

Getting ready for school

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Education (MoE) has finalised preparations for the 2024-2025 academic year, which will commence on September 1.

The ministry has confirmed the appointment of 3,233 new teachers for the new academic year. This includes 691 male teachers (21.3%) and 2,542 female teachers (78.7%). These appointments are intended to address the current demand for teaching staff across various specialisations.

According to the latest statistics, the number of teachers in government schools has reached 61,195, distributed across 1,269 schools, with Omanisation rate of 87.6%.

Additionally, there are 10,652 administrators and technicians in these schools - 4,306 males and 6,346 females - with Omanisation rate of 99.8%.

In special education schools, there are 220 teachers, with Omanisation rate of 93%, and 52 administrators, with Omanisation rate of 83%.



BACK TO SCHOOL

New teachers	3,233
Total teachers	61,195
Support staff	10,652
Total schools	1,269
New school buses	800

16 new school buildings

Khamis bin Mubarak al Hadidi, Director General of Projects and Services at MoE, informed that 16 new school buildings will be operational at the start of the 2024-2025 academic year. Construction has also begun on 15 new school buildings, and tenders are open for construction of 20 additional schools.

He stated that RO7mn has been allocated for renovating

several schools during the fiscal year 2024. Additionally, over RO4mn has been set aside to refurbish 83 science laboratories, while RO3mn will be invested in enhancing the educational envi-

ronment through establishment and upgrading of sports fields and other facilities.

RO4.8mn for 800 new buses

An annual budget of RO4.8mn has been allocated for procurement of 800 new school buses and renewal of contracts for over 20,000 buses for students. MoE has also signed an agreement with Karwa Motors and Development Bank to replace 5,000 school buses

over the next five years.

"Starting from the 2024-2025 academic year, 1,000 school buses will be replaced each year, with the buses distributed across the governorates based on actual need," Hadidi said.

He also informed that MoE continues to train school bus drivers as part of a preventive driving programme in cooperation with Traffic Safety Institute and Petroleum Development Oman. This effort aims to provide continuous training for bus drivers to keep them informed about the latest driving and safety practices, contributing to a safe and reliable transportation environment.

Additionally, the ministry continues to implement the VIA road safety education programme aimed at students aged 10-18 in cooperation with Shell Oman. Initially conducted in four schools during the 2022-2023 academic year, the programme - now called Road Friends - will be implemented in 33 schools across various governorates in the new academic year, targeting approximately 1,320 students.

30 agreements worth RO22mn inked to boost investments in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) signed 30 usufruct contracts of an investment value exceeding RO22mn on Sunday. These agreements are for land spread over 2.3bn sqm and aim to bolster the agricultural, industrial, medical and commercial sectors in Dhofar.

The signing ceremony was led by H E Hamad bin Ali al Nizwani, Undersecretary for Housing in MHUP.

Representatives of the investing companies and institutions were present along with officials of Oman Investment Authority, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and Najd Agricultural Area Development Office.

Twenty-five of the 30 agreements are in the agricultural and food security sector, covering 11.6 acres and worth over RO19.5mn. These include one for establishment of Oman Agricultural Society's headquarters in Thumrait, which will feature a logistics centre and service facilities spread over 42,000sqm.



Additionally, four usufruct contracts were signed in the industrial, medical, residential and commercial sectors, with a combined investment value of over RO3mn and covering 22,500sqm.

MHUP reaffirmed its commitment to leveraging the usufruct programme as a strategic tool to boost the local economy, attract investment and foster economic growth. The programme aims to create job opportunities and support projects that contribute to achieving self-sufficiency in key areas.

EV convoy sets off from Muscat to Dhofar to promote green mobility

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) flagged off an electric vehicles convoy on Sunday to encourage adoption of more sustainable transportation. The convoy - the first of its

kind - featuring 12 electric vehicles (EVs) will cover 1,000km from Muscat to Dhofar via Dakhliyah and Al Wusta.

H E Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, Undersecretary for Transport in MTCIT, informed that the initiative aims to enhance public awareness on the benefits of EVs and encourage a shift to-

wards more sustainable transportation. "The convoy aligns with Oman's sustainable development goals by promoting green mobility and reducing carbon emissions."

As part of the initiative, Dhofar will host an EVs exhibition from August 27 to 30, further advancing the sultanate's vision of re-

ducing carbon emissions and working towards the goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

The convoy will also promote Dhofar Khareef while engaging a wider audience to raise awareness on the benefits of EVs.

Currently, there are six car dealerships in Oman actively

working to import EVs, contributing to the growing availability of these vehicles in the country.

MTCIT has already launched 18 initiatives to bolster green mobility.

The convoy will showcase advanced EV technology and pass through six charging stations between Muscat and Salalah.



03

Actor Talib al Balushi refutes claim of being barred by Saudi



16

Suga and Spite - Pros and cons of celebrityhood



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Oman-China Forum set to boost trade, investment ties



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in collaboration with Arabian Research Bureau and the COMEX Global Technology Show, will host Oman-China Forum at Grand Millennium Muscat on Monday. This event aims to strengthen trade and investment relations between Oman

and China. The forum will bring together Omani investors and their Chinese counterparts, including representatives from 15 companies and 30 officials and investors from the Longhua District of Shenzhen City. The event is part of ongoing efforts to support digital transformation and boost the national economy. The forum follows the suc-

cess of the 33rd edition of COMEX Global Technology Show, which showcased efforts to promote digital transformation in Oman. The exhibition also featured the COMEX Business Roadshow, a new initiative to introduce investors and entrepreneurs to opportunities in Oman's technology sector. As a result, several Chinese companies have been encouraged to visit Oman from

August 25 to 28 to explore partnerships and investment opportunities. As part of a public-private partnership, the forum aims to introduce Chinese investors to national initiatives that attract foreign direct investment. The delegation's agenda during the visit will ensure productive discussions and foster stronger economic ties between Oman and China.



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DON'T DRY YOUR LINEN IN PUBLIC



Muscat Municipality recently announced that hanging laundry in balconies of residential buildings is against the law, with fines ranging from RO50 to RO500 for violations. The rule has sparked varied opinions among residents. Here is what *Muscat Daily* readers said -

Jayatee Choudhury
Student

It is undoubtedly a good decision to be enforced especially on houses overlooking roads. High rises as well as newly constructed buildings ought to have a common area for drying. Also, all buildings must have boards emphasising the 'no balcony laundry' rule.

Saeed al Balushi
Driver

The municipality should consider having public drying areas or offer leniency for those who lack indoor drying options. Fines should be reasonable, especially for families struggling with space and resources. I feel that the fines are high. Sometimes people make mistakes and such high fines are depressing for the common man. I do not welcome the move.

Sanjay Sharma
Engineer

I agree that this is a good rule, though the fines are too high. I feel the authorities also need to look at the building options. Many flats do not have an open space to hang laundry. Hence there must be regulations - when flats are being made, it must include space for laundry.

Khalid Ahmed
Businessman

It is indeed a good rule as there are times when drying clothes spoil the look of the city. The rule

is necessary for maintaining the city's image. It improves the overall appearance of neighbourhoods, making these more presentable to tourists and residents alike. However, there should be a grace period to allow people time to adjust.

Salman Khan
Quantity surveyor

There are many careless people who do not bother about others. I have seen people hang clothes and even undergarments outside. Not only does it look ugly and spoil the look of the neighbourhood but also causes embarrassment.

Kevin D'Souza
Private sector employee

I do not feel it is a good rule. There can be warnings or awareness campaigns but not so hefty fines. There are many countries in Europe, like Italy and France, where one can see colourful laundry hanging in balconies. There's something called laundry art, too.

Mohammed al Harthi
PRO

For families living in apartments without drying space, this is difficult. Not everyone can afford dryers, and finding alternatives could take time. The fines seem too high, and there needs to be a practical solution for residents. New buildings need to be designed so that wet clothes can be accommodated without defiling the city's beauty.



? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

With the new school year starting on September 1, what measures should be taken to reduce morning traffic congestion in Muscat?

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

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Omani actor Talib al Balushi refutes claim of being barred by Saudi Arabia

Our Correspondent Muscat

Omani actor Talib al Balushi, who recently starred in the Indian film *The Goat Life*, has denied social media rumours claiming he has been barred from entering Saudi Arabia.

The film, directed by Blessy, showcases a Saudi kafeel (sponsor) in a cruel light, drawing controversy for its portrayal of labour exploitation. There have been heated debates recently on social media criticising the movie. People claim the film is an attempt to distort the image of Saudi Arabia.

The Goat Life is adapted from *Aadujeevitham* - a Malayalam

I have received a lot of praise for my performance, and it's essential for viewers to differentiate between cinema and reality. Let us focus on the film's artistic value rather than misunderstanding it

TALIB AL BALUSHI

novel by Benjamin, based on the true story of Najeeb Muhammad, an Indian migrant in Saudi Arabia who was forced to work like a slave as a goatherd in the middle of a desert. Balushi, as the sponsor, is depicted as a man devoid of compassion, treating goats better and denying Najeeb of food, water and freedom.

A social media platform Movie Street suggested that Saudi authorities have banned Balushi due to his role in the film.

However, Balushi, currently in India, refuted the claims and said, "There is no letter from either the Saudi or Omani governments barring me from entering Saudi Arabia. People should remember, this is just a film, not

real life. My character was just that - a role I portrayed."

Balushi added that his work has been appreciated by audiences despite the controversial theme.

"I have received a lot of praise for my performance, and it's essential for viewers to differentiate between cinema and reality. Let us focus on the film's artistic

value rather than misunderstanding it," he said.

A post from director Blessy said, "The movie carefully tried to portray the compassion and empathy of the Arab people through the character of the kind gentleman who (without whom Najeeb would have died on the road) rescues Najeeb, taking him in his Rolls Royce, offering him water and encouraging him to sleep, and taking him to a place where Najeeb could get help.

"The restaurant staff, the people at the detention centre, and the Arab out-pass check post are all portrayed as epitomes of kindness, compassion, and empathy," he added.

Oman vital sanctuary for Socotra cormorant, hosts 45,000 birds in Musandam

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman is a vital sanctuary for the Socotra cormorant, a threatened bird species native to the Arabian Sea, the southeastern Arabian Peninsula, and Socotra Island.

In 2023, the Environment Authority (EA) successfully recorded 45,000 Socotra cormorants in Musandam governorate, a key seasonal habitat for these birds.

Locally known as 'Lowh,' Socotra cormorants are occasionally spotted as far as the Red Sea coast in the west and are known to breed on Socotra Island in Yemen. Eng Noura Abdullah al Shehhi, head of the Environmental Conservation Section in Mu-

sandam, noted that these cormorants gather in Musandam's rocky areas and sandy beaches from May to September in search of their primary food, sardines.

Shehhi explained that the Socotra cormorant was named after its first sighting on Socotra Island in Yemen. These birds are distinct, with adult cormorants having black feathers and young ones being brown with a slender neck and white belly. They can grow up to 80cm in length.

The Environment Authority is dedicated to monitoring and studying various migratory bird species in Oman. Their efforts include conducting field surveys and addressing the threats faced by Socotra cormorant, such as marine pollution, coastal development, and hunting.

MoSD launches development programme to enhance rehabilitation services

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) on Sunday inaugurated a special programme for its staff members deployed in rehabilitation centres dedicated to individuals with disabilities.

Running over five days, the Professional Development Programme for the year 2024-25 aims to enhance the skills of rehabilitation workers, boost their performance, and keep them abreast of the latest advancements in the field.

By focusing on elevating the quality of rehabilitation services, the programme is set to improve

the efficiency and effectiveness of support provided to individuals with disabilities, ultimately enhancing overall care quality.

The initiative includes extensive training for professionals specialising in disability rehabilitation, with a particular focus on individuals with autism spectrum

disorder. The key aspects of the training cover managing group rehabilitation, addressing speech disorders of neurological origin, and applying sensory integration theory to tackle fundamental sensory issues affecting performance.

Moreover, the programme features practical training in neurodevelopmental therapy aimed at improving functional skills for individuals with cerebral palsy, including restoration of motor function and enhancing body movement control.

Hala Musa al Wahaibi, Director of the Department of Persons with Disabilities at MoSD, said that the ministry's strategy pri-

oritises developing skilled professionals to better support individuals with disabilities. She added that the programme for 2024-25 is designed to significantly enhance the competencies of workers in this field.

Maryam Muhammad al Mahrouqi, National Officer for Physiotherapy Services at the Ministry of Health (MoH), described the programme as a vital step towards strengthening the capabilities of workers in both medical and social rehabilitation sectors.

She underscored the importance of collaboration between MoH and MoSD in advancing rehabilitation services.

Mobile food lab ensuring safety during khareef

Salalah - Dhofar Municipality's mobile food laboratory is playing a crucial role in enhancing food safety during the khareef festival in Dhofar this year.

The initiative is part of the municipality's efforts to improve health practices and uphold high standards of food safety at various event sites across the region.

Salah Salem al Ajili, Director of the Food and Laboratories Department at Dhofar Municipality, said that the mobile laboratory was introduced to strengthen health oversight over temporary food carts that serve visitors and tourists during the khareef season. The mobile lab has conducted over 300 tests on food and water samples this August alone, ensuring the safety of visitors at tourist destinations.

Ajili added that the mobile laboratory's dual purpose includes both practical testing and public education.



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MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Grade In Tender Board Registration	Last day to purchase tender documents	Last date of tender submission
16/2024	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance & Operation of Electro-Mechanical Services, Civil, Cleaning and Pest Control Services to Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex at Basher for the Period 2025-2026	Excellent Grade	07/09/2024	07/10/2024
17/2024	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance and Operating Services to Seeb Sports Stadium (Including Sports Hall at Seeb Sports Club for the Period 2025-2026	Excellent Grade	07/09/2024	07/10/2024
18/2024	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance and Operating Services to Al Amal Sports Club for the Period 2025-2026	Excellent Grade	07/09/2024	07/10/2024
19/2024	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance and Operating Services to Ibra Sports Complex for the Period 2025-2026	Excellent Grade	07/09/2024	07/10/2024
20/2024	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance and Operating Services to Ibra Sports Complex for the Period 2025-2026	Excellent Grade	07/09/2024	07/10/2024
21/2024	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance and Operating Services to Khasab Sports Complex (Including Sports Centre at Lima) for the Period 2025-2026	Excellent Grade	07/09/2024	07/10/2024
22/2024	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance and Operating Services to Salalah Sports Complex for the For the Period 2025-2026	Excellent Grade	07/09/2024	07/10/2024
23/2024	Services	Cleaning Services to Entire Campus and Facilities to Ministry's Various Buildings at Muscat Governorate for the Period 2025	Excellent Grade	07/09/2024	07/10/2024
24/2024	Services	Cleaning Services to Entire Campus and Facilities to Ministry's Various Buildings at Muscat Governorate for the Period 2025	First Grade	07/09/2024	07/10/2024
25/2024	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance & Operation of Electro-Mechanical and Air-Conditioning Units to Ministry's Various Buildings in Muscat Governorate for the Period 2025	First Grade	07/09/2024	07/10/2024
26/2024	Construction and Maintenance	Restructure & Setup of New Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Office at Al-Khuwair	Excellent Grade	31/08/2024	09/09/2024
27/2024	Construction and Maintenance	Construction, Completion and Maintenance of Guard Residence at Al Khuwair	Third Grade	31/08/2024	09/09/2024

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

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MARKET WATCH	
MSX30	4,687.69
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FOREX RATES (RO1 equals)	
India	218.04
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Bangladesh	308.43
Philippines	146.36
Sri Lanka	773.86

*Rates as on August 25
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Eurozone inflation expectations remain unchanged

Eurozone consumers' inflation expectations for the next year held steady for the third consecutive month, according to the European Central Bank's (ECB) latest survey of consumer expectations released on Friday.

"Median inflation expectations for the next 12 months remained unchanged at 2.8% for the third month in a row, after dropping to their lowest level since September 2021 in May," the ECB reported.

However, median expectations for inflation three years ahead saw a slight increase, rising by 0.1 percentage points to 2.4% in July.

Perception of inflation over the past 12 months decreased to 4.1% in July.

Top finance leaders to converge at BT Oman CFO Forum & Awards

Muscat - Business Today has announced the inaugural edition of the Oman CFO Forum & Awards, which is set to bring together top finance executives, industry experts and thought leaders for a day of insightful discussions and knowledge exchange. H E Nasser Bin Khamis al Jashmi, Chairman of the Tax Authority, will be the guest of honour at the event scheduled on September 17, 2024 at Sheraton Oman Hotel, Muscat.

Saleh Zakwani, Executive Chairman, Apex Media, said, "We are committed to driving thought leadership and facilitating the exchange of information and knowledge across society and the business community through our print and digital media channels. The Business Today 'Oman CFO Forum & Awards' is part of our initiatives that are strategically designed to align with the broader objectives of our nation, as outlined in Oman Vision 2040. The prestigious gathering is aimed at empowering CFOs to drive innovation, navigate complexities and unlock sustainable growth opportunities in today's rapidly evolving business environment. Additionally, the Forum



H E Nasser Bin Khamis al Jashmi

will recognise outstanding achievements in the financial industry through the BT Oman CFO Awards."

Over 200 delegates including senior officials and the leading CFOs, CEOs, finance heads and industry professionals from sectors such as the oil and gas,

banking, finance, investments, consulting, insurance, manufacturing, communications, logistics, and the top government officials, are participating in the Forum.

The event is supported by prominent industry bodies and institutions including the College



Over 200 delegates including senior officials and leading CFOs, CEOs, finance heads and industry professionals from various sectors are participating in the Forum

Mouj Muscat, Mazda, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing, Dhofar Insurance, Mubashir and Concept Communications.

A thought leadership speech by Saif al Harthi, Finance Functional Director, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) will set the tone for the Forum. It will be followed by two panel discussions. The first panel discussion, titled 'Leading Through Change - Redefining the CFO's Role in Business Transformation,' will explore how CFOs can lead their organisations through periods of change. The second panel, titled 'Strategic Responses & Compliance: Navigating the Evolving Tax Landscape & Emerging Trends,' will delve into the complexities of regulatory compliance in today's ever-shifting tax environment.

Discussions at the Forum will cover a wide range of critical topics including enhancing strategic planning and decision-making for competitive advantage, fostering innovation and leadership in finance for long-term success, building resilience and adaptability in finance operations, adopting digital transformation for operational efficiency, advancing ESG integration and sustainable

finance initiatives, strengthening risk management practices, navigating regulatory challenges and emerging market trends, and inspiring talent development while enhancing In-Country Value (ICV).

In addition to the enriching sessions, the BT Oman CFO Awards will celebrate the exceptional contributions of CFOs and finance teams who have demonstrated remarkable performance and innovation in their organisations. The awards will also recognise significant advancements in financial technology solutions.

On this occasion, Business Today is also publishing a special edition featuring the Top 50 CFOs in Oman who have redefined business success with their innovative strategies, astute leadership and commitment to excellence. The winners of BT Oman CFO Awards will also be featured in it.

Organised by Interactive Apex and Muscat Daily, the Oman CFO Forum & Awards promises to be a must attend event for finance professionals. For more information, contact sajir@apexmedia.co.om or call +968 9947 4314, or visit www.bt-cfoforum.com

Tethys Oil commenced exploration well Kunooz-1 in Oman's Block 58

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Swedish oil exploration and production company Tethys Oil last week announced that the drilling operations of the exploration well Kunooz-1 in the Fahd area in Block 58 onshore Oman has commenced.

The well is planned to be drilled to a total depth of approximately 3,900m and drilling operations are expected to be ongoing for about 45 days, the company said in a statement.

The exploration well Kunooz-1 will be drilled into the Masirah Bay formation with the Nafun play carbonates Buah and Khufai as its primary targets at depths of approximately 3,500m and 3,800m, respectively. The well's secondary target is the Ara/Birba carbonates at an approximate depth of 3,100m.

Kunooz-1 is Tethys Oil's first exploration well in Block 58. The prospect on which the well



is drilled is one of several identified on Block 58 in close proximity to well established play fairway and infrastructure in neighbouring Block 6.

Tethys Oil is, through its wholly owned subsidiary Tethys Oil Qatbeet Limited, the

operator of Block 58 and holds a 100% license interest.

Tethys Oil focuses on onshore areas with known oil discoveries. The company's core area is Oman, where it holds interests in Blocks 3&4, Block 49, Block 56 and Block 58.

GCC banks show strong appetite for international expansion: Fitch

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The GCC banks are showing a strong appetite to grow their presence in major regional markets, particularly Turkey, Egypt and India, attracted by improving economic conditions and better growth opportunities than in their domestic markets, Fitch Ratings said.

"Several GCC banks are reportedly looking to acquire banks in Turkey, Egypt and India. We believe external growth is part of some GCC banks' strategy to diversify business models and improve profitability. By deploying capital into high-growth markets, they may be able to compensate for weaker growth in their home markets," Fitch said in a research note.

Turkey, Egypt and India each have much larger populations than the GCC, and greater potential for banking sector growth given their strong real GDP growth prospects and smaller banking systems relative to their economies. Their banking system assets-to-GDP ratios are below 100%, compared with



over 200% in the largest GCC markets, and private credit-to-GDP was only 27% in Egypt, 43% in Turkey and 60% in India in 2023, according to Fitch.

The rating agency noted that the GCC banks' main exposure outside the GCC region is through subsidiaries in Turkey and Egypt, where they had about \$150bn of assets at end-Q1 2024.

"While these markets are the main focus for growth, there is increasing interest in India, particularly from banks from the UAE, which has strong and growing financial and trade links

with India," Fitch added.

GCC banks' appetite to expand in Turkey has increased since the country's macroeconomic policy shift following last year's presidential election, which has reduced external financing pressures and macro and financial stability risks and recently led Fitch to revise its Turkish banking sector outlook to 'improving'.

Fitch forecasts Turkish inflation to decrease to an average of 23% in 2025 from 65% in 2023, and GCC banks will probably stop using hyperinflation reporting for their Turkish subsidiaries from 2027. Together with

greater Turkish lira stability, this could improve GCC banks' returns on their Turkish operations.

According to Fitch, interest from GCC banks in Egypt is also gaining momentum. The rating agency believes this is driven by Egypt's improved macroeconomic environment, opportunities offered by the authorities' privatisation programme, and the expansion of some GCC corporates in the country.

Fitch said that the Egyptian banking market has high barriers to entry, but GCC banks may have opportunities to acquire stakes in three banks through the authorities' privatisation programme. The expansion of GCC corporates in Egypt, particularly of UAE firms, could also support increased GCC bank presence.

However, Fitch noted that the increasing cost of acquiring banks in Turkey, Egypt and India could weigh on GCC banks' acquisition plans. Price-to-book multiples have increased since last year, particularly in Turkey and India, reflecting improved macroeconomic prospects and decreased operating environment risks.

78% consumers choose digital banking over cash transactions

New Delhi, India - As much as 78% of consumers now prefer to do most of their banking digitally through mobile apps or websites, according to the Alkami report. This shift is part of a broader trend towards cashless transactions and contactless payments, which have become the default for many, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the report, nearly 80% of financial institutions have seen an increase in cashless transactions over the past two years. This change has been accelerated by the pandemic, with many consumers opting for digital payments to avoid handling

cash. About 60% of these institutions noted that the volume of cashless transactions has surged by more than 20%.

Cashless payments are not a new concept - personal checks and credit cards have been around for decades. However, today's digital payments, whether made through a smartphone, laptop, or tablet, are quickly becoming the standard. The convenience and safety of these transactions, especially in a post-pandemic world, have made them more popular than ever.

Allison Cerra, Chief Marketing Officer at Alkami Technology, said, "The banking leaders of the



future will be those that can harness data for the best use, gain a holistic view of their relationships, and meet the rapidly

changing needs of digital consumers."

With more people turning to digital banking, there has been a

noticeable decline in the use of ATMs and checks.

Chad Rogers, Executive Vice President at Connexus Credit Union, noted that even millennials are moving away from traditional banking methods. "What we are seeing, even with our millennial users, is that they're no longer ordering checks, or making cash withdrawals from our ATMs as we would expect. Instead, they are self-serving from home or wherever they are. They're moving money through our digital banking platform," he said.

Interestingly, even though fewer people are visiting bank branches in person, their overall

engagement with banks has increased. Thanks to the ease of mobile and online banking, customers are now interacting with their banks more frequently, often on a daily basis.

While cashless transactions are on the rise, the adoption of cryptocurrency is growing more slowly. Around 21% of financial institutions reported that their customers are asking for Bitcoin products and services. Although this is still a relatively small percentage, 35% of banks believe that offering cryptocurrency options could give them a competitive edge.

Banks are also feeling the heat

from fintech companies like PayPal, Stripe, and Venmo. Jamie Dimon, CEO of JPMorgan Chase, has called these fintechs "enormous competitive threats" to traditional banking. The popularity of fintechs has only increased during the pandemic, with many consumers turning to these platforms for their financial needs.

Despite the competition, some banks are partnering with fintechs to stay relevant. According to the report, 50% of banks and 40% of credit unions have teamed up with fintech companies in the past three years to enhance their digital offerings.

ANI

UAE carriers fly to 606 destinations as global travel demand picks up

Abu Dhabi, UAE – The UAE's national carriers are expanding their destinations, driven by the country's strong global tourism and business reputation and the resurgence in travel demand. The General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) projects passenger traffic to reach 140mn, reflecting the ongoing growth and competitiveness of UAE airlines.

Official data indicates that UAE national carriers now serve approximately 606 destinations worldwide, including joint and cargo routes, marking a 3.4% increase from the 586 destinations served at the end of 2023.

The breakdown of destinations by carrier is as follows: Emirates with over 144 destinations, Etihad Airways with 79 destinations, flydubai with 125 destinations, Air Arabia with 218 destinations, and Wizz Air Abu Dhabi with 40 destinations.

Etihad Airways

Etihad Airways, in particular, has been expanding its route network with the goal of reaching 125 destinations by 2030. The airline aims to leverage its strategic location between Asia and Europe and increase its annual passenger count to 33mn.

Etihad Airways has been strengthening its network since the beginning of this year, with



Etihad Airways has been strengthening its network since the beginning of this year, with plans to expand to over 125 destinations by 2030

plans to expand to over 125 destinations by 2030. This expansion strategy leverages its strategic location between Asia and Europe, aiming to increase its annual passenger count to over 33mn. The airline expects to introduce several new destinations this year after launching 15 new routes last year, including Lisbon, Copenhagen, Calcutta, and Osaka.

Additionally, Etihad will increase its flights to Thailand to 41 per week starting in October

and will resume flights to Nairobi on December 15.

In the first seven months of 2024, Etihad Airways carried 10.4mn passengers and expanded its fleet to 93 aircraft by the end of July, compared to 78 aircraft in July 2023. The airline also added 10 new destinations to its network this year. In the first half of 2024, Etihad recorded a net profit after tax of AED851mn, a 48% year-on-year increase, with revenues growing by 21% to AED11.7bn.

Emirates Airlines

Emirates currently operates a network covering 144 passenger and cargo destinations across six continents, continually working to increase seat capacity to meet rising travel demand and provide flexibility and choice for travellers passing through Dubai.

Emirates Airlines is set to fly its upgraded Boeing 777 aircraft to Zurich and Riyadh in early October and will add the same aircraft to its operations in Geneva

and Brussels. Emirates is completing the modernisation of 80 more Boeing 777 aircraft as part of its more than \$3bn programme to deliver the best products and services in the industry and elevate the passenger experience in the skies to unprecedented levels.

flydubai

flydubai flies to 125 destinations in 58 countries across Africa, Central Asia, Central and South East Europe, the GCC, the Middle East, the Indian Subcontinent and South East Asia, served by a fleet of 88 Boeing 737 aircraft.

flydubai recently launched regular flights to EuroAirport Basel Mulhouse Freiburg, four

times a week, becoming the first national airline to operate direct flights from Dubai to this destination, growing its network in Europe to 29 destinations, including Budapest, Catania, Krakow, Milan-Bergamo, Prague, Salzburg and Zagreb.

The airline expects to take delivery of seven aircraft by the end of the year and plans to hire more than 130 new pilots to support its network expansion, adding Basel, Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius to its destinations.

Air Arabia

Air Arabia Group operates an extensive network with 218 destinations across six strategic hubs, including 113 from the UAE, as well as locations in Morocco, Egypt, and Pakistan. In the first half of 2024, the airline reported a net profit of AED693mn and served 8.9mn passengers, marking a 16% increase from the previous year. The seat occupancy rate remained strong at 81%.

On the other hand, Wizz Air Abu Dhabi has a portfolio of 40 destinations and continues to expand its operations to meet growing demand with a modern and sustainable fleet, supporting the airline's ambitious plans to launch flights to new destinations.

WAM



Bitcoin climbs to \$65,000 as Fed signals rate cut

New York, US – The price of Bitcoin climbed to nearly \$65,000 on Sunday after US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell signalled an interest rate cut at the central bank's upcoming meeting in September.

Bitcoin saw its price climbing to as high as \$64,845 on Friday after Powell's much-anticipated speech at the annual Jackson Hole symposium in the US state of Wyoming. The world's biggest cryptocurrency was trading around \$64,653 at 2230 GMT Friday for a daily gain of 6.8%.

Ethereum, the world's largest altcoin by market cap, was trading at \$2,788 for a daily increase of 6.2%.

The value of the cryptocurrency market stood at \$2.27tn, rising 5.79% for the day, according to CoinMarketCap, a digital asset price-tracking website.

Bitcoin's share, known as dominance, was at 56.1% and Ethereum's was at 14.7%, while some altcoins soared more than 20% for the day.

Fed Chair Powell said his confidence has grown that inflation is on a sustainable path back to 2%, saying "time has come" for an adjustment in monetary policy.



BoE chief says too early to declare victory against inflation

London, UK – The Bank of England (BoE) Governor Andrew Bailey said it is too early to declare victory against inflation.

"Recent experience leads me to be cautiously optimistic that inflation expectations are better anchored as a result of the regimes we have in place," he told the annual Jackson Hole symposium in the US state of Wyoming on Friday. "The second round inflation effects appear to be smaller than we expected."

Consumer inflation in the UK annually rose 2.2% in July, accelerating from a 2% year-on-year gain recorded in June, which is also the central bank's target.

The BoE on August 1 cut the bank rate by 25 basis point, from 16-year high, down to 5%.

Bailey said headline inflation has fallen sharply since the coronavirus pandemic as energy and food prices, in particular, have decreased. Some inflationary pressures still persist, he added.

He said the UK sees a lower level of inflation persistence than it expected a year ago, adding, "We need to be cautious because the job is not completed – we are not yet back to target on a sustained basis."

"Policy setting will need to remain restrictive for sufficiently long until the risks to inflation remaining sustainably around the 2% target in the medium term have dissipated further. The course will therefore be a steady one," he said.

Anadolu Agency

ECB urges caution on interest rate cuts amid inflation uncertainty

Frankfurt, Germany – The European Central Bank (ECB) is treading carefully on potential interest rate cuts, opting to approach its September 12 meeting with an open mind and guided by a broad evaluation of forthcoming economic data.

Essentially, it shouldn't be taken for granted that a rate cut will be delivered at the September 12 monetary policy meeting in Frankfurt, in stark contrast to market expectations, which largely anticipate a rate reduction next month.

This cautious stance is detailed in the recently published account of the ECB's monetary policy meeting held on July 17-18, 2024. The document reflects a sense of caution among members of the Governing Council, who are wary of making premature commitments to a specific rate trajectory.

"There should be no pre-commitment to a particular rate path, given the uncertainty surrounding the pace at which inflation will return to target," the account notes.

This reflects the Governing Council's consensus that flexibility is crucial in the current economic environment, as the path



of inflation remains uncertain.

Gradual adjustment favoured

The ECB's account also reveals that a cautious approach would enable Frankfurt to respond more gradually if inflation proves to be more persistent than currently expected.

"The Governing Council could afford to be patient and wait for more data to confirm that disinflation was indeed on track," the document adds.

Members indicated that the September meeting is viewed as an opportune moment to reassess the level of monetary pol-

icy restriction, but while data dependency remains key, it should not translate into an overemphasis on individual data points.

The most recent data highlighted that inflation has been more resilient than anticipated, even as economic activity indicators have underperformed. Members noted that "the short-term outlook had thus become somewhat more 'stagflationary'", with growth risks skewed to the downside.

Members pointed out that the short-term outlook for growth has deteriorated, as evidenced by both soft and hard data, including weak manufacturing PMI

indicators. The economy remains unbalanced, with the recovery predominantly driven by the services sector.

Despite these challenges, the labour market continues to display resilience. The unemployment rate held steady at 6.4% in May, its lowest since the inception of the euro, reinforcing expectations that a soft landing for the economy might be in the cards.

Fiscal policy also emerged as a point of concern, with policymakers wary that political uncertainty and shifts in governments across the eurozone could lead to less fiscal consolidation than

There should be no pre-commitment to a particular rate path, given the uncertainty surrounding the pace at which inflation will return to target

EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK

previously expected.

Inflation is forecast to hover around current levels for the remainder of the year, partly due to base effects related to energy prices, before gradually declining towards target in the second half of next year and stabilising around 2% by 2026.

The ECB Governing Council underscored the persistence of services inflation as a central factor in shaping the overall inflation outlook. Services inflation has remained stubbornly high, hovering around 4% since late 2023, with core inflation also showing resilience.

Euronews.com

Russia's Gazprom delivers 42mn cubic meters of gas to Europe through Ukraine

Moscow, Russia – The volume of Russian gas supplies to Europe through Ukraine is 42.1mn cubic meters per day, a Gazprom spokesman told reporters. Gazprom is Russia's largest state-owned energy producer and exporter.

"Gazprom continues to supply Russian gas for transit through Ukrainian territory via the Sudzha gas pumping station [in the Kursk Region] in an

amount approved by Ukraine. The volume is 42.1mn cubic meters for August 25. A request for transit via the Sokhranovka gas pumping station was rejected," he said.

The volume stood at 42.4mn cubic meters on August 24.

Gazprom Spokesman Sergey Kupriyanov said earlier that recent developments in the Sudzha area had already led to a sharp rise in natural and lique-



fied natural gas (LGN) prices.

On August 6, Russia's borderline Kursk Region, where the Sudzha gas pumping station is located, came under a massive attack from Ukraine.

The transit line through Ukraine remains the only route for Russian gas supplies to western and central European countries.

In 2022, the Gas Transmission System Operator of

Ukraine said it would suspend the flow of gas to Europe via the Sokhranovka transit point due to force majeure as the company allegedly was unable to control the Novopskov gas compressor station in the Lugansk People's Republic.

However, the Russian gas giant did not see any proof of force majeure.

Meanwhile, Gazprom set a new historic record of gas deliv-

eries for domestic consumers in August, the company said. The record was registered on August 22 and totalled 700.4mn cubic meters of gas.

"The record was registered on August 22 and totalled 700.4mn cubic meters of gas. This maximum of August coincides with the absolute summer record of daily deliveries set on July 17, 2024," the company said.

TASS

MoCIIP records 63% increase in industrial licence applications in Dhofar governorate

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) on Sunday informed that the number of industrial licence applications in Dhofar governorate saw a significant 63% increase year-on-year during the first half of 2024.

The ministry said that during the H1 this year, there were 3,095 applications compared to 1,897 applications during the first half of 2023. Additionally, 5,348 certificates of origin were issued during the first half of 2024 compared to 3,963 certificates during the same period in 2023, reflecting a 34.9% increase.

Regarding commercial registrations in Dhofar, the number reached 2,560 during the first half of 2024, compared to 2,846 registrations during the same period in 2023, bringing the total number of registrations in the governorate to 73,520 by the end of the first half of 2024.

The number of foreign investment registrations, however, fell to 253 during the first half of 2024 compared to 744 during the same period in 2023. With this latest addition, the total number of foreign investment registrations rose to 11,480.

The number of active licences in this governorate has been reported to be approximately

127,399 till the end of H1 2024.

Mohammed bin Khalifa al Badhrani, Director General of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion in Dhofar Governorate, stated that the governorate witnessed an increase in industrial licence applications, with 1,676 new applications during the first half of 2024 compared to 1,184 applications during the same period in 2023. Badhrani attributed this increase to the investment-friendly environment in Dhofar, as well as the facilities and incentives offered to investors. MoCIIP, in collaboration with relevant authorities, has enabled investors to use the latest smart applications to facilitate investment procedures.

Badhrani added that the highest licensed commercial activities in Dhofar governorate include the construction and contracting sector, export and import offices, along with a notable increase in licences for restaurants and cafés, vehicle mechanics, and retail clothing stores.

Empowering private sector

Badhrani said that the Directorate General of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion in Dhofar Governorate is working to enhance the investment climate with the aim of empowering the private sector to attract foreign investments and highlight key investment opportunities in the governorate.



Dhofar governorate is working to enhance the investment climate with the aim of empowering the private sector to attract foreign investments and highlight key investment opportunities

MOHAMMED BIN KHALIFA AL BADHRANI



the mining industry.

Investment opportunities in Dhofar governorate are diverse, and they include fields such as fiberglass boat manufacturing, cement paper bag production, and the manufacturing of formations used in water and soft drink packaging.

The agricultural sector in Dhofar also flourishes during the Khareef (monsoon) season due to seasonal rains, which boost food security and positively contribute to the local economy, Badhrani pointed out.

Khareef season as investment stimulus

Badhrani explained that the Khareef season presents a significant investment opportunity, as the governorate experiences notable growth in commercial activities during this period. The retail sector, in particular, benefits from the influx of tourists and residents, which stimulates sales and business activities, supporting small and medium enterprises as well as artisanal industries.

Dhofar governorate enjoys exceptional advantages in the logistics sector due to the presence of Salalah Port and the free zone. The Salalah Free Zone has successfully attracted numerous economic projects, with 127 usufruct agreements signed, totaling an accumulated investment volume of RO4.5bn.

Badhrani highlighted that Dhofar Governorate offers many incentives to attract investments, including a 30-year income tax exemption, customs exemptions, full foreign ownership rights for investment projects, and other advantages that make the governorate a preferred investment destination.



Kia Seltos SUV, a vehicle for busy roads, tricky highways

Living the city life comes around with its own set of challenges. The narrow roads, heavy traffic and tricky highways make navigation a tedious task. For those meeting busy schedules and getting life through a hectic routine, it is important to have a dedicated car that meets your expectations.

Indulge in an enhanced driving experience with the Kia Seltos, a compact SUV that is perfect for young drivers and executives looking for a modern ride. It is easy to navigate in winding city spaces or crowded mall parking spots when one is driving at an elevated position of an SUV.

Treat it as an investment or a lifestyle upgrade, Kia Seltos checks all the boxes. Diving deeper under the hood, the Seltos features a 1.5L engine producing 113hp at 6,300rpm paired to a VVT transmission that delivers exceptional performance and an impressive fuel efficiency of 17 KMC/litre, lessening the burden on your pocket.

At first look, the impressive 2,610mm wheelbase and 17-inch alloy wheels create a firm road grip whereas the interior is spacious, comfortable and aesthetically pleasing that spells luxury.

Crafted using a bold design philosophy with sharp muscular creases, in the Seltos, Kia intro-

It is easy to navigate in winding city spaces or crowded mall parking spots when one is driving at an elevated position of an SUV. Life-saving technologies are reflected in its product lineup

duced its new design, a diamond pattern radiator grille garnish complemented by the eye-catching daytime running headlights.

A look inside - the five-seater offers the luxurious comfort of roomy legroom, wider headspace, ventilated front-row seats and a panoramic sunroof that brightens the mood.

One can discover a range of seamless controls for easy cruising with the 3.5-inch mono OLED LCD, smooth controls paired to the steering wheel, 8" display audio with integrated Apple Car Play and Android Auto and a wireless charging tray for compatible smartphones, the company stated.

It pointed out that one can customise the interiors with ambient lighting options while filling up the 433-litre boot to load

Oman Air receives first of three new B787-9 deliveries for 2024

Oman Air received delivery of its latest Boeing B787-9 aircraft, the first of three scheduled for this year. Part of an existing order, which includes eight more aircraft by 2027, the newest marks the tenth Dreamliner in the airline's fleet.

As one of the world's most modern and advanced passenger aircraft, the B787-9 is known for its innovative design and exceptional fuel efficiency, while its wide cabins and large windows offer unparalleled on-board comfort for guests. The aircraft touched down in Muscat on Friday afternoon, arriving from the Boeing facility in Seattle.

"We're excited to welcome our new Boeing B787-9 to our aircraft line-up, which aligns with our strategy to fly a modern and common Oman Air fleet. It allows us to maintain efficiency in operations, optimise maintenance costs and ensure a seamless and consistent experience for our guests," said Con Korfiatis, Chief Executive Officer.

"Our latest addition to the fleet is also consistent with our focus on transforming our airline



towards financial sustainability, while upholding our reputation as a world-class carrier and supporting Oman's ambitions to increase tourism and connectivity in the years to come."

The newest aircraft features a two-class configuration with 30 Business Class seats and 258 Economy Class seats and will serve across the airline's network of destinations. Oman Air's spacious, elegant cabin design, and exceptional service and hospitality, has garnered it a string of international awards, including

most recently Best Seat Comfort in the Middle East at the APEX 2024 Awards and Best Airline Staff Middle East at the Skytrax 2024 Awards.

Oman Air began operations in 1993. Initially founded to serve important domestic routes, it has since undergone rapid growth and is today recognised as a major international carrier connecting cities around the world to Oman's stunning nature, rich heritage and welcoming culture.

The award-winning airline has been instrumental in transform-

ing Muscat into one of the Middle East's most desirable travel destinations, while supporting adjacent commercial, industrial and tourism activities. With a young and modern fleet including, among others, fuel-efficient Boeing 737 and 787 Dreamliner aircraft, which feature luxuriously appointed interiors, Oman Air is renowned for its exceptional products and services, both in the air and on the ground, and for the signature Omani hospitality it offers to every guest throughout their journey.

JW Marriott Hotel celebrates dual honours

JW Marriott Hotel Muscat is proud to announce that two of its distinguished leaders, general manager Juliana Salla and executive chef Okan Demir have been recognised for their exceptional contributions to the hospitality industry at the prestigious Oman's Best Hospitality Awards.

The awards ceremony, held on July 24, honoured Juliana Salla as Oman's Best General Manager (Hospitality) and Chef Okan Demir as Oman's Best Chef (Hospitality).

Juliana Salla, general manager of JW Marriott Hotel Muscat, has swiftly made her mark since the hotel's reopening, leading it to achieve Green Key certification - the first for a Marriott



Okan Demir (left) and Juliana Salla



property in Oman. Juliana's career, marked by a dedication to sustainable practices and innovative leadership, spans two decades across the globe, including key roles with The Ritz-Carlton and W Hotels.

Her relentless pursuit of excellence has now earned her the

title of Oman's Best General Manager (Hospitality).

Chef Okan Demir, executive chef, has brought his extensive culinary expertise to the kitchens of JW Marriott Muscat. Hailing from Turkey and with two decades of experience across multiple countries, Okan's pas-

sion for fresh, sustainable ingredients and his skill in crafting memorable menus have set a new standard for dining in Muscat. His culinary vision and leadership have been recognised with the title of Oman's Best Chef (Hospitality).

These accolades reflect JW Marriott Muscat's commitment to excellence, driven by leaders who are passionate about sustainability, innovation, and exceptional guest experiences.

Nestled in the heart of Oman's scenic capital, JW Marriott Hotel Muscat is the first-ever five-star hotel in the up-and-coming Madinat al Irfan business district and the flagship property of JW Marriott.

Social development committees making efforts to enhance community partnership

The social development committees in various wilayats are making 'diligent efforts' to meet community needs, besides improving the quality of living in the wilayat.

The Omani Women Association is a partner in this mission supporting and empowering needy families, besides extending their support to 'purposeful initiatives' for volunteer teams that enhance social unity.

Ali al Saidi, Muscat wali and the chairman of the social committee of Muscat wilayat, explained that the Ministry of Social Development through various regulations guides these committees at the wilayat level in various projects and initiatives.

In this regard, the first regulation was issued in 2016, with some amendments made to this in 2024. This regulation has been issued for deciding on the committees' tasks, the terms and period of membership, and members' selection. It also organises the volunteer teams' work in each wilayat, Saidi explained.

The social development committees include representatives of various governmental and community organisations. They include managers of the Social Development Department or the Partnership and Community Development Department. Also, representatives of the several ministries including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Housing



and Urban Planning, and Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs. As well as, representatives of the municipality, the Omani Women Association, sports clubs and volunteers.

Social Cohesion

Social development committees pursue to increase the citizen's standard of living and enhance social cohesion. Its most noticeable role is financial assistance

offer, such as paying housing rent, electricity and water bills, and health care. It is done by paying the costs of housemaids' recruitment to the neediest groups in society.

Emphasising these councils' importance to stabilise good Omani values and customs, the wali said the social development committees of various wilayats also support programmes to

control alien epidemics to Omani society.

Confirming the cooperation spirit between the social development committee and Seeb Volunteer Team, Majida bint

Sheikhan al Maamri, the team's head, informed that her team - through 20 campaigns and initiatives - contributed more than 3,500 hours of volunteer work.

Majida revealed that the team offered its support to many needy families through the Yusr (simplifying) or Grief End initiative. Under this initiative, 126 individuals benefited with a total amount of RO150,450,200.

Forty families were supported under the 'Productive Home' project, while 554 families benefited from the charity and solidarity system. The team also distributed 22,068 cartons of food under the Fasting Iftar project, additionally offering 114,598 meals to needy families. Support was also extended to 430 orphans and 38 families via humanitarian sponsorship projects.

The Omani Women Association plays a crucial role in supporting the programmes and projects of the social development committees in Oman. These associations are an integral part of the society, and have tangible contributions in the implementation of charitable projects, in cooperation with various governmental and private bodies.

Regarding the association's role in social development projects, Thuriya al Ameri, the association head in Quriyat, spoke about close coordination between the social development committees and the Omani Women Association for the implementation of those.



Fuelre4m unveils Styrex - world's first solution to polystyrene crisis

In a historic breakthrough against one of the most pressing environmental challenges of our time, Fuelre4m proudly introduces Styrex. This groundbreaking innovation is not just a new product; it is a global first, revolutionising how we manage and repurpose polystyrene waste.

Fuelre4m is already in discussions with leading global businesses, and the interest is significant, demonstrating the urgent demand for a solution like Styrex. Polystyrene, commonly known as Styrofoam, has long plagued our environment as a persistent pollutant. Every year, approximately 14mn tonnes of polystyrene waste are generated worldwide, yet recycling rates remain shockingly low. This non-biodegradable material takes up to 500 years to decompose, contributing to overflowing landfills and devastating ocean pollution.

It poses a severe threat to marine life, with around 1 million marine animals perishing annually due to plastic pollution, including polystyrene. Remarkably,

polystyrene accounts for roughly 30% of global landfill volume, underscoring the urgent need for a revolutionary waste management solution.

Styrex is the world's first and only solution capable of fundamentally solving the polystyrene waste crisis. This pioneering product harnesses cutting-edge nanotechnology to convert polystyrene into a valuable, sustainable resin, marking a seismic shift in waste management practices. With the UAE poised to put itself on the map as the leader in adopting this world-first technology, the potential for a national and global environmental transformation is immense.

"Styrex is not just a product; it is a revolutionary leap forward in solving one of the most critical environmental crises we face today," said Rob Mortimer, Founder, and CEO of Fuelre4m. "This problem shouldn't even exist anymore! It is imperative that everyone on the planet recognises their responsibility to tackle this issue."

Mandarin Oriental, Muscat unveils luxurious spa

An oasis of luxury has emerged in the heart of Shatti al Qurm with the opening of Mandarin Oriental, Muscat. The Spa at Mandarin Oriental, Muscat marks a new chapter of holistic wellness inspired by ancient Eastern philosophy and Omani healing traditions.

The Spa seamlessly combines Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group's award-winning signature programme's with local rituals and ingredients. Comprised of eight treatment rooms including a couple's suite, the spa offers a holistic wellness experience with bespoke treatments, expert specialists and serene sea views.

As the wellness retreat opens its doors, Mandarin Oriental, Muscat has announced its exclusive partnership with Biologique Recherche - a luxury skincare brand with advanced facial treatments delivering outstanding,



immediately visible, and long-lasting results.

Unique to The Spa at Mandarin Oriental, Muscat are two 'Essence of Muscat' treatments. Drawing inspiration from

Oman's enchanting natural scenery, the 'Mountain Restoration' explores the serenity of the Hajar Mountains and harnesses the restorative power of roses, pomegranates and Omani Frank-

incense.

Separately, the 'Rose Quartz Ritual' heralds to the time-honoured therapy of sand bathing in the Arabian desert and combines sound-healing with circulatory

massage and facial techniques using Damask Rose from Jabal Akhdar.

Nestled in the heart of The Spa, the Hammam is a sanctuary of indulgence with its exquisite mosaics and fragrant oils. Guests can enhance their wellness journey with a range of facilities designed to complement The Spa with exclusive facilities for male and female guests. This includes an outdoor relaxation terrace, sauna and steam room and outdoor pools. In addition, the hotel's Fitness and Wellness Centre boasts the latest in gym technology, with state-of-the-art equipment and body analysis to cater to all fitness levels and preferences.

Mandarin Oriental, Muscat is a beachfront gem nestled between the city and the Gulf of Oman in Shatti al Qurm, the capital's most prominent address.

Oman Post opens IPPEX option for fast and reliable delivery

Oman Post, the national postal operator, has opened the International Postal Premium Express Service (IPPEX); a premier solution designed for customers seeking to send parcels and packages internationally.

The service guarantees efficient delivery of packages weighing up to 30kg to the door of the recipient in over 220 destinations worldwide easily and reliably. Customers can anticipate receiving their parcels within one to five days.

A key feature of the IPPEX service is its comprehensive tracking system, which allows customers to monitor their shipments in real-time. Additionally, the service includes shipment insurance and in-house customs clearance, streamlining the international delivery process and providing cus-



tomers with peace of mind.

To further encourage customers to utilise the IPPEX service, Oman Post is currently offering a special 25% discount on all shipments made through this service until September 10. This promotion makes international shipping more accessible to customers.

As a leading member of the Universal Postal Union and part of the Asyad Group, Oman Post continues to blaze the trail in parcel service possibilities. Oman Post's IPPEX service is one of many offerings that fulfill the postal provider's mission of connecting people and businesses in Oman and beyond.

Engineers from Kerala mark evening of infotainment

Engineers from Kerala and their families in Muscat had a fun-filled evening with a family quiz conducted with great enthusiasm.

The Kerala engineers' community enjoyed an evening of infotainment - Quiz Night 2024 - held at the National University auditorium in Al Hail, Muscat, a release stated. Organised and executed by the Thangal Kunju Musaliar College of Engineering Alumni Oman Chapter, Quiz Night 2024 was conducted by the renowned Quiz Whiz of Oman, Hala Jamal.

The event was held under the guidance of president Dickie Philip, secretary Ajith Kumar, and quiz coordinators Naushad Abdul Hameed and

Mrinal Gopalakrishnan.

This competition - in its 21st edition this year - was open to the members of the Kerala engineers' families, with each team comprising one member, one woman and one kid.

The preliminary round saw the participation of over 40 teams, featuring a written round of questions and answers. The twin semi-finals were closely contested, leading to a nail-biting finale where teams raced to hit the buzzer for extra points. Sharp thinking and quick moves propelled the Malayali Engineers Alumni to victory, with Trichur Engineering College Alumni as the runner-up and Kannur Engineering College Alumni as the second runner-up.

Germany: Solingen attack suspect probed for terrorist links

Berlin, Germany - The investigation into a man suspected of carrying out deadly stabbings at a festival in the western German city of Solingen is now in the hands of federal prosecutors as being a case of suspected terrorism, a police spokesperson said on Sunday.

The attacks on Friday evening, in which three people died and eight were injured, has been claimed by the extremist 'Islamic State' (IS) group. The Federal Public Prosecutor's Office is now examining whether a suspect who handed himself in on Saturday evening has links with the terrorist organisation.

Police said the suspect, identified as a 26-year-old Syrian man, had admitted responsibility for the attack and was currently being questioned. German news magazine *Spiegel* reported that the suspect came to Germany in 2022 as a refugee and applied for asylum in the city of Bielefeld.

According to *Spiegel*, the suspect will be taken to the southern city of Karlsruhe on Sunday to appear before the Federal Court of Justice, the highest court of civil and criminal jurisdiction in Germany. A judge at the court will then decide on the conditions of his pre-trial detention, the magazine said.



Police said the suspect, identified as a 26-year-old Syrian man, had admitted responsibility for the attack

Random stabbings

The attacks occurred in front of a music stage at an event in Solingen's market square to mark 650 years of the city's history. Two men, aged 67 and 56, and a 56-year-old woman were killed by the knife-wielding attacker, who also injured eight other people, four of them seriously.

The assailant fled unidentified amid the panic caused by the attacks, which police said deliberately targeted victims' throats.

On Saturday, IS claimed responsibility for the attack on its news site, without providing evidence. The extremist group said that a 'soldier of the Islamic State' had carried out the crimes 'to avenge Muslims in Palestine and everywhere.'

German officials have said that they have also arrested a 15-year-old boy on suspicion that he knew about the planned attack and failed to inform authorities. The Solingen incident is likely to further inflame anti-immigration sentiment and xenophobia in some sectors of German society and boost support for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) ahead of elections next week in the states of Thuringia and Saxony.

DW



Two cars were torched near a French synagogue in La Grande-Motte

Synagogue blast: French police arrest suspect after

Paris, France - French police have arrested a suspect after an explosion in front of a synagogue in the southern city of La Grande-Motte, a port and resort city on the French Mediterranean coast, comes after a manhunt reportedly involving 200 police officers and gendarmes.

In the incident on Saturday morning, two doors of the synagogue were set on fire along with two vehicles in front of the building. One policeman was injured when a gas bottle exploded in one of the vehicles as police secured the site of the attack, which occurred as faithful were about to arrive for worship on the Jewish sabbath.

Acting Prime Minister Gabriel Attal said on Saturday that if the synagogue had been full at the time of the crime and people had come outside, there would likely have been fatalities.

The anti-terrorism prosecutor's office, which was put in charge of the investigation, said a man suspected of carrying out the attack was arrested on Saturday evening.

"Before the police could intervene, (the suspect) opened fire on the (police), who returned fire. The man was wounded in the face," the office said in a statement. Broadcaster BFM TV said the suspect was a 33-year-old Algerian, but local police declined to give details.

France, like many other European countries, has seen a surge in antisemitic crime following the deadly attack on Israel on October 7 by Palestinian group Hamas, and Israel's ensuing retaliatory offensive against in the Gaza Strip.

Several French media outlets said the suspect had been seen on CCTV shortly before the attack with a Palestinian flag tied round his waist.

DW

NASA: SpaceX to bring stranded astronauts home early next year

Wilmore and Williams will return home in February 2025 while Starliner will return uncrewed



Officials have said that astronauts Barry Wilmore and Sunita Williams have plenty of supplies and are trained for extended stays

Washington, D.C., US - Two NASA astronauts who flew to the International Space Station (ISS) aboard a faulty Boeing Starliner capsule will return to Earth with rival SpaceX early next year, the US space agency said on Saturday.

American astronauts Barry 'Butch' Wilmore and Sunita 'Suni' Williams launched to the ISS on the first manned test flight of the Starliner on June 5 for what was planned as a week-long mission.

However, the capsule's propulsion system suffered a series of glitches in the first 24 hours of its flight leaving the veteran astronauts stranded on the station for 79 days now.

On Saturday, NASA administrator Bill Nelson told a press conference that Wilmore and Williams will return home in February 2025 while Starliner will return uncrewed.

What's NASA's new plan?

The SpaceX Crew-9 mission will lift off late in September, after the Boeing capsule has headed towards the Earth, freeing a docking port on the ISS.

The SpaceX Crew-9 mission will carry only two passengers instead of the four planned originally.

NASA and SpaceX are working to reconfigure seats on the Crew-9 Dragon, 'and adjusting the manifest to carry additional cargo, personal effects, and Dragon-specific spacesuits for Wilmore and Williams', the space agency said.

Boeing's woes

NASA's space operations chief Ken Bowersox said agency officials unanimously voted for Crew Dragon to bring the astronauts home. Boeing voted for Starliner, saying that it was safe.

The rescue of the astronauts by its biggest space rival is a fresh public relations blow to a crisis-hit Boeing.

Boeing had pinned hopes on its Starliner test mission to redeem the troubled programme after years of development issues and over US\$1.6bn in budget overruns since 2016.

"I know this is not the decision we had hoped for, but we stand ready to carry out the action's necessary to support NASA's decision," Boeing's Starliner chief Mark Nappi said in an email to employees.

"The focus remains first and foremost on ensuring the safety of the crew and spacecraft," he said.

Nelson said NASA had not lost confidence in Boeing and plans to continue working with the aviation giant so the space agency will have two vehicles capable of ferrying astronauts to and from the ISS.

He added he was '100 per cent sure Boeing will launch Starliner again with a crew on board'.

Officials have said that Wilmore and Williams - both former military test pilots - have plenty of supplies, and are trained for extended stays.

DW

American astronauts Barry 'Butch' Wilmore and Sunita 'Suni' Williams launched to the ISS on the first manned test flight of the Starliner on June 5 for what was planned as a week-long mission

German government's future in danger in Sept 1 regional elections

Berlin, Germany - In the spa town of Bad Langensalza, Thuringia, a couple hundred people have gathered in a car park to hear a speech from a man in a pristine white shirt considered one of the most dangerous people in German politics: Björn Höcke, leader of the Thuringian branch of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The event, overlooked by the town's ivy-covered old city wall, has been pitched as a 'summer party'. There is beer, bratwurst, and balloons; children are getting their faces painted. Höcke, the last of several speakers, fairly springs onto the small stage with his arms spread wide, glowing with self-confidence.

No wonder: His party has been comfortably leading opinion polls in Thuringia for several months. The elections here and in neighbouring Saxony are now just days away, on September 1, and the AfD could well win both of them.

The day before, a much less popular man in eastern Germany was visiting Dresden, capital of Saxony, to stick a symbolic spade in the ground for the foundation of an EU-supported Taiwanese semiconductor factory expected to provide 8,000 new jobs to the region.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz was there partly to save his future. His centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) is hovering around 5% in opinion polls in both Saxony and Thuringia. That is a knife-edge - 5% is the hurdle for representation in the state parliaments, and if the SPD fails to clear it, Scholz could face serious questions before the national election in the fall of 2025.

"Scholz had great successes in the 2021 election in eastern Germany," Hans Vorländer, a political scientist at the Dresden University of Technology, told DW. "If they fail to make it into the parliaments now ... I'm sure within the



The far-right AfD is expected to emerge as the strongest party from three pivotal state elections

SPD there will be questions about Scholz's leadership ability and the next candidacy for chancellor."

An election about democracy

However many semiconductor factories arise in eastern Germany, the region often seems bogged down in grievance and fear - depopulated, far-right leaning, still affected by the economic aftermath of the reunification of East Germany with the West. The AfD has made an art of fostering these residual resentments. In Bad Langensalza, Höcke finishes his speech by calling on people to vote for him to prevent 'the demise of the country'. This, he said, is an election about 'whether we want a future or not'.

The listeners seem convinced. Even the floating voters at this

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) is hovering around 5% in opinion polls in both Saxony and Thuringia

'summer party' aren't put off by the racist statements AfD figures occasionally make - or that Germany's domestic intelligence agencies consider the Thuringian AfD to be even more extremist than the AfD as a whole. "A few things he said were pretty good," one undecided man told DW. "Like lowering taxes. But all the parties promise that before an election."

Not that everyone in Thuringia accepts the AfD as a legitimate option. Wherever Höcke campaigns, he has to shout down a

whistling, jeering counter-demo made up of various left-wing anti-fascist groups. Just a day before the Bad Langensalza 'summer party', the AfD was forced to cancel a Höcke event in the city of Jena because counterdemonstrators managed to break police lines and get into the event itself.

Höcke has long since learned to channel this hostility into his speeches. In between claiming that transvestites are teaching sex education in primary schools and migrants are bringing crime to Germany, he says that the government is becoming increasingly authoritarian. His parallels with the communist dictatorship that once ruled East Germany go down well with supporters in Bad Langensalza. This stirring of real or imagined grievances is what all the other parties in Thuringia and Saxony have to deal with, especially those belonging to Scholz's centre-left coalition.

The AfD's approach appears

to be working. In Thuringia, the latest polls put the AfD at around 30%, way ahead of the centre-right Christian Democrats (CDU) at 21%. In neighbouring Saxony, the CDU is putting up a better fight, matching the AfD at around 30%.

Though eastern Germany is often seen as a homogenous region, there are major political differences among the states. While Thuringia has been governed for the last decade by the socialist Left Party under State Premier Bodo Ramelow, Saxony has been led by Michael Kretschmer of the centre-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) since 2017.

These two politicians' fortunes in the current election campaign could hardly be further apart. Kretschmer's CDU has just recently retaken the lead from the AfD in some polls, while Ramelow's time in office looks all but over.

DW

At least 13 killed after boat sinks off Yemen

Sana'a, Yemen - At least 13 people have died and 14 others are missing after a boat sank off the coast of Yemen, Al Jazeera reported, citing the United Nations migration agency.

In a statement on Sunday, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said: "A migrant boat capsized off the coast of Yemen's Taiz governorate on Tuesday."

It further said that the boat, which departed from Djibouti with 25 Ethiopians and two Yemeni nations, sank near Dubab district in Bani al-Hakam subdistrict in Yemen, Al Jazeera reported.

The IOM said 11 men and two women were among those confirmed dead as a search operation is being conducted to locate the missing, including the Yemeni captain and his assistant. It stated that the cause of the capsizing of the ship remains unclear.

The acting chief of IOM's mission in Yemen stated: "This latest tragedy is a stark reminder of the perils faced by migrants on this route. Every life lost in these dangerous waters is one too many, and it is imperative that we do not normalise these devastating losses and instead work collectively to ensure that migrants are protected."

ANI

Thwarted large-scale attack by Hezbollah, says Israel's military

Hezbollah said that it launched an attack on Israel with a large number of drones and rockets

Jerusalem - Israel's military said its fighter jets attacked thousands of Hezbollah rocket launchers in Lebanon that were aimed at northern and central Israel.

"Approximately 100 IAF fighter jets ... struck and destroyed thousands of Hezbollah rocket launcher barrels that were located and embedded in southern Lebanon," the military said in a statement.

"Most of these launchers were aimed toward northern Israel, and some were aimed toward central Israel." Military spokesperson Lieutenant-Colonel Nadav Shoshani told reporters that Hezbollah in turn fired hundreds of rockets and UAVs toward northern Israel.

Shoshani said the rockets were 'part of a larger attack that was planned, and we were able to thwart a big part of it this morning', but he did not specify what Hezbollah had targeted.

"We're still in a situation assessment of the aftermath of the



The United Nations special coordinator's office in Lebanon (UNSCOL) and UNIFIL peacekeepers have called the situation at the border 'worrying'

attack ... there is still some fire happening," he added.

Meanwhile, Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said that one person had died in an Israeli strike on a vehicle in the town of Khiam.

Local media in Lebanon also reported other strikes across the country's south.

Hezbollah 'begins retaliatory strike'

Meanwhile, Hezbollah said that,

in response to the killing of its top commander in a Beirut suburb last month, it had launched an attack on Israel with a large number of drones and rockets.

The Lebanon-based group said it targeted an identified 'special military target as well as Israel's Iron Dome platforms and other sites but that the full response would take 'some time'.

"The number of Katyusha rockets launched until now is more than 320 ... towards

enemy positions," a Hezbollah statement said. The group added that it had targeted 11 Israeli bases and barracks.

Flights suspended

Flights to Tel Aviv and Beirut scheduled for Sunday and Monday from France have been suspended, the country's flagship airline said.

Air France usually runs a daily service to both cities, and it had already halted flights to Beirut

between July 29 and August 15.

The announcement comes after a spike in cross-border hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah early on Sunday.

Royal Jordanian Airlines, Jordan's flag carrier, also suspended its Beirut flights, citing 'the current situation'.

Germany's Lufthansa extended its Beirut flight suspension on Friday, to last until the end of September, and announced it would not fly to Tel

Aviv and Tehran until September 2. According to French news agency AFP, Beirut's airport was still open on Sunday, but many passengers were left stranded due to delayed or cancelled flights.

'Worrying' developments

The United Nations special coordinator's office in Lebanon (UNSCOL) and UNIFIL peacekeepers, meanwhile, have called the situation at the border between Israel and Lebanon 'worrying'.

Israel announced a 48-hour state of emergency as Hezbollah launched strikes from Lebanon. The Israeli military said it was also striking Hezbollah targets

The two agencies on Sunday issued a joint statement in which they 'call on all to cease fire and refrain from further escalatory action'.

"A return to the cessation of hostilities, followed by the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1701, is the only sustainable way forward," the statement said, adding: "We will continue our contacts to strongly urge for de-escalation."

DW

Gaza death toll passes 40,400 as Israel kills 71 more Palestinians: Ministry

Gaza City, Palestine - At least 71 more Palestinians were killed in Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip, bringing up the death toll since last October 7 to 40,405, the Health Ministry said on Sunday.

A ministry statement added that some 93,468 other people have been injured in the assault. "Israeli forces killed 71 people and injured 112 others in three 'massacres' of families in the last 24 hours," the ministry said.

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

At least seven Palestinians were killed and several others injured in fresh Israeli airstrikes in the Gaza Strip on Sunday, medical sources said.

An airstrike targeted a residential apartment in Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood in northern



The attacks came amid reports of a limited Israeli pullout from southeastern areas of Deir al-Balah

Gaza, leaving three people dead and several others injured, a medical source said.

Another Palestinian lost his life in artillery shelling in the Burj refugee camp in central Gaza,

another source said.

Two more people were killed in a drone strike targeting a group of civilians in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip, the source said.

A Palestinian woman was also killed by Israeli gunfire in the town of Al-Qarara, north of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip.

The attacks came amid re-

ports of a limited Israeli pullout from southeastern areas of Deir al-Balah with massive damage reported to houses and infrastructure in the area.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army withdrew on Saturday from areas north of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, leaving behind mutilated bodies and widespread destruction.

The devastation was particularly severe in the 'Hamad residential city' area, where Israeli warplanes destroyed dozens of apartments and levelled entire towers, eyewitnesses told Anadolu.

They reported that dozens of residential buildings were reduced to rubble in the northern areas of Khan Younis, alongside the bulldozing of citizens' lands and properties.

Anadolu Agency



Protests demanding hostage swap deal and early polls continue in Tel Aviv

Israeli protesters demand immediate hostage swap deal

Jerusalem - Thousands of protesters demonstrated in several Israeli cities on Saturday evening, demanding an immediate hostage swap deal with Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip.

Thousands protested in downtown Tel Aviv, urging the government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to finalise a deal that would lead to the release of Israeli hostages in Gaza, the state-run broadcasting authority KAN reported.

Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid shared photos of himself on X taking part in protests.

"Go to Cairo (negotiations) yourself, don't send anyone else, finalise the deal now," Lapid urged Netanyahu.

Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronoth reported that demonstrations also took place in Haifa, Herzliya, and Caesarea.

A Hamas delegation arrived in Cairo on Saturday to resume talks on a hostage swap and a ceasefire in Gaza, which have been stalled due to Netanyahu's refusal to give up control of the Philadelphi Corridor on the Gaza-Egypt border and the Rafah crossing. Several press re-

ports have accused Netanyahu of sabotaging the talks out of fear for his political future.

The Hamas delegation will meet with Egyptian officials to get an update on the latest developments in the ceasefire talks, a Palestinian source familiar with the situation told Anadolu on Saturday, requesting anonymity.

In a statement, Hamas spokesman Izzat al-Rishq confirmed the delegation's visit, saying the movement remains committed to the July 2 proposal backed by US President Joe Biden.

He said the Hamas delegation, led by Khalil Al-Hayya, is visiting Cairo at the invitation of Egyptian and Qatari mediators to review the outcome of recent negotiations in the city.

The spokesman sought to put 'pressure on the occupation (Israeli government) to obligate it to stop obstructing reaching an agreement'.

This visit comes two days after an Israeli security delegation and a US team arrived in Cairo.

Both delegations are taking part in ceasefire talks.

Anadolu Agency

8 killed, 44 injured in Russian attacks in Ukraine

Kyiv, Ukraine - At least eight people were killed and 44 others injured in overnight Russian attacks in northern and eastern Ukraine, officials said in separate statements on Sunday.

Mykola Oleshchuk, the commander of Ukrainian Air Force, claimed on Telegram that Russia carried out missile attacks overnight on the border regions of Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, and Donetsk.

The missiles were launched from Russia's Voronezh and Rostov regions, he claimed, adding that most of the missiles failed to reach their planned targets. He said eight of nine Russian drones were also intercepted over the



southern Mykolaiv region.

On Telegram, Mykolaiv Governor Vitaliy Kim reported that 15 residential and commercial buildings were damaged by debris

from drones that were shot down.

Donetsk Governor Vadym Firlashkin said seven people were killed and 15 injured in the region in the Russian attack that also

damaged civilian infrastructure in the region's Pokrovsk, Kramatorsk and Bakhmut districts.

The Sumy Regional Military Administration issued a separate

statement on Telegram, saying one person was killed and 16 others were injured in a missile strike in the region. Kharkiv Governor Oleh Synyehubov said on Telegram that 13 people were injured in Kharkiv and Chuhuiv cities.

Local authorities in the Chernihiv region have not yet reported any casualties or damages.

Russian authorities have not yet commented on the Ukrainian officials' claims.

Meanwhile, five people were killed and 12 others were injured in a pre-dawn shelling on Sunday by Ukrainian forces of Russia's border region of Belgorod, which also damaged infrastructure.

Anadolu Agency

ROHINGYA CRISIS

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh observe seventh ‘Genocide Day’

Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh - Rohingya refugees stranded in camps in southern Bangladesh observed the seventh ‘Rohingya Genocide Day’ on Sunday.

The commemoration took place as new refugees, fleeing escalating violence in Myanmar, continued to arrive at the border.

Seven years ago, the majority of the Rohingya community was forced to flee Myanmar’s Rakhine state, an act recognised as genocide by the UN and other international organisations.

According to Foreign Ministry data, Bangladesh currently hosts over 1.3mn Rohingyas in Cox’s Bazar and Bhasan Char isle, with no repatriations taking place despite previous attempts to initiate the process.

Despite the heavy rain, at least 10,000 Rohingya refugees gathered in the morning in the field of Camp-4 in Ukhia, Cox’s Bazar district, to commemorate the seventh ‘Rohingya Genocide Day’ amid slogans such as ‘We want to go back to our homeland’ and ‘Ensure rights for the Rohingya’.

Mohammad Alam, a Rohingya community leader in Bangladesh, addressed the crowd before leading morning



Seven years ago, the majority of the Rohingya community was forced to flee Myanmar’s Rakhine state, an act recognised as genocide by the UN

Muslim prayers.

He called for ‘proper rights’ and ‘safe repatriation’, emphasising the need for living a dignified life with access to education and job opportunities. The thousands in attendance resonated with his demands.

Among those present was Mohammad Nur, 25, who arrived in the Bangladesh camp in

late August 2017. He lost two brothers while crossing the border. “When I arrived here, I was 18-year-old and hoping for a better future. But now I find myself idle and without any work,” Nur told Anadolu.

“We want jobs. We want to live with dignity here because we believe safe repatriation is impossible under the current

conditions in Myanmar,” he said.

New arrivals

Recent violence in Rakhine state, involving clashes between the Arakan Army and Myanmar armed forces, has forced at least 2,000 new refugees to cross into Bangladesh, Anadolu discovered during a visit to the camps. More than 2,000 new

Rohingya refugees have entered Bangladesh since the collapse of Sheikh Hasina’s government on August 5, which led to several Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) personnel abandoning their posts due to fears of public retribution.

The new refugees have taken shelter mostly in three out of 27 camps, Anadolu found out after

When I arrived here, I was 18 years old and hoping for a better future. But now I find myself idle and without any work. We want jobs. We want to live with dignity

MOHAMMAD NUR

talking with refugee community leaders and officials.

BGB officials have acknowledged the significant influx of refugees but have indicated that they are actively working to prevent additional arrivals.

“We have detained at least two dozen new Rohingya refugees today,” a BGB commander, who wished to remain unnamed, told Anadolu on Saturday. The detainees were held at a makeshift checkpoint, as observed by Anadolu.

Anadolu visited three Rohingya camps on Saturday and spoke with at least 30 new refugees who have arrived after August 5.

On Bangladesh’s eastern bor-

der, the advance of the Arakan Army into Maungdaw district has forced thousands of Rohingyas to flee.

Hundreds of refugees have died crossing the Naf River and the nearby border. On August 5, a series of drone strikes reportedly targeted civilians fleeing the fighting and violence in their villages in Maungdaw.

Abdus Sabur lost all his children, including four-year-old twins, while attempting to cross the river amid heavy bombing on August 5. Sabur fled Maungdaw’s downtown after it was encircled by the Arakan Army from three sides earlier this month.

“The last of the Myanmar army and some armed Rohingya forces withdrew on August 3, so we decided to flee to Bangladesh,” Sabur told Anadolu. “But all my children drowned in the rough waters of the Naf River. Only my wife and I survived.”

Unverified reports estimate the death toll at around 200 people. If confirmed, this would be one of the deadliest attacks on civilians in Myanmar’s three-year civil war, which began after the military coup in 2021.

Anadolu Agency

FROM PERSECUTION TO EXODUS

The Rohingya refugee crisis is a complex and protracted humanitarian crisis that stems from decades of discrimination and violence against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar

1977 - Myanmar, then known as Burma, launches Operation Dragon King (Naga Min) in Rakhine state. The Rohingya ethnic minority is declared ‘illegal’ and stripped of their citizenship.

1977-78 - During Operation Dragon King, mass arrests, persecution, and severe violence force approximately 200,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh. In response, Bangladesh establishes refugee camps.

By 1979 - Most Rohingya refugees repatriate to Burma. Of those who remain in Bangladesh, around 10,000 people, predominantly children, die due to a reduction in food rations.

1989 - Burma is renamed Myanmar following a military crackdown that

suppresses a popular uprising. Around 250,000 Rohingya flee to Bangladesh.

1992 - In the spring, Bangladesh closes its camps to new arrivals, and repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar begins in the fall, despite international protests. In the subsequent years, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya are returned to Myanmar.

2003 - Of the 20 camps established in Bangladesh during the early 1990s, only two remain operational: Nayapara camp near Teknaf and Kutupalong camp near Ukhia.

August 25, 2017 - A shadowy Rohingya militant group known as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) attacks police posts in Rakhine state, resulting in the deaths of at least a dozen officers. The violence triggers the largest mass displacement in the crisis to date, with Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) documenting over 6,700 violent deaths among Rohingya. Many global leaders accuse Myanmar of ethnic cleansing.

November 23, 2017 - Bangladesh and Myanmar agree to begin repatriating refugees, but the UN High Commissioner for Refugees reports

that conditions are not yet suitable for their safe return, causing the process to be halted.

December 5, 2017 - UN human rights chief Zeid Ra’ad al-Husseini warns of potential ‘elements of genocide’ and calls for an international investigation.

August 25, 2018 - Thousands of Rohingya refugees hold protests to mark the first anniversary of their exodus. UN investigators call for the prosecution of Myanmar’s army chief and five other high-ranking military commanders for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.

An attempt to repatriate 2,260 Rohingya refugees fails as they refuse to return without assurances of safety.

July 16, 2019 - The US imposes sanctions on Myanmar’s army chief and three other high-ranking officers.

November 11, 2019 - Gambia files a lawsuit at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) accusing Myanmar of genocide. Three days later, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague authorizes a full investigation into the persecution of the Rohingya. Additionally, rights groups file a

third case in Argentina under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

December 11, 2019 - Aung San Suu Kyi represents Myanmar at the ICJ, denying allegations of genocide but acknowledging that the army may have used excessive force.

January 23, 2020 - The ICJ orders Myanmar to take urgent measures to prevent further alleged genocide and requires the country to report back within four months.

February 1, 2021 - The Myanmar military seizes power, placing Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest and subsequently sentencing her to 17 years in prison.

March 21, 2022 - The US officially designates the 2017 violence against the Rohingya as genocide

40 killed in two road accidents in Pakistan

Karachi, Pakistan - At least 40 people were killed and dozens others injured in two road accidents in southwest and northwest Pakistan on Sunday, police and local media reported.

Some 29 passengers were killed when a passenger vehicle fell into a ravine near Rawlakot in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, about 80km (50 miles) from the capital Islamabad, local broadcaster Geo News reported, citing rescue officials.

Commissioner Rawlakot Abdul Hameed Khan confirmed that 21 people were killed in the road mishap.

Local TV channels showed footage of the badly damaged bus lying on rocks downhill as locals gathered at the scene.

In another accident, 11 Shia pilgrims were killed and over 30 injured when a bus fell into a ravine in southwest Pakistan on Sunday morning, police said.

The accident occurred in the Lasbella district of Balochistan



TV channels showed footage of the damaged bus lying on rocks downhill

province, which borders Iran.

Victims from the northeastern Punjab province were on their way to Iran.

The initial investigation suggested that the accident was caused by a failure of the brakes. The incident took place days

after 28 Pakistani pilgrims were killed and 23 injured in a bus crash in the Iranian city of Yazd on Wednesday.

Road accidents in Pakistan are common, owing primarily to inadequate safety standards. Anadolu Agency

Telegram founder Durov held in France

Paris, France - French police arrested Pavel Durov, the billionaire founder and CEO of the messaging app Telegram, at Le Bourget airport near Paris on Saturday.

Durov was arrested on a warrant for offenses related to the popular messaging app, the AFP news agency reported, citing unnamed officials.

According to French broadcaster TF1, Durov was traveling aboard his private jet from Azerbaijan and was arrested around 8pm local time (1800 GMT).

He is due to appear in court on Sunday.

Why is Durov being investigated?

Pavel Durov is suspected of failing to take measures to curb the use of his platform for criminal purposes.

France’s OFMIN, an agency tasked with preventing violence against minors, had issued an arrest warrant for Durov as part of a preliminary investigation into alleged offenses including fraud, drug trafficking, cyberbullying, organised crime and the promotion



of terrorism, one of the sources close to the case said.

‘Enough of Telegram’s impunity’, said one of the investigators. He added that they were surprised that Durov came to Paris, knowing that he was a wanted man.

Telegram is one of the most important social media platforms in the world after Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok and Wechat. It currently has the aim of reaching one billion active users by next year.

The Russian-born Durov, 39, reportedly holds French citizenship. He founded Telegram in 2013 with his brother Nikolai.

The Russian-born Pavel Durov, 39, reportedly holds French citizenship. He founded Telegram in 2013 with his brother Nikolai, and left Russia in 2014

Durov left Russia in 2014 after refusing to comply with government demands to shut down opposition communities on his social media platform, VK, which he subsequently sold.

After Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Telegram became the main source of unfiltered, sometimes graphic and misleading content from both sides about the war and the politics surrounding the conflict.

The messaging app is one of the most important online networks in Russia. It is used by many authorities and politicians for communication.

Russia reacts

Meanwhile, Russian state-run TASS reported that the Russian Foreign Ministry is working to clarify the detention of Pavel Durov, in France. The Russian Embassy in Paris told TASS that Durov’s representatives hadn’t contacted them, but diplomats are investigating the matter.

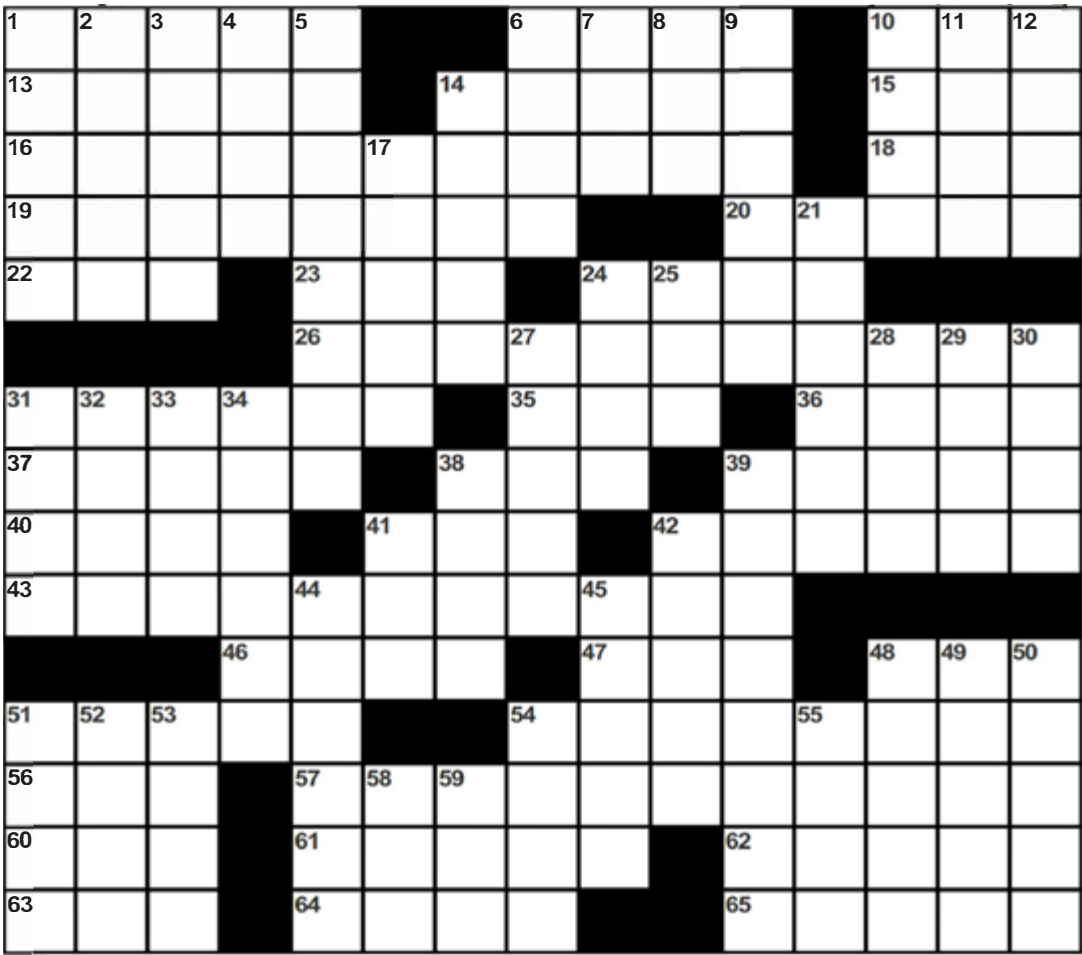
Foreign Ministry’s spokesperson Maria Zakharova recalled Western outcry over Russia’s 2018 Telegram ban, asking if they’ll demand Durov’s release now or remain silent.

“The Paris’ decision to detain Telegram co-founder Pavel Durov raises a question whether international organisation will demand his release or will ‘swallow their tongues,’” TASS quoted Zakharova as saying.

Russian lawmaker Vladislav Davankov also urged Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to act, suspecting political motives.

He warned Durov’s arrest could endanger Telegram users’ data and called for diplomatic efforts with French authorities. Agencies

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Ear-related
 - 6) French military cap
 - 10) Nonstick kitchen spray
 - 13) Pipe-unclogging brand
 - 14) "Expletive deleted" sound
 - 15) Air hero
 - 16) Significant other
 - 18) Inform on the mob
 - 19) Outside the lab, say
 - 20) Port near Gibraltar
 - 22) AKC category
 - 23) Soul singer Cooke
 - 24) Online 'zine
 - 26) Citrus-flavored soda
 - 31) Like pieces in a kit
 - 35) Cyclotron bit
 - 36) Art deco great
 - 37) One to vie with
 - 38) Come... (lures)
 - 39) Edgar who painted ballerinas
 - 40) Birthstone for many Libras
 - 41) Female rabbit
 - 42) Attacks from all sides
 - 43) Publisher of authori-nanced books
 - 46) Marine One rider (Abbr.)
 - 47) Fleur-de-...

- 48) Emissions-monitoring org.
- 51) ... pork (Chinese dish)
- 54) Fortified Portuguese wines
- 56) Half a sawbuck
- 57) 1962 hit for Bobby "Boris" Pickett
- 60) Senate vote
- 61) Often-quoted line
- 62) Take a sip of
- 63) Curator's concern
- 64) ...do-well
- 65) Lipstick mishap
- DOWN**
- 1) Fess up to
- 2) Heavenly prefix
- 3) Like Seattle's climate
- 4) Alamo capturer Santa ...
- 5) One in need of salva-tion
- 6) Abstract artist Paul
- 7) Extra-wide, on a shoe-box
- 8) Dispenser candy
- 9) Emetic drug
- 10) Cowpoke's pal
- 11) Trendy berry
- 12) French city on the Moselle
- 14) Myanmar, formerly
- 17) A bit less than a liter

- 21) Is in sync
- 24) Ids' complements
- 25) All chess pieces (even the queen!)
- 27) San Fran griddier
- 28) Twist the arm of
- 29) ASAP, in the ER
- 30) Pianist Dame Myra...
- 31) Alta. or Ont.
- 32) Co-host of Strahan
- 33) "Mrs. Bridge" author... S. Connell
- 34) Muslim leader
- 38) Klutz's cry
- 39) Napoleons, bombs, etc.
- 41) Henna rinse, e.g.
- 42) Off-forgotten part of a 45
- 44) "The buck stops here" president
- 45) Tickle pink
- 48) Wipe away
- 49) Shells, but not BBs
- 50) "My Name is ... Lev"
- 51) Yucatan dweller
- 52) Ride-requesting app
- 53) Do some ushering
- 54) Roman Cath. title
- 55) Mosque leader
- 58) "To a ... " poem
- 59) Dundee denial

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

A friend in need may be a friend indeed, but this can also mean they're a pain in the behind. While it may be slightly excruciating, you will need to exercise your patience when it comes to platonic relationships now. If they need to vent about their work or their honey or the price of gas, it's your duty to make sympathetic noises, at least for a certain amount of time.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Usually you like a little buttering up, but right now someone's applying the spread to the wrong side of the bread. Whether it's someone in your family or a member of your extended family of friends, this flattery doesn't seem to be getting them anywhere. In fact, they may be losing ground in your estimation. Set your disdain aside and let the situation unfold a bit. You'd want a little slack if you were in their shoes.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your internal editor, that little something that intervenes between what goes on upstairs and what you say, is taking the day off. While it's putting its feet up somewhere and enjoying a drink with an umbrella in it, those around you are subject to your genius monologues, your sudden brilliant plays on words, your outbursts about how the world should be and more. Just have an apology ready in case you inadvertently put your foot in that wide-open mouth.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Sure, you could win that tug-of-war. With your follow through, that's a game you're pretty much unbeatable at, but is it really something you want to commit yourself to? Take a while longer to assess the situation and your would-be opponent. Perhaps there's a way to turn this into a much more immediate and happier win/win type of thing.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 23

Both sides of the bed as well as the foot of it are the wrong side to get up on, and add to that your shoelace will probably break, your bus will be late or you'll forget about that important meeting. How do you fix this horrible, no-good, very-bad-day spell? Break your routine. Take yourself out for a nice lunch, take a long walk, take the rest of the day off. Calling a friend and venting and laughing might help too.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Money and the future are mingling in the stars, and perhaps they should be in your mind as well. When was the last time you gave some thought to planning your longer-term finances? And when was the last time you paid more than the minimum on your credit card bill or made a deposit in your savings or retirement account? Put your practical side to work: a book, a banker, or a friend can help.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

If you're selling the Brooklyn Bridge, there's no shortage of buyers right now, and you're entirely capable of talking circles around just about anyone. While exercising your mighty powers of communication is a powerful thrill, you'll also want to engage your ethics and sense of fair play. Giving them a line of bull or making their heads spin just because you can isn't so good for the karma.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You've had your natural diplomacy running in high gear for some time with regard to a given situation, perhaps work related, maybe in the romantic realm or maybe just with your car mechanic, but you also have your limits. Call off your peacekeeping mission before you totally burn yourself out. A little conflict doesn't have to be scary, and it can even be quite productive. Say what you mean and mean what you say.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Change is in the air, and when it comes to work, you can easily make it change for the better. Show that you're both a team player and an innovative thinker, and show these things to someone in a position to help you implement those big ideas and smart plans you've been quietly working on. You could find yourself in charge of a project that'll look really excellent on your resume and might even get you a bonus or raise.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

The rest of the world is in hustle-and-bustle mode, but you're in the mood to stay in bed with a good book or a good person. Playing hooky might be a possibility, but if you're short on sick days, put on your best smile and face the day to the best of your ability. If you play your cards right, you can probably knock off early and head home to your love nest, and what a relief it'll be.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

The stars are sending some intriguing and unexpected stuff your way, particularly when it comes to the realm of romance. Someone very out of place (your boss, the mail carrier, a stranger on the street, a character in a book) can provide you with some simple advice that will enlighten your heart in a pretty amazing way. As for your existing or next love connection, it may very well be in a strange package now too.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Not judging a book by its cover is key now, especially when you're meeting new people. A person who seems like your polar opposite may be bringing you a fascinating new perspective, but not if you decide prematurely that you don't like them. Engage your natural open-mindedness and give each new person and idea a chance, and then maybe another one. The bonus is that your karma will prosper as well.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- The Haast's eagle is the largest eagle known; where does it live?
A. Nowhere, it is extinct
B. New Zealand
C. Western Canada
D. Kazakhstan
- Which of these, a landlocked principality, is the smallest German-speaking country in the world?
A. Luxembourg
B. San Marino
C. Andorra
D. Liechtenstein
- Inspired by lucid dreaming and corporate espionage, it won Academy Awards for Best Visual Effects, Best Sound Editing, Best Sound Mixing, and Best Cinematography. Which film is it?
A. Inception
B. The Matrix
C. In Dreams
D. Electric Dreams

Answers: 1. A 2. D 3. A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	S	S	A
A	L	S	Qu
U	R	S	I
E	B	L	A

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.

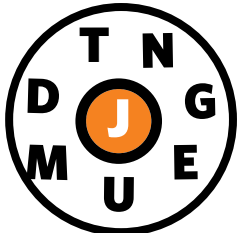
SOLUTION
20-25 words: Excellent,
15-20 words: Very good,
10-15 words: Good,
5-10 words: Average

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

ARSENAL ACE VILLA

Trossard, Partey goals and Raya’s wonder save help Gunners blank last season’s bogey team

Birmingham, England - Second-half goals by Leandro Trossard and Thomas Partey earned Arsenal earn a hard-fought 2-0 win at Aston Villa on Saturday as Mikel Arteta’s side continued their perfect start to the Premier League season.

Villa did the double over Arsenal last season, defeats that ultimately cost the Gunners the title, and had plenty of chances to make it three successive wins at Villa Park, striker Ollie Watkins missing two gilt-edged openings.

However, Arsenal weathered

with great collective organisation and huge individual threat.

“But we found a way to win, especially because the team played with a lot of personality and understood the game better and better.

“Against any formation, any opponent, we are finding a threat from many areas, and that’s a big compliment for the team.”

As well as getting the better of Arsenal twice last term, accounting for 40% of the Gunners’ Premier League defeats in the entire season, Villa came into Saturday’s match as the only side to

I am very happy. First of all, a really tough place to come, great atmosphere, a good team, really well coached with great collective organisation and huge individual threat.

MIKEL ARTETA

the storm, taking the lead in the 67th minute through substitute Trossard, before Partey made sure of the three points 10 minutes later.

Villa supporters headed for the exits, ruing their missed opportunities, as Arsenal’s travelling fans celebrated two wins from two to keep them on track for another serious title challenge.

“I am very happy,” Arteta said. “First of all, a really tough place to come, great atmosphere, a really good team, really well coached

beat Arteta’s team in 2024.

On the road, Arsenal have been especially unrelenting this year, winning eight of their nine Premier League away games ahead of the trip to the Midlands, scoring 28 goals, conceding three and keeping seven clean sheets.

The visitors again made a blistering start at Villa Park, dominating the opening exchanges, with Bukayo Saka denied by a superb early save from Villa keeper Emiliano Martinez.

Villa did settle into the game



Arsenal’s Leandro Trossard celebrates with teammates after scoring against Aston Villa; (below) Trossard with William Saliba



and should have taken the lead in the 24th minute, but England striker Watkins somehow contrived to miss the target with the goal at his mercy.

Watkins was again guilty of wasting a glorious opening early in the second half, heading too close to David Raya in the Arsenal goal when reacting first to Amadou Onana’s effort coming down off the crossbar.

In pursuit of their first league title in 20 years, Arsenal were al-

ways going to threaten and took their chance when it came, Trossard sweeping home with his first touch after coming off the bench.

Partey’s second was less emphatic, squirming under Martinez, but no less crucial to end the Villa hoodoo and keep the Gunners firing. Arsenal have won their first two games in a top-flight campaign without conceding for the first time since 1971-72.



Pep Guardiola was all praise for Erling Haaland

Haaland’s numbers ridiculous, says Pep

Manchester, England - Pep Guardiola believes Erling Haaland could etch his name alongside Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi among the game’s greatest strikers with his “ridiculous” scoring numbers.

Haaland bagged a hat-trick in City’s 4-1 win over Ipswich Town on Saturday, the 10th for the Premier League club.

“The numbers are ridiculous,” Guardiola told reporters. “He can compete in terms of goals with Cris-

He can compete in terms of goals with Cristiano and Messi. The numbers are unbelievable at his age. He’s an incredible threat.

PEP GUARDIOLA

tiano and Messi. The numbers are unbelievable at his age. He’s an incredible threat, hopefully he can be here for many years.”

Two games into the season and the 24-year-old Haaland has four goals in what could well be a third consecutive Golden Boot campaign.

His overall record at the club is 94 goals in 101 appearances.

The battering ram of a forward, who missed nearly two months last season with a foot injury, benefited from a restful summer after Norway failed to qualify for Euro 2024.

“I said a few weeks ago, he feels better than previous seasons,” Guardiola said. “This season, no Euros, relax and arrive well.”

Madueke hits hat-trick as Chelsea blow Wolves away

Wolverhampton, England - Noni Madueke scored a second-half hat-trick as Chelsea crushed Wolverhampton Wanderers 6-2 away in a frenetic Premier League clash at Molineux on Sunday.

Chelsea’s first Premier League points of the season and the first for new manager Enzo Maresca arrived in spectacular fashion as the visitors ripped Wolves apart after the break following an absorbing first period.

Maresca’s side led twice in the first half with goals by Nicolas Jackson and Cole Palmer but both times Wolves deservedly hit back through Matheus Cunha and Jorgen Strand Larsen.



Chelsea’s Noni Madueke celebrates after scoring against Wolverhampton Wanderers

Wolves fell part after the break, however, and Madueke took the game beyond them with three goals in 15 minutes, all of them assisted by the excellent Palmer. Joao Felix came off the bench to mark his return to the club with his side’s sixth goal.

Newcastle escape with draw

Newcastle United’s Anthony Gordon equalised 14 minutes from time to secure a 1-1 draw at Bournemouth in the Premier League on Sunday and spoil their hosts’ 125th anniversary celebrations.

Marcus Tavernier put

Bournemouth ahead in the first half but Gordon stole in at the back post to steer home a 76th-minute cross from substitute Harvey Barnes to ensure a deserved share of the spoils.

Newcastle advanced to four points from their opening two games of the season. Bournemouth drew their first match at Nottingham Forest.

Bournemouth, hoping for a win to mark their anniversary festivities, had the ball in the net in stoppage time for what looked initially to be a dramatic late winner but Dango Ouattara’s effort was ruled out for handball after a VAR check.

Lyon’s owner denies 100 million euros target for transfers

Lyon, France - Olympique Lyonnais are not required to sell players for 100 million euros (\$112 million) before the summer transfer window ends, the French club’s owner John Textor said on Saturday.

“We do not have sales targets, and we are not required to sell 100 million euros of players as there may be other ways to bring in revenues to maintain financial sustainability,” Textor told Reuters.

On Thursday, the French newspaper L’Equipe reported that Lyon had put the majority of their squad on the transfer market to raise 75 million euros to balance their budget and meet financial sales targets.

Lyon have spent around 134 million euros since June, more than any other team in France.

Textor is the majority stakeholder of Olympique Lyonnais through Eagle Football Group (EEFG.PA), a holding company listed in Paris. The French side was acquired by Eagle Football in



Lyon announced the transfer of French defender Mamadou Sarr to Racing Club de Strasbourg for 10 million euros last Thursday

2022, which holds 87.7% of the share capital. The group posted a yearly revenue of 368.3 million euros in June, an increase of 78% from the previous year, helped by events and an uptick in player trading.

Textor also said that they expect to sell maybe two more players before the transfer window closes on Friday, acknowl-

edging that it’s been a slow window in that regard and that Lyon may have missed their normal budget in the off-season.

“That’s certainly true, but that does not mean that we are required to hit that budget. If it’s a slow transfer window, then we hold players until the next window. It’s as simple as that,” he added.

Dominant win gives Postecoglou and Tottenham renewed belief

London, England - Tottenham Hotspur have banished any self-doubt they may have had going into the season after a dominant 4-0 home Premier League victory over Everton on Saturday, said manager Ange Postecoglou, who believes there is more to come from his side.

Tottenham were held to a 1-1 draw by Leicester City in their season opener on Monday, much to the frustration of Postecoglou and his players, but were creative and clinical to ease past Everton with an accomplished performance.

Son Heung-min with a brace, Yves Bissouma and Cristian Romero were among the goals as Tottenham eased to their first win of the campaign.

“I always have hope and I am optimistic at heart. You need to be in our game, there is plenty that can bring you down,” Postecoglou told reporters.

“The performance (at Leices-



Tottenham’s Son Heung-min celebrates after scoring against Everton

ter) was really good but when you don’t get the result there is always a bit of doubt there.

“We played well last (match) and dominated the game, today was a bit different. The lads had a strong mindset and we got a really good goal early on and didn’t let off after that.

“The performance was good. It’s really encouraging for us. There is more (improvement). We want to keep performing.”

Yves Bissouma netted his first Tottenham goal to open the scoring against Everton after he had been suspended by the club for the trip to Leicester having been caught on video inhaling nitrous oxide.

“It is a good start (to the season for Bissouma),” Postecoglou said. “He has still got work to do. I’m not doubting his footballing quality. We want to make him the best version of himself.

“That starts off the field as much as on it.”

LEWANDOWSKI POWERS BARCA

Polish striker’s goal hands the Catalan side win over Bilbao

Barcelona, Spain - Striker Robert Lewandowski smashed home a rebound to earn Barcelona a 2-1 win over Athletic Bilbao in an absorbing LaLiga clash on Saturday. A deflected strike by teenager Lamine Yamal in the 24th minute gave Barca the lead. The visitors levelled in the 42nd minute when Oihan Sancet converted a penalty after defender Pau Cubarsi fouled Alex Berenguer inside the box. Lewandowski netted the winner in the 75th minute from a rebound by the goalkeeper to give Barca their second win in as many games.

Barcelona are level with Celta Vigo at the top the LaLiga standings on six points. Athletic are 15th with one point from two matches. Although the Catalonia giants dominated possession, Athletic were always a threat on the break with brothers Inaki and Nico Williams a constant menace, forcing Marc-Andre ter Stegen into several top-class saves. Still missing key players like Gavi, Ronald Araujo and Frenkie De Jong due to injury and new signing Dani Olmo yet to be registered, new manager Hansi Flick relied on the superb form of his forwards Lewandowski, Yamal and Raphinha.

Brazilian Raphinha stood out again playing as an attacking midfielder, creating several chances and feeding his team mates with precise passing. Barca opened the scoring in the 24th minute when 17-year-old Yamal recovered a rebound from a free kick and fired a curling shot through a crowded box that deflected off the head of Athletic defender Inigo Lekue into the net. Athletic equalised through a tidy finish from Sancet but Barcelona dominated the second half with Lewandowski almost scoring twice, hitting the post

Still missing key players like Gavi, Ronald Araujo and Frenkie De Jong due to injury and new signing Dani Olmo yet to be registered, Hansi Flick relied on the superb form of Lewandowski and Yamal

again with a header and having a close-range volley saved by goalkeeper Alex Padilla. Lewandowski was rewarded in the 75th minute when Padilla palmed away a cross from Pedri but gifted the rebound to the Polish striker who firing an unstoppable half-volley into the empty net for his third goal of the season.



Barcelona’s Robert Lewandowski celebrates after scoring against Athletic Bilbao on Saturday



Hansi Flick

Flick all praise for ‘great player’ Lewandowski

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona manager Hansi Flick heaped praise on striker Robert Lewandowski after the Poland captain scored a second-half winner to earn a hardfought 2-1 LaLiga victory over Athletic Bilbao on Saturday. It was Lewandowski’s third goal in two games following his double that gave Barca a 2-1 fightback win at Valencia last weekend. “I know Robert (Lewandowski) really well and I don’t think he has returned to form because that’s how I have always seen him as a player,” Flick told DAZN. Under Flick’s management at Bayern Munich in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 seasons, Lewandowski scored 83 goals in 71 matches, winning several major titles including the 2020 Champions League. “I’m happy with him because it’s not only the goals he scores, it’s his collective effort, the way he dedicates himself to pressing

high and very effectively,” Flick said. “Physically, he is 100 per cent. He is a total professional, who takes fitness very seriously. He knows how to handle pressure and we saw that after the equaliser in the second half. He is a great player.” Flick also commended Brazilian winger Raphinha, who excelled again playing as an attacking midfielder. “Rafa can play in any attacking position. He can play as a 10 or he can change positions, he is phenomenal in pressing. We needed someone like him as we are still missing some players,” Flick said. Gavi, Ronald Araujo and Frenkie De Jong are all out with injuries and new signing Dani Olmo has yet to be registered with LaLiga due to Barca’s breach of Financial Fair Play (FFP) rules. “I must be very happy after two wins against such tough opponents and under the circumstances,” Flick said.



Nuri Sahin

Sahin says Dortmund need to build on their winning start

Dortmund, Germany - Borussia Dortmund are looking to capitalise on their winning start in the Bundesliga and overcome the teething pains as the season progresses, new manager Nuri Sahin said after his side won 2-0 at home against Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday. Dortmund faced a tough battle to find their rhythm against Frankfurt in a cagey match that was nearing a scoreless draw until substitute Jamie Gittens broke the deadlock in the 72nd minute, moments after Frankfurt’s Fares Chaibi had missed a big chance. Frankfurt came close to equalising late on, but Gittens scored his second goal after a quick counter-attack, earning coach Sahin his first three points in charge. “We had moments where we struggled, the momentum was on their side especially after they almost made it 1-0. But we scored and that’s what matters,” Sahin said. “We had the rub of the green and the momentum was luckily on our side towards the end.”

Gittens hits double as Dortmund beat Frankfurt in league opener

Dortmund, Germany - A second-half brace from substitute Jamie Gittens earned Borussia Dortmund a 2-0 home win over Eintracht Frankfurt in their first Bundesliga game of the season on Saturday. Dortmund, who finished fifth last season, broke the deadlock in the 72nd minute after struggling to find their rhythm against a feisty Frankfurt who contained their opponents with high pressing. “It was a hot day and it was a good opponent. Things weren’t running smoothly for us yet,” Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel told reporters. “We lost a few balls, even though we had a lot of possession overall. It wasn’t a top performance yet, but it was a good first performance. There were a lot of good things we can build on, but also some things we need to work on.” England under-21 international Gittens scored with a superb strike from a tight angle that sailed into the top far corner after cutting inside the box from the



Borussia Dortmund’s Jamie Gittens celebrates after scoring against Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday

right. Frankfurt came close to a late equaliser but saw their hopes of salvaging a point dashed as Gittens scored his second after a quick counter-attack in stoppage time to earn coach Nuri Sahin his first three points at the helm. Dortmund also made it 10

We lost a few balls, even though we had a lot of possession. It wasn't a top performance yet, but it was a good first performance.

GREGOR KOBEL

seasons in a row with a win in their opening league game, the longest active run. “It was a great game for me. I scored two goals. I’m happy that it all worked out,” Gittens, who already has more goals this season than his only strike last term, told Sky.



Inter Milan’s Hakan Calhanoglu celebrates after scoring against Lecce on Saturday

Darmian, Calhanoglu on target as Inter beat Lecce for first win

Milan, Italy - Champions Inter Milan beat Lecce 2-0 at home in Serie A on Saturday as goals from Matteo Darmian and Hakan Calhanoglu secured Simone Inzaghi’s side their first win of the season. Inter, who were held to a 2-2 draw at Genoa last weekend, were well in control of the match and provisionally moved top of the table with four points. Darmian gave Inter the lead in

side five minutes after the ball bounced up in front of the defender who headed it into the net. Calhanoglu doubled the advantage from the penalty spot in the 69th minute, after Inter were awarded a spot-kick for Kialonda Gaspar’s foul on Marcus Thuram. Calhanoglu converted his 17th penalty out of 17 in the Italian top flight. Inter were without captain Lautaro Martinez, last season’s

top scorer, who was sidelined with a muscle problem. Lecce, who kicked off their third consecutive season in Serie A with a 4-0 home defeat by Atalanta last week, play Cagliari on Aug. 31. Rivals AC Milan were stunned in a 2-1 loss at promoted Parma earlier on Saturday, and 10-man Udinese beat Lazio 2-1 before Genoa earned a 1-0 win at Monza to move up to second.

It was too easy for Parma when they attacked, says Milan’s Fonseca

Parma, Italy - AC Milan coach Paulo Fonseca requested more involvement in defence from his players after they were stunned in a 2-1 Serie A loss at promoted Parma on Saturday. Parma shocked Milan with a goal by Dennis Man after 83 seconds before Christian Pulisic equalised in the 66th minute, only for substitute Matteo Cancellieri to restore Parma’s lead. “I’m disappointed. It’s difficult to explain our defensive attitude. It’s clear that we have

a defensive problem,” Fonseca told a press conference. “For Parma it was too easy when they attacked. I’m not just talking to the defenders, I’m talking about the whole team, how they defend collectively and individually. “I take responsibility for what the team does, but we have to recognise these defensive problems.” Parma, who held Fiorentina to a 1-1 draw last week, managed the same number of shots on target as Milan (five).



Paulo Fonseca

HISTORIC VICTORY

Miraz, Shakib help Bangladesh post first Test win against Pakistan

Rawalpindi, Pakistan - Bangladesh registered their first-ever Test win over Pakistan after spinners Mehidy Hasan Miraz and Shakib Al Hasan bowled them to a memorable 10-wicket victory in the series opener in Rawalpindi on Sunday.

Pakistan, who declared their first innings on 448-6, were bowled out for 146 in their second, which left Bangladesh needing 30 runs to go 1-0 up in the two-test series.

Miraz (4-21) and Shakib (3-44) wreaked havoc with the ball, exposing Pakistan's blunder of not picking a single specialist spinner in their attack.

Bangladesh openers Zakir Hasan and Shadman Islam chased down the target in seven overs to seal victory with more than one session to spare.

"It's massive," Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said after a perfect 26th birthday gift.

"We had never won here, but we had the believe before the start of the series that we can win this time."

Mushfiqur Rahim, whose stel-



Bangladesh's Mehidy Hasan Miraz celebrates after taking the wicket of Pakistan's Mohammad Rizwan

It's massive. We had never won here, but we had the believe before the start of the series that we can win this time

NAJMUL HOSSAIN SHANTO

lar 191 powered Bangladesh to 565 all out in the first innings, was adjudged player of the match.

The veteran batter donated the prize money to the flood-affected peopled of his country.

Pakistan opted for a pace-heavy attack but the slow nature of the track neutralised their formidable new-ball attack of

Naseem Shah and Shaheen Afridi. Resuming the final day on 23-1, Pakistan lost skipper Shan Masood early to Hasan Mahmud for 14. Babar Azam was dropped early but could not make the most of the reprieve and dragged a ball from Nahid Rana onto his stumps to depart for 22.

Shakib dismissed Saud Sha-keel and Abdullah Shafique to

put Bangladesh in charge before Miraz joined the party.

Mohammad Rizwan followed his 171 in the first innings with a fighting 51 but it was not enough. "Never to make an excuse, but it didn't play the way we thought it would," Masood said at the presentation ceremony.

"There have been mistakes and we have to do better when we play next. There's always room for a spinner," he said.

England beat Sri Lanka

A controlled 64-run partnership between Joe Root and Jamie Smith guided England to a five-

wicket win over Sri Lanka on the fourth day of the first Test at Old Trafford on Saturday.

Root dug in after England had made a shaky start to chasing a modest victory target of 205, reaching his half-century off 108 balls.

"We had to work hard for that over the four days but we bowled really well throughout, Jamie Smith batted so well and then Joe put on a clinic for us at the end," England captain Ollie Pope told the BBC.

"Of course, we knew that England would come hard against us," Sri Lanka captain Dhanan-jaya de Silva said.



McLaren's Lando Norris was in dominant form at the Dutch Grand Prix

Norris wins Dutch GP to end Verstappen's home dominance

Zandvoort, Netherlands - McLaren's Lando Norris ended Max Verstappen's unbeaten home record with a commanding Dutch Grand Prix victory and second win of his Formula One career to breathe new life into the championship on Sunday.

Red Bull's triple world champion finished 22.896 seconds behind, after seizing the lead at the start but being passed on the 18th of 72 laps, with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc taking the chequered flag in third place.

It was the first time since the race returned to the calendar in 2021 that Verstappen had not triumphed at Zandvoort and extended his losing streak this season to five races. His lead over Norris was cut to 70 points after 15 of a record 24 rounds, with McLaren also cutting Red Bull's increasingly vulnerable advantage in the constructors' championship to 30.

"It feels amazing. I wouldn't say a perfect race because of lap one again, but it was still beauti-

ful. The pace was strong, the car was unbelievable," said Norris, who took his first win in Miami in May. "I could push and get past Max. It was a straightforward race. Tough but enjoyable."

Norris had started on pole position for the fourth time in his career and Sunday's race on the breezy Dutch coast, in front of his rival's Orange Army of fans, was the first time he had converted the advantage into victory.

It looked at the start that he might have thrown it away once again, the 24-year-old Briton making a sluggish start off the line as Verstappen hit the throttle and led decisively into turn one.

The McLaren clearly had the pace as well as the drag reduction (DRS) advantage, however, and after one probing attempt on lap 17, Norris went past down the inside at turn one and pulled steadily away.

Norris also took a bonus point for fastest lap with a final flourish and was voted Driver of the Day by fans.

Defending US Open champion Djokovic eyes more Grand Slam glory

New York, US - Novak Djokovic said he remains eager to continue making history as he begins his U.S. Open title defence only three weeks after winning a coveted gold medal at the Paris Games to cement his status as the greatest tennis player in history.

Djokovic aims to win a record 25th Grand Slam and become the first U.S. Open champion to successfully defend his title since Swiss great Roger Federer in 2008.

The 37-year-old said he was looking forward to playing his first match of the tournament on

Monday against Radu Albot under the lights of the Arthur Ashe Stadium.

"The goal is always for me to try to go all the way to the finals and fight for the trophy. That kind of mindset is no different for me this year," Djokovic told a news conference on Saturday.

"People ask me 'now that you have won everything with the golden medal, what else is there to win?' I still feel the drive. I still have the competitive spirit. I still want to make more history and enjoy myself on the tour."

"The US Open holds the biggest tennis court in the world.



Novak Djokovic

People ask me 'now that you have won everything with the golden medal, what else is there to win?' I still have the competitive spirit.

Night sessions here are very famous. I'm going to play my first match on Monday night, I can't wait to be under the lights.

"The noise, the energy of the stadium is just different. I look forward to it."

Other than his Paris Games triumph, Djokovic has claimed no other titles in 2024, losing to younger players such as Jannik Sinner in the Australian Open semi-finals and Carlos Alcaraz in the Wimbledon final.

The last time Djokovic played all four majors in a season without winning one was 14 years ago. Yet the Serb looked like he was in fine form at the Olympics, beating French Open champion Alcaraz in the final.

Djokovic claims to be motivated to keep pushing himself forward through his rivalries with younger players.

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‘German treasure’

DÜSSELDORF

EXPLORE THE CULTURE, CUISINE, AND CHARM OF THIS VIBRANT GERMAN CITY FOR AN OUT-OF-THE-WORLD EXPERIENCE

Do you long for a trip where history and vibrant modern culture collide at every turn, a fusion of modernity and tradition? Welcome to Düsseldorf, Germany - a city that enchants visitors looking for both depth and excitement by seamlessly combining the ancient with the new.

For my readers who are Omani, this dynamic city welcomes you to immerse yourself in its rich tapestry of experiences, ranging from gastronomic delights to cultural treasures, all nestled within picturesque riverfront views and hospitable neighbourhoods.

Düsseldorf International Airport (DUS) has excellent connections; direct flights from Muscat take about 7 hours. It's easy to get into the city centre once you land. You may get from the airport to Düsseldorf Hauptbahnhof (Main Station) in less than 15 minutes at a reasonable rate by using the S-Bahn rail service. Ride-sharing services and taxis are also an alternative.

Travellers looking for opulence should consider staying at an abundance of hotels in and

around the Königsallee retail district - the hotels provide luxurious accommodations and excellent service. For a more affordable option, think about hotels which are close to the busy train station that provide comfort without sacrificing quality. You won't be lost for choice when it comes to accommodation.

Exploring neighbourhoods

Old Town/Altstadt: Dubbed 'the longest bar in the world', this charming neighbourhood is home to more than 300 taverns and bars. Düsseldorf is home to classic German breweries. The charming Burgplatz and the magnificent St Lambertus Church are also located in the Old Town and are ideal locations for an afternoon stroll.

Königsallee: Also referred to as the 'Kö', this elegant shopping avenue is arguably the most refined in Germany. This street, which is home to upscale retailers like Prada, Chanel, and Louis Vuitton, is a shoppers' paradise. If you're not in the mood for upscale shopping, the tree-lined canal that runs beside the street is a lovely backdrop for a leisurely stroll.

Hafen Medien: This restored waterfront district, complete with cutting-edge restaurants and avant-garde architecture, is a monument to Düsseldorf's con-

temporary metamorphosis. At Gehry's, named for the renowned architect, you can savour creative cuisine while taking in views of the cityscape.

Kassel: This neighbourhood, which is well-known for its exquisite Art Nouveau buildings, provides boutique shops and cosy cafes in a laid-back setting. It's the ideal place to spend a calm afternoon exploring on a bike or foot.

Highlights of Culture

Düsseldorf has a wide range of cultural activities. Art enthusiasts should definitely visit the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, which houses pieces by modern masters as well as Picasso. With expansive gardens ideal for a scenic getaway, Schloss Benrath, an 18th-century baroque palace, offers an instructive view into Germany's regal history.

As far as cuisine is concerned, many outlets offer a fusion of Asian and European dishes, perfect for those longing for a taste of home away from home. Alternatively, one can treat oneself to fine Italian dining at some exotic restaurants renowned for signature, mouthwatering flavours and cosy ambiances.

Düsseldorf's nightlife is just as diverse as its attractions during the day. There's a lot of excitement in the Altstadt, where you can meet people in neighbourhood hangouts like Kreuzherreneck for a more relaxed atmosphere.

In addition to Königsallee, the Schadowstraße has a wide variety of retail establishments, from well-known chains to quaint independent boutiques, all of which are excellent for finding one-of-a-kind gifts and mementoes. Another hidden treasure is the Carlsplatz Market, an outdoor market perfect for an immersive shopping experience where you can sample local vegetables/specialties.

Reflections

For travellers from Oman, Düsseldorf provides a seductive fusion of culture, history, and contemporary living. Düsseldorf is sure to make an impact, whether you choose to explore its fascinating art and historical monuments, indulge in its great culinary scene, or just spend a relaxing day in its many neighbourhoods.

The city calls the Omani visitor with warmth, elegance, and a tapestry of experiences waiting to be weaved into priceless memories. So, gather your belongings and go out on an enchanted exploration of this German treasure!

(Contributed by Maitha Ritchie)



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CANCEL CULTURE

SUGA AND SPITE

WHILE SUGA – MEMBER OF THE POPULAR KOREAN BOY BAND BTS – IS CURRENTLY FACING POLICE SCRUTINY AND PUBLIC IRE OVER A ‘DRIVING OFFENCE’, DIE-HARD FANS AROUND THE WORLD DECRY THE OVERALL CULTURAL TIGHT-ROPE WHICH MOST KOREAN IDOLS ARE COMPELLED TO WALK TO STAY RELEVANT

WALL OF SHAME

- Online trolling is punishable under South Korea’s 2021 anti-stalking law, with penalties of up to three years in prison and up to 30mn won (US\$22,621) in fines, but offenders often get away with a slap on the wrist.
- In October 2008, actress Choi Jin-sil committed suicide after complaining about malicious allegations of her debts following divorce from baseball player Cho Sung-min, who also subsequently committed suicide.
- The tragic deaths of Sulli and Goo Hara underscore the devastating impact of cyberbullying, particularly within South Korea’s entertainment industry. Both celebrities were subjected to relentless online abuse.
- Oscar-winning Parasite actor Lee Sun-Kyun committed suicide last December after being questioned by police for his suspected drug use. Lee reportedly complained of severe mental distress, after harassment by some media outlets.

Celebrities and cultural idols in South Korea sure enjoy overwhelming love and admiration by fans, not just in South Korea, but globally. However, it all comes with a volley of unwelcome strings attached, often leading some celebrities in question to depression, emotional turbulence, even suicide!

The latest pointer to this scary trend is that of globally popular Korean boy band BTS’s Suga (Min YoonGi) who is currently under police scrutiny, as well as facing unprecedented backlash from fans, for being

apprehended after losing his stance while parking an e-scooter, as he was found to be inebriated.

Wearing a helmet, Suga had left a bar just 500m from his residential complex, on a ‘kick board’, after enjoying a few drinks. As he reached his residence, the popular Korean idol, who has a fan following running of nearly 50 million, stumbled while turning his kickboard to park.

To Suga’s misfortune, a beat policeman chanced upon him and chose to go to town with his ‘big catch’. He was subjected to a breath analyser test and subsequently fined as well as his licence was revoked for being under the influence.

are all humans. I do not see any issues for Suga to continue his career path. Korean ‘cancel culture’ is quite extreme.”

Tight-rope walk

To add to the star’s anguish, he has also been facing the ire of fans as well as ill-wishers who have not only been trolling him on social media and suggesting that he quit BTS but also sending unpleasant pointers, like sending provocative wreaths to his home, which suggest the demise of his career and image.

Korean stars have to often walk the

often unrealistic beauty standards, which include having a slim figure and ‘perfect’ facial proportions. The standards are so stringent that idols often resort to extreme dieting and cosmetic procedures to be in the reckoning.

The case of Momo Hirai, from the popular girl group Twice, is a stark example of such pressure. Momo reportedly survived on nothing but ice cubes for ten days, to stay within a specific weight requirement, with the threat of being barred from appearing on a variety show looming large over her.

Scrutiny and scandals

The scrutiny idols face also extends far beyond their physical appearance. Every aspect of their behaviour is also monitored and judged by the public. Something as seemingly trivial as the way an idol eats, speaks, or even smiles can become the subject of intense public debate.

A recent example is that of Won-Young, from the girl group IVE, who received an onslaught of hate comments simply for the way she ate a strawberry. This incident exemplifies how idols are expected to conform to a range of acceptable behaviour, and that any deviation could lead to severe public backlash.



Won-Young

Rumours and scandals are another area where idols face enormous pressure. In a society where reputation is paramount, even unverified claims can have devastating consequences.

Hyunjin, from the boy group Stray Kids, experienced this first-hand when he was accused of bullying during his school years. Public reaction was swift and harsh, forcing him to take a hiatus from his group while the damage to his reputation illustrated the unforgiving nature of public opinion in the K-pop industry.

Despite a growing number of reported cyberbullying cases and related suicides, the South Korean police have reportedly struggled to file charges. In 2019, the country’s legislators had called for a new law that would make cyberbullying education mandatory in all schools.

(Contributed by Nisha Joshi)



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