

Oman enhances SDGs index score to 82.2%



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Sultanate of Oman presented its second Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the implementation progress of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) during the plenary session of the High-Level Political Forum held in New York on Friday. The session, attended by delegations from all UN member states, focused on monitoring and evaluating the progress of SDGs and identifying policies to enhance future progress.

The second VNR highlighted improvements in various indicators of the SDGs and performance rates of numerous programmes and initiatives implemented by Oman. These efforts align with Oman Vision 2040, which serves as a roadmap for financial and economic sustainability, contributing to the achievement of the UN agenda for sustainable development.

According to the State of Sustainable Development 2024 report, Oman has made significant progress across social, economic and environmental dimensions. The SDGs dashboard shows that Oman achieved an overall indicator score of 82.2%, confirming sub-

Saqri, Minister of Economy and Head of Oman's delegation, emphasised the comprehensive and integrated strategy adopted by Oman for economic, social and environmental development.

Guided by Oman Vision 2040, this strategy integrates

civil society, the private sector and stakeholders in achieving development goals.

"Oman is committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals on time," H E Saqri stated. He expressed hope that the review would open broad horizons for building and strengthening strategic partnerships with all countries and international organisations, enriching the achievement of the SDGs. "Despite challenges, Oman is steadily progressing in the right direction, guided by a development approach that prioritises the needs of the present while securing the future for upcoming generations."

Paula Narvaez, President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and other high-level representatives from participating countries, acknowledged Oman's efforts and progress, highlighting the sultanate's dedication to sustainable development and its role in global partnerships.

Despite challenges, Oman is steadily progressing in the right direction, guided by a development approach that prioritises the needs of the present while securing the future for upcoming generations

H E DR SAID BIN MOHAMMED AL SAQRI

stantial advancements towards the UN goals. The report indicated that 11 out of the 17 SDGs are on track to achieve their targets by 2030, achieving at least 75%. The remaining six goals have reached an average level of progress, with none falling below targets.

During the presentation, H E Dr Said bin Mohammed al

the SDGs into its framework, fostering continuous progress. H E Saqri noted the significant results achieved in the first three years of implementing the vision, including increased economic growth rates, support for diversification sectors, reduction of public debt to safe limits, expansion of social protection, and enhanced participation of

PRESIDENT SISI CONDOLES HIS MAJESTY IN CALL

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a phone call from President Abdul Fattah el Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt on Saturday.

During the call, the Egyptian President expressed the solidarity of his country's leadership, government and people

with the Sultanate of Oman on the shooting that took place in Wadi Kabir in Muscat last week.

He also expressed his sincere condolences and sympathies to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people on the martyrdom of a security ser-

viceman and death of civilians.

On his turn, His Majesty thanked President Sisi for his noble gesture and condolences.

His Majesty commended the historical and fraternal relations binding the two countries and their peoples. ONA

ICJ calls occupation of Palestine by Israel illegal; Oman welcomes move

Muscat - The Sultanate of Oman has welcomed the International Court of Justice (ICJ) opinion that Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory is unlawful and should come to an end 'as rapidly as possible'.

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry said the sultanate welcomed the opinion of ICJ on the legal consequences of the practices of the occupying state. It further called on the international community to implement international resolutions and covenants calling for an immediate end to the illegal occupation of the occupied territories and a halt to settlements and the cycle of violence in the Palestinian territories.

The court was specifically asked to give its view on Israel's policies and practices towards the Palestinians, and on the legal status of the occupation.

The top United Nations court said on Friday that Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territories is unlawful and called on it to end, and for settlement construction to stop immediately, issuing an unprecedented,



sweeping condemnation of Israel's rule over the lands it captured 57 years ago.

Nawaf Salam, President of ICJ in The Hague, read out the non-binding advisory opinion issued by a 15-judge panel on Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories.

The judges pointed to a wide list of policies - including the building and expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, use of the area's natural resources, and annexation and imposition of permanent control over lands and

discriminatory policies against Palestinians - all of which they said violated international law.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu quickly denounced the opinion, saying the territories are part of the Jewish people's historic homeland.

It is statement, Oman renewed its position calling for granting the Palestinian people their inalienable right to establish their independent state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

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Al Rifaa

RO120mn worth of housing loans given in 2023

Muscat - Oman Housing Bank approved 2,762 housing loans amounting to RO120mn in 2023. Musa bin Masoud al Jadidi, CEO, informed that the bank has extended its services to various governorates, particularly outside Muscat.

"The number of loans granted to citizens in governorates outside Muscat was 2,072, valued at RO88.79mn, representing 74% of the bank's total lending activity," Jadidi said. A total of 690 loans were approved for Muscat, totalling over RO31mn.

Of the total, 105 loans, amounting to over RO4mn, were approved in Dhofar; 381 loans, valued at RO15mn, in North Batinah; and 712 loans, totalling over RO29mn, in South Batinah.

Since the bank's establishment in 1977 till the end of 2023, the number of subsidised loans provided to citizens amounted to 65,778 valued at over RO1.5bn.

Foreign Ministry officials offer condolences to Indian and Pakistani ambassadors

Our Correspondent Muscat

H E Khalid bin Hashel al Musalhi, Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs in Foreign Ministry, and Sheikh Ahmed bin Hashel al Maskari, Head of GCC and Regional Neighbourhood Department, offered their condolences to the Indian and Pakistani ambassadors on Saturday.

The Omani officials met H E Imran Ali, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of the Republic of India, and expressed their sincere condolences and sympathies for the death of a number of members of the Pakistani and Indian communities in the gun attack in Wadi Kabir last week.

They further wished for



H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India, with Foreign Ministry officials on Saturday



H E Imran Ali, Ambassador of Pakistan, with Foreign Ministry officials

speedy recovery of the injured, stressing the sympathies of the sultanate and its support for the families affected by the horrific attack.

On their part, the ambassadors of the two countries praised the measures taken by the Omani authorities to contain the situation and confront the ag-

gressors, which reduced the loss of life, expressing their gratitude and appreciation for the medical care received by the injured in hospitals.

The two envoys expressed their sincere condolences for the martyrdom of a security officer and their wishes for speedy recovery for all the injured, while

stressing their countries' full solidarity with Oman and support for the measures it takes to spread reassurance and maintain the security enjoyed by the country.

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Underwater museum opens to divers; permits required for entry: EA

Our Correspondent Muscat

Environment Authority (EA) has announced the opening of an underwater military museum in Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve, welcoming tourists and diving enthusiasts.

In a statement, EA said that to ensure the protection of this unique marine environment and safety of visitors, permits are mandatory to enter the reserve.

These permits can be obtained through the authority's official website. Visitors are reminded of the importance of strictly adhering to approved safety procedures for diving activities when visiting the museum.

The museum is a collaborative effort between EA and Ministry of Defence, aiming to create a unique underwater attraction that merges historical preservation with marine conservation.



(Supplied photo)

The museum seeks to bolster eco-tourism by establishing a unique tourist attraction catering to diving enthusiasts, thereby enhancing Oman's tourism sector. 'We anticipate witnessing coral reefs flourish within the next six months.'

The primary goal of this project is to rehabilitate and expand coral reef habitats, mitigating environmental damage caused by natural and human activities.

Additionally, the museum aims to boost marine tourism by providing a novel attraction for tourists and diving enthusiasts, relieving pressure on existing coral reef sites and attracting a

diverse range of marine species to the area.

EA organised its seventh campaign aimed at cleaning coral reef in the Daymaniyat Islands Natural Reserve on Thursday.

Thirty-two individuals participated in the campaign, successfully recovering fishing nets estimated to be 180m in length that were entangled in coral reefs.

The campaign underscores the ongoing commitment of the authority to conduct extensive environmental cleanup operations targeting marine ecosystems and coral reefs.

The campaign received support from Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Barka, as well as volunteer diving teams, highlighting a collaborative effort to preserve and protect these vital natural habitats.

BIDS INVITES

Oman Sales & Services invites bids for the procurement of IT infrastructure for a Disaster Recovery solution (cold site). Interested and qualified companies are requested to submit their proposals in response to the Request for Quotation (RFQ).

Instructions to Bidders:
RFQ Collection Deadline: 22nd July 2024, 5:00 PM
Proposal Submission Deadline:
29th July 2024, 5:00 PM

Requests for RFQ documents and clarifications must be sent via email to: drsolution@muscatdutyfree.com

40bn seeds distributed in Dhofar to combat invasive plant species

Salalah - Dhofar Municipality has distributed over 40bn local grass seeds to combat the Parthenium plant and other invasive species in the governorate.

Mohammed Mubarak Suhail Akkak, an environmental health specialist with Dhofar Municipality, stated, "The municipality remains dedicated to eradicating invasive plants like Parthenium. We have distributed over 40bn local grass seeds and more than 68 varieties of wild plant seeds to date. We have begun the process of uprooting these weeds in Mirbat, Taqah, Rakhayut, Dalkhout and Salalah."

He added that Parthenium is one of the most detrimental weeds known today, negatively impacting vast areas of Dhofar's plains and agricultural fields. The plant produces chemicals that inhibit the growth of crops and pastures, and allergens that affect both humans and livestock. It is also a common cause of pollen allergies. "Our efforts aim to strengthen local ecosystems, suppress invasive species and promote biodiversity in Dhofar."

Scorching heat leads to surge in car breakdowns

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As temperatures soar in Oman, an increasing number of cars are being taken to garages in Wadi Kabir Industrial Area, primarily due to malfunctioning air conditioners and overheated engines. The extreme heat significantly impacts vehicles, leading to frequent overheating and unexpected roadside breakdowns.

The main triggers for these are faulty condensers and compressors within AC systems and radiator units.

Sharing his experience, Razeeq Kazi, a consultant, said, "My car AC broke down just two days ago. I rolled down my window and drove. It was a terrible experience; I was dripping with sweat and my eyes were burning. The summer heat not only drains people but also puts vehicles through a gruelling test. I thought I could manage for a few days, but it was impossible. I rushed to the mechanic."

It has become common to see cars stranded on roadside, with hoods propped open and steam rising out of overheated engines. Repairing an engine problem can cost around RO300, while AC repairs can be up to RO150.

Garages in Wadi Kabir are bustling with activity as the summer intensifies. Mechanics are working overtime to meet the growing demand.

Suman Das, a seasoned mechanic, remarked, "We have



Repair expenses often arise due to neglecting regular vehicle maintenance. Many of these issues result from simple neglect, like failing to top up water and coolant levels in the radiator

SUMAN DAS

seen a significant increase in cars coming in due to overheating."

He informed that repair expenses often arise due to ne-

glecting regular vehicle maintenance. "Many of these issues result from simple neglect, like failing to top up water and

coolant levels in the radiator. However, some problems involve serious damage to the AC system, requiring the replacement of condensers, compressors and other parts. People often think that just adding AC gas will solve the problem. It doesn't; in fact, it becomes a costlier affair."

According to Praveen Akthar, another mechanic, the constant use of air conditioning escalates the problem. "The AC adds extra

load on the engine, leading to overheating. Radiators often have a build-up of debris, rust and minerals, which hampers efficiency in transferring heat away from the engine, causing overheating."

The combination of intense heat, low coolant levels, dirt and prolonged vehicle usage puts immense pressure on engines, particularly straining cooling systems. Routine checks under the hood, such as monitoring coolant, engine oil and water levels, are frequently overlooked, leading to severe consequences.

Public relations officer Majid al Barwani's "car is fine, but the AC is not cooling" and still awaiting repairs.

"Every mechanic in every garage is busy with radiator and AC-related repair works. Vehicles, including mine, are just sitting idle, awaiting their turn for repair. I drive from Mawalah to Ghubra for work every day. I need to get it done soon," Barwani said, adding that due to the inconvenience and frustration, he has rented a car to go to work.

The financial impact of repairing an overheated engine adds another layer of difficulty for car owners. Ali al Balushi, a sales executive, recently spent RO170 on AC and engine parts, like coils, radiators, condensers, pistons and pipes. "Repair costs were high, which added a significant strain to our monthly household budget."



Tourist centre to be established in Wadi Bani Khalid

Our Correspondent
Muscat

North Sharqiyah has initiated a tender process for the construction of a tourist centre in Wadi Bani Khalid in an effort to bolster domestic tourism and attract international visitors.

Set in a scenic landscape, Wadi Bani Khalid attracts domestic and international tourists due to moderate temperatures and abundance of water in the wadi.

Visitors to Wadi Bani Khalid can explore numerous geological wonders such as the Maql Cave and approximately 12 springs, including Ain al Sarooj, Ain al Lathb, Ain Kanara, Ain al Muntajar and Ain Ghalala. The area is

also renowned for its 56 aflaj, notable among them being Al Haili, Al Fardh, Al Sarooj and Al Jarbi.

The wilayat has a rich array of archaeological treasures ranging from forts to towers, with Al Mawalik Fort being the most prominent, dating back to the 4th century AH.

Additionally, North Sharqiyah has launched another tender to develop a children's playground and a sports walkway in the Al Salil area of Dima Wa al Taien. It also plans to construct several internal roads to enhance connectivity of various wilayats within the governorate.

The deadline for submitting bids for these projects is August 26, 2024.

Haima-Thumrait highway project to be awarded soon

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dualisation of the Haima-Thumrait highway, a lifeline between Muscat and Dhofar, is nearing final stages of being awarded and implemented, according to H E Khamis al Shamakhi, Undersecretary for Transport in Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

H E Shamakhi stated that the technical analysis of the Haima-Thumrait road dualisation project is complete, and financial analyses are underway. "The project, spanning 400km, is in its final stages of awarding and implementation."

The ministry had announced the tender for the Haima-Thumrait road project in June 2023. The Adam-Haima-Thumrait highway stretches 717.5km, of which only 280km - Adam to Haima - are currently dualised.

The highway is divided into three sections: Phase 3 from Haima to Maqshin, a distance of 132.5km; Phase 4, connecting Maqshin to Dawkah via Qitbit, a distance of 135km; and Phase 5



H E Khamis al Shamakhi

from Dawkah to Thumrait, covering a distance of 132.7km.

Dhofar has several vital road projects under implementation, and designing and awarding stages. These projects aim to enhance the road network in the governorate's wilayats, including Dhalkut, Al Mazyouna, Maqshan, Rakhyut, Salalah and Thumrait.

H E Shamakhi highlighted the Arjot-Sarfit road project in Dhalkut, which involves slope stabilisation. Currently 79% complete, project completion is expected by the end of the year at a cost of RO11mn.

In reference to the Harweeb-Al Mazyouna-Miten road being built at a cost of RO30mn, he informed that the project is 15% complete.

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BIDS INVITES

Oman Sales & Services invites bids for the provision of Third Party Logistics (3PL) warehousing services. Interested vendors are requested to submit their proposals in response to the Request for Quotation (RFQ).

Instructions to Bidders:

Please pay RO 100 and collect RFQ document by 25th July 2024, 5:00 PM

Proposal Submission Deadline: 8th August 2024, 5:00 PM

Requests for RFQ documents and clarifications must be sent via email to: warehousestender@muscatdutyfree.com

Asyad's profits soar 43% to RO64mn

The group attracted direct foreign investments of over RO1bn through its economic and free zones

Muscat - Asyad Group, Oman's global integrated logistics provider, has revealed that its net profits grew 43% to RO64mn in 2023, from RO45mn in 2022.

The group attracted direct foreign investments worth over RO1bn through its economic and free zones, Asyad revealed.

Asyad Group is steadily advancing towards its strategic objectives of enhancing the commercial, financial, and operational performance of its assets, valued at RO1.6bn in 2023, and bolstering Oman's status as a vital global logistics hub.

The annual report from Asyad Group revealed the group's revenues grew by 5% to reach RO465mn, demonstrating a continuous growth trajectory.

The compound annual growth rate of revenues reached 21%, while profits saw a compound annual growth rate of 73% since the group's establishment.

Asyad has maintained a strong record in occupational safety and achieved an Omani-sation rate of 85%. In 2023, it created around 400 job opportunities and added 84 Omani sailors to its marine fleet.



Asyad Drydock saw a 4% increase in business volume last year compared to 2022, executing 230 projects and providing services to commercial clients from over 40 countries.

The group activated freight forwarder services, resulting in over 2,000 shipments in the first year of operation from various land, sea, and air ports. Storage activities increased by 32%, and warehouse capacity grew by 16% in 2023.

In 2023, Asyad launched partial shipping solutions linking Indian markets with the Omani market, enhancing trade movement and supporting local companies and SMEs.

Oman Post and Asyad Express expanded their network to six new countries, bringing their services to a total of 12 countries. Their operations grew by 81% compared to 2022, and nine international companies moved their regional distribution operations to Oman. In the small and medium ports sector, the volume of goods handled increased by 4% compared to 2022, with 134 cruise ships carrying more than 432,000 passengers.

Masdar raises \$1bn to fund renewable energy projects

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company - Masdar, the UAE's clean energy powerhouse, has raised US\$1bn through its second green bond issuance, under its Green Finance Framework.

The announcement comes one year after the company's first successful issuance of US\$750mn on the International Securities Market of the London Stock Exchange.

The issuance comprises dual tranches of US\$500mn each, with tenors of five and ten years and coupons of 4.875% and 5.25% respectively.

There was strong appetite from regional and international investors with the orderbook peaking at US\$4.6bn, an oversubscription of 4.6x.

Allocation was finalised with an average split of 70% to international investors and 30% to MENA investors.

The US\$1bn proceeds from the issuance will be deployed to fund Masdar's equity commitments on new greenfield projects, several in developing economies, as the company pur-



sues a target portfolio capacity of 100GW by 2030.

Mohamed Jameel al Ramahi, Chief Executive Officer of Masdar, said, "Following the successful launch of our first green bond in 2023, our second green bond issuance for US\$1bn underscores investor confidence in Masdar's financial robustness and its sustainability credentials."

"The funds will be pivotal in advancing our ambitious portfolio of renewable energy projects, further cementing our role as a

key player in supporting an equitable energy transition by increasing energy access in emerging markets and the Global South."

Mazin Khan, Chief Financial Officer of Masdar, added, "As we have committed under our Green Finance Framework, we are raising green bonds and other green finance instruments to invest in new dark green projects."

Khan pointed out that the Green Finance Framework is an "important component of our in-

vestor relations story, but it is also a commitment that we are transparently fulfilling through the publication of our audited annual allocation and impact reporting". Few companies as strongly rated as Masdar offer investors bonds that can make such a positive impact across the ESG spectrum, he asserted, adding that "even fewer companies can tell investors exactly where every dollar of their money is going and its impact". WAM

Lithium to replace oil for future mobility: German chancellor

Belgrade, Serbia - Lithium is as important for mobility in the future as oil has been until now, said German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Friday.

Addressing the Summit on Critical Raw Materials in Serbian capital Belgrade, Scholz said, "We need lithium and I am convinced that it is important for future mobility."

Serbia and the European Union signed a memorandum of understanding on a strategic partnership on sustainable raw materials, battery production chains and electric vehicles in the presence of Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and Scholz.

"This project (Jadar lithium extraction project by the Anglo-Australian multinational mining company, Rio Tinto) creates new production chain potentials, jobs, not only when it comes to mining, but also in other processing steps," said Scholz, adding that it is a turning point for the future.

The summit is attended by Scholz and the vice president of the European Commission and in charge of the European Green Deal, Maros Sefcovic, who signed the memorandum with Serbia on behalf of the EU.



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, in a joint press conference with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic (not in photo), in Belgrade, Serbia on Friday

EU, Serbia sign agreement on sustainable raw materials, battery production chains and electric vehicles

"We have already had talks and I can say that I am satisfied. For us as Serbia, it represents a great hope. We are convinced that we will not miss this chance," said Vucic in the pres-

ence of Scholz and Sefcovic.

Vucic added that the Jadar mining project will mean Serbia's quantum leap into the future.

Thousands of environmentalists have been holding demonstrations at regular intervals for years against the Jadar lithium extraction project in Serbia by the Anglo-Australian multinational mining company, Rio Tinto.

Environmentalist claim that the project is harmful to the health of residents and the environment.

Rio Tinto discovered lithium mineral reserves in the Serbian city of Loznica in 2004.

Anadolu News

European Union countries offering tax relief to foreign skilled workers

Berlin, Germany - The measure proposed by the German government under its new so-called growth initiative last week envisages tax incentives of 30%, 20% and 10% for skilled people from abroad who are willing to take up jobs in Germany.

This means their taxable income will be lowered by these percentages in the first three years of employment. However, there will be minimum and maximum gross salary limits for the tax credits which have yet to be defined.

The measure, which is planned to be reviewed after five years, has drawn strong criticism from German labour unions who've dismissed the plan as 'two-class taxation'. Supporters believe though it'll make the German job market more financially

attractive to foreigners.

Economy Minister Robert Habeck told German business daily Handelsblatt that skilled workers prefer countries with better tax conditions, such as the Scandinavian nations, and that it's "worth trying to attract people to Germany this way".

A 2018 study commissioned the German parliament shows that at the time 15 EU countries had enacted regulation favouring foreigners with tax incentives. Among them were the Netherlands, Greece, Croatia, Cyprus, Italy, Spain, and Portugal.

Portugal and Spain

Portugal has been giving tax incentives to foreigners since 2009 under a policy to attract skilled workers and overcome Portugal's debt crisis and boost



productivity.

High-income individuals and freelance workers - who can work from anywhere in the world basically - are enjoying, for example, a flat tax rate of 20% on

their income for ten years. Portuguese citizens, by contrast, are subject to a progressive tax rate of between 14.5% and 48%. To qualify for the 20% rate, workers must work and live in Portugal for

more than six months per year. Pensions, and income from capital investments such as dividends are excluded from the 20% rule.

Some 74,000 foreigners ben-

efited from Portugal's flat-tax incentive in 2022. In Portugal's neighbour, Spain, the special foreigner-tax rate is higher with 24% but also comes as a flat tax on all income they earn.

Italy, Sweden, Denmark

Paying income tax in Italy is a more complex undertaking, no matter if you are an Italian or a foreign citizen. The latter, however, can claim some tax breaks depending on how long they have lived in the country, how much they earn, as well as the number and age of their children.

Two Scandinavian countries Sweden and Denmark are not exactly know for low taxes. But there too, foreign nationals enjoy some privileges.

In Sweden, 25% of gross in-

come is tax-free for foreign workers, with the government in Stockholm having increased the tax-benefit period for those earning above €10,000 a month from five years to seven years.

Danish citizens usually pay their income tax on a progressive basis according to their salaries. Danes in the highest tax bracket need to hand over up to 53% of their income to the state.

Not so for foreigners earning more than 10,000 a month. Their top tax rate is capped at 32.84% and remains there regardless of how much more they earn. Highly qualified specialists and scientist pay even less during the first seven years of their employment in Denmark, with a tax rate of just 27% plus social insurance contributions.

DW

Will China ever overtake US to become largest economy?

Berlin, Germany - The idea of China's outstripping the United States to become the world's largest economy has been a fixation for policymakers and economists for decades. What will happen, they argue, when the US - one of the most dynamic, productive economies - is usurped by an authoritarian regime with a workforce of 750mn?

Predictions of when exactly China would steal the US's crown have come thick and fast ever since the 2008/9 financial crisis, which hampered growth in the United States and Europe for many years. Before what became known as the Great Recession, China saw double-digit annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth for at least five years. In the decade following the crisis, China's economy continued to expand by 6%-9% annually. That is, until COVID-19 struck.

As if the pandemic - which led to strict lockdown measures that brought the economy to its knees - weren't enough, the Asian powerhouse was also plunged into a real estate crash. At its peak, the property market was responsible for a third of China's economy. However, rules introduced by Beijing in 2020 put limits on how much debt property developers could take on. Many firms went



bankrupt, leaving an estimated 20mn unfinished or delayed homes unsold.

Around the same time, declining trade relations with the West also weakened growth in the world's second-largest economy. Having encouraged China's ascendancy for decades, by the late 2010s, the US shifted to containing Beijing's economic and military ambitions, if only to delay the inevitable advance.

The apparent change of for-

tunes for the Chinese economy was so stark that a new term emerged about a year ago - 'Peak China'. The theory was that the Chinese economy was now burdened by many structural issues, such as a heavy debt load, slowing productivity, low consumption and an aging population. Those weaknesses, along with geopolitical tensions over Taiwan and a decoupling of trade by the West, sparked speculation that China's impending eco-

nomic supremacy may be delayed, or never happen.

But Wang Wen from Renmin University of China's Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies told DW that the notion of Peak China was a 'myth', adding that China's total economic output reached almost 80% of the US output in 2021.

Wang said that as long as Beijing maintained 'internal stability and external peace', the Chinese economy would soon overtake

the US.

He cited the desire of millions of rural Chinese to move to urban areas, where earnings and quality of life were reportedly much higher.

"China's urbanisation rate is only 65%. If calculated at 80% in the future, it means that another 200 to 300 million people will enter urban areas, which will generate a huge increase in the real economy," he said.

DW



Global power demand to rise by 4% in 2024

Istanbul, Türkiye - Global electricity demand is expected to grow 4% this year and in 2025, the fastest pace in nearly two decades, according to a new report by the International Energy Agency (IEA) on Friday.

This rise is fuelled by strong economic growth, extreme heatwaves and rising uptake of technologies that run on electricity such as electric vehicles and heat pumps, the Paris-based energy watchdog's 'Electricity Mid-Year Update' found.

Excluding the exceptional rebounds witnessed following the global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, the figure illustrates the highest annual growth rate since 2007, the report said.

'Renewable sources of electricity are also set to expand rapidly this year and next, with their share of global electricity supply forecast to rise from 30% in 2023 to 35% in 2025,' the report added.

According to the report, the share of electricity generated by renewables globally next year is predicted to eclipse the amount generated by coal for the first time.

Solar PV alone is predicted to meet approximately half of the growth in global electricity demand over 2024 and 2025 with solar and wind combined meeting as much as three-quarters of the growth, according to the report. The report also foresees that despite the intense boosts in renewables, global power generation from coal is unlikely to drop this year due to the strong growth in demand, particularly in China and India.

Chinese hydropower production recovered strongly in the first half of 2024 from its 2023

low. If this upward trend continues in the second half of the year, it could curb coal-fired power generation and result in a slight decline in global power sector emissions in 2024.

Some of the world's major economies are registering particularly strong increases in electricity consumption such as India and China with expectations of surge of 8% and 6%, respectively.

Electricity demand in the US is forecast to rebound this year by 3% amid steady economic growth, rising demand for cooling and an expanding data center sector, with 1.7% growth in electricity demand in the EU.

The growing use of air-conditioning is expected to remain a powerful driver of electricity demand around the world as several regions faced extreme heatwaves in the first half of this year. The report also mentions the rise of artificial intelligence, as the electricity demand of data centers is drawing increased attention, highlighting the wide range of uncertainties concerning the electricity demand of data centres.

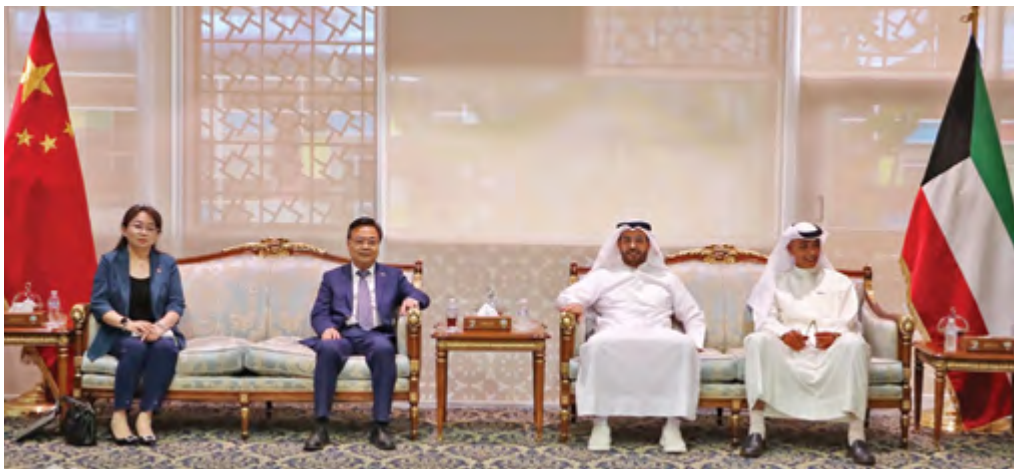
Commenting on the report, the IEA Director Of Energy Markets And Security, Keisuke Sadamori, said, "It's encouraging to see clean energy's share of the electricity mix continuing to rise, but this needs to happen at a much faster rate to meet international energy and climate goals."

"At the same time, it's crucial to expand and reinforce grids to provide citizens with secure and reliable electricity supply - and to implement higher energy efficiency standards to reduce the impacts of increased cooling demand on power systems," Sadamori added.

Kuwait Minister discusses cooperation with China

Kuwait City, Kuwait - Kuwait's Finance Minister and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment, Dr Anwar al Mudhaf, discussed on Friday enhancing cooperation in the electricity and renewable energy with commissioner-general of China's representative office in the Middle East and North Africa.

In a press statement, the Ministry of Finance said during the meeting, held at its headquarters, the two officials discussed joint efforts and bilateral work to implement the agreements and memorandums of understanding signed during the visit of Amir Sheikh Meshal al Ahmad al Jaber



al Sabah to the Republic of China in September last year.

The statement highlighted

several energy projects, including the key project to operate and manage the Al-Shagaya renew-

able energy station (Area 3 + 4) which will be executed by Chinese companies according to the

latest standards and technical specifications.

Mudhaf emphasised Kuwait's commitment, represented by Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmed Abdullah al Ahmad al Sabah, to remove all obstacles and support efforts to implement the signed agreements swiftly.

The meeting was attended by Dr Mahmoud Bushehri, Kuwait's Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and Minister of State for Housing; Zhang Jianwei, China's Ambassador to Kuwait; Samih Hayat, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Asian Affairs, and a number of other Kuwaiti officials.

Moody's upgrades Türkiye's ratings to B1

Istanbul, Türkiye - Moody's on Friday said it upgraded Türkiye's long-term foreign- and domestic-currency issuer and foreign-currency senior unsecured ratings to B1 from B3.

The global rating agency said the outlook remains positive.

'Concurrently, the foreign-currency backed senior unsecured rating of Hazine Mustesarligi Varlik Kiralama A.S. has also been upgraded to B1 from B3', with a stable outlook, it said in a statement.

The reasons for the upgrade were listed as improvements in governance, more specifically the decisive and increasingly well-established return to orthodox monetary policies, which are yielding the first visible results in terms of reducing the country's major macroeconomic imbalances, it said.

While inflation and domestic demand have started to moderate, inflationary pressures are expected to ease significantly in the coming months and into 2025, it added.

The Central Bank of Türkiye (CBRT) is rapidly enhancing the credibility of monetary policy, which in turn is helping to restore confidence in the Turkish lira,



said the agency. 'Moreover, the tight policy stance is already materially reducing Türkiye's elevated external vulnerability,' said the statement.

'The positive outlook reflects a balance of risks skewed to the upside,' according to the rating agency.

As the credibility and effectiveness of monetary policy increases, macroeconomic stability and stronger institutions may allow Türkiye's underlying credit strengths, such as its diversified and competitive economy and comparatively strong fiscal and debt metrics, to come forward again, it said.

It would be realised especially if the shift in the conduct of macroeconomic policy is accompanied by structural changes

that reduce the risk of long-lasting inflation shocks in the future, it added.

Moody's also raised Türkiye's local-currency country ceiling to Ba1 from Ba3.

'The three-notch gap between the local-currency ceiling and the sovereign rating reflects the prospect for a further reduction in external imbalances and improving monetary policy effectiveness, as well as a relatively limited government footprint in the economy,' it said.

Türkiye's foreign-currency ceiling, meanwhile, has also been raised to Ba3 from B2.

'The two-notch gap between the foreign-currency and local-currency ceilings takes into account reduced external vulnerability risks,' it explained.

Moody's, however, noted that the level of dollarisation in Türkiye remains high and confidence in the Turkish lira has not yet been fully restored.

On the other hand, the central bank's sharp monetary tightening has restored confidence in and attractiveness of the Turkish lira, which can be seen in the increase in lira deposits, as deposit rates averaging close to 60% currently, it said.

The agency expects consumer inflation to sharply decrease to below 45% by December, helped by the slowdown in domestic demand that is currently underway and with appreciation in the real exchange rate.

Moody's expects Türkiye's current-account deficit to stand at a manageable 2.4% of GDP in 2024 and below 2% of GDP in 2025, down from 5% in 2022.

'While Türkiye's headline external financing needs remain at elevated levels of over 20% of GDP, more than half is financed via stable funding sources, in particular trade credit and deposits into both the CBRT and the banking system that have been resilient to repeated shocks,' it explained.

Anadolu News



Young Germans shunning farming

Berlin, Germany - It's in Züllichöfen, a small village in the western German state of North Rhine-Westphalia, where Dorothee Hochgürtel, a 65-year old woman, has been running the farm since 2001. She keeps more than a hundred animals. Besides that, she has an orchard where she's cultivating over 130 different types of apples.

A pharmacist by profession, Hochgürtel is still holding down a breadwinning job in the pharmaceutical industry. But it's not the dim prospect of making a living from farming that worries her most these days, she says.

"I know I'm not getting any younger. I'm nearing retirement age and the question I keep ask-

ing myself is 'who am I going to leave this farm to?'"

Hochgürtel says that her two children pursued other careers of their own liking and had no interest in the farm.

German agriculture contributes less than 1% to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and is less important to the economy than in neighbouring France and Poland.

Reinhard Jung, a policy advisor at the Freie Bauern, a farmers' lobby group, says the German farming sector has come under additional pressure from another corner in recent years: Demographic change.

"The shortage of skilled workers is an issue in all sectors [of

the Germany economy]," he told DW, with agriculture being especially disadvantaged in the nationwide race for young people.

As young people today have a 'desire for a good work-life balance', says Jung, the long hours of hard work and no holidays put in by older generations of German farmers is 'not an option' for the young.

Christina Vogel from the German Agricultural Society (DLG) says it's a 'challenge' to embark on a career in agriculture.

"There are numerous demands to comply with today, notably legislation and consumer pressures but also climate change," she told DW.

DW

LYNK & CO floats incredible offers

Lynk and Co is revolutionising the roads of Oman. Each model is crafted with a blend of cutting-edge technology, superior craftsmanship and remarkable performance.

Experience the thrill of owning the Lynk and Co 01, a Premium SUV. Incredible offers with many benefits are available until August 31. Enjoy financing options with EMIs starting from just RO135, alongside a 6-year extended warranty with unlimited kilometres, 6 years of AAA roadside assistance, and 5 years or 50,000km of service. Additionally, free registration for the first year which will save you on registration costs. As a bonus, receive a free gift valued at RO50 with your purchase.

This stylish SUV sets a new standard for luxury driving in Oman. It seamlessly blends sophisticated design with advanced technology, delivering unmatched urban performance. Stay seamlessly connected and informed on the go with the car's



wireless charging, advanced infotainment system, and intuitive HMI interface.

The city-smart design perfectly combines elegance with functionality, making it ideal for everyday adventures. Cutting-edge safety features, including ADAS (Advanced Driver-Assistance Systems), and an air-purifying cabin ensure you can drive with confidence and peace of mind, allowing you to fully experience the beauty of Oman's roads. The powerful 2ltr Turbo engine in the Lynk and Co 01 delivers an impressive 215 HP, enabling swift acceleration and smooth passing for a truly confident drive. Lynk and Co 01 rated with 5.5-stars in C-NCAP crash test.

Head over to the Lynk and Co showroom at Ghala Heights, Muscat, to explore these incredible offers and take advantage of this opportunity with added benefits to drive home your dream car. These offers are valid only until August 31.

Family at heart of LG's new campaign

LG Electronics (LG) has announced its new campaign of short videos under the 'Life's Good' brand slogan, titled 'Get More Care', following the success of previous themes 'Get More Love' and 'Get More Magic', aimed at highlighting how LG products enable small gestures of love and care among family members so that they can enjoy true Life's Good moments amidst unforgettable experiences.

Throughout the video series, LG will showcase those sometimes unnoticed loving moments experienced in the home while shining a subtle light on how its products enhance everyday lives through the brand's innovative technology intricately interwoven into its customers' everyday lives, by chasing their vicarious football dreams, or simply following their favorite teams in 4K clarity, a press release said.

A key highlight of the campaign is the immersive family viewing experience provided by LG's groundbreaking OLED screens - such as the LG Signature 97-inch OLED M3 4K Smart TV, offering a portal to new universes. With unparalleled picture quality and vivid colors, and sound refinements of 9 AI Pro-



cessor 4K Gen6, LG OLED screens transform an otherwise ordinary viewing into an unforgettable experience of resplendent immersion, bringing families closer together.

Additionally, the campaign will showcase the convenience of LG's WebOS, a smart platform that offers seamless access to a wide range of entertainment options and smart home features. Whether it's finding the perfect movie or the latest TV shows for family night, explore a vast array of content with built-in streaming services such as Netflix, Prime Video, Disney+, YouTube, and Apple TV+. LG's intuitive WebOS interface also means receiving personalized sports updates and tailored content

recommendations as easy as accessing further built-in apps like Music and Sports, making family time entertainment effortless and enjoyable.

The cutting-edge InstaView knock-knock feature is another standout in the campaign, perfect for revealing those sometimes-hidden signs of love. This technology, available on LG's latest refrigerators and ovens, allows users to see inside with a simple knock, making meal preparation more interactive and fun. Families can easily decide what to cook from the fridge or check on the progress of a juicy roast in the oven, all without opening a door.

"We are excited to introduce 'Get More Care' as our new

brand campaign," said Sa Nyoun Kim, LG Electronics Gulf president, at LG Electronics. "Through these heartwarming short films, we aim to show how our products make everyday moments more special and meaningful. At LG, we believe that technology should enhance the way we care for each other, and this campaign perfectly encapsulates LG's 'Life's Good' vision."

LG's commitment to human-centered innovation and user-centric design is at the forefront of this campaign, demonstrating how the company's products contribute to a more connected and caring lifestyle. By showcasing the practical benefits and emotional value of LG's technology, 'Get More Care' aims to resonate with families across the region.

The four-episode Get More Care video campaign, which launches on June XX, showcase fun and touching stories in the home, and ties in effortlessly with LG's brand direction and visual identity, while maintaining and reiterating the brand's core values of 'Uncompromised Customer Experience', 'Human-centered Innovation', and 'Warmth to Power a Smile'.

ahlibank showcases core values at media event



In a significant stride towards solidifying its position as the 'Partner in Excellence' to all, Ahlibank recently held a special media networking event at the bank's head office in Watayyah, highlighting its mission, forward-thinking vision, and integral values.

The event took place on July 17, witnessing the attendance of key personnel from leading media institutions and news agencies in the Sultanate of Oman, a press release said.

The event highlighted Ahlibank's core values of innova-

tion, integrity, responsibility, sustainability, and most significantly, the bank's commitment to excellence. Being the 'Partner in Excellence', Ahlibank shed the spotlight on its vision to be a vibrant and innovative center for banking, one that is committed to surpassing its customers' expectations, and contributing tangibly to the country's socio-economic growth agenda. In addition, the event underpinned Ahlibank's mission to deliver outstanding value to its shareholders through its comprehensive banking solutions,

guaranteeing access to excellent products and services.

Jumana al Hashmi, head of Marketing and Corporate Communications at Ahlibank, said, "We would like to express our gratitude to all government and private institutions for accepting our invitation to our annual media event and for their invaluable support in helping us achieve our goals. We have refined our approach and framework to be more customer-centric, aligning with our commitment to delivering a comprehensive range of banking products.

NBO offers exclusive credit card benefits

In its commitment to enhancing the banking experience for its customers, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) provides a comprehensive suite of credit card benefits, focusing on luxury and convenience, and delivering value through exclusive offers designed to meet a variety of lifestyle needs.

Maha al Raisi, assistant general manager and head of Products at NBO, states, "At National Bank of Oman, we believe that loyalty should be rewarded. That's why our credit card benefits are more than just a payment tool; they are a passport to a variety of exclusive luxuries and everyday conveniences. They reflect our commitment to providing exceptional value to our customers, whether they're travelling the world or making local purchases. From cashback and airport lounge

access to travel insurance and chauffeur services, NBO's credit cards offer an elevated experience tailored to the needs of today's customers. We aim to ensure that every transaction with our credit cards feels like a reward."

The Infinite, Signature, and Platinum credit cards come with premium benefits that cater to travellers and those seeking entertainment and rewards. For frequent travellers, the Infinite Credit Card provides unlimited access to global airport lounges. Signature Credit Card holders receive up to 12 complimentary airport lounge visits per year, while Platinum Credit Card users are entitled to 6 visits annually.

The NBO Rewards Programme offers a competitive 1% cashback on purchases made with Infinite, Signature, and Platinum credit cards.

Odys Aviation, Mwasalat to develop uncrewed aircraft

Odys Aviation, a sustainable aviation company building hybrid-electric vertical take-off and landing aircraft, and Mwasalat the Omani National Transport Company, announced that they will collaborate on the development of programmes in Oman for 25 of Odys' Laila uncrewed aircraft, with the intention of first launching pilot programmes on unpopulated and defined routes with pre-production aircraft in 2025.

Laila is a hybrid-electric VTOL aircraft designed in multiple configurations for cargo and capable of transporting payloads up to 60kg with a 400km range. Missions operated via these aircraft provide a low-carbon air cargo alternative for routes across Oman, opening up opportunities that have previously been time-consuming or inaccessible because of infrastructure and geographical challenges, a press release said.

Under the terms of the agreement, the two companies will work together to undertake joint research and development activ-



ities to define target routes and services using Odys Aviation's pre-production aircraft, leveraging the existing relationship and formal engagement Odys has with Oman's CAA, with a view to establishing new aerial logistics networks with Odys' Laila aircraft upon receiving full regulatory approval. The partnership

also focuses on enhancing the functionality and defining the applications of Odys Aviation's Laila aircraft in the GCC.

Beyond identifying applications, the two organisations will collaborate to develop concepts of operations that will define aircraft maintenance operations and regulatory compliance for

the aircraft in service. During pilot operations, Mwasalat will facilitate use of these aircraft for entities including Oman Post and Asyad Group for logistics operations. In the long-term, it is anticipated that Odys Aviation's aircraft will support Mwasalat with further applications for var-

multiple sectors in Oman and beyond, and we're looking forward to seeing the impact across the businesses we support across the region when our pilot programs roll out in 2025."

"The team at Odys Aviation has always been committed to advancing sustainable aviation

The team at Odys Aviation has been committed to advancing sustainable aviation and we're thrilled to be working with Mwasalat

JAMES DORRIS

ious sectors including passenger transportation, oil and gas services, security, tourism, health services and civil defense.

"Mwasalat is excited to be partnering with Odys Aviation to pioneer the future of sustainable air mobility in Oman using their innovative hybrid vertical takeoff and landing technology," said Bader al Nadabi, CEO of Mwasalat.

"These new air vehicles will revolutionise mobility across

and we're thrilled to be working with Mwasalat's progressive leadership to develop and implement meaningful pilot initiatives that will prove the use case for this technology," said James Dorris, CEO and co-founder of Odys Aviation.

To further support activities in the GCC, Odys recently announced the appointment of Moosa al Balushi to the position of regional director business development, based in Muscat.

Scams target Olympic fans: Kaspersky

Kaspersky experts have noted a surge in scamming activity surrounding the first in-person Summer Olympics since the lifting of pandemic restrictions is set to begin on July 26.

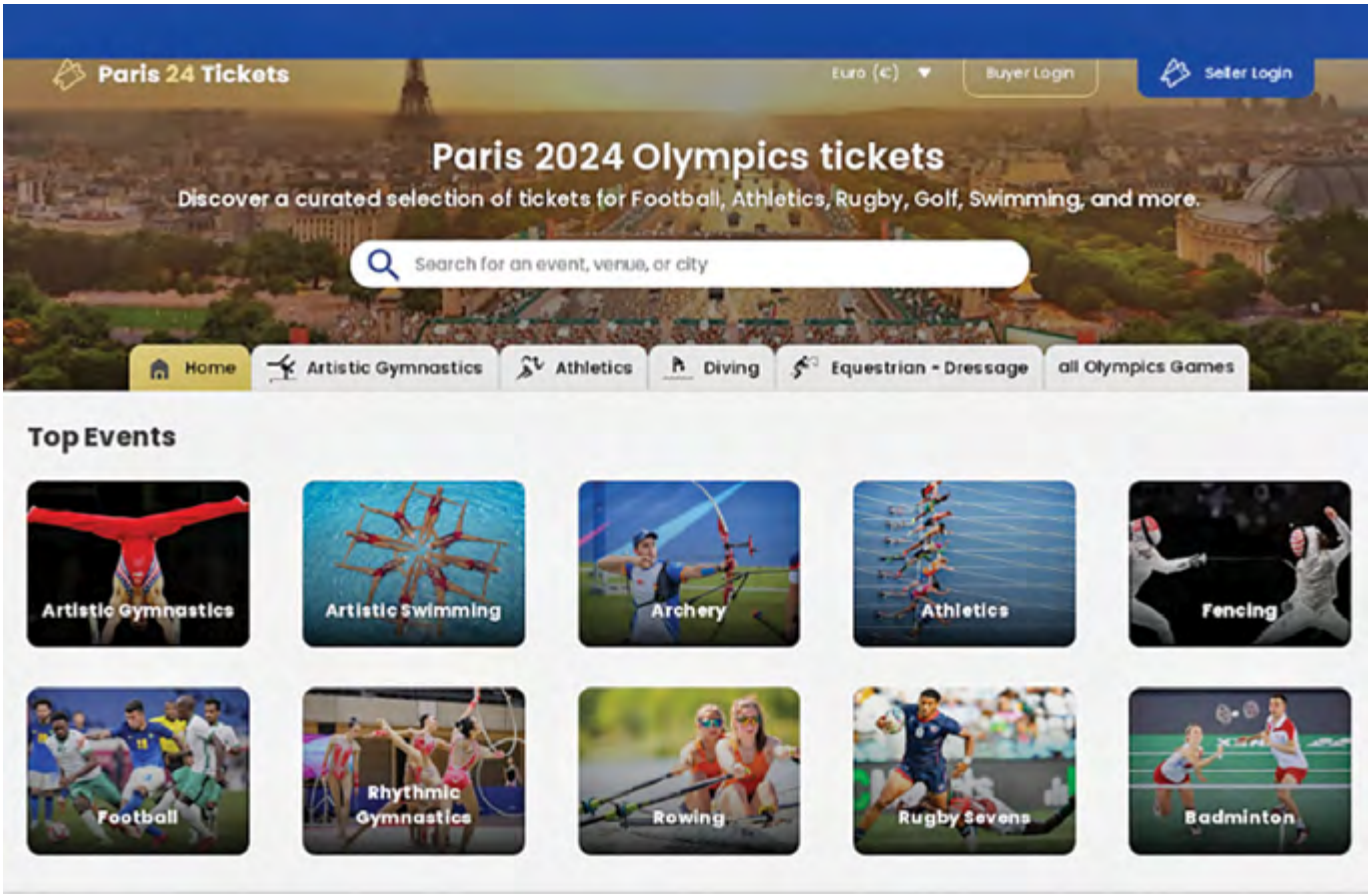
With millions of sports enthusiasts expected to gather, the event became a big draw for fraudsters targeting users' money and data, Kaspersky reported.

To understand how scammers are exploiting viewers' interest, Kaspersky experts analysed Olympic-related phishing websites and identified the main schemes currently in use.

Fake tickets

With the Olympic Committee warning of fake ticket offers and news of a UK swimmer's family being scammed out of £2,500 while attempting to purchase tickets for the Paris Olympics, Kaspersky's telemetry confirms that fraudsters are actively crafting phishing websites. These sites offer tickets for Olympic competitions at exclusive prices or claim to have seats for sold-out events. This well-tested yet effective fraudulent scheme has resurfaced during many Olympic seasons, and Kaspersky's experts expect such websites to proliferate during Paris 2024 events.

In this scenario, users fill out a data form and transfer both their personal information and money to scammers. As a result, they may receive invalid tickets or, more likely, nothing at all, leading to financial loss and their data being sold on Dark Web forums.



During major events like the Olympics, the sheer volume of offers can be overwhelming and deceptive... Scammers prey on the excitement and urgency people feel

ANTON YATSENKO

Fake corporate giveaways

Many organizations host giveaways for their employees, partners, and customers during major events. Recently, Kaspersky experts uncovered a fraudulent page impersonating a French bank, falsely promising a chance to win event tickets. Employees are enticed to fill out a form with personal details, including their internet account login credentials and passwords.

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This allows fraudsters to infiltrate victims' corporate resources and potentially spread malicious content further.

Cell phone plans

Fraudsters have set up phishing websites offering a free 48GB data package for all networks. These sites entice users to provide personal information, such as phone numbers and payment details, under the guise of activating the data package. Once submitted, this information is

harvested for malicious purposes, leading to potential financial loss and privacy breaches.

Fake merch stores

Kaspersky experts have also discovered fraudulent online stores selling merchandise such as shirts, uniforms, accessories, and more. Needless to say, those who were enticed by these offers never received the items they ordered.

"During major events like the Olympics, the sheer volume of

How to stay safe from scams during the Olympics

- Verify authenticity: Only purchase tickets, merchandise, or services from official and reputable sources. Check the event's official website for authorized sellers.
- Be sceptical of deals: Be cautious of deep discounts and exclusive deals, especially if they come from unknown sources.
- Secure your data: Avoid sharing personal and financial information on unfamiliar websites. Ensure the website is secure by looking for "https" in the URL and a padlock symbol in the browser bar.
- Use security software: Keep your antivirus and security software up to date to protect against malware and phishing attacks. Kaspersky protects its users from all types of phishing and scams.
- Educate yourself: Stay informed about common scam tactics and how to recognize them. Follow updates from cybersecurity experts and official sources.

offers can be overwhelming and deceptive," says Anton Yatsenko, security expert at Kaspersky.

"Scammers prey on the excitement and urgency people feel, making it crucial to approach every offer with a healthy dose of scepticism. Remember, if something seems too good to be true, it probably is. Take the time to verify the authenticity of offers and protect your personal information. Your vigilance can be the difference between enjoying the event and falling victim to a scam."

Kaspersky is a global cybersecurity and digital privacy company founded in 1997. With over a billion devices protected to

date from emerging cyberthreats and targeted attacks, Kaspersky's deep threat intelligence and security expertise is constantly transforming into innovative solutions and services to protect businesses, critical infrastructure, governments and consumers around the globe.

The company's comprehensive security portfolio includes leading endpoint protection, specialised security products and services, as well as Cyber Immune solutions to fight sophisticated and evolving digital threats.

'We help over 220,000 corporate clients protect what matters most to them,' Kaspersky stated in a release.

Aramco awards Dar al Handasah Consultants engineering and project management contract

Dar al Handasah Consultants, (Shair and Partners), a Sidara Company, under an amendment to an existing framework agreement, will provide consultancy services, including engineering, design, project management, and multidisciplinary services for both existing and new infrastructure projects led by Aramco.

The amendment, awarded in December 2023, provides for additional five years of general engineering and project management services - infrastructure (GESI) and can also be extended up to three additional years.

This award effectively extends a previous GESI framework agreement that Dar signed with Aramco in 2019 and builds on a historical relationship that dates back to 1957, and that has been characterized by the successful delivery of innovative and trans-



formative projects across various sectors.

Commenting on the new framework of agreement, Dar and Sidara's chairman and CEO Talal Shair said, "We are privileged to continue supporting

Aramco in achieving its strategic objectives. We believe the new agreement validates and spotlights our contributions and provides us with an opportunity to continue to bring exceptional value to Aramco, leveraging the

best of our expertise and capabilities, and that of all Sidara Companies."

Dar has been active in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia since 1957, successfully delivering more than 600 projects for over

100 clients. With seven offices across major cities in the kingdom, the company currently employs over 3,000 employees, including more than 1,000 Saudi nationals.

Beyond its contributions on numerous Aramco projects, Dar has played a role in many of the ambitious and visionary gigaprojects that are currently in development across the Kingdom, particularly those that support the achievement of Vision 2030.

Dar is the founding member of Sidara, a global collective of the world's brightest and best planners, designers, engineers, and consultants with over 20,000 professionals and over 300 offices across all geographies, who have come together on a shared mission: to advocate for the world as we would for our own home.



Bank Muscat launches online payment plan

Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in Oman, has launched an online Easy Payment Plan (EPP), which provides the option to pay in installment for online shopping through integration with Bank Muscat's Payment Gateway System.

The Easy Payment plan facilitates affordable purchases of products and services with interest free repayment installments of up to 12 months using Bank Muscat Credit Cards. It is noteworthy that Sharaf DG is the bank's first merchant partner under the Online EPP plan service.

Customers can benefit from the new payment plan by visiting the merchant website and adding to the cart the items they would like to purchase. They can then use Bank Muscat's credit card to complete their purchase by selecting Installment Payment Plan on the online payment gateway.

The credit card limit will be reduced by the purchase amount. The minimum purchasing value using this service is RO100 and is applicable to all active Bank Muscat credit cards.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah Hamood al Jufaili, Assistant General Manager - Digital Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "In line with the bank's customer-centric vision to provide excellent financing facilities, Bank Muscat's online Easy Payment Plan will allow customers to avail goods and services and pay conveniently over a period of 12 months without interest.

"The bank is planning to enhance the list of merchant partners who provide this service in the coming period. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our valued customers for their continuous trust in the services and products which are designed to enhance their banking experience."

Bank Muscat confirms its keenness to enhance secure digital payments through developing various payment options to meet customers' needs and aspirations. The Bank's credit cards are a preferred mode of payment in Oman, and the online EPP scheme reiterates the bank's commitment to promoting secure digital payments in Oman.

Water-cooled drone for desert operations launched

Skyfront, the global leader in high endurance hybrid drones, announced that the Skyfront Perimeter 8+ WC, a variant of the hybrid-electric Perimeter 8+ drone equipped with a water-cooled engine and heat-tolerant avionics, is now available for desert operations worldwide.

The drone is designed to provide reliable drone operations in the most austere desert environments in temperatures up to 50°C. Traditional battery-powered drones face significant challenges in high-temperature conditions, including faster battery degradation, reduced lifespan, and the risk of battery fires. Similarly, air-cooled engines on drones can overheat.

The Skyfront Perimeter 8+ WC addresses these issues with its advanced water-cooled engine and heat-tolerant avionics,



offering drone operators peace of mind in extreme conditions.

Skyfront's new drone was recently stress tested at the White Sands Missile Range US Army testing facility in New Mexico, where it successfully carried heavy payloads at high altitudes during mid-day operations in temperatures of 45°C. The

drone can operate at density altitudes that are typically infeasible for traditional multirotor drones, making it a game-changer for various applications.

The drone is ideal for high endurance defence and commercial applications in extreme environments. It is effective for detecting improvised explosive

devices (IEDs), landmines, and unexploded ordnance (UXO). Additionally, it is designed for geophysical exploration and long linear inspections of utilities, pipelines, oil, gas, and power transmission lines.

This drone is available as a retrofittable upgrade to the popular Skyfront Perimeter 8. The Perimeter 8, deployed by customers in over 30 countries, is renowned for its endurance, payload capacity, and range. It boasts proven flight times of over 5 hours and can carry 5kg for 3 hours and 10kg for one hour.

"Alchemy Analytics provides

advanced unmanned geospatial solutions and services, and we've seen firsthand the Skyfront Perimeter 8+ WC unlock reliable high endurance drone operations in the deserts of the Middle East and enable peace of mind for drone operators," said Conrad Wright, CEO of Alchemy Analytics.

"Skyfront is excited to deploy the first water-cooled hybrid-electric multirotor drone in the Middle East," said Troy Mestler, CEO of Skyfront. "The Skyfront Perimeter 8+ WC is now available as a retrofittable upgrade for existing customers and as a new system for new customers."

China: Bridge collapses in sudden floods, killing at least 11

Beijing, China - At least 11 people died, and 30 people were missing after a bridge collapsed amid torrential rains in north-western China, state media said on Saturday.

'Nearly 20 vehicles and more than 30 people' are missing after the collapse of the highway bridge, local broadcaster CCTV said.

The bridge in Zhashui County in Shangluo City, Shaanxi province, collapsed at 8:40pm on Friday local time due to sudden downpours and flash floods, state news agency Xinhua reported, citing authorities.

Rescue operations are ongoing, with five vehicles recovered from the water so far. All 11 confirmed deaths were bodies in the retrieved vehicles.

Local media visuals showed a submerged section of the bridge with water rushing over it.

Heavy rains lash Chinese provinces

Northern and central China have been battered by heavy rains earlier this week, causing flooding and extensive damage.

In Baoji city in Shaanxi, at



The site of a bridge collapse in Zhashui County in Shangluo City, northwest China's Shaanxi Province (Xinhua)

least five people were killed and eight missing after floods and mudslides, state media reported. The neighbouring provinces of Gansu and Henan in central China were also affected by incessant rains.

Nanyang city in Henan saw a year's equivalent of rainfall at the beginning of the week, CCTV reported.

China facing extreme weather

This year, China has experienced a summer of extreme weather, with major flooding in central and southern regions, while northern areas face severe heatwaves.

Earlier this month, in eastern China a tornado left one person dead and injured 79 others, while causing major damage.

In May, deadly mountain floods and landslides hit Hunan, while deluges also left 38 dead in southern Guangdong province.

Again, in the same month, days of rain caused a highway to collapse in southern China, killing 48 people.

DW

New COVID variant spreading in Australia

Canberra, Australia - A new COVID-19 variant, LB.1, hit Australia as health experts warned that it could spread faster than previous variants, local media said on Saturday.

The country's health department spokesperson said that there had been confirmed cases of LB.1 in Australia, SBS News reported. Health experts also warned that the new variant could spread faster than the previous variants.

"Although LB.1 is almost certainly more transmissible than KP.2, it doesn't appear to be outperforming KP.3 and its descendants," the broadcaster quoted Professor Adrian Esterman, chair of biostatistics and epidemiology at the University of South Australia, as saying.

Paul Griffin, an infectious disease physician and clinical microbiologist at the University of Queensland, also said that the country could appear to be nearing a peak in coronavirus cases this winter, but he added that it's difficult to tell that it could cause a new wave of infections.

Anadolu Agency

Biden says he will return to campaign

Delaware, US - Calling Donald Trump's speech at the Republican National Convention (RNC) a 'dark vision for the future'. US President Joe Biden has vowed to get back on the campaign trail next week to 'save democracy', *The Hill* reported.

Notably, Biden has been isolating at his Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, home after testing positive for COVID-19 on Wednesday while he was campaigning in Las Vegas.

In a statement, Biden said that Trump's remarks at the RNC on Thursday night focused on his own grievances and had no plans to make life better for working people. "Last night the American people saw the same Donald Trump they rejected four years ago. For over 90 minutes, he focused on his own grievances, with no plan to unite us and no plan to make life better for working people," Biden said on Friday.

He insisted that he would again defeat Trump in November amid growing calls for the president to drop out of the race.

Calls from Democrat members became louder on Friday, when Senator Martin Heinrich became the third Democratic senator to call for Biden to move aside, and four House Democrats issued a joint statement urging the president to end his reelection bid. In a statement, Biden said: "Donald Trump's dark vision for the future is not who we are



US President Joe Biden said he would again defeat Trump in November amid growing calls for the president to drop out of the race

as Americans. Together, as a party and as a country, we can and will defeat him at the ballot box," *The Hill* reported.

He further said: "I look forward to getting back on the campaign trail next week to continue exposing the threat of Donald Trump's Project 2025 agenda while making the case for my own record and the vision that I have for America: one where we

save our democracy, protect our rights and freedoms, and create opportunity for everyone."

Biden also said that Trump 'avoided mentioning his Project 2025 agenda, but still proudly flaunted the worst of MAGA extremism', echoing the response from his campaign chair, Jen O'Malley Dillon, to the former president's speech at the convention Thursday night.

O'Malley Dillon said Trump did not mention Project 2025 even once. The Biden campaign has tried to connect Trump to the controversial conservative policy blueprint from the Heritage Foundation, while Trump and his team have aggressively attempted to distance themselves from it, *The Hill* reported.

Former US President Donald Trump kicked off his Presidential

Biden said that Trump's remarks at the RNC on Thursday night focused on his own grievances and had no plans to make life better for working people

nas from Democrats like Nancy Pelosi. They must stop this, as it's harming our country. We need to focus on making America great again, not beating people. We won against impeachments and indictments, but the time wasted is damaging. If that effort went towards helping America, we'd be much stronger," he said.

Speaking to the Republican cadre, Trump endorsed his running mate and Senator from Ohio, J D Vance. While accepting his nomination, Trump said that he would be the President for all of America.

"I am running to be President for all America, not half of America because there is no victory in winning for half of America. So, tonight with faith and devotion I proudly accept your nomination for president of the United States. In four months we will have an incredible victory."

ANI

Canada reaffirms one-China policy

Beijing, China - Canada reaffirmed the one-China policy as Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Canadian counterpart, Melanie Joly, met on Saturday in Beijing, according to a Canadian agency.

The two ministers held a meeting and discussed 'opportunities and challenges in the bilateral relationship as well as a wide range of global issues of common concern, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Israel-Hamas conflict and tensions in the Korean Peninsula', Global Affairs Canada reported.

Both sides agreed to enhance coordination on shared issues within the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and other relevant international forums.

Joly said Canada 'would continue to defend our democracy and the values it has always stood for, including human rights, the rule of law, and the principles enshrined in the UN Charter, as Canada does consistently in its international engagement', said the agency. She also reaffirmed Canada's one-China policy, 'which remains unchanged'.

The ministers agreed on the importance of keeping open lines of communication and are committed to holding regular ministerial-level discussions on topics such as peace, security, and



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Canadian counterpart, Melanie Joly, met on Saturday in Beijing

Both sides agreed to enhance coordination on shared issues within the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and other relevant international forums

trade.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, said that in recent years, China-Canada relations have experienced difficulties and twists, which is not the situation China wants to see and requires serious reflection from the Canadian side.

There is no conflict of fundamental interests between China

and Canada, and people in the two countries have long practiced friendly exchange, Wang said. And China-Canada relations have long been at the forefront of China's relations with Western countries.

Wang said that China and Canada, as two major countries with important influence in the Asia-Pacific region, share extensive common interests and com-

plementary advantages. Maintaining and developing bilateral relations well serves the fundamental interests of the two countries and two peoples.

The two sides should view each other in an objective and rational light, treat each other with mutual respect, handle differences in the spirit of seeking common ground while shelving differences, and strengthen cooperation through the principles of equality and mutual benefits, Wang stressed.

Wang said the two sides should return to their original intentions and draw lessons from history.

Agencies

Trump pledges to end Ukraine war if elected US president

New York, US - Former US President Donald Trump spoke on the phone with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky during which he pledged to end the conflict in Ukraine if elected to become president again.

He also pledged that once elected, he would bring 'peace to the world'.

Trump took to Truth Social on Friday to announce his 'very good call' and said that the Ukrainian leader had condemned the assassination attempt on him and extended congratulations on the successful Republican National Convention in Milwaukee.

"He condemned the heinous assassination attempt last Saturday and remarked about the American people coming together in the spirit of unity during these times," Trump said on his social media platform, as cited by CNN.

"I appreciate President Zelensky for reaching out because I, as your next President of the United States, will bring peace to the world and end the war that has cost so many lives and devastated countless innocent families. Both sides will be able to come together and negotiate



Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky

a deal that ends the violence and paves a path forward to prosperity."

During his June 27 pre-election debate with US President Joe Biden, Trump had promised that, if re-elected, he would be able to end the conflict before his inauguration on January 20 next year.

In a post on X describing the call, Zelensky said he congratulated Trump on his nomination and condemned the 'shocking assassination attempt in Pennsylvania'. "I wished him strength and absolute safety in the future," he said.

"I noted the vital bipartisan and bicameral American support for protecting our nation's freedom and independence."

Last week, when Zelensky was in the US, he said that 'everyone is waiting for November', including Putin. He also said that Biden and Trump are 'very different', but both support democracy and 'Putin will hate both of them', CNN reported.

Ukraine is concerned over the fact that the country could lose vital US support as Trump's campaign surges and Biden's falters. Trump's public comments have varied between criticising US backing for Ukraine's defence and supporting it, while his running mate, J D Vance, has been a leader of Republican efforts to block US military and financial assistance to Ukraine since Russia invaded in 2022.

ANI

Biden, Netanyahu meeting to focus on Gaza ceasefire, says US official

Biden and Netanyahu will discuss ways to reach a deal on ceasefire in Gaza and return of hostages during their meeting on Monday

Washington, D.C., US - White House National Security Council Adviser Jake Sullivan on Friday said President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will discuss ways to reach a deal on ceasefire in Gaza and return of hostages during their meeting on Monday.

"Overriding focus of the meeting between President Biden and Prime Minister Netanyahu is going to be about the ceasefire and hostage deal," Sullivan told Aspen Security Forum in Colorado.

He said Biden will focus his energy with Netanyahu to 'get this deal done in the coming weeks'.

Biden unveiled proposals for a three-phased truce on May 31, and talks continue.

Sullivan said there are some



technical details regarding the ceasefire deal to be worked out about the 'Phase 1 to Phase 2 sequence'. "We believe there is an opportunity to get it done. We are mindful that there remain obstacles in the way, and let's use next week to try to clear through those obstacles and get to a deal," he said, echoing Secretary of State Antony Blinken's remarks on Friday.

Blinken said the US is driving towards the 'goal line' of getting

a ceasefire agreement in Gaza, adding: "We're inside the 10-yard line."

Asked if he is optimistic, Sullivan responded: "I have learned the hard way never to use the word optimism in the same sentence as the Middle East."

"What I will say is that I think we have our best opportunity now that we have had since the last brief hostage deal in November to get to an outcome. It is there for the taking," he said.

Asked about Netanyahu's expected speech addressing US Congress on Wednesday, Sullivan said he believes it 'will be one that doesn't look like 2015' but more reflective of circumstances of today. Netanyahu had criticised the nuclear deal with Iran in his address nine years ago.

"I expect to have constructive conversations with the Israeli government in the days leading up to the speech," he added.

'Unlawful occupation'

Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will transmit to the General Assembly the advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which deems Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967 as unlawful, said his spokesman on Friday.

Stephane Dujarric in a statement said Guterres will promptly transmit the findings to the UN General Assembly, which had re-

quested the court's advice in 2022. "It is for the General Assembly to decide how to proceed in this matter," he said.

Guterres reiterates that the parties must re-engage on the long-delayed political path towards ending the occupation and resolving the conflict in line with international law, relevant UN resolutions and bilateral agreements, according to the readout.

"The only viable path is the vision of two States - Israel and a

We believe there is an opportunity to get it done. We are mindful that there remain obstacles in the way, and let's use next week to try to clear through those obstacles and get to a deal

JAKE SULLIVAN

fully independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian State - living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognised borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States," said the statement.

The ICJ in its opinion said Israel's decades-long occupation of East Jerusalem and West Bank is 'unlawful' and should be brought to an end 'as rapidly as possible'.

It said Israel should cease new settlement activities, and 'evacuate all settlers from the Occupied Palestinian Territory'.

The General Assembly had adopted a resolution requesting the ICJ to give an advisory opinion on the legal consequences arising from the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967, how the policies and practices of Israel affect the legal status of the occupation.

Anadolu Agency

20 killed as Israel pounds besieged Gaza

Gaza City, Palestine - Dozens of Palestinians, including children, were killed and injured on Saturday in a series of overnight airstrikes conducted by Israeli warplanes targeting homes in various areas of the Gaza Strip.

"Five Palestinians were martyred and several others were injured by an Israeli airstrike targeting the Ayad family's home in the Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood of Gaza City," the Civil Defence Service in Gaza said in a statement.

"Israeli warplanes targeted a house belonging to the Shraihi family in the new camp in Nuseirat, central Gaza Strip, killing four Palestinians, including children and women," it added.

Another Israeli airstrike targeted the Abu Jaser family's home in the Al-Alami area of the Jabalia refugee camp, killing four Palestinians and injuring several others, according to the Civil Defence.

Three more Palestinians were killed and others were injured in an Israeli airstrike on the Batran family's home in the Al-Bureij



refugee camp of the central Gaza Strip.

Eyewitnesses told Anadolu that Israeli warplanes bombed a populated dwelling belonging to the Abu Sidra family in the Nuseirat refugee camp, resulting in several Palestinian casualties.

In a statement, the Al-Awda Hospital reported receiving 'four martyrs and 15 injured Palestinians following an airstrike near the Tala'a Mosque in the Nuseirat camp'.

Israeli forces ambushed?

Meanwhile, the Al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Palestinian group Hamas, said on Saturday that they ambushed Israeli forces in the southern Gaza Strip.

Al-Qassam said on Telegram that their fighters 'lured an Israeli foot force into a tunnel that had been booby-trapped in advance and blew it up with members of the force, causing casualties'.

It indicated that the operation took place in the 'Tel al-Sultan neighbourhood, west of the city of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip'.

There was no comment from the Israeli army on the Al-Qassam Brigades statement as of 12.17pm local time (0917GMT).

There has been no response from the Israeli side to the statement, but they usually limit themselves to occasionally updating data on soldier casualties

in the war on Gaza.

Besides, the Israeli army late on Friday killed a Palestinian teen in the southern occupied West Bank.

Palestine television said Ibrahim Zaqeeq, 19, was shot in his head by Israeli forces in Beit Ummar.

It said Zaqeeq was released from Israeli jail two weeks ago and is the only son in his family.

Witnesses told Anadolu that an Israeli force raided Beit Ummar and opened fire on Palestinians, seriously injuring Zaqeeq and others who suffered asphyxiation from teargas.

Early on Friday, another Palestinian died from wounds he sustained in January from Israeli forces near Jenin in the northern occupied West Bank.

In the last few years, the Israeli military has conducted regular raids in the West Bank, which have escalated with the beginning of the onslaught against the Gaza Strip on October 7. Palestinians have also been violently attacked by illegal Israeli settlers.

Anadolu Agency

'Federal solution not possible for Cyprus'

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday reiterated support for a two-state solution on Cyprus, saying that ignoring the realities on the Eastern Mediterranean island would lead 'nowhere'.

"We believe a federal solution is not possible in Cyprus," Erdogan told at a commemoration ceremony soon after arriving on an official visit to Lefkosa, the capital of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

Erdogan, whose visit marks the 50th anniversary of Turkey's Cyprus Peace Operation, also expressed Ankara's readiness to negotiate, discuss, and ultimately achieve a lasting peace and solution on the island.

He further stated that the Greek Cypriot side 'clearly' showed it had 'no intention' of sharing political power or natural resources with the island's Turkish Cypriots.

"To date, the Turkish Cypriots



Recep Tayyip Erdogan

and Turkey have been the sincere parties striving for a solution, making sacrifices, taking risks, and showing their commitment," the Turkish leader added.

The island of Cyprus has been mired in a decades-long dispute between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, despite a series of diplomatic efforts to achieve a comprehensive settlement.

Ethnic attacks starting in the early 1960s forced Turkish Cypriots to withdraw into enclaves for their safety.

Anadolu Agency

Iran can produce material for nuclear bomb in weeks, says Blinken

Colorado, US - Iran will be capable of producing the necessary material for use in a nuclear weapon within 'one or two weeks', US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday.

Blinken made the statements at a security forum in the US state of Colorado.

National security adviser Jake Sullivan, meanwhile, said the United States has noted 'an uptick of public commentary from Iranian officials' musing about that possibility 'since the April attacks and counterattacks between Israel and Iran and its al-

lies.

Iran launched in April an unprecedented barrage of missiles and drones targeting Israel after what Iran said was an Israeli strike on its embassy complex in Syria that killed two Iranian generals.

What did Blinken say?

On the Iranian nuclear programme, Blinken said: "What we've seen in the last weeks and months is an Iran that's actually moving forward."

"Instead of being at least a year



away from having breakout capacity to produce fissile material for a nuclear weapon, they're probably one or two weeks away

from doing that," Blinken said, adding that 'where we are now is not a good place'.

He blamed the pace of this

Iran launched in April a barrage of missiles and drones targeting Israel after what Iran said was an Israeli strike on its embassy complex in Syria that killed two Iranian generals

progress on the US withdrawal from a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and global powers known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of

Action (JCPOA).

Former US President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the deal in 2018, calling it 'defective at its core'. The deal involved easing sanctions on Iran in exchange for tougher oversight of its nuclear programme to prevent the construction of nuclear weapons.

"Now, they haven't produced a weapon itself, but ... you put those things together, fissile material, an explosive device, and you have a nuclear weapon," Blinken said.

Sullivan, meanwhile, said 'I have not seen a decision by Iran

to move' in a way that signals it has decided to actually develop a nuclear bomb right now. He added that Tehran would 'find a real problem with the US' should that happen.

Iranian plans to develop its nuclear programme have been at the centre of much condemnation and concern in the Middle East and beyond.

The IAEA has said Iran is the only non-nuclear weapons state to enrich uranium to the high level of 60 per cent - just short of weapons-grade.

DW

Indian Coast Guard continues firefighting ops on cargo ship

New Delhi, India - The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) continues its robust response to the fire incident onboard the merchant vessel Maersk Frankfurt. The present position of the vessel is 17 miles from Karwar, Karnataka.

The fire in the forepart of the vessel has been suppressed, but heavy smoke continues to emanate. Unfortunately, the fire has reignited in the midship area.

ICG ships Sachet, Sujeet, and Samrat are actively engaged in firefighting operations. Continuous efforts are being made to control and extinguish the fire.

A Coast Guard Dornier aircraft has conducted an aerial assessment of the situation. Additionally, an ALH Dhruv helicopter was launched from New Mangalore for Goa, conducting an assessment of the vessel enroute and evaluating the feasibility of deploying Dry Chemical Powder (DCP) bags.

Coast Guard District Headquarters No. 11 (Goa) is arranging the provision of DCP bags and balls to aid in firefighting operations. The specialised pollution control vessel, Samudra Prahari, is being deployed to the



Smoke and flames billow out after a fire broke out on a container cargo vessel about 102 nautical miles southwest of Goa, on Friday (ANI)

Fire in the forepart of the vessel has been suppressed, but heavy smoke continues to emanate. The fire has reignited in the midship area

scene on Saturday to provide further assistance.

At present, there is no requirement for the evacuation of

the crew. The Master of the vessel has indicated that anchoring is not feasible due to the inaccessibility of the forecastle area, which has been compromised by melting containers, posing significant risks to the crew.

The ICG remains committed to ensuring the safety of the crew and the vessel while mitigating the impact of this incident on maritime safety and the environment, a statement said. Continuous monitoring and response efforts are underway to bring the situation under control.

Late on Friday night, the Indian Coast Guard control room in Mumbai had received a distress call from container carrier MV Maersk Frankfurt 50 NM off Karwar regarding a major fire onboard. ICG Dornier and ships Sachet, Sujeet and Samrat were immediately pressed into action. An additional aircraft was also mobilised to augment search and rescue efforts. The Coast Guard said that firefighting was in progress to avert ecological disaster and ensure the safety of the vessel and crew.

ANI

Bangladesh: Military enforces curfew

The curfew is meant to quell student-led protests, after at least 105 people have been killed this week

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh's army began enforcing a curfew meant to quell student-led protests, after at least 105 people have been killed this week in the unrest.

The curfew will last until 10am local time (0400 UTC) on Sunday. The government said it will then assess the situation and decide the next course of action.

The measure was temporarily eased for two hours from midday to allow people to shop for groceries and supplies.

TV footage showed that people in the streets had their ID cards examined by soldiers at various checkpoints.

The French AFP news agency reported that one of its journalist saw police fire live rounds at protesters in the capital Dhaka on Sunday. A suspension on internet and messaging services has remained in place since Thursday.

All gatherings were also banned on Friday, but there were continued clashes between protesters and police. Officers have fired tear gas and hurled sound grenades to disperse protesters.

On Friday, protesters stormed a jail and freed over 850 inmates before setting fire to the facility, TV channels cited police as saying. Protesters stormed and set fire to state-run broadcaster Bangladesh Television's head office in Dhaka on Thursday.



Students gather to protest the quota system in public service jobs and police, which killed at least six people and injured dozens more in Barishal, Bangladesh on July 17

There must be impartial, prompt and exhaustive investigations into these attacks, and those responsible held to account

VOLKER TURK

The unrest broke out after a court reinstated a quota system for government jobs, including 30 per cent for the families of those who fought for Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971.

The protests were also fuelled by high youth unemployment in the South Asian country.

Bangladesh's government under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had abolished the quota system in 2018. The state has ap

pealed against the reinstatement of job quotas and the Supreme Court has suspended it for a month, with a hearing due for August 7.

Hasina was reelected for a fourth successive term in January

this year.

Several opposition parties boycotted the election after the ruling Awami League rejected demands that a neutral caretaker government preside over the election.

UN decries attacks on protests

Meanwhile, the United Nations human rights chief on Friday called the attacks on student protesters in Bangladesh 'shocking and unacceptable'.

"I am deeply concerned by this week's violence in Bangladesh, resulting in reports of dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries. The attacks on student protesters are particularly shocking and unacceptable," UN human rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement.

"There must be impartial, prompt and exhaustive investigations into these attacks, and those responsible held to account," the statement continued.

Turk said he was very worried about reports of the deployment of paramilitary police units, which he said have 'long track records of violations'.

He urged the government to take measures to ensure the safety of students in peaceful protests and to guarantee the right to freedom of assembly without fear of attacks.

DW



Japan extends continental shelf in search for rare minerals

Tokyo, Japan - Japan on Saturday extended its designation of its continental shelf east of a series of Pacific islands southeast of the country, despite opposition from China, local media reported.

The move came into effect with a revised Cabinet order, designating a significant portion of the Ogasawara Plateau maritime area as part of its continental shelf to launch research on extracting maritime natural resources, including rare earth minerals, Tokyo-based Kyodo News reported.

Last month, Japan's Cabinet decided to issue decrees on the

The move came into effect with a revised Cabinet order, designating a significant portion of the Ogasawara Plateau maritime area

120,000sqkm (about 46,330-sq-mile) expansion in the plateau region, located on the east side of Father Island in the Ogasawara Islands.

However, the move triggered opposition from China and Beijing.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning denounced the decision, saying that it 'contravenes the stipulations of UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and universal practice'.

Last month, Japanese Minister for Ocean Policy Yoshifumi Matsumura said his country would be able to exercise its sovereign rights to explore the continental shelf and develop natural resources.

Anadolu Agency

India: NTA publishes NEET-UG results

New Delhi, India - The National Testing Agency (NTA) on Saturday declared the state-wise and centre-wise data of the results of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test Undergraduate (NEET-UG) 2024 on the official website.

The Supreme Court on July

18 directed the NTA to announce the results of the NEET-UG by July 20.

A bench of Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra ordered that result should be published separately, city-wide and centre-wise, by 12

noon on Saturday.

The apex court passed the direction to the NTA to publish the results, after the petitioners-students urged it to direct the testing agency to publish the result of all students to bring in some transparency.

The top court in its order

stated: "The petitioners have submitted that it would be appropriate if the results of the NEET-UG 24 exam is published on the website so as to bring about some transparency on the centre-wise marks obtained by candidates."

ANI

Biden vows to push for release of WSJ reporter

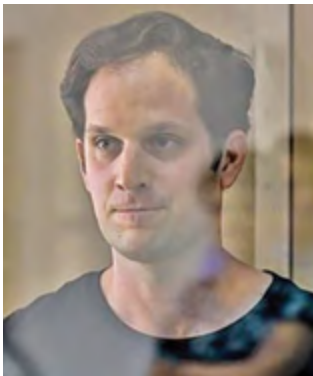
Washington, D.C, US - President Joe Biden said the US will push for the release of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich after a Russian court sentenced him to 16 years in prison on Friday for espionage charges.

In a statement, Biden said Gershkovich has not committed any crime.

"Rather, he was targeted by the Russian government because he is a journalist and an American. We are pushing hard for Evan's release and will continue to do so," the US president said.

Biden accused Russian of 'wrongfully' detaining the WSJ correspondent, saying journalism is not a crime.

"We will continue to stand



Evan Gershkovich

strong for press freedom in Russia and worldwide, and stand against all those who seek to attack the press or target journalists," he said.

"Additionally, since the very first day of my Administration, I have had no higher priority than

seeking the release and safe return of Evan, Paul Whelan and all Americans wrongfully detained and held hostage abroad," he added.

The Russian prosecutors requested an 18-year sentence in a high-security prison colony, but the judge decided against the maximum term, as reported by the court's press service.

In a separate statement, the Russian Attorney General's Office said Gershkovich was accused of collecting classified information about the defence industry enterprise Uralvagonzavod on behalf of the CIA.

"Illegal actions were committed by him in compliance with careful measures of secrecy," it added.

Gershkovich pleaded not guilty to the charges.

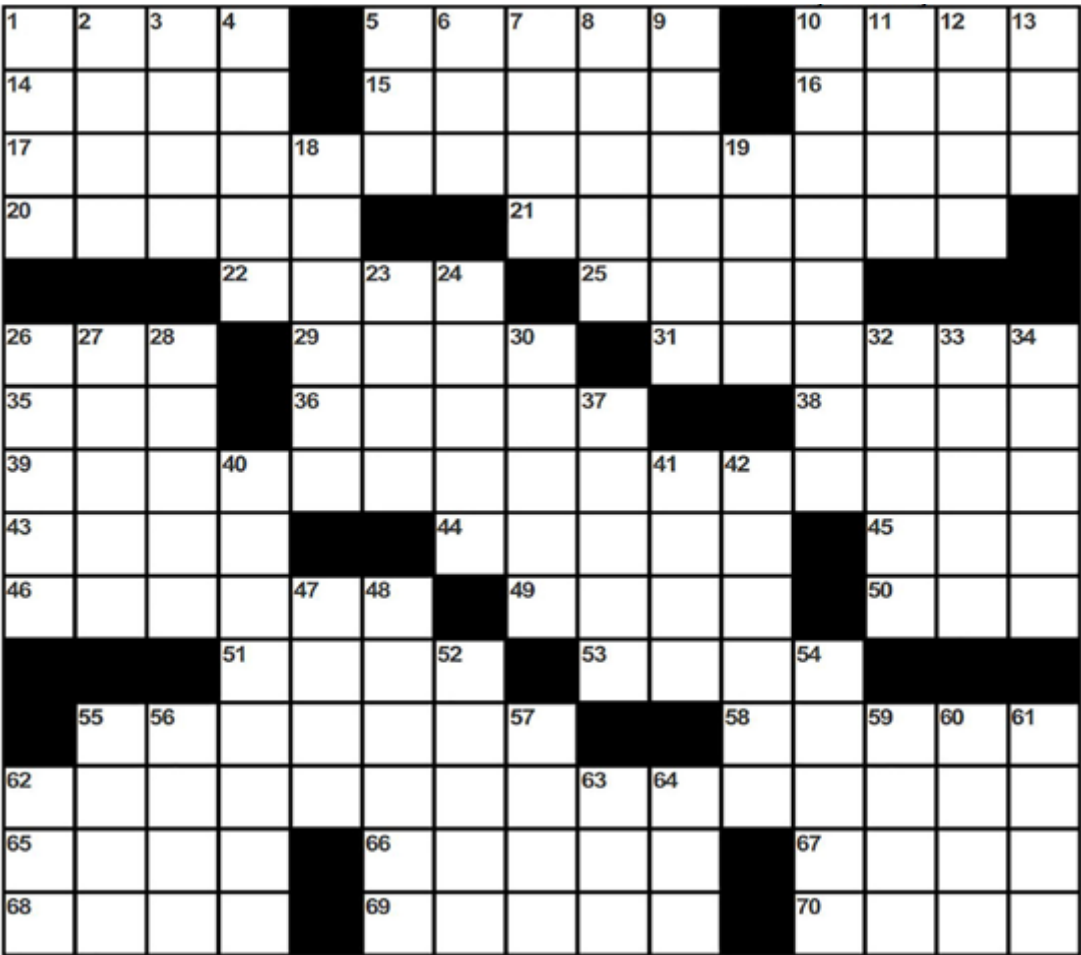
Gershkovich's lawyer, Daniel Berman, has announced that he will file an appeal against the court's decision, saying he was not permitted to attend court proceedings. "I was told that there is already a lawyer on assignment," Berman added.

However, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov explained that the court hearings were conducted in camera due to the sensitive nature of the espionage case.

Peskov also refrained from commenting on allegations that the trial was expedited to facilitate a potential exchange for a Russian citizen imprisoned in a Western country.

Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**

 - 1) Actor Guinness
 - 5) Journalist Boothe Luce
 - 10) Things to repent for
 - 14) "Do you take me_
 - 15) Gobi green
 - 16) Bright brain concoction
 - 17) Using more and more credit
 - 20) Old-fashioned music hall
 - 21) Eternal
 - 22) Immature salamanders
 - 25) Go to_ (deteriorate)
 - 26) Almanac feature
 - 29) After the deadline
 - 31) Worked hard
 - 35) Altar avowal
 - 36) Zinc_
 - 38) Like desert growth
 - 39) Revealing
 - 43) Nero's robe
 - 44) Artist's plaster
 - 45) Poem type
 - 46) A tool for 55-Across front?"
 - 49) Ice Follies venue
 - 50) Bird's beak
- 51) Extremely deep sleep

53) And others, for short

55) The grim one and others

58) Short summary, for short

62) Promoting

65) Good bit of land

66) Acts of the Apostles?

67) Many household pets

68) "Use" homophone

69) Leave the flock

70) Leader in home entertainment?

DOWN

 - 1) Bushy hair style
 - 2) Clear's partner
 - 3) Coastal eagle
 - 4) It's due for a paddling
 - 5) One in jail
 - 6) Drop back
 - 7) Largest continent
 - 8) "The Lord of the_"
 - 9) Have great respect for
 - 10) Fries, often
 - 11) Caesar's bad day
 - 12) Bills on birds
 - 13) Obeyed "Down in front!"
 - 18) Receivables
 - 19) Fake butter
 - 23) Uber competitor
 - 24) Emulate an angry bee
 - 26) Some baseball gear
 - 27) Committee type
 - 28) Bess' love
 - 30) Lawn straightener
 - 32) Disclose
 - 33) Wear away
 - 34) Star in Cygnus
 - 3 7) Borden cow
 - 40) Bran muffin alternatives
 - 41) "_ It Romantic?"
 - 42) Amusement park racing vehicle
 - 4 7) Arizona Indian
 - 48) Corrects text
 - 52) In-group lingo
 - 54) "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" host
 - 55) "Con mucho dinero"
 - 56) Beige shade
 - 57) "Judge Judy" hopeful
 - 59) "Bye bye"
 - 60) Crafts partner
 - 61) "Hey ... over here"
 - 62) Mary_ Cosmetics
 - 63) After-hours school grp.
 - 64) Not outgoing

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Today, it might be a good idea to adopt a more analytical attitude, especially when it comes to dealing with people you don't like. If they rub you the wrong way, so what? They don't have an impact on your life, so skip past them and never look back. If you pay attention to folks who have nothing nice to say, you're giving them more power over your life than they deserve. Your time and energy should be devoted to the people who bring out the best in you.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

A recent chat with a dear one has left you wearing a big smile, and from all indications it's going to keep you smiling for a long time to come. You've earned the right to be happy. The past couple of months have been "interesting," one might say, but you've managed to keep your chin up, stay chipper, and even help get others out of the moods they were in. Now enjoy your heavenly rewards.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Doing research might not be your idea of fun, but how much fun would it be if you ended up making a very expensive wrong decision? Take some time today to get a better understanding of your options and the situation. Read more and see what you can find out. Sure, you could make an educated guess and feel pretty confident about it, but why take that chance? There's too much at stake, so don't do any guessing now.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. A hunter claimed to have seen what bird in 1688, thought to be the last recorded sighting?

A. Gryphon
B. Roc
C. Phoenix
D. Dodo

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

You're still trying to figure out what to do about the current situation at work, but your emotions seem to be drowning out your thoughts. Not to worry. Every now and then it's only fair to give your kinder, gentler side control of the steering wheel. It's now officially time to do just that. Relax and let the Universe lead you. That means no obsessing, which could be far easier said than done.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER

Business as usual will leave you bored as usual today. But the good news is that you'll have someone on your side who's just as bored as you and just as eager to find a fun way to mix things up! Skip past all your analytical thinking and focus on more creative ways to get things done. Team up with this person today and it could be the beginning of a beautiful relationship. Turn on the music and take off your shoes. Relaxation is always a good way to start the brainstorming.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Are your goals set in stone? They'd better be! The more solid they are, the faster you'll be able to reach them. A lot can be achieved today, but only if you know exactly what you need to do. Write everything down if you have to. This isn't the day to just go with the flow or follow your mood. There's too much at stake for you to just do whatever you feel like doing whenever you feel like doing it. You need to be a little bit more disciplined than usual now.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

No one has ever had to remind you that fun often comes out of unexpected circumstances. So even though today seems quiet, you have one eye open for a "coincidence" that will bring you right to your next adventure. Of course, you know that there's really no such thing as a coincidence. It's all about the Universe arranging for you to meet someone or get somewhere. Others might not get it, so educate them. Gently.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your emotions are right there on your face, for all the world to see, and the best part is that they're all good emotions. You're happy and pleased with yourself over recent relationship developments, and you know the feelings are mutual, so what could be better? Well, you could lavish some adoring attention on the person responsible for all this good stuff. That could make things even better, right?

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Sometimes, bluntness can be charming. People can appreciate a person who cuts to the chase and doesn't waste their time with empty compliments or wishy-washy sentiments. Dust off your direct manner of speaking and don't be afraid to tell it like it is. You'll know just how to use the right amount of diplomacy without diluting your message. You can make people understand that they're in the wrong without making them feel like you're accusing them of anything.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

You've been playing the part for what seems like forever: your family's honorary peacemaker, mediator, and hostage negotiator. You've talked a family member off the metaphorical ledge more than once, and you've always known that the chances were excellent that it would happen again. Well, guess what? It's time to break out your crisis kit. The good news is that this time it will go a lot more smoothly. Practice makes perfect, right?

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Timing is everything now. Act too soon and you'll move forward before you're absolutely ready. Act too late and you'll miss a very important opportunity. You'll have a deep understanding of when the time is right if you can just slow down enough. You need to be able to pay attention to the changes in the attitudes of people around you in order to understand when to make your move. Listen more than you talk and stand still more than you march forward.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

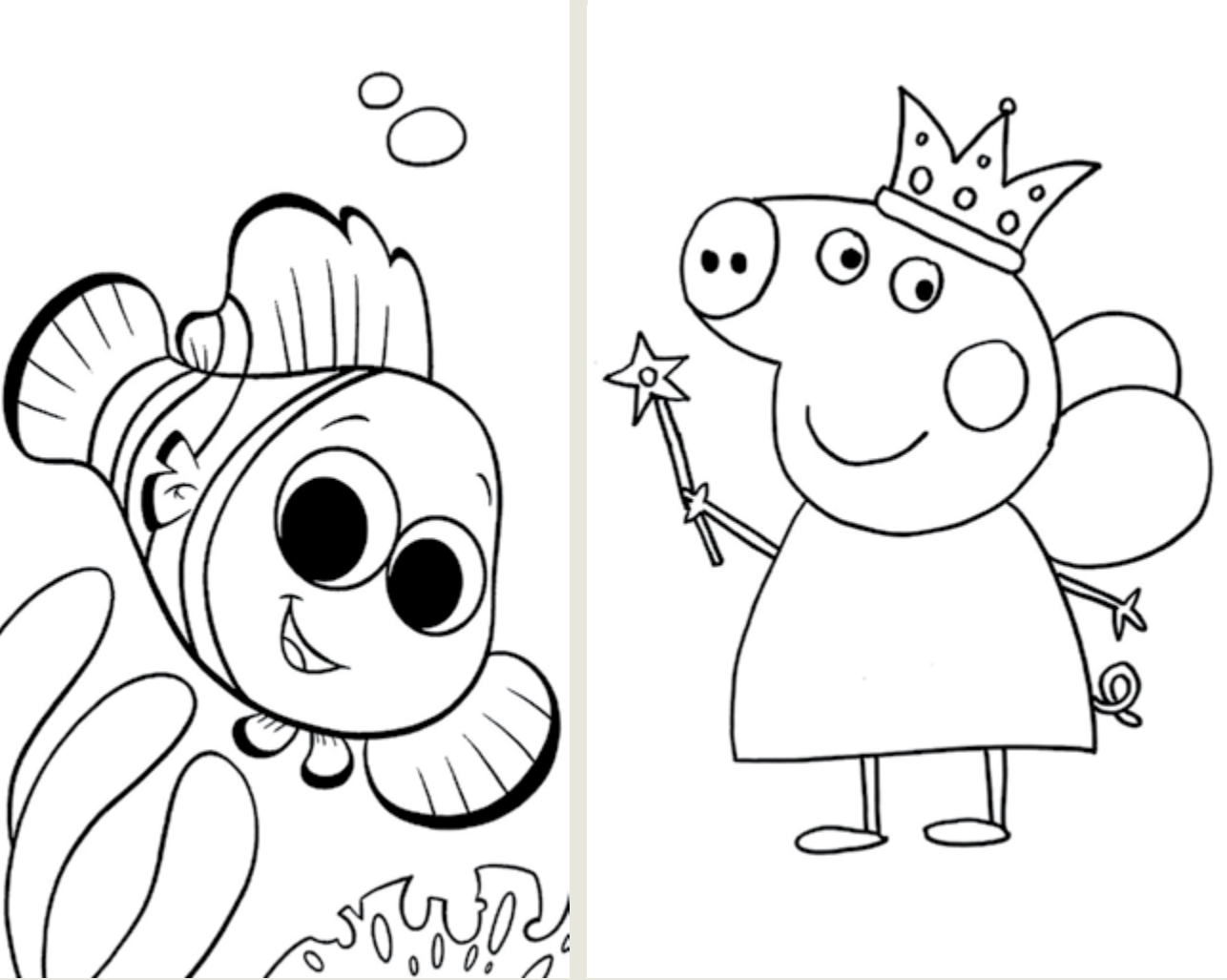
You believe that you've spent far too long on this project, waiting for someone to come around to your way of thinking. You also believe that given enough time you could convince anyone of anything, and that includes this stubborn soul. You're right on both counts. If you hadn't been quite so eager to change minds, you probably could have pulled off this project alone. As it is, you needed help because you got distracted. But who could blame you?

03. Which of these was a former name of Northern Rhodesia?

A. Zanzibar
B. Zimbabwe
C. Zaire
D. Zambia

Answers: 1. D 2. D 3. D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

N	E	S	U
C	S	K	D
A	F	O	H
N	E	B	D

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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

BARCA FANS WANT NICO, BUT WHERE'S THE MONEY?

Supporters raising funds in TikTok for Williams signing

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona fans have been contributing symbolic amounts of money to the club's official TikTok account in an effort to support the LaLiga side secure the signing of forward Nico Williams.

The 22-year-old Athletic Bilbao winger became a major transfer target for top European clubs as he was one of the most exciting players in Spain's seven-match winning run at the European Championship.

Williams, who scored two goals including the opener in Spain's 2-1 victory over England in the final, showed a promising partnership with Barcelona forward Lamine Yamal, who was named the tournament's best young player.

Barcelona fans are now eagerly pushing for a Yamal-Williams attacking duo as they send funds to the Catalan club, which has faced financial challenges in recent times.

"Sign Nico", "We 100% need Nico" and "For Nico Williams" are some of the comments with donations on Barcelona's most recent TikTok videos.

According to Transfermarkt, Williams' current market value is 70 million euros (\$76.29 million), while the Spanish press has reported that Athletic set his release fee at 58 million.

Despite the goodwill of the Barca fans, the donations, labelled as "rewards" on TikTok, would not be of much help for the club as they range from 5 cents to one Euro, with the social network retaining a large part of the funds.

Barcelona, who finished second in LaLiga and were knocked out of the Champions League in the quarterfinals last season, have not signed any players so far during the summer transfer window.

Al Hilal eye Barca youngster

Saudi Arabian team Al Hilal are preparing to make a significant offer for Barcelona's young forward Vitor Roque, according to reports in Spain.

Roque is expected to leave Barca this summer as the club has made it clear he will not get any playing time.

At present, Barcelona are open to selling him if a substantial offer comes in that could bring in a profit. While a transfer within Europe seems impossible, The Catalans are aware of Al Hilal's interest in the player and is waiting for any concrete moves.

If an astronomical offer is made, they will do everything in their power to secure the deal.



Barcelona fans desperately want Nico Williams (R) to partner Lamine Yamal in their attack



Alvaro Morata

Morata leaves Atletico to join Milan

Milan, Italy - Spanish striker Alvaro Morata has joined AC Milan from LaLiga side Atletico Madrid on a four-year contract, the Serie A club said on Friday.

Neither Milan nor Atletico disclosed the financial details of the deal, but media reports said the Italian side triggered the release clause in his contract, which was around 13 million euros (\$14.15 million).

Having joined Atletico for a reported fee of around 65 million euros in 2019, the 31-year-old, who captained Spain to European Championship glory in Germany on Sunday, scored 58 goals in 154 appearances for the club.

Morata started his career with Spanish giants Real Madrid before moving to Juventus in 2014 and also had a spell at Premier League club Chelsea.

At the Santiago Bernabeu, he won the Champions League, LaLiga and Copa del Rey twice each while also winning the FIFA Club World Cup and UEFA Super Cup.



Manchester United agreed a 62 million euro (\$67.56 million) fee for Lenny Yoro

Man United sign 18-year-old French defender Lenny Yoro

Manchester, England - Manchester United have signed 18-year-old French defender Lenny Yoro from Lille on a five-year contract, the Premier League club announced on Thursday, as they bid to shore up their defence.

Sources say United agreed a 62 million euro (\$67.56 million) fee for Yoro, who has played 60 games for Lille.

The centre-back, who made 41 appearances last term, was named in the Ligue 1 team of the season after helping Lille finish fourth and secure a Champions League qualifying spot.

Yoro has been chased by several top European clubs, with Real Madrid one of the teams linked to the player.

He will be a welcome addition to a back line that has been riddled with injuries and has seen Raphael Varane depart.

"Lenny is one of the most exciting young defenders in world football; he possesses every attribute needed to develop into a top-class centre-back," United sporting director Dan Ashworth said in a statement.

"Having had such an excellent start to his career we are excited to support him in reaching his immense potential here at Manchester United."

The teenager is the Old Trafford club's second big acquisition, after Dutch striker Joshua Zirkzee

The teenager is the Old Trafford club's second major acquisition after Netherlands striker Joshua Zirkzee joined for 42.5 million euros on Sunday.

"Signing for a club with the stature and ambition of Manchester United so early in my career is an incredible honour," Yoro said in a statement.

Serie A side Como appoint Fabregas as coach

Spaniard Cesc Fabregas has been appointed as head coach of Como, where he is a minority shareholder, after leading them to promotion to Serie A as assistant and interim coach last season, the club said on Friday.

Former Arsenal, Barcelona and Chelsea midfielder Fabregas ended his playing career at Como in 2023 and became an assistant coach at the club. The 37-year-old took over as interim coach in November after head coach Moreno Longo was fired.

Como rose from seventh to third in Serie B under Fabregas before Osian Roberts was appointed as interim coach in December, with Fabregas remaining as his assistant.

Como secured automatic promotion after finishing second in the league.

Roberts will now take over as



Cesc Fabregas

Como's head of development, the club said in a statement.

"I am so happy to be starting this season as head coach and I thank the ownership group for trusting me with this position," Fabregas said.

"It's going to be a tough and important season but myself and the rest of the coaching staff are ready and we all believe."

Como also announced their first signing under Fabregas on Friday, with former Liverpool, Sevilla and Villarreal defender Alberto Moreno joining on a one-year contract with an option for an automatic extension for another season.

"Alberto is a fast, agile and technically gifted defender with great international experience, having played in top European competitions," Fabregas said. "His characteristics will certainly be useful to face a new and difficult championship."



Hugo Lloris

Euphoria no excuse, says Lloris on Argentina players' chant

Paris, France - Argentinian players cannot use the euphoria of their Copa America win as an excuse for their racist chants about the French team, former France captain Hugo Lloris said, adding the song was an "attack on French people."

A video posted by Argentina international Enzo Fernandez on Instagram after his team beat Colombia 1-0 in Sunday's final, featured a song sung by some members of the Argentina squad about France's players of African descent.

FIFA is investigating the video after French Football Federation (FFF) said it was "racist and discriminatory". Chelsea, the Premier League club Fernandez plays for, have also started an internal disciplinary procedure over the matter.

Fernandez later apologised for the video saying he got caught up in the euphoria of celebrations and the song does not reflect his beliefs or character as he stands against discrimination.

"It doesn't matter if you are in a moment of euphoria because you have won an important trophy," Lloris told the BBC on Thursday.

"It demands even more responsibility when you are a winner."

"We all stand against discrimination and racism. I just think and hope it is a mistake. We all make mistakes sometimes and hopefully they will learn from it."

Argentina's Vice President Victoria Villarruel defended Fernandez and the team and the country's undersecretary for sports, Julio Garro, was removed from his position for suggesting that captain Lionel Messi apologise for the chants.

Lloris, who is France's most capped player and their 2018 World Cup winning captain, said Argentina deserved credit for what they have achieved in the sport in the last few years having become "the face of football in the world".

"You (Argentinian players) are an example for others, especially the kids. It was a proper attack about the French people, especially for the French people who have some African origin and family," he said.

ALL SET FOR MISSION PARIS

Oman athletes ready for the Olympics

Muscat - The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) is preparing its athletes for Olympic Games in Paris, which start on Friday. Four athletes will represent Oman across three different sports.

While young sprinter Ali bin Anwar al Balushi will make his Olympic debut, sprinter Mazoon al Alawi is competing in her third Olympics after Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020. Both will participate in the 100m race.

National shooter Said Ali al Khatri will also make his Olympic debut, in the men's Trap Shooting category, while swimmer Issa Sameer al Adawi will compete in the 100-meter freestyle event for the second consecutive Games, following his appearance in Tokyo 2020.

The Paris Olympic Games run until August 11.

Ali al Balushi secured his place in the 100-meter event by qualifying directly among the top 56 sprinters, a position confirmed by World Athletics, the global governing body of the sport. The other athletes from Oman were granted international invitation cards, a result of the OOC's strong network and connections with the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Olympic Solidarity Commission, and international sports federations.

Last Thursday, OOC Secretary General Taha al Kishry met with the athletes to congratulate them on the honour of representing Oman on the world stage. He en-



Mazoon al Alawi



Said Ali al Khatri



Ali bin Anwar al Balushi



Issa Sameer al Adawi



I have been in close contact with the Paris 2024 Olympics coordinators. It is essential to arrive in Paris a few days before the team to ensure all arrangements are in place

ALI AL BUSAIFI

couraged them to perform at their best, aiming to bring honour to Oman through positive and advanced results that reflect the nation's sporting progress.

Sheikh Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of the OOC, will lead Oman's official delega-

tion to Paris. The delegation will also include His Highness Sayyid Azan bin Qais al Said, Vice Chairman of the OOC; Taha Suleiman al Kishri, Secretary General of the OOC; Ali bin Salim al Busaifi, Oman's Chef-de-Mission; Amer al Zeidi, a physiotherapy specialist; and Adil al Balushi as the media reporter. Additionally, the team will feature Shuaib al Zadjali, an anti-doping official, and Abdulmoneim al Alawi, a FINA open water referee.

Ali al Busaifi will depart for Paris on Monday to finalise preparations ahead of the athletes' arrival. He will attend the Chef-de-Mission meeting at the Olympic Village on Tuesday.

"I have been in close contact with the Paris 2024 Olympics coordinators over the past months. It is essential to arrive in Paris a few days before the national team to ensure all arrangements are in place," Ali al Busaifi said. "The Chef-de-Mission meeting will cover various topics to ensure a smooth entry and comfortable stay for our athletes in the Olympic Village."

"We extend our gratitude to the Paris 2024 Organising Committee and our national team members for their cooperation and support. We wish all our athletes the best as they arrive in Paris to commence their training ahead of the competitions."

From water bottles to half-beards: When rituals and charms fuel Olympic dreams

Whether you knock on wood or throw salt over our shoulders, most people have a superstition or two.

But no matter what you believe in, superstitions can give meaning to the often random nature of life and give people the feeling of control.

In the world of high-stakes competition, this feeling is vital. Read on to discover what some Olympians will do to try to control their destinies at Olympic Games Paris 2024.

Nadal: the king of rituals

Tennis seems to attract some of the most interesting superstitions, making it a sport where every detail and quirk can become part of a player's unique game-day routine. Among these players is 22-time Grand Slam champion Rafael Nadal.

The Spaniard takes an ice-cold shower exactly 45 minutes before every match, a ritual he describes as entering a new, powerful mental space. On the court, he meticulously arranges



Gianmarco Tamberi

his water bottles so the labels face the same direction. He also follows a strict sequence of actions, like not stepping on court lines and performing a specific routine with his shirt, hair, and face before serving.

In the 2022 Australian Open quarter-finals against Denis

Shapovalov alone, Nadal completed his shirt-tug, hair-tuck, and face-wipe routine 146 times. In his memoir Rafa, the double Olympic champion opened up about some of his habits. He said, I must put the two bottles down at my feet, in front of my chair to my left, one neatly be-

hind the other, diagonally aimed at the court."

"Tennis is such a mentally aggressive sport that anything external I am able to distract, I always do it."

Osaka keeps it bottled up

Four-time Grand Slam winner

Naomi Osaka is also particular about her wattle bottles on the court. Like Nadal, her ritual revolves around the precise arrangement of the bottles, making sure that they face the same direction and are placed in a specific order.

"I would say that most athletes have very strong superstitions," Osaka shared.

"It could be one thing, it could be two things. For me, it's definitely the lines and the logo. Also, I need my water bottles to be completely straight. I'm not sure why that is," the tennis star explained.

Medvedev's timing

Daniil Medvedev insists on eating exactly two hours and thirty minutes before his matches, believing that this precise timing is crucial for his performance.

"I eat exactly two hours and 30 minutes before my matches. Always. It can't be a second earlier or later. A tick. I don't change these things. Other things, like training before a match, I sometimes adjust."

Tamberi's charismatic presence will undoubtedly add a touch of drama and excitement to the Olympic high jump competition

Half-bearded showman

Gianmarco Tamberi is one of the greatest showmen in track and field, known for sporting a full beard during qualification and shaving half of it for the final.

The Italian high jumper, who famously shared the Olympic gold with Qatar's Mutaz Barshim at Tokyo 2020, is now headed to Paris as both the reigning Olympic, world and European champion. And yes, he'll be the man sporting his signature half-beard. The 32-year-old has had his ritual since 2011 and shows no intention of shaving it all off yet. "It has become my trademark," Tamberi explained.

Fans anticipate Tamberi's upcoming performance and facial hair in Paris, where his charismatic presence will undoubtedly add a touch of drama and excitement to the Olympic high jump competition.

FIFA delays decision on Israel's suspension until after Paris Games

FIFA has put off a decision on a Palestinian bid to suspend Israel from international soccer until after the Paris Olympics, saying both parties had requested more time to submit their positions.

The Palestinian Football Association (PFA) had submitted a proposal to suspend Israel in May over the war in Gaza, with FIFA ordering an urgent legal evaluation and promising to address it at an extraordinary meeting of its council in July. Soccer's global governing body said on Thursday the legal assessment would now be shared with its council by Aug. 31.

"Following requests for extension from both parties to submit their respective positions, duly granted by FIFA, more time is needed to conclude this process with due care and completeness," FIFA said.

The Paris Olympics will be held from July 26-Aug. 11, with group matches for the men's soccer tournament starting on July 24.

Israel qualified for the men's tournament and play Mali, Paraguay and Japan in the group phase. The Palestinian Football Association (PFA) said it had received FIFA's letter on Thursday, informing it of the postponement. The PFA said it had sought clarification from FIFA on the process for handling the legal opinion.

Japan gymnastics captain out of Games for smoking

Tokyo, Japan - Shoko Miyata, the 19-year-old captain of the Japan women's artistic gymnastics team, has withdrawn from the squad for the Paris Games after violating the team's code of conduct by smoking, the Japanese Gymnastics Association said.

JGA officials said Miyata arrived in Japan on Thursday after leaving the team's training camp in Monaco for investigation, which confirmed the violation including drinking alcohol.

The women's squad would compete with four athletes instead of five, the JGA told a media conference.

"We apologise from the bottom of our hearts for this," JGA President Tadashi Fujita said, bowing deeply along with other officials including Miyata's personal coach, Mutsumi Harada.

Hopes had been high for the Japan women's gymnastics team, which was seeking to win a team medal at the Paris Games



Shoko Miyata

for the first time since the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.

Miyata had been expected to lead a team comprised entirely of first-time Olympians and teenagers after she secured her Paris berth in May with a third consecutive NHK trophy.

Coach Harada said that while Miyata's conduct had been reckless, she had been under extreme pressure to perform at the highest level.

"She was spending her days

really burdened with so much pressure," he said, wiping away tears. "I would implore people to understand that."

Mental health facing young athletes took centre stage at the last Olympic Games in Tokyo when gymnastics superstar Simone Biles pulled out of one competition after another.

Artistic gymnastics is one of the most popular sports at the Summer Games and will be held from July 27 to August 5.



Tadej Pogacar celebrates his win

Pogacar wins Tour de France stage 19

Tadej Pogacar produced a climbing masterclass as he stormed to a stunning solo victory on Friday's stage 19 of the Tour de France in the Alps, a 145 km (90.1 miles) ride from Embrun to Isola 2000.

Pogacar's explosive attack to win the stage moved him one step closer to the title as the yellow jersey holder crushed his closest rivals and extended his lead over Jonas Vingegaard and Remco Evenepoel.

After overtaking breakaway leader Matteo Jorgenson inside the final 2 km to win the stage, Pogacar's lead over second-placed Vingegaard is now over five minutes while Evenepoel is more than seven minutes behind with two stages left.

"We were speaking in the training camp (about) how we want to race this day and we did it exactly like we said to the point where I attacked. It went really

100% perfect," Pogacar said.

"I was a little bit empty in the last 2 km. When I caught Carapaz and Simon Yates, there was already a limit. But then when I see that Matteo was also losing a bit, I tried to push through.

"And then when I tried to pass him with the speed a little bit, I killed my legs. And then I was thinking maybe he (will) come back and out-sprint me or something. He was really strong today, chapeau to Matteo and all the breakaway guys."

After six riders broke away, it was Jorgenson who made the first move to surge ahead, but with 10 km left, Richard Carapaz looked to catch up to the American with Simon Yates not too far behind. Pogacar had been following three minutes back and he launched his attack less than 9 km from the finish, leaving Vingegaard and Evenepoel behind.

NADAL IN FINAL

Spaniard rallies past Ajdukovic in Bastad

For the first time in more than two years, Rafael Nadal has that final feeling.

The Spaniard rallied from a set and a break down to overhaul Duje Ajdukovic 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 on Saturday afternoon at the Nordea Open and reach his first tour-level championship match since 2022 Roland Garros.

Having overcome Mariano Navone in a four-hour marathon on Friday in Bastad, Nadal needed time to loosen up in his maiden clash against Croatian qualifier Ajdukovic. Yet he raised his level in time to recover after dropping serve in the opening game of the second set, going on to break his opponent's serve five times across the second and third sets en route to a two-hour, 13-minute semi-final triumph.

"I think it was a tough match. My opponent had one of the best backhands that I played against," said Nadal in his on-court interview. "He came here with a lot of confidence. I think I was trying to push him back. It was very, very difficult, honestly, but I found a way to survive and be through to that final after a long time without being in a final. So that's great news and I'm very happy with that."

Just as he had against Navone, Nadal sealed victory despite letting slip a double-break lead in the deciding set. After Ajdukovic ral-



Rafael Nadal

lied from 0-3 to 3-3, the former No. 1 in the rankings immediately broke through on return again before holding firm behind his serve to clinch the win.

Although he made a relatively slow start to Saturday's match, Nadal delivered a more consistent performance overall than he had against Navone. He was particularly clinical on return, and converted all six break points he earned against Ajdukovic.

"Always it is a great feeling to be back in a final," said Nadal. "I have won four matches in a row, something I was not able to make happen since two years

It was very, very difficult, honestly, but I found a way to survive and be through to that final after a long time without being in a final.

RAFAEL NADAL

ago. A lot of things happened, but still in this process of recovering, a lot of things I lost, because I had a very important hip surgery almost one year ago.

"So things were not going that easy, but I am fighting. I am fighting during the whole tournament to be where I am today, and I think matches like yesterday's, like today's, help to improve a lot of things on court. I am happy

with that, and let's see if I am able to play a little bit better tomorrow."

Zverev wins in Hamburg

German Alexander Zverev, the top seed, cruised past eighth-seeded Zhizhen Zhang of China 6-4, 6-3 to post a quarterfinals win in front of his home-country fans. In the semifinals, he will meet Spain's Pedro Martinez, who recorded a 1-6, 6-1, 6-4 win over Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo, the fourth seed.

Saturday's second semifinal will feature a match between

fifth-seeded Arthur Fils of France and third-seeded Sebastian Baez of Argentina. Fils defeated Holger Rune of Denmark in a 6-4, 4-1 walkover, while Baez topped Italian Luciano Darden, the seventh seed, 2-6, 6-4, 6-4.

Tsitsipas is semis

No. 1 seed Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece advanced to the semifinals with a 6-4, 6-3 win over Italian Fabio Fognini, the seventh seed, in just 68 minutes. Awaiting him in the next round is another Italian, Matteo Berrettini, who defeated Felix Auger-Aliassime of Canada 7-6 (7), 7-6 (2).

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3	Wet Mix Plant	Appollo	200 Tph	2006
4	Wet Mix Plant	Maxmech	250tph	2015

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S.No	Description	No's
1	40mm Dia Pipe - 3m Length	560
2	40mm Dia Pipe - 6m Length	2100
3	Base Plates	2700
4	Cuplock Vertical 1 Mtr	1700
5	Cuplock Vertical 2 Mtr	2300
6	Telescopic Leg - 2mtr	300
7	Cup Lock Ledger 1.3 Mtr	20
8	Cup Lock Ledger 1.8 Mtr	1800
9	Cup Lock Ledger 1.6 Mtr	1500
10	Cup Lock Ledger 1.2 Mtr	7500
11	Cup Lock Standard 1.8 Mtr	130
12	Adjustable Props 2.4 - 3.9 Mtr	2200
13	Universal Jack 75 Cm	3500
14	Cup Lock Standard 0.80 Mtr	750
15	Adjustable U Head 760 Mm	3500
16	Cup Lock Ledger 1 Mtr	6200
17	Cup Lock Ledger 1.5 Mtr	1200
18	Cup Lock Standard 2.5 Mtr	1600
19	Cup Lock Standard 1.3 Mtr	3000
20	Stirrup Heads	8300
21	Ms Channel 100 X50 X6 Mtr	1800

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SUTTON HOUSE



In the 17th century, girls attending a London boarding school learned to make decorative paper cuttings. Several of these creations -including a tiny fox, a star and a hen - survived for 350 years beneath the floorboards of Sutton House, a historic building that once functioned as a school for upper and middle-class girls.

The papers, along with hundreds of other artefacts, were finally recovered during renovations in the 1980s. However, no one catalogued these objects until last year, when a team of volunteers sorted through them. This week, Sutton House will publicly display the paper cuttings for the first time.

Due to the flimsy material, experts were surprised to find them intact. According to Isabella Rosner, an expert in early modern material culture, only a few other examples of such art are known to exist.

"It's an art form that is discussed in 17th-century domestic manuals, but there is very little material survival - three examples from 17th-century England,

Forgotten folds

Paper cuttings made by 17th-century schoolgirls were discovered beneath floorboards in Sutton House in London



The room in Sutton House where the paper cuttings were discovered

of which this is one," Rosner disclosed.

Sutton House's girls' school was founded in 1657. At the time, providing formal education for girls was a 'relatively new concept', as Kate Simpson, a senior collections officer at the National Trust, tells *The Guardian*.

The school provided lessons in writing, reading, math, music and art. The girls studied paper cutting alongside other crafts, such as embroidery and needlework. Instructors showed them how to cut paper designs from a book and hand-colour them. The finished products were used as decorations on boxes, bowls and more.

Researchers think that Hannah Woolley, an established 17th-century author of books on house management, once worked at the school, and perhaps, even taught the girls paper cutting.

In her books, Woolley described the 'cutting of Prints, and adorning Rooms or Cabinets, or Stands with them' as skills which 'I shall be willing to impart to them, who are desirous to learn,' says Rosner in a statement from the National Trust. "It is possible the paper cut-outs identified were carried out by pre-

teen and teenage girls under her tutelage."

The paper cuttings, which feature personal touches from the girls who made them, are all unique. The colourful pink hen, for example, is misspelled as 'a hean', as per the *Art Newspaper*.

"We have long known about the role of Sutton House as a girls' school over its lifetime, but with few details about the classes, the pupils or teaching," says Simpson in the statement. "This discovery brings to vivid life one of the skills that pupils were taught and the painstaking process of handling, cutting and colouring such tiny pieces of paper."

The cuttings will be on view at Sutton House in London from July 19 through December.

(Courtesy: smithsonianmag.com)

Art of quilling

Paper rolling, paper scrolling, filigree, mosaic and quilling are all names which have been given to this art during its long history. Some sources suggest that many of the techniques used today were originally practised in Ancient Egypt.

The popularity of quilling has fluctuated. Work of high quality was achieved by French and Italian nuns in the 16th and 17th centuries, genteel ladies in the Stuart period, ladies of leisure in the Georgian and Regency periods - and it is currently enjoying a modern revival.

Nuns on the continent decorated reliquaries and holy pictures, adding gilding and much ornamentation. The ecclesiastical connection was maintained when the art spread to England with the development of paper, though vellum and parchment were also used. Poorer churches produced religious pictures with rolled decoration. When gilded or silvered, it was difficult to distinguish it from real gold or silver filigree work.

Quilling was never practised by 'working-class' women in the past. Indeed, it was a decorative art which ladies of leisure would use to work panels and coats-of-arms. Later it was extended to include covering tea-caddies, workboxes, screens, cabinets, frames etc. Backgrounds for these often included foil, mica or flaked shells.



Beautiful boxes were made by cabinet makers, with recessed sides. These were advertised and sold, often to boarding schools for young ladies. '.....it affords an amusement to the female mind capable of the most pleasing and extensive variety; and at the same time, it conduces to fill up a leisure hour with an innocent recreation...' (*The New Lady's Magazine*, 1786)

In 1875 an attempt was made to reintroduce the art of quilling by William Benrose, who produced a kit called 'Mosaicon', together with a handbook. Another reference has been discovered in an Edwardian book of household management entitled 'Floral Mosaicon'. In the article mention is made of pieces being purchased by Queen Mary and Queen Alexandra.

Enthusiasts include Elizabeth, daughter of George III, Joseph Bramah (the famous locksmith), Mrs Delany (pioneer of other paperwork and friend of Jonathan Swift), Jane Austen (who mentions it in her novel *Sense and Sensibility*) and the Bronte sisters.



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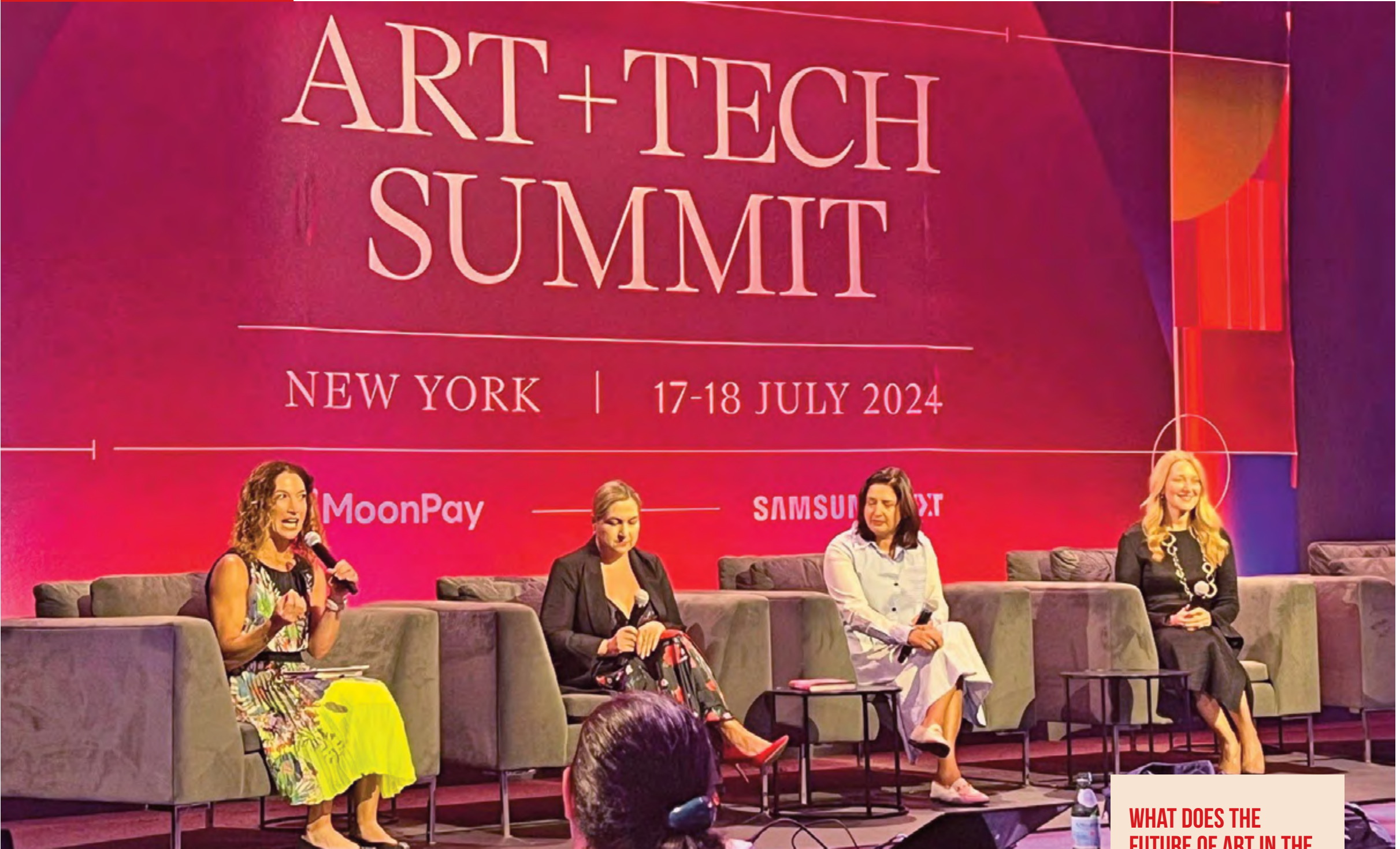
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ART + TECH SUMMIT



When Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak took the stage for the final talk on Wednesday at the Christie's Art + Tech Summit, a sea of iPhones rose into the air to photograph tech's living legend.

And while Wozniak came off as the archetypal excitable inventor, he quickly bemoaned tech companies' recent turn away from making reliable, problem-solving products.

"I see two digital worlds," Wozniak said. The first, he said, was the moment he came

balance between the value of the new technology and the investment it has garnered, not to mention the high costs it incurs - and he wasn't the only one at the conference to do so.

Though Kevin O'Leary, of Shark Tank fame, said he made a nice chunk of change investing in NVIDIA, a leading AI company, he spent most of his talk focusing on buying watches, advertising on cable, and doing business in the UAE. When it comes to AI, O'Leary said, the industry is quickly approaching the 'show me' phase and finding out that most of what hyped-up tech founders call AI is really just run-of-the-mill data mining and science.

A lack of clear-cut applications makes the energy expenditure in AI seem all the more irrational. As tech consultant Sol Rashidi mentioned in the 'Real Applications of AI' panel at Christie's, OpenAI alone uses the equivalent of double the annual energy needs of France in a single year.

She added that the US grid would have to be completely rehailed to meet the energy demands necessitated by mass adoption of AI. (Oddly enough, neither of the panelists on another talk - The Role of Art in the Sustainability Discourse - had anything to say about that).

Still, other panelists at the summit groped for AI's applications. In three sepa-

versity, typified this vagueness.

"There are these big sci-fi-like questions we've been asking and ... it's still an open question," he said. "We need more understanding and science about its capabilities that are not understood, we need some science and quantification. This tech is developed in a black box way."

Not so reassuring. But regardless, what does any of this have to do with art? The one place in which AI has been adopted by users is in the creative realm, as multiple speakers noted.

"The creative space is where AI has had the biggest impact and I don't think anyone could have predicted that," Bob Muglia, the former CEO of the AI data cloud company Snowflake, said.

Two years ago, at a past edition of the Christie's Art + Tech Summit, crypto VC and ARTnews Top 200 collector Ryan Zurrer said almost exactly the same thing

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF ART IN THE MUSEUM SPACE LOOK LIKE FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS?

My recent experience with Unsupervised at MoMA is our benchmark. We received almost three million visitors and realised that the museum can be an incredible place for making art that reaches beyond traditional bubbles.

My personal motto since I began this journey is "making art for everyone". Any age, any background.'



Refik Anadol, digital artist, speaks about navigating the natural world with AI

As we all know, AI is profoundly changing every aspect of our lives, and I'm confident we will find new vocabularies, new forms of storytelling within this. I really hope that this new form of art, of imagination, can be used to create more powerful connections across the world.

It's an inspiring, exciting time, but it's also challenging. With possibilities like these we also have deep responsibility. We must work ethically and ensure this technology is used to support humanity.'

when the fact is that generative-AI outputs are already being consumed by audiences on a mass scale. That uncomfortable and inconvenient reality was roundly ignored by the panelists.

Instead of hearing from executives at generative AI companies, the summit's talks featured a number of artist-researchers - Alexander Reben and Refik Anadol, among others - who are developing their own AI tools for their art practices.

(Courtesy: artnews.com)

DIGITAL ARTISTS, SAY AI

up in, dominated by the invention of new products people could buy. The second is the present, with its focus on endless updates and subscription plans.

It's no surprise then that Wozniak spoke fairly derisively about artificial intelligence, an ill-defined, hyped technology with vague applications that has nevertheless raked in hundreds of billions of dollars in private capital (as well as government subsidies) in the US alone, according to the Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence.

"I used to ride my bicycle over to the Stanford campus to watch a machine pick up a blue ball and put it into a blue box," Wozniak said. "It only understood simple rules and now it understands more."

Wozniak openly struggled with the im-

"So, not so fast bubble-ooley," he said. "Show me how it works and where I get my return."

O'Leary's suggestion that the AI investment bubble is about to pop echoes a fairly pessimistic report released in June by Goldman Sachs titled 'GenAI: Too Much Spend, Too Little Benefit?'

In the report, Goldman Sachs' head of Global Equity Research, Jim Covello, was quoted saying, "Truly life-changing inventions like the internet enabled low-cost solutions to disrupt high-cost solutions even in its infancy, unlike costly AI tech today."

Other analysts, quoted in the report, said that AI's 'killer application' has yet to emerge and that it would take another ten years for its applications to become cost-effective.

AI DOMINATES THE ART AND TECH SUMMIT 2024 (JULY 17-18) IN NEW YORK LAST WEEK, PROJECTING, HOWEVER, AN IMBALANCE BETWEEN THE VALUE OF THE NEW TECHNOLOGY AND THE INVESTMENT IT HAS GARNERED

rate panels, Randy Hunt, head of design at Notion, Ashley Ferro-Murray, programme director for the arts at the Doris Duke Foundation, and Dr Zhou Yu, co-founder of Articulate.AI, pointed to AI's potential to increase productivity.

"The AI can do the most tedious tasks and the humans can do the complex tasks and decision making. It will act as a complement to human teams," Zhou said, trotting out the usual line at the 'AI: From Research to Practice' panel.

Meanwhile, numerous panelists obliquely referred to the fears around AI, offering reassurances without ever saying the words automation, labour, climate change, or super-intelligence. At the same panel as Zhou, Dr Sanjeev Arora, a computer science professor at Princeton Uni-

versity, typified this vagueness.

"There are these big sci-fi-like questions we've been asking and ... it's still an open question," he said. "We need more understanding and science about its capabilities that are not understood, we need some science and quantification. This tech is developed in a black box way."

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