two of his three wickets with slow, sharply dipping yorkers. One of them was MS Dhoni for a first-ball duck. He spoke about how he doesn't rely on technique as much as feel, which is why he wasn't at his best at the start of the season; he was rusty. But with overs under his belt, he has gotten better and better.

This pitch, on first sight, seemed to be pretty good for batting. But eventually it became clear that it was playing some tricks. Harshal mentioned that since it was a day game and the square was so dry he was getting reverse swing from as early when he came on to bowl, in the 10th over. Later, in the evening, the new ball started to deck around. There was turn on offer too. Both Chahar and Jadeja produced double-wicket overs.



Mohammed Siraj (L) with Faf du Plessis

Siraj, Du Plessis star in see-saw win for Bengaluru

Bengaluru, India - Four overs of craziness aside, Royal Challengers Bengaluru played the near-perfect game at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium to roll Gujarat Titans over for the second time in a week.

Riding on the back of their seam-bowling success and a blistering opening stand between Faf du Plessis and Virat Kohli, RCB dominated for the first 26 overs of the game. But a middle-order collapse - where GT picked up six wickets for only 25 runs - briefly put them on the back foot. However, Dinesh Karthik (21*) and Swapnil Singh (15*) counter-punched to complete a four-wicket win.

RCB's victory with 38 balls to spare also takes them from tenth to seventh on the points table. They are on eighth points, as are ninth-placed GT, with both sides holding slim chances to make the playoffs.

Pitch number eight was the same surface on which Sunrisers Hyderabad pumped 287.

But Saturday's version was different, courtesy the few hours of rain on Friday.

Mohammed Siraj and Yash Dayal utilised that little assistance to move the ball in both directions in the powerplay, and found success. Siraj dismissed Wriddhiman Saha for the fourth time in six innings and then had Shubman Gill playing away from his body for a catch at deep point. Sai Sudharsan also failed to get going, and GT could post only 23 for 3 in the powerplay, their lowest score of all time in that phase.

M Shahrukh Khan, David Miller and Rahul Tewatia then scored in the thirties to keep the GT innings moving. Despite the occasional boundaries, the RCB seamers did not let them get away. Vijaykumar Vyshak pushed them back with short balls, as did Cameron Green, and helped by an electrifying fielding effort, the bowlers' combined pressure soon brought about a lower-order collapse.

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When he was a boy growing up in Wadi Musa, a town in southern Jordan, Mohamad Alfarajat says his father told him stories of green terraces planted with wheat in the region’s desert canyons, along with thriving apricot orchards and fig trees that fed the local community.

Alfarajat, now a geologist at Al-Hussein Bin Talal University in nearby Ma’an, Jordan, says little of that bounty remains. Longer and longer dry spells have made it harder to maintain the fields that fed his father and generations before him.

“Since climate change started 40 years ago, the fertile areas started to contract,” Alfarajat says. “The community used to grow its own food on its own land, and now they import nearly everything from outside.”

As drought has made local agriculture precarious, climate change has also made flash flooding more frequent, threatening both the area’s ancient ruins and local communities. And more intense temperature swings have accelerated the weathering of historic sandstone facades that were carved at the height of the Roman Empire.

“The impact of climate change at Wadi Musa is very clear,” says Alfarajat. “If you want to see climate change impacts in front of your face, come to Petra.”

Wadi Musa has changed in other ways since Alfarajat was a boy. Since the 1980s, the nearby archaeological site of Petra has turned into a global tourism hotspot. Nearly a million visitors visit Petra each year to marvel at the tombs and temples cut into sandstone by the Nabatean civilisation almost 2,000 years ago.

To protect the site in decades to come, Petra’s guardians are turning to ancient solutions, including technology left behind by the people who originally built the remarkable desert outpost.

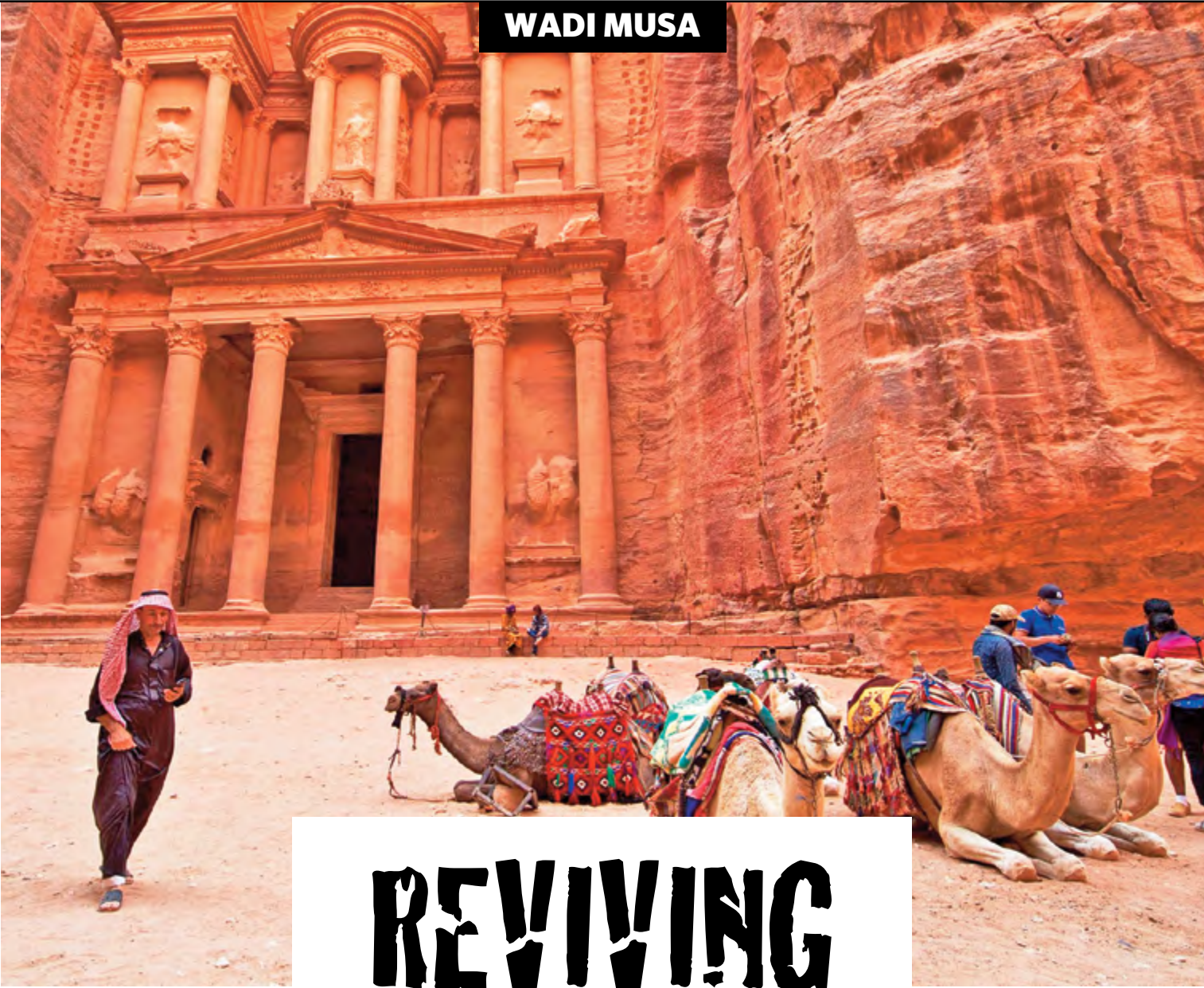
Abo Mohammad descends into the well-house that protects Ain Al Sarab spring, a source of water that was known and used by the ancient Nabatean Kingdom that once inhabited modern day Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Ain Al Sarab has continued to provide fresh water for drinking and irrigation.

Adapting to floods

The mountains around Petra are shaped like a bowl, with the ancient city at the centre. When it rains in the region, water quickly makes its way downhill - often resulting in catastrophic, even deadly, flash floods. People in the area still talk about the winter of 1963, when floods took people at the site by surprise and killed dozens of locals and tourists.

In 2018, rushing water again sent boulders tumbling through the ravines around Wadi Musa. As recently as December 2022, fast-moving walls of water coursed through Petra’s narrow canyons, sloshing muddy water all the way up to the steps of the iconic Treasury - an ancient building made famous as an exterior in ‘Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade’.

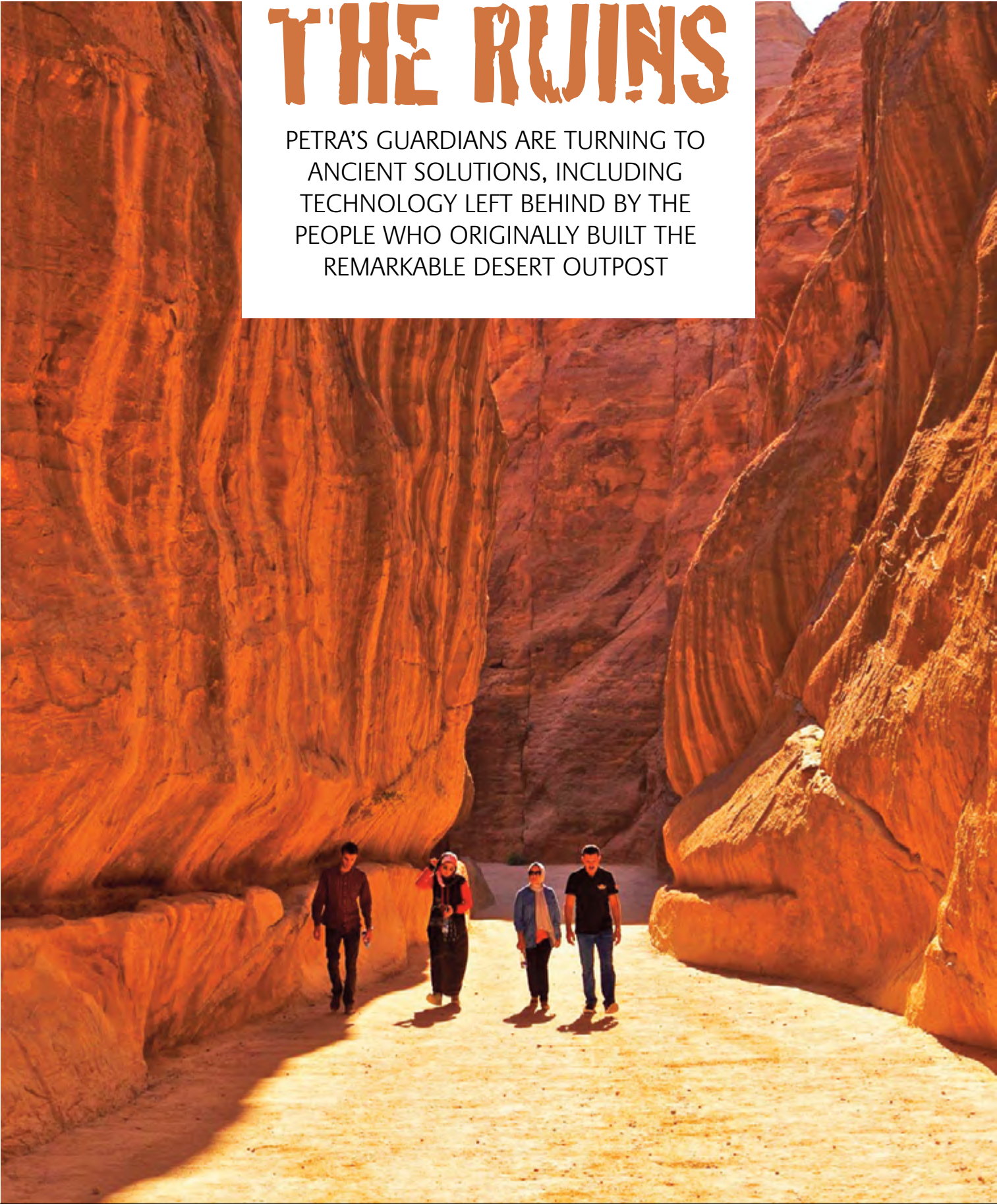
“Water came from four directions, directly into the Treasury,” says Taher Falahat, a cultural heritage expert at the



WADI MUSA

REVIVING THE RUINS

PETRA’S GUARDIANS ARE TURNING TO ANCIENT SOLUTIONS, INCLUDING TECHNOLOGY LEFT BEHIND BY THE PEOPLE WHO ORIGINALLY BUILT THE REMARKABLE DESERT OUTPOST



Petra Development Tourism Regional Authority, the agency that manages Petra and the surrounding area.

Research shows the Nabateans, too, had to deal with seasonal flooding and drought. Desert traders who ruled the region until around 300 AD, the Nabateans were a key link in the trade in luxury goods between the Roman Empire and their neighbours to the east.

The features that made the area around Wadi Musa attractive for the ancient Nabateans - its winding canyons, high peaks and plateaus, and protected valleys - also make it vulnerable to flooding today. “They faced the same problems, they had the same topography,” Falahat says.

Archaeologists have spent decades tracing the ways Nabateans managed water in the region. They discovered that Nabatean engineers came up with an interlocking system of terraces and small dams to flood-proof ancient Petra. The elaborate system channels water through the many ravines and canyons in and around Petra and Wadi Musa. The dams slow the rushing water that leads to flooding, channeling it into storage ponds. Terraces, meanwhile, soaked up water and provided space for crops.

Once the Nabatean kingdom collapsed in the fourth century AD, the system was neglected and fell into disrepair. Even after Petra was rediscovered by archaeologists and developed as a tourist destination in the 20th century, researchers overlooked the dams, focusing instead on the magnificent architecture cut into the cliffs of Petra’s canyons.

“They’ve been left alone for thousands of years,” Falahat says. “They’re all still there, they’ve just fallen apart.”

Plans to revive them are part of the recommendations of a new, National Geographic Society-funded effort to help Petra and other cultural heritage sites around the world adapt to climate change. Called Preserving Legacies, the project aims to help communities protect their heritage sites from climate change.

“We build local climate models and talk to community leaders about what’s most important to save,” says the project’s leader, geographer, and National Geographic Explorer Victoria Herrmann.

It’s a crucial effort. As the Earth’s climate shifts, once-in-a-century events like the deadly floods that hit Petra in 1963 are likely to get more frequent, with rainfall in the region increasing by an estimated 40% by 2050. “Flooding, which has always been part of Petra’s story, will get more intense,” Herrmann says.

The authorities who manage Petra and the surrounding area have put in place extensive training programmes and evacuation drills to make sure park staff are prepared for floods. A digital warning system tracks rainfall and sounds an alarm when conditions are ripe for flooding.

During the floods that hit the site in late 2022, the preparation had paid off - 1,700 tourists and staff were evacuated from Petra in a matter of hours, with no reported injuries.

(Courtesy: nationalgeographic.com)



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Picture Positano as a lively resort town perched on cliffs commanding views over the blue waters of the Mediterranean. (Right) The mystical island of Capri

Paradise

POSITANO, ITALY

PERCH

THE CHARM AND ALLURE OF ITALY IS WHAT ATTRACTS MILLIONS OF VISITORS FROM AROUND THE WORLD TO THIS OTHERWORLDLY BOLT HOLE, OFTEN DESCRIBED AS HEAVEN ON EARTH. AND POSITANO, A LIVELY RESORT TOWN IN THE AMALFI COAST, IS ONE OF THE JEWELS IN THIS CROWN

The Amalfi Coast is visually spectacular and is dotted with quaint picturesque villages up the coast. All of these are worth a visit as each has its charm and are all in relative proximity to one another which makes it easy to do day trips. One of these charming towns is Positano.

Picture Positano as a lively resort town perched on cliffs commanding views over the blue waters of the Mediterranean. Colourful bright buildings cascade down the mountainside. The narrow streets in town are lined with family-run shops and cafes, restaurants, luxury fashion boutiques and hotels.

The charm of Positano is truly enchanting, it invites tourists to enjoy its peace and beauty and getting there isn't as difficult as one may imagine. Arrive at Naples International Airport and drive down to the Amalfi Coast; either ask your hotel to organise a chauffeur-driven car or you may opt to rent a car from the airport and drive down yourself.

Although the drive down was an adventure, as the roads are extremely windy and quite narrow with a rock face on one side and drop on the other, it is still one of the most beautiful scenic routes on the planet and well worth the occasional nail-biting moments. For those who would rather take a bus, these are available from the airport, as are taxis.

The drive down is not more than an hour, an hour and a half at most depending on the time of year, it can get busy in the summer season and could be unenjoyable as it can get super crowded and getting around could get a little tedious.

The best time to visit would be April through to June or you could catch the end of the season in September and October. The crowds during shoulder season and low season are manageable, you will also find prices are a lot more reasonable.

Dining options

Zass, this restaurant overlooks Praiano with stunning views of the coast at night. Il San Pietro's Michelin-starred restaurant is the place to go if you're looking for a formal dinner with an unforgettable atmosphere.

The Michelin-starred restaurant, Li Galli, at Hotel Villa Franca offers a gastronomic experience not to be missed with its creative dishes and otherworldly ambience. For a unique experience, indulge in a delightful meal at Chez Black. Located right on the beach and the atmosphere is matchless.

There is no shortage of choice for Dining at The Le Sirenuse. La Sponda, was a culinary journey on its own, Michelin-starred, with a romantic ambience offset by hundreds of lit candles and exquisite Mediterranean flavours, the setting is something out of a fairy-tale. Aldo is another restaurant to have dinner alfresco blanketed by the Amalfi stars on the hotel terrace, with a great choice of the classics we know and love, also there



is a choice of healthy fresh fish caught on the very same day, as well as a choice of vegetarian dishes and salads.

Restaurant Bruno is also a great little restaurant perfect for a quick lunch because of the view and location of course. It is ideally located halfway down the hill not too far from the centre of town

Shopping options

The boutiques along the main shopping street are where you will come across hidden gems, little family-run boutiques, jewellery stores, art galleries and touristy shops amongst many other surprises along the way. Here are a few choices to get you started.



Pepitos, for authentic linen goods, dresses, tablecloths and everything in between. Ceramica Assunta, is the oldest ceramic store in Positano, has been around since 1948. There is no shortage of ceramic stores in and around Positano but this store has the largest selection of hand-painted goods.

Vietri-sul-Mare is another must-visit for ceramics where they have been making pottery since Roman times. Emporio Sireunse is the hotel gift shop where you can walk around just for the sake of window shopping. Maria Lampo, one of the oldest and most well-established boutiques in Positano and La Bottega di Brunella, is another choice if you are looking for linen.

Things to do

A must-do on your list is a boat tour along the coast. A sunset cruise with a small snack set up for you and your significant other/family/friends is ideal.

Going to the beach is another must on the list for your Positano vacay, albeit the

sand is not brown but black, this is because of the volcanic nature of the Amalfi Coast - there are a tonne of beach clubs that suit all budgets.

If lazing on a sundeck sipping a cocktail, gazing into the endless blue sea starts getting boring, why not try a spot of hiking, especially at The Path of the Gods - a unique experience where you get the most amazing views of the rocky Amalfi Coast, the glistening Faraglioni of Capri (the famous capri stacks) in the distance, and the vividly coloured tiled domes of Positano and Praiano.

Capri

Tourists have been enchanted by the magical, mythical island of Capri for generations. Off the coast of Naples, the island is a large lump of volcanic rock in the Tyrrhenian Sea. The landscape is covered in lemon trees, Bougainvillea, blossoming broom flowers, and Mediterranean bushes.

Take a day trip to Capri for stunning views and upscale shopping. Start your day with a scenic boat trip, where you can explore the enchanting Blue Grotto with its iridescent blue waters. Stop off at a secluded cove for a swim before or after the Blue Grotto, which is not to be missed. After marvelling at this natural wonder, make your way to Capri Town and get lost walking through a maze of narrow little lanes winding between traditional whitewashed buildings. Meander through the cobble streets where you will find jewellery shops, designer fashion boutiques, and accessories - a shopaholic's paradise.

(Contributed by Maitha Ritchie Insta: @m_ritchie3)

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