

HIS MAJESTY, GERMAN PRESIDENT HOLD TALKS TO STRENGTHEN TIES

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier of the Federal Republic of Germany held an official session of talks at Al Alam Palace on Tuesday.

The German President began an official visit to the sultanate on Monday.

At the outset of the session, His Majesty the Sultan emphasised his welcome to President Steinmeier, wishing him and his accompanying delegation a pleasant stay.

On his turn, the German President expressed his gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan for the warm welcome and hospitality.

The session reviewed bilateral relations and ways of promoting these in various spheres to serve the joint interests.

The two leaders exchanged views on regional and international developments, as well as matters of common interests.

The official session of talks was attended from the Omani side by Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Nu'mani, Minister of Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, Dr Hamad bin Said al Oufi, Head of Private Office, Said bin Hamood al Mawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and Head of the Mission of Honour, and Maitha bint Saif al



Mahrouqi, Ambassador of Oman to Germany.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan and the German President held a closed-door session.

Prior to the official talks, the German President was accorded an official reception ceremony on Tuesday.

A squadron of cavalry lined the two sides of the road to the gate of Al Alam Palace upon arrival of President Steinmeier's motorcade to welcome him.

The Royal Guard of Oman band played a welcome tune, to the accompaniment of trumpets, as the motorcade entered the courtyard of Al Alam Palace.

His Majesty the Sultan accompanied the German President to the Dais of Honour where the national anthem of Germany was played, while the artillery fired a 21-gun salute for the guest.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with members of the official delegation accompanying President Steinmeier, wishing them a pleasant stay.

On his turn, the guest shook hands with some members of the Royal Family, chairmen of the State Council and Majlis A'Shura, ministers and Commander of Sultan's Armed Forces.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan and the guest proceeded to the palace hall for coffee.

President Steinmeier was accompanied by an official delegation comprising Dr Tobias Lindner, Minister of State in the Foreign Ministry of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dirk Lölke, Ambassador of Germany to Oman, Wolfgang Silbermann, Head of Foreign Policy Department in the Office of the Federal President, and several German officials.

ONA

See also Page 02



04

Interview: Hussain al Yafai, CEO, StanChart Oman

12

Thai TikTokers make 'elephant pants' cool

Qurum Commercial District facelift in works

Our Correspondent Muscat

Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Governor of Muscat, held a meeting with owners of real estate businesses and commercial centres operating in Qurum on Monday with the aim of rejuvenating Qurum Commercial District.

Attended by Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, the meeting focused on transforming the district into a dynamic hub for shopping, entertainment and related services.

The revitalisation plan is set to enhance the economic and social

vibrancy of the neighbourhood. It includes rehabilitation of public spaces with modern landscaping, paving, lighting and introduction of new commercial spaces. The initiative is geared particularly to-

economic, social and tourism benefits, besides creating job opportunities.

Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidi, Chairman of Sabco Group, who attended the meet-

This will play a pivotal role in revitalising commercial activities and modernising shopping and entertainment in the city

SAYYID KHALID AL BUSAIDI

wards providing growth opportunities for small and medium enterprises in retail, food and entertainment services.

The redevelopment is expected to bring about significant

ing, shared his enthusiasm on social media. "We received happy news from the Governor of Muscat about development of the neighbourhood, aiming to restore its status as a bustling shopping

destination and commercial hub in the heart of Muscat."

He elaborated that the district would undergo a comprehensive facelift with modern urban planning and lighting, along with new commercial and investment opportunities for SMEs in various sectors, including retail, food and beverages, and entertainment.

"This will play a pivotal role in revitalising commercial activities and modernising the shopping and entertainment landscape in the city."

The plan is seen as a significant move towards enhancing the commercial appeal and overall development of Muscat.

SWISS PRESIDENT TO VISIT OMAN ON THURSDAY

Muscat - President Dr Alain Berset of the Swiss Confederation and his wife Muriel Zeender Berset will pay an official visit to Oman on Thursday.



ious spheres, President Berset of the Swiss Confederation and his spouse will pay an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman on Thursday and Friday.

A statement was issued by Diwan of Royal Court to this effect, saying: "With the prime objective of consolidating the friendship between the Sultanate of Oman and the Swiss Confederation in a manner that boosts cooperation in var-

'The visit reflects the Royal keenness accorded by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Berset to bilateral relations between the two countries and means of promoting these to serve their peoples.'

H M hosts dinner in honour of German President



Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq hosted an official dinner at Al Alam Palace on Tuesday in honour of Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, and his accompanying delegation, on his visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The dinner was attended by some members of the Royal Family, ministers and officials.

Later, His Majesty the Sultan bid farewell to the German President, wishing him a pleasant stay during his visit to Oman and a safe return home.

The Honourable Lady As-sayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, wife of His Majesty the Sultan, held a dinner banquet at the same palace in honour of Elke Bndenbender, the wife of President Dr Steinmeier, on her visit to Oman.

The banquet was attended by a number of personalities from both the Omani and German sides.

Oman country of rich history and prosperous future: German President

Manah - German President Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier and his spouse Elke Bndenbender visited Oman Across Ages Museum in the wilayat of Manah, and the Nizwa Fort - Oman's one of the most prominent national monuments - on Tuesday as part of their official visit to the sultanate.

At the museum, the visiting dignitaries were received by Eng Al Yaqdhan Abdullah al Harthi, Director General of the Museum, along with a number of other officials.

The President and his spouse went on a tour of the museum and listened to a briefing about the facility's design inspired by the rugged topography of Al Hajar Mountains. They toured the History Hall and the Renaissance Hall, which present interactive displays to the visitors.

They took note of antiques and manuscripts that demonstrate the depth and authenticity of Omani history. They were briefed about modern technologies that characterise the museum and the services that the museum provides for visitors.

At the conclusion of their visit, Dr Steinmeier and his spouse signed the Senior Visitor's Register, conveying their thanks for the hospitality accorded to them,



and describing Oman as a "country of rich history and prosperous future".

At Nizwa Fort, the guests were received by Sheikh Hilal bin Saeed al Hajri, Governor of

Dakhiliyah, and Saleh bin Dhiab al Rubaie, wali of Nizwa. They also received souvenirs

presented by children from Nizwa.

The German President was accompanied during the visit by Nasr Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary General of the Royal Court Affairs, Chairman of Board of Trustees of Oman Across Ages Museum; H E Eng Said Hamoud al Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (Head of the Mission of Honour); H E Dr Rahma Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, among other officials.

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MoSD ropes in OQ to support persons with disabilities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) on Tuesday signed a cooperation agreement with OQ, the global integrated energy group, to support persons with disabilities through various programmes.

This agreement embodies the community partnership programmes adopted by OQ as part of its social responsibility initiatives. The agreement - signed by H E Sheikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Social Development; and Talal bin Hamed al Awfi, Chief Executive Officer of OQ Group - is expected to boost the efforts that are being made to empower persons with disabilities to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

It aims to achieve strategic objectives with a view to addressing the challenges faced by those persons, and benefiting from the opportunities available to create initiatives and projects that serve disabled persons in the sultanate.

The agreement contributes to finding appropriate solutions to develop services for persons with disabilities, as well as enhancing governance and integration between strategic partners at a sectorial level.

"The MoSD appreciates the efforts exerted by OQ to strengthen community partnerships and support associations that serve persons with disabilities and Omani women. These efforts enable civil society organisations to perform their roles and serve their members who deserve all forms of support," said H E Shamsi after signing the agreement.

He pointed out that the agreement seeks to find and innovate solutions that can result in having more services for this segment of the society, governing businesses to meet the requirements of social causes, channelise support to those who deserve it, and formulate all legislations that would advance social causes.

OQ chief Talal al Awfi said, "Our partnership with the Ministry of Social Development and civil society organisations is an integral part of the community partnership strategy adopted by OQ in its businesses and investments. We, at OQ, believe in the important role played by these institutions in social aspects and seek to serve these groups of people under the umbrella of those institutions."

Awfi explained that the agreement falls under the framework of strengthening social actions directed to people with disabilities and improving the services provided to them to secure a better life for these segments through the laboratory. He pointed out that OQ hopes that the laboratory will make a qualitative shift in meeting the needs of people with disabilities in the Sultanate of Oman.

According to the 2020 census report, there are 42,304 people with disabilities, who account for 1.55% of the Omani population.

2nd international women, children's film fest from Dec 4

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Film Society has announced the schedule for the second International Women and Children's Film Festival set to take place from December 4 to 6.

The event is a significant platform aimed at promoting Omani women in the cinema world, establishing a dedicated children's film fest, discovering new talent, and showcasing Oman as a key destination for filmmaking, tourism and the arts.

Khitam al Said, director of the festival, highlighted its growing



prominence both locally and internationally. She emphasised the festival's commitment to presenting films that celebrate women's roles in society across

different cultures. "Additionally, the festival endeavours to craft a vibrant space for children's cinema, offering a unique artistic perspective into the world of childhood with its myriad of symbols, fantasies and narratives."

This year, the festival has attracted 85 submissions from 14 countries, out of which 39 - 31 feature films and eight documentaries - have been selected for screening.

The feature films will vie for awards in categories such as Best International Feature Film, Best Omani Feature Film, Best Screenplay and Special Jury

Award. Similarly, the documentaries will compete for awards including Best International Documentary Film, Best Omani Documentary Film, Best Screenplay and Special Jury Award.

The jury panel for feature films comprises director Nujoom al Ghanem from the United Arab Emirates, director Aisha al Rifai from Saudi Arabia and artist Nour al Huda al Ghamaria from Oman. For documentary films, the jury includes director Marwa al Sharqawi from Egypt, Dr Azza al Qassabiya and Laura al Siyabiyah from Oman.

The festival's agenda includes film screenings, special children's

movies, interactive sessions and workshops, such as 'Make Your Own Documentary Film' conducted by director Marwa al Sharqawi. Guests will also enjoy guided tours of Muscat governorate.

The opening ceremony of the festival at Oman Film Society headquarters will feature the screening of *Clouds* by director Muzna al Musafer and a special segment dedicated to Palestine. The festival will also celebrate female artists and directors known for their unique cinematic contributions. Special activities and dedicated spaces for children be a part of the festival's offerings.

46,000 VISIT NATURE RESERVES

Oman's 26 reserves play a pivotal role in preserving biodiversity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's nature reserves, renowned for their scenic beauty and diverse ecosystems, drew 46,934 visitors this year till the end of the third quarter, Environment Authority (EA) reported.

These reserves, with their picturesque landscapes, camping sites and diving facilities, offer unique opportunities to explore nature, coral reefs and other underwater marvels.

An EA official stated, "The authority is committed to conducting scientific studies and enhancing tourism and entertainment facilities within these nature reserves."

He informed that Oman's 26 nature reserves play a pivotal role in preserving biodiversity and promoting the sultanate as a global ecotourism destination.

These reserves are also a key attraction for domestic tourism and contribute to the national income. "We are currently focus-



The programme was instrumental in rescuing 66 large turtles entangled in fishing nets. To ensure the safety of these species, concerted efforts in waste management and fishing net collection have been exerted, alongside measures to restrict vehicular access to nesting beaches at night.

EA has also developed a guideline for investment opportunities in nature reserves, following a rigorous evaluation process conducted by specialists from various departments.

In 2023, four major investment opportunities were announced in reserves - in Khor al Qurm al Kabeer, Khor Taqah, Khor al Mughsail and Al Wusta Wetland Reserve - which are expected to further enhance the appeal and accessibility to these natural havens, contributing significantly to Oman's growing status as an ecotourism hub.



ing on developing nine new nature reserves to further support ecotourism in the sultanate," the official added.

Discussing wildlife conservation efforts, the official said, "Significant strides have been made in protecting endangered animals. The Wildlife Rehabilitation and Reproduction Centre in Barka is home to 2,746 wild animals and birds. This year alone, the authority has rescued 41 animals and birds."

Further elaborating on conservation efforts of marine wildlife, particularly turtles, he said, "This year, 300 new turtles were tagged, bringing the total to 12,345. A total of 55 turtle mortalities were reported, but our Turtle Commandos Programme successfully led over 62,000 turtles back to the sea."



ASMED to conduct meetings for SMEs to address challenges

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) is set to organise two crucial meetings with entrepreneurs from North Sharqiyah and South Sharqiyah governorates.

These meetings are scheduled for December 7 in North Sharqiyah and December 10 in South Sharqiyah, from 7.30am to 2.30pm.

An ASMED official informed that the primary objective of these meetings is to brainstorm on innovative solutions and initiatives to address the diverse challenges faced by entrepreneurs.

Discussing ASMED's continuous support for SMEs, the official said the recent launch of a new programme called 'Escalation of Small and Medium Enterprises' is designed to

Meetings scheduled for December 7 in North Sharqiyah and December 10 in South Sharqiyah, 7.30am to 2.30pm

enhance the standards of entrepreneurs, facilitate their growth, improve classification and promote overall development.

Focusing on various critical aspects, the programme aims to increase manpower, boost annual revenues, generate employment, and support the expansion and growth of SMEs both locally and regionally.

SME owners are encouraged to register for these meetings through the link https://bit.ly/Alsharqiya_Entrep_meetings

As of June 2023, ASMED had registered a total of 104,574 SMEs.

Entrepreneurs meet to chalk out plan for net zero

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The National Net Zero Programme, in collaboration with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), held its inaugural forum for entrepreneurs titled 'On our way to net zero - Opportunities and growth', on Tuesday.

The event aligns with Oman's commitment under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, adhering to the Paris Climate Agreement's goal to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.



As part of its strategy to transition to a green economy, His Majesty the Sultan has mandated the establishment of the Oman Sustainability Centre, which will play a pivotal role in ensuring the effective implementation of Oman's National Net Zero Plan, and supervising and overseeing carbon neutrality initiatives and programmes.

The forum's primary objective was to bolster the strategic partnership between government bodies and the private sector. It aimed to inspire

entrepreneurs and showcase opportunities for SMEs to engage in projects that support zero neutrality and carbon emission reduction goals.

The event featured discussions focused on the national programme for net zero and exploring promising initiatives and projects for entrepreneurs. It also shed light on the technologies and innovations that support achieving zero neutrality.

ASMED presented a visual overview of its programmes supporting entrepreneurs in areas such as funding, contract financing, local added value, marketing and promotions.

Interactive dialogue sessions were held to discuss the challenges and opportunities faced by entrepreneurs and to share successful case studies of SMEs contributing to carbon emission reduction.

Distinguished attendees included Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of Environment Authority, Halima bint Rashid al Zaria, President of ASMED, and representatives of various relevant companies.

The forum marks a significant step in Oman's journey towards a sustainable and environmentally responsible future, highlighting the role of entrepreneurs in achieving these ambitious targets.

PDO EMPLOYEES RAISE RO577,000 FOR PEOPLE OF GAZA



Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) announced on Tuesday that its employees donated RO577,000 to the people of Gaza. "Our staff members have raised RO577,000 to support the relief efforts for the people of Gaza in coordination with Oman Charitable Organization. More than 3,000 staff members contributed part of their salary responding to a corporate appeal," a statement said



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INTERVIEW

HUSSAIN AL YAFAI, CEO, STANDARD CHARTERED OMAN

Standard Chartered: Supporting economic growth and sustainability in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In an exclusive interview with *Muscat Daily*, Hussain al Yafai, CEO of Standard Chartered Oman, provides valuable insights into the bank's evolution in Oman and its pivotal role in driving commerce through corporate, commercial, and institutional banking. Delving into the alignment of Standard Chartered's activities with Oman's Vision 2040, Yafai discusses the bank's contributions to Oman's economic growth, particularly in major fundraising activities and debt capital market issues. He also elaborated on bank's role in sustainability-linked financing and ESG initiatives.

Standard Chartered has been present in Oman for nearly 55 years. Could you please provide a brief overview of how the bank's operations have evolved over time?
Our role is to drive commerce. Through our Corporate, Commercial and Institutional Banking we support clients with their transaction banking, financial markets, corporate finance and borrowing needs. We also support their international banking needs across 53 markets, which include some of the world's fastest growing economies and most active trade corridors. The bank's global network complements our strong local proficiencies, allowing us to support the growth and development of Oman's economy through innovative and efficient solutions.

How does Standard Chartered align its activities and commitments with Oman's Vision 2040?
Oman's 2040 Vision aims to create a competitive business hub underpinned by strong regulation and ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) goals. This presents many opportunities for growth in corporate

banking, given the increased demand for financing from businesses in various industries.
The same is true for institutional banking, as the government continues to develop its infrastructure and invest in key sectors such as tourism, health-care, and education. Alongside this, the Muscat Stock Exchange aims to promote public offerings, diversify capital markets solutions, and encourage investment. It is also looking to upgrade its market status and bring capital markets to the centre stage of economic development.
Taken together, these are exciting times for a bank like Standard Chartered that serves the broader Omani economy.

Can you talk about Standard Chartered's involvement in major fundraising activities and debt capital market issues for the government, government-related entities, and corporates?
Standard Chartered has played a pivotal role in several notable deals in Oman.
Earlier in 2023, the bank served as the sole ratings advisor and global coordinator for Energy Development Oman (EDO) during its inaugural \$1bn Sukuk issuance. This transaction marked a historic milestone for EDO as it ventured into capital markets with its first benchmark USD Sukuk issuance. Moreover, it represented the first issuance from Oman in that year and the first USD-denominated transaction for an Omani government-related entity since 2021.
Standard Chartered was also appointed as deal manager by Oman's Ministry of Finance as part of a liability management exercise in which the Oman government sought to repurchase outstanding securities, potentially totalling up to \$1bn. The exercise sought to support the Oman government's strategic objective of reducing



Our operations in Oman form a core part of Standard Chartered Group's strategic footprint in the Middle East and support Oman's 2040 Vision, which aims to create a competitive business hub
HUSSAIN AL YAFAI

its debt burden and enhancing its debt-to-GDP ratio, a critical metric in its pursuit of attaining an investment grade rating.
The bank also recently issued its first-ever green guarantee for China Energy Engineering Shanxi Electric Power Engineering Company for a solar energy project in Oman.
What is the bank's focus regarding providing job opportunities and training and development for young Omanis? Additionally, can you shed light on the diversity and inclusion initiatives of the bank?
We employ more than 82,000 people across the globe, and we support our employees and provide the autonomy and opportunity to make an impact. We are on a journey to innovate and transform, with the employee experience at the heart of our evolution. We are building a successful bank that drives commerce and prosperity through a culture of inclusion.
We tackle the issue of diversity in three ways: Great Place to Work, Great Place to Bank, Support for Our Communities. Globally, our colleagues come from 132 nationalities and 30% of our senior roles are held by women, including 14 female CEOs.
In Oman specifically, Omanis make up all senior management, over 90% of middle management, and we have

an overall Omanisation rate of close to 94%. Omani women also make up a significant portion of our team, with our local heads of HR, Properties and CFCC (compliance) all Omani women.
Can you provide insights into your bank's role in sustainability-linked financing and ESG?
Our sustainable investments product range continues to grow and is now available in 16 markets across Asia, Africa and the Middle East. We mobilised \$300bn in green and transition financing and have set up a Transition Acceleration Team to support carbon-intensive sectors.
Our Sustainable Trade Finance Proposition was launched in March 2021 to help companies build more resilient and sustainable supply chains. We are involved in the Just Transition Energy Partnership projects in Emerging Markets (e.g. Indonesia).
We have successfully deployed our expertise to Oman through the CEEC-SEPEC green guarantee and are working with several clients on developing ESG frameworks. Two of such frameworks have already been completed in the electricity and telecommunications sectors. There are an additional six more currently at various stages of completion across a number of sectors including logistics, tourism and hospitality, mining and natural resources.
What is the significance of Oman as a market for Standard Chartered's strategic footprint in the Middle East?
Standard Chartered Oman has been present in the sultanate since 1968, and has been actively supporting the economy ever since. Our operations in Oman form a core part of Standard Chartered Group's strategic footprint in the Middle East – and support Oman's 2040 Vision – which aims to create a competitive business hub.
In what ways does Standard Chartered engage with the local community and contribute to corporate social responsibility in Oman?
Giving back to the communities we work and live in is more than just a commitment or our responsibility – it is what we stand for as an organisation. Volunteering is a core component of our community engagement strategy. It allows us to use their time and expertise to create a positive impact on our communities, our own well-being and our broader business. That's why at Standard Chartered that we offer every employee three days paid leave to volunteer annually. Not only does it bring great personal rewards, it enables us to build connections, develop new skills, and gain fresh perspectives.
Across our network, 43,851 colleagues volunteered and collectively logged more than 58,461.5 employee volunteering days at the end of October. In Oman, our employees have achieved a rate of 48% participation rate in volunteering activities. A few examples include our collaboration with the Omani Ministry of Health, where Standard Chartered Oman organised a blood donation camp for Standard Chartered employees and several local businesses and banks. Our employees also volunteered in visiting the children with cancer and heart ailments and donating Eid gifts in the lead-up to the holiday. We have also previously Worked with Dar Al Atta'a on a COVID relief donation of \$225,000 towards social and financial relief to families, small businesses and individuals who lost their jobs, because of the pandemic and lack of tourism, as well as Ramadan food distribution to needy families over several years. Our employees have also taken part in clean-ups post major cyclones.

Air Liquide and Marafiq join hands to produce industrial gases in Duqm



Monica Varagnat and Abdullah al Hashimi signed the agreement

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Air Liquide, a global leader in industrial gases, and Marafiq, responsible for managing power and water sectors in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to establish a partnership for the centralised production and supply of industrial gases in Duqm.
Duqm, hosting numerous industries requiring industrial gases, will see the development of infrastructure by Air Liquide and Marafiq for the production and supply of industrial gases.
Under this agreement, Air Liquide and Marafiq will explore efficient and low-carbon solutions for producing and supplying industrial gases to various industries in Duqm. This partnership will benefit end-users, including property developers and industrial customers in Duqm, through economies of scale, synergies, world-class technologies, and operating expertise related to industrial gases.
In a press statement, Monica Varagnat, Large Industries Business Line VP – Africa, Middle East, and India at Air Liquide, said, "Air Liquide is pleased to partner with Marafiq, aligning with our growth ambitions in the Duqm industrial basin. Leveraging our world-class technologies and expertise, Air Liquide aims to contribute to the industrial development in Duqm."
Abdullah al Hashimi, Managing Director of Marafiq, said, "This agreement will empower Marafiq to enhance its services to industrial projects in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, providing integrated services, including electricity, water, industrial water, and industrial gases to companies in the zone."
"Air Liquide's specialisation in the industrial gases sector positions it as a valuable partner, and we anticipate that the MoU will mutually benefit both companies while serving and attracting numerous industrial projects to the Special Economic Zone at Duqm," he added.

Ahlibank achieves strong growth in Q3

Muscat – Solidifying its position in Oman's banking sector, ahlibank announced its outstanding financial performance for the third quarter of 2023.
Thanks to its broad portfolio of digital products and services, ahlibank has succeeded in being one of the fastest-growing banks in the sultanate, actively contributing to the achievement of the goals set for Oman Vision 2040.
The bank's key performance indicators for the third quarter ending September 30, 2023 reflect impressive growth, with total assets increasing by 4.7% to reach RO3.154bn. Net profit



Said Abdullah al Hatmi

increased by 16.9% to reach RO29.29mn, in comparison to RO25.06mn for the first nine months of 2022.
Customers deposits rose by 6.4% to RO2.371bn, while net loans, advances and financing

expanded by 5.1% to RO2.666bn at the end of third quarter of 2023. The bank's operating income demonstrated robust growth of 8.5%, reaching RO73.67mn as at the end of September 2023, and the operating expenses increased by 2.1%.
Said Abdullah al Hatmi, CEO of ahlibank, said, "As we approach the end of the year, our performance reflects our unwavering commitment to achieving the strategic goals we set at the beginning of this year. This has greatly contributed in cultivating our growing customer base. With our innovative and exceptional banking solutions, we have set new standards in the banking sector."
"These consecutive achievements are the result of our focus to play a pivotal role in reshaping the banking sector in the sultanate. Therefore, we are dedicated to providing a portfolio of exceptionally outstanding banking services, while adhering to global standards, and meeting our customer's evolving needs."
A significant milestone during the third quarter was the successful oversubscription of ahlibank's rights issuance in September, increasing the bank's paid-up capital from RO194.9mn to RO244.9mn.

Oil prices increase ahead of OPEC+ meeting

Muscat - Oil prices increased on Tuesday amid supply uncertainty magnified by reports of disputes among OPEC+ members over their production quotas for the upcoming year.
International benchmark crude Brent traded at \$80.50 per barrel in morning trade in London, a 0.79% increase from the closing price of \$79.87 a barrel in the previous trading session on Monday.
The US benchmark, West Texas Intermediate (WTI), traded at the same time at \$75.47 per barrel, up 0.81% from Monday's close of \$74.86 per barrel.
Supply uncertainties in global oil markets continue to impact oil prices. The meeting of OPEC+ members scheduled for November 26 in Vienna was postponed by four days to November 30.
The group is expected to determine its production quotas to be imposed from January onward.

Since 2022, the group has collectively agreed to cut about 5 million barrels of production daily, but the pledge to reduce output has failed to reduce supply excesses on the global market.
If OPEC+ production cuts continue, the average global oil supply is expected to reach 102.8mn barrels per day. Despite production reductions, this represents a surplus of almost 1.3mn barrels per day, the International Energy Agency said in its latest analysis.
Additionally, investors are closely following US Fed officials' statements for further insight into the world's biggest oil consumer's interest rate policy. Analysts are awaiting macroeconomic data from the US, scheduled for later in the day.
Meanwhile, supply-side concerns slightly eased after Hamas and Israel initiated a prisoner exchange and a four-day humanitarian break with an additional two-day extension.



VIVA Supermarket marks significant entry into Oman

Landmark Group announced its ongoing expansion in Oman with its venture VIVA Supermarket opening a significant chapter in the group's journey in Oman.

With the purpose of bringing exceptional value to consumers, Landmark Group started its journey in Oman in 1992 with Babyshop. Today it has consolidated its position through its well-loved brands - Home Centre, Centrepoint, Max, Emax, Fun City with a footprint of more than 90 stores across the country.

Founded in 2018 with a steadfast commitment to delivering high-quality, affordable grocery VIVA is today recognised as a trusted food discount store, catering to diverse communities. With over 80 stores across the UAE and the recent launch of its third store in Oman since September 2023, VIVA has solidified its position as a go-to destination for groceries and household goods.

The supermarket brings exclusive brands and private labels, offering a perfect fusion of quality and affordability with most products of European quality. This commitment to providing a unique offering has contributed to VIVA's growing popularity among consumers seeking value without compromising on excellence.

Landmark Group's purpose is deeply rooted in its overarching commitment to innovation, sustainability, and partnerships, as highlighted by Renuka Jagtiani, Chairperson of Landmark Group, "Landmark Group's suc-



cess is a testament to the trust and loyalty extended to us by countless individuals and our partners. Our journey is intricately intertwined with the aspirations of our consumers, making it as much theirs as it is ours. We are happy to now introduce VIVA supermarket to Oman, confident it will be relevant to the community as our established brands."

Landmark Group attributes its enduring success to a focus on entrepreneurial spirit and in-

novation. Georg Fischer, CEO & Founder of VIVA, stated, "At VIVA, we strive to deliver our promise of fresher, cheaper and better everyday to our customers."

"Our emphasis on ethical business practices and customer-centric strategies is the cornerstone of our success. As we expand, we remain dedicated to providing communities with not just groceries but great value through our unique, affordable products."

Trend Micro unveils Vision One platform to transform enterprise cybersecurity in Oman

Trend Micro Incorporated, a global leader in cybersecurity, launched Trend Vision One platform marking a significant leap forward in enterprise cybersecurity, encompassing robust attack surface risk management, cross-layer protection across hybrid environments, and cutting-edge extended detection and response (XDR), now amplified by powerful generative AI technology.

The platform's advanced XDR and AI capabilities include a broad set of native security sensors to deliver the most comprehensive and cross-domain threat protection. By consolidating data across internal and third-party sources, utilizing advanced AI and machine learning analytics, and correlated detection models, the platform brings revolutionary cyber protection to Oman and the region.

The threat landscape in the Middle East and Africa region is evolving rapidly, and Trend Micro is leading the charge in ensuring the safety of organizations in Oman and the region. As per the 2022 Annual Cybersecurity Report by the Company, 'Rethinking Tactics', Trend Micro security solutions successfully blocked and detected over 870mn cyber threats in the region last year. The launch of Trend Vision One Platform underscores the company's dedication to this mission.

"In a world where threats constantly evolve, Trend Micro continues to challenge the status quo," says Assad Arabi, Managing Director, Gulf and Emerging



Assad Arabi

Markets, Trend Micro.

"Our relentless pursuit of innovation has enabled us to stay at the forefront of cybersecurity, delivering unparalleled solutions that safeguard Omani and regional organisations against emerging risks. Trend Vision One underscores our commitment to pushing boundaries, redefining industry standards, and providing the highest level of protection for organisations in Oman and the region."

With its robust integration ecosystem, Trend Vision One elevates enterprise cybersecurity by unifying visibility, automation, and orchestration. It integrates smoothly with third-party networks, fueling security organisations' growth.

Additionally, it empowers Managed Security Service Provider (MSSP) partners to deliver comprehensive solutions addressing industry needs. Trend Micro brings transformative generative AI capabilities into its platform with the introduction of Companion, an AI-powered cybersecurity assistant.

Triumph Over Terrain: Epic fourth edition of Himam Trail Run Race concludes

The fourth edition of Himam Trail Run Race, organised by Dakhiliyah governorate with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism as the main supporter, concluded last weekend in spectacular style.

The closing ceremony, presided over by H E Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, in the presence of Sheikh Hilal al Hajri, Governor of Dakhiliya, and a number of notable officials, witnessed the crowning of the winners of the race categories that were organised over three days in Hamra, Jabal Akhdar, Nizwa and Izki, attracting more than 750 runners, male and female, from 62 countries, and two thousand participants of different ages in short community races.

Omani champion Hamdan al Khatri came in first place in the 110km Al Hajar ULTRA race, covering the entire distance in 16 hours and 55 minutes, followed by American athlete Jason Schlarb, who completed the distance in 17 hours and 23 minutes.

In third place was the Iranian runner, Mohammad Reza Jelodar, who completed the race in 18 hours and 48 minutes.

In the female category, Moroccan Aziza el Amrany won first place, followed by German Isabel Martine Schüller, and third was Dutch Kristina Skupien.

In the 55km races, the first three places were entirely Omani, as Saleh al Saidi came in first place, followed by Sami al Saidi and third Anjad al Jamoudi. In the female category, first place went to British Eve Moore, second place to American Whitney Mickelsen, and third place to Danish Kristina Schou Madsen.

This annual sporting event aims not only to promote the sport of trail running locally and regionally but also to draw inter-



large Rush 5km, Mini Marvels 4km, and the Tiny Titans races (2km and 1km) taking place over the weekend. These trails were designed to cater to all levels of runners, from elite athletes to young enthusiasts.

In addition to the races, the event featured an exhibition appealing to sports enthusiasts, with various vendors, sports-related activities, and food options. Set against the backdrop of the beautiful Bait ar Rudaydah castle in Birkat al Mouz, the exhibition ran from November 22 to November 25, coinciding with Oman's 53rd National Day holiday. This exhibition provided an opportunity to engage with the community and visitors from within and outside Oman, enhancing the event's festive atmosphere.

The Himam Trail Run Race main races are accredited by the International Trail Running Association (ITRA). This inclusion allows competitors to earn internationally recognised points and improve their global rankings in trail running. The race is supported by various organisations, including the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, the SMEs Development Authority, Royal Oman Police, Nizwa Municipality, Nizwa Sports Club, Royal Society for Radio Amateurs and Scouts and Guides. Joining forces to enable success are notable companies such as ASYAD Group, Oman Airports, Petroleum Development Oman, be'ah, Daleel Petroleum, Abraj Birkat al Mouz, Golden Tulip Nizwa, Raha Supermarket and Al Safa Foods. This lineup of supporters reflect the significance and impact at multiple levels, from promoting tourism, healthy lifestyle and fitness to contributing economically to the region.

national professionals to the unique Omani terrain. The Himam Trail Run Race is distinctive in its traversal through four wilayats, offering runners a unique experience amid nature, historical landmarks, and the diverse topography of the Hajar Mountains.

The classic and challenging Al Hajar ULTRA 110km kicked off on November 23, starting in the picturesque town of Hamra. Runners embarked on a journey through the rugged beauty of Jabal Akhdar before descending into Birkat al Mouz.

They navigated rocky paths, climbed steep inclines, and took in the stunning views of the surrounding landscape, ultimately

gaining a total of 5700 metres in elevation. The technical Skyward Canyon 55km, as well as the Scenic Sprint 20km races, both began on November 24 in Izki and Birkat al Mouz, respectively.

Runners were treated to an unforgettable experience as they navigated rocky paths, climbed steep inclines, and absorbed the breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape. The 20km distance offered a completely new trail designed to present runners with scenic views of authentic Omani landscapes.

A range of shorter distances was also offered to enable more community members to undertake the wonders of trail running with the Hilly Haven 10km, Vil-



Apex Specialized Eye Centre adds VISUMAX 800 machine

In the spirit of ongoing development, Apex Specialized Eye Centre has added an advanced and innovative technology to its wide range of medical technology - the state-of-the-art VISUMAX 800 machine.

This machine opens new and advanced opportunities in the field of vision correction, with its sophisticated design and superior performance making it an ideal choice for complex eye surgeries. This machine is used to do SMILE procedure among others, which stands for Small Incision Lenticule Extraction, and is a modern refractive surgery technique used to correct certain types of vision problems, primarily myopia (nearsightedness).

Under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhi, former minister of Energy and Minerals, the new VISUMAX 800 machine was inaugurated with pride and honour.

This opening serves as a clear indication of the center's commitment to delivering advanced medical services and elevating healthcare standards in the com-

munity.

Dr Naila al Harthy, Senior Consultant Ophthalmologist and Co-Founder, Apex Specialized Eye Centre, on this occasion expressed satisfaction over the addition of this new technology.

"In our relentless pursuit of optimal outcomes, the VISUMAX 800 emerges as a reliable ally, promising improved surgical experiences and outcomes for our patients. Its versatility allows us to address a spectrum of refractive conditions, ensuring that everyone receives tailored, state-of-the-art care," she said.

The co-founders, Abdul Lathief Uppala and Dr P A Mohammed said that this new device underscores the centre's commitment to improving the patient experience and providing top-quality care.

Thanks to these innovations, the centre's doctors can achieve better results and offer unique care that caters to the individual needs of each patient.

Firasath Hassan and Moideen Bilal, Executive Directors of Badr

Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, who were the part of the launch, in a joint statement said the launch of the VISUMAX 800 at Apex Specialized Eye Center marks an exceptional achievement, showcasing the centre's consistent leadership in delivering the latest medical technologies.

As a cornea and refractive surgeon dedicated to pushing the boundaries of visual excellence, Dr Yogesh Bhadange is thrilled by the possibilities that the VISUMAX 800 brings to practice. He said the VISUMAX 800 is a symphony of cutting-edge technology, offering unparalleled precision and efficiency in every procedure. Its advanced features, from enhanced imaging to a user-friendly interface, empower surgeons to craft personalised treatment plans with unprecedented accuracy.

This transformative technology is set to redefine industry's approach to cornea and refractive surgery, opening new doors to innovation and elevating the standard of care we provide.

UAE delegation reviews Oman's experience in school education

Within the framework of the educational cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates, an educational delegation from the Emirates Schools Establishment visited the Sultanate of Oman, headed by Eng Mohammed Hamza al Qasim, director general of the Emirates Schools Foundation, Dr Omar al Dhaheri, executive director of the School Operations sector, and Ahmed al Obaidli, senior protocol specialist.

Qasim said, "This visit focuses on exchanging experiences in the field of education, because there is a deep-rooted Emirati-Omani historical relationship, and we have to consolidate these relations through the field of education, which is one of the most important sectors. The Sultanate of Oman has made great strides in the field of education. Through meetings with officials in the Ministry of Education, we learnt about the experiences in the Omani schools, specifically in special education, integration schools, and general education. "There are many opportunities to exchange experiences in various fields of education and we work together to develop this field. What attracted me in this



visit was what was presented at Fatima Bint Al Walid School in the aspect of research and development, and filling the existing gaps, whether in operations or academics. This is an important experience that we will benefit from in our schools in the United Arab Emirates."

On the first day, the visiting delegation met with Professor Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaedi, Undersecretary of the Ministry

of Education for Education. During the meeting, the school education system in the Sultanate of Oman, student activities, in addition to the special education teaching system, integration, and several other educational fields were discussed.

The delegation also met with Majid bin Saeed Al Bahri, Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs. During the meeting, the system for appoint-

ing teachers, the transfer system, and its challenges were discussed. They also discussed the digital transformation project in the ministry, the roadmap for the e-learning system, and the geographical distribution of schools, their operational system, and their structure, in addition to many areas of common interest between the two sides.

On the same day, the visiting delegation held a meeting with a

number of director generals at the ministry and the educational directorates. Presentations were held on the education process in the Sultanate of Oman, the special education and the continuous learning, and on evaluating the educational system for the Sultanate of Oman through a joint study between the Ministry of Education and the Federation of New Zealand Educational Organizations.

On the second day, the Emirati delegation visited Al Manhal Basic Education School (1-4) and Fatima Bint Al Walid Basic Education School (5-10), where the delegation was briefed on the most important educational initiatives that were implemented in the two schools. Some presentations were held in academic achievement, community partnership, scientific research, entrepreneurship, etc.

New book for children launched

A new book - Zavian and the Arabian Leopard Cub - written for children by Jane Jaffer MBE, in English and translated by Maythaa al Mandhari into Arabic, was launched recently in the Let's Read Children's Library Bus in Oman Avenues Mall.

The book with colourful illustrations by Nermeen Kazoun, centres on Zavian, a young boy who, together with his sister, Sariya, and his cousin, Raifi, travel to Salalah to visit the Dhofar region of the Sultanate of Oman.

During their stay they meet some of the endangered animals that live in the conservation areas of Dhofar, including an Arabian Leopard cub, a hyena, an ibex, an eagle, an oryx and a camel. The children search for the leopard cub's mummy who has mysteriously gone missing after a night's hunting. The animals join in the search and eventually Zavian, Sariya and Raifi, rescue the mummy leopard, with the help of a Civil Defence Air Ambulance Team.

Following the story, readers will find questions to answer and a wealth of factual information about the amazing, critically endangered animals featured in the story.

Jane Jaffer is a writer based in Muscat who has published works of poetry, fiction, memoirs, and children's books.

AJIA backs motorcycle training programme

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles (AJIA), the official importer of BMW Motorrad in Oman, collaborated with the Motorcycle Learning Centre by providing it with two BMW Motorrad motorcycles for riders' training programmes.

The aim was to raise the efficiency of motorcycle training programmes in Sultanate of Oman and contribute to road safety by raising awareness on motorcycle safety culture and environment, a press release said.

The modern motorcycles include bigger engine capacity in comparison to the centre's current training motorcycles with an option of on-road and off-road capability, providing the trainees with the opportunity to venture into different types of riding experiences and trainings.

This provides motorcycle enthusiasts the opportunity to train



on world-class motorcycles that have great technical capabilities along with the supervision of competent safety instructors who are qualified and internationally certified.

The collaboration was signed by Rashid Faqir al Balushi, general manager of the Motorcycle Learning Centre and Rachid Zamani, managing director of AJIA.

NASA crew reveal mission insights at DFF

The NASA SpaceX mission crew of Expedition 69, including Emirati astronaut Dr Sultan al Neyadi - who became the first Arab to do a spacewalk - today revealed exclusive insights into their six-month mission aboard the International Space Station (ISS).

Speaking at the Dubai Future Forum (DFF) 2023, a panel of astronauts and cosmonauts from the NASA-led Expedition 69, which splashed down earlier this year, discussed their mission objectives, which included the development of cutting-edge technologies and conducting groundbreaking scientific experiments in zero gravity, a press release said.

Hazza al Mansoori, the UAE's first astronaut and Increment Lead during the mission, joined Al Neyadi on the panel. He revealed, "Expedition 69 successfully completed over 200 experiments aboard the International Space Station." He also re-



called the 'overwhelming feeling' of looking at our planet from space, saying, "The perspective we have, the appreciation of what we have here on Earth, it's really huge."

Al Neyadi was similarly awed by his spacewalk. "Going out and seeing the vastness and darkness of space, was really incredible. What kept me really

focused was knowing that this is a lifetime opportunity," he added.

Joining Neyadi and Mansoori were NASA astronauts Stephen Bowen, Woody Hoburg, and Francisco Rubio, as well as State Space Corporation ROSCOSMOS cosmonauts Sergey Prokopyev, Dmitry Petelin and Andrey Fedyaev.

Bowen noted how new discoveries are made in space every

day that impact life on Earth. Hoburg spoke about how the crew 3D printed human meniscus, for the first time during their research mission, which could support major advances in healthcare.

Prokopyev commented, "We conducted numerous experiments during our mission, which

will be invaluable for future studies and research in deep space."

The eight astronauts and cosmonauts on the panel, who have spent more than 50,000 hours in space between them, including during the 186-day mission on the ISS, also shared how they coped with being separated from their families for so long.

Experts on sustainability to meet at Medlab Middle East Congress

Running a laboratory consumes a considerable amount of resources and energy, which can be a significant burden on the environment. To highlight the issue, Medlab Middle East will gather a panel of global experts at the 'Sustainability in the Laboratory' conference, a CME-Accredited conference which takes place on February 8 at the Medlab Middle East Congress.

Studies show that laboratories consume ten times more power and four times more water than commercial office space. Furthermore, laboratories generate 5.5 million metric tonnes of plastic waste annually. As a result, many laboratories and pharmaceutical businesses are taking steps to future-proof their operations and minimise their impact on the environment, a press release said.

Dr Nehmat El Banna, Clinical



Pathology specialist and CEO of Freiburg Medical in Dubai will be speaking at the Sustainability in the Laboratory conference and believes the topic to be a vital element of the healthcare system in general.

"Laboratories are a significant player in the healthcare industry and are known to be the highest users of energy in the sector. Climate change has a direct consequence on human health. There will be higher temperatures, more adverse weather events,

and poorer air quality which will lead to more illnesses, and infectious diseases will spread more easily. All of this will place a greater burden on the healthcare industry," she said.

"While climate change is a complex issue with many contributing factors, the health of future generations is of paramount importance to us as a sector. We must, therefore, address the environmental footprint of laboratories and take action to mitigate the effects of our operations,"

she added.

For the past five years, Freiburg Medical has been implementing sustainable practices across its UAE facility. This includes using energy-efficient LED lighting, reducing water usage, and utilising more environmentally friendly instruments. Additionally, the company works closely with its suppliers to ensure that sustainable practices are adopted.

Tom Coleman, exhibition director, Informa Markets Healthcare added, "As the region's largest medical laboratory exhibition and congress, sustainability has become a paramount focus for Medlab Middle East. Even small conservation efforts can lead to significant environmental and cost benefits for laboratories, this is why laboratory sustainability is becoming a top priority."

Al Hayat welcomes two new surgeons

Dr Sukumara Vengail and Dr Hema Tadimari - both renowned consultant laparoscopic and general surgeons with vast experience of more than 25yrs in the field of General Surgery - have joined Al Hayat International Hospital.

Dr Hema has 29 years of experience in General, Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgery. She is an outstanding surgeon, holds special interest in complex bariatric and metabolic surgery and performs all types of abdominal, breast, simple, complex and recurrent hernia and anorectal surgeries. She is one among the very few lady surgeons available in the private healthcare sector in the country.

Dr Vengail holds special interests in doing all types of simple and complex laparoscopic surgeries and has been trained in handling complex abdominal, thyroid, parotid, anorectal and varicose vein surgeries. He is also well experienced in performing all types of hernia and painless



Dr Sukumara Vengail



Dr Hema Tadimari

minimal wound hemorrhoids surgery. He also holds the additional responsibility as Medical Director of Al Hayat Hospital.

Dr K P Raman, founder and chairman of Al Hayat Interna-

tional Hospital, said, "We welcome both the doctors to Al Hayat team. Appointment of both these doctors are part of expanding our specialties and to offer affordable treatments for various General Surgery cases. We have been expanding our expertise in almost all specialties since our inception in 1995. Over the years, Al Hayat has grown from a single doctor cardiology practice to a multi-specialty hospital with services for the whole family, including in-patient services."

Avinash Nair, general manager, Operations, said, "our objective is to gradually ensure a comprehensive solution to all General Surgery cases. We welcome Dr Sukumara Vengail and Dr Hema Tadimari to our team of surgeons, and their induction will help us serve the citizens and residents of Oman more effectively. Al Hayat is fully equipped to ensure that patients get the most appropriate care all the time."

UN experts call for independent probe into crimes committed in Israel, Palestine

Athens/Gaza - A group of UN experts called for full and independent investigations into crimes committed in Israel and Palestine in a joint statement on Monday.

Urging Israel, the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and authorities in Gaza to cooperate fully with the investigations, they said "independent investigators must be given the necessary resources, support and access required to conduct prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into crimes allegedly committed by all parties to the conflict".

"The duty to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity, including any act of summary or extrajudicial killing, torture or other outrages on human dignity, is a fundamental legal obligation," they added.

They also called on the international community to work so that all those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity as well as for any other international crimes committed in the conflict are swiftly brought to justice, especially those with command responsibility.

"There is no statute of limitation for such crimes, and they fall under universal jurisdiction, which means that courts in any country can exercise their authority to prosecute those responsible, regardless of their nationality and the country where the crimes were committed."

Israel launched a massive military offensive in the Gaza Strip following a cross-border attack by the Palestinian group Hamas



Some Palestinians injured are seen at the Al-Shifa Hospital, in Gaza which houses thousands of injured and displaced people (Anadolu Agency)

on October 7.

It has since killed at least 14,854 Palestinians, including 6,150 children and more than 4,000 women, according to health authorities in the enclave.

The official Israeli death toll stands at 1,200.

On Monday, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said that once the humanitarian pause ends in Gaza, the army would resume its military operation throughout the entire Gaza Strip with greater strength.

"You now have a few days. We will return to fighting. We will use the same amount of power and more," Gallant said while meeting with Israeli troops, according to the Times of Israel news website. "We will fight in the entire Strip," he added.

"Remember that while you are organising and resting and investigating, the enemy is also doing the same," he said, referring to the Palestinian group Hamas.

Qatar announced an agreement late on Monday on extending a four-day humanitarian pause between Israel and Hamas in Gaza for an additional two days, under which further prisoner exchanges will be carried out.

Duty to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity, including any act of extrajudicial killing or other outrages on human dignity, is a fundamental legal obligation

UN EXPERTS

fighters also opened fire at the Israeli soldiers, who responded with gunfire, the IDF said, adding that 'a number of' Israeli soldiers were lightly injured in the incidents. According to the statement, the Israeli troops were stationed in positions as per the framework of the humanitarian truce between Israel and Hamas.

Violation of truce?

Meanwhile, three explosive devices were activated near Israeli troops in two different places of the northern Gaza Strip, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) said in a statement on Tuesday.

In one of the cases, Hamas

in the northern Gaza Strip. "We are committed to the truce that Israel has committed to and we call on the mediators to put pressure on Israel to comply with all the terms of the truce on the ground and in the air," Obeida said in a statement.

The EU called for the acceleration of humanitarian aid entry into the Gaza Strip on Tuesday. Speaking at a panel at the Press Club Brussels, the European Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarcic, drew attention to the significant volume of humanitarian aid that entered Gaza since the beginning of a humanitarian pause on November 24.

But he underscored that the screening process at the Rafah border crossing on the Gaza-Israeli border takes too long. Screening capacity should be increased and more fuel should be allowed into Gaza, said Lenarcic. Meanwhile, the US is urging Israel not to replicate the mass displacement of Palestinians that resulted from its invasion of the northern Gaza Strip when it pursues its campaign in the south of the coastal enclave, according to two senior American officials.

The officials, who spoke on Monday to reporters on condition of anonymity, said 2mn Palestinians are now residing in south and central Gaza.

Many were forced from their homes in the densely populated north amid relentless Israeli bombardment that has leveled wide swathes of the coastal enclave.

Agencies

Blinken to visit Israel, West Bank

Washington DC, US - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit Israel, the West Bank, Belgium, North Macedonia and UAE this week. It is Blinken's third visit to Israel since Hamas launched an attack on southern Israel on October 7.

During his visit to Israel and the West Bank, Blinken will discuss Israel's right to defend itself in accordance with international humanitarian law, continued efforts to secure the release of remaining hostages and protecting civilian life during Israel's counter-offensive against Hamas in Gaza. He will also discuss the principles he outlined in Tokyo on November 8, the US Department of State announced in a statement.

"The Secretary will also discuss the principles he outlined in Tokyo on November 8, tangible steps to further the creation of a future Palestinian state, and the need to prevent the conflict from widening," the statement said.

On Monday, Blinken expressed happiness over the re-



Antony Blinken (AFP)

lease of hostages from Gaza, including a young American girl. He stated that US will continue to make efforts until all hostages are released.

Taking to X, he stated: "Good to see more hostages released today - including a young American girl who turned four just days ago. Our efforts will continue until all hostages are set free."

Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden on Monday welcomed the additional two-day truce between Israel and Hamas. He thanked Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi and Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani for

their commitment to this process and in reaching the agreement.

In a statement, Biden stated: "I have remained deeply engaged over the last few days to ensure that this deal-brokered and sustained through extensive US mediation and diplomacy-can continue to deliver results. Thus far, more than 50 hostages have now been released and returned to their families."

He said: "The humanitarian pause has also enabled a significant surge in additional humanitarian assistance to the innocent civilians who are suffering across the Gaza strip."

He noted that the humanitarian pause has enabled a significant surge in additional humanitarian assistance to civilians who are suffering across the Gaza strip.

"The United States has led the humanitarian response into Gaza-building on years of work as the largest funder of humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people. We are taking full advantage of the pause in fighting

to increase the amount of humanitarian aid moving into Gaza, and we will continue our efforts to build a future of peace and dignity for the Palestinian people," he added.

Apart from visiting the West Bank and Israel, Blinken will travel to Belgium to attend the NATO Foreign Ministers Meeting, including the first foreign ministers meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council, according to a US Department of State statement.

He will highlight NATO's steadfast commitment to Ukraine in its fight against Russia's aggression, emphasise US support for democracy and regional stability in the Western Balkans, and discuss priorities for the Washington Summit in July 2024.

During his visit to North Macedonia, Antony Blinken will engage with OSCE counterparts, reaffirming the US' steadfast commitment to the OSCE and its core mission of promoting security, stability, and cooperation among states.

ANI



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un

N Korean satellite captures photos of US strategic spaces

Seoul, South Korea - The military spy satellite that was launched by North Korea on November 21 has taken 'in detail' photos of the White House, the Pentagon, and nuclear aircraft carriers docked at a US naval base, Yonhap News reported.

The North Korean leader of the communist state, Kim Jong-un, saw the photos in an operations report from the Pyongyang General Control Centre of the National Aerospace Technology Administration on Monday morning and dawn Tuesday, the

official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

The images were taken of the White House and the Pentagon at 11:36pm on Monday.

The spy satellite also took photos of Naval Station Norfolk, Newport News Shipyard, and a Virginia airfield, all located in Virginia, at 11:35pm on Monday. Newport News Shipyard is known for providing submarines to the US Navy, while Naval Station Norfolk is the home port of the US Navy's Fleet Forces Command.

ANI

NZ ditches smoking ban to fund tax cuts

Wellington, New Zealand - New Zealand's newly-elected government has reversed a ground-breaking smoking ban initially aimed at saving lives and preventing youth from taking up smoking, CNN reported.

The move has sparked outrage among public health officials and anti-tobacco groups, who are dismayed by the decision to abandon the ban to finance tax cuts.

Enacted a year ago, the anti-smoking law prohibited the sale of tobacco to individuals born on or after January 1, 2009, with implementation scheduled for July 2024, accompanied by severe penalties, including fines up to NZ\$150,000 for violations, as reported by CNN.

Prime Minister Chris Luxon, from the conservative National Party, now leading a coalition with New Zealand First party and ACT New Zealand party, justified the reversal, citing disagreement with certain aspects of the policy and expressing concerns about a potential surge in the black market for tobacco. Luxon emphasised that his administration is committed to reducing tobacco use, pointing to declining smoking rates in the country.

In conversation with CNN affiliate Radio New Zealand, Luxon said his government would continue education programmes.

ANI

World leaders must break cycle of global warming at COP28: UN chief

United Nations, US - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres emphasised on Monday that world leaders attending the COP28 climate conference this week need to interrupt the perilous progression of global warming before a 'critical tipping point' is encountered.

The UN chief was briefing reporters at the UN headquarters in New York after seeing for himself over the weekend the 'profoundly shocking' speed at which ice is melting in Antarctica - three times faster than the rate in the early 1990s.



Antonio Guterres speaks to the press in New York, on Monday (Xinhua)

COP28, which refers to the 28th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, is scheduled to be held in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, from November 30 to December 12.

Recent data shows that the current extent of sea ice at the South Pole is 1.5mn sqkm less than the average for this season, an area equivalent to the total combined landmass of Portugal, Spain, France, and Germany.

"What happens in Antarctica doesn't stay in Antarctica,"

Guterres said. "We live in an interconnected world. Melting sea ice means rising seas. And that directly endangers lives and livelihoods in coastal communities across the globe."

He pointed out that the consequences extend beyond the impact of floods and saltwater intrusion on food and water resources, affecting the sustainability of small islands and numerous coastal cities around the globe.

"The movement of waters around Antarctica distributes heat, nutrients and carbon

around the world, helping to regulate our climate and regional weather patterns," he told correspondents outside the UN Security Council.

"But that system is slowing as the southern Ocean grows warmer and less dense. Further slowdown - or entire breakdown - would spell catastrophe." With no let-up in fossil fuel extraction 'we're heading towards a calamitous three-degree Celsius temperature rise by the end of the century', he warned.

Xinhua

INDIA



Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami meets the workers who were trapped inside the Silkyara tunnel after the rescue operation, in Uttarkashi on Tuesday (ANI)

All 41 trapped workers rescued successfully from Silkyara tunnel

Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand - After tireless efforts of rescuers which continued for 16 days, all 41 trapped workers were evacuated successfully from the Silkyara tunnel in Uttarakhand. Meanwhile, locals distributed sweets outside the Silkyara tunnel as trapped workers were being rescued from the tunnel. Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami met the workers who have been rescued along with Union Minister of State General (Retd) V K Singh. "Initial health checkup of all the workers is being done in the temporary medical camp built in the tunnel," Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami tweeted. Moreover, Union Minister

Nitin Gadkari said that he is relieved and happy as 41 trapped labourers in the Silkyara Tunnel collapse have been successfully rescued. "I am completely relieved and happy as 41 trapped labour-

ments and agencies complemented each other despite facing numerous challenges. Tireless and sincere efforts by everyone, coupled with prayers from all, have made this operation possible. The dedicated en-

operation. "Deep appreciation for the international rescue experts, administrative officers, and the Uttarakhand government for their swift and effective response. I take this opportunity to thank the PM @narendramodi Ji, who has been constantly monitoring the entire operation and providing guidance and support whenever required. CM Uttarakhand @pushkardhami Ji and my colleague @Gen_VKSingh Ji almost camped there during the operation. Last but not least, I thank the officers and engineers of MoRTH for their sincere efforts," he further said. As workers were rescued, Kin of Anil Bedia, a worker from Ranchi, who was trapped in the

Silkyara tunnel said: "We're feeling very good...we hope he comes out soon..." "The exact time of breakthrough was 7:05pm. Uttarakhand CM, Minister of State for Road Transport and Highways and Civil Aviation Gen VK Singh are present there," said Harpal Singh, Project Head, Zoji-la Tunnel. CM Dhami appreciated the morale and courage of the workers and personnel engaged in the rescue operation. A portion of the tunnel caved in on November 12, the debris falling in the 60-metre stretch on the Silkyara side of the tunnel, trapping 41 labourers inside the under-construction structure. ANI

This was a well-coordinated effort by multiple agencies, marking one of the most significant rescue operations in recent years

NITIN GADKARI



ers in the Silkyara Tunnel collapse have been successfully rescued. This was a well-coordinated effort by multiple agencies, marking one of the most significant rescue operations in recent years. Various depart-

deavours of the rescue teams have yielded favourable results," Gadkari posted on X (formerly Twitter). He further expressed gratitude to each agency and individual involved in this rescue

operation. ANI

'India can help Canada in Nijjar murder probe'

Ottawa, Canada - Indian High Commissioner in Canada, Sanjay Kumar Verma said that, and India is only asking for 'specific and relevant' evidence in the killing of India designated terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar so that it can help Canada in reaching the conclusion of the investigation.

He further said that instead of the differences, the India-Canada relations should focus on convergence, as New Delhi is still open for business relations and urges Ottawa to send more business delegations here.

In an interview with Canadian journalist Tahir Gora at TAG TV Toronto, the Indian High Commissioner said: "We have always said that India is ready to look into any specific and relevant shared by our Canadian friends and take it forward in a logical way that is legally defensible in both the countries."

On being asked if India is looking into the allegations and concerns made by Canadian PM Justin Trudeau, Verma said that India is only asking for relevant information so that New Delhi can help Ottawa reach the conclusion of the case.

"India is only asking for specific and relevant information so that we can help you. We can help the Canadian investigators to reach their conclusion, to the extent that it will be viable for them to go for the legal action...I will urge my Canadian friends and colleagues. I can assure them that we will certainly look into them," he added.

The Indian envoy further said that there is an understanding of New Delhi's concerns from the Canadian side but more action needs to be seen on the ground.

"We have voiced our concerns on various occasions and not only today from through our



Sanjay Kumar Verma

historical relationship which we have here. I believe that there is an understanding of our concern in the Canadian policy-making circles and decision-making circles. I have seen many statements coming from the Canadian leadership respecting Indian sovereignty and territorial integrity and I have no doubt about it," Verma said.

He added: "We need to see more on the ground and through the dialogue. I am sure we'll be able to see that convergence on the ground as well and we'll see any semblance of use of Canadian soil by Canadian citizens to target and challenge Indian sovereignty."

The Indian envoy further said that New Delhi and Ottawa have a long friendship but the two countries are seeing 'divergence' on this one issue. He further stressed that instead of focusing on divergence, the two countries should focus on convergence and take them forward. "Trade is an issue which is absolutely separate...it is a convergent. Trade is something that brings us together, and I would suggest, that our friends, both in the Indo-Canadian community and wider Canadian community take the advantage of current economic growth and innovative growth." ANI

Kerala: Missing girl found by police after 20 hours

Kollam, Kerala - A missing six-year-old girl who was kidnapped from the Pooyappally area was found by police after 20 hours in Kerala's Kollam on Tuesday afternoon, the police said. As per the police, the girl was found in Ashramam Maidanam, a ground in Kollam city, apparently abandoned by the kidnappers. The six-year-old was abducted from the Pooyappally

area when she was heading to tuition class with her eight-year-old brother on Monday evening, the police said. The kidnappers, suspected to be four in number and including one woman, came in a white car and abducted the child, the police added. The police said that the child's mother had received a ransom call of Rs 5 lakh. ANI

Bill Nelson arrives 'to strengthen' NASA-ISRO ties

New Delhi - NASA Administrator Bill Nelson touched down in India on Tuesday, expressing his enthusiasm for a week of meetings and events aimed at strengthening the partnership between NASA and ISRO. He emphasised that India is a leader in space and is looking forward to a productive visit. "Touchdown in India! Ready to embark on a week of engaging meetings and events to grow @NASA's partnership with @isro. India is a leader in space and we're looking forward to a

productive visit," Nelson said in a post on X. He will also be visiting the UAE for a series of meetings with key government officials. Nelson will also meet with space officials in both countries to deepen bilateral cooperation across a broad range of innovation and research-related areas, especially in human exploration and Earth science, the American space agency NASA said in a release. Nelson's visit to India will fulfill a commitment as part of the US and India initiative on



NASA Administrator Bill Nelson

Critical and Emerging Technology initiated by President Joe Biden. In the India leg, Nelson will visit several locations, including the Bengaluru-based facilities where the NISAR spacecraft, a joint Earth-observing mission between NASA and its Indian counterpart ISRO, is undergoing testing and integration for launch in 2024. NISAR is short for NASA ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar. NISAR is an equal collaboration between NASA and ISRO

and marks the first time the two agencies have cooperated on hardware development for an Earth-observing mission. While in the UAE, Nelson will also participate in the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference. Also, during the visit, students in each country will have the opportunity to meet with Nelson to discuss science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education and their roles as members of the Artemis Generation. ANI

Afghan refugees forced to survive freezing winter

Kabul, Afghanistan - World Food Programme (WFP) Director in Afghanistan, Hsiao-Wei Lee, has expressed deep concern regarding the forced deportation of refugees from Pakistan ahead of the harsh winter season, Khaama Press reported. Lee highlighted that more than one million people are expected to leave Pakistan, with over 3,70,000 already arriving in Afghanistan. These refugees are being compelled to return to Afghanistan during what is considered the 'most challenging time of the year'. Lee emphasised the grim prospects for these families, stating that they are uncertain about their survival in the upcoming freezing winter.



This file photo shows Afghan refugees arriving with their belongings on trucks from Pakistan at the Torkham border on November 1 (AFP)

Notably, Afghanistan faces an unforgiving winter, making it extremely challenging for the returnees. Unfortunately, there are no welcoming arms awaiting

these families in their home country, according to Khaama Press. The returnees have also voiced their dissatisfaction with

the behaviour of Pakistani forces and are requesting that the deportations be halted or that they be allowed to take their belongings with them. Meanwhile, despite calls from the UN and human rights groups to stop the deportations, Pakistani authorities are planning to complete the process by January, further intensifying the dire situation, Khaama Press reported. Experts as well as international aid organisations have raised concerns about the lack of transparency highlighting the risk of foreigners entering Afghanistan under the guise of nationals and raised alarm over the harsh conditions faced by Afghan returnees in the country, especially during the severe winter.

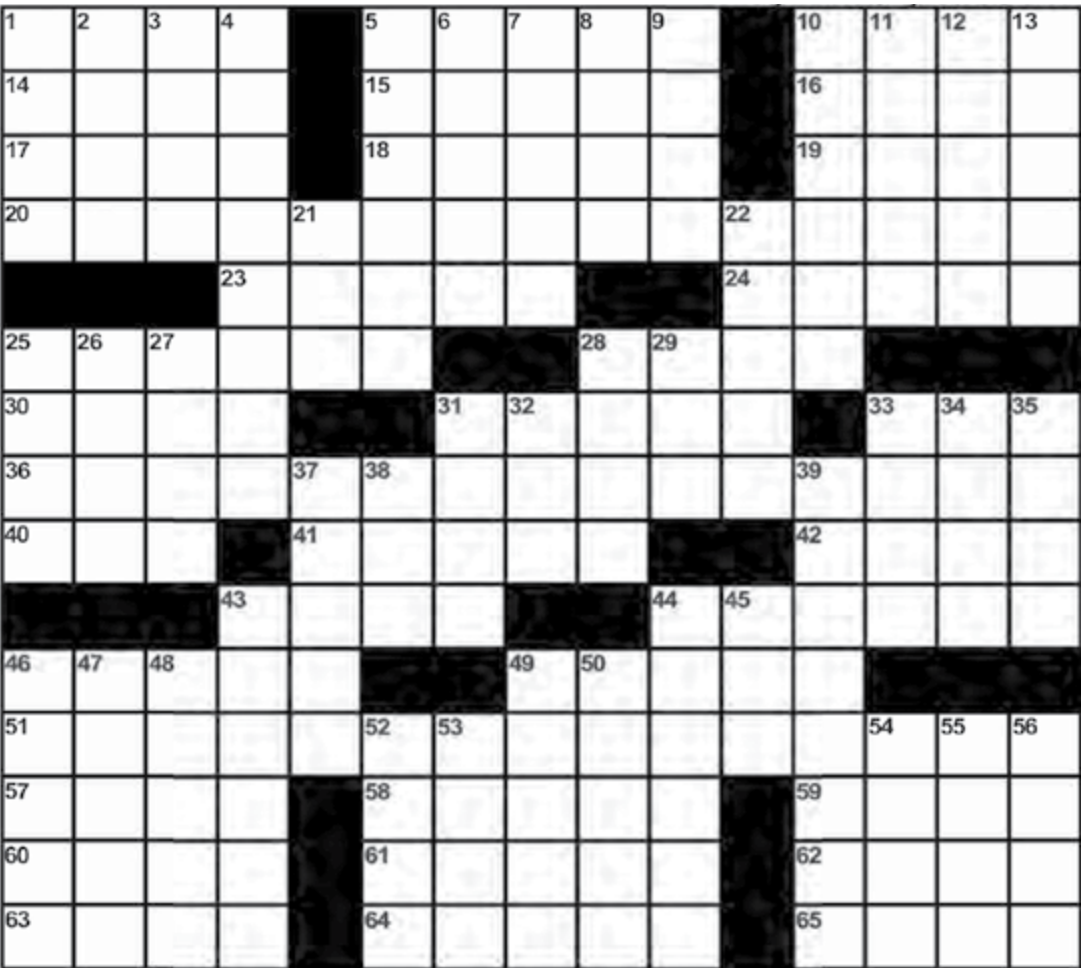
The United Nations has also voiced concern about the welfare of Afghan citizens who have arrived in Afghanistan and has called on the Pakistan government to halt the expulsion of more than one million Afghan refugees, at least during the winter season, Khaama Press reported. The World Health Organisation had previously said that in order to offer medical care to refugees who either willingly or involuntarily return to the nation from Pakistan, they would require ten million dollars in help, reported TOLO news. The global health body also issued a warning over the spread of infectious diseases among refugees who are returning home. ANI

Pakistan: PTI to conduct intra-party elections

Islamabad, Pakistan - The core committee of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) will be conducting intra-party elections within the time frame given by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), Geo News reported citing *The News* reported on Tuesday. PTI's approval comes days after the electoral body ruled that its intra-party polls were not 'transparent', ordering the party to hold new elections if it wishes to retain its symbol. The party was, therefore, asked by the commission to hold fresh elections within 20 days in a reserved verdict announced on November 23.

In the verdict, the ECP stated that the PTI failed to hold free and fair intra-party elections, adding that the polls were objectionable and controversial, Geo News reported. "PTI's intra-party elections cannot be accepted," stated the verdict, directing it to hold polls and submit the record within seven days. The party's Central Media Department said its members discussed crucial issues including the country's current political climate, the party's organisational activities and the intra-party polls during the core committee meeting. ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Rough file
- 5) Cold shower?
- 10) Very excited
- 14) Way, way off
- 15) Classic John Wayne film
- 16) "Ain't gonna happen"
- 17) "Frasier" actress Gilpin
- 18) "Encore!"
- 19) "Hold_ your hat!"
- 20) Stung a second time
- 23) Make president
- 24) Battery projection
- 25) Barroom fights
- 28) It's historic?
- 30) Exercise for the flexible
- 31) Organic fertilizer
- 33) Object stared at in disbelief
- 36) Certain condiment
- 40) Chapter in a history book
- 41) Count of jazz
- 42) Paste alternative
- 43) Legend's cousin
- 44) Fine wool
- 46) Book of many places
- 49) Crooner Sam
- 51) Container ship, e.g.
- 57) "Swan Lake" costume

- 58) Taper off, as wind
- 59) Kind of palm
- 60) Advil target
- 61) Aficionado
- 62) Units of work
- 63) Casting need
- 64) Looks of wickedness
- 65) Backtalk

DOWN

- 1) Wholly absorbed
- 2) Not many
- 3) Wrapped Indian garment
- 4) Bargain hunter's accomplishment
- 5) Tends to stubble
- 6) Mr. Spock's forte
- 7) Make new laws
- 8) Cut a scene
- 9) "Beloved" author Morrison
- 10) Consecrate with oil
- 11) Muppet with a hooked nose
- 12) Didn't take part (with "out")
- 13) Rock containing crystals
- 21) Building addition, sometimes

- 22) Type of jar
- 25) Computer info quantity
- 26) Laugh like a lion?
- 27) Taj Mahal location
- 28) Cover ground?
- 29) Singer DiFranco
- 31) "Gee whillikers!"
- 32) Prefix with "cycle" or "sex"
- 33) Jamaican fruit
- 34) Roman satyr
- 35) Popular cookie
- 37) Bottomless pit
- 38) Gangster's rapid-firer
- 39) Ways out
- 43) Former Panamanian leader Noriega
- 44) Workers with vans
- 45) _ out a living
- 46) Essence of roses
- 47) Event that buries hatchets
- 48) Carpenter's rotating device
- 49) Yearn for
- 50) Playful aquatic mammal
- 52) Gloomy atmosphere

- 53) Slender woodwind
- 54) Gilbert of "Roseanne"
- 55) Baker's dozen?
- 56) It's not for a winner

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You don't always have to plan ahead if you want to travel, especially right now when your wanderlust has reached near epidemic proportions. Strike out on a little adventure today when you get the time. You don't have to dust off your passport and head to the airport in order to go somewhere cool. How about just checking out what's up on the other side of town? Making a neat new discovery is easy when you're as open to it as you are.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You need to find a balance between what you want out of life and what you know you can achieve. It's not that you have to settle for less; it's just that you need to get realistic about what you can accomplish. If you can be adaptable with your expectations, you'll start finding more success coming your way. Socially, you need to get back in touch with someone you haven't seen in a while. They have a question that only you can answer.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Nothing can stop you from the good times today. Your creativity and ingenuity can help you make anything fun. Even waiting for a dental appointment can be a good time when you're on the case! You mind is wide open, you're thinking positively, and you're ready to connect with other people in a new way. You seek inspiration, but it's not a frustrating quest. It's a joyous exploration that's full of adventure and celebration.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which of these is not one of the Seven Dwarfs?

- A. Bashful
- B. Spacey
- C. Grumpy
- D. Sleepy

02. Which sport, practised since at least the 8th century BC, is still current and was celebrated on the special 10 Greek coin minted in 2003?

- A. Wrestling
- B. Javelin throwing
- C. Discus throwing
- D. Sword fighting

03. Which of these historical figures is most associated with the year 1865?

- A. Guy Fawkes
- B. George Washington
- C. Joan of Arc
- D. Abraham Lincoln

Answers: 1. B 2. D 3. D



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Your public self and private self want different things right now, and it's starting to make you feel weird and out of place wherever you are. But the good news is that a confluence is coming soon, and your goals for your personal and professional lives will be in harmony. They might still not be totally aligned, but they'll be close enough to each other to enable you to take a deep breath and smile again. Things are falling into place!



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Your wildest ideas never come at a convenient time, but that shouldn't stop you from pursuing a good one! Today, when you think up something just so crazy that it might work, you have to do whatever it takes to get the time and the resources you need to make it happen. Use your creativity to start a buzz and get other people excited enough to want to help you. Try a few experiments and see what you can make happen before the sun sets tonight.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

If you're in the middle of making any type of travel plans, try to finalize them today. If you leave anything up in the air, chances are good that it will fall through the cracks. If other members of your party aren't quite ready to commit, you'll either have to push them harder than you want to or make up their minds for them. Being more assertive could actually be fun, and it will remind you how much power you really have.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

One of your partners in romance, life, business, or school has changed recently. It's still taking you some time to get used to it. They aren't quite the same person you always thought they were, but you have to get comfortable with the fact that they might be happier now than they were back then. If you care about them, support them on their journey. Give them some space and wait for them to get back in touch with you.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

They say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but you might be getting a bit fed up with someone who seems to be following in your footsteps a bit too closely right now. It's nice to see that someone admires you, but it's not so nice to see them lose their own identity. Have a talk with this carbon copy and ask them why they've been making the changes. Help them find better solutions, but don't let on that you feel they're borrowing from you.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

An opportunity you thought was already pretty sweet is looking even more attractive today. The big question is how you can make sure you get picked for it. Just stay flexible and be prepared. Make it clear that you're ready to go at a moment's notice and ready to take on anything those in power are willing to give you. Don't be afraid to be obvious about it either. There's no point in beating around the bush when it comes to something like this.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Watch for differing ideas that could cause conflict in your group. Not everyone is on the same page. You might feel the need to create harmony with everyone, but why put yourself through all that work? A little disagreement can be a good thing. It gets interesting conversations started and can spur innovation. So let whatever happens happen and feel free to jump into a debate or two yourself. You've been saving up a great idea and now might be a good time to share it



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

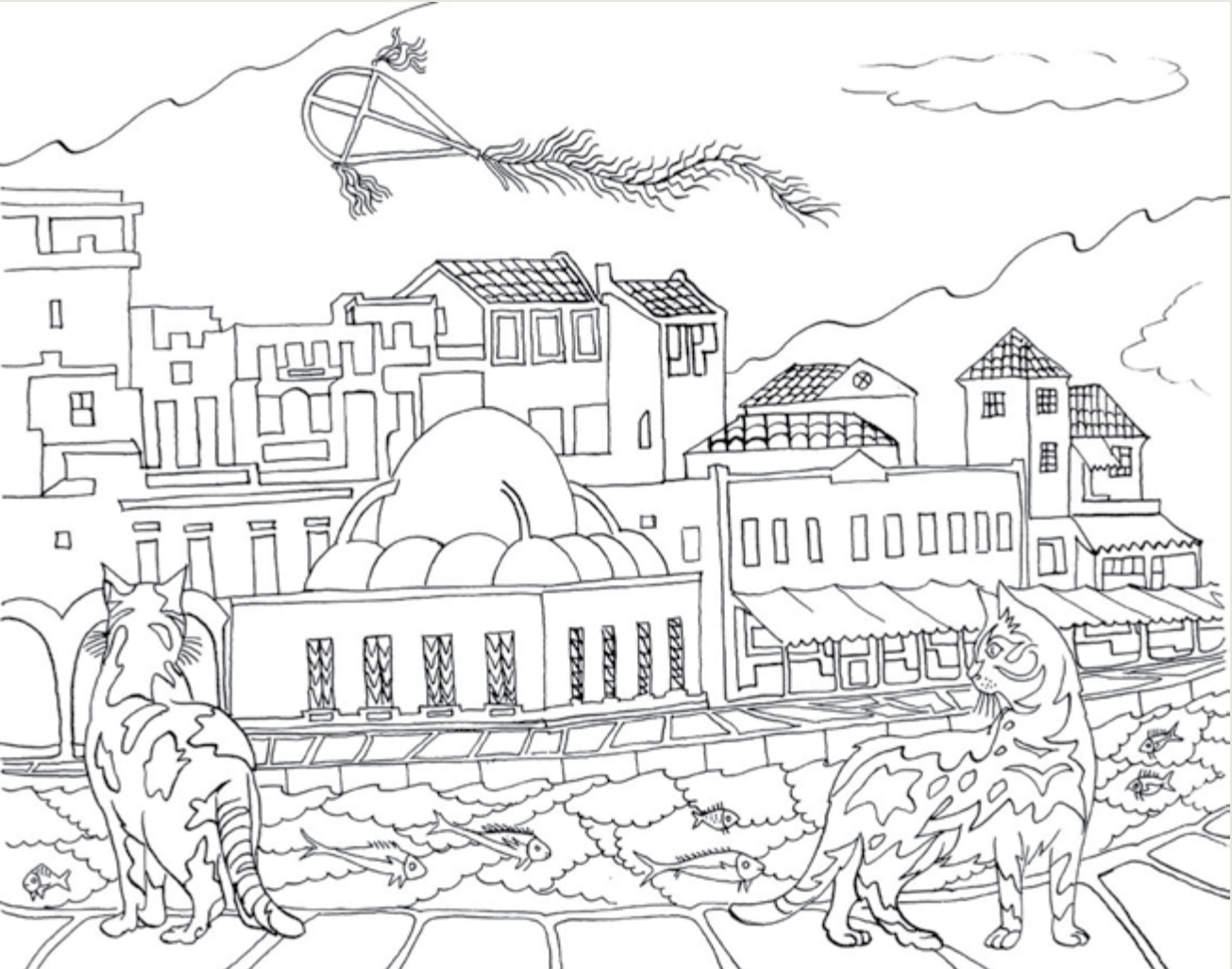
You've been introducing more spontaneity into your life, and all signs point to this being a good move. Sure, it might have encouraged some outbursts from friends, but it hasn't caused any real drama, at least nothing you need to concern yourself about. They might be having a tough time adjusting to the new you, but you're loving the increased positive energy and the unpredictability of your life now. Keep on changing and keep people guessing about what your next move might be.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Don't pull rank on your underlings or associates today. You have power because you know how to use it, not because you know how to lord it over people. You'll be much happier if you join with everyone and participate in whatever the group is doing. Connecting with others will create a lot of warm feelings and the possibility to grow even closer than you are. You have the ability to balance your authority with your friendliness, so use it.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

T	L	A	N
M	I	L	W
L	S	O	E
B	G	B	U

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

TOP DRAW

Ten-man Al Nassr hold Persepolis to ensure progress as group winners

Riyadh - Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr confirmed their qualification for the last 16 of the AFC Champions League as Group E winners on Monday despite playing most of their 0-0 draw against Persepolis FC in Riyadh with 10 men.

The result means Luis Castro's side cannot be overtaken at the summit by second placed Persepolis with one round of matches remaining after Al Nassr held on to take a point despite Ali Lajami's sending off in the 17th minute.

Al Nassr move onto 13 points from five games with Persepolis five points behind and the result also means that Al Duhail have been eliminated after the Qatari side had knocked Istiklol out of the competition earlier in the day.

The Iranians can still take one of the three best runners-up spots available in the last 16 when they take on Al Duhail in the final group game on December 5.

Despite missing the competition's leading scorer Anderson Talisca, Al Nassr were pushing for an early opener when Cristiano Ronaldo went down in the area under a challenge from Soroush Rafiei but the prospect of a penalty was ruled out following a VAR check.

Aymeric Laporte sent his weak header into the arms of Alireza Beiranvand a quarter of an hour into the game while moments later Al Nassr were reduced to 10 men when Lajami was shown the red card for his reckless studs-up challenge on Milad Sarlak. With a man advantage Persepolis increased the pressure with Mehdi Torabi shooting wide in the 24th



Al Nassr's Cristiano Ronaldo in action against Persepolis

Ronaldo tells ref to overturn penalty

Riyadh - Al Nassr praised their forward Cristiano Ronaldo for his display of sportsmanship during Monday's Asian Champions League encounter against Persepolis after he told the referee to overturn a penalty decision awarded in his favour.

During the Group E match held in Riyadh, the Former Man United and Real Madrid star was involved in a challenge by Soroush Rafiei that led to the referee initially awarding a penalty. However, Persepolis players immediately contested the decision, and Ronaldo

joined them in expressing his belief that the tackle did not warrant a penalty.

Ronaldo's intervention prompted the referee to reevaluate the incident using the pitchside monitor, ultimately leading to the reversal of the decision.

minute before Al Nassr regrouped and Ronaldo smashed a long range attempt high and wide as the game moved into injury

time at the end of the first half.

Persepolis did have the ball in the net eight minutes into the second half when Shahab Zahedi

struck from close range, but that effort was ruled to be offside, while Nawaf Al Aqidi parried Sarlak's effort to safety a minute

later. Ronaldo then bent his effort narrowly wide of Beiranvand's left post as the game approached the hour mark before the Portuguese was substituted after suffering a neck injury earlier in the second half.

Al Ittihad made it four wins in five when they consigned AGMK FC to their fifth straight defeat with a 2-1 score at the OKMK Sports Complex in Group B on Monday. AGMK, knocked out already, will play their final game in the current edition next week against Air Force Club of Iraq, while Al Ittihad face IR Iran's Sepahan on the same day.



Fulham's Willian scores against Wolves on Monday

Two Willian penalties help Fulham edge past Wolves in five-goal thriller

Fulham, United Kingdom - Two Willian penalties, including one deep into second-half stoppage time, edged Fulham past Wolverhampton Wanderers, winning 3-2 at Craven Cottage to claim their first victory in five Premier League matches.

Marco Silva made two changes from the side that lost 3-1 at Aston Villa, with Harrison Reed starting in place of the suspended Joao Palhinha, while Tom Cairney replaced Bobby De Cordova-Reid. The average age of Fulham's starting line-up was

30 years and 36 days, the oldest of any Premier League XI this season.

There was one change to the Wolves team that beat Tottenham 2-1 in their previous match, meanwhile, with Santiago Bueno handed his Premier League debut in place of the suspended Craig Dawson.

Fulham went in front after only seven minutes, with Alex Iwobi flicking in from Antonee Robinson's cutback to score his first Premier League goal for the club.

'VAR causing a big problem at the moment'

Fulham, United Kingdom - Wolves manager Gary O'Neil, a longstanding supporter of VAR, expressed frustration with the system following his team's 3-2 defeat to Fulham on Monday when two penalties were awarded against his side.

O'Neil voiced his concerns to reporters, highlighting the inconsistency in VAR decisions. "I've always been for VAR, but I think it's causing a big problem at the moment," he stated, referencing the penalties given against his

team. "The fact that the first one isn't deemed a clear and obvious error and the second one is, I just think VAR has cost us there."

"Maybe tonight has finally turned me against VAR when I thought it would help, but it doesn't." O'Neil pointed out the discrepancies between the two penalties, saying that while the referee admitted an error in the first instance involving Nelson Semedo, there was disagreement regarding the decision on Harry Wilson's challenge.

CLASSIFIEDS

JOB VACANCY

Inviting applications for the post of production and factory in charge - steel fabrication from those specialised in steel pipes fabrication, structural steel, tanks, vessels, skid packages; with 5 years of experience and having a driving licence email: najma@alrouba.com

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Al Faisal Al Zubair (L) with Martin Konrad (C) and Fabian Schiller

Al Zubair, Konrad and Schiller set to begin Asian Le Mans Series campaign In Malaysia

Muscat - The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed trio of Al Faisal Al Zubair, Martin Konrad and Fabian Schiller begin their challenge for honours in the Asian Le Mans series at the Sepang International Circuit in Malaysia this weekend.

The Omani, the Austrian and the German have entered a Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo in the competitive GT class in the series that makes a return to South East Asia with this weekend's double header. Competitors then move on to the Dubai Autodrome and the Yas Marina circuit in Abu Dhabi in early February next year for the remaining rounds.

Al-Zubair teamed up with Konrad and German racer Luca Stolz at two rounds of the last Asian Le Mans series and finished third and seventh in the two four-hour races at the Dubai Autodrome.

Al Zubair said: "I am really looking forward to the start of

Asian Le Mans at the end of this week. It's a championship where we finished strong last year by winning both races in Abu Dhabi and we finished second in the championship. This year, we are aiming to go one better. We do understand that there is an extra round this year. The entry list also seems a lot stronger than last year.

"This is something we do bring into account and we know the competition will be tough. Myself, Konrad and Fabi haven't been to Sepang before, so we will be learning the track as well. But we feel confident and hope to be on the pace relatively quickly. We will try and go for the win and try and get the Le Mans entry - that is our target."

This year's Al Manar Racing Mercedes had been built and prepared by Getspeed from its base at the Nürburgring in Germany.



Red Bull's Max Verstappen won 19 of the 22 races this season while his teammate Sergio Perez took two victories.

Horner reflects on 'phenomenal' Red Bull season

Abu Dhabi - The Red Bull has swept all before it this season, breaking a string of records in the hands of the now three-time world champion Max Verstappen. With his team mate also chipping in with two early season wins, that Red Bull car has victories in 21 of the 22 races this year, a staggering feat that dwarfs comparisons to other eras of dominance.

Verstappen's win at the final race of the season made it 19 victories for him, with the anomaly of Singapore the only weekend where Red Bull didn't stand on the top step of the rostrum. They also managed to win five of the six Sprints between them too,

Oscar Piastri in Qatar the only driver able to get the better of the RB19 in the shorter format.

"This car is going to go down in the history books as a very, very special car," said Team Principal Christian Horner. "To have won 21 races out of the 22... just missing out in Singapore leaves room for improvement. But, I mean, what a year.

"I think more than anything, for all the men and women behind the scenes back at the factory, across the whole business... all the support staff as well have made this happen. They've played their role in delivering this car and operating it.

"We've had 22 different ven-

ues; we've won at 21 of them. There's been rain, wind, all kinds of conditions and strategy. It's just been the most phenomenal year and everybody can take a huge amount of pride in what they've achieved."

It wasn't just the RB19's obvious pace that made this year so spectacular for the team as they picked up accolades for most wins in a season, most wins by a single driver, most wins by one driver from pole, most points and their first ever 1-2 finish in the drivers' championship.

The RB19 was also incredibly reliable, with a strong Power Unit delivering the goods on the straights.



Christian Horner celebrates the victory with Max Verstappen

There's been rain, wind, all kinds of conditions and strategy. It's just been the most phenomenal year and everybody can take a huge amount of pride in what they've achieved

CHRISTIAN HORNER



Shubman Gill

Shubman Gill appointed captain of Gujarat Titans

Mumbai, India - Shubman Gill has been appointed captain of Gujarat Titans a day after the franchise traded Hardik Pandya to Mumbai Indians. Hardik had led the Titans in 2022 and 2023, and the 2024 season will be Gill's first leadership assignment in the IPL.

"I am delighted and proud to assume the captaincy of Gujarat Titans and thank the franchise for their trust in me to lead such a fine team," Gill said in a statement. "We have had two exceptional seasons and I keenly look forward to leading the team with our exciting brand of cricket."

Gill, 24, had started his IPL career with Kolkata Knight Riders in 2018 and was released ahead of the auction in 2022. As a new franchise in the IPL, the Titans were allowed to sign up to three players ahead of the 2022 auction and they brought Gill on board for INR 7 crore, along with Hardik and Rashid Khan for INR 15 crore each.

Gill scored 483 runs in 16 matches in IPL 2022, top-scoring with an unbeaten 45 in the final against Rajasthan Royals as Titans won the title in their inaugu-

ral season. He was their highest run-getter in IPL 2023 with 890 runs in 17 innings, which included three centuries, in a campaign where Titans finished runners-up to Chennai Super Kings in the final.

Gill is currently fifth on the list

I am delighted and proud to assume the captaincy of Gujarat Titans

SHUBMAN GILL

of top run-scorers in the IPL in the last six years behind KL Rahul, Shikhar Dhawan, Virat Kohli and Faf du Plessis. He will lead a strong Titans line-up which includes several experienced players like Kane Williamson, Rashid Khan, David Miller, Matthew Wade and Wriddhiman Saha.

Vikram Solanki, the Titans director of cricket, said: "Shubman Gill has shown growth in stature and standing over the last two years at the highest level of the game."

We've got a very strong future, says Australia Davis Cup team

Malaga, Spain - Australia vowed to claim the Davis Cup title next year after losing a second successive final in the men's team tournament on Sunday.

In the final in Malaga, faced a red hot Jannik Sinner and his Italy side and had to endure their second consecutive final defeat.

Italy clinched their first title in 47 years, propelled by Sinner's dominating performance, especially his 6-3, 6-0 victory over Alex De Minaur in the singles match.

De Minaur, who also featured in last year's final against Canada, expressed both disap-



Alex De Minaur

pointment and determination following the defeat. Reflecting on Australia's strong performances since the tournament shifted to the best-of-three rubbers format, he highlighted the nation's collective effort. "There hasn't been another nation that's gone back-to-back in the last two years, so we are showing a pretty good effort collectively," he said.

Despite the setback, De Minaur remained resolute, stating, "We'll be back. We'll get this. I mean, we've got a very, very strong future ahead of us."

Australia, having last secured the title in 2003, has showcased

their depth in the absence of Nick Kyrgios due to injury. Captain Lleyton Hewitt has fostered a cohesive team spirit among talents like De Minaur, Alexei Popyrin, Jordan Thompson, as well as the doubles pairing of Matthew Ebden and Max Purcell.

Following his defeat against Sinner, a dismayed De Minaur acknowledged the Italian's impressive form: "Jannik is riding this amazing wave of confidence ... it's seriously impressive the level he's showing."

De Minaur expressed regret at not being able to extend the match to the doubles.

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PACHYDERM PANTS

'JUMBO JAMBOREE'

THAI TIKTOKERS MAKE 'ELEPHANT PANTS' COOL SUCH THAT IT HAS BECOME A SENSATION AMONG LOCALS AND TOURISTS IN THAILAND

An elegant Thai socialite poses in sunglasses, a designer handbag discreetly visible in the Instagram photo, her stylish outfit completed by a pair of elephant print pants...

Infamous across Southeast Asia, so-called elephant pants made of thin baggy cotton were once synonymous with grubby backpackers in search of themselves - and the nearest Chang beer, a popular local lager.

The pachyderm pants were adopted by foreigners during an early wave of budget Southeast Asia travel, as visitors sought to appropriate 'authentic' culture, despite there being little truly Thai about them, researchers say.

While they are still sold from stalls alongside Bangkok's tourist haven - Khao-san Road - for about 150 baht (US\$4), young Thai influencers and the kingdom's high society are increasingly reclaiming them.

"The pants are dope," influencer Dalintan 'MoRich' Promphinit told AFP, after cavorting in a bright yellow set for his two million TikTok followers in April. "They're

not just souvenirs foreign tourists buy," he said. "Thais are rocking them too."

"It's like a fashion statement with a teen street fashion vibe," said the 19-year-old. His fans instantly loved his latest look. "They kept asking where I got it," he said.

A sensation

Posing at Chiang Mai's ancient wall, Toei, 27, who only gave her first name, is clad head-to-toe in the 'adorable' elephant print.

"Initially, they were a hit among tourists, but now they're trending on TikTok, thanks to influencers," her 28-year-old friend Ong, also sporting the print, added. "So, we embraced the trend."

A half-hour drive away is Kingkarn 'Jack' Samon's factory, where rolls and rolls of pachyderm-inspired prints are measured, sliced and stitched.

"The pants have become a sensation in Thailand," she told AFP during a tour of the facility, which has around 100 workers, producing 1,000-2,000 items daily. Orders - including shirts, dresses, even handbags - are up 30% since the end of the



When people think about elephant pants, they think of them as really cheap, but I want to make them look like Versace

GIGI WORASINSIRI

COVID-19 pandemic. The pants account for 85% of sales.

Kingkarn's is just a small cog in the kingdom's textile and garment industry, which accounts for about three percent of its GDP. She imports the fabric from China, shipping it to Bangkok for printing, before it returns to her factory, 700km away. The design's popularity, however, has not been without controversy.

An online debate brought local reporters to her door after some Cambodians claimed Thailand had appropriated the elephant print, Kingkarn explained. Refusing to be drawn on the latest iteration of the historic rivalry, she did admit with a grin: the debate has boosted sales.

Think Versace

Ultimately, little about the pants are Thai, said Kanjana Thepboriruk, an associate professor at Northern Illinois University's Center for Southeast Asian Studies. Their adoption by foreigners, attempting to stake a claim on 'authentic experiences', instead meant Thais viewed them as international, she said.

"I see the elephant pants as the latest way that young rich Thais or aspiring middle-class Thais align their identity with Westerners," she said.

And high-end retailers have quickly cottoned on. Inside a luxury Bangkok mall, Bangkok Tales's elephant pants sell for 1,090 baht (US\$30).

"When people think about elephant pants, they think of them as really cheap, but I want to make them look like Versace," explained founder and designer Raviwan 'Gigi' Worasinsiri.

Raviwan initially targeted tourists, but the pandemic flipped her business model, with Thais filling the deficit. "I was surprised," she said, crediting TikTok.

At the other end of the spectrum in Bangkok's sprawling Chatuchak market, 32-year-old Onnitsa Kuren already owns three pairs.

"Elephant-patterned pants go with anything - just pair them with a T-shirt," she said. Musing as she browsed, she added, "I'm currently on the lookout for a red pair." AFP



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