

TOBACCO USE DECLINES GLOBALLY, RISES IN OMAN

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A new World Health Organization report has shown that tobacco use rates are declining globally. However, Oman is among six countries in the world where tobacco use is rising.

The report shows that 150 countries are successfully reducing tobacco use, while six countries - Congo, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Oman and Moldova - are still seeing tobacco use rising.

Globally, there are 1.25bn adult tobacco users, according to the latest estimates in the 'WHO global report on trends in prevalence of tobacco use 2000-2030' released on January 16.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, Dr Jawad al Lawati, Senior Consultant and Rapporteur of National Tobacco Control Committee, said this trend is expected to continue if effective measures are not implemented. "This is mainly because there is no comprehensive legislation in Oman for tobacco control at the moment, despite all other GCC countries having one."

Dr Lawati added that there are several challenges which tobacco control is facing in Oman. "New products are coming in. In addition to e-cigarettes and e-shisha, there are heated tobacco products. There are also nicotine bags and tobacco bags, which are used as oral tobacco products or substitutes for oral tobacco."

This is mainly because there is no comprehensive legislation in Oman for tobacco control at the moment, despite all other GCC countries having one

DR JAWAD AL LAWATI

"These products are becoming increasingly popular, especially among younger demographics, underscoring the urgency for regulatory action. Although there has been a recent increase in fines for e-cigarette usage, there needs to be a fine for people who are caught using it. Comprehensive measures are needed to address both traditional and emerging forms of tobacco and nicotine use."

Commenting on the lack of comprehensive legislation, Dr Lawati said that "higher authorities are not yet convinced" of the urgent need of these.

In the report, Dr Ruediger Krech, Director of WHO Department of Health Promotion, said, "Good progress has been made in tobacco control in recent years, but there is no time for complacency. I'm astounded at the

depths the tobacco industry will go to pursue profits at the expense of countless lives. We see that the minute a government thinks they have won the fight against tobacco, the tobacco industry seizes the opportunity to manipulate health policies and sell their deadly products."

Currently, the WHO South-East Asian Region has the highest percentage of population using tobacco at 26.5% with the European Region not far behind at 25.3%. The report shows that by

2030, the WHO European Region is projected to have the highest rates globally with a prevalence of just over 23%. Tobacco use rates among women in WHO's European Region are more than double the global average and are reducing much slower than in all other regions.

While the numbers have steadily decreased over the years, the world will make it to a 25% relative reduction in tobacco use by 2025, missing the voluntary global goal of 30% reduction from the 2010 baseline. Only 56 countries globally will reach this goal, down four countries since the last report in 2021.

potential of Dhahirah governorate. We are committed to driving strong economic growth in the region and, thus, contributing to the nation. We are optimistic about future opportunities and a high return on investment for our shareholders," said Abdulrahman al Yahyai, Chairperson of Al Dhahirah Company.

It signed several MoUs with reputed entities in Oman, including one with Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) signed by its deputy chairman Ahmed al Theeb and Yahyai. The partnership is for establishing, developing and operating a dedicated integrated station for truck services near the land port within the Integrated Economic Zone in Dhahirah.

Continued on Page 03

Company set up to develop Dhahirah offers shares to community

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a novel initiative, the people of Dhahirah are being offered shares of a company set up to further economic growth and development in the governorate.

A closely held joint stock company established in 2021, Al Dhahirah Company has been mandated to highlight the governorate's unique strengths. Members of communities in the governorate can be shareholders, earning profit from the area's economic growth and development.

The company - with close to 2,400 shareholders from the wilayats of Ibri, Dhank and Yanqul - opened its office in Muscat recently under the auspices of Abdulsalam al Murshidi, President of Oman Investment Authority. The company aims to coordinate investments across vital economic sectors targeted for economic growth in Dhahirah, while yielding new investment opportunities.

The office inauguration included a signing ceremony with key stakeholders. "Our new office and strategic partnerships with stakeholders from different sectors indicate our long-term ambition to become a tier-one company that further unlocks the



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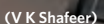
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Our Correspondent

Muscat

Known for its bustling streets, Hamriya now wears a cloak of silence. Once buzzing with animated conversations in every corner most times of the day, the Bangladeshi quarter of Ruwi High Street stands eerily quiet after 6pm. This marked change in the area's atmosphere is attributed to recent raids targeting illegal workers.

Just weeks ago, Hamriya was alive with activity. People gathered in groups to watch cricket matches or share news from back home. It is a shadow of its former self these days, gripped by an air of desolation following a crackdown on visa violations.



drastic transformation, S Babu, a worker from Bangladesh, said, "The neighbourhood feels abandoned. Those without visas live

in constant fear. They don't step out expecting a raid at any time."

Rehman M, another worker,

said, "The threat of arrest and deportation hangs over us. I've ceased my evening activities, preferring the safety of my

home."

This climate of fear extends beyond individuals directly affected, taking a toll on local businesses. Coffee shops and eateries, once brimming with customers and lively discussions, are empty. Groceries, meat and fish sellers, and vegetable vendors have few customers, creating a void in the local economy.

Talat Aziz, a coffee shop owner, lamented the current state of affairs. "Our shop was more than just a coffee shop; it was the centre of community interaction and storytelling. The absence of our regulars has led to significant economic challenges," he said, highlighting the broader impact of the recent crackdown.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, conferred medals of Excellent Service and Royal Merit on several officers and non-commissioned officers of Royal Court Affairs (RCA) on Thursday. The medals were pinned by Nasr Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary General of RCA. The Royal felicitation was in recognition of efforts exerted by the honoured personnel during their tenure at RCA (ONA)

Our Correspondent

Muscat

In a show of social solidarity and to prevent food waste, Oman Food Bank distributed 33.2 tonnes of cooked food among the needy by end of November of 2023.

Ibrahim Abdullah al Hosni, Chairman of Board of Directors of Oman Food Bank, said, "We continue our efforts in the field of charitable work by preserving food and distributing it to those who deserve it, within the framework of achieving social solidarity and giving in society."

He informed that the bank, a non-profit organisation established in 2021, aims to spread the culture of preserving food, providing food aid to beneficiaries, and contributing to achieving food security.

The bank has four branches that collect food and distribute it among the needy, Hosni added, noting that there are awareness efforts on the importance of food preservation and introducing the



We also want to be prepared throughout the year to provide food aid to those affected by disasters in the event of any

**IBRAHIM ABDULLAH
AL HOSNI**

bank's role to the community.

According to Hosni, besides 33.2 tonnes of cooked food, the bank distributed 51.16 tonnes of vegetables and fruits, and 5,000 food baskets.

On plans for 2024, Hosni said, "The bank will continue to encourage reducing food waste and recycling surplus food. We also want to be prepared throughout the year to provide food aid to those affected by disasters in the event of any."

The bank recently launched a project called Daymah, which involves recycling waste and treating it to produce soil-enhancing fertiliser.

Our Correspondent

Muscat

To support the future of the water sector in the sultanate, Nama Water Services will organise Oman Water Week from January 22.

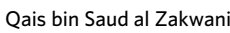
Oman Water Week will be a transformative event bringing together professionals, policymakers, researchers and experts from the water sector. Focused on shaping a sustainable future, the conference will serve as a platform for knowledge exchange, innovation and collaboration.

The event will also highlight how Oman can transform its water sector to become more resilient, sustainable, flexible and efficient.

The event will cover a wide range of topics, including the impact of climate change on water resources, new technologies and approaches to water management, and the use of water as a source of energy.

There will also be discussions on the legal and political aspects of water management, and how public-private partnerships can help improve water infrastructure.

Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, CEO of Nama Water Services, stated that the sultanate is committed to a sustainable economy



and has developed a road map to achieve net zero by 2050 through strategic initiatives aimed at reducing the carbon footprint in the key economic sectors and building a sustainable future.

He added, "As the key player in Oman's water sector, Nama Water Services has taken the initiative to host this annual gathering to engage all key stakeholders to discuss how the water sector could be the enabler for sustainable development in Oman."

Oman Water Week will provide a platform for experts, researchers, policymakers and industry professionals to share insights, exchange knowledge and engage in meaningful discussions that will shape the future of the water sector in the sultanate, Zakwani informed.

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Salute to Omani excellence

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In 2023, a group of exceptional Omanis brought laurels to the country through various achievements in innovation, sports, and social development. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik recognised these accomplishments by awarding 13 Omanis with the Royal Commendation Medal, Second Class, last week.

Among the awardees, Razan Hamad al Kalbani, known for her research and innovation, has been celebrated both locally and internationally. She recently won the first prize at the Korea International Women's Innovations Exhibition for her 'X-ray absorbing coating from a natural ingredient' innovation. Additionally, Razan has been bestowed with the GCC Order of Excellence (2nd Class), among other accolades.

In her conversation with *Muscat Daily*, Razan expressed her gratitude. "Receiving the Royal Commendation Medal from His Majesty the Sultan is a great honour. This recognition is a mo-



Razan Hamad al Kalbani

tivation to further my efforts in innovation and uplift Oman's reputation globally," she said.

She added, "I pray God to help me repay the debt to this generous country, which continues to shower us with its bounties."

Ahmed al Harthi, a notable figure in international motor racing, has also been acknowledged. With titles like the 2019 European Blancpain Championship Cup and the 2022 Le Mans Championship under his belt, Ahmed sees this commendation



This recognition tops any trophy I've ever received. This is a medal for the entire sporting community

AHMED AL HARTHI

as a crowning achievement. "Being recognised by His Majesty Sultan Haitham is a dream come true." He added that representing the country in the best possible way with the best possible re-



Said al Muqaimi

sults has always been the most important goal, and "this recognition tops any trophy I've ever received".

"This is a medal for the entire sporting community as well as everyone who has been by my side for the past 17 years, family, sponsors and the general public. It will motivate me to continue to push and achieve more results in the coming years. I also believe this will inspire more young athletes to persevere their dreams."

Said al Muqaimi, recognised for his public initiatives and so-

cial responsibility, has been instrumental in developing a road project that significantly reduced travel distance between the governorates of South Sharqiyah and North Sharqiyah.

The project reduced the journey from Haloot in the Niyabat of Tiwi to Al Aud in the wilayat of Wadi Bani Khalid from 200km to just 10km.

Upon receiving the Royal Commendation Medal, Muqaimi said, "It's an honour to be recognised by His Majesty Sultan Haitham. This encourages continued efforts in community building. I hope our work inspires Omani youth towards volunteerism and fosters a culture of social solidarity."

Muqaimi recounted that he started work on widening some parts of the road and pave some of it with cement, especially at crossroads and near wadis.

"I hope that private institutions will support us financially to complete the road expansion. I urge Omani youth to participate in volunteer work to achieve social solidarity in the society."



ROHM announces two nights with Trio Jourban

Muscat - The Royal Opera House Muscat is holding two special evenings of classical music with the celebrated Palestinian ensemble Trio Jourban.

Trio Jourban is a group founded by three brothers, Samir, Wissam and Adnan, famous for their collaborations with the great Palestinian poet, the late Mahmoud Darwish. Darwish chose Trio Jourban to give musical voice to his poems and wouldn't work with any other musicians.

In 2018, the trio collaborated with Pink Floyd bassist Roger Waters for two of the tracks on their latest album, drawing inspiration from the words of Mah-

moud Darwish.

The brothers are fourth generation oud artistes, exhibiting a skill and connection with the old borne of generations of commitment to this ancient instrument. Accompanying percussionist, Youssef Hbeisch, joins the ensemble to draw out the voice of classical oud playing.

Sought after worldwide, Trio Jourban will perform two concerts, exploring songs from their acclaimed albums. Their artistry carries a noble message of Palestinian identity to listeners from around the world. The concerts will take place at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts on February 2 and 3 at 7pm.

Desert Tourism Forum on Jan 24

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is set to launch its first Desert Tourism Forum 2024 in the wilayat of Bidiya, North Sharqiyah governorate, on Wednesday. The event aims to showcase investment opportunities in the region, with a special focus on desert tourism.

Salah bin Salem al Hajri, chairman of the Tourism Committee of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in North Sharqiyah, said that the forum is a first-of-its-kind initiative in the sultanate. It will focus on the economic and investment potential of the desert tourism sector against the backdrop of



relevant laws and opportunities for both local and international investors. The forum also intends to discuss the cultural and social aspects of desert tourism, drawing on experiences from the Gulf region.

"The Oman Desert Tourism

Forum will highlight the unique tourism components, cultural heritage, and diverse tourism patterns of Oman's deserts," said Salah al Hajri. He added that the forum will announce new initiatives, in collaboration with various organisations, to launch specialised training courses in tourism media. These courses will uplift the skills of North Sharqiyah's residents working in the tourism sector.

Hamad bin Ali al Hajri, a member of the OCCI Board of Directors in North Sharqiyah, shared that the forum will feature presentations on various topics. These include investment opportunities in desert tourism, legislative frameworks, and the

cultural and social dimensions of the sector.

A delegation from Saudi Arabia, including officials from the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and representatives from different economic sectors, will visit the OCCI branch in North Sharqiyah on Sunday.

"The visit aims to strengthen economic and commercial ties and explore investment prospects between the two nations," Hamad bin Ali al Hajri stated.

The Saudi delegation will also participate in the Oman Desert Tourism Forum, seeking to understand the investment potential in North Sharqiyah, particularly in desert tourism.

Company setup to develop Dhahira

Continued from Page 01

Al Dhahirah Company will also cooperate with Oman Broadband Company to invest in developing cutting-edge infrastructure to enhance the region's connectivity. An MoU was signed for this by Sultan al Wahabi, CEO of Oman Broadband, and Ibrahim al Balushi, COO of Al Dhahirah Company.

Additionally, agreements were signed with Tamkeen Oman and Schlumberger to co-operate in the area of downhaul tools rental services. Al Dhahirah Company will continue to coordinate investments across sectors in the governorate, including oil and gas and industries targeted by diversifications.

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Association of Early Intervention

ASSOCIATION FOR EARLY INTERVENTION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Announcement: Invitation to attend the 2023 General Assembly meeting

The Board of Directors of the Association of Early Intervention for Children with Disabilities is pleased to invite its distinguished members to attend the annual general assembly meeting, which is scheduled to be held on Monday the 4/3/2024 at (4:30 PM) at the Association of Early Intervention Ghala Height.

Agenda of the meeting

● Board of Directors administrative report of 2023 and work plan for the year 2024.

● Balance sheet and closing account for the ending fiscal year and draft work of New Year budget 2024.

● Discuss the Auditor report.

● Election of the Board of Directors and filling the vacant positions.

● Appointing a financial controller and determining his remuneration, without prejudice to the provisions of the International Financial Supervision Law.

● Any Other Matters.

Kindly note the last day to nominate for membership in the Board of Directors and renew membership is Sunday, February 11, 2024. Any application received after the above date will not be considered.

NOTE: All the above reports will be available at the association's office and in the electronic media for the members review and information. If there are any inquiries, please send us by what's up (72727785).



مجلس تجارة والصناعة
Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Tender

Oman chamber of commerce and industry in Al Batinah North Governorate would like to announce the following public tender:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Tender Fees (irrevocable)	Specialized companies	Deadline for Obtaining Documents	Deadline for Tender submission
1/2024	Organizing and Managing of Gulf Business Women Forum	25 OMR	Companies specialized in contracting and construction	01 February 2024	15 February 2024

Companies specialized in managing and organizing conferences may obtain the tender documents from the Administration Department at the first Floor of the chamber's branch Al Batinah North Governorate, during the official working hours against the payment of tender fees.

Tender Terms:

Provide valued CR, OCCI membership and taxation certificate.

Interested companies should enclose their bids a 1% Bank guarantee/ certified cheque of proposal value issued by one of the banks operating in Oman valid for 90 days from the deadline of submitting the bids addressed in the name of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The bids without this temporary guarantee will not be considered.

The bids should be submitted in red waxed envelopes addressed to - Head of main tendering Committee, OCCI, written outside the Number and title of the Tender. No indication about the bidder is allowed on the envelope.

Offers should be deposited in the tender box kept at the Administration Department in the first floor of OCCI Al Batinah North Governorate branch.

OCCI is not bound to accept the lowest or any other bids. It has the right to accept or reject any bids without showing reasons.

Interested companies should submit the Tenders before 12 pm on 15 Feb 2024

For further details, you may call 91384243 or email : maryam.balushi@omanchamber.om



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Omantel raises \$500mn via Sukuk issuance

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Telecommunication Company (Omantel) has successfully raised \$500mn through a US dollar-denominated Sukuk issuance.

'Omantel is pleased to announce the successful closing of its issuance of Shariah-compliant Sukuk under its - USD-denominated Rule 144A/ Reg S debut with a size of \$500mn,' the company said in a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Thursday.

The order-book for the Sukuk was opened on Wednesday and closed on the same day, Omantel said.

The tenor of the Sukuk is seven-year with a profit rate of 5.375% per annum.

Omantel said the issuance received significant interest from regional and international market participants.

'The proceeds of the issuance will be used to repay the bridge loan of \$460mn,' the company noted.

Omantel announced the initiation of a series of meetings with qualified fixed-income investors on Tuesday to discuss the anticipated benchmark seven-year Sukuk offering in US dollars.

'Generally, it is expected that this transaction will have a positive impact on Omantel's financial position,' the company noted in its previous disclosure on Tuesday.

Global credit rating agency Moody's Investor Service assigned a Ba2 rating with a positive outlook to Omantel's proposed Sukuk issuance on Tuesday. Moody's assigned a Ba2 rating to the proposed backed senior unsecured Sukuk trust certificates to be issued by OTEL Sukuk Limited, a special-purpose vehicle established in the Cayman Islands by Omantel.

Oman's 2024 budget signals slower debt reduction: Fitch

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's 2024 budget, released in early January, indicates that the authorities will continue to pay down government debt, strengthening the sovereign's resilience to potential shocks, but increasing social spending will slow the pace of debt reduction in 2024, Fitch Ratings said.

In a statement, the rating agency noted, 'Fitch's treatment of certain budget items differs from that of the authorities, but the official figures suggest the fiscal surplus may be slightly larger than our previous projections in 2023 and slightly smaller in 2024.'

Fitch now predicts the surplus to decrease to 1.8% of GDP in 2024, down from an estimated 3.3% in 2023, based on the budget data and the rating agency's latest oil price assumptions. In its December sovereign data comparator, Fitch had previously forecasted the surplus to remain relatively stable at 2.1% of GDP in 2024, compared to 2.2% in 2023.

'The overall impact on Oman's credit metrics should align with the assumptions we made when we upgraded the sovereign's long-term foreign-currency issuer default rating to 'BB+' from 'BB,' with a stable outlook, in September 2023,' Fitch said.

Fitch attributes the smaller surplus in 2024 to a projected 1% decline in Oman's oil output, con-



Fitch predicts the sultanate's budget surplus to decrease to 1.8% of GDP in 2024, down from an estimated 3.3% in 2023

sistent with the recent reduction of the country's OPEC+ production quota, along with a modest weakening in international oil prices, impacting revenues.

The budget anticipates non-oil revenue growth driven by stronger economic activity, with 'no significant new revenue-raising measures being announced.' Fitch highlighted the government's plans to expand the social safety net, adding about 1% of GDP to spending.

It said, 'Fuel subsidy costs are

expected to remain significant at about 0.7% of GDP in 2024, with an expectation that the government would eliminate the subsidy if global energy prices decline. The authorities also intend to maintain public capital expenditure broadly stable in 2024.'

Fitch anticipates prudent spending in Oman for 2024, with key current expenditure items generally growing in line with nominal GDP.

'The budget shows no indica-

tion of significant backtracking on recent fiscal consolidation measures, and we expect further modest progress on electricity price reform. Meanwhile, public finances will benefit from slightly lower debt service costs in 2024 following liability management operations conducted by the government since 2022,' affirmed the rating agency.

Oman's government plans to utilise part of the surplus to continue debt repayment. Fitch notes that Oman's utilisation of the revenue windfall from high oil prices to reduce debt and extend maturities influenced the decision to upgrade its ratings in September.

However, Fitch expects the pace of debt reduction to ease in

2024, with the government debt-to-GDP ratio projected to decrease to around 33% in 2024 from 36% in 2023. This slowdown is attributed not only to the smaller surplus but also to the authorities' plans to allocate some of the surplus to the Oman Future Fund to support economic development.

The rating agency emphasised that Oman's public finances will remain vulnerable to global oil price shocks, although less so than before the Covid-19 pandemic.

'External debt maturities remain significant at \$6bn per year for the government and state-owned enterprises combined, although less burdensome than in recent years,' added Fitch.

Asyad launches container terminal in Duqm

Duqm - Asyad Group has commenced operations at the Asyad Container Terminal - Duqm, which will be managed and operated by the group's ports and terminals arm, Asyad Ports.

This latest addition to Asyad's asset lineup follows the Omani logistics giant's robust expansion plans, aiming to provide more integrated logistics solutions, anticipate and proactively respond to new trends in global trade and handling, and meet the requirements of the world's biggest players in the container business.

The Asyad Container Terminal is also set to promote the Port of Duqm and the Special Economic Zone at Duqm as a global container handling destination and a center for integrated logistics. This expansion aligns with Asyad's established strategy to increase the competitiveness of its services and the throughput of its ports.

Operating and managing the state-of-the-art container terminal further highlights Asyad's advanced capabilities, know-how, and competencies, being the national operator responsible for undertaking the management



and operations of ports and terminals. Securing this high-profile project specifically reflects customers' and stakeholders' confidence in Asyad Ports' efficiency, expertise, and quality of service.

Since its inception, Asyad Ports has proven its proficiency

in operating and managing several local ports and terminals, consistently posting a profit since the first year of operations.

In terms of technical capabilities, the Asyad Container Terminal is equipped with four remotely operated 65-tonne

twin lift STS cranes and twelve 50-tonne RTG cranes. These cranes have a 71-meter outreach and 18-meter backreach and are fitted with a host of fifth-gen technologies, optic fiber data transfer systems for remote operation, and smart driving sys-

tems.

Additionally, the terminal boasts a cutting-edge yard control system and an automatic landing system, all designed to improve overall handling and productivity. The terminal also consists of three berths capable of berthing and handling three ships at a time, with a quay

Asyad Container Terminal is set to promote Port of Duqm and Special Economic Zone at Duqm as global container handling destination and a center for integrated logistics

length of over 1,000 meters, a storage capacity of 26,000 TEU, and over 600 reefer containers.

Highlighting the role of the new terminal in Oman's drive for economic diversification, Ahmed Ali Akaak, Acting CEO of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm,

stated that this venture will unlock great investment opportunities by connecting the Special Economic Zone at Duqm with global shipping lines, capitalizing on the direct access to key global markets and Duqm's strategic location at the crossroads of major international shipping lanes.

Dr Ahmed Mohammed al Abri, CEO of Asyad Ports, said, "Operating the Asyad Container Terminal is a significant milestone in our journey to develop and expand our portfolio and commercial operations. It clearly signals the efficiency of Asyad Ports' solutions and the strong confidence afforded to us by our global customers. Over the past two years, Asyad Ports has proven its ability to manage and operate several terminals for general and bulk cargo."

"The state-of-the-art terminal will leverage its location at the 18-meter deep Duqm Port to accommodate vessels of all sizes and offer loading, unloading, and transshipment services, container packing and unloading, and other added-value services," Abri added.

Qatar to sell first green bond 'very soon'

Switzerland, Davos - Qatar is ready to sell its first green bond - and first external deal of any kind in four years - soon, according to the Gulf state's finance minister.

"We are ready to do it very soon," Ali al-Kuwari told Bloomberg Television at the World Economic Forum in Davos. "We are not hungry for money but it will be mainly to send a strong statement about the need to counter climate change".

The country recently finalised a green-finance framework to ensure it meets the requirements for issuing green bonds, which typically fund projects meant to reduce carbon and other planet-warming emissions.

Qatar, one of the world's biggest producers of liquefied natural gas, hasn't issued Eurobonds since early 2020. Back then, it sold \$10bn of five-, 10- and 30-year debt.

Global oil demand growth to fall by half in 2024: International Energy Agency

Muscat - World oil demand growth is predicted to fall by half in 2024 on the back of macroeconomic headwinds, tighter efficiency standards and an expanding EV fleet, according to the International Energy Agency's (IEA) latest report on Thursday.

In the Oil Market Report for December, the agency said global oil demand growth experienced a notable slowdown in the fourth quarter of 2023, falling to 1.7mn barrels per day (bpd), a

significant decrease from the 3.2mn bpd rate during the second and third quarters of 2023.

Reflecting the unwinding of China's post-pandemic travel demand surge, growth is projected to further ease from 2.3mn bpd in 2023 to 1.2mn bpd in 2024, influenced by various macroeconomic headwinds, including tighter efficiency standards and the expansion of the electric vehicle (EV) fleet.

The global demand landscape is heavily influenced by China,

which is set to contribute to nearly 60% of this year's increase in worldwide demand. Last year, China's contribution was even higher, exceeding 75%, as the country recovered from its lockdowns.

Supply to hit news records in 2024

Global oil is set to reach a new high of 103.5mn bpd this year, with outputs from the US, Brazil, Guyana, and Canada will drive the increases.



Non-OPEC+ production is expected to dominate this year, contributing close to 1.5mn bpd in growth.

In contrast, the supply of 22 members of the OPEC+ group is forecast to remain relatively stable compared to last year, assuming that the extra voluntary cuts initiated recently are gradually phased out in the second quarter of 2024.

Supply from OPEC's current 12 members rose by 50,000 bpd in December to 27.02mn bpd,

while flows from the 10 non-OPEC nations edged around 20,000 bpd lower to 14.83mn bpd.

Higher flows from Nigeria and smaller increases from Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Kazakhstan offset losses in Iran, Kuwait and elsewhere.

However, production in January is expected to drop as the group's extra supply curbs kick in and as protests force the closure of Libya's largest oil field.

Agencies

Saudi Tadawul acquires 32.6% stake in DME

Saudi Tadawul Group becomes joint largest shareholder in Dubai Mercantile Exchange alongside CME Group

DME will be rebranded as Gulf Mercantile Exchange to reflect its position as key regional commodities exchange

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Saudi Tadawul Group Holding Company (STG), a leading diversified capital markets group in the MENA region, has entered into a binding agreement with existing shareholders of DME Holdings Limited to acquire a 32.6% stake in Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME), one of the leading international commodities exchanges.

As a result, STG will become the joint largest shareholder in DME Holdings alongside CME Group, with other shareholders including the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and Dubai Holding as well as global financial and commercial industry leaders.

The deal also includes an ability for STG to increase its shareholding in the future. The shares acquired represent a mix of new and existing shares, with the proceeds from the new shares used to fund DME's growth.

The agreement will support a strategic move towards leveraging the Middle East's geographic proximity to both key commodity production hubs and end-markets, with DME serving as a bridge between production and end-markets. The partnership



will enable the new Gulf Mercantile Exchange to capture demand for energy, metals, and agricultural commodity markets and support the ongoing global transition to a sustainable economy through the launch of next-generation derivatives contracts as part of the transition to a sustainable economy.

DME Oman
Dubai Mercantile Exchange is home to the DME Oman Crude

Oil Futures Contract (DME Oman), that generates the world's largest amount of physically delivered crude oil. The DME Oman contract serves as the third-most important crude oil benchmark globally, which is

agreed that no changes to any aspects of the DME Oman contract will result from the transaction contemplated by the agreement. In addition, to avoid conflict of interest and safeguard the twin imperatives of neutrality and price discovery, no Saudi Arabian crude oil contract will be traded, sold or bought on, or indexed to, nor will Saudi crude be delivered against, the DME Oman contract via DME.

CME Group will continue to provide its industry-leading CME Globex trading technology and clearing services to the Gulf Mercantile Exchange. The CFTC's role in overseeing CME Clearing's operations to protect the integrity of transactions executed on the DME and mitigating risk to traders will remain unchanged.

Ahmad Sharaf, chairman of DME Holdings Limited, said, "On behalf of DME Holdings and its shareholders, I am delighted to welcome Saudi Tadawul Group as joint largest shareholder. As we enter a new era of growth as the Gulf Mercantile Exchange, we are excited about the potential to build a regional commodities powerhouse with global relevance. Not only will our expanded partnership support our flagship Oman Crude Oil Con-

tract but it will also position us to become a champion for the transition to a more sustainable future."

Mulham al Jarf, Deputy President for Investments at Oman Investment Authority, said, "We are delighted to welcome Saudi Tadawul Group as a new shareholder. Its expertise and insights, along with what we have built over the years with DME Holdings in Dubai Mercantile Exchange, will be invaluable as we continue to navigate through an ever-evolving market landscape. This partnership marks a significant step in our commitment to innovation and excellence in providing opportunities for DME's regional and global stakeholders while maintaining the integrity of DME Oman."

Eng Khalid al Hussan, Group CEO of Saudi Tadawul Group, said, "Our investment in DME Holdings provides STG with access to one of the most important asset classes globally for the first time, embedding commodities trading into the Middle East's largest capital markets group. We look forward to working together to unlock new growth opportunities, leveraging our proximity to key financial and production hubs to bridge demand from east and west."



Oil prices rise over 1% last week amid Red Sea tensions

Muscat – Oil prices increased during the week ending January 19, following optimistic expectations about global oil demand, a fall in US commercial crude oil inventories and supply risks from the ongoing conflict in the Red Sea.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$79.08 per barrel on Friday, increasing by more than 1% relative to the closing price of \$78.29 a barrel on Friday previous week.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI), the US benchmark, traded at \$73.89 a barrel at the same time on Friday, for a rise of around 1.7% from last Friday's session that closed at \$72.68 per barrel.

The decrease in US stockpiles assuaged market concerns over

falling demand.

Data released by the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) on Thursday showed that US commercial crude oil inventories decreased by around 2.5mn barrels to 429.9mn barrels, compared to the American Petroleum Institute's expectation of a rise of around 483,000 barrels.

Meanwhile, increased tension in the Red Sea put upward pressure on oil prices by raising fears that disruptions in the global supply chain due to delays in energy shipments would negatively impact supplies.

The possibility of global supply shortages grew when the Houthi group declared on Thursday that they had attacked a US vessel in the Gulf of Aden.

A Houthi military spokesman said the assault was in response to US and UK aggression against Yemen and also to pressure Israel to halt its deadly war on the Gaza Strip.

Following week-long airstrikes launched by the US and UK on Houthi targets in retaliation for the attacks, fears were raised of supply chain disruptions, which drove oil prices up.

The Red Sea is one of the world's most frequently used sea routes for oil and fuel shipments. It is used to transit fuel between Egypt's Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aden, allowing ships to avoid the much costlier and longer route around the southern coast of Africa.

Agencies

Norway aims to remain at forefront of Europe's energy security and transition

Oslo, Norway – Norway, as the largest producer and only net exporter of oil and gas in Europe, takes great pride in contributing to Europe's energy security and its upcoming energy transition, according to State Secretary in the Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, Elisabeth Saether.

Saether told Anadolu Agency that the country, as the single most important supplier of gas to Europe, aims to continue low-emission gas exports at a rate of around 120bn cubic meters (bcm) per year over the years ahead and, additionally, to export oil to Europe in 2024 and beyond.

Although she envisages a continuation in the development of Norway's continental shelf, she expects a production decline due to resource constraints from 2030 onward.

Projects for 2024
Norway's projects are not limited to the oil and gas sector, but the government has ambitious plans as part of its long-term commitment to develop offshore wind.

The country aims to award areas for the generation of 30 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2040.

"The first project areas will be awarded in 2024. We plan to tender the next round of new areas in 2025 and to follow up



Norway's government has ambitious plans to develop offshore wind projects

Norway aims to award areas for the generation of 30 gigawatts of offshore wind energy by 2040. The first project areas will be awarded this year

with new areas regularly,' Saether added.

The country's commitment to low emissions can be seen with a new project for carbon capture and storage (CCS), called Longship, which is dubbed the largest industrial climate project in Norway.

The flagship project seeks to serve as a catalyst for the continued implementation of CCS on a national and worldwide scale by proving that it is feasible and safe along the whole value chain.

She explained that the Longship project has been developed on the shoulders of a commitment from several Norwegian governments to develop CCS, and this year will see this progress with a receiving terminal and offshore storage ready to receive CO2.

She argued that the recent developments have reflected the importance of energy security and affordable energy prices for Norway and Europe.

Although Norway is a small player in the global crude market,

with production covering about 2% of global demand and only 3% of the global gas market, it is nonetheless a vital exporter.

Norway supplied between 20% and 25% of the gas demand of the EU and the UK.

The majority of Norwegian gas is exported through the gas pipeline system connecting Norwegian fields to the UK and the EU, out of which 5% is exported as LNG.

Most of the oil and gas produced on the Norwegian shelf is exported. Combined, oil and gas exceed half of the total value of Norway's total commodity exports, making oil and gas the most important export commodities in the Norwegian economy.

Anadolu Agency

US existing home sales fall to lowest level since 2010

New York, US – US existing home sales fell 1% in December 2023, diving again to their lowest level since August 2010, according to data released Friday by the National Association of Realtors (NAR).

Existing home sales, which measures the change in the number of existing residential buildings sold, fell to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 3.78mn last month.

The revised November figure stood at 3.82mn for a monthly gain of 0.8%.



In October 2023, existing home sales were down 4.1%, compared to the previous

month, at 3.79mn – lowest since August 2010.

On an annual basis, sales

were down to 4.09mn, marking the lowest level since 1995, while the median sales price reached a record high of \$389,800 in 2023, according to NAR.

"The latest month's sales look to be the bottom before inevitably turning higher in the new year," NAR chief economist Lawrence Yun said in a statement. "Mortgage rates are meaningfully lower compared to just two months ago, and more inventory is expected to appear on the market in upcoming months."

Anadolu Agency

China's natural gas output rises 5.8% in 2023

Beijing, China – China's natural gas output registered stable growth in 2023, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed.

The country produced 229.7bn cubic meters of natural gas in 2023, up 5.8% from a year earlier.

A total of 119.97mn tonnes of natural gas was imported in 2023, up 9.9% year-on-year, according to the bureau.

In December alone, the country imported 12.65mn tonnes of natural gas, increasing by 23% year-on-year. The growth rate was 16.4 percentage points higher than that of November, said the bureau.

On the other hand, China's crude oil output posted steady growth in December 2023, of-



ficial data showed.

The output totalled 17.65mn tonnes last month, rising 4.6% year-on-year, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

For the whole year of 2023, the crude oil output reached 208.91mn tonnes, up 2% year-on-year, NBS data showed.

In 2023, China imported 563.99mn tonnes of crude oil, climbing 11% year-on-year, according to the data.

Xinhua

Chery comprehensively enhanced overseas after-sales service in 2023

In 2023, Chery Group achieved a global automobile sales volume of 1,881,316 units, with over 930,000 vehicles exported.

As of now, Chery Group has accumulated over 13mn global users, with 3.35mn overseas users, maintaining its position as the top Chinese brand for passenger car exports for 21 consecutive years. The continuous increase in Chery's global sales volume can be attributed not only to the support and trust domestically and internationally of its brand and products but also to its exceptional commitment to providing excellent after-sales services.

To further develop the overseas after-sales service system and advance globally unified after-sales service standards, Chery's After-sales Service Department organised more than 20 offline hands-on trainings overseas in 2023. These trainings covered 20 countries and regions, including South America, South Africa, and Asia, among others.

Through these hands-on trainings, Chery improved the after-sales staff's understanding of the customer management system, refined standard after-sales service procedures, and simultaneously improved the maintenance skills of service technicians.

Li Wei, the head of the after-sales Service Department of



Chery, stated, "To win customer satisfaction, our after-sales service must constantly promote itself. We adhere to the principle of localization and provide services tailored to the real needs of customers in different countries and regions. We aim to offer higher-quality products and services to meet the increasingly diverse demands of customers."

These overseas trainings not only perfected the model of 'learning through practice and using through practice' but also cultivated a group of high-quality, professional, and skilled after-sales service elites.

To enhance brand influence and owner after-sales service experiences, Chery's After-sales Service Department actively or-

ganized various marketing activities in overseas markets in 2023.

For instance, in May 2023, the department initiated the 'Global Service Video Shooting and Most Beautiful Customer Lounge Photo Collection Activity', receiving feedback on service videos from 18 countries and regions, with the video from Malaysia winning first prize.

Nineteen markets participated in the 'Most Beautiful Customer Lounge Selection' activity, with Uzbekistan winning first prize.

Additionally, 18 overseas markets actively participated in Christmas and New Year marketing activities organised by the After-sales Service Department, offering free vehicle inspections, gifts for station visits, a precise

full-car wash, and other after-sales brand activities, with a total participation of 100,000 owners.

In 2024, Chery's after-sales service department plans to conduct targeted service marketing activities in each summer and winter, continuously creating 'more convenient, more professional, more intimate' services for customers. In addition, con-

sidering the actual conditions of each country and region, the department will enhance after-sales service levels in five dimensions: free car wash, roadside assistance, dual-person express maintenance, walker services, and mobile services, promoting the implementation of differentiated Chery services.

In 2024, Chery's after-sales service department has also formulated plans to increase storage and construction of the international spare parts warehouse and improve the 30-day shipping satisfaction rate for spare parts. These measures aim to provide overseas users with more convenient and professional services.

In the future, Chery continues to adhere to a user-centred approach and a more humanized service philosophy and refine process management and construction service guarantees to establish a more efficient and higher-quality Chery after-sales service system. This will drive the comprehensive upgrading of after-sales services, creating a better travel experience for Chery owners.

Chery Automobile took the first spot among all Chinese automotive brands in J D Power 2023 China Initial Quality StudySM(IQS). In Oman, Chery vehicles are distributed by Saud Bahwan Group.



Bank Muscat to accept applications for Green Sports 2024 until Jan 31

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in Oman, accords great attention to community service, social responsibility and sustainability initiatives. Recently, the Bank has launched the 2024 edition of its flagship Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme, Green Sports.

All local sports teams who would like to apply for the programme are invited to complete the registration before January 31.

All teams interested to participate in this year's edition can submit their applications digitally.

To submit applications, teams should may visit <https://bm.click/GS> and fill in the application form electronically using a computer, tablet or mobile phone. In case of any queries or doubts on the submission process, teams may email: GreenSports@bankmuscat.com, or call 24768595/24801200 /24801 25 for more details,' the bank stated.

The Green Sports programme is developed to help local sports teams enhance their role in the community and provide suitable infrastructure that can help the youth develop their talents.

The scope of Green Sports support for sports teams includes greening of football fields with natural or synthetic turf, providing floodlights or water desalination equipment in areas facing water salinity.

Over the previous years, the programme contributed to bol-

ster the infrastructure of Omani sport especially football which helped in honing the sports, cultural and social skills of Omani youth. This support has also enabled sports teams to hold various activities in the play yards and contributed to expanding the green spaces across Oman.

The Green Sports Programme is one of Bank Muscat's CSR initiatives, which draws from the values of leadership and partnership to create a positive impact on Omani society. The programme aims to develop and provide a sustainable infrastructure for sports fields in Oman. Bank Muscat's Green Sports programme has so far supported 183 teams in Oman with another 20 teams to be added this year.

Indian embassy celebrates Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation Day

Embassy of India, Muscat, celebrated 'Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation' (ITEC) Day on Thursday in the embassy premises.

The function was attended by about 150 participants, which included ITEC alumni from Oman, comprising officials and professionals from diverse sectors who have participated in various training courses in India under ITEC Programme during previous years.

The function was attended by many other officials from various Omani authorities/agencies, looking after training aspects of their employees.

H E Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Ba'owain, Minister of Labour, was the chief guest on this occasion.

The Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme was launched in September 1964 as a bilateral programme of assistance of the Government of India for capacity building of friendly developing countries. It has emerged as a key vehicle for India's contribution to Human Resource Development of partner countries. Under ITEC Programme, Officials from more than 160 coun-



tries from Asia, Africa, East Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean as well as Pacific and Small Island countries are invited to benefit from India's developmental experience. The ITEC Programme offers over 14000 courses annually covering diverse range of subjects from traditional areas like agriculture, SMEs, management, English language to IT, Science & Technology, biotechnology, etc. The skills which are being provided under ITEC Programme facilitate human resource development, capacity building, skill upgradation and empowerment.

Addressing the gathering, H E Amit Narang, the Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, emphasized that the ITEC Programme has evolved into a important platform for partnerships focused on capacity building between our two nations.

He stated that the program has received a positive response in Oman over the years, with numerous Omani officials actively participating in ITEC courses. Ambassador also expressed ap-

preciation to the Ministry of Labour, Foreign Ministry, and other relevant ministries and organisations in Oman for their support in effectively implementing the ITEC Programme in Oman.

H E Narang stated that recent state visit of His Majesty to India further strengthened the partnership in capacity-building, training, and skill enhancement.

Noted dancer Jhumpa Chakraborty and her students presented Kathak, a popular dance form from India.

Ministry of Education holds competition for poetry and creative writing

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Center for Professional Guidance and Student Counseling (Department of Educational Activities), last week organised a poetry, story, and novel writing competition under the slogan 'In Arabic, we create'.

The two-day event was organised by the Educational Center for the Arabic Language for the Gulf States, a release stated.

In this stage, a number of 33 students participated from the various educational directorates in the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. The poetry, story, and novel competition

came within the programmes of the Arab Center for the Arabic Language for the Gulf States for the session (2023-24).

The competition has been

held to discover the potential and linguistic abilities of gifted students according to a set of standards and indicators in the field of poetry, story, and novel, as well



as students' presentation silks.

Those who qualified to compete in this stage submitted their texts to an evaluation committee specialised in the fields of the

competition, and at the conclusion of the evaluation, the students, and the supervisors of the two stages of the competition in the educational directorates

were honoured in a ceremony that included examples of students' contributions in poetry, stories, and novels.

Younis al Kharboushi, head of the Activities Department and Chairman of the Evaluation Committee, said, "The results of the desk evaluation of the nominated works revealed the students' linguistic potential and abilities in creative writing, as the student productions were distinguished by diversity in presenting topics that touched upon the environment of the Arabian Gulf, ancient and modern, in addition to presenting some current and futuristic societal issues and problems in Gulf society."

"The evaluation committee is completing its work by conducting oral interviews for all participating students, with the aim of differentiation to choose participants for the third phase of the competition at the level of the Gulf countries, which is hosted by the Educational Centre for the Arabic Language in the United Arab Emirates next March."

The competition aims to highlight Arabic language, enhance loyalty and a sense of belonging to the language in the hearts of young people.

Strong representation from Saudi expected at ATM in May

Saudi Arabia is on course to welcome an estimated 30mn overnight tourists this year, according to research conducted by Oxford Economics on behalf of ICAEW. Delegates from around the world are preparing to capitalise on this momentum and explore opportunities within the Kingdom's thriving tourism sector at Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2024, which will take place at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) from May 6 to 9.

Last year, Saudi Arabia's government revised its combined domestic and international 2030 visitor target upwards from the previous 100mn to 150mn. Amid sustained investment in its tourism, hospitality and leisure segments, as well as a slew of ambitious gigaprojects, the Kingdom aims to increase the economic contribution of its tourism sector to 10% of national GDP by the end of this decade.

Representing almost a 50% increase in KSA exhibitor participation, ATM 2024 will host a selection of high-profile exhibitors from Saudi Arabia, including SAUDIA, flynas, NEOM, Dur Hospitality, AMSA Hospitality and the Royal Commission for AlUla. First-time exhibitors will comprise almost 17% of the total Saudi participation, which includes Cruise Saudi, Tabuk Investment and Tourism Co, Al Badiah Transportation, Sixth Gulf



**Saudi Arabia increases its 2030 visitor target to 150mn
Attracted 27.6mn overnight tourists in 2023
Tourism sector aims to offer 10% of national GDP**

and Fairmont Mekka Clock Tower, among others.

Saudi Arabia will represent a key focus for attendees as policymakers, industry leaders and travel professionals from around the world share insights, forge new relationships and showcase cutting-edge innovations with the potential to drive further growth within this burgeoning

tourism market.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director, Arabian Travel Market, said, "We plan to shine a spotlight on this exciting market at ATM 2024 with a dedicated Saudi Village, which will be highlighted on the exhibition floor and will consist of a full showcase of Saudi products. With significant interest in this market, there will

be a range of panel discussions that will enable attendees to identify and capitalise on new opportunities in the kingdom."

Data released by Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Tourism highlights a surge in inbound visitors in the first half of 2023. The kingdom welcomed 14.6mn tourists during this period, representing a 142% year-on-year increase. A pronounced uptick was also recorded in the country's domestic tourism segment, with a 16% rise in spending and an average stay length of 6.3 nights - up from 4.6 nights during the corre-

sponding period of 2022.

Saudi Arabia's buoyant economy looks set to propel growth across the wider Gulf, according to the World Bank's latest Global Economic Prospects report. The country's economy is expected to expand by 4.1% this year, contributing to an anticipated 3.6% rise in the combined GDP of GCC countries during 2024.

"The kingdom is working diligently to diversify its economy in preparation for the post-oil era, and segments such as tourism, aviation and hospitality - not to mention leisure, entertainment and events - are playing a major role in this transition," Curtis added. "We are looking forward to welcoming a diverse range of exhibitors and delegates from Saudi Arabia to ATM 2024, and we know that industry leaders from around the world will be keen to gain further insights into this thriving market throughout this year's show."

In line with its theme, 'Empowering Innovation: Transforming Travel Through Entrepreneurship', the 31st edition of ATM will once again host policymakers, industry leaders and travel professionals from across the Middle East and beyond, encouraging them to forge new relationships, exchange knowledge and identify innovations that can reshape the future of global travel and tourism.

Harley Street offers groundbreaking new treatments for early Alzheimer's

Exciting outcome of new clinical trials will be presented at Arab Health 2024

In 2023, new-generation medications in international clinical trials have demonstrated slowing of the progression of Alzheimer's Disease and its symptoms. The implications of these historic results for the global Alzheimer's Disease pandemic will be presented at Arab Health 2024 by Harley Street's Dr Emer MacSweeney, co-founder and CEO of Re:Cognition Health's, pioneering Brain & Mind Centers. Re:Cognition Health's experts have been intimately involved in several groundbreaking clinical trials for these effective new generation treatments, with the first of these entering the market, and many more currently in development, in global clinical trials.

Dr MacSweeney will detail a new perspective and a cautiously optimistic outlook for early-stage Alzheimer's and how the definition of the disease has changed completely in the light of tremendous recent scientific advances.

This will include the results from Eisai's 'CLARITY' Study for Lecanemab, and Eli Lilly's TRAILBLAZER-ALZ 2 study for Donanemab. Both studies trialed new monoclonal antibodies against toxic brain amyloid protein, which successfully slowed the progression of Alzheimer's Disease and its symptoms. The TauRx LUCIDITY study also demonstrated exciting results for a new medication aimed against toxic tau protein in the brain.

"There is every reason to be cautiously optimistic, as these new-generation medications, available in the UK and in international clinical trials, can potentially change an individual's future," said Dr MacSweeney speaking ahead of Arab Health 2024.

"As we grow older, Alzheimer's Disease is the most common cause, by far, of the symptoms listed below and there are no medications on the market in the UK to slow the progression of this disease and its symptoms. If you recognise any of these

symptoms in yourself, friends or family, it is important to seek a diagnosis as soon as possible. The most accurate diagnosis, globally, can be achieved through screening for a clinical trial and if confirmed to be due to early symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease, the same trial could provide the opportunity for an effective treatment."

Furthermore, new medications are available on the market, now, at Re:Cognition Health's USA Centers and likely to be at their UK Centers in Harley Street in 2024. This is in addition to multiple newer and potentially even more effective medications still in clinical trial.

Lecanemab - FDA approval for USA granted 2023. Currently, under review by MHRA



Dr Emer MacSweeney

for UK approval.

Re:Cognition Health's patients joined a global study cohort of 1,795 volunteers with early-stage Alzheimer's Disease to receive fortnightly infusions of Lecanemab or placebo. Results demonstrated a 27% reduction in the rate of progressive cognitive decline over an 18-month period for those taking Lecanemab compared to those on a placebo. Dr Emer MacSweeney, CEO and Medical Director at Re:Cognition Health, expressed excitement about these results, emphasising the potential not only as a treatment for early-stage Alzheimer's, but also for the development of multiple new treatments.

Donanemab - Currently under review by FDA for approval.

Alizz Islamic, Oman Housing Bank sign agreement for 'Iskan'

The CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank, Ali bin Saif al Mani affirmed that the partnership with Oman Housing Bank, the 'Iskan' programme aims to enhance the bank's role in supporting urban development projects undertaken by the government. This collaboration involves providing supported housing financing to eligible citizens.

The programme aims to facilitate housing financing for citizens on the waiting lists of Oman Housing Bank and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, supported by various local banks operating in the sultanate.

The agreement was signed by Ali bin Saif al Mani, CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank and Moosa bin Masoud al Jadidi, CEO of Oman Housing Bank.

Alizz Islamic Bank actively seeks to contribute to all development initiatives benefiting the Country and its citizens, whether through partnerships with Oman Housing Bank or by offering services and products aligned with sharia's principles.

The CEO emphasised that through this partnership, they aim to support many Omani families who meet the eligibility criteria for receiving housing financing. This humanitarian principle will contribute to extending the veins of urban development to various provinces of the sultanate and enable many Omani families to afford homes.

This reflects the belief that the prosperity of individuals leads to the prosperity of societies. A dedicated team has been formed



to process financing requests referred to Alizz Islamic Bank, streamlining transaction processes, a release stated.

Through the electronic platform Iskan, eligible citizens can access the platform's page, com-

plete registration procedures with easy steps, and choose Alizz Islamic Bank for housing financing. The financing is in line with the sharia's principles, featuring straightforward and flexible transaction procedures. All

products and services provided by the bank have been approved by the bank's Fatwa and Sharia'a Supervision Authority.

After submitting the application to Alizz Islamic Bank and completing all procedures, the bank will review the request and send a financing offer, including the financing amount, expected monthly installment, service fee percentage, expected financing duration, and any other applicable fees. The purpose of obtaining financing includes building a home, purchasing a ready-made home, purchasing an unfinished home and completing it, or purchasing residential land and building a home on it. The financing amount can reach up to RO60,000 to RO80,000 for citizens.

Sharakah supports SME Ideal Partner with customised financial services

Oman's leading SME development company, Sharakah, has recently announced a collaboration with IT solutions company Ideal Partner to offer services including bill discounting solutions and term loan series through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

The MoU, signed by Reem al Ghadani, founder of Ideal Partner, and Ali Ahmed Muqabbal, CEO of Sharakah, establishes a comprehensive framework for collaboration, covering a wide range of crucial areas.

Ideal Partner, located in Al Khuwair, offers a range of IT services including data center solutions, physical security, IT solutions, control/automation systems, managed services, and airport systems.

Reem al Ghadani expressed 'profound gratitude' to Sharakah for their 'invaluable support' in the collaboration.

"Ideal Partner is dedicated to offering cutting-edge IT services and solutions. We specialise in



designing and developing energy-efficient mission-critical datacenters, comprehensive ICT infrastructure projects, and integrating commercial and residential audio and video systems," she noted, while giving the background of her company.

"Our expertise extends to designing control and automation systems, security systems, and

offering 24/7 monitoring, support, and helpdesk services through our managed services. Additionally, we are skilled in the installation and maintenance of Visual Docking Guidance Systems for airports. This collaboration with Sharakah marks a significant milestone in our journey, enabling us to extend our reach and enhance our capabilities

ties to better serve our clients," she added.

Commenting on the collaboration Sharakah CEO said, "Our collaboration with Ideal Partner represents a significant opportunity for Sharakah to support their business and contribute to the realisation of their future strategies and plans. Through our partnership programmes designed to support small and medium enterprises, we aim to provide valuable resources and support that will benefit their growth and success."

Ali Muqabbal asserted that Sharakah is committed to nurturing entrepreneurial talent and fostering the growth of SMEs in Oman.

"Our comprehensive schemes are tailored to meet the diverse needs of these businesses, helping them to thrive in today's competitive environment and sustainably grow in sectors like renewable energy, In-Country Value projects, and communication technologies."



North Batinah Governor visits Suhar Industrial City

Mohammed bin Suleiman al Kindi, Governor of North Batinah, led a delegation of various governmental bodies in North Batinah governorate, on a visit to Suhar Industrial City to get familiarised with the investment climate and the investing projects.

Received by Abdullah bin Ahmed al Mayasi, Director General of Suhar Industrial City, the delegation was briefed on recent statistics of the industrial city.

In 2023, Suhar Industrial City received 55 investment applications, among which 45 projects got localised across

461,399sqm. Mayasi also highlighted achievements at Ladayn project in Suhar Industrial City, where five agreements were signed in 2023 totalling around RO22mn for seven projects spanning 80,000sqm, and initially involving a workforce of approximately 200 employees.

Mayasi added that Madayn has made notable progress in the Phase 7 development project at Suhar Industrial City, currently standing at a 98.6% completion rate.

"The project includes a 32-km road network, water network and

sewerage network. This is in addition to a treatment plant with a capacity of 2,000 cubic metres, rainwater drainage network, dyke for protection against floods, an irrigation network and two water supply tanks with a total capacity of 2,700 cubic metres," he elaborated.

The visit also included a field tour of Suhar Industrial City, which covered Masar Service Centre that presents an integrated platform to facilitate procedures for investors to obtain required approvals, permits and licenses for their projects.

Germany passes new citizenship law

The legislation is to ease the rules on gaining citizenship and end a ban on holding dual citizenship

Berlin, Germany - German lawmakers have approved legislation to ease the rules on gaining citizenship and end a ban on holding dual citizenship.

Some 382 lawmakers - mostly from Chancellor Olaf Scholz's left-liberal coalition government - voted in favour of the draft law, while 234 conservative and far-right lawmakers voted against it. Twenty-three lawmakers abstained.

With the new law, immigrants will have a right to German citizenship after five years of residence in the country, instead of the current eight years.

For immigrants who have shown outstanding academic or professional achievements, and have good language skills, this period will be reduced to three years.

The new citizenship law will also allow immigrants to hold dual citizenship or multiple nationality, which was not possible till now, for many of those coming from outside the European Union.

Germany's Interior Minister Nancy Faeser has welcomed the vote, saying that it was an important reform step, as part of the government's efforts to modernise the laws on immigration.

"We are creating a modern immigration legislation that will meet the requirements of our diverse society. It was high time



The new citizenship law will also allow immigrants to hold dual citizenship or multiple nationality, which was not possible till now, for many of those coming from outside the European Union (Anadolu Agency)

to do this," the Social Democrat politician said.

She also criticised far-right politicians for distorting public debates about migration, carrying out a racist propaganda against immigrants for many years.

"These debates have taken place on the backs of people who have lived and worked in Germany for many years, but have never been allowed to fully belong here. Our reform shows them: You belong to Germany!" Faeser said.

She also underlined that reforming the citizenship law will help Germany in addressing the skilled workers' shortage, attracting qualified specialists and professionals from abroad.

"We are in the middle of a global competition for the best

brains. We urgently need skilled workers in many areas of our economy. We will only attract the best minds if they can become a full part of our society in the foreseeable future, with all their democratic rights," Faeser said.

Currently around 12mn people in Germany - around 14 per cent of the total population - do not possess German citizenship. Around 5.3mn of them have been living in the country for at least 10 years, according to official figures.

Many of them had been reluctant to apply for German citizenship in the past due to tedious bureaucratic procedures, strict regulations and restrictions on holding dual citizenship.

Anadolu Agency

ICE, ICE... BABY



People walk on a road covered with snow in northern England, Britain, on Friday (Xinhua)

'Russia could attack a NATO country within 5-8 years'

Berlin, Germany - German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius on Friday warned that Russian President Vladimir Putin could attack a NATO country 'within 5-8 years'.

"We hear threats from the Kremlin almost every day ... so we have to take into account that Vladimir Putin might even attack a NATO country one day," Pistorius said in an inter-



Boris Pistorius

view with the Berlin-based Der Tagesspiegel newspaper.

While a Russian attack is not likely 'for now', the minister added: "Our experts expect a period of five to eight years in which this could be possible."

The remarks from Pistorius coincide with warnings by Sweden's Minister for Civil Defence Carl-Oskar Bohlin, who said that "war could come to Sweden."

Pistorius told Der Tagesspiegel that the Swedish warnings were 'understandable from a Scandinavian perspective', adding that Sweden faced 'an even more serious situation', given its proximity to Russia.

Sweden is also not yet a member of the NATO alliance, pending approval from Türkiye and Hungary.

Anadolu Agency

Chinese foreign minister strengthens economic ties with Brazil during visit

Bogota, Colombia - Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira said he met his Chinese counterpart in Brazil on Friday where they engaged in talks to bolster economic cooperation.

The meeting with Wang Yi took place at the Itamaraty Palace in the capital, Brasilia, where both ministers sealed agreements in the crucial sectors of trade and tourism.

Following the one-on-one and delegation discussions, Vieira addressed reporters and highlighted the anticipated positive effects of the newly-linked deals.

The talks delved into global geopolitical concerns, with Vieira revealing that the ministers engaged in discussions on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the Israeli war against the Gaza Strip.

The talks aimed to explore potential contributions from China and Brazil to a resolution to the international challenges, he said.

Reflecting on the comprehensive review of China-Brazil relations, Vieira underscored Brazil's historical adherence to the one-China principle.

"We have reiterated Brazil's unequivocal commitment to the one-China principle. We have also discussed in detail what else can be done between the two countries," he said.

Wang echoed the sentiment



The meeting took place at the Itamaraty Palace in the capital, Brasilia

We have reiterated Brazil's unequivocal commitment to the one-China principle. We have also discussed what else can be done between the two countries

MAURO VIEIRA

and acknowledged the existing 'strong' economic ties between China and Brazil and the shared commitment to strengthening relations through the visit.

He expressed a desire to elevate the global strategic partnership between China and Brazil to new heights. "Brazil and China are aware of their responsibilities and are committed to contributing to the unity of developing countries, peace, and the development of the world," he said.

The Chinese minister indicated his country's intention to contribute constructively to world trade, peace and stability in the context of a multipolar world.

Wang also emphasised the maturity and resilience of Brazil-China relations, highlighting the intention to deepen collaboration in critical sectors such as agriculture, mining and infrastructure.

Anadolu Agency

Conflict, drought displaced more than 3.4m people in Ethiopia: UN migration agency

Mogadishu, Somalia - More than 3.4mn people have been displaced in Ethiopia because of conflicts and drought, the UN migration agency said on Friday.

The International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Ethiopia's National Displacement report said on Friday that 64 per cent of these people were displaced by conflict and 17 per cent were forced to leave their

homes by the ongoing drought while social tension affected nine per cent. "Somali region hosts the highest number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) primarily due to drought, while Tigray region hosts the highest number of IDPs primarily displaced due to conflict," IOM said.

An estimated 2.5mn returning internally displaced persons were identified in over 2,000 vil-



lages across 11 regions in the Horn of Africa nation, according to a village assessment survey (VAS) that was carried out between August and September 2023.

"The highest returning IDP caseloads nationwide were in the regions of Tigray (59 per cent), Amhara (15 per cent), and Afar (eight per cent)," the report said. The report noted that the

Amhara region was 'largely uncovered' due to 'increased insecurity'.

Earlier this month, Ethiopia's Disaster Risk Management Commission warned that nearly 4mn people who mostly live in the drought-stricken states require urgent food assistance.

The worst affected regions by the ongoing drought include Afar, Amhara, Tigray and Oro-

mia, and southern and southwestern parts of the country.

The warning came as the war-stricken region of Tigray is witnessing one of the worst humanitarian crises in the country in decades.

More than 860 people have died in Tigray since September due to hunger, according to the Tigray communication bureau.

Anadolu Agency

UK Royal Navy's 2 ships based in Bahrain collide

Ankara, Turkey - Two of the UK Royal Navy's ships based in Bahrain collided on Saturday, according to an official statement.

Royal Navy's elite mine-hunters, HMS Chiddingfold and HMS Bangor, were involved in an accident when Chiddingfold rammed into the docked Bangor.

In a statement, Rear Adm. Edward Ahlgren said: "I am aware of a recent incident that took place between two minehunters in Bahrain Harbour."

"First of all I would like to stress that thankfully nobody was hurt in the collision, but some damage was sustained," Ahlgren said.

The officer stressed that 'a full and thorough investigation is already underway and any changes in procedure that could prevent further incidents will be rapidly implemented'.

"In the meantime, the UK will continue to play a key part in ensuring the safety of merchant shipping in the region," Ahlgren added.

The cause of the accident is still unknown, according to the statement.

The two vessels are in the Gulf as part of Operation Kipion, the UK's long-term air and maritime presence in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

Anadolu Agency

Israel continues offensives in Gaza, kills 165 in last 24 hours

Gaza City, Palestine - At least 165 Palestinians have been killed and 280 injured in the last 24 hours, and people are still trapped under rubble as Israeli forces continue their assault on the besieged Gaza Strip, the territory's Health Ministry said on Saturday.

"The Israeli occupation committed 14 massacres against families in the Gaza Strip, leaving 165 martyrs and 280 injured during the past 24 hours," the ministry said in a statement.

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

Israeli forces blew up multiple homes in the town of Al-Qarara, northeast of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, killing several people and injuring others, the Palestinian news agency Wafa reported on Saturday.

A Palestinian was also killed after being directly targeted by a reconnaissance plane in Khan Younis, the news agency said, citing medical sources.

Moreover, Israeli warplanes launched intense airstrikes targeting the areas of Bani Suhaila, Al-Zana, Abasan, and Batn Al-Sameen, east and south of Khan Younis.

Israeli fighter jets also shelled, with many missiles, the town of Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip.

Israeli warplanes also launched intense airstrikes on Bani Suhaila, Al-Zana, Abasan, and Batn Al-Sameen in the east and south of Khan Younis.



The Israeli occupation committed 14 massacres against families in the Gaza Strip, leaving 165 martyrs and 280 injured during the past 24 hours

PALESTINIAN HEALTH MINISTRY

Fighter jets also shelled Jabalia, a town in northern Gaza, with numerous missiles.

With the latest Palestinian casualties, the death toll from Israel's ongoing attacks on Gaza since October 7 has risen

to 24,927, with 62,388 others injured, the ministry said.

Israel has pounded the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack by Hamas on October 7, which Tel Aviv says killed nearly 1,200 people.

According to the UN, around 85 per cent of Gazans have been displaced by the Israeli onslaught, while all of them are food insecure. Hundreds of thousands of people are living without shelter, and less than half of aid trucks are entering the territory than before the start of the conflict.

Internet services return to Gaza

Telecommunications and internet services gradually returned to Gaza on Friday evening after

an 8-day communications blackout for the besieged enclave from the outside world.

In a statement, Paltel Group, the provider of communications services in the Gaza Strip, announced that its technical teams had been working over the past days to repair the damage to the internal network infrastructure 'caused by the continued aggression on the Strip'.

It said that two of its staff were killed on Saturday while trying to fix the telecommunica-

tions network by an Israeli artillery shell, bringing the toll among its staff killed in the course of the Israeli onslaught against Gaza to 14.

Communication and internet services were disrupted on January 12 in most parts of the Gaza Strip, marking the ninth outage since October 7. Paltel is the largest provider of cellular and internet communication services in the Gaza Strip and the exclusive provider of fixed communication services.

Anadolu Agency

Access denials by Israel prevent deliveries: UN

Washington, US - The access denials by the Israeli military are preventing the humanitarian deliveries into the Gaza Strip, a UN spokesman said on Friday.

"Our humanitarian colleagues are reporting that Israeli restrictions on the import of critical equipment, including communications devices, are severely compromising safe and effective aid operations anywhere in Gaza," Stephane Dujarric told reporters.

"In the north, we and our partners are trying to increase humanitarian deliveries, but access denials by the Israeli military are preventing a scale-up," he said.

Seven of 29 planned missions during the first two weeks of January could be fully or partially carried out, he added.

Turning to the availability of water for drinking and domestic use in Gaza, Dujarric said it is



'shrinking' each day.

"The World Health Organization (WHO) is already reporting 152,000 cases of diarrhoea, more than half among children

under the age of five, and the inability to do water chlorination to kill bacteria is aggravating the already concerning situation," he added.

"Lack of toilets and sanitation services have forced people to resort to open air defecation, increasing concerns over disease outbreaks.

"Disrupted routine vaccination activities, as well as lack of medicines for treating communicable diseases, is further raising the risk of diseases spread," he added.

Regarding a meeting between senior Russian diplomat and a Hamas representative in the capital Moscow, Dujarric said the UN supports discussions that would lead to immediate humanitarian cease-fire, and unconditional release of hostages. "We're not involved in these discussions, but we understand that there are diplomatic discussions going on in different places...There needs to be discussion between interested parties.

"We just hope that whatever discussions are being held, lead to a positive outcome for the people of Gaza and for the people of Israel," he added.

Anadolu Agency



US carries out strikes on Houthi anti-ship missile launchers

Washington, US - The US carried out a new wave of airstrikes targeting Houthi anti-ship ballistic missile launchers on Friday.

The 'three successful self-defence strikes' targeted Houthi ballistic missile launchers that were 'ready to launch attacks', National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby told reporters at the White House.

"These actions were, I want to stress again, done in self-defence, but it also helps make safer international waters for both naval vessels as well as merchant shipping," he said.

The attack marks the sixth wave of strikes against Houthi targets since the US and UK began carrying them out January 12. The western attacks have been carried out near daily since.

US President Joe Biden acknowledged on Thursday that they are not deterring the Houthis from conducting

further attacks, but said the US would continue to carry them out.

The Houthis said their attacks aim to pressure Israel to halt its deadly war on the Gaza Strip.

Asked why the US should continue its strikes given that the president acknowledged they are not stopping the Houthis, Kirby said on Thursday that 'with each and every one of these strikes, we are taking away capability from the Houthis. With each and every one of these strikes, we are making it harder for them to continue to propagate these attacks'.

The Red Sea is one of the world's most frequently used sea routes for oil and fuel shipments. It is used to transit between Egypt's Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aden, allowing ships to avoid the much costlier and longer route across the southern coast of Africa.

Anadolu Agency

Relisting of Houthis as terrorists is political: Ex US-ambassador

Washington, US - A former US ambassador and expert on the Middle East downplayed Washington's recent move to relist Yemen's Houthis as a specially designated global terrorist group, saying it is 'mostly symbolic' and its impact 'will not be very significant'.

"My personal view is that it's largely political," Gary Grappo, who served as US ambassador to Oman from 2006-2009 and at the State Department's Bureau of Near East Affairs, told Anadolu.

"They had been designated as a terrorist organisation during the Trump administration. And when Biden came into office, he



lifted that designation primarily because with it in place, the ability to deliver humanitarian goods is severely limited," he said.

"And at the time, there was an urgent need - in fact, there

still remains an urgent need - for humanitarian goods, food, medicine and other items to be delivered," he added.

Without the sanctions, it was far easier for both the US and

other international organisations, including the UN, to deliver humanitarian goods, he noted.

"But I think now the tenor of the conflict has reached a point where the administration really feels compelled to redesignate them as a terrorist organisation," he said.

The US on Wednesday announced the reclassification of the Houthis as a 'terrorist organisation' in a move that reverses a decision in 2021 to remove them from the US Specially Designated Global Terrorist List (SDGT).

Tensions have escalated in the Red Sea amid Houthi attacks

on commercial ships suspected of having links with Israel.

The Houthis say their attacks aim to pressure Israel to halt its deadly onslaught on the Gaza Strip.

The US and UK launched airstrikes against Houthi targets in Yemen in recent days in retaliation for the attacks, which have created fears of a new bout of inflation and supply chain disruption. The Red Sea is one of the world's most frequently used sea routes for oil and fuel shipments.

"I don't see where this is going to be that impactful against the Houthis," Grappo said.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA



Union Home Minister Amit Shah

India will get rid of Naxalism in three years: Shah

Sonitpur, Assam - Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Saturday that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country will be cent per cent free of the problem of Naxalism in the next three years. "I believe that in the next three years under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, the country will completely get rid of the problem of Naxalism," Shah said while speaking at the 60th Raising Day of Sashatra Seema Bal (SSB) in Assam's Tezpur on Saturday. Lauding the bravery of the SSB in fighting against Naxalism, Amit Shah said that along with the CRPF and the BSF, the SSB has brought the Naxal movement to an edge. "Along with protecting the border of friendly countries of Nepal and Bhutan, the SSB has fought against Naxalites in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Bihar. I have heard of your bravery whenever I have gone on review of Naxal operations in these areas," Shah said. Speaking on the role of the

SSB in eliminating terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, the Union Home Minister said: "In Jammu and Kashmir, the SSB has laid down their lives while fighting together with the CRPF, BSF, Jammu and Kashmir Police and the Indian Army against terrorists." Amit Shah said that the government has released a postal stamp to mark the occasion of the 60th Raising Day of SSB. "Today on the occasion of the 60th Raising Day of Sashatra Seema Bal, the Government of India also released a postal stamp. It will keep the SSB's devotion to duty alive in front of the people of the country forever." Shah said that the central government has taken several steps for the welfare of all the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) including the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and other organisations. The Union Home Minister attended the event along with Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. ANI

'Indian accused of plot to murder Pannun can be extradited to US'

Prague, Czech Republic - A Czech court has ruled that Prague can extradite to the United States, the 52-year-old Indian man, Nikhil Gupta, who is accused by the United States of involvement in the alleged attempt to kill Sikh separatist leader Gurbhag Singh Pannun, Czech-based media outlet Seznam Zpravy reported, citing judicial database Infosoud. However, the extradition of Gupta, still requires the approval of Czech Justice Minister Pavel Blazek, the publication reported. Gupta was detained in Prague in June last year on the basis of a bilateral US-Czech extradition treaty. According to the Czech news website, Gupta is now in Prague's Pankrac prison. The Prague High Court upheld the ruling made by the first-instance court during a closed hearing this week. Referring to Pannun, Gupta's lawyer, Petr Slepicka in his argument at the Prague High Court stated: "In the opinion of the Indian government, he threatens the security of the Republic of India and is a comparable threat to it as Osama bin Laden is to the USA," reported Seznam Zpravy. Gupta has argued in his claims that the case pertaining to Pannun plot has a political or military background. However, the judge rejected the defence argument that it was a political case. A spokesperson for the Ministry of Justice, Vladimir Sepka, stated that it is unclear how long the decision-making process for Gupta's extradition will take. "The time frame of the min-



Nikhil Gupta was detained in Prague in June last year on the basis of a bilateral US-Czech extradition treaty

ister's decision cannot be predicted now," said Repka, according to Seznam Zpravy. Meanwhile, Gupta's lawyer, Petr Slepicka, said that they will still file a complaint with the Constitutional Court. "We will file a constitutional complaint and at the same time we will ask the Minister of Justice not to extradite my client to the USA," the lawyer stated. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court of India on January 4 had declined a petition filed on behalf of Gupta for consular access, legal aid and ongoing extradition proceedings in the Czech Republic. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta termed it a 'sensitive' matter and said it was for the Central government to take a call if it wants to intervene on the issue. The bench said it should respect the jurisdiction of the foreign court where the matter is pending. "There is nothing much we can do. This is an international matter, and all aspects are covered under the Vienna Convention. If consular access is not granted, authorities can be approached directly. However, as per your own list of dates, consular access was given to you twice," the bench told C Aryama Sundaram, representing the kin of Gupta. Gurbhag Singh Pannun is

an India-designated terrorist who holds American and Canadian citizenship. As per the US Justice Department indictment, Indian national Nikhil Gupta is currently in custody and has been charged with murder-for-hire, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. Czech authorities had arrested and detained Gupta on June 30, pursuant to the bilateral extradition treaty between the United States and the Czech Republic. The US Justice Department had claimed that an Indian government employee, who was not identified in the indictment filed in a federal court in Manhattan, had recruited Indian national Nikhil Gupta to hire a hitman to allegedly carry out assassination of Pannun, which was foiled by US authorities. The US Justice Department claimed that Gupta, is an associate of CC-1 (an unidentified person who directed the alleged plot), and has described his involvement in international narcotics and weapons trafficking in his communications with CC-1. ANI

We will file a constitutional complaint and at the same time we will ask the Minister of Justice not to extradite my client to the USA

PETR SLEPICKA

No flights at Delhi airport from 10.20am to 12.45pm till January 26

New Delhi - In view of Republic Day celebrations, no flights will arrive or depart from Delhi Airport between 10:20am and 12:45pm from January 19 to January 26, according to an official statement from Delhi International Airport Limited. As the country is gearing up for the 75th Republic Day, the Delhi Police on Friday prohibited flying of sub-conventional aerial platforms, including paragliders, paramotors, hang gliders, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) in the national capital.

The prohibition has been implemented for 29 days - from January 18 to February 15- unless withdrawn earlier. "It has been reported that certain criminal or anti-social elements or terrorists inimical to India may pose a threat to the safety of the general public, dignitaries, and vital installations by the use of sub-conventional aerial platforms like para-gliders, para-motors, hang gliders, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), unmanned aircraft systems (UASs), micro-light aircraft, remotely piloted aircraft,



Security personnel stand guard at Kartavya Path on a cold and foggy morning in New Delhi on Friday (ANI)

hot air balloons, small-size powered aircraft, quadcopters or even by para-jumping from aircraft etc," the Delhi Police said in a statement. "Now, therefore, in pursuance of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India, New Delhi's O.M. No. VI-23014/209/Delhi/2018-VS dated 10.05.2019, I, Sanjay Arora, Commissioner of Police, Delhi in the exercise of the power conferred upon me by section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 read with Govt. of India, Ministry of Home

Affairs, New Delhi's Notification No. U-11036/3/1978 (i) UTL, dated 01.07.1978, do hereby prohibit flying of sub-conventional aerial platforms like paragliders, para-motors, hang gliders, UAVs, UASs, microflight aircraft, remotely piloted aircraft, hot air balloons, small size powered aircraft, quadcopters or para jumping from aircraft etc. and their online sale over the jurisdiction of the National Capital Territory of Delhi on the occasion of Republic Day Function-2024." ANI

'Over 350,000 people urgently need assistance in Congo'

Geneva, Switzerland - The UN on Friday said that more than 350,000 people in the Republic of Congo need urgent humanitarian assistance due to extreme rainfall in recent weeks. Calling the flood disaster in the country 'unprecedented in scale for six decades', Jens Laerke, spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), told a briefing in Geneva that nine out of the country's 12 departments remain under water some three weeks after an emergency was declared on December 29 and a total of 1.8mn people are affected. "More than 350,000 people urgently need humanitarian assistance, but access is a challenge because of the floods and many villages can only be reached by boat or canoe,"



Laerke said. He stressed that the floods have left local communities without shelter or access to primary health services, adding

that there is 'limited or no access' to clean drinking water or sanitation in the worst-affected areas. Some 27,000 children are out

of school, he stated. Warning that the floods could also have longer-term consequences, he said: "Our initial assessments estimate that 2,300

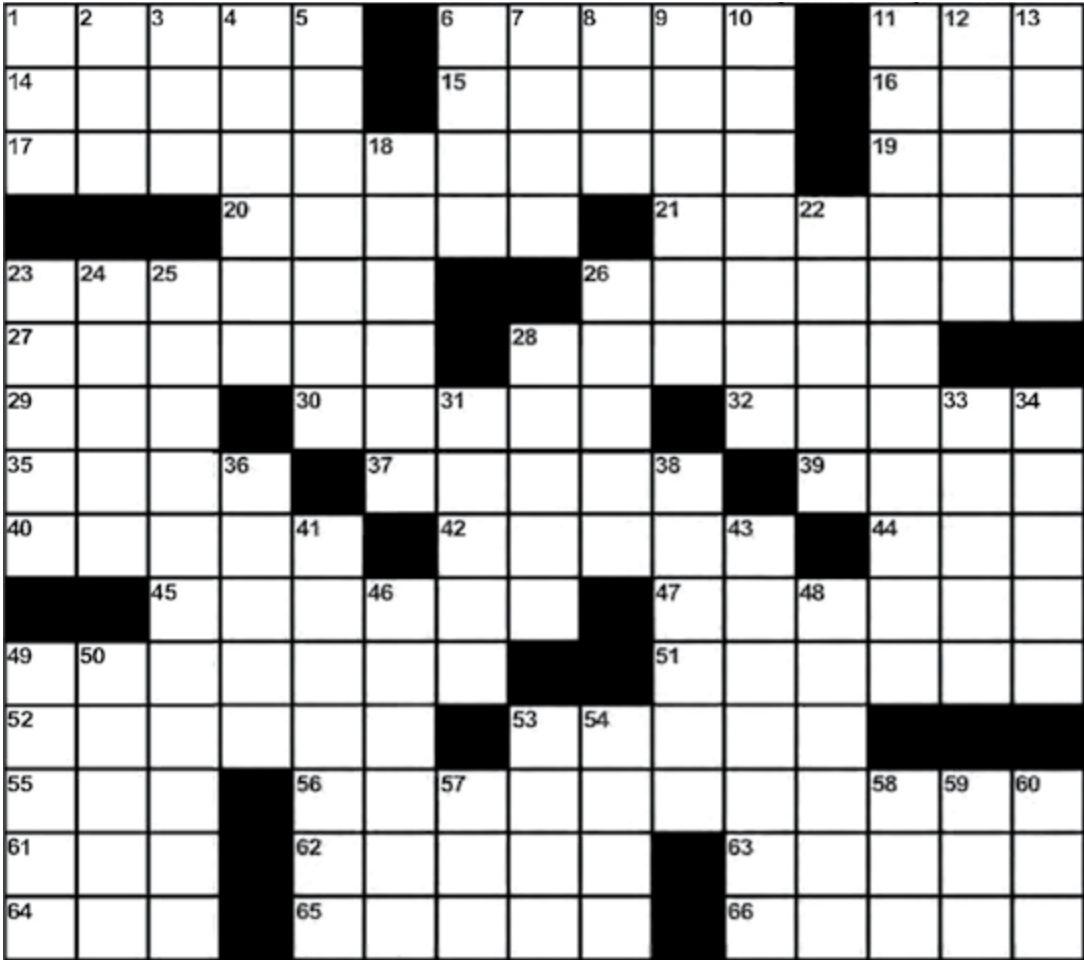
hectares of cultivated land have been flooded, which raise concern that means to produce food, for example fruit trees and fishing gear, has been destroyed and livestock has perished." Laerke said that for immediate response, the UN agencies and the Republic of Congo government gathered a total budget of US\$26mn, prioritising shelter, food security, nutrition, health, and water, sanitation and hygiene. "To support the initial response, an allocation of US\$3.6mn from the Central Emergency Response Fund has been made to address the most pressing needs of 270,000 people," Laerke said. "However, to implement the response, more international funding will be needed." Anadolu Agency

UN 'concerned' about North Korea underwater nukes test

Washington DC, US - The UN is 'very concerned' about North Korea's test of its underwater nuclear weapons system in response to this week's joint military drills by South Korea, the US and Japan, a UN spokesman said on Friday. "We have seen this development and we remain concerned and very concerned about the current situation on the Korean Peninsula," Stephane Dujarric told reporters. His remarks came after North Korea's defence ministry said it carried out 'an important test of its underwater nuclear weapon system 'Haeil-5-23' under development' in the East Sea. "The Secretary-General

(Antonio Guterres) reiterates his call for de-escalation, the full implementation of Security Council resolutions and for the creation of environment that is conducive to dialogue and the resumption of diplomatic talks which are frankly the only possible path forward," Dujarric said. The trilateral maritime exercise by Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo included the US nuclear carrier USS Carl Vinson and the Aegis-guided missile cruiser USS Princeton. Pyongyang said the joint drill 'constituted a cause of further destabilising the regional situation, and they are an act of seriously threatening the security' of North Korea. Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Heirloom location, often
6) Crude dwelling place
11) Tool in a bucket
14) A Marx brother
15) City on the Red River
16) Fury
17) Film: "Road ..."
19) It's spotted in casinos
20) Mars' two
21) More suggestive
23) Give the go-ahead
26) Is a middleman
29) A long way from festive
30) Brief scouting mission?
32) Bundle-of-joy deliverer of legend
35) Jet fighter heroes
37) Chopper blade
39) Admire from_
40) Kind of Boy Scout badge
42) Skirts that leave little to the imagination
44) What's due in Venice?
45) Kid's charity associated with

- Halloween
47) Female fowl that's less showy than the male
49) Beach changing places
51) Like some horrid weather
52) Spheres of influence
53) Small shovel
55) Seven on a sundial
56) Famous walkway: ... road
61) Uncanny trio?
62) Mountain climber's accessory
63) Bar, at the bar
64) "Stupid me!"
65) Broke off
66) It's certain along with taxes, it's said

DOWN

- 1) Take steps
2) Despite the fact that, briefly
3) Money left on a table, often
4) Deliverers of cold blocks, once
5) Dead reckoner?
6) Leg bone
7) Lids
8) "Wheel of Fortune" gimme?

- 9) Tailgater's container
10) Response to a stimulus
11) Position to take: ... road
12) Projecting window type
13) Social equals
18) "I" finisher
22) _-courtin' (dated, country-style)
23) Indian state
24) "The final frontier"
25) Trash: road ...
26) Like a rambling sentence
28) Recurring theme
31) "Here_ trouble!"
33) Having less training
34) Danish currency
36) Exodus mountain
38) Lumber mill noisemaker
41) Old type of photo
43) Cultivation place
46)_ point (example)
48) Having distaste
49) Went spelunking
50) Type of acid
53)_ gin fizz
54) Duck's home
57) Inc., in the U.K.
58) "Let's call_ day"
59) Bunk
60) Australian road sign abbr.

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

There could be a lot of inefficiency in your group today. Everybody is following their own whims and losing focus on what would be best for everyone. You see this, so you have an obligation to help others see it too. Step up and take control. Point people in the right direction, give them an objective, and delegate responsibilities. Being a leader is something you are quite skilled at, even though it isn't always your favorite thing. But being the grownup is necessary sometimes.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You might think that negative comments or power plays by other people have nothing to do with you, but their drama has been hanging you back whether you realize it or not. It could be a case of guilt by association, so take a good long look at who you're hanging out with right now. Are they acting in a way that makes you proud or makes you cringe? If you feel the need to get some distance, do it sooner rather than later. Stand on your own and protect your reputation.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Nothing will be more fun for you today than interacting with strangers! You are going to be giving off some powerfully flirtatious energy, and people won't be able to resist chatting you up and getting to know you. They'll make sure that you always have a smile on your face. So don't be surprised if someone makes eye contact that lingers just a bit longer than it needs to. They're hooked! If you are single, this could be a life-changing day for you.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Professor Sprout is a character in which series of books?

- A. Winnie the Pooh
B. Harry Potter
C. The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo
D. Pippi Longstocking

02. The letters "G I", when applied to dietary matters, stand for what?

- A. Glucose Intolerant
B. Glycemic Index
C. Genetically Imbalanced
D. Grossly ignorant

03. Of the 29 letters in the Turkish alphabet, how many are vowels?

- A. 5
B. 8
C. 6
D. 7

Answers: 1.B 2.B 3.B



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

What used to seem like an outrageous idea to you will suddenly seem rather reasonable today. You're evolving your position on various issues and surprising some of the people who have known you for years. You can expect someone to question you about it, but you'll have all the answers you need at your fingertips. You can defend your positions so easily because you've thought so much about it. Being the odd one out in a crowd of like-minded thinkers will feel good.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

The cast of characters in your life could start to change significantly today, and your regular way of doing things will have to be different in order to accommodate all of these new faces and energies. While for some people this could create some feelings of resentment, you're going to enjoy the unpredictability of the day. You can easily embrace what's going on and see that after the initial turmoil is over, things are only going to get even better.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your analytical skills are sharp right now, so using them to make choices about the health of your finances is smart. But don't go trying to use them on your personal relationships! People are not bank accounts, and they don't have expected rates of return. Talk to your friends and ask them what they need from you. That's the best way to make sure that you are doing your part to keep the relationship thriving. Think with your heart and be honest about what you feel too.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You should share your open-mindedness and new point of view with someone who thinks the way you thought, in the past. Spread the enlightenment around. At first they might think you are being a know it all and talking down to them, but keep at it. Soon enough, they will see that you have their best interests at heart. They are smart enough to get it eventually, so don't give up hope that they will come around to your way of thinking. Just keep talking and making suggestions.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You have had a strong curiosity for things that are outside of your own experience, but today that curiosity is driving you to distraction! You need to get involved in something from a different culture today. Watch a foreign sports event, listen to some ethnic music, or dine out at a restaurant that makes you feel like you're in a different country. Feed yourself figuratively and literally on the expressions, ideas, and food of other cultures and you'll be extremely satisfied.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Today, your patience might be tested when one or more of your projects gets put on hold by someone, either because they have power over you or because they've flaked out on their part of things. As much as you might want to get angry, you need to take a philosophical view of things. This pause in the action was meant to happen for a reason, possibly to give you time to double-check the work you've done so far. Put your energy in that instead of getting mad at someone.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

When you can learn to be flexible with an obstinate person, you can learn to do just about anything! A touchy and stubborn person will cross your path today, and they will tell you that it's their way or the highway despite the fact that the ideas you have (that they don't want to hear) will make their life easier. Never mind. Laugh it off and do what they say. Go along to get along, and be amused by the fact that they are so short-sighted. Do not follow their example.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Someone who you don't usually see eye to eye with has important things to teach you whether you like it or not. You need to give them some time and try really hard to respect their right to speak even if you hate what they are saying! This will set the tone for an honest dialogue, and you'll be the one to get all the credit in the end when the two of you start improving your communication skills and relationship. Harmony is easy to achieve when you think the best of someone.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

There can be real value in your daydreams, so feel free to let your mind wander all over the place today. Having fantasies during your waking hours provides a great practice round for whatever new plans you want to pursue. So explore a new path today. Shoot for new heights and visualize how things would go if you ran the world, were a rock star, or just managed to get a promotion at work. Imagining it to be so is the first step in making it so.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

C	V	E	T
R	G	O	R
K	S	A	E
O	G	A	H

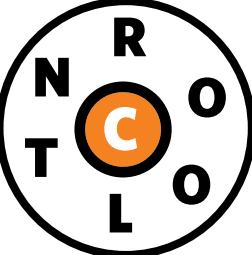
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. 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

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

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

POLEAXED

Top seed Swiatek stunned by Czech teenager Noslkova in Australian Open

Melbourne, Australia - Top seed Iga Swiatek tumbled out of the Australian Open on Saturday, losing 3-6 6-3 6-4 to Czech teenager Linda Noslkova in the third round as her bid for a maiden title at Melbourne Park and fifth Grand Slam trophy fell apart.

The Pole, more accustomed to breezing past opponents with the odd "bagel" thrown in, had struggled in Melbourne, enduring a first-set tiebreak in her opener against Sofia Kenin before fighting back from the brink to oust Danielle Collins.

Things were looking up for her after a strong opening set but Noslkova dug deep to become the first teenager to defeat the top-ranked player at the Australian Open since Amelie Mauresmo toppled Lindsay Davenport in 1999.

"I'm speechless, I knew it was going to be an amazing match with the world number one and such a player, but I didn't really think it would end up like this," said Noslkova.

The emotional 19-year-old crouched to the floor and put her hands over her face when the big moment came and buried her head in her towel later and cried.

"I'm just really glad to get through this round," she added.

Noslkova had emerged as a tricky third-round opponent for Swiatek with three top-10 wins under her belt, but the Pole had



Linda Noslkova

I knew it was going to be an amazing match with the world number one

LINDA NOSLKOVA

looked in no mood to be dragged into another fight as she broke in the sixth game and held to love in the next to take charge.

The 22-year-old Swiatek barely let the intensity drop after taking the opening set as she forced the Melbourne Park debutant into some uncomfortable

positions in the second by working the angles and launching big forehands.

But Noslkova held firm, responding with explosive hitting of her own and breaking en route to levelling up the contest.

"I felt like I had everything under control until she broke me in the second set," Swiatek said. "I had couple of chances to break her in second set and I didn't use them. That's a shame.

"She was proactive. I wanted to do that later in the next games. Sometimes I was rushing it. I wasn't playing with my intuition and naturally. I guess I'll have to work on stuff to feel more comfortable next year."



Top seed Iga Swiatek failed to get going against Czech teenager Linda Noslkova

Alcaraz and Medvedev march into fourth round

Melbourne, Australia - The main contenders for the men's title have all breezed into the fourth round of the Australian Open, with Carlos Alcaraz, Daniil Medvedev and Alexander Zverev joining the charge on Saturday.

Alcaraz reached the fourth round for the first time when Chinese teenager Shang Junchen pulled up injured while trailing in their uneven contest 6-1 6-11-0.

The second seed still had time to show off the skills that have al-

ready won him two Grand Slam titles and gave himself a decent rating out of 10.

"I'm feeling great. Probably seven, eight," said the 20-year-old. "It's a high score, but that's how I feel. Every match that I'm playing, I'm feeling better and better."

Daniil Medvedev, who had needed five sets to beat Emil Ruusuvuori in a second-round match that concluded in the early hours of Friday morning, made short work of Felix Auger-



Carlos Alcaraz

Aliassime with a 6-3 6-4 6-3 victory.

"Physically today was very tough," said the third seed, twice a losing finalist in Melbourne.

"I want to try to go again to the final, try to have my chance of winning another Grand Slam. Just want to show good tennis, beat good guys, and hopefully get one more title."

Sixth seeded German Zverev also went through in straight sets after a 6-2 7-6(4) 6-2 win over American Alex Michelsen.



Novak Djokovic



Arthur Cazaux

'The only important thing is to give everything on court'

Melbourne Australia - French wildcard Arthur Cazaux reached the fourth round of the Australian Open on Saturday and warned his future opponents that whatever else happens in their matches, they will know they have been in a fight.

The 21-year-old, ranked 122nd in the world coming into the tournament, rode his powerful serve to a 6-3 6-3 6-1 thrashing of Tallon Griekspoor in the third round, adding the Dutchman to a list of victims already featuring Laslo Djere and Holger Rune.

It is Cazaux's debut at Melbourne Park - he was not ranked

high enough to get into qualifying last year - and he became the first wildcard since Denis Istomin in 2017 to get into the second week.

Having played the likes of Rune, Carlos Alcaraz, Jannik Sinner and Arthur Fils as a junior, Cazaux said he does not feel any pressure on court.

"I'm ready to fight everyone. I'm ready to fight in every match," he said.

"I'm here to give everything on court. Sometimes I play bad, sometimes I play good. It doesn't matter. The only important thing is to give everything on court."

Tata Group bags five-year IPL sponsorship rights for \$300m

Mumbai, India - The Tata Group has extended its title sponsorship of the IPL for another five years, from 2024 to 2028, for INR 2500 crore (US\$301 million approx.), making it the "highest-ever sponsorship amount in the history of the league," a BCCI statement said. The group were the IPL title sponsors in 2022 and 2023, and are also the title sponsors of the Women's Premier League (WPL).

"The collaboration with TATA Group for the title sponsorship of IPL 2024-28 is a significant milestone in IPL's journey," IPL chairman Arun Singh Dhumal said. "The record-breaking sum of INR 2500 crore by TATA Group is a testament to the immense value and appeal that the IPL holds in the world of sports.

"This unprecedented amount not only sets a new benchmark in the history of the league but also reaffirms the IPL's position as a premier sporting event with global impact. TATA Group's commit-



ment to cricket and sports is truly commendable, and we look forward to scaling new heights together and providing fans with unparalleled cricketing entertainment."

The Tata Group had replaced Vivo as IPL title sponsors for the last two seasons. The BCCI had temporarily severed ties with Vivo, a Chinese mobile and technology company, following political tensions between India and China in June 2020. Vivo had origi-

nally bagged the title sponsorship for 2018 to 2022 for INR 2199 crores (US \$341 million approx. at the time), but for the 2020 season, it was replaced by Dream 11, before Vivo returned for 2021. Tata's bid for the next five years is a 13.7 per cent jump over what Vivo had paid for 2018-22.

"This collaboration embodies the spirit of growth, innovation, and a mutual dedication to excellence," BCCI secretary Jay Shah said.

Laver: Only a 'miraculous' effort can stop Djokovic at Australian Open

Melbourne, Australia - Novak Djokovic has already been pushed to four sets in two of his early matches at Melbourne Park but Australian great Rod Laver says engravers should get to work putting the world number one's name on the Grand Slam trophy for an 11th time.

Laver, the only player to win the calendar Grand Slam twice, is convinced Djokovic will glide past challengers after the 36-year-old downed Tomas Martin Etcheverry to set up a fourth round meeting with Adrian Panarin. "It's almost like he's priming himself to get through to the final," 11-times Grand Slam winner Laver said on Saturday.

"He'll lose a set somewhere in these five-setters and I'm think-

ing, 'Is he having us on?' because he could win this in two and two and two (6-2 6-2 6-2)."

Djokovic claimed last year's title despite playing with a small tear in his hamstring and 85-year-old Laver said it would take something extraordinary to dethrone him.

"He's such a great athlete to begin with, but his mind also is tennis and so he sees it almost unfold in front of him, just what he should be doing," said Laver.

"That's how he's being a great champion. "He serves well, his groundstrokes are unbeatable, so I have to believe, unless someone miraculously plays their best tennis to knock him off they can start putting part of his initials on the trophy now."

Al Yahyaei confident of victory against Thailand

Doha - Salaah Al Yahyaei is determined to power Oman to three points when they meet Thailand in their second match in Group F of the Asian Cup on Sunday.

Oman need a victory to get their campaign back on track after a heartbreaking loss to Saudi Arabia on Matchday One while Thailand - who defeated Kyrgyzstan in their opener - will confirm their spot in the knockout stage with another three points.

Al Yahyaei got his ninth international goal when he scored from the penalty spot against Saudi Arabia last Wednesday, only for Oman to concede twice late in the match.

"For our game tomorrow against Thailand, we'll be facing a strong and well-organised team," said midfielder Al Yahyaei. "We're fully ready for this game, we have no other choice but to win and to get the three points."

"The game against Saudi is in the past now. We are fully focused on the match tomorrow and we'll be going for the win. I just hope that the Omanis will come in big numbers because their presence will give us great motivation."



Salaah Al Yahyaei

Meanwhile, for Thailand's Weerathap Pomphun, the match against Oman represents another opportunity to showcase the importance of proper planning after head coach Masatada Ishii's tactics worked perfectly in the 2-0 win over Kyrgyz Republic.

Thailand, however, can expect a tougher second game with Oman looking very dangerous on the counter against Saudi Arabia.

"From the last result, we feel really good and that has given us the motivation to perform well in

the next match," said the 27-year-old midfielder.

"Oman are a good and strong team with quality players. We studied their game against Saudi, so that we can prepare. Tomorrow both want to win and it will come down to who can avoid more mistakes.

"We know Oman but we have our own strategy. We prepare the best possible way. As a defensive midfielder, it's my job to stop the opponents' attack. But everyone needs to work together to support the team."

'We are fully prepared'

Oman determined to beat Thailand, says coach Ivankovic



Oman are in high spirits ahead of their match against Thailand

Doha, Qatar - Branko Ivankovic has full faith in his Oman side to get the job done when they face Thailand in their Asian Cup Group F tie on Sunday.

Satisfied with his team's spirited performance despite the 2-1 defeat to Saudi Arabia in their opening match, Ivankovic is certain Oman have what it takes to bounce back and reignite their knockout stage hopes.

"When we saw the draw, we knew that it was a difficult group. With all due respect to our next opponents, our primary objective is to win," said the Croatian coach.

"We are fully prepared and want to be focused and play as good a game as we did against Saudi Arabia."

Against three-time champions Saudi Arabia, Oman held on to their 1-0 lead for 78 minutes



We are fully prepared and want to be focused and play as good a game as we did against Saudi Arabia

BRANKO IVANKOVIC

before conceding twice which - according to Ivankovic - was a clear indication of what his players are capable of.

"We proved against Saudi Arabia that we are able to match

any opponent we face. They are one of the top favourites and were the only team to beat the world champions (Argentina) last year (FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022). Against such a tough opponent, we lost out only in the 97th minute.

"I understand the anger and sadness of the fans but I have a lot of belief in this team. I am proud of them and am not going to make unnecessary changes.

"Thailand had a terrific opening game and while there is pressure on us to bounce back, we enjoy it because that's what football is all about - performing under pressure. My responsibility is to establish a winning culture in the dressing room and motivate my boys to give their best."

Thailand kicked off their journey with a 2-0 victory against the

Kyrgyzstan but head coach Masatada Ishii has refused to let his players get carried away.

"Starting the competition on a winning note is obviously great and it gave us a fair idea of how well-prepared we are," said Ishii, who led Kashima Antlers to the J1 League in 2016.

"But we were handed a heavy defeat by Japan (5-0 in a friendly) not so long ago. So, while I'm pleased to have collected three points, I think there is still work to be done.

"Oman have a very strong midfield and a lot of our work is to find ways to contain them. If you look at their earlier game, they got their lead and resorted to defending. It's just that a team like Saudi Arabia is good enough to break that down and overcome the deficit and thus, we have a lot of work to do."

Ghalenoei unhappy with missed chances

Al Rayyan, Qatar - Despite picking up a second win in a row and booking their place in the next round, Iran coach Amir Ghalenoei was not best pleased with some aspects of his side's play in their 1-0 victory against Hong Kong on Friday.

"I'm happy with the three points we got from this match, but I'm sorry that we missed a lot of chances and could have been punished in the last 10 minutes," said Ghalenoei.

"I want to say congratulations to Hong Kong and their

coach for the performance they put in. I'm happy we got a clean sheet, but I'm very unhappy about the chances we wasted.

"If you see the stats, you can see the difference in shots, possession and chances created. For sure, we have some mistakes, but the players and the technical staff are all fighting hard and giving their best, so we should not underestimate that."

Meanwhile, Hong Kong coach Jorn Andersen was proud of his players despite the defeat.

The East Asian side, the

lowest ranked in the tournament, fought hard but were undone by a first-half finish from Mehdi Ghayedi, ending the game at Khalifa International Stadium just one goal behind Iran side ranked 129 places above them.

"I have to repeat what I said before the last game," said Andersen.

"We played against one of the top teams in Asia. 21st in FIFA rankings, but we did not see the difference between the teams. For that I'm very proud," he said.

CLASSIFIEDS

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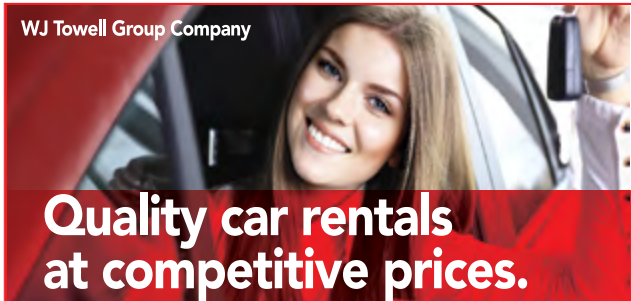
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Paul Gauguin's *Tropical Conversation* (July-October 1887)



VAN GOGH AND GAUGUIN'S...

CAT IS OUT OF THE BAG

THE PLAYFUL CREATURE - PAINTED WHILE THE ARTISTS WERE LIVING IN THE YELLOW HOUSE - HAS CREPT OUT OF HIDING AFTER MORE THAN 100 YEARS



Paul Gauguin's *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (detail) (1897-98)

Photograph of Gustave Fayet and his daughter Yseult in the study in the Château d'Igny, with *The Little Cat* hanging above the desk (1913)



Paul Gauguin's *The Little Cat*, which has been hidden away in a private collection for more than a century, has just gone on show at Amsterdam's Van Gogh Museum. This delightful work was painted while the French artist was staying with Van Gogh in the Yellow House in Arles.

Artistically, this cat (or kitten) faithfully followed Gauguin on his far-flung travels. It first appears on the West Indian island of Martinique, where the feline is depicted in the foreground of *Tropical Conversation*. The cat is apparently lapping up milk and in its haste has put its front paws into the large dish.

A year later, the creature appears again, in Arles, in *The Little Cat*. Since Gauguin did not take the *Tropical Conversation* painting to Arles, he may well have had a pencil sketch from Martinique at hand (such a drawing, from his West Indies sketchbook, still survives in a private collection). Or he could have simply remembered the animal's distinctive pose.

What is most striking is that the cat reappears a decade later in Gauguin's greatest masterpiece - *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (detail below) - done in 1897-98 on the island of Tahiti. This is a highly ambitious composition, nearly four metres wide.

A pair of cats appear prominently in the central foreground - one facing the viewer and the other in the Martinique pose, front paws in the dish. This time the black cat has become white, although with dark patches on its rear.

Looking at the newly unveiled painting of *The Little Cat*, what might appear to be simply a charming depiction of a feline is actually all that is left of what was probably originally a much larger still life. Gauguin was presumably unhappy with the full composition and at some point he cut away and discarded three quarters of the canvas, saving just the left-hand quarter (72 x 25 cm).

The clue about the original picture comes in a comment which Vincent wrote to his brother Theo on November 21, 1888. Gauguin was working on 'a big still life of an orange pumpkin and some apples and white linen on a yellow background and foreground'.

Intriguingly, Van Gogh himself had earlier painted a still life with the slightly unusual combination of pumpkins and apples (September 1885, now Kroller-Müller Museum, Otterlo), so he may have suggested the composition to his friend.

There is, however, a vague visual representation of part of Gauguin's lost still life in the

background of Van Gogh's *Portrait of Paul Gauguin*. This too is a fascinating picture, since it had been largely dismissed as a fake since the 1930s and was not displayed at the Van Gogh Museum (it was recorded as 'anonymous' in the museum's 1987 catalogue).

The *Portrait of Paul Gauguin* depicts the artist in his beret, working on a yellow canvas at a slight angle on an easel. In front of his face is the vague outline of a circular object and beneath this is a small area of orange, presumably a pumpkin. The portrait therefore depicts Gauguin in the act of painting his lost still life. In a sense, it mirrors Gauguin's portrait of his friend with *Sunflowers* (August 1888) on his easel, probably done at the same time.

The yellow background in both *The Little Cat* and the still life on the easel in *Portrait of Paul Gauguin* could well represent a tribute to Van Gogh - and his favourite colour. Just three months earlier Van Gogh had painted his *Sunflowers* with a bold yellow background, a picture greatly admired by Gauguin.

Research has revealed that *The Little Cat* and the *Portrait of Paul Gauguin* were both painted on jute, rather than traditional artists' canvas. Although further investigations are now underway at the Van Gogh Museum, it is likely that the two paintings were made from the same 20-metre roll of jute which Gauguin had purchased in Arles soon after his arrival.

And what happened to *The Little Cat*? It was sold by Gauguin's Paris dealer, the avant-garde figure Ambroise Vollard. He was renowned for his love of cats and one wonders whether Gauguin might just have included the two creatures in *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* partly to please his dealer.

In 1906, three years after Gauguin's death, *The Little Cat* was acquired by the French collector and artist Gustave Fayet. A 1913 photograph shows it hanging in his study.

Looking at Gauguin's playful cat, one can see the possible influence of Japanese prints in his mind, since these creatures frequently appeared in such works. Gauguin has not copied a cat from a specific Japanese print, but he may well have been inspired by them.

Now that *The Little Cat* is on loan to the Van Gogh Museum, further research will be done on the picture. Hopefully it will be possible to examine the edges of the canvas and to use non-invasive techniques to examine beneath the surface of the still life that is apparently on the easel in the painting.

(Source: theartnewspaper.com)

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MUSEUM OPENINGS IN 2024

SCHEDULED TO LAUNCH THIS YEAR, NEW INSTITUTIONS AROUND THE WORLD ARE DEDICATED TO ASTRONOMY, ARCHAEOLOGY, NATURAL HISTORY, INCLUSIVITY, AND FOLK ART

Past forward

A rendering of the 2.3-acre site that will house the Museum of Shakespeare



NHM Commons' Judith Perlestein Welcome Center



A work of art itself, Hampi Art Labs is built from locally sourced materials such as steel and soil that blend seamlessly with the natural landscape. Its opening exhibition, 'Right Foot First', is made up of artworks from the Jindal Collection spanning 1998 to 2023. They include pieces by contemporary Indian artist Shilpa Gupta.

Natural history and archaeology

The largest natural and historical museum in the western United States is about to gain a whole new wing with the addition of NHM Commons - a 75,000-square-foot welcoming portal that will serve as a museum expansion and a community hub. Situated on the southwest side of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County campus in

Several much-anticipated exhibition openings await Smithsonian Institution visitors this year.

A copy of Martin Luther King Jr.'s original "I Have a Dream" speech is now on display at the National Museum of African American History and Culture, while the Smithsonian American Art Museum will see paintings from William H Johnson's 1940s Fighters for Freedom series, which includes depictions of famous historical figures such as Harriet Tubman and Mahatma Gandhi as well as lesser-known individuals, all working toward the common goal of world peace.

This spring, the National Museum of American History offers visitors an opportunity to engage in hands-on activities that show how inventions improve sports, and to view the very 1966 Honda CB77 'Super Hawk' motorcycle that inspired Robert Pirsig's fic-

tionalised autobiography Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.

Other highlights include the chance to explore the narrative art of the Plains through everything from historical hides to contemporary ledger sketches at the National Museum of the American Indian, contemplate fibre arts as a means of modern female expression at the Renwick Gallery, or peruse artworks, photographs and archival materials highlighting Brazilian identical twin brothers Gustavo and Otavio Pandolfo and their hip-hop-inspired urban graffiti traditions, at the Hirshhorn Museum.

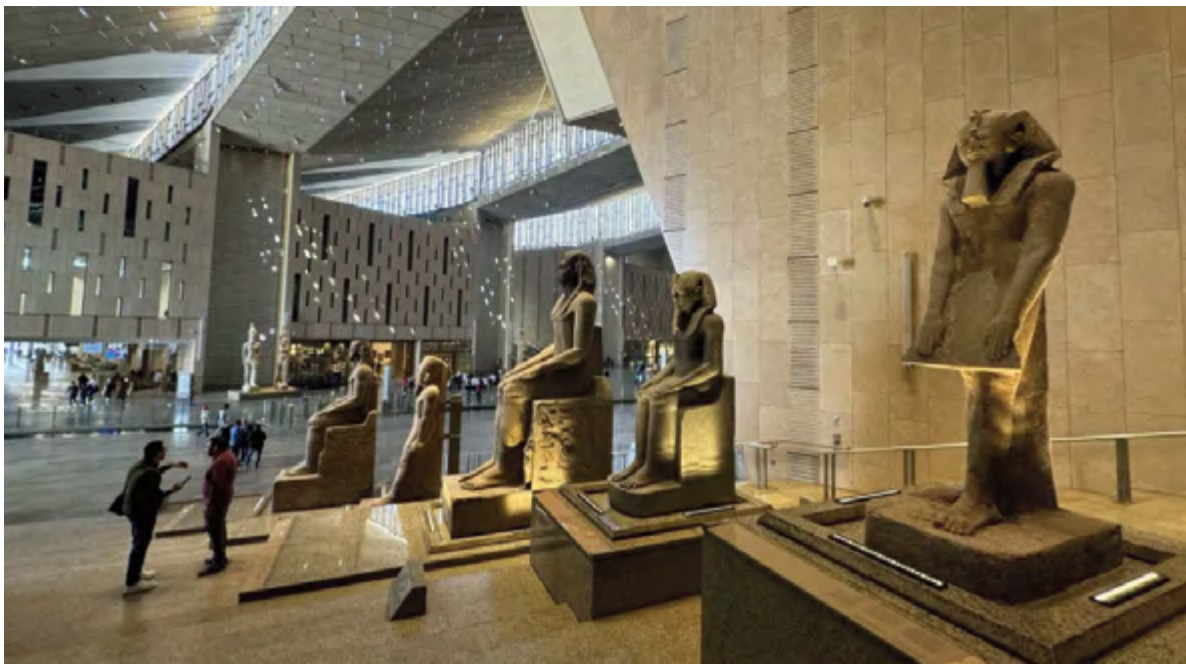
Around the globe, an array of new museum openings is also poised to enlighten and inspire. The year 2024 will also see the Grand Egyptian Museum welcome public visitors, and the open quarry digs and 'Hall of Ex-

tinction and Hope', where visitors can explore ways to take action against climate change, at South Jersey's Edelman Fossil Park Museum are now opening this summer.

Inclusivity, astronomy

With a grand opening set for June 28, 2024, the Stonewall National Monument Visitor Center will be the first visitor center devoted to the LGBTQ+ rights movement within the National Park Service system. Pride Live is the nonprofit social advocacy group overseeing this inclusive space, curating select works that highlight the history of Stonewall.

Scheduled to start welcoming visitors in November 2024, the Kemper and Ethel Marley Foundation Astronomy Discovery Center is geared toward everyone from amateur astronomers to people who simply enjoy looking at stars. The new multi-



The Grand Egyptian Museum will be the largest archaeological museum complex on the planet

faceted space includes a 180-seat immersive theater, which includes a wrap-around LED screen allowing visitors to get up-close views of remote landscapes, like those on Saturn and Mars.

Literature and folk art

At the Museum of Shakespeare, visitors descend nearly ten feet underground and into a 16th-century day in the life of William Shakespeare, reimagined through innovative multi-sensory technology recreating the sights, sounds and even smells of 1598 London. A projected reconstruction of the playhouse sits right above the remains of the Curtain's actual stage, and artificial-intelligence technology brings animated performances to life, so you can be-

come a part of the action.

The 19,000-square-foot museum, which is a collaboration between MOLA, Historic England and creative studio Bompas & Parr, is part of a larger 2.3-acre site that will include apartments, office buildings, shops and restaurants.

The southern Indian town of Hampi is a centre for traditional arts and crafts, such as Lambani embroidery, an intricate style of needlework that incorporates vivid colours, various stitches and mirrors. This also makes it an ideal base for a new creative space. Opening on February 6, Hampi Art Labs is a showcase for contemporary art-making, connecting artists with the region's distinct craft traditions and techniques.

Exposition Park, the new addition - slated to open later this year.

This year may finally be the year that the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) opens its doors to the public. This colossal project is slated to start welcoming visitors sometime this summer. When it does, it will be the largest archaeological museum complex on the planet - a place overflowing with more than 100,000 artifacts and thousands of years of history, dating from prehistoric times to modern Egypt.

From its 2,000-foot-tall translucent stone facade to the colossal statue of Ramses II standing in the complex's sun-filled atrium entry, GEM makes a strong first impression to visitors. (Source: smithsonianmag.com)



Hampi Art Labs, India



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