

OIA launches RO2bn Oman Future Fund

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) officially launched Oman Future Fund on Wednesday to serve a wide range of investment categories.

The fund has a capital of RO2bn that will be utilised over a five-year period - RO400mn every year. The fund will allocate 90% of its capital to directly invest in new or existing projects that prove to be commercially and economically viable. The remaining 10% is divided into 7% allocated to SMEs and 3% for startups.

It will offer funding and investment solutions to various investor categories, including private sector organisations, business owners, SMEs, foreign investors and startups. With the exception of oil and gas and real estate in direct local investments, the fund will focus on eight targeted sectors - tourism, manufacturing, green energy,



The fund comes as a key enabler of economic diversification

ABDULSALAM AL MURSHIDI

information and communication technologies, ports and logistics, mining, fisheries and agriculture.

The launch is in line with Royal directives to realise the objectives and mandates of OIA and drive its efforts further to develop the national economy and attract foreign investments.

Launching the fund, Abdulsalam al Murshidi, President of



(Supplied photos)

OIA, emphasised the fact that it was established in line with government policies and strategies aimed at enhancing targeted economic sectors. "It comes as a key enabler of economic diversification and a credible partner to local and international investors who are considering investing and expanding their businesses into Oman and becoming part of

the Omani business community."

It will help in further empowerment and integration of the private sector, supporting SMEs, and bolstering venture capital in the sultanate.

Murshidi informed that Oman Future Fund is OIA's third portfolio; the two existing portfolios are National Development Fund and Future Generations Fund.

"With its extensive investment expertise, OIA will manage the fund and demonstrate the capabilities of local talents who have already proven to be successful wealth managers and investors with a track record of accomplishing good investment returns."

According to Mulham al Jarf, Deputy President for Investment

at OIA, the fund will be governed by the authority based on international best practices to ensure efficiency and flexibility in achieving the desired financial and economic objectives of setting it up.

"The fund will complement the existing government financing and investment ecosystem that currently involves a number of institutions such as Oman De-

velopment Bank, SMEs Development Fund, Rakiza Fund, Oman Technology Fund, etc. Oman Future Fund offers flexibility in choosing the type of investment participation, whether through direct financing at market rates or equity investments with the private sector in a balanced manner not limited to one sector alone," Jarf elaborated.

To achieve the fund's national objectives, the Ministry of Finance will act as a strategic partner to OIA in managing the direct local projects, while Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development will serve as a member in the Advisory Committee to provide insights and advice to the Investment Committee. Additionally, Oman National Investment Development Company (Tannmia), ITHCA Group, Omantel and Cyfr Capital will manage investments allocated for SMEs and startups.

Interested investors can apply directly via the electronic platform futurefund.om



HON'BLE LADY SAYYIDA AHAD VISITS BURAIMI

Honourable Lady Sayyida Ahad bint Abdullah bin Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, visited Al Wafa Disabilities Centre, Sa'ra Oasis and Al Hillah Fort in Buraimi on Wednesday. At Sa'ra Oasis, an olive tree was named 'Al Jalila' in her honour. During her visit to the Al Wafa Centre, she learnt about the rehabilitation and therapeutic services it provides to its beneficiaries (ONA)

Omani-Polish company set up to manufacture, launch satellites

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Following the successful launch of Oman's first satellite into low Earth orbit aboard SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California in November 2023, Oman's ETCO SPACE has announced establishment of a joint Omani-Polish company called Spazers.

In partnership with Polish companies SatRev and Tuatara, ETCO SPACE aims to provide satellite manufacturing services, space launch services, and build and operate ground stations in Oman and the Middle East through Spazers.

"This significant step propels us into a future of innovation and collaboration in the realm of



(Supplied photo)

space exploration, integrated satellite services, attracting talent, and fostering cutting-edge research," ETCO SPACE stated.

"Driven by a dynamic vision, Spazers aims to be a hub for fuelling regional space ecosystem growth through satellite manufacturing and launching services.

It will also allow us to provide seamless ground station building and related operations to our customers, fostering innovation through the expertise of SatRev and Tuatara."

The company will focus primarily on providing satellite manufacturing services for vari-

ous purposes, including communications, Earth observation and scientific research.

Satellite launch services will be an important component of Spazers' services, translating the long experience of SatRev in launching satellites with several global providers to meet the growing demand for satellite launches in the region and beyond.

"By providing services for the construction, design and operations of ground stations, the new company seeks to raise the readiness of the space services system provided to government and commercial customers and translate its strategic plans to enter the markets of the Middle East and North Africa," ETCO SPACE stated.



Initiative launched to spread culture of blood donation



PDO opens Greater Saqr production gathering station



Omani globetrotter visits 65 countries

Oman, Saudi discuss plans to increase pilgrim traffic via Rub al Khali border

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In order to facilitate pilgrims from Oman to Saudi Arabia, the two countries are looking to improve the traffic of pilgrims via the Rub al Khali border checkpoint.

In a host of measures announced on Wednesday by the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs and Ministry of Hajj and Umrah of Saudi Arabia, officials informed that the Saudi low-cost airline flynas will soon launch scheduled flights from Jeddah to Salalah to accelerate the movement of hajj and umrah pilgrims and promote tourism between the two countries.

Additionally, a visa office will be opened in the first quarter of 2024 in Oman to streamline the arrival of visitors in Saudi Arabia.

To make optimum use of the Rub al Khali border checkpoint, the two countries agreed that pilgrims will be sent in batches. "Both sides would assess the effect of the arrangement with the primary objective of improving services and formalities," a statement said.

A session of talks was held in Muscat by officials on Wednes-



In 2023, 53,000 umrah pilgrims visited from Oman, an increase of 207% compared to 2022. At least 14,000 pilgrims took the Empty Quarter road to travel to Saudi Arabia

day from both ministries dealing with the integration of services for pilgrims.

The talks were headed by H E Dr Mohammed Said al Maa-mari, Minister of Endowments

and Religious Affairs, and Dr Tawfiq Fawzan al Rabiah, Minister of Hajj and Umrah in Saudi Arabia.

In a joint press statement, the two sides affirmed that their roles in making arrangements for pilgrims complement each other. Oman's ministry would coordinate with the Saudi departments concerned to organise the umrah sector.

The Saudi ministry appreciated the collaboration with the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, notably the arrangements made by Oman Pilgrims Affairs Office to cut down the number of organisers from 93 to 33 to help render better services to the pilgrims, the joint statement said.

The two sides will enhance communication by holding roundtable discussions with relevant parties to raise the efficiency of staff tasked with organising pilgrims' affairs, as well as hajj and umrah companies from Oman.

In 2023, 53,000 umrah pilgrims visited from Oman, an increase of 207% compared to 2022. At least 14,000 pilgrims took the Empty Quarter road to travel to Saudi Arabia.

Oman to regain its investment-grade rating in 2024

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In its Global Focus 2024 report, Standard Chartered has forecast Oman's continued improvements in fiscal performance, deleveraging and commitment to reform could enable the sultanate regain its investment-grade rating as early as this year.

This comes against a backdrop of a marginally slower growth projection for global GDP at 2.9%, a result of the most aggressive cycle of monetary tightening in years, the report said.

The Standard Chartered report also stated that policymaking in Oman will likely focus on pro-growth structural reforms to improve the business environment, attract foreign direct investment and execute initial public offerings, which should help stimulate investment and consumption while avoiding further disinflationary risk.

Standard Chartered also projects Oman's public debt will fall to 34% of GDP by the end of 2024 on sustained twin surpluses.

The bank sees growth in the



non-oil sector, picking up to 2.5% in 2024, driven by sectors such as tourism, manufacturing and trade, whilst overall economic growth is expected to be slow with subdued inflation.

Hussain al Yafai, CEO of Standard Chartered Oman, said, "We expect the sultanate to continue to demonstrate resilience in the face of global uncertainties and project a positive credit rating trajectory in 2024 as a result of its strong fiscal performance and reform efforts."

The sultanate has successfully achieved remarkable turnaround in its fiscal situation, despite global economic challenges over the past three years. Consequently, all three major global credit rating agencies - Moody's, Standard & Poor's and Fitch - upgraded Oman's sovereign credit ratings in 2023.

National mental health programme begins

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) represented by Al Masarra Hospital on Wednesday launched the first National Mental Health First Aid Training Programme to develop 'a conscious community' to create a conducive environment for people needing support.

The programme launched under the auspices of H E Dr Saeed Harib al Lamki, Undersecretary for Health Affairs, with the presence of Dr Bader al Habsi, Director of hospital, is aiming to develop the health sector, engage



health personnel of various categories in decision making, and create solutions for the challenges faced by the health sector.

The training programme is empowering participants with the necessary knowledge, skills

and confidence to provide psychological support and respond in an emergency through high-quality evidence-based rehabilitation and education; thus creating a conscious community.

The two-day training pro-

gramme that targeted 20 medical and allied medical staff is distinguished by its effectiveness and quality in improving primary preventive mental health in an innovative way using artificial intelligence techniques.

The notion of the programme was one of the initiatives proposed at the first health innovation forum by pharmacist Zainab al Wahaibi from Al Masarra Hospital.

As part of activating public-private partnership, the programme is supported by Oman Environmental Services Holding Company - be'ah.

Omran to organise tourism carnival in Wadi Dayqah

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) is organising a carnival in Wadi Dayqah, about 75km from Muscat.



Christened as Wadi Dayqah Carnival, this tourism festival will be held in two parts, one on January 19 and 20 and the next on January 26 and 27.

Nestled in Quriyat, Wadi Dayqah has one of the largest dams in the Arabian Peninsula and draws a huge number of tourists throughout the year.

The primary goal of this carnival is to position Wadi Dayqah as a burgeoning tourist hotspot by ensuring more enriching tourism experience. The carnival would offer individuals and families the opportunity to partake in a diverse range of recreational activities.

Additionally, it would encourage local community to get involved and showcase Omani

products and locally designed initiatives.

Designed to cater to visitors of all ages, the carnival will have a diverse entertainment activities. It will feature a dedicated space for small and medium-sized enterprises, a children's corner with an array of engaging and interactive games, and a section dedicated to the sale of Omani culinary delights.

"The water sports activities to be introduced at Wadi Dayqah are part of a comprehensive development plan being implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) and the Ministry

of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources (MAFWR)," an official said.

The choice of Wadi Dayqah Dam as the event venue stems from its status as a well-loved tourist destination, frequented by families, particularly during weekends.

Constructed in 2012, Wadi Dayqah Dam serves as a reservoir for rainwater from the surrounding mountains and regulates water flow through the villages downstream. The result is a breathtaking freshwater lake and a meandering stream stretching 7km from the primary body of the dam.

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H M CONFERS ORDER OF COMMENDATION ON ROHM DG

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has conferred the Order of Commendation on Umberto Fanni, Director General of Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM). The commendation is in recognition of Fanni's efforts in managing the opera house, as well as his contribution to enriching and promoting musical art regionally and internationally through the programmes offered by ROHM. The commendation was handed over to Fanni by Sayyid Khalid Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court on Wednesday (ONA)

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JINDAL SHADEED

Initiative launched to spread culture of blood donation, meet shortage

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a bid to address the ongoing shortage of blood and cultivate the culture of blood donation, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Oman Blood Donor Team, has launched an initiative called 'Waa al Hayat' or 'Life Awareness'.

Ahmed bin Hamad al Kharousi, Supervisor of Oman Blood Donor Team and the initiative, told *Muscat Daily*, "The Department of Blood Banks Services in Bausher, in cooperation with our team, introduced Waa al Hayat this month."

The initiative features over 25 volunteers representing various governorates. Its core activities include organising workshops in colleges, schools and clubs throughout the sultanate with the primary objective of raising awareness of blood donation and addressing the shortage in all blood banks.

Kharousi emphasised the fact that such initiatives are crucial for motivating individuals to donate blood and foster a culture of mutual support within society.

"All blood banks across the sultanate require a continuous supply of blood due to various



(Supplied photos)



Oman's blood banks collectively need approximately 7,000 units of blood every month

AHMED AL KHAROUSI

ongoing factors, including surgeries, treatment for cancer and road accidents."

Oman's blood banks collectively need approximately 7,000 units of blood every month. "We are dedicated to organising more blood donation campaigns across different governorates," Kharousi added. "We hope that more people will step forward to participate in this initiative, which not only aids in addressing the blood shortage but also positively impacts participating families."

The initiative, in collaboration with Oman Hereditary Blood Disorders Association, will also conduct workshops and cam-

paigns aimed at educating the community about pre-marital screening.

Kharousi emphasised the importance of pre-marital screening as a proactive measure to prevent potential issues that may arise for couples in the future, such as genetic diseases. "Encouraging couples to undergo pre-marital tests has become crucial to avoid complications later in life."

Kharousi concluded by urging the community to actively participate in the initiative's workshops and donate blood to save lives, underscoring the critical role every individual can play in contributing to this noble cause.

Admission registration for Indian schools from Jan 21

Muscat - Online registration for admission in Indian schools in the capital area for the next academic year - 2024-2025 - will start on January 21, 2024 for Classes KG I to IX.

Online registration for admissions is applicable to seven Indian schools in the capital area - Indian School Bousher, Indian School Muscat, Indian School Darsait, Indian School Al Wadi al Kabir, Indian School Al Ghubra, Indian School Al Seeb and Indian School Al Maabala.

"The centralised admission system with online registration introduced by the Board of Directors of Indian Schools in Oman has facilitated the entire admission process, making it convenient for parents and schools to take care of the rush for admissions," said Dr Sivakumar Manickam, Chairman of Board of Directors, Indian Schools Oman.



"The admission portal gives complete information on the admission procedure, status of vacancies and answers to frequently asked questions thereby easing the stress of parents in finding a place for their wards in the school of their choice," Manickam added.

Parents seeking admission for their wards in the international wings (Cambridge Syllabus) of

Indian School Al Wadi al Kabir and Indian School Al Ghubra are also required to fill in the online registration form for admissions.

Admissions are open to children of Indian nationals with valid resident visas. Children who have completed three years as of April 1 are eligible for Kindergarten admission.

Admissions for children with special needs are open at Care and Special Education (CSE) in Indian School Muscat. Parents can approach the CSE administration directly for admission (www.cseoman.com)

Admission procedures have been made completely online; parents are not required to visit schools for payment of admission processing fee.

The closing date of online registration is February 24. Further details of the admission process are available at www.indian.schoolsoman.com

EA removes 500kg of fishing nets in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Environment Authority (EA) is conducting another campaign in the wilayat of Mirbat to raise awareness among people to protect the coral reefs in Dhofar.

An EA official said that the authority, in cooperation with several diving teams, civil and voluntary teams and community members in Mirbat, carried out a coral reef cleaning campaign on Tuesday.

Diving teams succeeded in removing more than 500kg of fishing nets stuck in coral reefs in the exercise.

"The campaigns aim to spread awareness in the community about the importance of preserving the environment and limiting the spread of waste in beaches and seas," the official added.

EA works continuously throughout the sultanate to support the marine environment and raise awareness among those in-

terested in the marine life, including fishermen, seafarers and beachgoers to preserve the environment.

"The authority will implement similar campaigns to remove marine waste in several parts of Oman. We hope fishermen abide by fishing laws. They shouldn't discard unwanted nets in the sea to save the nature," the official said.

"The authority is also continuing the 'Environmental Protectors' programme, which aims to raise the level of environmental awareness among citizens and tourists to monitor and report any action that may cause harm to the environment."

This initiative of the EA in collaboration with government agencies and private sector institutions is focused on providing services and hosting various activities, besides monitoring and preventing burning of trees, particularly at sites where barbecuing is common.

Over 5,000 to participate in Together We Progress Forum

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A total of 5,314 citizens - 65% male and 35% female - have expressed interest in attending the second edition of the 'Together We Progress Forum' to be held in February, the Government Communication Centre has announced.

Among listed sessions, 'Youth Sector Development' has garnered the maximum interest with 52% of participants, followed by the 'Work and Employment in the Macroeconomic System' session which has 31% participants and 'Media and National Identity' with 17% participants.

The highest number of registrations are from Muscat gover-

norate, representing 41% of the total. Individuals holding bachelor's degrees constitute the most registrations, accounting for 50% of the participants. Nearly half of the participants - 48% - work in the public sector.

Organised by the Secretariat General of Council of Ministers, the Together We Progress forum is a national event that fosters constructive dialogue between citizens and decision-makers. It provides a platform to address crucial issues determined by public consensus, involving more than 4,600 Omani citizens in community participation.

The discussions, based on preference of the public, will delve on topics aligned with the government's top priorities.

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Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

ASEAN remains China's largest trading partner

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been the largest trading partner of Chins for four consecutive years, according to the General Administration of Customs (GAC) of China. According to a report by China Central Television, the most recent data from the GAC indicates that trade between China and ASEAN has consistently displayed a positive growth trajectory in 2023.

It is noteworthy that since 2020, China and ASEAN have emerged as each other's principal trading partner.

As of 2023, the trade volume between China and ASEAN increased by 16.8 times in 20 years, and the cumulative two-way investment exceeds 380 billion U.S. dollars.

PDO inaugurates Greater Saqr production gathering station

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the sultanate's flagship exploration and production company, on Wednesday celebrated the official inauguration of the Greater Saqr Gathering Station under the auspices of H E Sultan bin Salem al Habsi, Minister of Finance.

The Greater Saqr Gathering Station project is regarded as a showcase for PDO's contribution to Oman Vision 2040 and represents the company's strategy in action, to deliver sustainable growth of its core oil and gas business whilst reducing costs and emissions.

The gathering station, which was completed safely and in record time, is located in the south of PDO's concession area. The project aims to maximise recovery from six satellite fields through standardised pattern development with water flooding, according to a press statement released by PDO.

The project's design enables zero flaring of harmful gases into the atmosphere and involves the efficient management of wastewater from oil extraction, which is then reused in injection activities within the project's



The inauguration ceremony was held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat on Wednesday

The scheme is expected to contribute to an annual cut of approximately 6,600 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent and will contribute to PDO's emission reduction plans to reach net zero emissions by 2050

fields.

Gas and water are separated by using an Enhanced Gas Flotation Tank, a new advanced technology pioneered by the Canadian company, Enerflex Water Solutions.

Held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat, the inauguration event was attended by several senior government officials, members of the PDO board and executive committee, and representatives from both the public and private sectors.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, H E Habsi said, "It was a pleasure to inaugurate Greater Saqr's Gathering Station located in the Wilayat of Shalim and Halaniyyat islands. We congratulate PDO on this excellent achievement and there is no doubt that the benefits of this project will contribute towards achieving a diversified and sustainable economy for the Oman."

Overall, the project consists of a 23km-long gas pipeline network, 11 water injection manifolds, 10 main selector valves and more than 400 wells. Its design enables peak production volumes of 30,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day (boepd).

Health, safety and environment (HSE) was a critical consideration throughout the project, with PDO staff and contractors working 4.2mn man-hours without any lost time injuries.

The scheme is expected to contribute to an annual cut of approximately 6,600 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent and will contribute to PDO's emission reduction plans to reach net zero emissions by 2050.



Abdullah Mohammed al Naimi

Al Ghubra temporary water station starts operations

Muscat - Nama Water Services on Wednesday announced the commercial launch of the Al Ghubra temporary water station. The newly launched station can process up to 20,000 cubic meters per day.

The project aims to guarantee the continuity of water supply to citizens and resident subscribers.

Abdullah Mohammed al Naimi, chief operation and maintenance officer at Nama Water Services, said, "The launch of the Al Ghubra Temporary Station is intended to support the existing station, cover the current increasing water needs in Muscat Governorate during peak water demand, and meet water needs."

He said that the commercial operation of the Al Ghubra Temporary Station will continue for five years until the completion of the construction of the Al Ghubra Station 3, which is still in the early stages of construction.

ONA

OQ receives four OPAL awards for best practices in energy sector

Muscat - Two OQ Group companies, OQ Exploration & Production and OQ Salalah, have won four awards at OPAL Awards for Best Practice 2023.

The awards ceremony, a landmark event in the energy industry, was held under the auspices of H E Salim bin Nasser al Aumi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

OQ Exploration & Production was honoured for two of its projects. The oil and gas processing unit at Bisat-C field in Block 60, won first place in the 'Made in Oman for In-Country Value (ICV)' category, while the Construction Assurance Safety Programme Evaluation Review (CASPER) received the second OPAL award in the Health, Safety, Security & Environment (HSSE) category.

Additionally, OQ Salalah's innovative efforts have been recognised, with the Pressure Safety Valve Calibration Application (Smart PSV) receiving an award in the 'Research and Development' category and the Organic Solar Cell (OSC) project being acclaimed in the 'Energy Transition' category, showcasing OQ's commitment to sustainability in the energy sector.

Considered a flagship project



in the energy exploration and production sector, the Bisat-C oil and gas processing unit significantly contributed to maximising ICV, while reinforcing OQ as a major developer of oil fields in Oman. The project's ICV contribution amounted to approximately RO22.2mn, accounting for 30% of its total project value. Additionally, OQ Exploration & Production has allocated around RO3.9mn to SMEs and local contractors within this project, while

the expenditure on products manufactured domestically for this project stands at about RO7.8mn.

The Construction Assurance Safety Programme Evaluation Review (CASPER), a groundbreaking innovation in the field of health and safety, is the first of its kind in Oman. Developed by the dedicated employees of OQ Group, this system is a testament to the company's commitment to leveraging digital technologies

Oil drops over strong dollar, China demand concerns

Muscat - Oil prices further dipped on Wednesday amid concerns over China's economic growth and the strength of the US dollar.

The international benchmark crude Brent traded at \$77.68 per barrel in morning trade in London, a 0.77% decrease from the closing price of \$78.29 a barrel in the previous trading session on Tuesday.

The US benchmark, West Texas Intermediate (WTI), traded at the same time at \$71.85 per barrel, down 0.92% from Tuesday's close of \$72.52 per barrel.

The US dollar's strength, following the Federal Reserve's hints at less aggressive interest rate cuts, has made oil more expensive for buyers using other currencies, potentially dampening demand.

China is a key player in global oil consumption, but its 5.2% growth rate in the last quarter of last year was less than projected, casting doubt on the predicted surge in oil demand, according to figures released by China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

China's oil refinery activity, however, increased significantly in December, indicating a contin-



ued, if not accelerated, demand for oil. The NBS data revealed that China's oil refinery activity surged to record levels in 2023, marking a significant turnaround from the previous year's decline.

China processed around 734.8mn metric tonnes of crude oil last year. This figure translates to approximately 14.7mn barrels per day (bpd), a sharp increase from the 13.5mn bpd recorded in 2022.

The resurgence in refinery activity is largely attributed to the operation of new plants across the country, which have ramped up production to meet the post-pandemic surge in fuel consumption.

In December, the NBS data revealed a 1.1% increase in refinery throughput compared to the same month in the previous year, processing 60.11mn tonnes, or about 14.16mn bpd.

While slightly lower than the previous month's, the figure underscores the steady recovery and robust demand in China's oil sector as the country navigates its way out of the pandemic's economic impacts.

Meanwhile, tension in the Red Sea region continues to fuel investor and supply concerns and is indirectly driving up oil prices.

Agencies

The Sustainable City - Yiti aims to achieve net zero emissions by 2040

Muscat - The Sustainable City - Yiti has shed light on its sustainable strategies, set to make it the region's first net zero emissions community by 2040.

Located just outside of Muscat, the ambitious project spans one million square meters and has an aspiration to become the largest operational sustainable community in the world. It will reduce the per capita emissions footprint of its

residents by 78% compared to conventional housing. This includes relying on 100% renewable energy, 100% water recycling, 100% waste diversion from landfill, and up to 80% self-sufficiency in food calorific requirements.

Slated for completion in 2026, the infrastructure of The Sustainable City - Yiti has reached 75% completion, according to a press release.

The Sustainable City - Yiti



follows a resilient and replicable working model that provides a map for a low-emissions future powered by intelligent technology and integrates three pillars of sustainability: social, environmental and economic. The world-class mixed-use development promises a high standard of living throughout the 300 villas/townhouses and 1225 plaza apartments, integrating best practices in design,

construction, technology, and maintenance.

To meet sustainability targets, the development seeks to cut down on emissions across the six pillars of environmental sustainability: food, energy, water, products, mobility, and waste. This multi-pronged approach is breaking new grounds for Oman, emphasising the Oman Vision 2040 and making sustainable living accessible to everyone.

China's economy grew 5.2% in 2023

Beijing, China - China's gross domestic product (GDP) posted a growth of 5.2% year-on-year in 2023, higher than the annual target of around 5%, data from China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed Wednesday.

The country's GDP reached a record of 126.06tn yuan (about \$17.71tn) in 2023, the NBS data showed.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang announced at the opening ceremony of the World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting 2024 that the Chinese economy continues to thrive and progress in the right direction.

In an address at the WEF's annual meeting in Davos, Premier Li stressed the country's pursuit of high-quality sustainable growth, highlighting the avoidance of short-term stimulus using debt.

Li also stressed the importance of rebuilding trust and the need to foster stronger relationships and restore confidence in the global economy.

"Chinese economy is making steady progress and will continue to provide strong impetus for the world economy. Last year, the Chinese economy was on the right track of recovery, with estimated growth of around 5.2%, higher than the around 5% target set at the beginning of last year," the premier said.

Li underscored China's ro-



Chinese Premier Li Qiang speaks during the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland

China's industrial output picks up pace

Beijing, China - China's industrial production registered steady growth last year, accompanied by a faster pace of intelligent and green transformation, official data showed Wednesday.

The value-added industrial output, an important economic indicator, went up 4.6% year-on-year in 2023, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said. In December alone, the figure grew 6.8% from a year earlier and 0.52% from November.

"Industrial production picked up steadily, with equipment manufacturing growing

rapidly," Kang Yi, head of the NBS, told a press conference Wednesday.

Following a sustained economic recovery, China's industrial businesses have bounced back due to improving market demand.

The NBS data showed in November, the combined profits of industrial businesses rose for a fourth straight month, up 29.5% from a year earlier. The industrial capacity utilisation rate stood at 75.9% in the fourth quarter, up from 75.6%, 74.5%, and 74.3% in the third, second, and first quarter, re-

spectively.

Kang said China has made solid progress in promoting the intelligent and green transition of the manufacturing sector and fostering new growth drivers for the economy.

The output of the equipment manufacturing sector expanded 6.8% year on year in 2023, faster than the average industrial production growth. The production of solar batteries, new energy vehicles and power generation equipment surged 54%, 30.3%, and 28.5%, respectively.

Xinhua

bust supply chain, manufacturing power, and the transition from a labor dividend to a talent dividend. He emphasised the leading role of high technology in driving the country's growth, citing its vast market and ongoing urbanization as key drivers of further development.

"China has a super-sized market with demand being rapidly unlocked. It will continue to provide a big stage for various businesses and talents. In the face of weak global demand, the market has become the scarcest resource. The Chinese market with its vast space and growing depth will play an important role

in boosting aggregate global demand," said the premier.

Li also called for global macroeconomic coordination, supply chain management, technology cooperation, green collaboration, and inclusive growth, emphasizing the importance of both South-South and South-North cooperation.

"Chinese people believe benefits should be shared mutually. Only when the benefits are felt by all can it be considered true development. We should fully implement the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, strengthen global development cooperation, bridge

development gaps and create new cooperation highlights in areas including poverty alleviation, food security and industrialization, so as to better benefit people from all countries," said Li.

The 54th WEF Annual Meeting is held in Davos from Monday to Friday with the theme of the conference "Rebuilding Trust". The main topics at the forum range from achieving security and cooperation in a divided world, creating jobs and growth for a new era to long-term strategies for climate, nature and energy.

Agencies

Green Economy Partnership sets up its headquarters in Qatar

Doha, Qatar - In a significant stride towards global sustainability, the Green Economy Partnership (GEP) headquarters will be domiciled in Doha, Qatar, furthering its commitment to fostering international collaborations under the country's far reaching sustainability vision.

Under the leadership of Sheikh Mansour al Thani, GEP aims to amplify its impact on global climate initiatives, emphasising collaboration with governments and the implementation of CO2 removal projects that fall under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement.

"The Green Economy Partnership was established to create global collaborations that exceed the nominal value of the transactions. We actively work with governments, advising and driving the development of ARR projects that reduce NetZero global climate impact. Our mission also focuses on bolstering social and economic well-being. The alignment with Qatar is meant to create the blueprints for the implementation of a robust framework for the hard to abate sector in utilising Interna-



Arthur Chirkinian (left) and Sheikh Mansour al Thani

tionally Transferable Mitigation Outcomes (ITMOs)," said Sheikh Mansour al Thani, Chairman of GEP.

The establishment of GEP's new headquarters in Doha signals a commitment towards operationalizing Net Zero strategies in the private sector on an economically viable way. GEP's global stature as a pioneering organisation in establishing a carbon elimination standard for carbon removals

aligns with the framework under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement.

With the planet's future at stake, GEP calls on global corporations and government departments to join in taking decisive action to reverse climate change by reducing carbon levels worldwide.

"Qatar's rapid strides in sustainability are commendable, and GEP's presence in Doha is a testament to the country's ded-

ication to achieving its sustainability plans. The international office in Qatar will serve as a hub for collaborative efforts, bringing together diverse stakeholders to address the pressing challenges of our time," said Arthur Chirkinian, CEO of Green Economy Partnership.

GEP supports and aligns with the Paris Agreement, advocating for comprehensive strategies beyond offsets alone. In line with the Oxford Principles for Net Zero Aligned Carbon Offsetting and other international initiatives, GEP actively advises companies to include Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR) in their net-zero strategies.

"We identify carbon removal suppliers from various methodologies and provide them with certification, assuring buyers that they meet our rigorous standards," said Chirkinian.

"Our innovative approach empowers businesses, including hard-to-abate industries, and individuals to take meaningful, measurable action against climate change. Together, we can create a sustainable, resilient future for generations to come."

Apple reclaims most valued brand title

Muscat - Apple ranked first on Brand Finance's 25 Most Valuable Brands list, with its value reaching \$516.6bn, retaking the throne from Amazon.

The leading valuation group released its Global 500 report on Wednesday, featuring Apple as the world's most valuable brand in 2024, as its value jumped 74% year-on-year.

The iPhone-maker was followed by US tech giant Microsoft with a brand value of \$340.4bn, and Google with \$333.4bn.

As for Amazon, the e-commerce giant fell to fourth place with \$308.9bn.

The social media brands of China-based TikTok and US-based Facebook ranked fifth and sixth, with \$84.2bn and \$75.7bn, respectively.

German-based telecom group



Deutsche Telekom, called "Europe's most valuable brand" by the report, ranked ninth globally with a \$73.3bn brand value. Chinese bank ICBC rounded out the top 10 with \$71.8bn.

Muhterem Ilguner, Brand Finance's managing director for Türkiye, told Anadolu that the rise in Apple's brand value was

achieved by expanding its ecosystem via new wearables and advance in the iPhone line.

Ilguner highlighted US-based chipmaker Nvidia for its AI efforts and investments, as its brand value shot up 163% to \$44.5bn, making it the brand with the most growth.

Agencies

Norway awards 62 offshore oil and gas blocs

Oslo, Norway - A total of 24 companies have been offered ownership shares in 62 production licenses on the Norwegian shelf in awards in pre-defined areas (APA) in 2023, the Norwegian Offshore Directorate announced on Tuesday.

The directorate said that this represents an expansion compared with the three previous years.

The count of fresh drilling licenses granted in the North Sea last year remained steady at 29 compared to the previous year, while 25 were authorised for the Norwegian Sea, a notable increase from the 16 issued the prior year.



The authorities reviewed applications from a total of 25 companies in the autumn of last year.

The directorate noted that of these 62 production licenses, 29 are located in the North Sea, 25 in the Norwegian Sea, and eight in the Barents Sea, while 16 of

the production licenses are for additional acreage of existing production licenses.

"We can see that the companies still have plenty of faith in making more discoveries in areas with familiar geology and close to existing infrastructure. It's important to prove re-

sources so that available capacity in established process plants and pipeline systems can be utilised. This means that even small discoveries can yield significant value creation," said the director of license management in the Norwegian Offshore Directorate, Kalmar Ildstad.

In 2022, Norway surpassed Russia to become the largest gas provider in Europe, following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, which disrupted long-standing energy connections.

The Nordic nation's supplies substituted for Russian gas exports that were prohibited by the European Union.

Anadolu Agency

TOGETHERNESS COMPANY ANNOUNCES SELLING THE FOLLOWING LANDS AND PROPERTIES:

- 1- Residential/commercial Land with an area of 2934 square meters in Ghala Heights
- 2- 5 agricultural plots in Barka, a total area of 84,000 square meters, each plot with an authorized well.
- 3- Residential/commercial Building with an area of 1883 square meters in Saham, with a commercial building on it
- 4- Residential/commercial Building with an area of 547 square meters in Buraimi, a building containing 8 shops and 10 apartments
- 5- Two farms in the state of Bidiya/Ghubra, with an area of 22,619 square meters, the other 45,000 square meters.
- 6- Residential plot for the Wilayat of Bidiya/Al Wasel, total area 96,847 square meters
- 7- Residential/commercial building, with an area of 1,572 square meters, it includes hotel apartments and shops in wilayat bidyah
- 8- Residential/commercial shops, with an area of 1944 square meters, it includes a market consisting of 19 shops in wilayat bidyah
- 9- Residential/commercial Land with an area of 1044 square meters and an existing hotel in the Wilayat of Mahut/Hajj
- 10- 4 industrial plots in Duqm, total area 30,000 square meters
- 11- One residential/commercial plot with an area of 900 square meters and a residential plot with an area of 594 square meters in Al-Qabil
- 12- Residential/commercial Land with an area of 750 square meters in Duqm

Contact at: - +968 92822040, +968 97365897
www.togethernessrealestate.com

All-new MG Whale SUV Coupe arrives in Oman



British-born automotive brand, MG is expanding its comprehensive range of sedans and SUVs in the Middle East as the brand kicks off 2024 with the launch of the all-new MG Whale SUV Coupe.

This sporty mid-size SUV is designed to cater to the travel requirements of younger buyers, ambitious professionals and families, who reside in urban environments but are always aspiring to add a dash of adventure

into their lives.

The futuristic design and the daring coupe-like silhouette of the MG Whale embody the youthful and progressive spirit of the people who live and work in the vibrant cities of the region. The Whale-inspired details like its signature front grille and Baleen daytime running lamps help convey the playfulness, intelligence, and grace of its name-sake. Other marine-related cues include Whale-fin door mirrors

and a Whale-tail spoiler and gearshift.

Additionally, traits like the two-tone glossy black roof, matte gold bumper accents, chrome dual exhaust pipes, and silver decoration add to the visual appeal of the SUV Coupe. The car also rides on stylish alloy wheels which have a large 19-inch diameter indicating its stylistic dominance over its competitors.

The SUV Coupe offers a well-laid-out, premium quality cabin

The futuristic design and the daring coupe-like silhouette of the MG Whale embody the youthful and progressive spirit of the people, who live and work in the vibrant cities of the region

that will ensure daily commutes and long journeys are quiet, hassle-free, and comfortable thanks to features like electric seat adjustments with memory seats, dual-zone air conditioning, and a power-operated panoramic sunroof.

Passengers will also be entertained and remain connected

thanks to the superlative technologies and features like the 9-speaker BOSE sound system, 256-colour ambient lighting setup, and the seamlessly integrated dual 12.3-inch Curved Panoramic Screen.

The comprehensive list of safety features includes an HD 360°surround view system and

Sporty and urban mid-size SUV is designed to meet the transportation requirements of the ambitious youth, modern couples, and young families

Whale-inspired details include: Whale grille, Whale-fin outside mirror and Whale-tail spoiler, convey the playfulness, intelligence and grace of a whale

2.0L Turbo engine and 8-speed transmission for purposeful power and exceptional fuel efficiency

High-tech interior with premium comforts and safety features like a HD 360° surround view system

a host of active and passive safety features, electronic aids to make the journey incident-free as well as comfortable. Moreover, the MG Whale is built on a chassis with a high-strength structure that is rated for high levels of torsional stiffness, which will provide maximum protection and a dynamic advantage.

The sleek SUV Coupe is driven by a powerful 2.0L turbocharged engine producing 231 HP and 370 Nm torque which is coupled to a reliable 8-speed automatic gearbox. The forced-induction motor provides the torque necessary to transport five passengers and their luggage swiftly and efficiently, while the low-displacement configuration aided by the 8 speeds of the modern transmission helps minimise fuel consumption.

Tom Lee, Managing Director of MG Motor's Middle East operations, commented: "MG's campaign to deliver great value SUVs continues with the launch of our all-new Whale model. The MG Whale will be appreciated by those who are progressive and believe in self-expression. The emotive design language draws cues from the whale to reflect power and grace in its lines. It also offers an exceptional list of comfort options with an affordable package to cater to the demands and needs of our customers in the Middle East."

All-new MG Whale models will also benefit from the brand's acclaimed six-year/200,000km warranty.

Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, remarked, "MG is demonstrating its progressiveness in terms of features and quality, while also recognizing the specific needs of customers in the Oman. The newly introduced MG Whale stands out as a sporty and urban mid-size SUV tailored for our diverse audience segments." He further stated, "Its distinctive design draws inspiration from the powerful whale, contributing to its sharp and sleek features, complemented by state-of-the-art technology."

Oman International Pharmacy Congress ends

The Oman International Pharmacy Congress and Exhibition came to an end on Tuesday with a number of recommendations, following a three-day long deliberations at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Focusing on the role of clinical pharmacist in a multidisciplinary team at primary health care institutions was one of the OIPCX recommendations, along with approving Pharmacist Independent Prescriber service for chronic diseases at PCH settings similar to the one existed in developed countries, considering the availability of competent clinical pharmacists in the country.

The conferees further approved the establishment of an integrated multidisciplinary system in supplies shortage management and called to boosting Gulf cooperation regarding implementation of drug safety programmes. It also recommended continuation of the ongoing Digital Transformation in pharmacy practices to fulfil goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The congress recommended the establishment of one umbrella for Gulf Pharmaceutical Societies, proceeding with the effective implementation of Health



Technology Assessment project, and qualifying pharmacists working in the field of Procurement and Supply Chains.

The congress, organised by the Ministry of Health represented by the Directorate Gen-

eral of Medical Supplies, has attracted more than 1,000 healthcare professionals, and witnessed the participation of officials from various advanced international organisations in the field of pharmacy practice in-

cluding the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP), the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP), the Institute of Safe Medications Practices (ISMP) USA and Canada, and the pharmaceutical societies of Gulf countries.

Moreover, the participation of National Association for Primary Care (UK) and Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply (CIPS) this year have enriched the event with many international practices and experiences in the field of drug supply chains and advanced pharmaceutical practice in primary and specialised health care.

The last day touched on combating non-communicable diseases in Primary Health Care focusing on the role of clinical pharmacists in integrated primary care and the factors contributing to non-adherence to prescribed therapy in PCI. Also, pharmacy services in solid organ transplantation and digital transformation of pharmacy services were outlined reviewing pharmacy-led virtual counselling clinic for renal transplant, and experience of the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Center.



MoE honours winning schools, students on Unified Sports Day

The Ministry of Education (MoE), represented by the Omani School Sports Association, in cooperation with Zaahib Foods Company 'Barzman', organised on Tuesday a ceremony to honour the winning schools in the media coverage competition for the Unified Sports Day.

'A Little Sports' event was under the patronage of H E Prof Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary for Education, Chairman of the Omani School Sports Association, in the presence of Ahmed al Hajri, Executive Director of the company, members of the Union's Board of Directors, school principals, and teachers.

The ceremony, which took

place at Khasab Hall in the Ministry's General Diwan, began with an introductory video clip about Barzman. The presentation offered a window to the modern technologies that Barzman uses in manufacturing; the certificates it obtained, and its products. This was followed by Ghalia al Zaabi, Head of Public Relations, and Media at the company, giving a speech.

"As part of our strategic plans in the field of community support, this partnership comes as an integral role with the organising bodies responsible for such activities to increase rates of active participation and achieve a healthy lifestyle within a sports culture worthy of export."

Following her speech, an audio-visual presentation was made on the 'A Little Sports' event, which included the activities that were carried out.

This was followed by the declaration of results, including the importance, objectives, and criteria of the competition, an analysis of its results and development proposals.

The ceremony ended with H E Prof Dr Ambosaidi honouring the 20 winning schools. "This honouring is an incentive to continue in this aspect, and to promote the unified school sports day. I extend my thanks to the schools, the company, and the Omani School Sports Association for their efforts," he said.



Winter camps for scouts and guides begin

The Ministry of Education (MoE) on Monday began winter camps for scouts and guides bringing together 570 boys and girls for an overall personality development exercise.

Ali Mohammed al Maamari, Director of Public Relations and Media at the General Directorate of Scouts and Guides, told Muscat Daily that these two camps are being organised in coordination with the Directorate General of Education and Training in South Batinah governorate.

Running from January 15-21 under the theme 'My Identity,

Creativity and Innovation', the scouts' camp for boys is being held at the Sultan Qaboos Scouting Camp in Musannah, South Batinah.

It features the participation of 264 scouts and leaders from various educational regions across the sultanate. The scouts have been divided into three sub-camps, each comprising 88 members.

Concurrently, the 25th Winter Camp for Girl Guides and Advanced Guides is being held at the permanent Scouting Camp in Sohar, with 306 participants

coming from different governorates.

"The scouts' camp aims to instill patriotism through environmental conservation and impart various scouting skills to help them enhance physical health, sustainable development capabilities, self-reliance, responsibility, service to others, and religious and scouting values. Living in the wilderness with their groups, the scouts deepen brotherhood bonds and acquire new skills and experiences, appreciating the value of even the simplest tasks in everyday life. The camp

also focuses on future skills and artificial intelligence.

"The Girl Guides' camp is dedicated to embedding religious culture, encouraging sports and physical activities, familiarising with scout and guide traditions, public service, community development, and providing a safe space for indoor and outdoor activities. These efforts align with the scouting and guiding methodologies," said Ali.

Organisation of these camps is part of mission to achieve the strategic goals of the Directorate General of Scouts and Guides.

INDIA

Kochi to be next ship building hub: PM Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated projects worth over Rs 4000 crore in Kerala’s Kochi

Kochi, Kerala - Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated projects worth over Rs 4000 crore in Kerala’s Kochi on Wednesday.

The three major infrastructure projects inaugurated by the Prime Minister included the New Dry Dock (NDD) at Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL), the International Ship Repair Facility (ISRF) of CSL, and the LPG Import Terminal of Indian Oil Corporation Limited at Puthuvyppeen, Kochi.

Highlighting the new infrastructure initiatives inaugurated on Wednesday, the prime minister said the central government is working to increase capacity of coastal cities like Kochi.

He further asserted that Kochi is set to be the next ship building hub of the nation.

“We are making efforts to increase the capacity of ports, to build and strengthen port infrastructure and to increase connectivity of ports through initiatives like the Sagarmala Pariyojana,” the prime minister said.

“Today when India is becoming the centre of global trade, then we are increasing our sea power. Soon we will see Kochi growing to be on the epitome of



Prime Minister Narendra Modi exchanges greetings with Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan as he departs for Delhi from Kochi airport, on Wednesday (ANI)

this,” Modi said.

He emphasised the new infrastructure that is inaugurated today which will further boost the Cochin shipyard’s capacity.

“Today the country has its

biggest dry dock. Besides this, infrastructures of ship-building, ship repairing and LPG import terminal have also been inaugurated,” Modi said.

“With these new features,

the capacity of the shipyard will increase manifold. I congratulate the people of Kerala for these facilities,” he added.

Pointing out that India is emerging as a major centre of

global trade, the prime minister said that the efforts to strengthen the country’s maritime power is also underway.

Modi who is on his two-day visit to the state offered prayers

at Guruvayur Sree Krishnaswamy temple in Thrissur earlier in the day.

Guruvayur temple is dedicated to Lord Guruvayurappan (Lord Krishna) and is a significant

place of worship for Hindus in Kerala.

He was welcomed by the Devaswom office bearers by giving a ‘Poorna kumbham’ (a pitcher with sacred water adorned with flowers). It is a traditional way of welcoming guests in temples and similar places.

During his temple visit, Modi also attended the wedding of actor and BJP leader Suresh Gopi’s daughter.

Modi also visited Triprayar Sree Ramaswamy Temple in Thrissur and offered prayers there. The Triprayar temple is one of the prominent temples in the state with Lord Ram as the main deity.

The prime minister arrived in Kerala on Tuesday night where he was welcomed by Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, MoS V Muraliedharan and BJP leader Prakash Javadekar at the Cochin International Airport in Nedumbassery. Modi held a roadshow in Kochi on Tuesday which was attended by thousands of supporters. BJP state president K Surendran accompanied the Prime Minister on board his motorcade for the roadshow. ANI

Flight passenger stuck inside toilet for entire journey

Bengaluru, Karnataka - The crew of the Mumbai-Bengaluru SpiceJet flight on which a male passenger underwent the ordeal of being trapped in the lavatory for around an hour due to a malfunctioning lock, provided guidance and reassured the flyer throughout the journey using handwritten notes, the airline said in a statement on Wednesday.

The airline crew assisted the distressed passenger with handwritten paper notes asking him not to panic.

Following the take-off of the flight at 2am on Tuesday, a passenger sitting in the 14th row went to the toilet and got stuck inside during the entire flight over an hour.

A spokesperson of the airline confirmed the incident and in a statement said: “On 16 January, a passenger unfortunately

The airline crew assisted the distressed passenger with handwritten paper notes asking him not to panic

got stuck inside the lavatory for about an hour on SpiceJet flight operating from Mumbai to Bengaluru, while the aircraft was airborne due to a malfunction in the door lock. Throughout the journey, our crew provided assistance and guidance to the passenger. Upon arrival, an engineer opened the lavatory door, and the passenger received immediate medical support.”

The airline crew said that an engineer would come to open

the stuck lavatory door as soon as the aircraft lands. He was also asked to sit on the closed commode during landing.

“Sir we tried our best to open the door. However, we could not open. Do not panic. We are landing in few minutes. So please close the commode and sit on it and secure yourself. As soon as the main door is open engineer will come. Do not panic,” read one of the handwritten notes passed on to the trapped passenger. Upon the flight’s arrival at the Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru, an engineer was rushed to address the malfunctioning lavatory door, which was successfully opened with the help of the engineering team, according to the spokesperson.

ANI

Navy warships to protect merchant vessels from piracy: Vice admiral

New Delhi - Vice Admiral Gurcharan Singh, Controller Personnel Services Indian Navy on Wednesday said that the Navy’s warships deployed in the Persian Gulf, off Somalia’s coast and the Gulf of Aden will deter piracy and protect merchant vessels.

Speaking to ANI, Singh said that the Indian Navy has deployed a huge number of large combatants, which includes the Kolkata class destroyers, many frigates and other ships, to sustain forces there and carry out operations that are primarily focused on ensuring the safety of shipping as well as carrying out anti-piracy operations in the regions. “One of the major roles of the Indian Navy is the protection of our maritime interests and that includes the protection of our trade, which travels through the oceans. Our ships are presently deployed for mission-based deployments across our



Indian Navy’s stealth frigate INS Trikand mission deployed in the Persian Gulf & Gulf of Oman (ANI)

interest in the Indian Ocean region, specifically because of the recent incidents in the area of the Red Sea, off the Somalia coast, in the Gulf of Aden. We have deployed a large number of large combatants, which includes the Kolkata class destroyers, many frigates and other ships, to sustain our forces

there and carry out operations that are primarily focused on ensuring the safety of our shipping as well as carrying out anti-piracy operations...” Gurcharan Singh said.

Talking about the strength of women in the force, Singh said that the Indian Navy has approximately 600 women officers as

of now and with the opening up of all entries, this strength will go up.

“We have approximately 600 officers (women) in the Navy as of now and with the opening up of all entries, this strength will go up. In addition, women short-service commission officers are also being granted permanent commission progressively,” the Navy’s Vice Admiral said.

He further said that the Indian Navy will also induct women Agniveers as musicians and sports entries from this batch of Agniveers onwards.

Stepping up its presence and deter piracy and drone strikes, the Indian Navy has now deployed almost 10 frontline warships with marine commandos in the region stretching from the north and central Arabian Sea to the Gulf of Aden.

ANI

China’s population falls for second year in a row

Istanbul, Turkey - China’s population registered a fall for a second consecutive year last year, official data released on Wednesday showed.

The country’s population started shrinking in 2022 for the first time in six decades and it lost its tag of world’s largest populated nation to India last year. The data by China’s National Bureau of Statistics showed that the birth rate in the world’s second-largest population hit a new low while the death rate ‘hit a peak not seen in more than a half-century’, South China Morning Post reported.

“The overall population in mainland China fell by

2.08mn last year to 1.4097bn, down from 1.4118bn in 2022,” the Hong Kong-based daily said, citing official figures.

The number of new babies born last year was 9.02mn, down by 5.6 per cent from 9.56mn in 2022.

“The falling number of new babies last year resulted in the lowest birth rate since records began in 1949, with 6.39 births for every 1,000 people compared with 6.77 in 2022,” according to the daily.

China’s National Bureau of Statistics also registered a growth of 5.2 per cent in gross domestic product last year to hit 126tn yuan (US\$17.6tn).

Anadolu Agency

British premier faces headwinds as 2 senior Tories resign

London, UK - In a significant blow to British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s government, two deputy chairmen of the Conservative Party, Lee Anderson and Brendan Clarke-Smith, along with parliamentary private secretary Jane Stevenson have resigned in protest against his flagship Rwanda bill.

The move comes as part of a broader rebellion by approximately 60 Tory members of parliament (MPs) who support an amendment aiming to strengthen immigration legislation proposed by the government. Despite the resignations and growing dissent within the party, Downing Street remains confident that the Rwanda bill will pass in a crucial vote scheduled for Wednesday. But with reports suggesting that at least 30



Britain’s Prime Minister Rishi Sunak

Tories may join the opposition in voting against the bill, there is a real possibility that it could fail.

Former ministers Robert Jenrick and Suella Braverman are among the Conservative MPs

publicly expressing their willingness to vote against the bill unless improvements are made.

The rebellion highlights the deep divisions within the Conservative Party, and even if the

Two deputy chairmen, Lee Anderson, Brendan Clarke-Smith, along with parliamentary private secretary Jane Stevenson have resigned in protest against his flagship Rwanda bill

government secures a victory, it may come at a political cost.

The controversial legislation aims to revive the government’s plan to send some asylum seekers to Rwanda as part of efforts

to deter individuals from crossing the English Channel in small boats.

In their joint resignation letter, Anderson and Clarke-Smith emphasised their previous arguments for incorporating ‘safeguards’ to ensure the legislation’s effectiveness.

“We had supported rebel amendments to the Rwanda bill not because we are against the legislation, but because like everyone else, we want it to work,” the letter said.

The controversial plan, which seeks to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda while their claims are being assessed, was ruled unlawful by the UK’s highest court, as they found the East African country is not a safe place for asylum seekers to be housed.

Anadolu Agency

Trump calls upon GOP rivals to come together as a team

New Hampshire, US - Coming fresh off a commanding victory in the Iowa caucuses, former President Donald Trump came out heavily against GOP leader and former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley on Tuesday, *New York Times* reported.

He, however, also gave a message calling on his GOP rivals to come together and move into the presidential polls as a team.

In the Iowa caucuses on Monday, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis came a distant second with eight delegates and former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley finished not much behind with seven delegates.

Trump painted her as out of touch with the conservative movement he helped inspire, negatively assessed her job performance as his ambassador to the United Nations and accused her of trying to wrest control of the primary from Republicans.

"Nikki Haley is counting on the Democrats and liberals to infiltrate your Republican primary," Trump said while addressing a rally at a country club in Atkinson, New Hampshire.

"Haley was artificially boosting her numbers here by rallying such supporters," he added.

Haley has been actively courting independent voters in New Hampshire, who make up a significant share of the electorate, and who can take part in the Republican primary.

The contest now moves to New Hampshire, a state where Haley enjoys some political clout and is within a difference of single digits of Trump.

The former President avoided getting much attacking against



Former US President and Republican presidential hopeful Donald Trump

Nikki Haley is counting on the Democrats and liberals to infiltrate your Republican primary. Haley was artificially boosting her numbers here by rallying such supporters

DONALD TRUMP

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who managed a distant second spot at Iowa.

"I don't even want to talk about him (DeSantis), because I don't want to waste it," Trump said. "I do want to talk about Nikki."

He went on to call the former South Carolina Governor a 'disaster' adding that she was 'not tough enough' for the presidency.

But, Trump's focus was not entirely on Haley. He did repeatedly attack President Biden's policies. But, citing the results in

Iowa, he forcefully argued that efforts by Haley and DeSantis to knock him from his perch as the front-runner were 'misguided'.

"It's time for the Republican Party to come together, unify and move forward as one team," Trump said.

Aiming to underscore that point, he called to the stage one of his former rivals, Vivek Ramaswamy, who dropped out of the primary on Monday night after finishing a distant fourth and immediately endorsed Trump.

Ramaswamy, a biotech entrepreneur and a Trump acolyte, repeated many of his talking points from the campaign trail,

which have long overlapped with Trump's brand of politics. Following this, he also attacked Haley for being 'insufficiently conservative', *New York Times* reported.

"We do have some enemies that we need to defeat on the other side," Mr. Ramaswamy said. "But we have challenges to address in our own party, right here at home."

Meanwhile, the event on Tuesday kicked off a comparatively packed campaign schedule for Trump in New Hampshire: He is scheduled to hold five rallies in six days in the state.

ANI



Russian missile hits residential building in Ukraine's Kharkiv (Anadolu Agency)

At least 17 injured in Russian missile strikes in Kharkiv

Istanbul, Turkey - At least 17 people were injured due to Russian missile strikes in the city of Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine, local officials said on Wednesday.

Kharkiv Governor Oleh Synyehubov said on Telegram that Kharkiv was hit twice with S-300 missiles from Russia's Belgorod region late on Tuesday. "As a result ... 17 civilians were injured: 16 women aged 38 to 90 and a 31-year-old man," Synyehubov said, adding that two of them are in either 'extremely serious' or in 'serious' condition.

He said that about 20 apartment buildings and the premises of a private medical institution were damaged in the city's Kholodnohirskiy district, while 14 cars were destroyed.

Russian authorities have not yet commented on the strikes.

Both Moscow and Kyiv have exchanged accusations over airstrikes against each other that intensified since late December, when at least 40 people were killed in various regions of Ukraine in a massive air attack, which President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described as the 'heaviest attack' since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war.

sia-Ukraine war.

On January 1, Russian President Vladimir Putin said his country will not let 'a single crime of this kind' go unpunished following a subsequent raid on the Russian city of Belgorod, which killed 25 people and wounded many others.

Ukrainian drones shot down

Russia's Defence Ministry said on Tuesday that 69 Ukrainian drones and 13 HIMARS rockets were shot down over the past day. Ukrainian troops continued attempts to storm Russian positions and Russian forces repelled six Ukrainian attacks in the Kupyansk area.

All assault attempts were repelled, with Russian forces destroying several pieces of heavy military equipment including two German-made Leopard 2 tanks, it said.

Ukraine also shelled several Russian border regions including Bryansk and Belgorod, resulting in the destruction of a number of private houses and service facilities, according to the ministry.

Anadolu Agency

EU starts screening process for Ukraine

Ankara, Turkey - The European Union will screen Ukrainian legislation as it starts accession talks, the head of the EU Commission said on Wednesday.

Addressing the European Parliament, Ursula von der Leyen hailed the EU's decision to integrate Ukraine and praised Kyiv's efforts to reform its democratic institutions.

She listed that in a matter of months, Ukraine has passed new laws to expand national minority rights, improve the judicial system, and ensure checks and balances on power.

"In preparation for the ac-

cession talks, we're starting the screening process and putting together now the negotiation framework," she said.

She recalled that 'the last European Council has shown the political will to stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes', and stressed that the EU 'must back this decision with adequate funding'.

The EU Council paved the way for the expansion of the 27-member bloc in December, announcing the commencement of accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova.

Anadolu Agency

Comoros' president wins fourth term

Nairobi, Kenya - Comoros' President Azali Assoumani has won a fourth five-year term, the country's electoral body announced late on Tuesday.

The election, held on Sunday, was marked by controversy as Assoumani faced off against five opponents, ultimately winning with 62.97 per cent of the vote, according to results published by the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI).

"This triumph is not just mine. It belongs to the resilient people of Comoros who have spoken. It's a shared victory," Assoumani said in his address to supporters just after being declared the winner.

Following the announcement, Mouigni Baraka Said Solihi, one of the primary opponents, vehemently denounced the results, al-



Comoros' President Azali Assoumani (Anadolu Agency)

leging widespread fraud and irregularities in the electoral process.

President Evariste Ndayishimiye of Burundi was quick to extend his congratulations to Assoumani, acknowledging the electoral outcome.

At 65, Assoumani, a former military officer who first came to power in a 1999 coup, has now served two non-consecutive terms as president, from 2002 to 2006 and from 2016 to the present.

The 2018 constitutional referendum that paved the way for his potential re-election was deeply divisive, with critics accusing him of undermining the power-sharing agreement among Comoros' three main islands.

Anadolu Agency

Maldives, Sri Lanka achieve control against Hepatitis B: WHO

Mumbai, India - Maldives and Sri Lanka have achieved control over hepatitis B disease, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced on Wednesday.

This comes after an expert panel verified that the two countries have had consistently high coverage of Hepatitis B vaccine doses in infants and a low prevalence of the deadly disease, corroborated through serological surveys conducted recently in both countries.

"I congratulate and commend the Maldives and Sri Lanka on their achievement which once again demonstrates the earnest efforts being made by the health leaders and officials, health

workers and the people of these countries towards the health and well-being of communities," Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia said.

The Expert Panel for Verification of Hepatitis B Control in WHO South-East Asia Region reviewed childhood immunisation data from the Maldives and Sri Lanka that showed consistent over 90 per cent coverage with Hepatitis B vaccine doses provided during infancy for the past many years.

The experts also reviewed the findings of national surveys conducted among children in 2022-2023, in these countries.

"Based on the evidence pre-



Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh

The two countries join Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Thailand, who achieved the same feat in 2019

sented to it, the Expert Panel concluded that the standards required for verification of hepatitis B control have been met in both these countries and hence recommended that this important public health target has been achieved in Maldives and Sri Lanka," said Dr Supamit Chunttiwat, chairperson of the Regional Expert Panel for

verification of hepatitis B control in Southeast Asia.

The two countries join Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Thailand, who achieved the same feat in 2019, WHO stated in the release.

Preventing hepatitis B infection in infancy substantially reduces chronic infections and cases of liver cancer and cirrhosis in adulthood.

Meanwhile, hepatitis control continues to be an important public health initiative in the Southeast Asia Region of WHO, which comprises 11 countries and is home to a quarter of the world's population.

The region has an estimated 60mn people living with chronic

hepatitis B and 2,18,000 people dying every year of hepatitis B and C. Of the people eligible for antiviral treatment, only about 10 per cent know their status and less than five per cent of them are on treatment.

In 2016, the South-East Asia Regional Immunization Technical Advisory Group endorsed a regional goal of hepatitis B control with a target of reducing hepatitis B prevalence to less than one per cent among children aged at least five years.

Hepatitis B vaccine, as a part of the pentavalent vaccine, has been included in the national childhood immunisation schedule of all countries of the region, with three doses of this vaccine

provided to children during their first year of life. Eight countries of the region also have a policy of providing a birth dose of the Hepatitis B vaccine to newborn babies.

According to WHO, the region made good progress in improving immunisation coverage of the pentavalent vaccine until 2019. However, there was a decline in coverage in several countries of the region in 2020 and 2021 following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Intensive efforts in countries have resulted in the revival of childhood immunisation coverage to pre-pandemic levels in several countries.

ANI

Suffering of Gazans gut-wrenching: Blinken

The US Secretary of State was speaking at the World Economic Forum

Geneva, Switzerland - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday called the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza after three months of Israeli attacks 'gut-wrenching,' adding that 'there has to be another way' forward that addresses Israel's concerns.

"What we're seeing every single day in Gaza is gut-wrenching, and the suffering we're seeing among innocent men, women and children breaks my heart," Blinken said at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

He described 'the tragedy' in the besieged strip as 'devastating' and added: "It also reinforces my conviction that there has to be and there is another way that answers Israel's most profound concerns and questions."

"Israelis have to live with security. They can't have a repeat of October 7. No country would accept the repeat of October 7," he said.

Since the beginning of the conflict on October 7, US officials have stressed their solidarity with Israel in the wake of Hamas' cross-border raid, which killed around 1,200 people, while also urging it to avoid the mistakes the US made in the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks.



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks during the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland on Wednesday (Anadolu Agency)

Following that raid, Israel has launched relentless military attacks on Gaza for over three months now, drawing international outrage for attacking hospitals, civilians, and schools.

During Israel's military campaign, at least 24,448 Palestinians have been killed and 61,504 others injured. The majority of the victims were children and women.

According to the UN, 85 per cent of the population of Gaza is already internally displaced amid acute shortages of food, clean water and medicine.

UN chief calls for cease-fire
Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, while addressing the WEF in Davos on Wednesday, reiterated his call for an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza.

"The world is standing by as civilians, mostly women and children, are killed, maimed, bombarded, forced from their homes and denied access to humanitarian aid," Guterres said.

"I repeat my call for an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza, and a process that leads

to sustained peace for Israelis and Palestinians, based on a two-state solution," he said. "This is the only way to stem the suffering and prevent a spillover that could send the entire region up in flames."

He warned that risk of a full-fledged confrontation with Lebanon would be a 'total disaster', and urged that it should be avoided 'at all cost'.

"What we are seeing in the Red Sea, all these demonstrates that it's not enough," he added.

The UN chief emphasised the importance of addressing the

What we're seeing every single day in Gaza is gut-wrenching, and the suffering we're seeing among innocent men, women and children breaks my heart

ANTONY BLINKEN

humanitarian situation in Gaza, establishment of cease-fire, and releasing hostages.

"But we need to find once and for all, a total commitment that the international community for the two-state solution to exist in Israel and Palestine as

the basis for a stable and peaceful Middle East for the benefit of everyone," he said.

Guterres stressed that there is an 'epidemic of impunity' around the world in which countries simply 'trampling' with international laws.

"From Russia's invasion of Ukraine, to Sudan, and, more recently, Gaza, parties to conflict are ignoring international law, trampling on the Geneva Conventions, and even violating the United Nations Charter," he lamented.

Israel is currently facing a genocide case brought to International Court of Justice by South Africa due to its actions in Gaza - which are repeatedly described as breach to international laws by UN. Tel Aviv, however, denies accusations of genocide by claiming that it is only trying to protect its own people.

Malaysian campaign
Meanwhile, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and his Cabinet ministers on Wednesday signed special postcards addressed to the UN chief, urging the world body to recognise Palestinian nationhood.

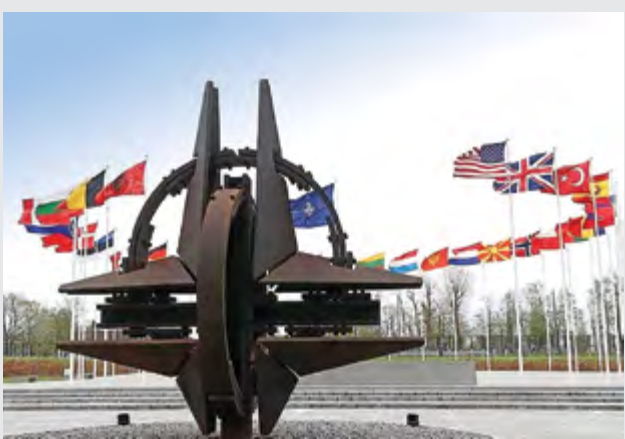
"This special postcard is to express the wishes of the people of Malaysia by urging the UN to accept Palestine as a member state and demanding that the violence and cruelty against the Palestinian people by the Zionist regime be stopped immediately," Anwar said on X.

He said the postcard will be delivered to Antonio Guterres through Malaysia's diplomat at the UN.

"We appeal to the UN to accept the State of Palestine as full member," Anwar wrote on his postcard addressed to Guterres.

"I hope this sincere voice of Malaysians gets serious attention from Guterres," said Anwar, who has personally led mass mobilisation in the Southeast Asian nation against Israel's attacks on Gaza.

Anadolu Agency



NATO's military body to meet in Brussels today

Ankara, Turkey - NATO's highest military authority will meet in Brussels on Thursday to discuss strategic issues, according to an official statement.

The defence chiefs of the Allied states will attend the Military Committee meeting, the statement issued on Wednesday read.

Sweden will also attend as an invitee, it further said, amid talks of the Nordic nation joining the alliance.

Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) Gen. Christopher Cavoli and Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (SACT) Gen. Philippe Lavigne will join the meeting via video link.

The military representatives will discuss many topics, including deterrence capacities, readiness, and the war in Ukraine.

"The last session of the first day the Chiefs of Defence will meet for the first time in a NATO-Ukraine Council format. They will discuss Russia's war

The defence chiefs of the Allied states will attend the Military Committee meeting

of aggression against Ukraine, the situation on the ground, and NATO and Allied continued support to Ukraine," the statement added.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg will attend the meeting at its final stage, to discuss 'political objectives and guidance ahead of the Defence Ministerial in February 2024 and the Washington D.C Summit in July 2024'.

The Military Committee is the top military authority and the oldest permanent body in NATO.

It advises the North Atlantic Council and the Nuclear Planning Group.

Anadolu Agency

Cemetery destroyed in Khan Younis city

Gaza City, Palestine - The Israeli army's withdrawal from areas in Khan Younis city in the southern Gaza Strip revealed the destruction of a cemetery in the city with many of its graves dug up by the Israeli forces.

According to an Anadolu correspondent, the Israeli army early on Wednesday retreated hundreds of metres from areas around the Khan Younis Nasser Hospital, leaving behind heavily damaged buildings and infrastructure. The Israeli army damaged the cemetery near the Nasser Hospital and exhumed some decomposed corpses while bulldozing areas in the cemetery, according to the correspondent.

Four killed in West Bank

Four Palestinians were killed in an Israeli airstrike on the Tulkarem refugee camp in the northern occupied West Bank on



Wednesday.

In a statement, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society said its medical teams removed four bodies from the struck site in the camp.

Eyewitnesses told Anadolu that an Israeli drone struck a site in the Tulkarem refugee camp while the Israeli forces besieged the camp and raided dozens of homes inside it.

The Israeli army bulldozers also destroyed roads, market shops and vehicles in the camp, the eyewitnesses added.

Palestinian official news agency Wafa earlier reported the killing of three Palestinians in an Israeli drone strike near the Balata refugee camp in Nablus city.

Tensions have been running high across the West Bank since Israel launched a deadly military

offensive against the Gaza Strip following a Hamas attack on October 7.

At least 360 Palestinians have since been killed and nearly 4,000 others injured by Israeli army fire in the occupied territory, according to figures released by the Health Ministry.

The Israeli army on Wednesday also detained 45 more Palestinians, including minors and

former prisoners, from various areas of the occupied West Bank.

According to a joint statement issued by the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs and the Palestinian Prisoners Society, the new detentions brought the total number of Palestinians detained by the Israeli forces since October 7 to 6,025.

Some Gazan laborers in the village of Azzun, near Qalqilya city of the West Bank, were also among the people detained, the statement said.

Soldiers also beat and abused Palestinians, and conducted field interrogations, in addition to damaging their homes and other properties, it added.

In their annual report, both groups said the total number of Palestinians detained in Israeli jails at the end of December 2023 stood at 8,800 including 80 women.

Anadolu Agency

European Parliament members urge EU to support ICJ case

Ankara, Turkey - In a compelling plenary session of the European Parliament (EP), members passionately called for the European Union to rally behind South Africa's International Court of Justice (ICJ) case against Israel, accusing the nation of committing 'genocide' in Gaza.

Irish EP member Clare Daly delivered a powerful speech, asserting that because of its actions, including the killing of tens of thousands of civilians and relentless bombardment in Gaza, Israel has lost the support of the international public.

Daly criticised Israel for what

she called 'provocative' actions aimed at inciting regional conflict, and she accused the nation of seeking assistance from the US to evade accountability.

Daly's scathing remarks also targeted European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and the US, drawing parallels to the situation in Yemen.

"As we saw in Yemen, butcher Biden is preparing for office with Madame Genocide (von der Leyen) by his side. They are the ones who ensure the continuation of Israeli terrorism. If it weren't for them, it would have ended long ago," she said.



Irish EP member Clare Daly

Ciaran Cuffe, an EP member with the Greens group, emphasised the need for Israel and its

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, to face consequences for violating international law.

Cuffe highlighted the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where continuous Israeli bombardment hinders the delivery of essential aid and medical supplies, leading to surgeries on children being conducted without anaesthesia.

Finnish EP member Heidi Hautala also urgently called for a permanent cease-fire in Gaza, citing the impossibility of meeting basic medical needs due to Israel's bombings.

Hautala stressed the significance of the ICJ thoroughly in-

vestigating the allegations of Israeli violations of the Genocide Convention.

She called on the EU to throw its weight behind South Africa's case and demand Israel's compliance with any interim measures imposed by the court.

Portuguese Socialist EP member Pedro Marques brought attention to the staggering death toll in Gaza, with 70 per cent of the victims being women and children. Marques emphasised the urgency of holding those responsible for violations of international law and war crimes accountable.

Anadolu Agency



Mali's Hamari Traoré (C) celebrates with teammates after scoring against South Africa

Mali win as South Africa pay penalty for early miss

Korhogo, Ivory Coast - Mali took advantage of an early let-off to beat South Africa 2-0 in the Africa Cup of Nations on Tuesday and take the lead in Group E.

After Percy Tau missed a penalty for South Africa, Mali captain Hamari Traore broke the deadlock after an hour and Lassine Sinayoko added a second six minutes later to put the west Africans ahead of Namibia on goal difference in the standings.

Traore was quickest to react and scored from centimetres out after South Africa goalkeeper Ronwen Williams had barely kept out a curling free kick from Sekou Koita at the Amadou Gon Coulibaly Stadium.

The second goal came soon after as a through ball put Sinayoko goal side and he shrugged off two defensive challenges to score from close range.

South Africa were handed a penalty after 18 minutes when a VAR check revealed an elbow in the face of striker Evidence Makgopa from Sikou Niakate as the

ball was played into the Mali area and the defender attempted to block the tall forward from getting to it. But Tau blasted it well off target to squander the opportunity to go ahead.

He did force a good save out of Djigui Diarra as South Africa dominated the first-half exchanges but they were almost caught out on the stroke of half-time with a defensive blunder that left Sinayoko through on goal but his effort was blocked by Williams.

Mali had two excellent chances soon after the break, first for Koita, who blasted wildly over, and then for Amadou Haidara, who was guilty of a horror miss when he was clear on goal but hurried his effort.

Yet they were quickly forgotten as the two goals put Mali firmly in the driving seat of a group that was always expected to be closely contested.

Mali and Tunisia next meet on Saturday while South Africa are up against Namibia on Sunday.

NAMIBIA UPSET TUNISIA

Deon Hotto's late goal hands southern African country deserved win

Korhogo, Ivory Coast - Namibia winger Deon Hotto scored in the 88th minute to hand the minnows a shock 1-0 victory over Tunisia at the Africa Cup of Nations on Tuesday.

The result kept up the sequence of surprise results that have dominated the opening days of the tournament.

Hotto sneaked in at the back post to hand the southern African country, 87 places below Tunisia in the world rankings, a deserved win as they were markedly more enterprising and created the better chances in the opening Group E encounter at the Amadou Gon Coulibaly Stadium.

Namibia, competing in their fourth finals but who had never tasted a Cup of Nations finals victory previously, should have won by a more handsome margin but were let down by poor decision making.

Tunisia are the top seeds in the group but laboured through the game and their goalkeeper Bechir Ben Said make several key stops to deny Namibia captain Peter Shalulile.

Hotto also wasted a clear first-half opportunity and had a curling free kick saved minutes before he ghosted in at the back post to secure the victory.

"This is a massive achievement for us, nobody gave us a chance. This is for a country that really needs a lift," said Namibia



Deon Hotto (L) scored the winner for Namibia

coach Collin Benjamin.

"We are not in a position to talk big before the match, when everybody calls us 'underdogs'. We can only do our talking on the pitch," he added.

Tunisia did force a sharp save

out of Namibia goalkeeper Loydt Kazapua in the final 15 minutes with a header that was acrobatically tipped over the top but that was as close as they came in a game where they were expected to dominate.

The north Africans, who are the third highest African side in the FIFA rankings at 28, looked nervy and out of sorts.

They join Ghana as former winners who have lost their opening match at the tournament while Algeria, Cameroon, Egypt and Nigeria were all held in games they were expected to win.

"We lost control of the mid-field and they caught us with their pace and aggression," said Tunisia coach Jalel Kadri.

Late penalty seals Burkina Faso's win over Mauritania

Bouake, Ivory Coast - Bertrand Traore scored a stoppage time penalty as Burkina Faso claimed a 1-0 victory over Mauritania in their Africa Cup of Nations Group D clash at the Stade de la Paix in Bouake on Tuesday, writing a piece of history in the process.

It is the first ever win for the

Burkinabe in their opening match of the African showpiece finals and came at the 13th attempt, handed to them when Aston Villa midfielder Traore stroked home his spot-kick after a foul by Mauritania captain Mohamed El Abd on Issa Kabore.

Burkina Faso dominated possession, but it was Mauritania

who carved out the better chances, though they were denied by the excellent reflexes of goalkeeper Herve Koffi and will feel aggrieved not to have got something from the game having conceded in the 96th minute.

Burkina Faso head the pool with their three points after the first round of matches.

Fancied Algeria were surprisingly held to a 1-1 draw by Angola on Monday.

Mauritania fought bravely but could have no complaints over the spot-kick as El Abd lunged at Kabore from behind.

Moroccan referee Jalal Jayed did not give the foul initially, but after a Video Assistant Referee

intervention, the correct call was made.

Burkina Faso have now scored in each of their last 15 Cup of Nations matches, the longest active streak and second lengthiest in the history of the tournament after Egypt found the net in 27 consecutive matches between 1957 and 1980.

CLASSIFIEDS

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Arantxa Sanchez Vicario

Sanchez Vicario gets suspended jail term

Madrid, Spain - Former Spanish tennis star Arantxa Sanchez Vicario has been given a suspended jail term for fraud, a court in Barcelona said on Wednesday.

Sanchez Vicario, 52, and her former husband Josep Santacana and three other people were convicted by the criminal court of hiding assets to avoid paying a 7.6 million-euro (\$8.27 million) debt to Banque de Luxembourg, including interest.

Sanchez Vicario will not serve any time in jail provided she does not commit any other crime within two years.

The two, who divorced in 2019, had denied the charges.

Santacana was sentenced to three years and three months in jail, the court said in its statement.

Sanchez Vicario had blamed Santacana, arguing he had been handling her money and she was not aware of any illegal tampering with her family assets.

SHOCK EXIT

Tunisian sixth seed Jabeur loses to teenager Andreeva

Melbourne, Australia - Ons Jabeur made a humbling early exit at the hands of teenager Mirra Andreeva but title contenders Coco Gauff and Jannik Sinner both got safely through their second-round contests at an Australian Open disrupted by rain on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, defending champion Novak Djokovic survived a huge scare before beating home hope Alexei Popyrin 6-3 4-6 7-6(4) 6-3 to reach the third round.

The 36-year-old Serb, bidding for a record-extending 11th crown in Melbourne, was in deep trouble in the third set when errors began to flow and he had to save four set points.

With the packed night-time crowd on the edge of their seats, top seed Djokovic used his vast experience to win the pivotal tiebreak and then broke a dispirited Popyrin midway through the fourth set to finally seize control.

Tunisian sixth seed Jabeur could hardly blame the conditions for her defeat given the one-sided nature of her stunning 6-0, 6-2 drubbing at the hands of 16-year-old Russian Andreeva on Rod Laver Arena.

"It was probably my best match," said Andreeva, who still has to find time for school work along with her training.

"The first set I didn't expect that I would play this good. The second set was also not bad. It was an amazing match. I'm super happy with the level that I showed today on the court."



The first set I didn't expect that I would play this good. The second set was also not bad. It was an amazing match. I'm super happy with the level that I showed today

MIRRA ANDREEVA

Brazilian 10th seed Beatriz Haddad Maia had little trouble in her second-round encounter with a talented teen, easing past another 16-year-old Russian, Alina Korneeva, 6-1, 6-2. Reigning champion Aryna Sabalenka puts her title on the line against a third 16-year-old in Czech Brenda Fruhvirtova in the evening session on Rod Laver Arena.

The wet weather prevented the start of play on the outer courts for more than three hours but the more high-profile matches continued under closed roofs on the showcourts.

Sinner was delighted that the inclement weather forced the roof of Margaret Court Arena to

be closed for his match against Jesper de Jong.

The fourth seed, who skipped all the warm-up tournaments this year, hit a rich vein of form at the end of last season on indoor courts and dominated the Dutch qualifier 6-2, 6-2, 6-2.

The rain finally relented and the roof was back open for US Open champion Gauff's second-round clash with fellow American Caroline Dolehide.

Initially it looked like the women's fourth seed would follow Sinner's lead but Dolehide dragged her into a real scrap and Gauff was forced to fight until her fourth match point to prevail 7-6(2), 6-2, 7



Ons Jabeur was completely out of sorts against Mirra Andreeva (above left) on Wednesday



Dusan Vlahovic of Juventus celebrates after scoring against Sassuolo on Tuesday

Dusan Vlahovic hits brace to help Juventus blank Sassuolo

Turin, Italy - A stunning first-half brace by striker Dusan Vlahovic helped Juventus to a 3-0 win over Sassuolo in Serie A on Tuesday as Massimiliano Allegri's side extended their unbeaten league run to 15 games in front of a sold-out home crowd.

Juve remain second in the standings on 49 points, two points behind leaders Inter Milan and seven above third-placed AC Milan.

Juve allowed the visitors more possession but stayed in

control of a lively clash at the Juventus Stadium and Vlahovic broke the deadlock in the 15th minute with a rasping shot from just outside the box.

The Serbia striker made it 2-0 before the break with a free kick from long range for his ninth goal of the season.

"Vlahovic played a good game, he was much more calm," Allegri told a press conference.

"This morning I spoke to him and told him that he wanted to overdo it (in the Coppa Italia quarter-final) against Frosinone,

he got into an argument with the referee. Tonight he was much more lucid."

The 23-year-old has been involved in a goal in four consecutive Serie A appearances, with three goals and two assists, for the first time in more than three years.

"Dusan went through a complicated moment because he wasn't well. Now he's working hard to improve and is finding the right calm to manage the match," Allegri added.

Sassuolo, who inflicted Juve's

only loss of the season in all competitions in a 4-2 defeat in the reverse fixture, went close in the 53rd minute through forward Domenico Berardi, who struck just wide from the edge of the box.

Juve keeper Wojciech Szczesny pulled off a brilliant save to deny yet another powerful shot from Berardi 10 minutes later before substitute Federico Chiesa sealed the win for the hosts in the 89th minute with a low strike into the middle of the goal.

NZ clinch T20 series as Allen pounds Pakistan with record ton

Wellington, New Zealand - Finn Allen blasted 137 off 62 balls, the highest score by a New Zealand batsman in a T20 International, to secure his team's series-clinching 45-run victory against Pakistan in the third match in Dunedin on Wednesday.

The opener clobbered 16 sixes, the joint-most in an innings in men's T20 Internationals, to power New Zealand to an imposing 224-7 at the University Oval.

Pakistan managed 179-7 in reply, including Babar Azam's (58) third fifty of the series, as New Zealand took an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match series.

Allen toyed with the entire Pakistan attack but was particularly harsh on Haris Rauf, plundering 28 runs, including three sixes, in the fast bowler's second over, taking him out of the attack.

The bowler was brought back in after New Zealand cruised to 109-1 at the halfway stage and



New Zealand's Finn Allen with the man of the match award

Allen smacked three sixes in that over from Rauf, who bled 60 runs for his two wickets.

Babar kept Pakistan in the hunt for a while but Tim Southee (2-29) led New Zealand's disciplined bowling to ensure they were never really threatened.

"It's good to see the hard work of the last few months come off," Player of the Match Allen said of

his knock, which also included five fours.

"I'm not so personal milestone-driven. I suppose it's just good to get across the line and put up a competitive score and take the series."

This is Pakistan's first series under new T20 captain Shaheen Afridi ahead of this year's 20-overs World Cup in June.

Bangladesh's Hossain banned for two years on corruption charges

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Banglaesh allrounder Nasir Hossain has been banned for two years from all forms of cricket, with six months suspended, for breaching the sport's anti-corruption code, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said on Tuesday.

The 32-year-old admitted three charges of failing to disclose that he was "approached to engage in corrupt conduct", receiving an iPhone as a gift and not cooperating with the investigation after being charged by the ICC. "Mr Hossain has chosen to admit to the charges and has agreed to the sanction in the place of an Anti-Corruption Tribunal hearing," the ICC said.

"Subject to him satisfying the conditions in respect of the suspended part of the sanction, he will be free to resume international cricket on 7 April 2025."

OCA U19, MCCC Yellow U16 and ISWK-I U16 register huge wins

Muscat - OCA U19 defeated ISWK U19 by 187 runs in the U19 Junior League 2023-24 supported by Khimji Ramdas at the Oman Cricket Academy Turf 1.

OCA U19 posted a mammoth 274 courtesy of a brilliant century by Lakshmi Narayana Satish while Kavish Shah scored 41. Varshith SD, Saumya Sampat and Siddharth S picked two wickets each.

In response, ISWK U19 were bundled out for 87 as Prathiesh HR claimed five wickets and Aneek C picked two.

MCCC Yellow U16 beat BSC U16 B by 302 runs in the U16 Academies League 2023-24 supported by Mazoon Dairy at the Municipality Grounds Amerat.

Ojjus Pachisia's scintillating 192 along with Jeet Shah's 153 helped MCCC Yellow U16 post 403 in 30 overs. The pair put on 325 runs for the second wicket. In response, BSC U16 B were



Lakshmi Narayana and Prathiesh HR of OCA U19

bundled out for 101 as Ayush Karthyic, Mithul S and Jeet Shah picked two wickets each.

ISWK CI U16 defeated ISWK Tigers in the U16 Schools League 2023-24 supported by Mazoon Dairy at the Municipality Grounds Amerat.

Aryan Joshi's unbeaten 126 along with Rishab Gupta's knock

of 125 and Marc Mathews' 72 helped ISWK CI U16 post a total of 357 in 30 overs. In response, ISWK Tigers were restricted to 166/9. Rishab Gupta picked three wickets while Aryan Joshi and Naren Padmanaban picked two apiece.

BRIEF SCORES:

OCA U19 274/10 in 48.2 overs (Lakshmi Narayana 116(114); Varshith SD 2/41) beat ISWK U19 87/10 in 24.4 overs (Rishab Gupta 23(30); Prathiesh HR 5/7) by 187 runs.

MCCC Yellow U16 403/1 in 30 overs (Ojjus Pachisia 192(86), Jeet Shah 153(80)) beat BSC U16 B 101/10 in 28.5 overs (Ahmed Ali 36(46); Jeet Shah 0/2) by 302 runs.

ISWK CI U16 357/3 in 30 overs (Aryan Joshi 126(79), Rishab Gupta 125(69)) beat ISWK Tigers 166/9 in 30 overs (Krish Vaibhav 29(23); Rishab Gupta 3/32) by 191 runs.

Heartbreak after dream start

Oman put up brave fight before Al Bulayhi’s stoppage-time goal wins it for Saudi Arabia

Doha, Qatar - Ali al Bulayhi’s stoppage-time goal broke Omani hearts as Saudi Arabia came from behind to win 2-1 in their Asian Cup Group F opener on Tuesday at a packed Khalifa International Stadium.

With the score tied at 1-1, Al Bulayhi scored with a close-range header from a set piece in the sixth minute of stoppage time and although the linesman’s flag immediately went up for off-side, VAR awarded Roberto Mancini’s side the goal.

Oman led for over an hour of the match, but a late resurgence from the Saudis secured their first three points.

Roberto Mancini’s men dominated the early proceedings, with Oman sitting deep, remaining compact and looking to hit on the break.

From one such quick counter-attack, defender Hassan Tam-bakti was left chasing Mushen al Ghassani and eventually brought him down inside the box.

Salah al Yahyaiei stepped up and sent goalkeeper Ahmed al Kassar the wrong way from the spot to put Oman in front after 14 minutes.

The crowd thought Saudi Arabia had equalised when Ahmed al Khamisi missed his attempt to clear Saud Abdulhamid’s cross from the right and the ball found its way to Sami al Naji who had the goal at his mercy from five yards out, but the attacking mid-fielder was caught off-guard and was unable to take his chance.

Oman had to be rescued by goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini



Oman’s Salah al Yahyaiei celebrates with teammates after scoring against Saudi Arabia in their Asian Cup group match on Tuesday

when Mohammed Kanno sent a diagonal ball into the box that was headed back across by Abdulhamid and Abdullah Fawaz’s

attempt to intercept it almost resulted in an own goal if it wasn’t for the quick reflexes of Al Mukhaini who kept his side in the

lead at the break.

Saudi Arabia continued pushing forward in pursuit of an equaliser after the restart and

came close after eight minutes when Kanno cut inside from the left and looked to find the bottom corner, but Al Mukhaini was alert

to the threat and made the save.

A minute later, Saleh al Shehri nearly found the leveller when he chested down the ball inside the

box and hit it on the half-volley, but his effort passed just over the crossbar.

Oman had a golden opportunity to double their lead midway through the second half when Al Ghassani broke free down the left and cut back for substitute Mataz Saleh who struck from just outside the box, but Al Kassar was able to deny his effort.

With 15 minutes to go, Mancini introduced winger Gha-reeb off the bench and was re-warded almost instantly as the

Oman had a golden opportunity to double their lead when Al Ghassani broke free down the left and cut back for substitute Mataz Saleh who struck from just outside the box, but Al Kassar was able to deny his effort

Al Nassr man danced his way past three Omani defenders before tucking the ball away into the back of the net to restore parity in the 78th minute.

The Green Falcons’ comeback was completed in the sixth minute of added time when Gha-reeb’s cross from the corner was nodded on by Ali Lajami for his centre-back partner Al Bulayhi who sent it home with a diving header, with the goal initially dis-allowed for offside but then awarded after a VAR review.

Oman will look to bounce back when they take on Thailand on Sunday, with the latter already on three points having secured a 2-0 win against Kyrgyzstan.



Thailand’s Supachai Chaieded celebrates after scoring against Kyrgyzstan

Supachai stars as Thailand beat Kyrgyzstan

Doha - Supachai Chaieded struck twice as Thailand defeated Kyrgyzstan 2-0 in their opening AFC Asian Cup Group F tie on Tuesday.

Having seen their Southeast Asian rivals Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam suffer opening match defeats, Thailand produced a dominant display to take the points at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium.

Thailand were quicker to settle and good work from Nicholas Mickelson on the right created a chance for Supacho Sarachat in the 14th minute, with his shot hitting the post with Supachai’s effort in slotting home the rebound ruled offside.

Kyrgyz Republic survived another scare eight minutes later when Supachok’s clever flick over the top found Suphanat Mueanta but the OH-Leuven for-

ward’s powerful shot hit struck the crossbar.

Thailand were not to be denied a third time when Bordin Phala, released down the left-hand side in the 26th minute, cut inside before unleashing a curling grounder from 25 yards out that was palmed by Erzhan Tokotaev into the path of Supachai, who rushed in for a simple finish.

Kyrgyzstan did improve in the closing minutes of the half with Zhyrgalbek Uluu Kairat unleashing a grounder from outside the box which custodian Pativat Khammai easily claimed.

Masatada Ishii’s players started the second half in confident fashion, almost doubling their lead within two minutes of the restart as Theerathon Bunmanthan’s long pass found Suphanat but Tokotaev made a fantastic one-handed save.

Coach Ivankovic hails ‘Oman’s fighting spirit for 90 minutes’

Doha - Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic lauded his players for their resilient display, citing fatigue as one of the key reasons for the late capitulation in their opening AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Group F match on Tuesday.

“Congratulations to Saudi Arabia for their deserved win, but also congratulations to my players for their fighting spirit for 90 minutes,” said Ivankovic.

“I’m really proud of my players, although I wished we would get rewarded for it with at least one point, but it wasn’t to be. Today we proved that Oman are here to fight, to go toe-to-toe with opponents, and that gives us motivation going into the next matches.

“The players were a little bit tired by the end and Saudi Arabia were winning all the duels. I always ask my players to continue to fight, but we needed to score the second goal which would have given us security, but by the end players were suffering from fatigue and some injuries, so I didn’t have many options.”

With 41,987 fans in atten-



Oman captain Harib al Saadi gets away from Saudi Arabia’s Abdullah al Khaibari

dance, the game at Khalifa International Stadium recorded the second highest attendance in the tournament after the opening match, and Brankovic expressed his gratitude to both sets of supporters, vowing to bounce back in upcoming games.

“The atmosphere tonight was fantastic. We are proud to have

been part of this game and that our fans contributed to this great atmosphere. I think it was the most exciting match in the tournament so far.

“We knew it would be a difficult match. The result wasn’t decided until the very end. We tried our best to get a result, but our objective now is to get two posi-

tive results against Thailand and the Kyrgyz Republic. The players proved they have the ambition and desire to deliver good football.”

Saudi coach Roberto Mancini credited his substitute players for the win.

“I think we played a very good game and we deserved the win,” said Mancini.

“We made one or two mistakes in the first half, which is normal in the first game, but in the end I believe we played a very good game. The players have been working hard over the past two weeks and have worked hard today to get a win that they deserved.”

“We have 23 players for this game, and when we change players, it is because we want to change the match. All the players who came in helped us change our game and get the win and that is an important role.”

The Green Falcons now boast a 100 per cent win rate, with three out of three competitive matches since Mancini took over.

Lebanon, China settle for draw

Doha, Qatar - Lebanon and China PR settled for a 0-0 draw in their AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Group A match at the Al Thumama Stadium on Wednesday.

The result took China PR to two points while it was Lebanon’s first with both teams having much to do on Matchday Three if they are to advance to the Round of 16. Both sides needed victory, with China held 0-0 by Tajikistan while Lebanon suffered a 3-0 defeat to Qatar in their opening match.

Lebanon took the game to China who looked shaky.

With five minutes gone, Lebanon’s Khalil Khamsi saw his header from Kassem El Zein’s throw-in collected safely by goal-keeper Yan Junling while at the other end, Wu Lei took advantage of a loose ball from Nour Mansoor to set up Lui Bin Bin but the effort was punched away by Mostafa Matar.

Australia coach Arnold: Joining Asian confederation improved us

Doha, Qatar - Australia made the right move to leave the Oceania confederation and join the Asian confederation (AFC) in 2006 as the level of competition in the continent has helped the Socceroos improve as a team, coach Graham Arnold said on Wednesday.

Australia had been with the Oceania Football Confederation for nearly four decades but made the switch in 2006 and played their first Asian Cup in 2007.

They have since won the competition as hosts in 2015



Graham Arnold

while they were runners-up in the 2011 edition, which was also held in Qatar.

“Yes, look, I didn’t make the decision to come into Asia from Oceania. But I really think it’s improved us as a nation in football because the competition, the teams we’re playing against is much harder,” Arnold told reporters.

“Australians are football fanatics and they’re seeing that Asian football is growing enormously and quickly. You can see in this tournament, the quality of

the teams there is getting better and better.

“So the Australian community is right behind the Socceroos and Australian football being in Asia.”

When it was suggested it gave Australia an easier path to the World Cup with only one team from Oceania qualifying for the inter-confederation playoffs, he added: “I don’t make those rules but New Zealand might not be happy if we go back.”

Australia are top of Group B after beating India in their opening match and they next play

Syria on Thursday, with Graham saying they needed to improve in certain areas despite the victory.

“I think that we did very well against India, but probably (need to improve) just the last pass or the last finish,” he said.

“I think our set pieces were not great against India. We had a lot of corners and that is probably one of our strengths and we just need to improve on those little things.”

Arnold said they had watched Syria’s previous games and done their homework.

Weekend



14

COMFORT FOOD
Get near the hearth and close to hearts with your winter comfort food



15

IN TOWN
Launch of British Omani Art Group and BBF meet on 'Space'



16

ENTERTAINMENT
A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood

GLOBETROTTER



Omani globetrotter visits 65 countries to spread the message of peace, promote Oman

Mohammed Taha

To document the culture of diverse peoples, promote Oman, and spread the message of peace and a spirit of adventure, Muatasim Anwar Ahmed al Salmi, 42, has visited 65 countries, so far.

What began as an interesting hobby, soon blossomed into an obsession, such that Salmi currently considers himself a global citizen privileged to be hailing from the Sultanate of Oman. In his quest to encounter and relish diverse cultures around the globe, Salmi also found it an excellent opportunity to take Oman to the world.

Salmi has written three books about his travel experiences, called 'Fasten your belts', 'The decision that saves the trip' and 'Cross roads' which will be unveiled during the upcoming Muscat Book Fair (slated for February 2024).

Honeymoon to hobby

"I set out in 2009 from Muscat to Malaysia and Singapore to spend my honeymoon with my wife. This trip encouraged me to eventually take up

more travel. So far, I have visited 65 countries, including Austria, Spain, Portugal, Kazakhstan, Bosnia, Albania and Turkey," he said, adding that he does visit all famous landmarks in every country besides leaving behind impressions of Oman that would make people curious to visit the sultanate, too.

Salmi has been enjoying his hobby of travel over the past 16 years - to discover the world, document the culture of diverse peoples, spread the message of peace, promote Oman and establish new relationships between people in Oman and the rest of the world.

In 2023, Salmi created his own project called TiDise. He organises monthly group trips to different countries with Omanis who wish to enjoy his spirit of adventure

Being well informed

Meticulously planning every trip in advance, he and his colleague Badr al Wahaibi create a plan before travelling to any country by preparing an integrated programme that includes the cost of travel and accommodation, study the climate and the entertainment places that they can visit.

They ensure that all travel documents are in place while also researching the experiences of other travellers at every destination they in-



I advise Omani youth to plan well before traveling to any country

MUATASIM ANWAR AHMED AL SALMI

tend visiting to be well informed about what to expect.

The duo has also been documenting their travels in the form of photographs/video clips as well as recording their own commentary and observation. Each group comprises about 30-50 people. The last trip undertaken was in Uzbekistan, returning in the first week of January.

"We also hold workshops for tourist guidance and prepare caravans for tourist groups that want to enjoy the tourist attractions in the various governorates of the sultanate," he disclosed.

Talking about unique experiences, he said, "In 2018, during our trip to Taiwan, an earthquake of magnitude 6.4 occurred, and it took us by surprise. We miraculously survived and returned to the hotel without any damage. There have been other hurdles, like lack of information about some countries, etc."

He further asserted, "I believe that travelling through many countries of the world builds an individual's personality and enables one to gain many experiences that help one face life's challenges. I advise Omani youth to plan well before travelling to any country."



Beef meatball & mushroom ragout

Ingredients

2tbsp sunflower oil
1 onion - finely chopped
2 garlic cloves - crushed
¼ bunch dill - finely chopped
500g venison mince
80g fresh white breadcrumbs
1 egg - lightly beaten
¼ cup Dijon mustard
60g unsalted butter
400g mixed wild mushrooms
½ tsp sweet smoked paprika
1tbsp each tomato paste and plain flour
400ml beef stock
150g sour cream
400g tagliatelle pasta
2tbsp chopped flat-leaf parsley leaves

Method

Heat 1tbsp oil in a frypan over medium heat. Cook onion for 3-4 minutes until soft. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute or until fragrant. Transfer mixture to a bowl and set aside to cool. Stir through dill, venison, bread crumbs, egg and 2tbsp mustard. Season, then form mixture into 30 small meatballs. Chill for 30 minutes to firm up.

Then, heat remaining 1tbsp oil in a large frypan over

medium heat. Cook meatballs, in batches, for 6-7 minutes until golden and cooked through. Transfer to a plate. Cover and keep warm.

Return pan to high heat with 30g butter. Cook mushrooms, stirring, for 4-5 minutes until golden. Add paprika, tomato paste and flour, and cook for 1 minute, then add beef stock. Cook for 7-8 minutes until slightly thickened. Return the meatballs to pan and stir through sour cream and remaining 1tbsp mustard. Cook, for 5 minutes.

Cook pasta, drain, then toss with 1tbsp parsley and 30g butter. Divide pasta and ragout among bowls and top with remaining parsley.



Traditional Stew and Herb Dumplings

Ingredients

- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 large onion - finely chopped
- 2 celery stalks - finely chopped
- 6 garlic cloves - crushed
- 1/3 cup plain flour
- 750g beef chuck steak - chopped into 5cm pieces
- ½ cup tomato puree
- 1tbsp Worcestershire sauce

Method

Heat half the oil in a large heavy-based saucepan with a lid over high heat. Add onion, celery and cook for 5-6 minutes until softened. Add garlic and cook for a further minute or until softened. Remove from pan and set aside.

Season flour. Toss beef in flour, shaking off excess. Heat remaining oil in pan over high heat. In batches, add beef and cook, stirring, for 4-5 minutes until browned. Remove from pan and set aside. Add tomato puree to pan and cook for 5-6 minutes until reduced by half.

Add Worcestershire sauce and tomato paste and cook, stirring occasionally, for 2-3 minutes until reduced slightly. Return onion mixture and beef to pan with stock, cider, tomatoes, and bay leaves.

Reduce heat to medium-low. Cover and simmer for 1 hour 30 minutes -2 hours, until beef is tender. Add root vegetables and cook for a further 40 minutes or until just tender.

For the dumplings, place flour and herbs in a bowl. Season. Grate frozen butter and, using your fingertips, rub into the flour mixture to create fine crumbs. Gradually add milk and use a butter knife to mix into a rough dough.

Using lightly floured hands, roll dough into 12 balls and pop on top of the stew, spaced out. Cover and cook for a further 20 minutes on simmer or until the dumplings have swollen to twice their size.

Divide stew between plates to serve. This can be eaten by itself or with a bowl of steamed rice. Garnish with fried onions for more flavour and aroma.

WINTER *comfort* FOOD

Make the most of winter, when you can stay by the hearth longer than usual and enjoy every moment. These recipes will keep you on your toes



Crisp Fried Cheesy Ravioli

Ingredients

1 cup (250ml) buttermilk, 2 cups breadcrumbs
500g packet good-quality cheese ravioli
Sunflower oil, to deep-fry
300ml good-quality tomato pasta sauce
Parsley and grated parmesan, to serve

Method

Place buttermilk and breadcrumbs in separate bowls. Dip

each ravioli first in buttermilk, then in crumbs to coat. Half-fill a deep-fryer or large saucepan with oil and heat to 190°C. Working in batches of 5, fry ravioli for 1-2 minutes until crumbs are golden and crispy. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towel.

Meanwhile, heat sauce in a small pan over low heat to warm through. Season, then transfer to a bowl. Arrange ravioli on a platter, sprinkle with parsley and parmesan, then serve with the sauce for dipping.



take a break

IN TOWN

BRITISH OMANI ART GROUP LAUNCH



A British Omani Art Group, an initiative by the British Omani Society was launched a fortnight ago



Photos: V K Shafeer

Space meet



British Business Forum organised a seminar on Space



Photos: V K Shafeer

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Continued effort is required if you expect to get more attention from a certain someone. Bolder action may be necessary to make the impression you want to make, but bolder action could be quite fun. Get creative with your flirting and don't be shy. Jump up and down and call out their name in a crowd.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

When someone seems intent on pushing your buttons in order to get a rise out of you, it can be a little tough to take an objective, philosophical view of what they are saying. But today you will have an easy way of letting any ill will or catty remarks roll right off your back. No one, no matter how hard they try, can get your goat.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

A new friend is starting to take on a much larger role in your life. Their influence is good, and it's necessary. They have a kind of strength that you should try to integrate into your own life. You should welcome the opportunity to talk with them today. The two of you are ready to take things to a deeper level and maybe even become real confidants.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

"Short and sweet" should be your motto today. Being concise will not only help you save time, it will earn you kudos from important and busy people who appreciate someone who can avoid beating around the bush. Your stock is rising with these people, and it's starting to feel exhilarating. You might want to sit down and really build a connection with them now.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

There is tension growing over what to do. You and your friends have opposing ideas about what would be the most fun, and right now no one is agreeing on a plan. But before you call everything off, consider compromising. You guys are good at it, so why not give it a try? If everyone gives up a little of what they want, then everyone can have a good time together.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

The worst thing you can do is to force yourself to do something that you don't really want to do, or act like you are into something when you aren't really all there. Just go with the flow and let yourself feel whatever it is you feel. Be genuine today. And if that means being in a grumpy mood or wanting to be alone all day long, then so be it.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You have every right to be expressive with your opinions, no matter how popular or unpopular they may be. So say what you feel today and do not worry that what you say could be misconstrued or used against you. When you speak your truth, no one can deny its validity and everyone has to respect it. Stand up, be proud, and say what you think the world needs to hear.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You are intelligent enough to know that when someone or something seems too good to be true it probably is. You'll see the truth behind someone's false front today, but you might be the only one. So be mild in your appraisal of this smooth talker. If you come right out and criticize them, you'll get backlash from the people who are falling under their spell.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Positive energy is all around you right now, and it's protecting you from any bad energy that jealous people might be putting out. You won't have to worry about the unexpected popping up and throwing you off your stride. In fact, you might even welcome the one or two hiccups that are likely. Someone who has wanted your attention will be a lot more obvious about it today.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You know what you want to do, so turn away from all distractions today and just focus on this one goal. There might be some negative comments here and there from folks who don't like your new agenda, but so what? There is a good chance that these negative naggers are coming from a place of serious jealousy.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You're not feeling so terrifically confident about yourself today, which could mean that spending time in social groups could be a little bit intimidating for you right now. To better cope with meeting new people or impressing the ones you already know who are in power, just try to relax. Realise that these people are just like you.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You will feel a strong need to express yourself today, and this urge might pop up at a very inconvenient or awkward time. But when you want to show the world what you feel, you need to show them what you feel. Just be ready to get reactions that you might not like. There are going to be people who have different opinions than you do

BOGGLER

G	B	D	L
E	N	E	I
L	T	A	C
S	I	O	Qu

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY:

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

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

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS

1. Which band's signature song is 'Dancing Queen'?

- A. Boney M
- B. The Beatles
- C. The Rolling Stones
- D. ABBA

2. Which is the smallest bird in the world?

- A. Finch
- B. Sparrow
- C. Hummingbird
- D. Kingfisher

3. Which country is the largest producer of apples?



- A. China
- B. Turkey
- C. USA
- D. India

Answers
1. D
2. C
3. A

WORD BUILDER



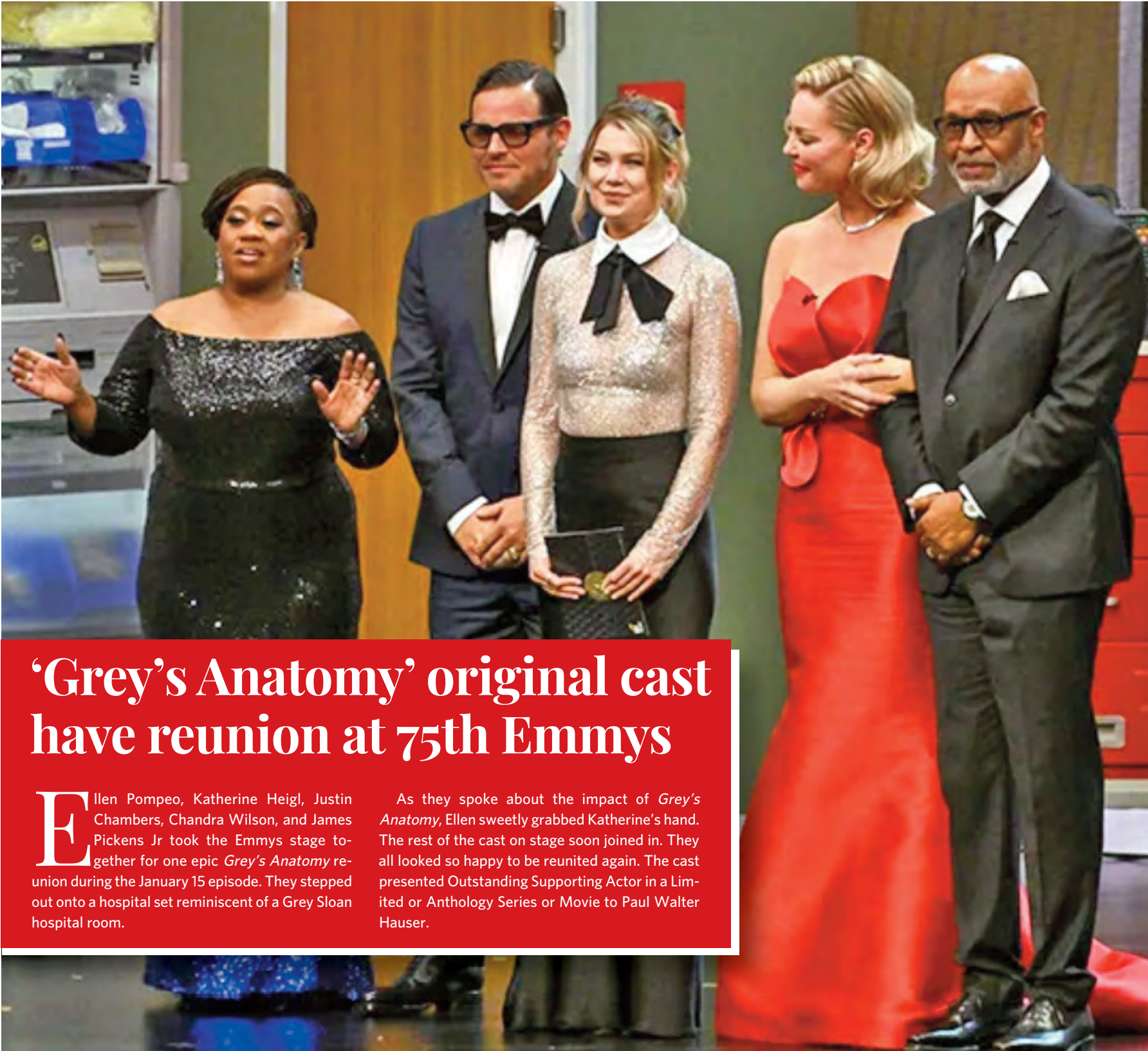
You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

entertainment



CHARLES MELTON'S
HARD FOUND FAME
IN HOLLYWOOD

Fame didn't come overnight for Charles Melton. The 32-year-old *May December* star, currently reaping praise and racking up awards and nominations for his scene-stealing performance alongside acclaimed Hollywood veterans Natalie Portman and Julianne Moore, has dutifully been chipping away at his resume since he moved to Los Angeles more than a decade ago.

"I was walking dogs and working Chinese takeout seven years ago," Melton recalled of his early days trying to make it as an actor. But his role in *May December* has notched him a spot as one of 'The Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of 2023'.



Ranbir Kapoor to star
in Ramayana

After the massive success of *Animal*, Ranbir Kapoor is set to embark on his next venture, collaborating with director Nitesh Tiwari for the epic *Ramayana*, alongside Sai Pallavi. The actor is slated to commence filming in Mumbai on March 2, with an additional schedule planned for April and May 2024. The anticipation surrounding this cinematic spectacle is heightened.

In the first part of the leg, Ranbir and Sai will shoot the dialogue-heavy scenes. The major crowd sequences, including some war portions, will be shot in April and May. The idea is to wrap these scenes before the monsoons hit the city.

COMING SOON

THE LAST RIFLEMAN

Inspired by true events, **THE LAST RIFLEMAN** is a moving and heartfelt True Story - War starring Pierce Brosnan as Artie Crawford, a World War II veteran in a care home in Northern Ireland who has just lost his wife.



Genre: War Starring: Pierce Brosnan, John Amos, Jurgen Prochnow Language: English Release date: January 18

Zac Efron wears
worrisome sunglasses
on TV interview



Zac Efron drew concern from his fans after wearing sunglasses indoors during an interview with the Today Show. While promoting his upcoming film *The Iron Claw* on the Today Show, the 36-year-old actor donned sunglasses as he sat beside his costars Jeremy Allen White, Harris Dickinson, and Stanley Simons. Efron explained to the hosts that the reason he was wearing them inside was to cover up an eye infection.

"I just have a bit of an eye infection," the *High School Musical* star explained. "But I really wanted to be here. It's such a good movie, and I want to come see you guys and tell everyone about it."



Watch Taylor Swift on television

After a tour through North American stadiums and a blockbuster debut in cinemas, Taylor Swift's 'The Eras Tour' lands in homes, appropriately enough, on Swift's birthday. *Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour*, the concert film of Swift's career-spanning spectacular, premiered on premium on-demand on Wednesday. How much it will cost to digitally rent the film hasn't been announced. An already lengthy film (2 hours and 49 minutes) will also now run past three hours, with the addition of three songs - *Wildest Dreams*, *Long Live* and *The Archer*.

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WELCOMES
FIRST
CHILD

The Bachelorette alum Clare Crawley is officially a mom! Clare, 42, announced that she welcomed her first child via surrogate with husband Ryan Dawkins on Monday, January 15. The reality star posted a picture on her Instagram Stories of the couple hugging in the hospital room. "She's here!" Clare wrote in pink text. "Healthy + beyond loved. Dream come true," she added. Clare and Ryan didn't reveal the name of their newborn baby girl.



HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW:
THE BEEKEEPER

Genre: Action thriller Starring: Jason Statham, Emmy Raver-Lampman, Josh Hutcherson

Quest for justice

The *Beekeeper* is a 2024 American action thriller film directed by David Ayer and written by Kurt Wimmer.

The story - Eloise Parker is a retired schoolteacher who lives by herself, but she has a tenant in her garage named Adam Clay, who leads a quiet life as a beekeeper. One day, Eloise falls

for a phishing scam and is robbed of over US\$2 million, the majority of which belongs to a charity organisation she manages. Devastated, she takes her own life.

Upon finding the body, Clay is immediately arrested by FBI agent Verona Parker, Eloise's daughter. After Eloise's death is ruled a suicide, Clay is released.



Verona tells Clay that the group that robbed Eloise has been under the FBI's radar for a while, but is difficult to track. She is pessimistic that they will ever be brought to justice even if they are found.

Wanting justice for Eloise, Clay contacts the Beekeepers, a mysterious organisation, to find the scammers responsible. Statham's character is named Adam Clay, an MMA upgrade of Clint Eastwood's *The Man with No Name*. We don't know anything about Adam except that he lives out in the country raising bees and selling their honey.

The movie, however, wimps out in the end, in the way that a

lot of vigilante action flicks wimp out: by reassuring us that the problem isn't systemic corruption baked into the national character or the human species, but a few bad apples doing bad stuff without their well-meaning boss's knowledge or approval.

Still, at its best, which is when Statham dominates the screen, shooting and maiming bad guys and setting gigantic fires, *The Beekeeper* is a fantasy about how satisfying it would be to brutalise and kill the sorts of white-collar crooks who prey on innocent people without fear of punishment. Worth a watch.

Rating ★★★★★