

Public debt cut down from R015.3bn to R014.5bn

Muscat - Oman has paid R0700mn (US\$1.8bn) towards its maturing international sukuk bonds, cutting down the volume of public debt from R015.3bn at the end of 2023 to R014.5bn.

This contributed to a decrease in the ratio of public debt to gross domestic product (GDP) from 36.5% at the end of

2023 to 33.9% in the first half of 2024.

The Ministry of Finance has stated that Oman's financial obligations were managed through repayment of external loans and issuing government development bonds, as part of the sultanate's prompt settlement of financial obligations and its continuous review of related



financing costs.

The ministry pointed out that repayment of foreign debt in 2024 reflected on the distribution of risks associated with the public debt portfolio.

As a result, external debt in the total volume of public debt decreased from 74% at the end of 2023 to 71% in the first half of 2024, the ministry explained.

It added that this process is consistent with the government's efforts to bring down public debt and support the local debt market through a lower risk rate.

The ministry affirmed that financial surpluses achieved are redirected to enhance social spending, stimulate economic

growth, manage financial obligations, reduce public debt, and build reserve buffers to manage financial obligations.

The government strives to strengthen the sultanate's fiscal position, reduce burden of public debt, minimise public debt risks and enhance creditworthiness by improving credit rating indicators.

MHUP unveils Greater Muscat Structure Plan



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) unveiled the Greater Muscat Structure Plan to a select group of 40 invited guests, including business owners, entrepreneurs and artists, last week.

The presentation served as a platform to gather valuable inputs from key stakeholders in the community on the master plan.

A ministry statement said, 'A discussion session on Greater Muscat was organised to bring together a group of talented photographers and painters along with business owners and entrepreneurs.'

The master plan, outlining the future development and urban planning strategy for the Greater Muscat area, was shared to ensure that the perspectives and insights of the business community and others are duly considered in the planning process, it added.

Spanning from Yiti to Barka, the master plan aims to steer sustainable and resilient urban development, fostering economic growth, enhancing infrastructure and preserving the natural environment.

Additionally, MHUP conducted a workshop on a structural plan for the wilayat of Rustaq.

Presided over by Masoud bin Saeed al Hashemi, Governor of South Batinah, and attended by walis and representatives of both public and private sector entities, the workshop focused on the

Spanning from Yiti to Barka, the master plan aims to steer sustainable and resilient urban development, fostering economic growth, enhancing infrastructure and preserving the natural environment

strategic development of Rustaq.

Jamal Abdullah al Mahrouqi, Director of Department of Housing and Urban Planning in Rustaq, highlighted the fact that the plan is one of the outcomes of the urban strategy to provide an integrated development plan for Rustaq city.

He further added that the plan aims to position Rustaq as a significant administrative centre for South Batinah. Covering an area of 61sqkm and designed to accommodate more than 51,000 people, the plan prioritises the development of a diversified economy with private sector participation, focusing on activities such as tourism, agriculture and education.

Key aspects of the plan include strategies for investment and economic development, spatial and landscape development, social development, infrastructure, environmental management and adaptation to climate change.

Why is CBD deserted?

Central Business District in Ruwi is grappling with a gradual exodus of businesses and residents. Key players are now seeking innovative solutions to revitalise the area

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Once the bustling economic heart of the capital, Central Business District (CBD) in Ruwi is facing challenges as businesses and residential tenants are gradually moving out. Stakeholders are rallying for innovative strategies to revitalise this waning hub.

The decline has been attributed to factors such as insufficient parking and the shift of commercial development to other parts of the city. However, experts believe that a comprehensive approach is necessary to rejuvenate the district.

Ihsan Kharouf, Head of Savills Oman, pinpointed two main factors deterring tenants from CBD. "Expansion of the city towards the west, from Al Khuwayr to Azaiba and further on till Barka, has drawn development away from Ruwi. Additionally, uncertainty regarding the district's long-term plans has made stakeholders hesitant until the Greater Muscat Structure Plan is finalised," Kharouf explained.

Providing insights into the office space situation, Ian Gladwin, Executive Director of Al Habib & Co, informed that out of approximately 300,000sqm of net lettable office space in Ruwi, about 85% is obsolete for cutting-edge Grade A business use. "However, the business district is still hugely recognised and continues to host the Central Bank, the Muscat Securities Market, and offers a networked, good infrastructure urban fabric with clear planning and car parking. The rental levels are affordable and it is still very accessible," Gladwin said.

CBD's challenges in recent times have come from migration of Omani workforce to the west, and to the suburbs of Al Khoud, Seeb, Mabella and Barka, he added.

"Al Habib has also seen the need for larger businesses to



(V K Shafeer)



Uncertainty over the district's long-term plans has made stakeholders hesitant until the Greater Muscat Structure Plan is finalised

IHSAN KHAROUF

move closer to mid-town locations to accommodate a westward shift development trend. This has resulted in lower space demand and subsequently lower rental levels in Ruwi."

Khalid al Balushi and Hamad al Nabhani shared personal experiences of relocating due to the challenges posed by paid and insufficient parking.

Balushi, a residential tenant moved to Bausher owing to the parking crunch, as did Nabhani and his technology business to Al Khuwayr.

A businessman, who wanted

to remain anonymous, said that many tenants have moved out of the area due to the unavailability of free parking. "A lot of customers coming for business to the area complain of the parking issue and often incur fines."

Real estate professional K Kumar noted a resurgence in the real estate market post-COVID-19 but acknowledged that paid parking has made the business district less attractive for residential tenants.

Kharouf, however, believes while parking may have played a part a long time ago, it is no

Of approximately 300,000sqm of net lettable office space in Ruwi, about 85% is obsolete for cutting-edge Grade A business use

IAN GLADWIN



longer a factor. "The parking issue can easily be addressed through allocation of a number of sites to multi-storey carparks either through existing municipal land or through the use of compulsory purchase to acquire sites for this purpose."

He is optimistic about CBD's potential for regeneration, citing its infrastructure, accessibility and walkability as key assets. He also outlined a three-pronged strategy for revitalisation, including a clear vision for Ruwi's future, a dedicated timeline, and committed funding

from both public and private sources.

Echoing these views, Gladwin expressed confidence in Ruwi's resurgence, highlighting its historical significance, strategic location and urban fabric as foundations for innovative regeneration efforts, while Balushi suggested a collaborative approach to urban renewal. He emphasised the importance of partnerships between government bodies, private sector entities and community representatives to re-envision and rejuvenate Ruwi.

ESO executive director wins Nat Geo Wayfinder Award

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Suaad al Harthi, Executive Director of Environment Society of Oman (ESO), has been honoured with the prestigious National Geographic Society 2024 Wayfinder Award.

She is among 15 newly named National Geographic Explorers to receive the award for advocating the protection of Oman's marine and terrestrial biodiversity through research, education and awareness raising initiatives.

"Humbled and honoured to share that I have received the National Geographic Society



Suaad al Harthi

Wayfinder Award and am joining its global National Geographic Explorer community," Suaad posted on LinkedIn.

Wayfinder Award recipients

are individuals who have proven themselves to be the next generation of influential leaders, communicators and innovators, she added, "whose critical work in-

spires the world to learn about, care for and protect the wonder of our world".

Speaking about her interest in National Geographic, Suaad reminisced, "I remember the huge collection of National Geographic magazines that were in my cousin's room and I used to go up there and flip through the pages fascinated by the photographs and articles from around the world. I never imagined that I would one day become a Nat Geo Explorer."

She thanked everyone who has contributed to this accomplishment, especially "my family and friends, and current and past

mentors and colleagues at ESO and Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi".

Hon Amor al Matani, Chairman of ESO, congratulated Suaad for the award and contributing "to protecting Mother Nature".

"Your passion, dedication and advocacy for the cause of conservation in creating a more sustainable future for many generations are exemplary and worth all the recognition of your work. Keep innovating; the world needs more of you," said Hon Matani.

From an indigenous ecologist working to restore the American bison on tribal lands to a photographer telling the critical

stories of polar research, the 2024 recipients are recognised for pushing the boundaries in science, conservation, education technology and storytelling - all to propel society's mission forward of illuminating and protecting the wonder of planet Earth.

"These individuals have proven themselves as the next generation of influential leaders and innovators, and we are thrilled to recognise them for their groundbreaking work across a diverse range of impact-driven projects," said Alex Moen, Chief Explorer Engagement Officer of National Geographic Society.

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Iranian artists hold joint show - called 'Eid Mobarak' - at Mina Art Gallery

AI in education: A double-edged sword

Muscat - The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) tools and chat-bots has revolutionised various sectors by simplifying complex tasks, enhancing decision-making processes, and transforming customer service. However, in the realm of education, this technological disruption has been met with mixed reactions regarding its impact on student creativity and academic integrity.

Educators and experts are voicing concerns over the increasing reliance on AI, which they argue could undermine the development of essential academic skills and critical thinking.

Tariq Hilal Barwani, an IT expert, pointed out the dual nature of AI, acknowledging its benefits while cautioning against its potential to stifle creativity. "The over reliance on AI tools certainly hinders students' creativity. A balanced approach where originality is a priority, is key."

Ameena Mohamed Ali, senior faculty at Oman Aircraft Control College, is observing widespread use of AI among students with unease, linking it to potential academic dishonesty and a lack of professional conduct in student work. "As an educator, I believe that it leads to unprofessionalism in student work. I have employed various strategies to identify and eliminate the use of AI like podcasts, debates and presentation assignments. This gives students a chance to express opinions and



enhance their skills in a unique way."

Saleh Salim al Araimi, Senior Lecturer of Computer Science at National University of Science and Technology, also expressed concern about AI's impact on critical thinking and problem-solving skills. He uses AI detec-

tion tools to monitor the extent of usage in student assignments. "Overuse of AI in the education system disrupts the emergence of important abilities like writing, research and independent analysis. Engaging in open conversation and explaining the rules of proper utilisation to the learner

will help them to stay academically honest."

Echoing these views, Dr Ramakrishna Kumar, Deputy Head of Electrical and Communication Engineering at National University of Science and Technology, said AI is a potential hindrance to creativity. "While it would not be

ideal to fully eradicate the use of these tools, it is necessary to use them sensibly to expand on existing original ideas. It should be used as an assistance rather than serve as a replacement."

From the student perspective, Gautam Singh of Modern College of Business and Sciences admits

Overuse of AI in the education system disrupts the emergence of important abilities like writing, research and independent analysis

SALEH SALIM AL ARAIMI

to using AI sparingly. "I keep my usage limited to getting ideas and information. Strict plagiarism checking of assignments by the college makes it difficult for students to use chatbots to write papers; it negatively impacts marks. In my opinion, use of AI may degrade originality but enhance creativity."

Another student from the same college, Roxy Ann Roy, informed that excessive reliance on AI diminishes her inclination to engage deeply with topics. "AI only suggests solutions without teaching us the underlying concepts and providing good reasoning for these."

The complex landscape reveals a growing need for a thoughtful integration of AI in educational frameworks, ensuring that technology enhances rather than detracts from the learning experience.

(Contributed by Sneha Lijoys and Gopika Babu)

Oman Airports signs pacts to support SMEs at Muscat airport

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman Airports signed two agreements on Thursday to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operate commercial activities at Muscat International Airport.

The agreements aim to enhance the commercial presence of SMEs at Muscat International Airport, marking a crucial move to integrate local businesses into the global marketplace.

In a statement, Oman Airports said, 'This initiative aligns with the national drive to develop the SME sector in recognition of its significant economic and social impacts.'

The agreements were signed by Sheikh Aimen Ahmed al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports, the executive management team of Oman Airports, and representatives of Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development with the owners of two SMEs.

The agreements are part of Oman Airports' ongoing efforts to provide opportunities for SMEs to offer their services at airports in the sultanate. The initiative underscores Oman Airports' dedication to fostering the growth of local businesses and integrating them into the broader economic framework.



TENDER

INTERIOR FIT-OUT WORKS AND PROVISION AND FIXTURE OF FURNITURE

Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (PWP) is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the law for the regulation and privatization of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 78/2004 as amended and the PWP license.

Tender Description	PWP is seeking proposals for a comprehensive contract for office renovation and enhancement covering both the interior fit-out works and the provision and installation of furniture for its office located in Muscat Grand Mall. In addition, the scope of work includes some tasks related to the existing furniture and IT equipment currently existing in the office space. Existing drawings, specifications, and the bill of quantities will guide the execution of these services, offering a solid framework for contractors to adhere to while ensuring alignment with PWP's specifications and expectations. The tender documents provide more details with respect to the scope of work.
Tender Number	OPWP/2024/012
Tender Purchase Period	06 June 2024 to 23 June 2024
Tender Fee	50 OMR / Free of charges for (SME) with a valid Riyada card.
Submission date	24 July 2024 at 12:00 PM Gulf Standard Time GST
Collection & Payment Methods	The tender documents are available for purchase in an electronic format through PWP website (https://www.omanpwp.om/tenders). The payment is done electronically through PWP website. In case of any queries, please send an email to: procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om .
Bank Guarantee	A Tender Bond (in the form set out in the tender documents) or a bank certified cheque of not less than 1% of the tender value, to be valid for a period of 120 days from the submission deadline date referred to above. The tender bond or certified cheque shall be enclosed as part of the bid. (SME) with a valid Riyada card is exempted.



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DRIVEWISE



JEREMY FOX IS A BRITISH DRIVING AND ROAD SAFETY EXPERT. SINCE 2009, HE HAS MANAGED THE DRIVER-TRAINING OPERATIONS OF TECHNICAL & ADMINISTRATIVE TRAINING INSTITUTE. HE CONSIDERS IT HIS PRIVILEGE TO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO OMAN'S IMPROVED ROAD SAFETY.

The dictionary defines 'anticipation' as 'the action of anticipating something; expectation or prediction; a prior action that takes into account or forestalls a later action'.

In my experience, drivers often get involved in unnecessary crashes because they don't apply sufficient mental engagement with the driving task. Without this level of engagement, they are unable to anticipate looming danger before it's actually too late for them to avoid it.

As the dictionary says, 'prior action' can 'forestall a later action'.

It's much more likely that we can avoid crashes by being proactive rather than reactive. This is because reactivity usually involves us taking late, necessarily hurried, action rather than dealing with hazards on our own terms. As with many things in life, there are distinct benefits in being ahead of the game.

A 'hazard' is anything which may cause a driver to consider changing course and/or speed. This could be a response to 'actual danger', such as a vehicle which pulls out of a junction and necessitates firm braking to avoid crashing into it, or 'potential danger' - for example, a posted warning sign for danger ahead (eg a bend).

The safe driver will slow down in the face of hazards rather than merely assume that everything will be fine by the time he reaches the danger area. I've heard many drivers at the scenes of crashes begin their explanation with the word 'suddenly'. In fact, things rarely happen 'suddenly'; it's the lack of driver 'awareness' and its close ally 'anticipation' which just makes it seem that way.

So how can we improve our anticipation? To begin with, total engagement with the driving task is crucial. As drivers, we should also lift our forward vision to the middle and far distance, as well as the near, in order to pick up danger earlier. Think of switching

your eyes to 'high-beam' rather than keeping them permanently on 'low-beam'!

A good way of remembering our zones of vision is to think of 'far, medium, near, rear'. The rear, of course, involves the effective use of mirrors to ensure 360-degree awareness.

It can't be over-emphasised that good anticipation relies heavily on concentration and a high level of all-round awareness. Here are a couple of examples for you to think about.

You're driving on the highway in the centre lane and see up ahead a vehicle in the lane to your right closing the gap on a slower-moving vehicle in front of it. What could happen?

Correct. It's likely that the following driver will want to pull out to overtake. This would threaten your space, and therefore your safety.

However, we can plan for this danger and take steps to regulate our speed so we don't commit to entering the danger area at the same time as the other driver wants

to overtake (as soon as we compete for the same space the risk increases significantly).

An even better option, if safely available, might be a move into the third lane to our left to pre-empt the predicted manoeuvre. This will increase our safety zone.

Another example could be if a child on one side of the road is shouting to his friend on the other, what are the chances of one of them running across in front of you?

The idea is that not only do we anticipate the danger but actually do something about it in good time, such as the sensible adjustment of speed and/or position. The alternative is allowing ourselves to be forced into late avoidance due to the absence of anticipation, and this is not a good situation to be in.

So, finally, think of driving on the COAST! Concentration - Observation - ANTICIPATION provides Space and Time.

Don't let anything 'sudden' happen to you. Safe driving!

(This is the first of a 12-part series)

ANTICIPATION

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Press & Publishing

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Start exams early to beat the heat: Teachers, parents

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As the sultanate grapples with soaring temperatures, reaching near the critical 50°C mark, there is growing concern among educators and parents over the timing of examinations in Omani schools for grades five to 12. The current exam schedule, which typically spans from the end of May to June, coincides with some of the hottest days of the year, posing significant challenges for students.

Muscat Daily spoke with several teachers and parents for their perspectives on the matter.

Ali al Shayadi, a teacher in Suwaiq, emphasised the significant impact of high temperatures on students' performance. He noted that rising heat during exam season adds to students' stress and fatigue, making it difficult for them to concentrate.

Shayadi suggested reconsidering the timing of exams; conducting these in the beginning of May could alleviate these challenges.

Parents echoed these views, noting the adverse effects of heat on their children's concentration and overall well-being during exams. Nasser al Hosani, a parent, voiced concern over the ability of his child, who is in grade ten, to cope with the demanding exam schedule during the hottest part



I hope exams are rescheduled to the beginning of May, a time when temperatures are generally bearable. The adverse effects of extreme heat on students' ability to perform well in exams must be considered

UMM AL ZAHRAA

of the year, particularly when facing multiple exams in a day. He recommended shifting the exams to cooler months to ensure students are comfortable and can give their best performance.

The situation is particularly difficult for students like Mohammed Talib's son, who highlighted the fact that his son has two papers - English and social studies - on Sunday, making it extremely difficult for his son to focus on both in this heat.

Similarly, Umm al Zahraa, a parent with a child in grade six, expressed her hope for exams to be rescheduled to the beginning of May, a time when temperatures are generally bearable. She stressed the need to consider the adverse effects of extreme heat on students' ability to perform well in exams.

Drawing on his extensive experience to underscore the importance of strategic planning for exam timings, Abdul Hadi

Mustafa, a veteran educator, suggested starting exams in May, and consequently beginning the academic year earlier from the middle of August to provide students with ample preparation time while avoiding the peak summer heat.

Supporting these recommendations, Adarsh Joy, a Logistics Manager, and Seena Lijoys, a homemaker, stressed the need of a reevaluation of the current schedules to prioritise student health and academic success. Both parents proposed adjustments that would minimise students' exposure to heat, such as conducting exams earlier in the day and even adopting online classes during extreme weather conditions.

Over 3,800 pilgrims cross Rub al Khali border post for haj

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Rub al Khali border crossing has facilitated the passage of over 3,800 pilgrims headed to the Holy Lands in Saudi Arabia for the annual haj pilgrimage. The last group of pilgrims departed through the border crossing in Dhahirah, which serves as the only road link between Oman and Saudi Arabia, on Thursday.

This year, a total of 14,000 pilgrims from Oman - 13,500 nationals and 500 residents, including 250 Arabs and 250 non-Arabs residing in the sultanate - are participating in the haj.

Malik bin Khalifa al Maamari, Assistant Director of Endowments and Religious Affairs Department in Dhahirah and a member of the team managing pilgrims at the crossing, highlighted the concerted efforts of various authorities to streamline



A group of 60 pilgrims representing Muscat Sunni Centre left for Saudi Arabia on Saturday via Muscat International Airport (V K Shafeer)

procedures for pilgrims. These include coordination with Royal Oman Police, the Omani Haj Mission and Saudi authorities.

"The facilitation of the pilgrims' journey through the border has been a priority, with swift clearance processes reflecting the dedication of all involved authorities to ease procedures for the pilgrims," stated Maamari.

Additionally, on the road to

the border, the Social Development Committee, represented by the Ibri Charitable Team, supported the pilgrims' journey. It set up a station in Ibri to manage the transit of 99 buses from various governorates in cooperation with Royal Oman Police. This station, staffed by a volunteer team of men and women, played a vital role in facilitating movement through Dhahirah.

WORLD OCEAN DAY

Time to act against human impact on oceans

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The sultanate, represented by Environment Authority, marked World Ocean Day, on Saturday, under the slogan 'Catalysing Action for Our Ocean and Climate'.

This year's celebration was intended to raise awareness on the impact of human actions on the oceans, develop global efforts and unite the world in the project of sustainable management of the world's oceans and protecting these from pollution.

Observing the day, 29 divers conducted a reef cleanup at Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve on Saturday.

The initiative was organised by Oman Sail with the support of Omantel in collaboration with Environment Authority.

Champion Omani diver Omar al Ghailani, former world record holder for deepest free dive, joined the initiative, lending his considerable experience to reach discarded items lurking out of sight.

Several studies have shown that damage to coral reefs due to discarded and lost fishing gear disturb the life cycles of many marine species and threaten the



health of sea life. Fish, turtles and birds ingest plastic left in the oceans or get caught in washed up fishing nets.

On the occasion, Khamis al Anbouri, Acting Commercial Director of Oman Sail, said, "We are uniquely placed to witness firsthand the disruption to the Daymaniyat Island reefs and it is our duty to lend our expertise to restore this beautiful area of national importance. Oman Sail is a passionate supporter of our oceans and encourages everyone across the nation to do all they can to keep our coastlines clean, for World Ocean Day and every

day."

The Daymaniyat Islands is Oman's first marine nature reserve and home to some of the nation's best-developed coral reefs. Over 100 species of coral fish and 579 species of reef fish, as well as globally endangered turtles, whales, sharks and dolphins visit the islands every year to breed and nest in the warm waters.

The islands have become a hot spot for local and international divers and snorkelers drawn to the area's numerous dive sites. As a result, the islands are an important ecotourism des-

tination and form a key component of the National Strategy for Fisheries 2040. The islands are a key site in maintaining environmental sustainability in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Saba Said al Busaidi, Senior Manager of Corporate Affairs at Omantel, said, "At Omantel, it is vitally important to raise awareness on the need to protect our marine environment; the oceans provide us with connectivity to more than 120 cities around the world through our submarine cables. Oman is blessed with diversity which we must maintain and help to thrive."

GROWTH THROUGH TOURISM

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group) would like to invite competent and experienced companies to participate in the following Tender:

Tender No.	25/2024
Tender Title	Provision of Interior Design Consultancy Services for Commercial Building 1 in Madinat AL Irfan
Tender Submission Closing Date	23 JUNE 2024
Tender Process Details	Please visit: www.omran.om/tenders



omran.om/tenders

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Dibba Port to open in Q1 2025 as 75% construction complete

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The construction work on the Dibba Fishing Port development project is progressing at a good pace, and the port is expected to be fully operational in the first quarter of 2025, a senior official informed on Saturday.

The Dibba Fishing Port, which is being developed at an approximate cost of RO40mn in the wilayat of Dibba in Musandam Governorate, is considered one of the most important development projects implemented by the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources. The project aims to achieve economic diversification and create an attractive environment for investments and exploitation of fishery resources in the sultanate.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, Ahmed bin Ali al Shehhi, head of the fishing port in the wilayat of Dibba, confirmed that the construction completion rate for the Dibba Port project has reached approximately 75%, and the marine works in the port are expected to be completed within the next two months.

"The project is expected to be fully opened during the first quarter of 2025, as the boat landing has been operated and the main beach will be completed in the coming days," he said.



Dibba Fishing Port will have a significant economic impact in Musandam Governorate. It is expected to provide more than a thousand direct and in direct jobs in the first year of commercial operations

AHMED BIN ALI AL SHEHHI



Shehhi informed that all concrete sidewalks have been completed, and public sidewalks equipped with high specifications, including electricity and water services, will soon be installed. He added that the port currently deals with all sectors and has received cargo ships to and from several neighboring countries.

He explained that the Dibba Port project is multi-use, as it includes four basic sectors: fishing, tourism, maritime transport and trade services, and maritime security.

Shehhi stated that the project includes two breakwaters, the length of the main breakwater being 1,550 meters, while the length of the secondary breakwater is 500 meters, with a harbor basin with a depth of up to 8 meters, floating moorings, a beach for docking small boats with a length of 130 meters, a boat slip, and a ship crane. "There are boats with a capacity of more than 150 tonnes, a fish market, an ice factory, a building for marine workshops,

warehouses for fishermen, various commercial stores, an administration building, a passenger building, and other service buildings," he said. According to Shehhi, the project also includes allocating an area of 5,000 sqm to invest in a tourist hotel, restaurant complexes, and tourist services, in addition to facilities for the transportation and trade sector. He explained that the port can accommodate cruise ships, especially after the International Cruise Ship Organization approved Dibba Port as a terminal for its ships worldwide. He added that the Dibba Port currently receives about 4,000 passengers per month through the National Ferry Company.

"Dibba Port will have a significant economic impact in the Musandam Governorate in general and the wilayat of Dibba in particular. Due to the investment opportunities it contains that will benefit the people of the governorate and attract foreign investors, it is expected that the project will provide more than a thousand direct and indirect jobs in the first year of its commercial operations," Shehhi said.

After the completion of the development work for Dibba Port, the port will become the second-largest multi-use port in Oman and the first port to connect Musandam Governorate with North Batinah Governorate. Immediately after the completion of the Dibba-Lima-Khasab road project, the Dibba Port is expected to increase the number of ships and attract more travelers and tourists to the area.

The head of the fishing port in Dibba expressed his hope that the port would contribute to supporting the national economy, revitalizing the economic movement in Musandam Governorate, facilitating the movement of shipping and landing, and providing new job opportunities for citizens.



Madayn plans to link government tenders with local products

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), represented by the Industrial Innovation Academy, has signed a cooperation agreement with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board to link government tenders with local products, aiming to boost the industrial sector and enhance local content in government projects, contracts, and procurement.

The agreement was signed by H E Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), Eng Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi, CEO of Madayn, and H E Eng Badr bin Salim al Maamari, Secretary General of the Tender Board.

As per the cooperation agreement, the government tenders will be linked with local products through the 'Rabt Platform', which was founded by the Industrial Innovation Academy as a

unified smart data platform to connect existing industries in the industrial cities, special economic zones, and free zones with government tenders.

The Rabt Platform ensures that local products and services are listed in tender documents and government procurement processes, prioritising them as preferred products for use, purchase, and supply in projects. The platform also analyses products and services offered by companies in the industrial sector, aiming to study their potential and establish connections with other businesses and sectors.

The platform aims to empower growth in the industrial sector and maximise local content within Oman; implement and manage a Decision Support System (DSS) for awarding government tenders; adopt an innovation-based Omani local content accreditation system; and enhance Oman's ranking in the Global Competitiveness Index.

Cybersecurity and cloud experts to converge at *Muscat Daily* conference

Muscat - The inaugural edition of *Muscat Daily's* Cybersecurity and Cloud Conference & Awards is set to bring together industry leaders, innovators and subject matter experts for a deep dive into the latest trends, challenges and advancements shaping cybersecurity and cloud services.

The conference scheduled on June 12 at Intercity Hotel (Al Khuwair) in Muscat promises a dynamic lineup of expert-led sessions, panel discussions and case-study presentations. Notably, the event will also honour outstanding achievements in cybersecurity and cloud services through awards.

H H Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said will grace the event as the chief guest, whereas Eng Said bin Abdullah al Mandhari, Group CEO of ITHCA Group, will deliver the keynote speech. The event is supported by Oman Banks Association, Oman American Business Council, NSSG, Aon, Secorado and Vidopix.



Over 100 delegates including policymakers, CISOs/CIOs/ CDOs and IT Heads, cybersecurity & cloud solutions providers, consultants in cybercrimes and digital forensics, risk and compliance professionals, and innovation leaders from across sectors including banking and finance,

power, telecom, logistics, healthcare, manufacturing and consulting are participating in the event. The conference will address imminent cybersecurity challenges posed by emerging technologies, with experts analysing the implications of these advancements. It also aims to discuss advanced threat detection,

using AI and machine learning to strengthen defenses against sophisticated cyber threats. Other topics include the need for strong security setups in multi-cloud environments, as well as strategies for protecting data across borders. The conference will also delve into managing and securing IoT networks, along with techniques for investigating breaches and responding effectively. These focus areas underscore the conference's commitment to equipping attendees with actionable strategies to optimise cybersecurity and cloud ROI (return-on-investment) in digital transformation projects and foster a cybersecurity-aware corporate culture. The conference is organised by Interactive Apex. For more information, contact sajir@apex-media.co.om or +968 9947 4314.

Vision Golfe 2024 shows growing French-GCC commercial cooperation

Paris, France - Vision Golfe 2024 Conference, held at the French Ministry of Economy, Finance, Industrial and Digital Sovereignty in Paris, has marked a significant milestone in bolstering economic relations between France and the GCC.

Organised by Business France, Vision Golfe is an annual event dedicated to strengthening the economic and strategic relationships between France and the GCC countries. This year's edition witnessed unprecedented engagement with over 1,200 attendees, including more than 500 stakeholders from GCC countries, reflecting a growing commitment to enhancing bilateral economic cooperation. The event was packed with insightful discussions that began with a welcoming speech from the French Minister of Economy, Bruno Le Maire, followed by Laurent Saint-Martin, CEO, Business France, on the importance of this



strategic cooperation for French trade and attractiveness. The event featured high-level participation from prominent figures from France and the GCC countries including H E Eng Salim Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals of Oman. Their contributions provided invaluable insights into trade and economic strategies, underscoring the importance of the conference agenda and enriching discussions with high-level governmental perspectives. In addition, more than 40 of-

ficials, including GCC ambassadors to France, French diplomats, representatives from Saudi, Qatari, Kuwaiti, Bahraini, Omani and UAE authorities, as well as CEOs from these countries attended the event, emphasising the high level of bilateral engagement. The conference saw the signing of significant agreements with the Saudi Ports Authority, MAWANI, and the Grand Port of Marseille Fos, symbolising the strengthening of maritime connections because of their strategic position at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, within the framework of the construction of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, IMEC. Another agreement strengthening bridges was established at Vision Golfe, between Export Bahrain and the French Chamber of Commerce to promote Bahraini exports while facilitating business relations between France and Bahrain.

SALE OF ITEMS OF A COMPANY UNDER LIQUIDATION

The liquidator of one of the companies announces the sale of the following items through sealed envelopes:

1) Light/ Heavy Vehicles.

2) Different types of Equipment.

Interested Parties can view the items on Monday 10/6/2024 between 9 - 1 at Jifnain site and Al Amerat office Building. Last date for submission the offers is Thursday 13 June 2024 at 2:00 Pm

For more details please contact; 99461960

Aramco unveils final price for secondary public offering

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia - The Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Aramco) announced the final price of the secondary public offering of the company's shares. This offering amounts to 1.545bn shares, representing about 0.64% of the company's issued shares.

The final offering price for institutional and individual subscribers is set at SAR27.25 per share. Individual subscribers will receive at least ten shares each, with the remaining shares allocated proportionally, the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported.

Aramco disclosed that

1,331,915 individual subscribers have fully subscribed. As a result, 10% of the offering shares will be allocated to individual subscribers, and the remaining 90% will be allocated to institu-

The Stabilising Manager may purchase up to 10% of the offering shares at the final offering price. The Manager has the right to exercise the over-allotment option within 30 calendar days from the date the offering shares started trading.

Aramco has stated that the settlement process and delivery of the offering shares to the subscribing institutions will take place through negotiated trades outside the market. The settlement process for individual subscribers will be done through the subscription manager and the company's securities depository centers (Edaa). The of-

tional subscribers.

The company has granted the Stabilising Manager a greenshoe option to cover short selling operations resulting from any over-allotment of shares.

fering shares will be deposited for individual subscribers in the subscribers' wallets/brokerage accounts with the financial market institution associated with the receiving entity.

The deposit of the offering shares allocated to subscribing institutions and individual subscribers will be completed before the opening of the Saudi Exchange on Sunday. Subscribers can trade the offering shares when the Saudi Exchange opens on that day. Any surplus of the subscription funds will be refunded to individual subscribers on Tuesday.

WAM

Global energy investment to exceed \$3tn: IEA

London, UK – Total energy investment worldwide is expected to exceed \$3tn in 2024 for the first time, with some \$2tn set to go toward clean technologies, including renewables, electric vehicles, nuclear power, grids, storage, low-emissions fuels, efficiency improvements and heat pumps, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said.

The remainder, slightly over \$1tn, is going to coal, gas and oil, according to the latest edi-

China is set to account for the largest share of clean energy investment in 2024, reaching an estimated \$675bn. Europe follows with clean energy investment of \$370bn



tion of the IEA's annual World Energy Investment report.

In 2023, combined investment in renewable power and grids overtook the amount spent on fossil fuels for the first time.

"For every dollar going to fossil fuels today, almost two dollars are invested in clean energy," said IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol.

"The rise in clean energy spending is underpinned by strong economics, by continued

cost reductions and by considerations of energy security," he added.

China is set to account for the largest share of clean energy investment in 2024, reaching an estimated \$675bn.

Europe and the United States follow, with clean energy investment of \$370bn and \$315bn respectively.

In 2024, investment in solar PV is set to grow to \$500bn as falling module prices spur new investments.

Global upstream oil and gas investment is expected to increase by 7% in 2024 to reach \$570bn, following a similar rise in 2023. The growth in spending in 2023 and 2024 is predominantly by national oil companies in the Middle East and Asia.

The report added that there are still major imbalances and shortfalls in energy investment flows in many parts of the world.

ONA

ECB delivers 'hawkish' rate cut, stresses data dependency

ECB reduced rate by 35 basis points and affirmed that it is appropriate to moderate the degree of monetary policy restriction after nine months of holding rates steady



Frankfurt, Germany – The European Central Bank (ECB) reduced interest rates by 25 basis points during its June meeting, a move largely anticipated by market participants following prior communications from ECB policymakers over the past month.

In the policy statement, the ECB affirmed that it is appropriate to moderate the degree of monetary policy restriction after nine months of holding rates steady. The new interest rates are set at 4.25% for main refinancing operations, 4.5% for the marginal lending facility, and 3.75% for the deposit facility.

"We decided to cut because overall our confidence in the path ahead has been increasing over the last months," President Christine Lagarde affirmed at the press conference.

Lagarde noted that the ECB decision was unanimous except for one Governor. The ECB President stressed that this is not yet a "dialing back" phase of interest rates, but rather a "moderation in the level of restriction," emphasising the need for more data and analysis to confirm the disinflationary path.

"There will be bumps on the road towards the 2% inflation target," Lagarde said.

When questioned about market expectations of further ECB rate cuts by the year's end, Lagarde responded: "Markets do what markets have to do, and we do what we have to do."

On the potential for a July rate cut, Lagarde gave a subtle answer: "We will have more data when we have projection meetings," hinting that September might be the next significant meeting for rate decisions.

The ECB reiterated its commitment to keeping policy rates sufficiently restrictive for as long as necessary to achieve the 2% inflation target, stating that future policy decisions will be data dependent, following a meeting-by-meeting approach.

"The Governing Council is not pre-committing to a particular rate path," the ECB remarked in the statement.

The ECB's statement reveals that headline inflation has decreased by 2.5 percentage points since September 2023, and that "the outlook has improved markedly."

(Source: Euronews.com)

US economy adds more jobs than expected in May

Josh Schafer

The US labour market added more jobs than expected in May, defying previous signs of a slowdown in the economy.

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics released Friday showed the labor market added 272,000 non-farm payroll jobs in May, significantly more additions than the 180,000 expected by economists. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate rose to 4% from 3.9% the month prior. May's job additions came in significantly higher than the 165,000 jobs added in April.

The print highlights the difficulty the Federal Reserve faces in determining when to lower interest rates and how quickly. Overall, the economy and labor market have held up, and inflation has remained sticky, building the case for holding rates higher for longer. Yet some cracks have emerged, such as signs of inflation pressuring lower-income

consumers and rising household debt.

"They're really walking a tightrope here," Robert Sockin, Citi senior global economist, told Yahoo Finance of the central bank. He noted the longer the Fed holds rates steady, the more cracks could develop in the economy.

Wages, considered an important metric for inflation pressures, increased 4.1% year over year, reversing a downward trend in annual gains from the month prior. On a monthly basis, wages increased 0.4%, an increase from the previous month's 0.2% gain.

"To see more confidence that inflation could move lower over time, you'd really like to see the wage numbers look a little lower than we've seen them today," Lauren Goodwin, New York Life Investments economist and chief market strategist, told Yahoo Finance.

(Source: Yahoo Finance)



الأنوار للاستثمارات ش.م.ع

Al Anwar Investments SAOG

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Directors' Report for the year ended 31st March 2024

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I have great pleasure in welcoming you to the 30th Annual General Meeting of Al Anwar Investments SAOG (AAI). I take this opportunity to place before you the Annual Report on the activities and performance of your company for the financial year ended 31st March 2024.

Overview of the Group results

AAI has maintained a prudent and pro-active approach towards managing its investments. Our portfolio investment companies are making efforts to overcome the present challenging economic environment. Some of our portfolio investment companies have been resilient in these difficult market conditions and consequently have maintained their profitability. Our immediate objective is to support our portfolio investment companies and to take advantage of investment opportunities as economic situation improves.

The Company reported a consolidated net profit of OMR 532,000 for year ended on 31st March 2024 as against a profit of OMR 354,000 for the year ended on 31st March 2023, an improvement of 50%, mainly on account of realised gain on the sale of its investment classified as fair value.

The total comprehensive income for the year ended on 31st March 2024 was OMR 1,568,000 as against a last year's OMR 1,969,000, a decline of 20%.

The shareholders' equity at 31st March 2024 is OMR 31.9 million. Net assets per share as at 31st March 2024 is 155 baizas per share as against 157 baizas for the previous year.

Dividends

The company's accumulated profits (retained earnings) as of 31st March 2024, are OMR 4.5 million. The Board of Directors recommends a cash Dividend of 5% (Last year: 5%) and Stock Dividend of 3% (last year: 3%) for the approval of shareholders.

Financial statements

The audited consolidated financial statements presented includes the following:

- The results of Subsidiary Companies for the year ended 31st December, 2023 of the following:
 - Al Anwar International Investment LLC, 100% subsidiary;
 - Al Anwar Taleem LLC, 100% subsidiary
 - Al Anwar Hospitality SAOC, 100% subsidiary in hospitality sector; and
 - Al Anwar Industrial Investments SAOC, 100% subsidiary.
- The share of profit/ (loss) of Associate Companies for the year ended 31st December, 2023 (Al Ruwad International Education Services SAOC up to 31st January 2024) in which AAI owns between 20% and 50% of share capital or has significant influence.
- Dividends from investments classified at Fair Value.
- Realized and unrealized gains / losses from investment classified at Fair Value.

Performance of Investments

Associates

1. Al Maha Ceramics SAOG (AMC) (AAI Stake – 18.74%):

AMC reported revenue of OMR 5,707,121 for the year ended on 31st December 2023, as compared with OMR 9,977,477 for last year, a decrease of 42.8%. Net loss after tax for the year is OMR (1,120,593) as compared to net profit of OMR 3,123,618 in the previous corresponding period, a decrease of 135.8%. Operational Profit of parent company is OMR 582,000 as compared to OMR 3,154,000 in the previous year, a decrease of 81.5%. The company recorded Share of Loss from its associate, amounting to OMR 1,615,358.

2. Voltamp Energy SAOG (VE) (AAI Stake – 24.68%):

VE reported revenues of OMR 30,512,671 during the year ended on 31st December 2023, a decrease of 14.8% as compared to OMR 35,842,036 for the last year. VE reported a net profit (attributable to shareholders of Parent Company) of OMR 816,510 during the year as compared to loss of OMR (1,460,924) in last year. The Company made a turnaround after 3 years when performance was affected by the global market slowdown and supply chain disruptions.

3. Arabia Falcon Insurance Company SAOG (AFIC) (AAI Stake – 22.62%):

AFIC recorded Insurance Revenue of OMR 20,973,982 during the year ended on 31st December 2023 as compared to OMR 21,072,323 for the last year. The Net profit after tax for the year is OMR 741,594 against OMR 1,029,406 of last year, a decrease of 28%, due to the decrease in net insurance service results. Growth in the business of the company is in line with the market. The transition from IFRS 4 to IFRS 17 in the reporting of insurance contracts resulted in a reduction in reported net income. However, this variance is expected to be temporary and should not significantly affect future financial years, as the impact has been fully accounted for in the current financial statements.

4. Al Ruwad International for Education Services SAOC (AIS) (AAI Stake – 43.51%):

The Company has reported lower revenue and a loss for the twelve months period ended on 31st January 2024 as compared to loss of last year. This is primarily due to lower number of students enrolled in the school during academic year.

5. National Biscuits Industries Ltd. SAOG (NABIL) (AAI Stake – 29.22%):

NABIL reported revenue of OMR 16,453,000 for the twelve months period ended on 31st December 2023 as against OMR 14,115,000 of last year, an improvement of 16.6% from last year. The net profit for the period increases to OMR 601,000 as against OMR 144,000 for the same period of last year, an improvement of 317%.

6. National Detergent Co. SAOG (NDC) (AAI Stake – 25.24%):

NDC reported revenues of OMR 21,180,627 for the year ended 31st December 2023 as compared to last year's 19,641,345, a growth of 7.8%. The Company reported a net profit of OMR 657,519 as compared to net loss of OMR (440,334) of last year.

7. Oman Chlorine SAOG (OC) (AAI Stake – 22.11%)

Oman Chlorine Group has reported revenue of OMR 32,174,460 for the year ended 31st December 2023 as compared with OMR 31,359,462 in the previous period, a growth of 2.6%. The net profit (Attributable to Parent Company Shareholders) for the period is OMR 1,968,036 as compared to profit of OMR 3,919,497 in the previous period, a decline of 50%.

The Oman operation (Parent Company) reported a net profit of OMR 1,801,261 compared to previous period of OMR 2,685,042 a decline of 32.9%. The company consistently maintained the capacity utilization of the plant above 100%. Despite of decline in caustic prices globally, company was able to improve the sales due to higher quantities sold.

Union Chlorine LLC, UAE, a subsidiary, has reported net profit of OMR 543,564 for the year ended on 31st December 2023, compared to profit of OMR 1,118,710 in previous period. The parent company's share of profit is OMR 325,595. The plant operating at capacity utilization of 100%, the revenue was higher while capitalizing on the international demand and securing more contracts at higher realizations. The company has established long-term supply agreements with major oil and gas companies and has also established direct supplies to end user within UAE and GCC, this is expected to positively reflect in the performance.

Gulf Chlorine WLL, Qatar, a subsidiary, has reported net loss of OMR (304,592) during the year ended 31st December 2023, compared to profit of OMR 1,109,532 in previous period. The parent company's share of loss is OMR (149,250).

Other significant investments

1. Bank Dhofar SAOG

AAI has an equity stake of 1.51% in Bank Dhofar at carrying value of OMR 7,250,000 as at 31st March 2024. The investment is classified at fair value. The Bank has reported total operating Income of OMR 144.1mn, an improvement of 0.6% from last year's OMR 143.1mn. Net profit after tax for the year is OMR 38.8mn as compared to OMR 34.2mn in the previous corresponding period, an increase of 13.5%.

2. Dhofar International Development and Investment Co SAOG (DIDIC)

AAI has an equity stake of 6.84% in DIDIC at carrying value of OMR 5,875,000 as at 31st March 2024. The investment is classified at fair value. The company has achieved consolidated net profits of OMR 7,758,251 for the year 2023, as compared to net profit of OMR 9,690,896 of last year. The decrease in profits was primarily due to unrealized loss on financial assets amounting to OMR (2.09 million) as against an unrealized gain of OMR 0.74 million in 2022. Moreover, the Company also charged off OMR 1.39 million which were unamortized upfront fees paid on a previous loan, which was refinanced during 2023.

Omanisation

AAI has always been fully committed of recruiting and training Omani employees and developing and promoting the local talent. AAI Omanisation level at 31st March 2024 is 57%.

Outlook

Oman's economy is expected to continue to improve as oil prices recovers from the lows witnessed in prior years. S&P Global Ratings has revised Oman's rating outlook to positive from stable, citing improving fiscal position, progress on reforms and rising oil prices.

AAI has maintained a prudent and active approach towards managing its investment portfolio. Our objective this year is to:

- continue to support and pro-actively manage our investment companies and,
- take advantage of investment opportunities available in the market

We are confident that AAI and its Group companies will continue to play a pivotal role in Oman's economic growth, create job opportunities for Omani nationals, and attract foreign investments in the Sultanate of Oman.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to take this

opportunity to express our greetings and good wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and pray to Allah to grant him and his government success to lead the country and the people to greater prosperity and progress.

The Board records its sincere appreciation to Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion, Financial Services Authority, Muscat Stock Exchange, Banks, Auditors for their continued support.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the Board of Directors of all our portfolio investment companies for direction given to the managements of the respective companies. I place on record my sincere thanks and appreciation for the dedicated efforts of the management team and all employees of our portfolio investment companies.

I would also like to convey my sincere thanks to the Shareholders of Al Anwar Investments SAOG for the confidence they have reposed in the company and its Board.

For & on behalf of the Board of Directors of
Al Anwar Investments SAOG

Dr. Shabir Moosa Al Yousef
Deputy Chairman

Consolidated statement of financial position as of 31 March 2024		
	2024 RO'000	2023 RO'000
ASSETS		
Investment in associates	30,915	31,048
Investments at fair value	13,241	14,176
Property and other assets	2,274	2,308
Receivables and prepayments	1,263	1,116
Cash and bank balances	85	183
TOTAL ASSETS	47,778	48,831
EQUITY		
Share capital	20,600	20,000
Legal reserve	4,674	4,603
Equity investment reserve	(459)	(1,016)
Associates reserve	2,647	2,168
Retained earnings	4,412	5,551
Total equity	31,874	31,306
LIABILITIES		
Bank borrowings	15,725	17,142
Payables	179	383
Total liabilities	15,904	17,525
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	47,778	48,831
Net assets per share (in Baizas)	155	157

Consolidated statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 March 2024		
	2024 RO'000	2023 RO'000
Share of results of associates	559	1,436
Net investment income	1,585	330
Other income	28	23
Net income	2,172	1,789
Administrative expenses	(353)	(312)
Finance costs	(1,066)	(1,043)
Reversal of contingency provision	260	-
Provision for impairment loss on investment in associate	(300)	-
Capital work-in-progress written-off	(36)	-
Corporate social responsibility expenses	(10)	(10)
Directors' fees and remuneration	(135)	(70)
Total expenses	(1,640)	(1,435)
Profit before tax for the year	532	354
Income tax	-	-
Net profit after tax for the year	532	354
Other comprehensive income:		
<i>Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss</i>		
Share of other comprehensive income / (loss) of associates	479	(64)
Net change in fair value of investments at fair value through other comprehensive income	557	1,679
Other comprehensive income for the year	1,036	1,615
Total comprehensive income and net profit after tax for the year	1,568	1,969
Earnings per share (in Baizas)	3	2

Note:1) The complete accounts will be send by mail to any shareholders who requests them in arabic or english as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.

2) Financial statements are available on MSX website.

5th Health Leaders Forum held

Towards empowering the healthcare leaders to actively participate in the health sector and improve their ability to make appropriate decisions in a timely manner, the Ministry of Health convened the fifth edition of Health Leaders Forum under the theme Empowerment 'Tamkeen' at Barceló Resort, Musannah last week.

Chaired by H E Dr Hilal Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, the two-day forum brought together MoH Undersecretaries, Governorates' director generals of health services, and hospitals directors, as well directors of Minister Office, a press release said.

The event is aspiring to meet spectrum of objectives that can be outlined in several points that includes increasing the health leaders' knowledge and awareness of their capacity to make appropriate health decisions to respond quickly to the challenges facing the health sector, and creating a stimulating work environment to attract and retain human resources to ensure job satisfaction. The event additionally will shed light on the initiatives that were designed to developing the health system.

At the onset of the forum, the minister emphasised the significance of the event as a continuation of previous forums. He stressed the importance of organised and deliberate efforts to ensure the sustainability of improving the healthcare system in line with the ministry's aspirations to achieve the goals of



Oman Vision 2040 in the healthcare sector.

The minister pointed out further that the forum focuses on several important topics, includ-



ing healthcare governance, enhancing employee commitment and institutional loyalty, the importance of leadership in the success of national projects and

initiatives, and the conduction of training workshop on leadership and decision-making.

Furthermore, H E Sabti reviewed the vision of the ministry and its future projects, which include developing the healthcare model, enhancing governance through the development of policies and necessary legislation to strengthen the healthcare sector based on decentralisation of health services, developing the human resources system through planning, attracting and developing competencies to em-

power them to work in the healthcare sector, digital transformation, and fostering a culture of project management, change management and continuous improvement.

Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, MOH's undersecretary for Planning and Health Regulation, also gave a presentation on Leadership and Efficiency in Healthcare Management, highlighting the concept of leadership in healthcare, characteristics of effective leadership in healthcare, and the causes of leadership failure providing examples in this regard.



Isuzu adds D-Max pick-ups to Budget Rent a Car fleet

OTE Group, the esteemed distributor of Isuzu brand trucks, pickups, and SUVs in the sultanate, announced the delivery of 15 state-of-the-art Isuzu D-Max D/C 4x4 Pickups to Budget Rent a Car.

This ceremonial handover symbolises the ongoing collaboration between the two entities, further augmenting Budget's Isuzu fleet to over 230 vehicles, comprising D-Max Pickups, Mux SUVs, and trucks, a press release said.

The key handover ceremony took place at the Budget Rent a Car office premises in Muscat, graced by representatives from both organisations, including Benty Jose, general manager, Yusuf Calcuttawala, sales manager, Fahad Ahmed al Balushi, fleet manager, and Anwar Sheer

Mohammed al Balushi, assistant fleet manager, from Budget Rent a Car.

The Isuzu D-Max, renowned for its robust performance, fuel efficiency, and exceptional off-road capabilities, this latest addition to Budget's fleet will effectively meet the burgeoning demand for reliable and versatile rental vehicles in Oman.

"We are thrilled to further fortify our partnership with Budget Rent a Car," stated a senior official from Isuzu Oman (OTE Group). "Isuzu vehicles epitomise exceptional value and performance, perfectly suited for the dynamic rental market. We are confident that these D-Max Pickups will not only meet but exceed the expectations of Budget's clientele.



Al Injaz holds KG graduation

Al Injaz International Private School celebrated its kindergarten graduation, honouring the achievements of its young learners, and acknowledging the importance of shaping the minds of future world leaders at the earliest stages of life.

Looking dazzling in their caps and gowns, the school's tiny tots had the opportunity to express their gratitude to their director, principal, teachers and parents alike, while receiving their diplomas, a press release said.

The guest of honour, Fayza Habib al Ghabshiyya, director of the Omani Women's Association in the Wilayat of Bousher and a member of the Municipal Affairs Committee, praised the dedication of the teachers in nurturing the students.

Celebrating two decades of hard work and dedication, Al Injaz International Private School remains committed to excellence in education, fostering a love for learning and holistic development.



OAB launches direct debit service

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) continues its commitment to pioneering innovative and secure banking solutions with the introduction of its latest product - Direct Debit.

Tailored for both individual and corporate customers, this new service simplifies digital payments by automating recurring bill payments, offering unparalleled convenience in banking transactions, a press release said.

Khalid al Amri, chief retail banking officer at OAB, said, "By investing in the latest financial technologies, we are aligning with Oman's digitisation efforts in financial services, and ensuring that our secure and convenient payment solutions are tailored to meet customers' evolving needs

Oman Arab Bank receives upgraded PCIDSS 4.0 certification

Building on its commitment to safeguarding its customers' information, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) announced receiving an upgraded certification for Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) version 4.0.

This demonstrates OAB's ongoing efforts to protect its customer payment card information and enhance defenses against potential security risks, fraudulent activities, and data breaches, a press release said.

The transition to PCI DSS version 4.0, a recognised security



standard confirms OAB's position as an organization that not only meets but exceeds the strict

security measures set by the PCI Security Standards Council. This standard plays a role for entities

handling information such as credit card details guaranteeing a robust and secure environment.

Sulaiman al Harthi, CEO of OAB stated, "This upgrade in certification is a testament to our high operational standards and secured processes which ensure we keep our customers' information safe always. Our continuous investments in cybersecurity and cutting-edge technologies ensure that our customer's payment card details are protected with utmost integrity."

The Payment Card Industry

Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) is a comprehensive security standard established by the PCI Security Standards Council (PCI SSC). This independent body is overseen by major payment brands like Visa, Mastercard, American Express, and Discover.

PCI DSS outlines 12 critical controls designed to safeguard cardholder information. These controls focus on securing networks that store card data, protecting cardholder details, and maintaining regular security assessments.



OIH launches 'FibroScan' for liver disease

Oman International Hospital (OIH) has launched the state-of-the-art FibroScan service, a modern non-invasive technology for detecting scarring (fibrosis) and fat deposition (steatosis) in patients with liver disease.

Chronic liver disease, especially fatty liver disease, is among the most significant health challenges facing modern societies. Fatty liver disease is rapidly becoming one of the most common global health problems largely caused by the global pandemic of obesity and diabetes.

Dr Abdulwahhab Shaheed Abdullah, a senior specialist in gastroenterology and hepatology in Oman International Hospital, stated that the importance of the FibroScan device lies in its ability to provide a quick, point-of-care, painless, non-invasive method for assessing liver health.

Ooredoo wins big at COMEX Excellence in Technology Awards

Named a leader in digital transformation and in creating a seamless B2B customer experience, Ooredoo was selected as the winner in the Telecom category at the recently held COMEX Excellence in Technology Awards 2024.

The telco has been increasingly focused on upgrading the ever-evolving world of digitalising businesses in Oman. Not only does Ooredoo offer a nationwide 5G network but also products and services that its connectivity and innovation enable, including



cloud and other solutions for businesses, a press release said. Saoud al Riyami, chief busi-

ness and wholesale officer at Ooredoo, said, "We are grateful for receiving yet another award

that recognises Ooredoo's contributions to Oman's transformation into a knowledge-based and technologically advanced economy. We know that businesses of all sizes play an important role in the digital transformation of the nation. As 5G continues to unlock many growth opportunities for our B2B customer base, we create value by offering personalised and seamless experiences that are customer-centric."

Digital has penetrated Ooredoo's B2B customer base by

over 50%, and now 49% of these customers' transactions are digital payments. Ooredoo focuses on digital penetration and strategic partnerships with local and international companies to innovate, expand services and contribute to building a robust digital infrastructure in Oman.

On a related note, and also during COMEX 2024, Ooredoo Fintech International, a wholly owned subsidiary of Ooredoo Group, launched Walletii, a new state-of-the-art Fintech solution.



Mitsubishi launches all-new L200

General Automotive Company (GAC), the authorised distributor of Mitsubishi Motors in Oman, launched the all-new Mitsubishi L200. This milestone showcases Mitsubishi Motors' unwavering commitment to innovation, excellence, and its focused approach to meet the evolving needs of the Oman market.

The all-new Mitsubishi L200 represents a paradigm shift in the pickup truck segment, featur-

ing a host of groundbreaking enhancements designed to elevate the driving experience and set new benchmarks in performance and durability, a press release said.

Junya Takami, president of Mitsubishi Motors Middle East and Africa, said, "The launch of the all-new Mitsubishi L200 signifies a new era of automotive excellence, where we redefine the boundaries of capability, safety, and eco-friendliness. Our

dedication to the Middle East, Africa, and Oman market is unwavering, and we are excited to introduce a vehicle that not only exceeds expectations but also aligns with our vision for sustainability and social progress."

Speaking on the occasion, Manoj Ranade, general manager, General Automotive Company, said, "At General Automotive Company, we are committed to providing world-class products with cutting-edge technology

and delivering the highest levels of customer satisfaction through our extensive sales and service network across the length and breadth of Oman and our trained and experienced staff. Today, GAC stands as the number one After Sales Distributor for Mitsubishi Motors in the whole of Middle East and Africa, a position that we are confident of retaining for a very long time."

Pointing out that the launch of the L200 marks not just a new

chapter, but another key milestone in this remarkable journey, he added, "This new model is not just a pickup; it is a culmination of years of research, customer feedback, and engineering excellence. The new L200 is designed to meet the diverse needs of our customers, offering enhanced performance, superior comfort, and advanced safety features."

The grand launch event, held at Al Rozna Hall in Muscat on June 5, is part of a series of

launches across Oman, marking a significant milestone in the company's history.

Niels Bormans, Group CEO, Zubair Corporation, said, "A journey that began way back in 1974, has paved the way for a long and fruitful partnership between Mitsubishi Motors and General Automotive Co. This partnership has been instrumental in bringing some of the finest vehicles to the Omani market, enduring challenging terrains."

Mazoon Dairy participates in HORECA 2024 show

Mazoon Dairy, the Sultanate of Oman's premier dairy producer, announced its participation in HORECA 2024, one of the region's largest and most influential trade show dedicated to the hospitality and food service industries.

This esteemed event, which brings together key players from the hotel, restaurant, and café sectors, will serve as a platform for Mazoon Dairy to highlight its extensive range of high-quality products, innovative solutions, and its commitment to excellence in dairy production, a press release said.

At HORECA 2024, Mazoon Dairy will showcase its diverse portfolio, which includes fresh milk, flavoured milk, yogurts, laban, cheese, juice and ice cream. Each product is crafted with the utmost care, ensuring premium quality and taste. Visitors can experience first-hand the exceptional freshness and rich flavours that distinguish Mazoon Dairy's offerings, thanks to its carefully selected and sourced ingredients and state-of-the-art processing techniques.

HORECA 2024 provides Mazoon Dairy with a unique opportunity to connect with key stakeholders in the hospitality industry. The company aims to engage with hotel operators, restaurant owners, café managers, chefs, and food service distributors.

BankDhofar introduces dedicated banking solutions

BankDhofar announced the launch of specialised banking services for self-employed individuals by providing a set of banking solutions to meet their banking needs.

This initiative aligns with Oman Vision 2040, empowering self-employed individuals, which in turn contribute to the growth and expansion of their businesses, a press release said.

Featuring a range of benefits,

including point-of-sale systems, communication support, and efficient payroll management solutions, the account equips freelancers with the tools needed to enhance financial transactions and sales. Moreover, the user-friendly payment gateway is tailored for freelancers simplifies online payment collections, while customized credit and debit card options cater to their unique needs.



The account is designed specifically for self-employed professionals categorized under small and medium enterprises, offers a smooth account opening process across the bank's 121 nationwide branches

The account also provides many benefits, such as point-of-sale systems and communication support, which help them collect their financial dues and enhance their sales. In addition

to having a unique system for paying employees' salaries with a convenient and effective way to manage employees' payrolls.

Freelancers can collect payments for their online transactions through a payment gateway designed for them and integrated with the bank's own gateway. Credit cards and direct debit cards are also designed to meet the unique needs of self-employment.

ISD CBSE 2024 scholars feted

Indian School Darsait honoured its students who topped the CBSE X and XII Board Exam 2023-2024 at the Annual Academic Excellence Awards Ceremony on 02 June 2024.

The ceremony celebrated the remarkable achievements of its students - the Oman Topper, School Toppers, National Toppers, Subject Toppers and A1 scorers in all subjects. The chief guest was Dr Sivakumar Manickam, chairman, Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman.

Shebeer Shamsuddin, member - Academic Subcommittee and Head - Purchase Subcommittee, School Management Committee, was the guest of honour at the event attended by members of the School Management Committee, parents of stu-



dents who were being honoured, and the staff of the school.

In his presidential address, Vijaya Saravanan Sankaran praised the academic ambassadors who have raised the bar for all stu-

dents through their diligence and pursuit of knowledge. He congratulated Yadu Krishna Balakrishnan who was the Oman Topper in the AISSE Science Stream with a score of 99%.

ISWK Cambridge holds Annual Day

ISWK [Cambridge] hosted their Annual Day celebration on June 1, a press release said.

This year's event commenced with a tribute to their late colleague Nambi Rajesh, an IT manager whose sudden passing away left the school community in shock and sadness. However, the event soon transformed into a vibrant celebration of achievements, talents and the spirited essence of the school community.

Under the theme 'GUSTO', the event featured a captivating dance drama showcasing an array of fairy tales and folk songs from diverse cultures, symbolising the celebration of life. Colourful performances by the early year learners set the tone for the morning's entertainment, fol-



lowed by an eclectic mix of choir, dance and fashion displays, each performed with grace and grandeur by learners. The theatrical performances featuring intriguing characters portrayed by the learners kept the audience

entertained throughout the event.

The Annual Day served as a gathering of the ISWK [Cambridge] community, comprising learners, educators and parents, commemorating yet another

successful academic year. Principal D N Rao and vice principal Sowmya highlighted the school's accomplishments, honoured outstanding learners, showcased diverse talents and reiterated the school's commitment.

French Embassy hosts roundtable session on Women and Sports

Coinciding with the countdown to the 33th Summer Olympic Games - Paris 2024, the French Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman, in collaboration with Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), represented by Oman Women's Sports and Gender Equality Committee, organised a dialogue session on 'Women and Sports'.

The event aimed to enhance the role of women in sports through local, regional, and international efforts, sharing experiences to achieve a more inclusive and balanced future in sports, a press release said.

The event took place last Wednesday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, under the patronage of Sayyidah



Sana bint Hamad al Busaidi, chairperson of Oman Women's Sports and Gender Equality Committee, and in the presence of H E Véronique Aulagnon, Am-

bassador of the Republic of France to the Sultanate of Oman.

The session featured six prominent female speakers who shared their inspiring experi-

ences in empowering women through sports, presenting their success stories and insights on enhancing women's participation in various sports activities

and achieving a balance between sports, professional, and personal life.

The goal of the session was to highlight the importance of em-

powering women in sports, exchanging experiences and inspiring visions to support women in achieving distinguished sports accomplishments, raising awareness of the role of sports in achieving sustainable development, and contributing to building a more balanced society.

The session began with a speech by H E Aulagnon, who spoke about Paris hosting the 33th Summer Olympic Games in 2024. She noted that this event represents a significant opportunity to enhance women's participation in sports globally.

She emphasised that Paris will witness the largest female participation in the history of the Olympic Games, reflecting International Olympic Committee's

commitment to gender equality, and expressed her appreciation to the Oman Olympic Committee and the Omani Committee for Women's Sports and Gender Equality for their continuous efforts in supporting and empowering women in sports and enhancing cooperation between the two countries to achieve shared goals in this field.

Saada al Ismaili, deputy chairperson of Oman Women's Sports and Gender Equality Committee, highlighted the committee's role in supporting and encouraging women to participate in sports activities. She shared her personal experience in sports, pointing out the challenges she faced and how she overcame them.

Renowned Apollo 8 astronaut William Anders dies in plane crash

San Juan Islands, US - William Anders, renowned NASA astronaut and member of the groundbreaking Apollo 8 crew, died in a plane crash in Washington state, as confirmed by his son, Gregory Anders, CNN reported.

The 90-year-old space pioneer met his untimely demise in an aircraft incident in the San Juan Islands. My 'dad passed in an aircraft incident in the San Juan Islands', Anders told CNN Friday evening.

The San Juan County Sheriff's Office issued a statement disclosing that an aircraft had crashed off the coast of Jones Island. The initial report, received around 11:40am PT, indicated that an 'older model plane was flying from north to south then went into the water near the north end of Jones Island and sunk'.

San Juan Sheriff Eric Peter relayed to CNN via email that the dive team was deployed to conduct a search at the scene.

In the wake of the tragedy, the Anders family is grappling with profound grief. "The family is devastated and grieving the loss of a great pilot," Gregory Anders expressed.

The San Juan Islands are situated approximately 90 miles north of Seattle.

William Anders, born on October 17, 1933, in Hong Kong, embarked on a remarkable journey marked by exemplary service and pioneering achievements. Graduating from the United States Naval Academy in



NASA astronaut and member of Apollo 8 crew William Anders

1955, he was commissioned in the US Air Force the following year, earning his pilot's wings. Anders' tenure included serving as a fighter pilot in all-weather interception squadrons of the Air Defence Command in California and Iceland.

His tenure at the Air Force Weapons Laboratory in New Mexico was characterised by his pivotal role in managing nuclear power reactor shielding and radiation effects programs.

Selected as an astronaut by NASA in 1964, Anders' contributions to space exploration were significant and enduring. He served as backup pilot for the Gemini 11 mission in 1966

and the iconic Apollo 11 flight in 1969. With over 6,000 hours of flying time, his expertise and dedication were unparalleled.

A pivotal moment in his career came in December 1968 when Anders, alongside Jim Lovell and mission commander Frank Borman, embarked on the historic Apollo 8 mission, becoming the first humans to orbit the moon. Anders assumed the role of lunar module pilot for this groundbreaking flight.

During the mission, Anders immortalised a moment of profound significance with his iconic photograph titled 'Earthrise,' capturing Earth's beauty against the backdrop of the lunar surface. His poignant reflection on this moment resonates deeply: 'We came all this way to explore the moon, and the most important thing is that we discovered the Earth.'

This legendary image, described as such by NASA, encapsulates Anders' profound realisation of Earth's fragility and our place within the cosmos.

"Suddenly I looked out the window, and here was this gorgeous orb coming up," Anders described of Earth.

"For me, it made me realise that the earth was small, delicate and not the centre of the universe," Anders said.

ANI

What's at stake in European elections

Athens, Greece - The European Parliament elections are likely to hand Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis another boost as the country's political left remains highly fragmented, according to Greek political analyst.

With polling in Greece set for June 9, Mitsotakis' ruling New Democracy (ND) party is expected to emerge victorious with somewhere between 32-34 per cent of the vote, Nikos Malkoutzis, co-founder of the Athens-based MacroPolis website, told Anadolu.

The main opposition leftist Syriza and social democratic PASOK will follow with 15-16 per cent and 12-14 per cent, he said, emphasising that their performance could prove decisive for the future of the Greek left.

"If PASOK were to finish ahead of Syriza, contrary to what opinions polls suggest, it would raise very serious questions about the future of Syriza and Stefanos Kasselakis as its leader," he said.

The far-right Greek Solution is most likely to come in fourth, according to Malkoutzis, with one particular reason being the more religious electorate's frustration with the marriage equality act recently introduced by the ND.

Momentum for Mitsotakis

For Mitsotakis, these elections represent a chance to 'keep up the momentum that his party had in last year's national elections, where they won very easily', said Malkoutzis.

The government has faced several challenges since then, including climate disasters, the Tempi train crash, the wiretapping scandal and the cost-of-living crisis, so this win will give Mitsotakis a chance to show that he still has the people on his side, the analyst added.

The Greek premier also wants to consolidate his position within the European People's Party (EPP) and European politics in general, he said.

"ND is, if not the strongest or most successful in terms of its national elections, certainly one of them. This has given Mitsotakis extra weight within the EPP," said Malkoutzis.

ND would be aiming to have at least eight or nine people among the 21 lawmakers Greece will send to Brussels, he said.

"Mitsotakis wants to maintain a successful and strong party in national terms, but also one that deserves to be heard within the European context," he added.

Malkoutzis said the Greek premier has managed to revive the ND with his pragmatic approach to politics, an idea 'he calls ... triangulation'.

"What he wants to do is to not govern as a traditional conservative, but to adopt positions that are sometimes to the left of his more liberal opponents, and sometimes even towards the right ... to keep the right-wing audience happy," he explained.

"In this way, he believes he is presenting himself as a leader who is above the traditional conservative political and social values that ND represents, and who is able to move both to the left and to the right."

Greek left is 'fragmented'

These elections will also 'confirm that the left and centre-left space in Greece is, not in a good way, fragmented, and cannot find any basis for cooperation', according to Malkoutzis.

Parties like Syriza, PASOK and the New Left can realistically challenge the government if they agree on some form of cooperation, he said.

However, he believes Syriza leader Kasselakis remains a major obstacle in any such endeavour. "He is not from a political background. He doesn't seem to have a very clear ideology," Malkoutzis said.

"He doesn't have a feeling for Greek politics, and that means that, first of all, there was a split in his party, which led to the formation of the New Left. It also means that PASOK does not trust him." Another reason is Kasselakis' own political ambitions, he added.

"As the party's new leader, he will want to prove himself and lead the party to the 2027 elections. As such, there will be no basis over the next three years for these parties to talk or to come together," said the analyst.

Anadolu Agency



View of billboard, filled with portraits of politicians, as European Parliament (EP) elections is coming up in Brussels, Belgium

With polling in Greece set for Sunday, Mitsotakis' ruling New Democracy (ND) party is expected to emerge victorious with somewhere between 32-34 per cent of the vote

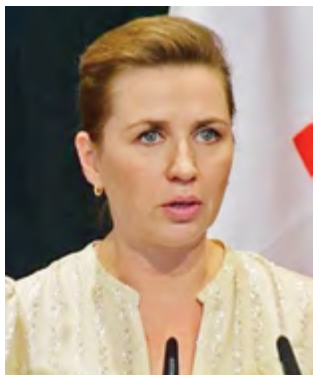
Danish PM Frederiksen attacked in Copenhagen

Copenhagen, Denmark - Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen was assaulted by a man in Copenhagen, according to a statement from her office to CNN.

"Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen was hit by a man on Friday evening on Kultorvet (public square) in Copenhagen. The man was subsequently arrested," the prime minister's office said.

In response to the distressing event, Frederiksen's office said that she 'is shocked by the incident', while refraining from providing further details about any potential injuries sustained during the altercation.

Minister of Environment Magnus Heunicke urged for national unity in the wake of the assault, emphasising the importance of collective responsibility in safeguarding one another, irrespective of 'political disagreements, election campaigns'. "Something like this must not happen in our beautiful, safe and free country," he



Danish PM Mette Frederiksen

said on X. "This is ugly and unacceptable. Let's show that Denmark is much better."

"Deeply shocked by the outrageous attack on my colleague and friend, Prime Minister of Denmark Mette Frederiksen," Latvian Prime Minister Evika Silina said in a post on X.

"All our thoughts are with you and your loved ones. Wishing you a speedy recovery," she added.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen condemned the attack, calling it a 'despicable act, which goes

against everything we believe in and fight for in Europe'. She went on to wish the prime minister strength and courage, saying she has plenty of both, CNN reported.

The incident unfolded against the backdrop of Denmark's upcoming participation in the European Union elections, adding an additional layer of significance to the event.

Frederiksen, a prominent figure in Denmark's political landscape, has led the centre-left Socialist Democratic party since 2019, assuming the role of prime minister. The attack on Frederiksen comes amidst heightened concerns surrounding political violence, notably underscored by the recent assassination attempt on Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico.

Analysts and lawmakers have pointed to a growing sense of political polarisation across Europe, reflecting an increasingly volatile climate within the continent's political sphere, CNN reported.

ANI

Japan: Dating app to boost marriage rates

Tokyo, Japan - Japan faces a daunting demographic challenge as its birth rate plunges to an unprecedented low, prompting governmental initiatives to reverse the trend, including the rollout of a state-backed dating app, CNN reported.

In a nation with a population of 123.9mn, a mere 727,277 births were recorded last year, a stark decline revealed by data from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. This downward spiral in fertility is underscored by a drop in the fertility rate, now standing at 1.20, down from 1.26.

A stable population demands a fertility rate of 2.1. Yet, Japan has struggled to meet this benchmark for over five decades, a trend exacerbated by the 1973 oil crisis, which precipitated economic recessions globally.

The repercussions are profound. With deaths outnumbering births, Japan faces a shrinking population, fuelling concerns regarding its workforce, economy, and societal structure. In 2023 alone, the nation witnessed 1.57mn deaths, doubling the birth rate, as reported by CNN.

Marital unions, too, are on the decline, with a notable decrease of 30,000 marriages last year juxtaposed with a rise in divorces. Experts anticipate this decline to persist for decades, given the nation's demographic imbalance.

Efforts to mitigate these challenges are underway, with the government establishing specialised agencies to address the issue. Initiatives include the expansion of childcare facilities, housing subsidies for parents, and, in select regions, financial incentives for couples to have children.

In Tokyo, a novel approach



The fertility rate in Japan is now standing at 1.20, down from 1.26

A stable population demands a fertility rate of 2.1. Yet, Japan has struggled to meet this benchmark for over five decades, a trend exacerbated by the 1973 oil crisis

emerges: a government-operated dating app. Currently undergoing preliminary testing, the app aims to facilitate connections among individuals seeking marriage.

Described as 'the first step' towards matrimony, the app employs an AI matchmaking system provided by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. Users undergo a 'values diagnostic test' to ascertain compatibility, with an option to specify desired traits in a partner.

Elon Musk, the tech magnate, expressed approval of Japan's initiative, emphasising the critical nature of addressing declining birth rates, according to CNN.

However, experts caution against apocalyptic scenarios, asserting that demographic shifts, while transformative, will not result in the disappearance of nations like Japan.

The dating app underscores the government's commitment to fostering marital bonds, urging individuals with a desire for marriage to take the initial leap. Eligibility criteria mandate users to be single, over 18, and residing or working in Tokyo.

ANI

8 months of death, destruction in Gaza

Gaza City, Palestine - As eight months have passed since Israel launched attacks on the Gaza Strip, the Tel Aviv administration continues to force Palestinians to starve, deliberately targeting civilian settlements and killing tens of thousands of Palestinians, including children and women.

Since October 7, Israel's bombing of Gaza has killed 36,801 Palestinians, including 15,328 children and 10,171 women, and injured 83,680 others.

Israel has deliberately targeted and destroyed civilian structures, including UN buildings, schools, hospitals, mosques, and churches, where civilians seek refuge.

By blocking humanitarian aid to 2.3mn Palestinians, Israel is also causing widespread famine.

Israel's relentless attacks have rendered Gaza unsafe, with its ground assault on Rafah further diminishing safety for the 1.5mn Palestinians seeking refuge.

According to Gaza's government media office statement on May 24, the Israeli military has launched attacks on Gaza with 77,000 tonnes of explosives since October 7, resulting in the complete destruction of 87,000 homes and rendering a total of 297,000 homes uninhabitable.

Israel's attacks have destroyed 189 public buildings, 108 schools, and universities completely, with 313 others partially damaged. Additionally, 604 mosques were destroyed, 200 partially, and three churches were targeted for demolition.

Israel targeted 160 health-



Israel's relentless attacks have rendered Gaza unsafe, with its ground assault on Rafah further diminishing safety for the 1.5mn Palestinians seeking refuge

Israeli military launched attacks on Gaza with 77,000 tonnes of explosives, resulting in complete destruction of 87,000 homes and rendering a total of 297,000 homes uninhabitable

care facilities in Gaza, disabling 55 health centres, 33 hospitals, and 130 ambulances.

It is also reported that 520 Palestinian bodies were retrieved from seven mass graves in hospitals raided by Israeli soldiers.

Israel destroyed 206 historical and cultural sites in Gaza, resulting in a direct loss of US\$33bn.

According to the World

Health Organization's office in occupied Palestinian territories, 464 attacks on healthcare services have been documented in Gaza since October 7.

Israeli blockade of Gaza and famine

For eight months, 2.3mn Palestinians in Gaza have been struggling to survive amid strikes from air, land, and sea, while also grappling with hunger,

thirst, and outbreaks of disease.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), it is estimated that over one million people, half of Gaza's population, will face famine and death by mid-July.

In Gaza, 100 per cent of the population is classified at the crisis level, with 1.1mn people at the famine level and 900,000 at the emergency level.

According to a statement from the UN Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) on Thursday, cholera could further exacerbate 'inhumane' living conditions in Gaza under Israeli attacks.

It warned of the risk of disease outbreaks and dehydration in Gaza due to limited access to

clean water and summer heat.

According to Gaza's media office, out of the 2.3mn population, two million people in Gaza have been displaced, resulting in over 1.095mn cases of infectious diseases and 20,000+ cases of Hepatitis A.

Ground assault on Rafah

Israeli army warned of further evacuation of some neighbourhoods in eastern Rafah, where 1.5mn displaced Palestinians are sheltering in makeshift tents.

On May 7, the Israeli army began a ground assault on Rafah in Gaza, occupying the Gaza side of the border with Egypt - Gaza's only gateway to the outside world.

Israel also blocks sick and

wounded individuals from leaving through the Rafah border for medical treatment.

The Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza stated that 25,000 injured and sick individuals require treatment outside the Gaza Strip.

Following Israel's ground assault on Rafah and its seizure of the Rafah crossing, no patients or wounded individuals have been able to leave Gaza.

Israel expands Rafah attacks

The International Court of Justice (ICJ), the judicial arm of the UN, issued interim measures on May 24, ordering Israel to immediately cease its attacks on Rafah, allow humanitarian aid, and permit entry of UN officials

to investigate their crimes in Gaza.

Israel's military continues to expand ground attacks on the city of Rafah and in the central and southern regions despite the ICJ's order to cease attacks.

UNRWA announced on May 28 that in the past three weeks, one million Palestinians have been displaced in Rafah.

UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini also stated on June 1 that all 36 shelters in Rafah have been evacuated, and they were forced to halt health and other critical services in Rafah.

Arrest warrant against Netanyahu

On May 20, International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor Karim Khan reported that he had filed an 'arrest warrant' application against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. Khan stated that there are reasonable grounds to believe Netanyahu and Gallant bear criminal responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza since October 8.

Netanyahu claimed that Khan's request for his arrest warrant was 'insanity' and alleged that the court's reasons for such a decision were 'fabricated'.

Following the arrest warrant application, the US House of Representatives passed a bill imposing sanctions on the ICC, while UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric, in a statement, opposed threats and harassment against all international officials, including ICC personnel.

Anadolu Agency



Torrential rain, dam overflow trigger flash flooding in Sydney

Sydney, Australia - Torrential rain, combined with spills from a major dam, caused flash flooding in Sydney on Saturday, prompting rescue efforts and evacuation orders in several low-lying areas, local media reported.

Emergency authorities carried out 13 rescues and received 297 calls for assistance from residents in Sydney, over the past 24 hours, according to local broadcaster SBS News. New South Wales State Emergency Service (SES) said in a statement that at least 10 emergency evacuation orders were in place for the suburbs in the city's northwest.

Riverside communities were warned of flood risks after a dam that provides 80 per cent of Sydney's drinking water started overflowing following the downpour.

While the overflow from Waragamba Dam, southwest of Sydney, has slowed and the rain has eased, flood risks remain. Riverside communities were warned to evacuate or prepare to be isolated due to floodwaters.

"That does not mean that the risk is not there because what we are going to see now is riverine

Emergency authorities carried out 13 rescues and received 297 calls for assistance from residents in Sydney, over the past 24 hours

flooding in many areas," acting SES commissioner Debbie Platz told reporters.

SBS News reported that the overflow was moving through the Hawkesbury-Nepean system, swelling rivers despite the heavy rainfall easing. "If people are not evacuating, then we're asking them to please be prepared for many days of isolation," Platz said. This marks the third consecutive month the dam has overflowed. The Hawkesbury River was rising toward major flood levels at North Richmond on Saturday morning, but appeared to peak below that level shortly after 8am local time (2200GMT).

Anadolu Agency

D-8 countries call for ceasefire in Gaza

Istanbul, Turkey - The D-8 Council of Ministers on Saturday called for an 'immediate, permanent, unconditional' ceasefire and an end to Israeli aggression against the Palestinians in the besieged enclave.

The joint declaration also called on all countries to ensure Israel's strict adherence to provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

D-8 nations 'affirm the unwavering support of D-8 Member States to the struggle of the Palestinian people to realise their inalienable rights, the full membership of Palestine in the United Nations and all the resolutions related to the Palestinian Cause in international for a', the statement said.

The Extraordinary Meeting of the D-8 Council of Foreign Ministers was held in Istanbul on Saturday to discuss the situation in Gaza.



70 more killed in last 24 hours

At least 36,801 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 Saturday.

A ministry statement added that 83,680 other people have also been injured in the Israeli onslaught.

"Israeli attacks killed 70 peo-

ple and injured 150 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.

Meanwhile, a Palestinian youth was killed by Israeli army gunfire during a raid in the occupied West Bank on Saturday.

In a statement, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society said that

its ambulance crew treated 'a 20-year-old who succumbed to his injuries in Anabta, east of the city of Tulkarm'.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported that 'Moamen Omar Abu Asal died as a result of the critical injury he sustained' during the raid by Israeli forces.

Another 11 Palestinians were injured on Saturday during an Israeli military incursion into the

Aqabat Jabr refugee camp, south of Jericho, Wafa added.

"Israeli forces assaulted and beat up members of two Palestinian families in the camp with rifle butts during the storming," it added.

Tensions have been high across the occupied West Bank since Israel launched a deadly military offensive against the Gaza Strip.

Anadolu Agency

Iranians expect new president to address economic woes



Citizens pointed out economic difficulties and unemployment as key issues

Council Saeed Jalili, former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, and former Vice

President Eshaq Jahangiri.

While the Guardian Council, a body of 12 jurists, continues vetting for the final candidates, inter-

est in the presidential election appears low.

Anadolu spoke with Iranian citizens about the elections and their expectations from the new president at some of Tehran's busiest areas, including Enghelab Square, Vali Asr, Jomhuri, and Palestine Streets. Most pointed out economic difficulties and unemployment as key issues.

'Give us hope'

Zeynab Pakzadeh, a student, said the country's human resources are not being utilised and that the situation for the youth is dire.

She added that many younger

people aspire to move to other countries. "This is very bad for the youth. Give us hope to stay here and build our future in our homeland, not in another country."

Civil engineer Mustafa Kasimlu expects the new president to improve the country's economic infrastructure, considering its human resources and potential.

He underlined that Iran is one of the leading countries in the world in terms of oil and natural gas reserves. "Despite that, there are regions in the country lying in absolute deprivation," he said.

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INDIA

Challenges await new government

Narendra Modi is all poised to lead the world’s most populous country for a third straight term

New Delhi, India - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is poised to lead the world’s most populous country for a third straight term, but things could be quite different for him this time around.

His electoral alliance may have come out on top in the weeks-long parliamentary polls, but his own Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) fell short of its ambitious targets, forcing Modi into the undesired position of having to rely on coalition partners.

This is a reflection of the BJP’s failure to address key issues in India, according to analysts, who say the new government faces a number of challenges, including spiking unemployment and inflation, that require a shift away from ‘Hindu nationalist policies’ and more focus on delivery.

“There will be real pressure to perform and show results,” Praveen Donthi, a senior analyst for India at the International Crisis Group, told Anadolu.

He said there will now be pressure on the government to ‘sort of moderate’ and ‘fine-tune’ some of its policies, stressing the results have shown that ‘empty rhetoric ... communal rhetoric alone won’t work’.

“It has to be backed up with performance,” he said.

Official results from the Election Commission of India show the BJP won 240 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha, the lower house of India’s parlia-



Narendra Modi addresses the media after meeting with President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi on Friday (ANI)

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has fell short of its ambitious targets, forcing Narendra Modi into the undesired position of having to rely on coalition partners

ment - a sharp decline from 303 in 2019 that means it will not have outright parliamentary majority for the first time in 10 years. The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), however, secured 293 seats, crossing the

272-mark needed to form a government.

On the other side, the opposition coalition, INDIA, has exceeded expectations by snapping up 232 seats.

Modi, who is set to take oath

on Sunday, claimed victory on Tuesday evening, terming it a ‘historic feat’ and thanking voters for their ‘immense faith.’

Economic challenges

Rhetoric aside, even a prime minister cannot argue against hard data that paints a bleak picture of joblessness and inflation in India. A recent report by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, a Mumbai-based think tank, showed India’s unemployment rate rose to 8.1 per

cent in April 2024, up from 7.4 per cent in March.

There were simultaneous spikes in rural and urban India: the rural unemployment rate climbed to 7.8 per cent in April from 7.1 per cent in March, while the rate in urban areas rose from 8.1 per cent to 8.7 per cent.

The organisation said Indian youth last year were facing ‘shockingly high unemployment rates’ and those between age 15-24 had a ‘double whammy of low and falling labour participa-

tion rates’.

Overall, the unemployment rate among youth stood at 45.4 per cent in 2022-23, it added.

Regarding India’s economic challenges, analyst Donthi said: “Unemployment has been one of the biggest problems ever since COVID. The GDP numbers are doing well for India because of its sheer size. The results have been mixed and it’s the poor people who are suffering.”

He said the election results indicate that India’s youth had voted for opposition parties.

“The new government will have to address the economic challenges, take care of the unemployment problem, because there could still be growth without job creation, so that is one trap that India will have to avoid,” he said.

Strategic challenges

On strategic and geopolitical challenges, Donthi said India’s issues have grown manifold due to its strained ties with China.

“The biggest security and strategic challenge for India right now is China,” he said, emphasising that relations between the two Asian giants are at their lowest since the war of 1962.

He said both sides have ‘sort of militarised the border’, making the situation ‘very sensitive and unstable’.

Talks to resolve the issue have not progressed and ‘there is an impasse’, he said.

The new government will be under pressure to break the deadlock and make progress on this front, he added.

“That will allow the government to sort of focus on the real challenges, and not spend all the resources on bolstering the border or importing the military equipment,” said Donthi.

He said tensions with China have inadvertently led to some sort of stabilisation of India’s relations with Pakistan, but added that Modi has said ‘he’s not keen to sort of reopen dialogue’ and ‘just wants to freeze it for now’.

Donthi also pointed out that India’s competition with China is now extending into the wider neighbourhood, including Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh.

“All this has sort of become a contested territory for influence between India and China. It’s playing out in the Maldives as well,” he added.

Another issue for the new government will be areas like Manipur and Indian-administered Kashmir, according to Donthi.

While Manipur is an ‘ethnic conflict at one level’, geopolitical factors are also playing into it, such as the civil war in neighbouring Myanmar, he said. The central government’s failure to ‘bring the conflict under control’ was a reason for the Congress winning both of the state’s constituencies this time, he added.

Anadolu Agency

Rahul Gandhi to lead Opposition

New Delhi, India - The Congress Working Committee (CWC) passed the resolution that party MP Rahul Gandhi should be appointed as the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, sources said on Saturday.

Rahul Gandhi won the Lok Sabha elections from Raebareli in Uttar Pradesh and Wayanad in Kerala. After the CWC meeting, Congress MP Kumari Selja said: “It was the CWC’s wish that Rahul Gandhi be elected the LoP...”

Senior Congress leader and newly elected MP from Alappuzha K C Venugopal said: “CWC unanimously requested Rahul Gandhi to take the responsibility of the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha.”

The CWC resolution praised Rahul Gandhi for his efforts in the election campaign.

“Former Congress President Rahul Gandhi has to be singled



Rahul Gandhi attending CWC meeting, in New Delhi (ANI)

out largely because of the Bharat Jodo Yatra and the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra that he designed and led. Both these Yatras that reflected his thinking and personality were historic turning points in our nation’s politics and instilled hope and confidence in lakhs of our workers and crores of our voters. Rahul Gandhi’s election campaign was single-minded, sharp and pointed and

more than any other individual it was he who made the protection of our republic’s Constitution the central issue in the 2024 elections. The PaanchNyay-Pachees Guarantee programme which resonated so very powerfully in the election campaign was the outcome of Rahul’s yatras in which he listened to the fears, concerns and aspirations of all people, especially youth, women, farmers, workers, Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs and minorities.”

The meeting of the extended CWC was held in the national capital on Saturday. The meeting was attended by Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi, Manish Tiwari, D K Shivakumar, and Revanth Reddy among others.

Speaking after the CWC meeting, Congress Rajya Sabha

MP Pramod Tiwari said: “Definitely he (Rahul Gandhi) should become (LoP in Lok Sabha). This was the request of our working committee. He is fearless and courageous.”

Earlier in the day, several party leaders voiced their demand that Rahul Gandhi should take over the key role. Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said: “Our demand is the same as that of 140 crore Indians. Rahul Gandhi has to take the position as the leader of the Opposition. Rahul Gandhi has been fighting for women and the unemployed,” he said.

Congress MP Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa who won the Lok Sabha election from Gurdaspur said that Rahul Gandhi is someone who can reply to the Prime Minister in the Parliament and hence he should assume the position of LoP.

ANI

Call for CBI inquiry into alleged irregularities in NEET 2024



Students protest against the alleged irregularities in NEET UG 2024 results, in Varanasi on Saturday (ANI)

New Delhi, India - Indian Medical Association (IMA) Junior Doctors Network has demanded a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry into the alleged irregularities in the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) 2024.

In a letter written to Pradeep Kumar Joshi, Chairperson, National Testing Agency (NTA),

the doctors’ body also requested for a re-examination ‘to ensure a fair and transparent evaluation process for all the students’.

IMA Junior Doctors Network raised concerns related to some students getting perfect scores, the concept of grace marks and the issue of paper leaks.

“Some students have scored

718 and 719 marks, which is statistically questionable. There has been no defined logic for the grace marks given to these students. No list has been shared as per given grace marks to students. NEET 2024 paper was leaked in many locations but why no action has been taken yet?” the letter read.

ANI

Bangladesh PM arrives to attend Modi’s swearing-in ceremony

New Delhi, India - The arrival of distinguished guests for Narendra Modi’s swearing-in ceremony has begun with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina landing in the national capital on Saturday. Secretary (CPV & OIA), Muktesh Pardeshi received Prime Minister Hasina at the airport.

Modi is set to be sworn in as Prime Minister for the third consecutive term on June 9, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said on Friday. Alongside him, members of his council of ministers will also take their oath on the same day.

Sheikh Hasina left Dhaka earlier in the day to attend the swearing-in ceremony of Modi on Sunday. Several leaders and State heads of neighbourhood region and Indian Ocean region



Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina is seen with artists on her arrival at the airport, in New Delhi on Saturday (ANI)

have been invited for Modi’s swearing-in ceremony as distinguished guests.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in an official state-

ment on Saturday said: “President of Sri Lanka, Ranil Wickremesinghe; President of Maldives, Mohamed Muizzu; Vice-President of Seychelles,

Ahmed Afif; Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina; Prime Minister of Mauritius, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth; Prime Minister of Nepal, Pushpa Kamal

Several leaders and State heads of neighbourhood region and Indian Ocean region have been invited for Modi’s swearing-in ceremony as guests

Dahal ‘Prachanda’; and Prime Minister of Bhutan, Tshering Tobgay, have accepted the invitation to attend.”

Highlighting the significance of the event, the MEA emphasised: “The visit of the leaders to attend the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his third

consecutive term is in keeping with the highest priority accorded by India to its ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy and ‘SAGAR’ vision.”

Additionally, the MEA mentioned that besides participating in the swearing-in ceremony, the leaders will also grace a Banquet hosted by President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan, later in the same evening.

Security tightened in Delhi

Meanwhile, the Delhi Police has taken strict measures to ensure security during the event.

According to Delhi police officials, multi-layered security arrangements have been arranged for the event. Five companies of paramilitary forces will be de-

ployed for the security of Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Apart from this, NSG commandos, drones, and snipers will also guard the Rashtrapati Bhavan for the mega event.

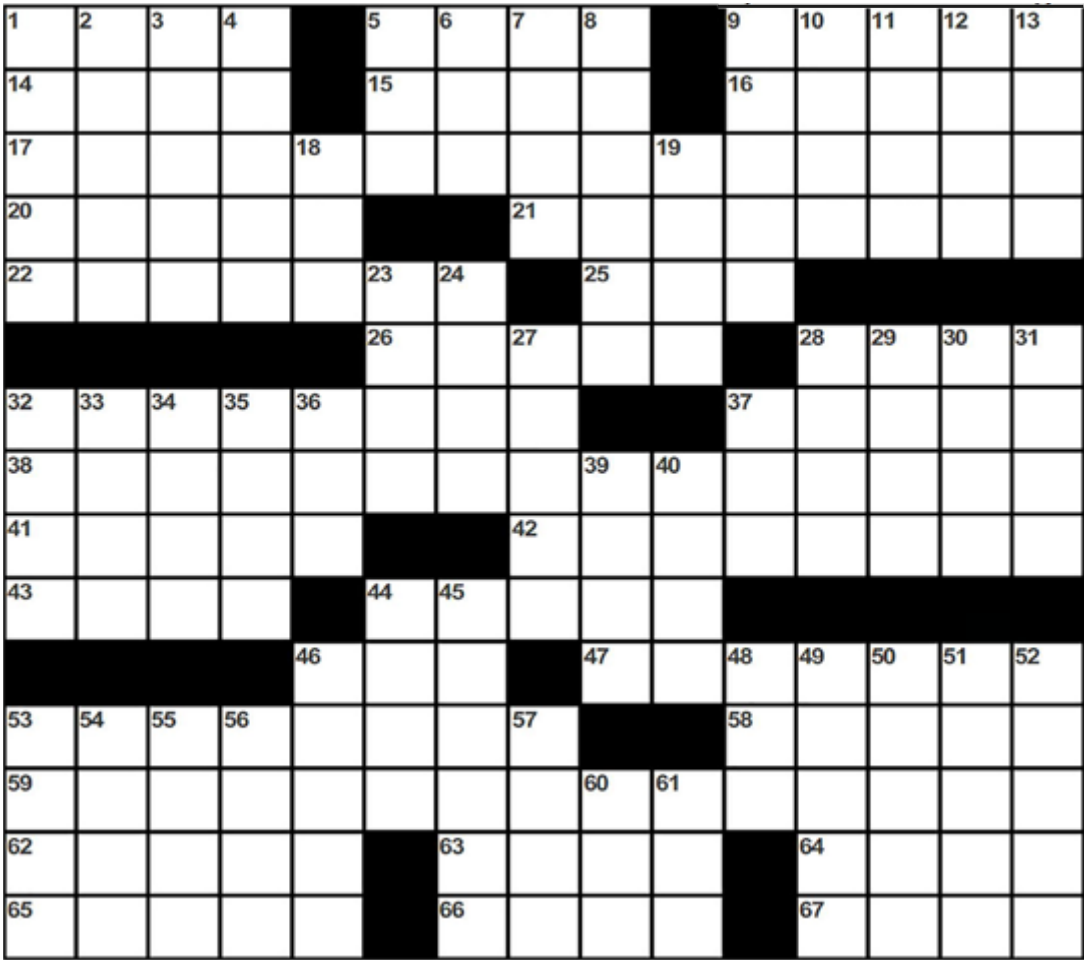
Visuals from the Kartavya Path police station showed the officials keeping a watch on the areas through CCTV cameras.

Security arrangements for the hotels, where the dignitaries will be staying, have also been enhanced. According to the police, the area around the Rashtrapati Bhavan has been made a ‘controlled’ area.

In areas including, Sansad Marg, Rafi Marg, Raisina Road and Sardar Patel Marg, vehicles having passes of the event will be allowed for the movement.

ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) "Cinderella" event
- 5) Beat one's... (jabber)
- 9) Jack Homer's fruits
- 14) Opera tenor's tune
- 15) Cast-of-thousands film
- 16) Like Halloween sounds
- 17) The IT department manages it
- 20) Registers register them
- 21) Foot-activated devices
- 22) Stagnation
- 25) Grig, when grown
- 26) Eyeball-bending drawings
- 28) Till contents
- 32) One in agreement
- 37) Steak condiment
- 38) Question upon meeting a stranger
- 41) "... with in sight"
- 42) Gross out
- 43) Installs a ready-made lawn
- 44) Sounds the bells
- 46) "As to"
- 47) Seemingly without end
- 53) Extremely delicate, as beauty

- 58) Like many marsh plants
- 59) Not what it once was
- 62) Sheds tears
- 63) Fiendish or wicked
- 64) Do a lawn job
- 65) "Faster!"
- 66) Melon protector
- 67) Changes color, in a way
- DOWN**
- 1) Low guys at the opera
- 2) Indo-European
- 3) Cotton thread used for hosiery
- 4) Procrastinator's promise
- 5) Valuable stone
- 6) ... and downs
- 7) Atomizer output
- 8) Basket maker?
- 9) "She loves me" decider
- 10) More than risque
- 11) Caspian Sea tributary
- 12) Deep mud
- 13) Calls, in poker
- 18) Maximal suffix
- 19) Yard divisions
- 23) Minute amount
- 24) Impersonator
- 27) Building used for sports
- 28) Upscale eatery

- 29) Luminous surround-ing
- 30) Dundee native
- 31) Deep red blood pigment
- 32) Grain beards
- 33) "Vamoose!"
- 34) Watermelon discard
- 35) "East" or "west" endings
- 36) Flanders of animation
- 37) Pension starter?
- 39) Harvard rival
- 40) Topple from power
- 44) Jury member, essentially
- 45) Pencil attachment
- 46) Commonplace, as writing
- 48) Bungle up
- 49) Didn't stay divorced
- 50) Poverty-stricken
- 51) "Time is money," e.g.
- 52) Harps' older relatives
- 53) Make impressions?
- 54) Drive-...
- 55) Elder son, often
- 56) Still-life pitcher
- 57) Name on many jeans' labels
- 60) "Jaws" sighting
- 61) Like a centenarian

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Even the most extroverted people need a break from battering their way forward. Now's the time for some downtime, and you may even find yourself uncharacteristically lost deep in thought. What you're mulling over now may be puzzling, but the process is definitely a productive one. Take some free-form notes about what's going through your head so you can refer to them later when you're back in full-steam-ahead mode.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Doing just one thing differently has a very nice ripple effect right now. Invite someone unusual to lunch or take that sushi-making class or go check out that exhibit you keep reading about. The idea is to get things expanding: your mind, your regular routine, your circle of friends. Once expansion is occurring, it'll be hard to stop it, not that you'd want to. The new sensations that accompany it are tremendous.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your straightforward side may be sidetracked now while your mind, or possibly your heart, indulges in some fantastical stuff. Not that there's anything wrong with fantasy, mind you. In fact, it expands your thoughts and feelings and can even leak some sweet stuff over into regular reality. It's when you get carried away that things can get a bit problematic. Ask a grounded friend for a reality check.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Your conservative, practical side may be in denial that there's something funny going on, but on a more intuitive level, it's hard to refute. It's time to do some reading between the lines (a friend who's an expert at this can help you detect the signs), and then it's time to figure out how, exactly, you're going to handle this potentially sticky situation. Even if you decide to let it lie, make it a conscious decision rather than a default one.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Give your inner critic the day off, especially when it comes to you. Allowing yourself a little latitude lets you do some of your best work, and not just in the employment arena. How about some freewheeling interpersonal exchanges? Suspend your serious side as well as the search for sheer perfection. Someone's oddities may strike you as sweet or interesting now instead of as just flaws. Tell them about it.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You're extremely eager to help, and your empathetic nature can lead to an interesting and fertile connection now. Sign up to volunteer, and the next thing you know, a fellow volunteer just happens to know someone who can help you with a special project, and so on and so on. It's all about keeping the cycle of good karma going without regard for the benefits that you might accidentally accrue. Or is it an accident after all?



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Your curious, adaptable, and, of course, intelligent nature provides you with all sorts of avenues of exploration and amazing ideas. When it comes to acting on one and following through, well, you can get a little sidetracked (or a lot sidetracked). But your most recent brainstorm absolutely deserves to be pursued. Set your priorities and make a schedule and maybe get a friend with a lot of determination on board.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Balancing what you want and need with selfless good deeds is one of your specialties, and the good karma you've been cultivating is about to come back around in a very nice way. A long-distance connection or someone from your past might suddenly help something sweet land in your lap, or a person close to you may do you a big old favor completely out of the blue. Knowing you, you'll keep the excellent energy flowing.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Some detours threaten to sidetrack you on your life's path at the moment, and they certainly may look fascinating. However, if you can bring yourself to buckle down to the existing tasks at hand (important work projects, ironing out wrinkles in existing relationships, dispatching some familial responsibilities), you can accomplish a great deal right now. And afterward, one of those alluring detours will still be available.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You usually know what or who you want, and you're usually ready to latch right on with little or no intention of letting go. A little indecision every so often is only natural, however, and if you're feeling it, don't try to deny it. In fact, it's probably worth investigating further. You may feel like you can't quite put your finger on what's holding you back, but look a little deeper and the source may become clear. Then your decision will be clear too.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're bringing even more of your patented intensity to every arena of your life at the moment, particularly in the realm of romance. Whatever you have going on now (a long-term romance, a fresh and hot new affair, even a couple of potential candidates), you can expect things to heat up suddenly to a boil. Get out the oven mitts! You'll be eager to pull the lid off, and it's likely to be burning hot.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You're lit up from within right now, and that glow you have is bound to attract all sorts of wonderful things and delicious people. You've also got the energy to give it all a whirl, and the desire too. In all the hubbub, make sure you keep your compassionate side engaged. While you're just testing the waters, someone else may be in deep. Don't let it go too far without letting them know where you're coming from and that you don't know where this is going.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. What is the longest known non-stop, non-eating migration flight south for the winter?

- A. About 11,000 km (6,835 mi)
- B. Up to 37,000 km (23,000 mi)
- C. About 4,800 km (3,000 mi)
- D. 2,400 km (1,500 mil)

02. What is the word for the requirements demanded by celebrities before they will appear on a TV show or at a performance?

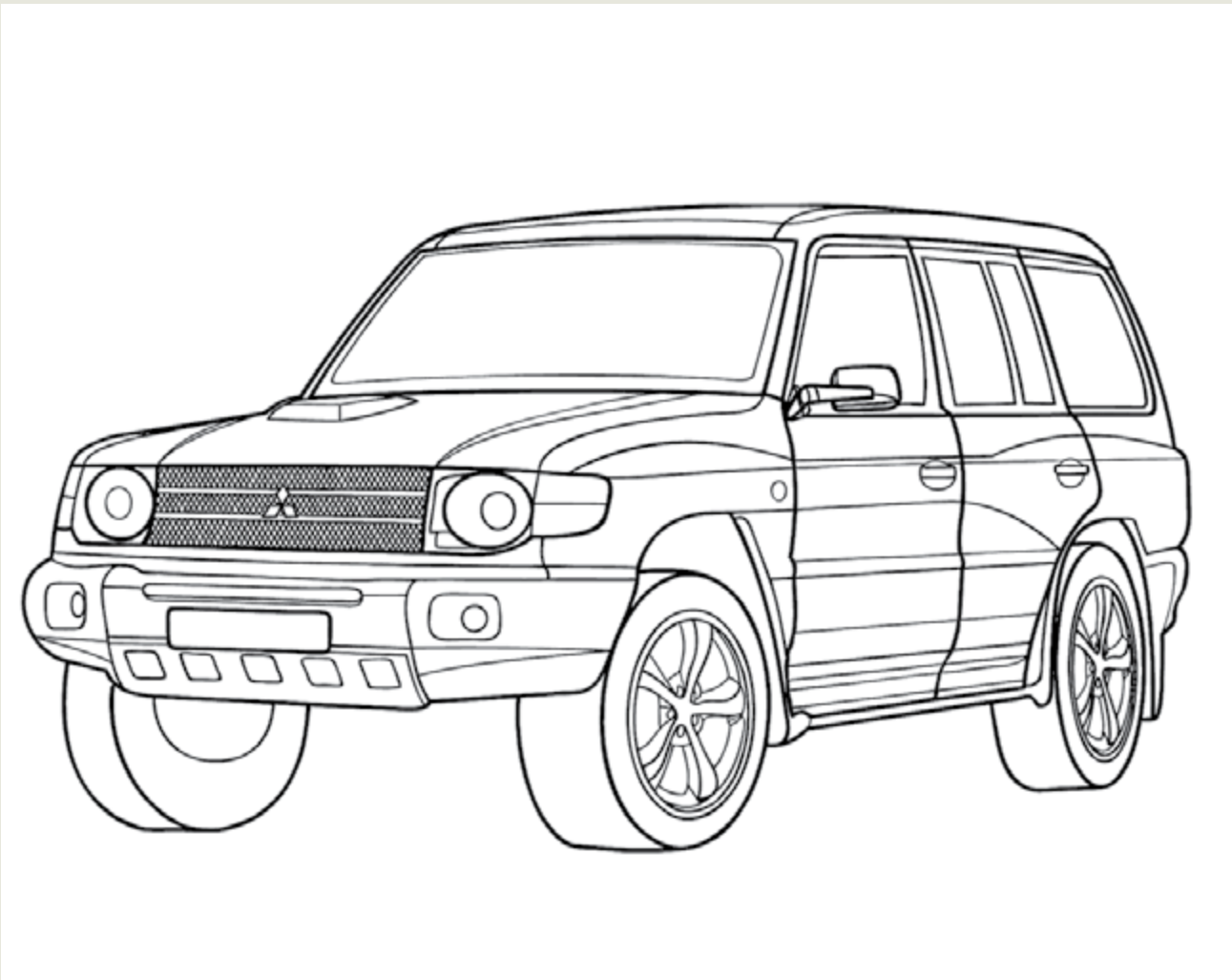
- A. Mandatory
- B. Rider
- C. Preperf agreement
- D. Road rules

03. Anna Wintour is famous in what field?

- A. Fashion
- B. Photography
- C. Yachting
- D. Music

Answers: 1.A 2.B 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

S	R	U	S
E	R	E	B
N	O	V	I
R	E	I	Y

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

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

WORD BUILDER



You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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



Iceland's Jon Dagur Thorsteinsson (2L) scores against England in their warm-up match at Wembley on Friday

DAGUR TO THE HEART

Title contenders England lose to Iceland in their final Euro warm-up match

London, England - England slumped to a 1-0 loss against Iceland in their last Euro 2024 warm-up match at Wembley on Friday, with Jon Dagur Thorsteinsson's first-half goal giving the Scandinavian non-qualifiers a surprise but deserved victory.

Thorsteinsson scored in the 12th minute, finishing off a sharp break with a low shot through John Stones' legs to beat goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale at his near post. The hosts spurned several opportunities to equalise, with Anthony Gordon slicing his shot well over the bar when in a similar position to Thorsteinsson

I'm not going to dress up the disappointment about the performance, but equally we have to stay calm because we know what needs to be put right and we will work on that

GARETH SOUTHGATE

two minutes after the goal.

England captain Harry Kane missed a golden chance in the 28th minute when he shinned Cole Palmer's cross over from six yards out.

But Iceland, who did not qualify for the Euros having been beaten by Ukraine in their playoff

final in March, finished the stronger side and were good value for the win. They should have doubled their lead in the 63rd minute but Thorsteinsson sliced horribly wide, with Ramsdale also forced to save a Sverrir Ingason header and Kolbeinn Finsson's audacious volley from

the edge of the box.

England pressed for a late equaliser but created few real chances and looked flat in their final game before the Euros in Germany, where they face Serbia in their opening Group C match in Gelsenkirchen next Sunday.

Manager Gareth Southgate conceded the defeat was a "far from ideal" preparation for the tournament at which England, runners-up in the last edition, will be one of the favourites.

"I'm not going to dress up the disappointment about the performance, but equally we have to stay calm because we know what needs to be put right and we will

work on that," he told reporters.

There were boos at fulltime from the crowd, with some fans seemingly more interested in trying to throw paper airplanes onto the pitch than watching the action on it, which Southgate said was understandable given England's performance.

But he insisted his side would be much better when their Euros campaign begins next week, adding that the defeat "gives us a chance to really focus the mind".

Southgate will also have concerns over the fitness of centre back Stones, who was replaced at halftime after appearing to roll his ankle in the first minute.



Arkadiusz Milik hobbles off the field

Poland beat Ukraine but injured Milik out of Euro 2024

Warsaw, Poland - Arkadiusz Milik was not included in Poland's squad for Euro 2024 which manager Michal Probiez announced after the 3-1 win over Ukraine on Friday, in which the Juventus striker went off injured.

Milik went down with a knee injury in the second minute of the game, and was assisted off the pitch by medical staff. The manager confirmed afterwards that his Euro chances were over.

It is a repeat of the last Euros, when Milik was injured in Olympique de Marseille's final match of the season in 2021, and was ruled out of Poland's squad.

Kacper Urbanski, who replaced Milik against Ukraine to make his debut, is in the squad for the tournament in Germany.

All four goals came in the opening half, with Sebastian Walukiewicz poking home his first goal for Poland in his first international game since 2020 and Piotr Zielinski dou-

bled the home side's lead with a shot from distance.

Poland were 3-0 up after the half hour mark when Taras Romanczuk headed in from a corner, before Artem Dovbyk pulled one back for the visitors three minutes before the break.

Ukraine named a completely different starting side to the one which drew 0-0 with Germany on Monday, manager Serhiy Rebrov using the opportunity to look at as many players as possible before the Euros.

Poland coach Michal Probiez left goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny and striker Robert Lewandowski, certain starters in Germany, on the bench, giving the likes of Milik a chance to impress, but the Juventus forward's game came to a premature end.

Poland will play their last warm-up match before the Euros against Turkey on Monday, while Ukraine finish their preparations with a game against Moldova on Tuesday.

Late rally help Germany beat Greece in warmup

Moenchengladbach, Germany - Euro 2024 host Germany had to come from a goal down to snatch a last gasp 2-1 victory over Greece on Friday in a lacklustre dress rehearsal ahead of next week's tournament start.

Pascal Gross fired in the winner in the 89th minute as the Germans showed they still have room for improvement ahead of their June 14 tournament opener against Scotland.

In an error-ridden first half performance, the hosts showed little in terms of dynamism and often lost possession, with the Greeks overrunning them and carving out a golden chance in the sixth minute. But Christos Tzolis's double effort from close range was blocked by goalkeeper Manuel Neuer, who will be first choice between the posts in the tournament over Marc-Andre ter Stegen. Neuer, however, could not hold on to another Tzolis shot in the 33rd after the German de-



Germany's Pascal Gross scores against Greece

fence lost possession in their own half, with the keeper spilling the ball into the path of Giorgos Masouras for a tap-in.

"We know well that in football

bad first halves are part of it," said Germany midfielder Toni Kroos. "Just too many mistakes. We gifted the ball away too often, then we were hit on the break.

We were more focused in the second half. We did it better after the break."

Germany put the ball in the net in the 43rd with Kai Havertz

but he was offside. The Arsenal player is expected to start in attack at the Euros with Niclas Fullkrug, who came on in the second half, on the bench.

Germany started pressing higher after the break with coach Julian Nagelsmann, who cut fourth goalkeeper Alexander Nuebel from the Euros squad, making five substitutions in the second half, and they started pushing the visitors back.

Havertz did better in the 55th, turning in the box and levelling with a deflected shot.

Greece almost hit back on the break in the 64th but Neuer again came to the rescue before Benjamin Henrichs rattled the crossbar with a 20-metre missile. Gross, also a second-half substitute, then made sure of the win with his long range effort with the fans, desperate to see the team win their first major international title in a decade on home soil, breathing a sigh of relief.



Morocco players celebrate Hakim Ziyech's goal against Zambia

Ivory Coast, Morocco win in WC qualifiers

Cape Town, South Africa - African champions Ivory Coast and World Cup semi-finalists Morocco both won important points in World Cup qualification on Friday but Nigeria were held at home by South Africa and are still to win a match in the 2026 preliminaries.

Seko Fofana's 36th-minute strike marked a successful homecoming for the Ivorians, playing their first home match since winning the Africa Cup of Nations in February, as they beat

Gabon 1-0 in Korhogo to go clear at the top of Group F.

A soft looking penalty saw Hakim Ziyech put Morocco ahead after six minutes against Zambia in Agadir in Group E but there was nothing fortuitous about their second in the 67th minute as Braham Diaz's mazy run set up teenage debutant Eliesse Ben Seghir, who recently switched allegiance from France.

Zambia pulled a goal back from Edward Chilufya in the 80th minute.

Czechs thump Malta in warm-up match

Prague, Czech Republic - The Czech Republic cruised past an overmatched Malta side 7-1 in their Euro 2024 warm-up match on Friday with Slavia Prague forward Mojmir Chytil scoring in each half for a team aiming to book a second straight quarter-final appearance.

Czech coach Ivan Hasek rested a number of key figures at the match in Grodig, Austria -- including West Ham United midfielder Tomas Soucek and

Czech coach Ivan Hasek rested a number of key figures at the match in Grodig, Austria - including West Ham United midfielder Tomas Soucek and Bayer Leverkusen forward Patrik Schick

Bayer Leverkusen forward Patrik Schick -- and instead blooded a number of less experienced players.

Fiorentina's Antonin Barak opened the scoring for the Czechs in the sixth minute from the penalty spot before Chytil

grabbed his first goal just before the break. David Jurasek, Ondrej Lingr, Matej Jurasek and Vaclav Cerny added to the Czech tally while Paul Mbong pulled a goal back for Malta.

The Czechs kick off their Euro 2024 campaign on June 17 against Portugal in Leipzig before facing Turkey and Georgia in Group F. The Czech play North Macedonia on Monday in their final preparation match for the tournament in Germany.



Czech Republic's Ondrej Lingr celebrates with teammates after scoring against Malta

IGA, THE QUEEN OF ROLAND GARROS

Swiatek thrashes Paolini to win third straight French Open title

Paris, France - Iga Swiatek strengthened her reputation as the queen of clay by capturing a third straight French Open crown with a crushing 6-2 6-1 victory over 12th seed Jasmine Paolini on Saturday to claim her fifth Grand Slam title.

Swiatek's 21st straight victory at her happiest hunting ground put her in fourth place in the list of longest winning streaks at Roland Garros in the Open era behind only Chris Evert (29), Monica Seles (25) and Justine Henin (24).

The 23-year-old, who arrived in Paris in the form of her life having lifted titles in Madrid and Rome, extended her run of victories on clay this year to a career-best 19 matches and celebrated with her fourth French Open title in five years.

"It's amazing to be here, I love this place. Honestly, I wait every year to come back here. I was almost out of the tournament in the second round so thank-you guys for staying behind me and cheering. It's been a really emotional tournament," Swiatek said after lifting the Suzanne Lenglen cup.

She also congratulated Paolini after the Italian's surprise run to both the singles and doubles finals in the women's competitions.

"Congratulations for an amazing tournament, we're going to have many more matches in the final rounds. And congratulations to your team as well," Swiatek said, wishing her opponent good luck in her doubles final to be played on Sunday.

Swiatek came out all guns blazing early in the contest but after narrowly missing the chance to break from 0-40 down



Iga Swiatek celebrates after her victory against Jasmine Paolini

in the second game, the top-seeded Pole made heavy weather of the next to surrender her serve, before bouncing right back.

The diminutive Paolini, only the third Italian woman after Francesca Schiavone and Sara Errani to reach the Roland Garros final since the sport turned professional in 1968, went toe to toe with Swiatek from there but cracked in the sixth game.

With the momentum shifting, claycourt specialist Swiatek began to dominate the exchanges from the baseline, superbly working the angles and sealing the opening set in 37 minutes after winning 20 out of

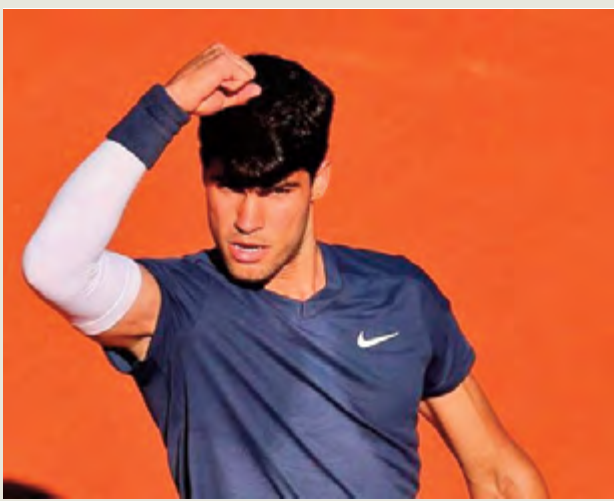
It's amazing to be here, I love this place. Honestly, I wait every year to come back here.

IGA SWIATEK

24 points since going down a break.

A shell-shocked Paolini smiled and soaked up the support and applause from the crowd on the main showcourt when she won the odd point early in the next set, but her challenge faded in the afternoon sun as Swiatek broke twice to build a 4-0 lead.

Swiatek, who dropped only one set throughout the tournament in a second-round epic with Naomi Osaka where she saved a match point, won 10 straight games before Paolini got on the board but there was to be no late comeback and the knockout blow was near.



Carlos Alcaraz celebrates his win against Jannik Sinner

Test of nerves for Alcaraz in final

Paris, France - Carlos Alcaraz will face a major test of nerves when he takes on Alexander Zverev in a potentially high-octane French Open men's singles final as both players look to claim a maiden Roland Garros title on Sunday.

Alcaraz, who already has two Grand Slam titles to his name, has been seen as fellow Spaniard Rafael Nadal's successor on the Paris clay. But in last year's semifinal, tension and nerves got the better of him and he cracked against Novak Djokovic.

In Friday's last-four encounter against Jannik Sinner, he owed his long comeback from a woeful, tense start to the Italian's inconsistency.

As long as he is mentally prepared for the challenge, however, Alcaraz, the youngest player to reach a Grand Slam final on all three surfaces - hard, clay and grass - will be the favourite to lift the Musketeers Cup and add his name to the list of Spanish players crowned at Roland Garros.

"I remember when I finish school I'm running to my home just to put the TV on and watch the matches here in the French Open," the 21-year-old said. "I watched a lot of matches. Of course Rafa Nadal. I wanted to put my

name on that list of the Spanish players who won this tournament. Not only Rafa. (Juan Carlos) Ferrero, (Carlos) Moya, (Albert) Costa, a lot of Spanish players, legends from our sport who won this tournament, I really want to put my name on that list, as well."

Fourth seed Zverev, meanwhile, will be looking to settle

In the last-four encounter against Jannik Sinner, Alcaraz owed his comeback from a woeful, tense start to the Italian's inconsistency

a score with the tournament itself, having been eliminated in the semi-finals here in the three previous editions while still chasing his maiden Grand Slam title.

He has reached the final at a major once previously, at the 2020 U.S. Open.

"Going from the U.S. Open final where I was two points away (from victory) to being rolled off in a wheelchair here two years ago", after suffering an ankle injury against Nadal, "it's all part of my journey" said the 27-year-old.



Ons Jabeur was not happy to play her quarterfinal in the morning

WTA calls for women to get fair share of prime time slots

Paris, France - The WTA has called for a balanced match schedule at the French Open that gives women's players their fair share of prime time billing after the Grand Slam featured men's matches in all 11 evening session slots this year. In France, Amazon's Prime Video has exclusive broadcasting rights for the major's evening sessions, which run from the first round to the quarter-finals, and only one women's match was chosen to be the evening showpiece in both 2022 and 2023.

Tournament organisers missed an opportunity to highlight the blockbuster second round clash featuring defending champion Iga Swiatek and Naomi Osaka in the evening.

"The generation and depth of talent we are currently wit-

nessing in the sport is incredible," the governing body of women's tennis said in a statement. "Fans want to see the excitement and thrill of women's tennis on the biggest stages and in the premium time slots.

Tournament director and twice Grand Slam champion Amelie Mauresmo had said last year they could "do better" on evening scheduling and Tunisian eighth seed Ons Jabeur was less than happy to play her quarter-final in the morning this year.

"I would have loved a quarter-final at night, not at 11 a.m. For me, it doesn't make sense... I don't know the broadcasts. I don't know the TV, but yeah, you achieve a quarter-final, it's like 'no, you play at 11'," Jabeur said.

Zverev overcomes early wobble to defeat Ruud

Paris, France - Alexander Zverev wobbled early on but steadied himself to get past ailing seventh seed Casper Ruud 2-6 6-2 6-4 6-2 on Friday and reach the French Open final, where he will take on Carlos Alcaraz for an elusive maiden Grand Slam title.

The fourth seed, competing in his fourth straight Roland Garros semi-final, finally broke through to become the second German man to make the title clash in the Open Era and match Michael Stich's feat from 1996.

"I'm obviously extremely happy. I have so much history on this court, some of my best and



Alexander Zverev celebrates a point against Casper Ruud

my worst memories are on this court," said Zverev, who sustained a serious ankle ligament injury during his semi-final against Rafa Nadal in 2022. "I'm happy to be in the final in my fourth attempt. I'm going to give it my all in the final on Sunday."

Zverev made a slow start as Ruud grabbed an early break and the first set with some clean ball-striking in front of a sparse crowd on Court Philippe Chatrier, as fans were still recovering from a four-hour epic between Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner.

Having found his range in the second set, Zverev squandered

the opportunity to grab a double break with a wayward volley but the 27-year-old pulled away to level the match and broke in the fifth game of third set before extending his advantage.

The 25-year-old Ruud slowly looked like himself again after dealing with a stomach issue but his hopes of a third successive Paris final faded when Zverev struck in the Norwegian's opening service game in the fourth set and ran away with the match.

"I knew I had to be much more aggressive. The first two sets were a high level, then I saw he was struggling," Zverev said.

Sinner disappointed after semifinal defeat to Alcaraz

Paris, France - Jannik Sinner was disappointed not to reach his first French Open final after his defeat by Carlos Alcaraz on Friday, but is looking forward to continuing what could become the new main rivalry in tennis.

Sinner and Alcaraz served up a five-set thriller, with the Spaniard winning 2-6 6-3 3-6 6-4 6-3.

While the Italian 22-year-old isn't quite ready to put their rivalry alongside that of Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal and Novak Djokovic just yet, himself and 21-year-old Alcaraz are sure to continue battling for the top prizes for some time.

"Well, you cannot compare us yet with the other players we had or still have," Sinner told reporters.

"But for sure, I mean, if we watch the results, we always, or most likely, when we play against, it's in the semis or final or quarters. Very important matches."

After the semi-final win, Alcaraz now takes a 5-4 lead in the head-to-head between the pair, and Sinner will be looking to put them back on level terms when they next meet.

"I think that's exciting for the game, especially when head-to-head is quite close," Sinner said.

"And the winner is happy and then the loser tries to find a way to beat him the next time, no? I think that's exciting."

"That's what I will try to do."

That familiarity can cause its own problems, and it also depends on which competition they meet in.

"You can see a little bit of tension sometimes of both players and both sides just because we know each other slowly a little bit better," Sinner said.

"Each time when we play against we expect a couple of things, and then, to mix up the plans, you make different choices sometimes on the court."



Jannik Sinner



Rishad Hossain (L) and Mustafizur Rahman were the pick of the bowlers for Sri Lanka with three wickets each

Hossain inspires Bangladesh to victory against Sri Lanka

Dallas, US - Bangladesh leg-spinner Rishad Hossain took three for 22 on Friday to help restrict Sri Lanka to 124 for nine in their group D match in Dallas and propel his team to a two-wicket victory in a thrilling start to their Twenty20 World Cup campaign.

Hossain, who was named player of the match, had an opportunity to secure a hat-trick after taking wickets with consecutive balls but could not capture the final wicket.

"I tried my best. I tried to bowl it as normal," he said.

In reply, Bangladesh reached 125 for eight with

Towhid Hridoy top scoring with 40 from 20 balls to win with an over to spare.

Fast bowler Nuwan Thushara took two late wickets to leave Bangladesh still to get 12 runs to go with only two wickets remaining, but the seasoned Mahmudullah (16 not out) steered his team to victory from the last ball of the 19th over.

"Everybody's body language was great, we gave 130%," said Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto.

"I think they bowled really well but on a wicket like this we should have won this easily."

Kiwis dance to Rashid's tune

Captain stars as Afghanistan thrash New Zealand in T20 World Cup

Georgetown, Guyana - Afghanistan's bowlers exploited to the full a pitch assisting both pace and spin at the Providence Stadium on Friday as they skittled New Zealand for just 75 from 15.2 overs and bowled their team to a 84-run run victory in the T20 World Cup.

Afghanistan captain and spin bowler Rashid Khan took four for 17 in his team's second decisive victory of the tournament; they defeated Uganda by 125 runs at the same venue on Tuesday and are on top of Group C.

After New Zealand captain Kane Williamson elected to field first, Afghanistan reached a respectable 159 for six from their 50 overs, with openers Rahmanullah Gurbaz (80) and Ibrahim Zadrau (44) putting on 103 for the first wicket from 14.3 overs.

Left-arm pace bowler Trent Boult took the new ball, with Lockie Ferguson opening from the other end, and conceded three boundaries in a row to Zadrau, two of them from streaky shots that flew down to fine leg and third man respectively.

Zadrau was dropped on the square leg boundary by Finn Allen from a lofted hook that he appeared to lose in the lights

with the batsman on 13.

Gurbaz had already received a let off when he dabbled the ball to third man, took off for a single and was out of his crease when he was sent back, but wicket-keeper Devon Conway was unable to catch the return.

New Zealand would still have been reasonably happy at the halfway stage with Afghanistan on 55 for two, but the two openers then went on the charge.

Zadrau hit off-spinner Michael Bracewell for a brace of sixes and Gurbaz cracked Boult for another six when the pace bowler returned.

The New Zealanders finally took a wicket when Matt Henry bowled Zadrau, and Henry took a second wicket when Azmatullah Omazari was caught by Lockie Ferguson for 22.

Boult returned to take two wickets in the final over with a runout.



Rashid Khan, with four wickets for just 17 runs, proved too tricky for New Zealand

Credit to our bowlers for putting up a good show against Australia: Ilyas

Bridgetown, Barbados - Oman skipper Aqib Ilyas loves to play with straight bat, be it on the field or off the ground. After his team lost by 39 runs to heavyweights Australia, their second successive defeat, in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup game on Thursday morning (Oman time), he said that "playing against a big team like Australia was a great experience."

Speaking at the post-match presentation, Ilyas said: "Playing a team like Australia was a great experience especially after the Super Over against Namibia in the opener. Australia played really well today but credit to our bowlers putting up a good show against Australia and restricting them. On turning tracks our bowlers can do really well."

The Oman skipper said: "Australia have top players in the side and we respect them. We had a grip on the game till the 14th over. We have to work on our



Aqib Ilyas celebrates after taking a stunning catch to get rid of Glenn Maxwell off Mehran Khan

batting. We have done in the past. If we can bat well in the powerplay it will be important for us and as a batter I have to do well there. Hopefully we will turn up better next time."

We didn't tick all three boxes: Ayaan

Oman's all-rounder and the team's top-scorer against Australia, Ayaan Khan, said: "We had our moments against them today. We definitely are

taking away lot of positives from this match."

Ayaan said that "electing to bowl first was the correct decision" despite the surface turning slower and slower in the second innings. "It was a fresh wicket. Today is a sunny day and it didn't rain, so we thought there should be a little bit moisture and it will have rough patches as well. The ball will spin a lot. Because only in one day the wicket will not change. We knew there would be a little bit of improvement [pitch]. The ball will come on the bat properly. We were just hoping that if we get to bowl first, we will restrict them early."

Ayaan added: "We always talk about positives and that is what we are trying to do to play some aggressive cricket. Unfortunately, we didn't tick all three boxes tonight. Especially in a T20 game, if you tick all three boxes you will be on the winning side," said Ayaan.

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YOUNGEST MALE ARTIST

'MAMA, FINISH!'



Ace Liam, from Ghana, who holds the Guinness World Record for being the world's youngest male artist, will turn 2 next month

At six months old, Ace-Liam Ankrah painted his first artwork, aptly named The Crawl. His mother, artist Chantelle Kuukua Eghan, wanted to keep him entertained as she worked on her own projects, so she placed a canvas on the floor. The boy spread paint across it as he crawled.

Now, Guinness World Records has officially confirmed the Ghanaian toddler, who turns 2 in July, as the 'world's youngest male artist'. He was 1 year and 152 days old on the day he was verified.

Eghan applied for the record last summer. A few months later, Guinness reached out and explained that Ace-Liam would need to fulfill specific requirements in order to qualify, Associated Press reports.

"He needs to be in an exhibition, make sales, and the sales receipt will be sent to [Guinness as] ... evidence of the event,"

Eghan told the TV channel JoyNews, per Premium Times. "If he doesn't sell the artwork, he won't qualify."

Expression of curiosity

Ace-Liam got to work. His first solo show - titled 'The Soundout Premium Exhibition' - opened in December at the Museum of Science and Technology in Accra, Ghana.

The boy's debut was a big hit, and nine of the ten paintings on display sold. Ghana's first lady, Rebecca Akufo-Addo, attended the exhibition and commissioned a piece from him, according to BBC News.

"His abstract paintings are inspired by the world around him - colours, shapes, textures, and his mood," says Eghan in a statement from Guinness. "Every painting is an expression of his curiosity and joy in discovering new things."



Mama, finish!

The boy creates his bright, expressive works using acrylic paint. After he selects the canvas size and paint colours, his mother opens the bottles for him, and his creative process begins.

"A painting session can last anywhere from a few minutes to about half an hour, depending on his interest at the moment," says Eghan in the statement. "Sometimes he leaves a painting and

comes back to it after a couple of days to finish it. Once he's done, he says, 'Mama, finish.'"

Eghan views Ace-Liam as a budding Jackson Pollock, the American abstract expressionist best known for pouring and flinging paint across the canvas in his 'drip paintings'.

"Jackson Pollock allowed his inner child to still be with him, even when he was old," Eghan tells BBC News. "His

work is vibrant and spontaneous, and that is how I see my son's work."

Youngest female artist

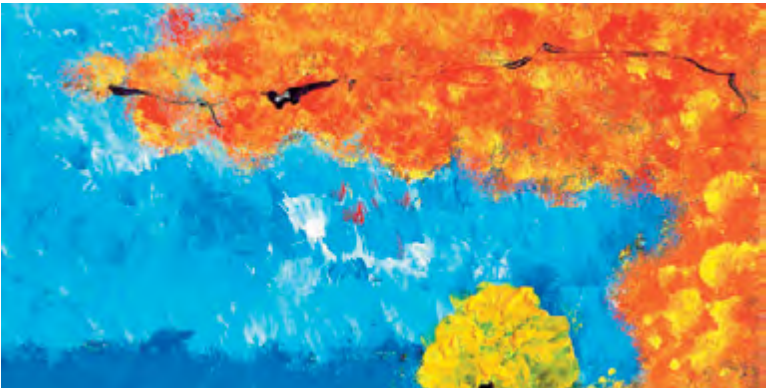
The overall record for the youngest artist belongs to Arushi Bhatnagar of Ujjain, India, who hosted her first solo exhibition at 11 months old. According to Guinness, she went on to create over 2,000 paintings, which she displayed in a number of subsequent exhibitions.

So far, Ace-Liam has sold 15 paintings during his brief career. BBC News reports that he even plans to hold an auction soon.

What's next for the young artist? Eghan is now searching for new opportunities for her son, such as applying for scholarships and helping him sell paintings to an international audience.

However, The Crawl is not for sale. His mother plans to keep that particular artwork in the family.

(Courtesy: smithsonianmag.com)



YOUNG AT ART

Arushi Bhatnagar (born in June 2002) had started painting at a very young age of 4 months, setting a Guinness World Record as 'Youngest Professional Artist' by making her first solo exhibition with 52 paintings, when she was just 11 months old, at Kalidas Akademi, Ujjain, where her first art work was sold.

Arushi's achievement is published in the Guinness Book of World Records 2007 and 2012. Since then, she has done over 15 solo exhibitions and participated in group exhibitions, too, receiving 12 awards and 25 honours, some from renowned galleries. Her artwork is sold across various countries, including US, Italy, Hungary, Dubai, and India.



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