



Oman most affordable tax-free country

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A study has revealed that Oman is the most affordable tax-free country to move to in 2024.

William Russell, provider of international health, life and income protection insurance with presence in over 160 countries, has ranked popular tax-free destinations based on relocation cost factors such as flights, rent, utility bills and average monthly net salary to reveal the world's most affordable tax-free countries to relocate to this year.

In its 'Tax-Free Relocation Report: Which tax-free countries are the cheapest for expats to move to?', Oman finds the number one spot, becoming the most affordable tax-free country to relocate to in 2024, with a relocation score of 7.92/10.

Oman is the cheapest country to purchase or rent an apartment and has the lowest monthly living costs. It is also the third cheapest

country for monthly utility bills, costing around US\$103, the report stated.

A one-way economy ticket to Muscat will cost expats around US\$227 from London and US\$492 from New York.

Kuwait is the second most affordable tax-free country to move to this year, with a relocation

Oman is the cheapest country to purchase or rent an apartment and has the lowest monthly living costs. It is also the third cheapest country for monthly utility bills, costing around US\$103

score of 6.49/10. Single economy flights to the country range from US\$159 to US\$660 and Kuwait is also the second most affordable country for both monthly costs and utility bills.

Bahrain ranks third most affordable tax-free country to relocate to in 2024, earning a



relocation score of 6.36/10. Bahrain is the second cheapest country to purchase an apartment in, costing US\$173/sqm on average. It is also the fifth most affordable country for both monthly costs and utility bills.

Popular relocation spot - the United Arab Emirates - ranked the fourth most affordable tax-free country (relocation score 5.84/10), with monthly costs of around US\$959, while the average monthly net salary in the UAE is around US\$3,474.

In fifth place is Brunei, earning a relocation score of 5.58/10. It is the second cheapest country to rent an apartment, costing around US\$492/month on average. It is also the second most affordable country for both monthly costs and utility bills, joint with Kuwait. The average monthly net salary in Brunei is US\$1,715.

Brunei is followed by Maldives, Qatar, Bahamas, Monaco, Cayman Islands, Bermuda and Vanuatu making the top 12.

Enhancing Oman's air connectivity: National Aviation Strategy unveiled

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The National Aviation Strategy 2040 will enhance Oman's aviation stature and help develop air cargo capabilities at Muscat and Salalah airports.

This was stated by Naif bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of Civil Aviation Authority, at a workshop organised by CAA on Monday for ministers and top officials to discuss preliminary findings of the National Aviation Strategy 2040 project.

The workshop focused on three main areas, including objectives of the National Aviation Strategy 2040, its principles and initial outcomes, in addition to feedback and guidance.

Abri emphasised that the strategy is set to reinforce Oman's strategic air position, leveraging its geographical advantage as a link between East and West. A significant focus of the strategy is augmentation of air cargo facilities at Muscat and Salalah airports, which are envisioned to become pivotal hubs in the region.

The strategy is a collaborative endeavour with inputs from approximately 60 entities, reflect-



(Supplied photos)



The strategy will leverage Oman's geographical advantage as a link between East and West

NAIF BIN ALI AL ABRI

ing a nationwide effort to elevate the aviation sector.

Hamid Ahmed al Barashdi, Director General of Strategic Planning at CAA and supervisor of the project, highlighted the authority's ambition to foster

strategic growth within the aviation sector by attracting investments and enhancing infrastructure and service quality.

Barashdi reiterated CAA's commitment to developing the

sector, improving Oman's global air connectivity, and ensuring the highest standards of safety, security and environmental sustainability.

The strategy, incorporated into the CAA's annual plan for 2023, is a testament to Oman's dedication to developing the aviation sector in alignment with national aspirations and international agreements. It is envisioned as a cohesive roadmap for the sector's future, setting a course for the sustainable development of the sultanate's aviation industry in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

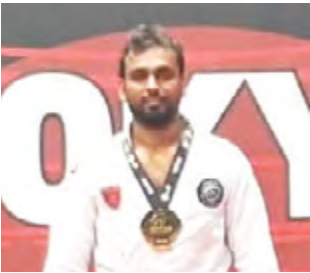
Ahmed al Farsi wins first place in jiu-jitsu grand slam in Japan

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Jujitsuka Ahmed bin Khamis al Farsi, 36, from Sur claimed the first place at the Abu Dhabi Grand Slam 2023-2024 held from January 13 to 14 in Tokyo, Japan.

Speaking exclusively with Muscat Daily from Tokyo, Farsi said, "The tournament is held annually and attracts the best players from around the world."

This edition of the tournament saw around 2,000 participants from around the world, including Brazil, China, Russia, South Korea, US, Italy, France and Spain. Farsi won the first place in the brown belt amateur 77kg



Ahmed al Farsi

weight category.

"Reaching the finals required immense concentration and determination," Farsi informed, adding that he prepared for the tournament by training daily for five hours.

Describing the sport, Farsi said jiu-jitsu is gaining popular in the GCC. Its philosophy is based on

two pillars. The first is the use of mental strength and the second, unarmed combat to improve fitness levels, flexibility, self-discipline, focus and composure.

"I am one of the oldest persons to practice this sport in Oman. I am currently with Al Wahda Jiu-Jitsu Club in UAE and I supervise the training of the UAE national team players in the sport."

Thanking everyone who supported him during his training, Farsi said he is hopeful of continuing to participate in international events and raising the Omani flag in different countries.

He urged Omani youth to take up jiu-jitsu, to believe in their abilities to achieve their goals and never give up on any challenge.

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H M's Musandam tour to elevate governorate's development: Officials

04

Non-oil sector expected to drive Oman's economic growth in 2024

'85% of Gaza population displaced'

Cairo, Egypt - In his last press briefing as Regional Director of WHO's Office for the Eastern Mediterranean on Monday, Dr Ahmed al Mandhari stated that almost 85% of the population of Gaza - 1.9mn people - are now displaced. "We are now at the 100-day mark since the hostilities in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory escalated," he added.

"In this short period of time, Gazans - previously waking up every day in their beds to get ready to go to school or work, have family dinners together, and make plans for the future - have lost their closest loved ones, homes and belongings, livelihoods, and most basic human rights.

"I leave my post as Regional Director with a heavy heart at the current state of our region. Fragile gains that have been made are being lost as health becomes entangled in politics, and as the



I leave my post as Regional Director with a heavy heart at the current state of our region

DR AHMED AL MANDHARI

public health impact of climate change grows more severe."

Dr Mandhari described the health system as "hanging by a thread, desperately trying to maintain functionality amid over-

whelming challenges and threats of attack". With only 15 of 36 hospitals functioning - and all of these only partially functioning - many injured patients are being treated on the floors of overcrowded health facilities. "Many of those who could be saved are dying due to lack of specialised doctors, fuel and electricity, medicine, food and clean water."

As a result of restrictions and delays in the delivery of fuel, medicines and other aid, the "unimaginable suffering" and risk of death and illness for people in Gaza continues to climb, he informed.

Currently, 140mn people in the Eastern Mediterranean region are in need of humanitarian assistance - totalling almost 20% of the region's population and around 40% of all people in need globally. In 2024, WHO requires almost US\$706mn to respond to major emergencies in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Announcement

The Tax Authority would like to draw the attention of taxpayers who are subject to VAT & Excise Tax to submit their returns for the fourth quarter of 2023, according to the forms prepared for this purpose through Tax Authority's Portal www.taxoman.gov.om not later than **Jan 30, 2023**

We hope everyone will abide and commit to the deadline of sumbitting.

Musandam on development march

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Royal visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Musandam is poised to significantly accelerate the governorate's progress, according to senior officials.

Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi, CEO of Madayn, underscored the transformative impact of His Majesty's directives for industrial expansion in Musandam. "The industrial city in Seih al Wasat in Madha and ready-built factories in Mahas Industrial City will catalyse industrial development, enhancing Musandam's economic vitality," Hadabi stated.

These initiatives, he affirmed, align with His Majesty the Sultan's vision of diversifying the economy and fostering job cre-



His Majesty's inaugural visit as Sultan underscores his commitment to firsthand assessment of ongoing economic and development projects

SAYYID IBRAHIM AL BUSAIDI



ation, integral to the sultanate's strategic development goals.

Hadabi added, "His Majesty's continuous focus on the development of industrial cities aligns with Madayn's overarching vision of creating world-class business cities, fostering sustainable economic and social development."

According to Sayyid Ibrahim al Busaidi, Governor of Musan-

The economic growth plans and programmes are inclusive, ensuring Omani women's participation

AISHA BINT AHMED AL HARFI

dam, His Majesty's inaugural visit as Sultan underscores his commitment to firsthand assessment of ongoing economic and development projects. His Majesty's interest in the governorate's economy highlights the importance placed on regional development.

The governorate is currently witnessing significant infrastructure advancements, including the

Dibba - Lima - Khasab road, the upcoming Musandam Airport in Khasab, and urban development projects, he informed.

Busaidi also emphasised the strategic role of the logistics sector in Musandam's growth, noting the dual functionality of Khasab Port in supporting both transport and the fishing industry. Initiatives to expand industrial zones and integrate port services are underway to mitigate geographical constraints and enhance development.

Aisha bint Ahmed al Harfi, Head of Craft Industries Department in the governorate, highlighted the inclusive nature of the economic growth plans, which empower Omani women through skill development and promotion of their products, while emphasising integration of

emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. "The economic strategies are inclusive, ensuring Omani women's participation in professional development and entrepreneurship," she added.

Describing the role of women in Musandam's socio-economic landscape as instrumental, local entrepreneur Iman Saleh al Salti said, "His Majesty's visit is a harbinger of enhanced employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for women, creating an environment where they can thrive professionally."

The community anticipates the visit will pave the way for the expansion of existing businesses and provision of resources needed for the empowerment of women and the governorate's economic upliftment.

5mn sqm of land offered for agri projects in 3 governorates

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The National Employment Programme (NEP) and Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning are offering two substantial land development opportunities spread over 5mn sqm, which are set to ignite agricultural advancements in three key governorates.

The first of these ventures will set up treated water farms in the Al Nahda area of Amerat in Muscat governorate. This area, covering approximately 500 fedans (2.1mn sqm), represents a private sector investment following the concerted efforts of NEP, alongside various government and private stakeholders.

The initiative is directed towards strengthening the private sector's role in primary agricultural production, propelling the nation towards self-reliance, and fortifying the foundations of Oman's food security system.

In July 2023, the Ministry of Labour, with NEP, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water



Resources, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP), and Public Services Regulatory Authority, ratified an action plan. The plan is strategically aligned with NEP's vision to leverage treated water in cutting-edge agricultural projects, fostering

sustainable farming practices, driving technological innovation in the sector, and ensuring seamless provision of local agricultural products to consumers.

The second opportunity presented by MHUP lays the groundwork for potential growth

through public auctions of 3.3mn sqm of arable land in Dhofar and Al Wusta governorates. The initiative encompasses a diverse array of agricultural ventures, including cultivation of vegetables, onion, fodder, wheat and soybean.

Wheat production up 229%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In an agricultural milestone, Oman's wheat production increased to 7,119 tonnes in the 2022-23 season, marking a substantial growth of 229% from the previous season's yield of 2,169 tonnes, as per data from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The area under wheat cultivation expanded to 6,359.35 acres, up 160% from the last farming season. The number of farmers engaged in wheat cultivation rose 22% in 2022-23, signifying a growing trend in the sector.

Dhofar led in wheat production with 5,940 tonnes grown on 5,112 acres, accounting for 80% of Oman's total wheat cultivation area. Dakhliyah dedicated 779 acres to wheat cultivation, Dhahirah 245

acres, North Sharqiyah 66.5 acres, South Batinah 57 acres, North Batinah 41.1 acres, Buraimi 33.25 acres, Musandam 13 acres, South Sharqiyah 9.5 acres, and Muscat 3 acres.

The surge in production is attributed to the ministry's initiatives, including adoption of modern irrigation techniques, with a notable shift towards sprinkler systems enhancing crop cultivation and yield efficiency.

Additionally, the ministry has forged a strategic alliance with Oman Flour Mills Company, ensuring the purchase of locally harvested wheat from Omani farmers. This partnership saw the company procuring approximately 5,000 tonnes of wheat in the 2022/23 season.

These concerted efforts underscore Oman's commitment to agricultural advancement, aiming to foster self-sufficiency and bolster food security.

Through usufruct contracts offered on the Tatwir platform, MHUP seeks to intensify the agricultural sector's efforts to bolster domestic production, harness advanced farming technologies, and achieve food security.

Highlighting the ministry's

ambition, an MHUP spokesperson called upon the private sector to seize this opportunity to initiate ventures that not only increase food production but also offer lucrative returns. The aim is to cater to both local and regional markets, while simultaneously

creating job opportunities for Omanis.

To participate in these projects, Omani individuals must be at least 23 years old. Companies interested in bidding must have minimum 30% share owned by an Omani or GCC national.



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Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion

Announcement No. 1/2024

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion announces that it is in the process of preparing a guide for Omani products. Companies interested in registering their products in the guide are required to complete the application form, attaching product images, and submissions should be sent via the following email: productsdirectory@tejarah.gov.om

Companies can register between January 14 and 19, 2024.

Access the form by scanning the barcode.

Note: establishments can add multiple products in the application.



www.tejarah.gov.om

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11th Muscat film fest to offer 'surprises'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The 11th chapter of the Muscat International Film Festival (MIFF) is all set for the 'lights, camera, action' moment with an array of films from renowned studios and independent filmmakers.

Promoted under the theme 'Renewed Oman', the festival from March 3 to 7 will witness some of the big celebrities from the Arab world as well as other parts of Asia attending the event.

The festival will explore and showcase the country's exotic locations in the deserts, among the mountains, in oasis, wadis and seas, which are unexplored and suitable for filming.

The MIFF's previous chapter triggered a great response under



the theme 'Make Your Film in Oman'.

"We are happy to have the 11th edition of MIFF in which several countries will take part," said Mohammad al Kindi, one of the members of the organising com-

mittee. Organised by the Oman Film Society (OFS), creators from around the globe are gearing up for this year's festival, he added.

The organisers have renewed their call for entries which will re-

main open until January 31.

Filmmakers can send their entries under the three main categories viz., short films, animations and feature films. They are also inviting filmmakers to explore Oman's diverse land-

The festival not only projects Oman to the global cinema community but also motivates Omani filmmakers by featuring their work

DR HUMAID AL AMERI

scapes, including deserts, mountains, archaeological sites, and valleys through their lenses.

Dr Humaid al Ameri, Chairman of OFS, described the festival as part of a series of events aimed at spreading cinema cul-

ture.

"The festival, while aiming to project Oman to the global cinema community, motivates Omani filmmakers by acknowledging and featuring their work."

MIFF not only celebrates cinematic artistry but also highlights Oman's rich cultural and geographical tapestry, Ameri added.

Filmmakers will have the opportunity to showcase their talent and the option to weave their narratives against the stunning landscapes of Oman. "This would create a dynamic background for storytelling," OFS chairman asserted.

With the call for entries open, anticipation is building for a cinematic celebration that transcends borders, inviting filmmakers to capture the essence of Oman's beauty

through their lens.

The festival will evaluate films for various competitions in International Feature Films, International Feature Documentary Films, Animation Films, Omani Short Narrative Films, and Omani Short Documentary Films categories.

The prestigious Khanjar Award will go to the best film across all categories, while the Al Mahzam Award will be for excellence in directing, screenplay, acting, cinematography. There will also be a jury award for the International Narrative and Documentary Film competitions.

"OFS will soon have a press conference and provide all details regarding the entries, expected cine celebrities and workshop dates," the organisers assured.

Omran opens first phase of Madinat al Irfan East

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) has completed first phase of Madinat al Irfan East project with the official inauguration of JW Marriott Hotel Muscat.

The celebration - concurrent with Oman's 53rd National Day and in alignment with the National Tourism Strategy 2040 - marks the introduction of the globally acclaimed JW Marriott brand to Oman, signifying a momentous stride in positioning Oman as a leading global tourism destination.

The inauguration event was graced by H E Salim Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, along with other dignitaries, Omran officials, and key figures in Oman's tourism industry, official sources said.

JW Marriott Hotel Muscat, a 5-star facility with an investment of approximately RO47mn, comes to existence with 304 rooms and suites.

As part of the Marriott Bonvoy international hotel chain, it is the first JW Marriott branded hotel in Oman.

Strategically located in the heart of Madinat al Irfan East and directly linked to the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre



(OCEC), the hotel is poised to offer exceptional experiences to its guests, significantly contributing to Oman's tourism sector.

Commenting on the completion of Phase I of Madinat al Irfan East, H E Mahrouqi pointed out that the development project represents a pivotal stage in the urban development of the city, creating a vibrant tourist destination that celebrates Omani identity.

"With comprehensive facilities like the OCEC, designed to global architectural and environmental standards, this development aligns meticulously with Oman Vision 2040's objectives to promote sustainable tourism

development, economic diversification, and preservation of natural resources," he added.

Dr Hashil Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran, branded this project as "a direct reflection of our vision to advance the tourism sector by utilising our rich historical and cultural heritage to upgrade Oman's position in the global tourism market".

"It plays a crucial role in contributing to economic development and is designed to provide distinctive and unparalleled tourism experiences that appeal to citizens, residents, and international tourists," he underlined.

The Omran CEO highlighted the commitment of the people in

Omran to develop premier assets that can support and strengthen the incentive tourism, business, and conference sectors.

"We are also dedicated to elevating the local market and the hospitality and tourism sectors. Our efforts are geared towards enhancing the capacity to host major conferences, events, and functions of the city."

Mahrouqi asserted that the group is "focused on augmenting the local value by creating opportunities for local enterprises, small and medium-sized businesses, and generating approximately 300 direct jobs".

Sandeep Walia, Chief Operating Officer - Middle East, Marriott International, stressed that their hotel in Muscat brings together a legacy of extraordinary hospitality underpinned by the brand's thoughtful ethos and commitment to sustainability that resonates deeply with today's global traveller.

"We are confident that the JW Marriott Hotel Muscat will elevate Oman's luxury hospitality landscape with its inspired design, immersive culinary experiences and anticipatory service for which the brand is known. Oman is an important market for Marriott International and we remain committed to it," he asserted.

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MoL declares 386 job opportunities

Muscat - The Ministry of Labour (MoL) announced the availability of 386 vacancies in a number of government units, of which 100 are for people with disabilities.

The job opportunities are for holders of various degrees, including 191 for bachelor's degree

holders and above, 47 for Post General Education Diploma (Post GED) holders and 148 for holders of GED and below.

The Ministry of Labour has opened registration for a duration of two weeks from the day of announcement.

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS – INDIAN SCHOOLS ONLINE REGISTRATION FOR ADMISSIONS IN INDIAN SCHOOLS IN THE CAPITAL AREA (2024-2025)

Online registration for admissions to classes KG I to Class IX in Indian Schools in the capital area for the academic year 2024-2025 will start from 21st January 2024 for the children of Indian nationals.

SL.N.	SCHOOL	SYLLABUS	CLASSES
1	Indian School Muscat (ISM)	CBSE	KG I – IX
2	Indian School Darsait (ISD)	CBSE	KG I – IX
3	Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir (ISWK)	CBSE	KG I – IX
4	Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir (ISWK International)	CAMBRIDGE	KG I – IX
5	Indian School Al Ghubra (ISG)	CBSE	KG I – IX
6	Indian School Al Ghubra (ISG International)	CAMBRIDGE	KG I – IX
7	Indian School Bousher (ISB)	CBSE	KG I – IX
8	Indian School Al Seeb (ISAS)	CBSE	KG I – IX
9	Indian School Al Maabala (ISAM)	CBSE	KG I – IX

For the online application form and for more details about the admission process, please visit www.indianschoolsoman.com

A non-refundable processing fee of OMR 15/- will be payable on each application. The closing date of online registration for admissions will be Saturday, 24th February 2024.

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

Admissions are purely subject to availability of seats in the respective schools.

MARKET WATCH	
MSX30	4,612.65
Sensex	73,327.94
FOREX RATES	
(RO1 equals)	
India	215.26
Pakistan	727.26
Bangladesh	284.81
Philippines	145.06
Sri Lanka	836.43
*Rates as on January 15 Source: xe.com	

BRIEFS

Eurozone posts \$22bn trade surplus in November

The eurozone trade balance saw a €20.3bn (about \$22.2bn) surplus in November 2023, according to official data released on Monday.

The figure has shifted from a €13.8bn deficit in November 2022, Eurostat data showed.

Euro area goods exports to the rest of the world fell 4.7% year-on-year to €252.5bn in November 2023, while imports plunged 16.7% to €232.2bn.

Intra-euro area trade dropped to 227.2bn in November 2022, a 9.4% decline from November 2022.

The EU27 registered a trade surplus of €19.2bn in the month, compared to a deficit of €22bn in the previous year.

Non-oil sector expected to drive Oman's economic growth in 2024

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With oil sector growth set to be dampened once again by constraints on crude production, it will be the non-oil sector that drives economic expansion in Oman this year, according to a leading UAE bank.

Emirates NBD forecasts real GDP growth of 1.7% in Oman this year, reflecting a modest acceleration from the 1.5% estimated for 2023.

“Once again, it will be the non-oil sector that drives the expansion, as we expect flat growth in the oil sector this year after an estimated contraction in 2023. Even with another year of constrained oil output, we anticipate an ongoing improvement in the fiscal position, with the debt load continuing to ease from the elevated levels seen several years ago,” Daniel Richards, Emirates NBD’s MENA economist, wrote in a research note.

Emirates NBD forecasts Oman’s non-oil growth at 2.5% for 2024, in line with the bank’s estimate for last year and moderately stronger than the average over the decade to 2022 (2.2% per annum). Over the first three quarters of 2023, non-oil sector growth averaged 2.7% year-on-



Emirates NBD forecasts Oman’s non-oil GDP growth at 2.5% for 2024, moderately stronger than the average 2.2% per annum over the decade to 2022

year.

According to Richards, as with the rest of the GCC, anticipated lower interest rates in the second half of this year should encourage greater consumption and investment from both households and businesses in Oman, especially with price pressures likely to remain benign.

Emirates NBD forecasts an average annual consumer price inflation rate of 2.0% this year, higher than its estimate of 1.0% in 2023.

Oil sector to see flat growth

Oil production in Oman averaged 1.05mn barrels per day (bpd) from January to November last year, down 1.9% from the 1.07mn bpd produced over the corresponding period in 2022. For the full year 2023, Emirates NBD has estimated an oil production decline of 2.0%.

“This informs our hydrocarbons GDP estimate of a 0.6% contraction in 2023, with natural gas and condensates production helping to offset the more sluggish crude oil production. Production of condensates, exempt from the OPEC+ agreement, was up 8.5% year-on-year over the same January to November period. Nevertheless, this growth estimate stands in contrast to the 10.2% hydrocarbons GDP growth recorded in 2022 as oil production was ramped up post the Covid-19 pandemic,” Richards wrote.

Looking ahead, previously agreed OPEC+ production cuts were reaffirmed by member states in late 2023 (Oman committed to cutting by 40,000 bpd in May) and are set to remain in place through the first quarter of 2024 at least before potentially easing thereafter, according to Emirates NBD. “While near-term oil production is likely to be weaker year-on-year, the Omani hydrocarbons sector also stands to benefit from ongoing investment in exploration and development.”

With oil production constrained, and oil prices likely to average similar to those of last year, Oman’s government revenues from oil will see only modest growth. However, higher natural gas revenues and an increasingly diversified tax base (VAT was introduced in 2021) will cushion the impact, Richards noted.

“Meanwhile, we anticipate that expenditure will remain flat, meaning a fiscal surplus equivalent to 0.9% of GDP this year, compared with our estimate of a modest -0.5% deficit in 2023 and a surplus of 7.3% in 2022,” he further wrote.

A reversal from the period of consecutive fiscal deficits has enabled Oman to reduce its government debt to 38% of GDP in 2023 according to ratings agency S&P, down from around 70% in 2020. This improved fiscal position has been recognised by major ratings agencies, with Fitch, S&P, and Moody’s all upgrading Oman’s ratings in the second half of last year.

Bank Muscat gets CBO approval to invest up to RO150mn in GCC banks

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Muscat announced on Monday that it has obtained regulatory approval to establish a strategic investment portfolio and invest in the listed banks in GCC countries.

“Bank Muscat wishes to inform the market that it has received in-principal approval from the Central Bank of Oman to set up a wholly-owned Strategic Investment Portfolio (SIP) and invest up to RO150mn,” the bank stated in a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

This investment portfolio is part of Bank Muscat’s enterprise growth strategy, focusing on business and revenue diversification to create enhanced shareholder value, the bank said.

“As per the mandate of this portfolio, the bank will invest in various listed banks in the GCC with the aim of benefiting from the general growth trajectory of the GCC banking sector,” Bank



Muscat added.

The bank also mentioned its intent to gradually build this portfolio over the next few years, depending on opportunities available in the market.

On Sunday, Bank Muscat reported a net profit of RO212.45mn for the year 2023, compared to RO200.75mn reported during the same period in 2022, reflecting an increase of 5.8%.

The bank’s net loans and advances, including Islamic financing receivables, increased by 4.9% to RO9.877bn at the end of 2023, compared to RO9.417bn as of December 31, 2022. Customer deposits, including Islamic customer deposits, increased by 9.1% to RO9.438bn, compared to RO8.647bn a year ago.

Saudi Arabia tops MENA in venture capital funding in 2023

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – Saudi Arabia achieved first rank across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region for the first time in terms of the amount of venture capital (VC) funding in 2023, according to MAGNiTT, the MENA-based venture capital data platform.

According to the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), this achievement reflects the development the kingdom is witnessing in various economic and financial sectors in light of the Saudi Vision 2030 and its goals to strengthen the national economy.

Saudi Arabia captured the highest share of total VC funding in the MENA region in 2023, accounting for 52% of the total capital deployed, up from 31% in 2022.

The funding deployed into Saudi Arabian startups grew by 33% in 2023 versus 2022. This confirms the attractiveness of the Saudi market, enhances its competitive environment, and consolidates the strength of the kingdom’s economy as the largest economy in MENA and its leading position globally as a



G20 country and a member of the BRICS group.

In 2023, the MENA region witnessed significant shifts in venture investment dynamics, according to MAGNiTT.

MAGNiTT observed a 23% decline in total funding compared to the previous year. Despite a challenging macro environment, MENA’s share of funding across Emerging Ven-

ture Markets grew by 8 percentage points to 22% this year.

These shifts mirrored the global financial landscape, marked by rising interest rates and technological disruptions.

MAGNiTT’s report offers a high-level analysis of the state of venture investment in MENA, highlighting its picks from this year’s most significant trends.

WAM

Global markets to spend \$1tn on LNG projects in next decade

London, UK – A wave of new LNG export projects is expected to be commissioned within a decade, with the US and Qatar responsible for half of the projects already under construction.

According to data compiled from the LNG 2023 Report of the San Francisco-based think tank Global Energy Monitor (GEM), LNG export and import projects worldwide, with a total annual capacity of 917mn tonnes and 705mn tonnes, respectively, are underway with an investment of about \$1tn.

Currently, export projects with a total capacity of 192.7mn

tonnes per annum are under construction, and LNG projects that will provide a total import capacity of 203mn tonnes per annum are under construction.

The rest of the planned LNG projects are in pre-construction stages of development.

Asia and Europe are currently the major developers of new LNG import projects, hosting around 90% of all new capacity under development.

However, LNG demand in Europe may be short-lived as the continent pursues its decarbonisation agenda, and the price sensitivity of many Asian importers



may call into question forecasts for LNG demand growth.

According to the report, the \$118bn worth of export projects currently under construction

could fail to recover their initial investments while operating if governments meet their climate targets.

With last year’s energy secu-

rity crisis due to the Russia-Ukraine War and the EU’s pledge to reduce Russian gas imports, GEM’s report maintained that European countries rushed to scoop up LNG from the spot market and proposed a slate of new LNG import projects, while the ensuing global gas crunch lent new momentum to massive, proposed export terminals in the US.

The report said that the effects of these shifting global dynamics this year began to materialise when seven LNG terminals began operating in Europe, increasing the region’s import capacity by nearly one-fifth. In

addition, three US export projects, equivalent to roughly half the country’s existing export capacity, reached final investment decisions.

The expected capital investment for import projects is \$190bn, whereas \$878bn is estimated for export projects.

The US leads in the countries building new export terminals, with exports of 336.9mn tonnes of LNG annually, followed by Russia at 164.1mn tonnes, Canada with 75.6mn tonnes, Mexico with 69.3mn tonnes, and Qatar with 49mn tonnes.

Asia dominates new import

capacity, with the most capacity under development on an annual basis at 454mn tonnes. Europe follows with 183mn tonnes, China with 267.9mn tonnes, India with 75.2mn tonnes and Germany with 65.4mn tonnes.

Commenting on the report to the Anadolu Agency, GEM Research Analyst Robert Rozansky summarised the risks of new LNG investments. He said, “Last year’s global gas crisis showed that LNG is an unreliable and volatile resource and imposes huge costs on countries that rely on LNG for energy.

Anadolu Agency

World economy to slow further in 2024: WEF

Davos-Klosters, Switzerland – Global economic prospects remain subdued and fraught with uncertainty, according to the World Economic Forum’s (WEF) latest Chief Economists Outlook released on Monday. WEF said that the global economy continues to grapple with headwinds from tight financial conditions, geopolitical rifts and rapid advances in generative artificial intelligence (AI). More than half of chief economists (56%) expect the global economy to weaken this year, while 43% foresee unchanged or stronger conditions. A strong majority also believe labour markets (77%) and financial conditions (70%) will loosen over the coming year, WEF said.

Although the expectations for high inflation have been pared back in all regions, regional growth outlooks vary widely and no region is slated for very strong growth in 2024. “The latest Chief Economists Outlook highlights the precarious nature of the current economic environment,” said Saadia Zahidi, Managing Director, World Economic Forum. “Amid accelerating divergence, the resilience of the global economy will continue to be tested in the year ahead. Though global inflation is easing, growth is stalling, financial conditions remain tight, global tensions are deepening and inequalities are rising – highlighting the urgent need for global cooperation to build momentum for sustainable, inclusive economic growth.”



A view of the venue ahead of World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland on Sunday

Regional variations

The outlook for South Asia and East Asia and Pacific remains positive and broadly unchanged compared to the last survey, with a strong majority (93% and 86% respectively) expecting at least moderate growth in 2024. China is an exception, with a smaller majority (69%) expecting moderate growth as weak consumption, lower industrial production and property market

In US and MENA, the outlook is weaker too, with about six in 10 respondents foreseeing moderate or stronger growth this year (down from 78% and 79% respectively)

concerns weigh on the prospects of a stronger rebound. In Europe, the outlook has

weakened significantly since the September 2023 survey, with the share of respondents expecting weak or very weak growth almost doubling to 77%. In the United States and the Middle East and North Africa, the outlook is weaker too, with about six in 10 respondents foreseeing moderate or stronger growth this year (down from 78% and 79% respectively).

Geopolitical rifts

About seven in 10 chief economists expect the pace of

geoeconomic fragmentation to accelerate this year, with a majority saying geopolitics will stoke volatility in the global economy (87%) and stock markets (80%), increase localization (86%), strengthen geoeconomic blocs (80%) and widen the North-South divide (57%) in the next three years. As governments increasingly experiment with industrial policy tools, experts are nearly unanimous in expecting these policies to remain largely uncoordinated between countries. While two-

World Economic Forum 2024 kicks off in Davos

Davos, Switzerland – Against the backdrop of escalating geopolitical tensions, evolving economic policies, and rapid technological advancements, the 54th annual World Economic Forum (WEF) kicked off Monday in Davos, Switzerland, with the theme “Rebuilding Trust.” During the January 15-19 meeting, over 2,800 participants from 120 countries, including prominent figures from the business, political, academic, and civil society realms, will gather to navigate the complex global landscape and seek solutions to pressing challenges. WEF underscores the ne-

cessity of international collaboration in tackling humanitarian, climate, social, and economic challenges, encapsulated by this year’s theme “Rebuilding Trust”. Leaders will concentrate on six critical themes: economic resilience, energy transformation, globalisation, productive artificial intelligence, strengthening institutions, and women’s health. Klaus Schwab, the founder and executive chairman of WEF, emphasised the imperative to rebuild trust in a fragmented world witnessing increased social divisions. Agencies

UAE's Aldar invests AED1bn in expansion

Abu Dhabi, UAE – UAE-based Aldar Properties recently announced that it is investing a further AED1bn to expand its logistics real estate business in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Having first entered the logistics sector with the majority acquisition of Abu Dhabi Business Hub (ADBH) in 2022, this new investment includes acquiring operational assets and developing ready-to-lease and build-to-suit options in response to strong demand for Grade A logistics facilities. Marking its first logistics acquisition in Dubai, Aldar has bought seven central logistics hubs and an adjacent plot, which, once developed, will almost double the current gross leasable area (GLA) of 19,000 sqm. The facility, which was sold by Seven Seas Steel Industries LLC, is strategically positioned in one of Dubai’s most estab-



lished industrial areas, Dubai Investments Park. The company has also created a healthy development pipeline and will build 233,000 sqm of new Grade A logistics facilities across the UAE. This includes single-tenanted facilities and logistics parks in Dubai, totaling 200,000 sqm of GLA that will be developed in partnership with established logistics real estate players, and a

33,000 sqm GLA expansion of the company’s premium logistics facility, ADBH, in Abu Dhabi. The ADBH warehouse portfolio is fully leased at its current capacity of 132,000 sqm to diverse institutional tenants, including Etihad, Mubadala and Twofour54. Talal al Dhiyebi, Group CEO of Aldar Properties, said, “Asset and geographic diversification

are core tenets of our growth strategy, and logistics is becoming an important asset class for Aldar. We are experiencing particularly strong demand for high-grade facilities in the UAE, driven by robust intra-regional trade, high-quality infrastructure, and an expanding digital economy.” The growth of the UAE’s logistics sector is supported by substantial investment into transportation and infrastructure to support the diversification of the economy. Aldar is experiencing strong demand to develop a range of logistics facilities, including supply chain and fulfilment warehouses to last-mile centres, in the form of single tenanted facilities and larger scale logistics parks. Tenants are in various sectors, primarily focusing on third-party logistics (3PL), e-Commerce and retail. WAM

Libya vows to make new oil and gas discoveries to fuel growth

Tripoli, Libya – Libya’s Oil and Gas Minister Mohamed Oun pointed to the untapped wealth of opportunities within Libya and vowed to discover “new oil and gas fields.” His remarks came at the Libya Energy & Economic Summit 2024 in the capital city of Tripoli, organised by Energy Capital & Power (ECP) under the theme: A New Libya: Built on Energy. Oun said the summit reveals the country’s determination in stabilisation, signaling a turning point for a country that has faced years of political and economic upheaval. He underscored the enduring importance of fossil fuels and pointed to the untapped wealth



Mohamed Oun

of opportunities within the borders. “We still have fields yet to be explored, including those in the Mediterranean and central regions, where new oil and gas fields will be discovered,” he said, highlighting Libya’s potential for growth in the energy sector. Farhat Omar Bengdara, chair-

man of the National Oil Corporation (NOC), emphasised the organisation’s pivotal role since its establishment in 1970 in bolstering the national economy through the development of oil reserves. He noted that NOC’s efforts have not only increased revenues but fostered strategic relationships with international partners, contributing to the energy supply to European countries and reinforcing global energy security. Bengdara acknowledged the substantial challenges facing the oil and gas industry and the necessity for collaborative partnerships. Anadolu Agency

Nasdaq Dubai welcomes listing of \$600mn green bond by China Construction Bank

Dubai, UAE – Nasdaq Dubai has welcomed the listing of a \$600mn green bond by China Construction Bank. The green bond issuance targets combating climate change, represents China Construction Bank’s significant commitment to sustainable financing and highlights the growing synergy in green financing between China and UAE. To mark the issuance, Li Xuhang, Consul-General of the People’s Republic of China in Dubai, and Hamed Ali, CEO of Nasdaq Dubai and Dubai Financial Market (DFM), rang the market opening bell at Nasdaq Dubai. The total value of bonds listed on Nasdaq Dubai by China Construction Bank, comprising the issuances by Hong Kong and Dubai branches, now stands at



\$2.45bn. Notably, the cumulative value of outstanding debt from Chinese Issuers on Nasdaq Dubai stands at \$11.95bn through 22 issuances. This listing brings Nasdaq Dubai’s total value of ESG-related issuances to \$27bn and contributes to a total value of debt listed on the exchange to-

taling \$128.66bn, positioning Nasdaq Dubai as a leading global hub for fixed-income listings and a hotspot for sustainable financial instruments. Xuhang highly appraised the remarkable performance of Chinese banking institutions in promoting green finance and expressed his expectation on China Construction Bank (DIFC

Branch) to keep contributing to energy transformation in the region, supporting green and sustainable development in UAE, Middle East and the World. Ali, in turn, said, “We are pleased to welcome this green bond listing of China Construction Bank (DIFC Branch) on Nasdaq Dubai. This further strengthens our long-standing relationship, which we have nurtured over the years. With this listing, Nasdaq Dubai solidifies its position as a global leader in creating an ecosystem that fosters sustainable financing and responds aptly to the growing demand for green financing instruments in the region. We look forward to furthering access to these innovative financial solutions on our platform.” WAM

TOGETHERNESS COMPANY ANNOUNCES SELLING THE FOLLOWING LANDS AND PROPERTIES:

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

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

Nama Water Services begins Sohar Sewage Project Phase III construction

Nama Water Services has begun construction on a sewerage network in the wilayat of Sohar, connecting it with the existing sewerage system.

Sohar Sewage Project - into its third phase - will serve the community by connecting approximately 4,200 residential and commercial units in the region, a release stated.

Nama informed that the project was awarded in December 2023 and 'it is expected to be completed in December 2025'.

Nama Water Services works to implement projects that aim to preserve the environment and public health, protect groundwater sources from pollution, and provide an alternative source of freshwater for irrigation in gardens, green spaces and other public areas.

With the growth of urban areas and increase in population, the company is aggressively expanding wastewater transportation networks.

Engineer Hassan bin Abdullah bin Muhammad al Farsi, Director of Projects in the Regional Governorates in the Nama Water Services, said that the Sohar project will provide sewerage system for wastewater in some residential and commercial areas in Al-Humbar and Al-Turaif, which were not covered in previous projects.



In addition, the Ghail al Shaboul area and the coastal areas of Sabarah, Shizaw and Hadheerah will have the sewerage service through vacuum technology due to the high groundwater level in these areas.

Gulf Petrochemical and Trading Services Company LLC will implement this project.

Farsi added that the project will work to serve the community and reduce their suffering from disposition of sewage waste in a faster, safer and healthier way and thereby reduce the number of sewage transport tanks in the areas.

"The work for the completion of the sewerage network in Sohar is one of the important projects to develop infrastructure in North Batinah as part of the government's efforts to provide waste water services in the regional governorates," he underlined.

This project involves construction of a 40km sewerage network of diameters ranging from 150mn to 1000mm. It also includes a 3km long air vacuum network system in coastal areas. Pump lines of 3km will raise the efficiency of the pumping stations in Al-Hajara, Al-Humbar 6 and Al-Humbar C-1. A lift station will also be constructed in Ghail al Shaboul. Lift stations are used to move wastewater from lower to higher elevation.

Symposium on Lean Management held at Oman International Pharmacy Congress

A symposium on Lean Management in Medical Supply Methodology was held as part of the ongoing Oman International Pharmacy Congress and Exhibition (OIPCX), at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center on Monday.

The symposium - held under the auspices of H E Dr Fatima al Ajmi, Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial, and Planning Affairs in the Ministry of Health - also saw the unveiling of Lean Pocket Guide.

The guide book reviews impacts of adopting lean management principles on enhancement of processes flow and the efficient provision of health services.

The launch ceremony presented further successful improvement projects carried out by DGMS personnel within lean management framework.

The Director General and Chair of OIPCX Ibrahim al Rashdi noted that the guide book proves the commitment of the directorate to empower health practitioners in the Directorate General and other employees



The symposium - held under the auspices of H E Dr Fatima al Ajmi, Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial, and Planning Affairs in MoH - also saw the unveiling of Lean Pocket Guide

working in the health institutions functioning directly under the ministry with the method of using LEAN methodology.

Rashdi added that the guideline was designed in clear and accurate way including key steps and innovative guiding proce-

dures that would strengthen work speed and achieve lean management goals, along with performing innovative actions and procedures to keep abreast with health sector developments.

It is noted that in line with the Ministry of Health's strategic directions as per 2040 plan, the Directorate General of Medical Supplies has made great efforts to promote health services improvements through implementing lean management in the medical supply sector.

On its second day, OIPCX highlighted spectrum of topics including Interchangeable Biosimilar and Biologics and the strategies for ensuring safe and effective usage, the latest advances in Drug Therapy/Genomics and the latest trends in Medication safety by ISMP USA & ISMP Canada, in addition to Regulatory update session in Pharmaceuticals, Medical devices and Manufacturing, and the latest trends in Antimicrobial Management.



Ooredoo launches Qadaa 2.0 to 'turn team members into leaders'

Ooredoo has recently launched the latest edition of its Qadaa leadership programme that provides the company's select team members with the skills to become effective leaders.

'Qadaa Leadership Excellence Programme 2.0' is the latest edition of its bespoke two-year leadership training programme, the company stated, stressing that 'effective leaders in the workplace are not born but made through hard work, as the saying goes'.

Qadaa 2.0 is developed for both senior and aspiring leaders to teach them how to bring out the best in their team to get things done.

"Qadaa is a transformational leadership development programme that forms part of Ooredoo's continuing drive to train and upskill team members. We initiated Qadaa to build and maintain a culture of sustained Ooredoo leadership across the organisation. We want our managers to use a specific leadership

style to support their team in thriving, while solid management is based on consistency," said Sulaiman al Mughairi, Acting Chief People Officer at Ooredoo.

Qadaa 2.0 was launched during a signing ceremony with BBusiness, and the innovative course includes learning, practice and coaching throughout.

The programme was initiated in 2016 to ensure all managers across all levels, are given the opportunity to perform and achieve optimally across the company.

Kia Sorento SUV comes with promise to 'make moments exciting'

The perfect companion for routine or unplanned journeys, the powerful, capable and spacious Kia Sorento SUV give you the advantage of making moments exciting on every drive.

The Sorento's stylish design is complemented by its eye-catching alloy wheels, LED headlamps, LED daytime running lights, LED front and rear fog lamps, LED rear combination lamps and remote engine start.

Contributing to making drives relaxing is the interior features that include power windows, Bluetooth, 60:40 split rear seats, smart phone wireless charger, Android auto and car play, 8" audio display, audio remote control, fabric seats, dual full auto-



matic A/C, 3rd row AC vents and more.

Powering the Sorento is a 2.5L engine with 177 HP and 23.7 kg.m. torque. The engine is

A range of advanced safety features in the Sorento increase the joy on every journey. They include Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Electronic Stability Pro-

Lane Keeping Assist (LKA), Forward Collision Avoidance Assist (FCA) and Lane Following Assist (LFA).

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers. Excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities easily ensure their absolute satisfaction, every mile of the way.

No wonder then that Reliable International Automotive has been ranked amongst the top Kia distributors worldwide and has been honoured with prestigious accolades including the 'Good Partnership award', 'Family Like Care' Service award, and 'Kia 'Distributor of Distinction' award.

The Sorento's stylish design is complemented by its eye-catching alloy wheels, LED headlamps, LED daytime running lights, LED front and rear fog lamps, LED rear combination lamps and remote engine start

paired to a 6-speed automatic transmission. Adding to driving delights is the drive mode select offering the driver choices to enjoy exciting driving experiences on varied terrains.

gram (ESP), Vehicle Stability Management (VSM), Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS), Driver and Front Passenger Airbags, Blind Spot Collision Avoidance Assist (BCA),

Bank Muscat LuLu Titanium Mastercard credit card gains regional recognition

In recognition of its leadership in innovation and distinctive products offerings, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in Oman, has received the award of the Largest Co-Branded Credit Card in Oman, at the Mastercard MENA East Business Forum, held in Dubai, the UAE recently.

The event was attended by a large number of leaders and officials representing regional banking and financial institutions.

This award, presented by Mastercard, is a testament to the substantial growth and positive performance of the Bank Muscat LuLu Titanium Mastercard credit card, the only exclusive co-branded Mastercard credit card in Oman.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah Tamman al Maashani, General Manager - Products, Bank Muscat, said that such "continuous commendations and awards" are always a matter of pride and delight as they reflect Bank Muscat's leadership in innovating banking solutions that suit the lifestyle of customers and meet their aspirations.

"The bank's products are always sought for at the local and international level. This makes us strive to provide unmatched banking experience when designing banking products to in-



clude all segments of society and meet their continuous and growing needs," he said, extending thanks and appreciation to "our valued customers for their trust in the services and products offered by the bank".

Gina Petersen-Skyrme, Vice President and Country Business Development Lead, UAE & Oman, Mastercard, said: "Mastercard and Bank Muscat share a commitment to placing customers at the heart of everything

we do. The strong performance of our co-branded credit card is a clear proof of the success of our common strategy of providing superior lifestyle benefits, exciting deals, priceless experiences and a rewarding banking journey."

Commenting on the accolade, Ananth A V - Director, Lulu Group International, Oman, India congratulated the BankMuscat Retail Cards Team. This Mastercard product and the offerings

are so well conceived, it is proving to be such a big draw amongst the customers. While the Lulu Card is the most preferred card in the Bank Muscat portfolio, he wished the team even more success in the days to come and hoped that the card would give the customers adequate reasons to use it prudently", he added.

The Bank Muscat LuLu Titanium Mastercard credit card is designed with benefits that de-

liver real value in everyday life. Cardholders can earn 2% of their purchase value at LuLu Hypermarket, in addition to 0.5% of purchase value at other local and international merchants, as LuLu reward points.

Complementing customers' travel-oriented lifestyles, the card provides complimentary access to over 10 airport lounges* in the UAE, KSA, Jordan, Kuwait and Egypt as well as free travel insurance.



Celebrating Friendship: The Buddy Network against bullying

Cartoon Network MENA proudly extends its collaboration with Unicef MENA in a steadfast commitment to combat bullying. The network is thrilled to announce the continuation of the transformative 'The Buddy Network' campaign, which has already made significant strides in the MENA region.

In its fifth year, Cartoon Network proudly introduces the 'Network of Buddies', inviting children to be a part in this initiative. This concept transcends mere words; it's a resounding call to action. It encourages children to unite as buddies, forging a strong front against bullying and wholeheartedly pledging their dedication to kindness and empathy.

The underlying belief here is that every child possesses the potential to contribute positively to their community. Cartoon Network recognizes that kids can influence their peers and surroundings as powerful change agents. By joining 'The Buddy Network', children are not just recipients of the message; they become ambassadors of friendship and inclusion.

This initiative seeks to empower kids, giving them the tools and understanding to recognise and address bullying behaviors, both online and offline. It fosters a sense of responsibility, urging children to be vigilant and supportive of one another.

The 'Buddy Network' is a unique initiative led by a diverse and celebrated group of personalities, each bringing their distinct perspectives and experiences. The 'Saudi Re-

porters' are central to this network, known for their influential presence. Among the notable advocates is Steve (Afro by Sara's son). Another key figure is Nouraldin Yousef, who hosted a live game show on Cartoon Network in 2012. Adding to the group's dynamic are Ines Sebiane and her husband, Suhaib Shaahaa, who are known for their collaborative spirit. Enji Kiwan, 2021's official Buddy, also plays a significant role, reinforcing the network's commitment to fostering unity, kindness, and friendship among children. Together, they serve as the foundation of Cartoon Network's impactful initiative. This campaign has made substantial headway in raising awareness about the detrimental consequences of bullying, underscoring the profound significance of taking a stand against bullying and being a friend to those in need.

In particular, the inspiring "Be a Friend" song performed by the Saudi Reporters has played a great role in conveying unity and kindness to children across the region. Their music has transformed them into friendship ambassadors, further solidifying the campaign's impact.

As 'The Buddy Network' enters its fifth year in the MENA region, it continues to educate children and parents about the far-reaching repercussions of bullying, whether online or offline. The campaign offers practical strategies to counteract bullying and encourages children aged 5 to 12 to embrace the role of a buddy rather than a bully.

Security and Safety Services clinches Al Rusayl Industrial City Football Cup 2023

Security and Safety Services clinches the 2023 Al Rusayl Industrial City Football Cup, defeating United Engineering Services 2-0 in the final that was held under the auspices of Eng Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi, CEO of Madayn.

The tournament, which kicked off three weeks ago at the Oman

Cement Company's field, witnessed spirited competition among 15 companies and factories.

'This event serves as a strategic initiative, promoting social cohesion and enhancing communication networks within the industrial community,' a release stated.



Omantel EA FC24 Tournament brings e-gaming enthusiasts

In continuation of its efforts to spearhead the e-sports scene in Oman, Omantel hosted a prestigious e-sports event, Omantel EA FC24 Tournament, at Marsa Plaza in Al Mouj Muscat. Top players from across the Sultanate of Oman took part in this flagship competition.

Building on the successful journey of hosting e-sport events in Oman that started with Play-Hera MENA, EA FC24 tournament was an opportunity for the ardent gamers to unlock their potential and demonstrate their talent.

The tournament, which reflected Omantel's keenness to engage with youth and e-sports enthusiasts, witnessed the participation of more than 610 e-sports fans to compete on the tournament in addition to hundreds who attended the event to support their teams competing for the title of the tournament. The event also mirrors Omantel's continuous commitment and support towards the advancement of the e-sports industry in Oman.

Fahima al Saidi, Senior Manager of Partnerships and Devices at Omantel, commented, "We



We are pleased with the growing popularity of e-sports in Oman especially with the issuance of H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said's decision to establish Oman E-sports Committee

Fahima al Saidi

are very thrilled to conclude 2023 with organising EA FC24 tournament, which tops our e-

sports and youth engagement agenda. We are equally pleased with the growing popularity of e-

sports in Oman especially with the issuance of H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said's decision establishing of Oman E-sports Committee under the umbrella of Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth".

She exhorted that e-sports events like EA FC24 are opening the doors for our young talents to showcase their hidden skills and unleash their full potential. "Gaming as an industry is wit-

nessing tremendous evolution globally and it is imperative for us to ensure that we keep pace with such developments," Fahima said, expressing delight for the "huge turnaround from the public to attend the tournament to compete, play, gather and unite with their counterparts from across the Sultanate of Oman".

Omantel has succeeded, through the integration of its operations, processes, and exten-

sive expertise in the field of communications and digital technology, in establishing its position as a leading telecommunications company within the Sultanate of Oman and beyond. The company's innovative approaches have contributed to providing the latest solutions to various consumer and business sectors. The company aims to deliver an unparalleled, exceptional experience to its subscribers and strives

to always exceed their expectations. Omantel works towards contributing to the achievement of Oman Vision 2040 objectives by investing in emerging technologies and providing cutting-edge solutions in modern technology, information and communications technology, such as cloud solutions, ICT solutions, AI, Smart solutions, cybersecurity, in addition to harnessing its technological capabilities.



North Korea tests new ballistic missile loaded with warhead

Istanbul, Turkey - North Korea on Monday said it successfully tested a solid-fuel ballistic missile loaded with a warhead which has 'nothing to do with the regional situation'.

Pyongyang said its Missile Administration tested an intermediate-range ballistic missile which was loaded with 'hypersonic manoeuvrable controlled warhead'.

"The test-fire never affected the security of any neighbouring country and had nothing to do with the regional situation," said the administration.

South Korea and Japan on Sunday said that North Korea launched a ballistic missile, the first such missile fire this year.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have persisted since last year as divided Koreas held regular military activities with the US and Japan also joining Seoul in joint military drills.

"The test-fire was aimed at verifying the gliding and manoeuvring characteristics of intermediate-range hypersonic manoeuvrable controlled warhead and the reliability of newly developed multi-stage high-thrust solid-fuel engines," Pyongyang-based KCNA reported.

The administration said such missile testing is part of regular defence activities to 'develop powerful weapon systems'.

Meanwhile, North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui has left for an official visit to Moscow at her Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov's request, Yonhap News Agency reported quoting state media on Monday.

Choe is slated to visit Russia from Monday to Wednesday at Lavrov's invitation, and her delegation was seen off at the airport on Sunday by Vice Foreign Minister Pak Chol-jun and Russia's Charge d'Affaires ad Interim Vladimir Topeha, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

Her visit seems to be a reciprocal journey after Lavrov visited Pyongyang in October.

Yonhap reported that there are suspicions that North Korea gave Russia weaponry to deploy in its conflict with Ukraine in exchange for Russia providing technical support for Pyongyang's nuclear programmes.

However, Pyongyang and Moscow have denied any arms deals so far.

Agencies

UN appeals for \$4.2bn to support 10.8m Ukrainians

Geneva, Switzerland - The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), along with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), appealed for a total of US\$4.2bn to support 10.8mn people in Ukraine, including 2.3mn refugees, throughout 2024.

Martin Griffiths, the under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator, told a joint press briefing in Geneva that 14.6mn people need humanitarian assistance in Ukraine, a 'staggering' 40 per cent of the population.

Coordinating the response inside Ukraine, OCHA requests US\$3.1bn for 2024 and targets 8.5mn people, Griffiths said.

He noted that the budget was reduced from last year's appeal of US\$3.9bn and said that it was 67 per cent funded, calling the 'best level of funding' in the world last year.

OCHA is 'trying to keep the numbers down so that we can make sure we get as much as we can prioritise people', he said. "We have to improve on the percentage, but Ukraine has been relatively well funded."

"No place in Ukraine is untouched by the war and the wave of attacks that began ... the devastating civilian cost of the war. Add to that the harsh winter is sweeping across Ukraine and ratcheting up people's need for life-saving support, heating, proper shelter, warmer clothes, and a sufficient calorie intake," the relief chief said.

Griffiths drew attention to those living in small towns and villages on the front lines, saying people have exhausted their own



UN's under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator Martin Griffiths

No place in Ukraine is untouched by the war and the wave of attacks that began ... the devastating civilian cost of the war. Add to that the harsh winter is sweeping across Ukraine

MARTIN GRIFFITHS

meagre resources and rely on aid coming in through convoys of UN partners to survive.

In Donetsk and Kharkiv regions, families live in damaged houses with no pipe water, gas, or electricity in the freezing cold. They are trapped indoors with many children with no schooling, he said.

Backing Ukrainians in host countries

Filippo Grandi, the UN high com-

missioner for refugees, stressed that some 6.3mn people have fled the country and remain refugees, mostly across Europe.

UNHCR coordinates the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) and requests US\$1.1bn, targeting 2.3mn refugees and host communities, Grandi said.

He noted that the appeal is covering refugees in 11 countries.

According to the high commissioner for refugees, Moldova is still a 'big priority'. Grandi

added that he will travel to Moldova this week and then he will visit Ukraine for a few days.

In total, the two highly prioritised UN plans aim to support some 10.8mn people in Ukraine and the region.

Russia's war on Ukraine is set to enter its third year in February.

Exports by Russia, Ukraine 'precarious'

Griffiths said that exports are continuing by both Ukraine and Russia though the Black Sea Grain Initiative came to a halt last July, calling it a 'rare piece of good news'.

He noted that up to 7.5mn tons of material was exported in the course of the last many months via alternative lanes, adding that the western edge of the Black Sea has been working

'quite well'.

"But it's precarious, it's tenuous," he stressed. "I believe personally, that we need to talk to both sides about how to make those exports safe. And of course, we are in constant contact with Türkiye on this who have their lead role in the Black Sea."

Last July, Russia withdrew from the Black Sea Grain Initiative, saying that the Russian part of the agreement had not been implemented. It sought the loosening of banking restrictions and the ability to ship its own fertilizer before returning to the deal.

The agreement, initially signed in July in 2022 in Istanbul by Türkiye, the UN, Russia, and Ukraine, was aimed at resuming grain exports from Ukrainian ports halted due to the war, which began in February 2022.

Competition for funding

Griffiths said that the competition for funding is going to be 'more difficult' than in 2023 as Gaza and Ukraine are places where the world's interests mainly are, preventing crises like Sudan from making the headlines. "We never talk about Sudan, which has probably the greatest suffering that you see and ... which is down around 37 per cent funded," he said.

"It is so hard (for Sudan) to get onto the screens and to the attention of people precisely because of the competition of places like Gaza now and Ukraine," he stated, adding that world interest in these countries makes all the difference.

Anadolu Agency

DR Congo's ruling party wins majority of seats

Kigali, Rwanda - The Democratic Republic of Congo's ruling Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) party of President Felix Tshisekedi won the majority of seats in December parliamentary elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) announced on Sunday.

UDPS won 69 seats in the 500-member National Assembly ahead of 44 other parties, according to the results.

This was followed by the Union for the Congolese Nation (UNC) party led by Tshisekedi's ally, Economy Minister Vital Kamerhe, with 36 seats.

Other parties led by Tshisekedi's allies such as Senate President Modeste Bahati Lukwebo and Defense Minister Jean Pierre Bemba won 35 and 17 seats respectively.

Observers say the results give Tshisekedi a comfortable majority needed to name a new government.



Felix Tshisekedi greets supporters after the elections in Kinshasa, DR Congo, on December 31, 2023 (Anadolu Agency)

Most of the president's allies, including National Assembly President Christophe Mboso, Senate President Modeste Bahati

Lukwebo and Prime Minister Sama Lukonde, as well as deputy prime ministers such as Vital Kamerhe, Jean-Pierre Lihau and

Christophe Lutundula were elected.

Opposition leader Moise Katumbi's Together for the Republic

party meanwhile emerged as the main opposition force with 22 seats, despite the fact that some of its main cadres, including spokesman Herve Diakiese, failed to sail through.

The UDPS and its coalition controlled over 390 seats in the outgoing assembly.

The results were announced days after the Constitutional Court confirmed Tshisekedi's reelection in the December general election.

Tshisekedi, 60, took office in 2019 and is expected to be sworn in on January 20 for a second five-year term to lead sub-Saharan Africa's largest country.

DR Congo's opposition parties disputed the election as fraud and unsuccessfully called for a fresh poll as the electoral commission insists the election was credible.

The national electoral body invalidated votes cast for 82 of the 101,000 parliamentary candidates over alleged fraud.

Anadolu Agency

Over 7.4mn flee war in Sudan: UN agency

Khartoum, Sudan - The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on Sunday said the number of people fleeing the war in Sudan has surpassed 7.4mn.

"More than 7.4mn people have been displaced inside and outside Sudan since the fighting broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on April 15, 2023," OCHA said in its latest update on Sunday.

The number of people displaced in Sudan has increased by about 611,000 over the past month, with many newly displaced from Gezira and other states, it noted. "The expansion of fighting between the SAF and the RSF into central and east-

ern Sudan - the country's crop production regions - has driven a significant increase in humanitarian needs," OCHA said.

"Insecurity, looting, bureaucratic impediments, poor network and phone connectivity, lack of cash, and limited technical and humanitarian staff are affecting the delivery of aid," said the UN agency.

It added that the 2024 Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan appeal is only 3.1 per cent funded as of Sunday.

Sudan has been witnessing deadly clashes between the SAF and the RSF since April 15, 2023, which have so far led to more than 12,000 people killed, according to earlier OCHA estimates.

Xinhua

France's controversial immigration law sparks massive protest in Paris

Paris, France - Thousands of demonstrators took to the streets of the French capital Paris on Sunday to protest against the government's contentious immigration law, which was recently passed with the support of far-right lawmakers in parliament.

Responding to a call from more than 400 associations, unions and political parties, they braved the cold weather to express their opposition to the law.

Gathering at Republic Square, they marched towards

Clichy Square, expressing their disapproval of the government's decision to push through the law with the backing of the far-right National Rally (RN) party.

Critics of the law argue that it will lead to discrimination against foreigners in the country and are demanding the abandonment of what they consider to be a 'racist' policy.

Carrying placards with slogans such as 'We Don't Want a Society Built on Racism, Colonialism, Fascism' and 'We Work Here. We Live Here. We Stay Here,' activists chanted slogans



Protestors gather to demonstrate against immigration bill in Paris, France, on Sunday (Anadolu Agency)

like 'Solidarity with the Paperless,' referring to those without residency permits.

The protest, which drew participants beyond immigrants, also saw the presence of several politicians such as lawmakers from the left-wing France Unbowed party including Mathilde Panot, Carlos Martens Bilongo, Hadrien Clouet and Daniele Obono.

Speaking to Anadolu, Clouet criticised the right-wing government for aligning itself with the far right and passing the immigration law.

He expressed concern, saying the government 'is implementing the programme of (far-right politicians) Jean-Marie Le Pen and Marine Le Pen. This is extremely shameful'. He said the political programme of these two figures is anti-republic, xenophobic and racist.

He also said that if the immigration law comes into effect, citizens and foreigners will not have the same social rights and foreigners will be subjected to extraordinary practices.

Anadolu Agency

SA lawyers preparing lawsuit against US, UK for complicity in war crimes in Gaza

Istanbul, Turkey - After South Africa filed a case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for genocide in Gaza, the country's nearly 50 lawyers are preparing a separate lawsuit against the US and UK governments on the grounds that they are complicit in Israeli forces' war crimes in Palestine.

The initiative, led by South African lawyer Wikus Van Rensburg, aims to prosecute those who are complicit in the crime in civilian courts in collaboration with lawyers from the US and UK, with whom he is already in contact.

Rensburg, who has been writing letters to various countries and the ICJ for the last few weeks demanding that Israel and its supporters be prosecuted, has begun preparations to file a lawsuit against the two Western countries, with the support of his colleagues.

"The United States must now be held accountable for the crimes it committed," Rensburg told Anadolu in an interview, detailing the process by which Washington and London will be tried as complicit in Tel Aviv's war crimes against the people of Gaza.

'ICJ case will guide us'
When he told the people around him about filing a lawsuit, Rensburg said he received a lot of support. "Many lawyers



Palestinian kids are seen among rubble of destroyed buildings after Israeli strike hit the house of Dabbe family in Rafah, the southern Gaza on Sunday (Anadolu Agency)

decided to join us in the lawsuit. Many of those who have joined are Muslims, but I am not. They feel obligated to assist this cause, but I believe that what is happening is incorrect."

What happened in Iraq is an example of this, he said, noting that no one held the US accountable for the crimes it com-

mitted in the Middle Eastern country as the issue was not given the necessary importance. But now people believe what is happening in Palestine is an ideal scenario for the legal process to be carried out, the South African lawyer said, adding that 'the US is busy spending more money and

more resources to (allow Israel) commit the crime'.

"No one says stop, enough is enough," he remarked.

Rensburg said the genocide case filed by South Africa against Israel at the ICJ will serve as a guide for their case against the US and UK, and that they will begin the process

based on the outcome of the case and the steps to be taken by the United Nations.

'The US must now be held responsible'

If the ICJ trial against Israel is concluded in favour of South Africa, Rensburg believed that the US may face sanctions even

if it does not accept the verdict.

The ICJ ruling will also strengthen a case against the Joe Biden administration, he added.

Rensburg said he and his colleagues in South Africa are making preparations by contacting law firms in the US and UK.

Reminding that Berlin is still paying compensation for the crime of genocide committed by Germany even today, Rensburg said: "The US must now be held responsible for the crimes it has committed. It must accept its responsibilities."

Pointing out that similar cases were filed against former US President George Bush in the 2000s, he said they believed that they could success-

Many lawyers decided to join us in the lawsuit. Many of those who have joined are Muslims, but I am not. They feel obligated to assist this cause, but I believe that what is happening is incorrect

WIKUS VAN RENSBURG

fully carry out the legal process abroad by working as a team.

He said South Africa made stronger arguments in the case in The Hague, and that he is intimidated by the argument that an attack against Israel could happen again if the court ruled in favour of South Africa.

Anadolu Agency

Death toll in Gaza rises to 24,100

Gaza City, Palestine - At least 24,100 Palestinians have been killed and 60,834 others injured in Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip since October 7, the Health Ministry in the besieged Palestinian enclave said on Monday.

"The Israeli occupation (forces) committed 12 massacres against families in the Gaza Strip, resulting in 132 casualties and 252 injuries over the past 24 hours," the ministry said in a statement.

According to the UN, 85 per cent of the population of Gaza is already internally displaced amid acute shortages of food, clean water and medicine, while 60 per cent of the enclave's infrastructure is damaged or destroyed.

Ambulance service resumed

The Palestine Red Crescent Society resumed ambulance and emergency services in North Gaza governorate on Sunday after a two-month suspension. Services had been halted due to Israeli occupation forces besieging the Gaza Ambulance Center and Al-Quds Hospital, the Red Crescent said in a statement.

Additional vehicles were deployed to boost services in North Gaza after the occupation destroyed many ambulances during raids on the Jabalia Ambulance Center about three weeks ago, the statement added.

According to its figures, eight Red Crescent staff have been killed.

Anadolu Agency

Gaza in much worse condition than Berlin in 1945 : Chilean president

Bogota, Colombia - The Gaza Strip is now in a much worse condition than Berlin was in 1945, Chilean President Gabriel Boric said on Monday.

Visiting Guatemala to attend the oath-taking ceremony of Bernardo Arevalo, Boric told reporters that a cease-fire was an urgent need of time.

"Gaza is in a much worse condition than Berlin was in 1945," he said, referring to the Fall of Berlin post-World War II.

"Almost all houses have been destroyed and 1.5mn people do not have any place to sleep, they are running out of food," he added.

"Nearly 200 Palestinians lose their lives every day in Gaza. This massacre has to be stopped now," he said.

"The solution to the problem between Israel and Palestine lies in the political dialogue," he further said, adding: "Two-state solution based on mutual borders will end this problem."

In November, Boric recalled



Chilean President Gabriel Boric (Anadolu Agency)

his ambassador to Tel Aviv for consultations due to the ongoing Israeli attacks in Gaza.

Chile, which hosts the largest Palestinian community outside the Arab geography with a population of about 500,000 Palestinians, recognised Palestine as a

'free, independent and sovereign state' in 2011.

Meanwhile, World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus marked the 100th day of Israel's attacks on Gaza, describing it as a 'tragedy' and re-

iterating his call for a cease-fire.

Emphasising that there is a 'major humanitarian crisis' in Gaza following the attacks, Ghebreyesus said on Sunday on X: "Today we mark 100 days of a tragedy."

"More than 24,000 Gazans killed - 70 per cent women and children; more injured, many grievously," he said adding: "Following over 300 attacks on health and continuous lack of safe access to critical aid, the majority of hospitals in the Strip have stopped working. The 15 facilities that are still working can only provide limited health care."

Amputations and deaths are rising due to the health care system's breakdown, while diseases are spreading in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions, he pointed out.

"People in Gaza are living in hell. Nowhere is safe. 100 days, and counting, of incessant insecurity and fear is beyond words," he said.

Anadolu Agency

Ethiopia told not to intervene in territories of Somalia

Mogadishu, Somalia - Somalia's prime minister warned Ethiopia on Sunday not to intervene in Somali territories.

In a statement during a programme in the capital Mogadishu, Hamza Abdi Barre emphasised that a sea access agreement signed earlier this month between Ethiopia and Somaliland is void.

He stressed that if Ethiopia intervenes in Somali territories, it must bear the consequences.

"Ethiopia cannot interfere in Somali lands. If they attempt such an intervention, they will withdraw carrying their dead. Somali territories cannot be obtained through songs or threats," he said.

The Somali government had recalled its ambassador from Ethiopia after the country signed the sea access agreement with Somaliland, which unilaterally declared its independence from Somalia in 1991.

Through the memorandum of understanding signed on January 1, Somaliland permitted Ethiopia to use its coasts for



Somalia PM Hamza Abdi Barre

both commercial and military purposes, including the strategic Red Sea port of Berbera.

Somaliland had also announced that Ethiopia would recognise its independence with the finalisation of the agreement.

In response, hundreds of people in Somalia protested against Ethiopia, including a number of prominent Somalis.

Ethiopia lost its Red Sea ports in the early 1990s after the Eritrean War of Independence, which lasted from 1961 to 1991.

Anadolu Agency

Germany urges swift EU agreement on Red Sea mission

Berlin, Germany - Germany urged the European Union on Sunday to quickly reach an agreement on a mission to protect the bloc's commercial ships in the Red Sea from attacks by Yemen's Houthi group.

In a joint news conference with newly-appointed French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne in Berlin, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock emphasised the importance of a military operation in the Red Sea.

Baerbock underscored the crucial role of the EU in the mis-

sion and said talks were 'ongoing at the EU level, and we hope to reach a conclusion quickly'. She added that the German government is actively involved in the negotiations.

The US renewed airstrikes on Saturday on the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, one day after attacks were carried out by Washington and London against targets in areas controlled by the Houthis in Yemen.

After the attacks on Friday, which resulted in five deaths and six injuries among the



German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock

Houthis, the group declared all American and British interests 'legitimate targets' for its forces in response to their 'direct and declared aggression' against Yemen.

The Houthis target in the Red Sea cargo ships owned or operated by Israeli companies or transporting goods to and from Israel, in solidarity with Gaza, which has been under Israeli onslaught since October 7.

Referring to the solidarity between Germany and France in relation to Ukraine, Baerbock highlighted the significance of

Sejourne's visit to the country as a strong signal of solidarity.

On Israel's war on the Gaza Strip, Baerbock said Germany was doing its best to secure the release of all captives held by Palestinian resistance group Hamas.

She also expressed deep concern over the suffering among civilians in Gaza, particularly children.

Hamas is believed to be holding nearly 136 Israelis following its cross-border attack on October 7.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA

Sachin Tendulkar is latest victim of deepfake video

New Delhi - Legendary Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar cautioned everyone on Monday against a deepfake video of a himself which has been used to promote an App. In the video Sachin Tendulkar's video and voice has been manipulated to make it sound like Tendulkar was promoting the app.

Tendulkar who spotted the manipulation took to X cautioning his fans and the public that that the video was fake and asked people to report such applications, videos and advertisements. He also tagged the Maharashtra Cyber Police, Union Electronics and Information Technology Ministry and Union Minister of State for Electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrashekar, in his tweet.

"These videos are fake. It is disturbing to see rampant misuse of technology. Request everyone to report videos, ads & apps like these in large numbers. Social media platforms need to be alert and responsive to complaints. Swift action from their end is crucial to stopping the spread of misinformation and fake news. @Gol_MeitiY, @Rajeev_Gol and @MahaCyber1," tweeted Sachin.

On November 6 last year, a modified video of actor Rashmika Mandanna appeared online sparking discussions of digital safety. In the viral video, it can be seen that a woman resembling the actress entering a lift wearing a black swimsuit.

The video quickly went viral and several social media users



Sachin Tendulkar during wedding reception of actor Aamir Khan's daughter Ira Khan in Mumbai on Saturday (ANI)

came forward to confirm that it was a deepfake. It was later identified that the video was of a British actress, Zara Patel.

The actor strongly reacted to

the video and said: "I feel really hurt to share this and have to talk about the deepfake video of me being spread online. Something like this is honestly, ex-

tremely scary not only for me but also for each one of us who today is vulnerable to so much harm because of how technology is being misused."

Amid that deepfake video issue, Union Minister for Communications, Electronics and IT Ashwini Vaishnaw said that notices were issued to all social media platforms directing them to take necessary steps to identify and remove such content.

Vaishnaw, had said: "Deep fake is a big issue for all of us. We recently issued notices to

It is disturbing to see rampant misuse of technology. Request everyone to report videos, ads & apps like these in large numbers. Social media platforms need to be alert and responsive to complaints

SACHIN TENDULKAR

all the big social media forms, asking them to take steps to identify deepfakes, for removing those content. The social media platforms have responded. They are taking action."

"Also, we must notice that the 'Safe Harbour' Clause that most of the social media platforms have been enjoying, doesn't apply if the platforms do not take adequate steps to remove the deepfakes from their platforms," he added.

ANI



Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati addresses a press conference on the occasion of her 68th birthday, in Lucknow on Monday (ANI)

BSP to go solo in LS polls: Mayawati

Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh - Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) president Mayawati on Monday reiterated her party's stand for the 2024 Lok Sabha election and said that her party will contest the polls alone.

Addressing a press conference here, the BSP chief said that her party may consider about alliance once the elections are over.

"Our experience with alliances has never been beneficial for us and we suffer more losses from alliances. For this reason, most of the parties in the country want to form an alliance with BSP. An alliance can be considered after the elections. If possible, BSP can extend its support after the elections...our party will fight the elections all alone," she said.

The former UP chief minister also hit out at the Centre and state governments - both ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) - and said that the ruling party trying to make people its 'slaves' by providing them with some free ration instead of uplifting them from poverty.

"Instead of uplifting people

from poverty and providing them employment, the central and state (UP) governments are providing them with some free ration and trying to make them their slaves. However, our government in UP had provided people employment to empower them," Mayawati said.

She also refuted the claims that she may take a retirement from politics, saying that she will continue to work to strengthen her party.

"Last month, I declared Akash Anand as my political successor following which it was being speculated in media that I may soon retire from politics. However, I want to clarify that it's not the case, and I will continue to work towards strengthening the party," she said.

The BSP chief exhorted party leaders and workers to "work with full strength to help the BSP get a favourable verdict" in the 2024 election. The BSP, a Scheduled Castes-centric party, was a major political force in Uttar Pradesh in the 1990s and 2000s but witnessed a gradual decline over the past decade.

ANI

BACK TO SCHOOL



Students on their way to school as schools in Delhi reopened for physical classes after the extended winter break on Monday (ANI)

Pilot assault incident: Action initiated against passenger

New Delhi - The aviation security agency has started an investigation into the incident of a passenger allegedly hitting an IndiGo pilot while the latter was announcing a flight delay at Delhi airport, the officials said.

The incident occurred on Sunday inside flight number 6E 2175 which was departing from Delhi to Goa at around 1pm.

In a viral video, the agitated passenger, later identified as Sahil Katariya, was seen punching the co-pilot, identified as Anup Kumar, while he was announcing on board about flight delays. In the video, the captain can be seen making an an-



nouncement on delays. The passenger - wearing a yellow jacket runs up to the captain and slaps him on the face.

A flight attendant standing beside the captain immediately comes to his rescue and stands

in front of the captain, trying to address the situation. The passenger is then pulled behind by another man as commotion spreads inside the cabin. The flight attendant can be heard shouting out 'You can't do this;

you can't do this' as the man who caused the commotion heads back to his seat.

The security agency said that an investigation has started regarding the viral video. The airline filed a complaint to the Delhi police and the police have assured appropriate action on the matter.

As per the Delhi Police, the co-pilot and security came to police station and gave a complaint against one passenger who assaulted the co-pilot. He misbehaved in flight and hit the co-pilot and made nuisance inside aircraft, police said.

ANI

Delhi Airport asked to immediately expedite CAT III-enabled runway

New Delhi - Delhi Airport has been asked to immediately expedite the operationalisation of its CAT III-enabled fourth runway to the satisfaction of the civil aviation regulator DGCA for final approval, Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Monday.

The airport in the national capital already has a CAT III-enabled runway. A CAT III landing is a precision approach that allows aircraft to land safely in low-visibility conditions. Delhi witnessed unprecedented fog wherein visibility fluctuated for several hours, and at times, dropped to zero between 5am to 9am on Sunday. On Monday too, the national capital woke to a thick fog.

Taking to social media platform X, Union Minister Scindia said that the Delhi Airport authorities were compelled to enforce a shut-down of operations for some time even on CAT III runways, keeping passengers' safety in mind.

In the past 48 hours, around 600 flights, both domestic and international combined, were delayed due to the severe weather conditions.

To mitigate the situation in the near future, the DGCA will issue an SOP for airlines on better communication and facilitation of passengers to minimise discomfort in view of flight cancellations and delays due to adverse weather.



Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi is seen enveloped in a dense blanket of fog on Sunday (ANI)

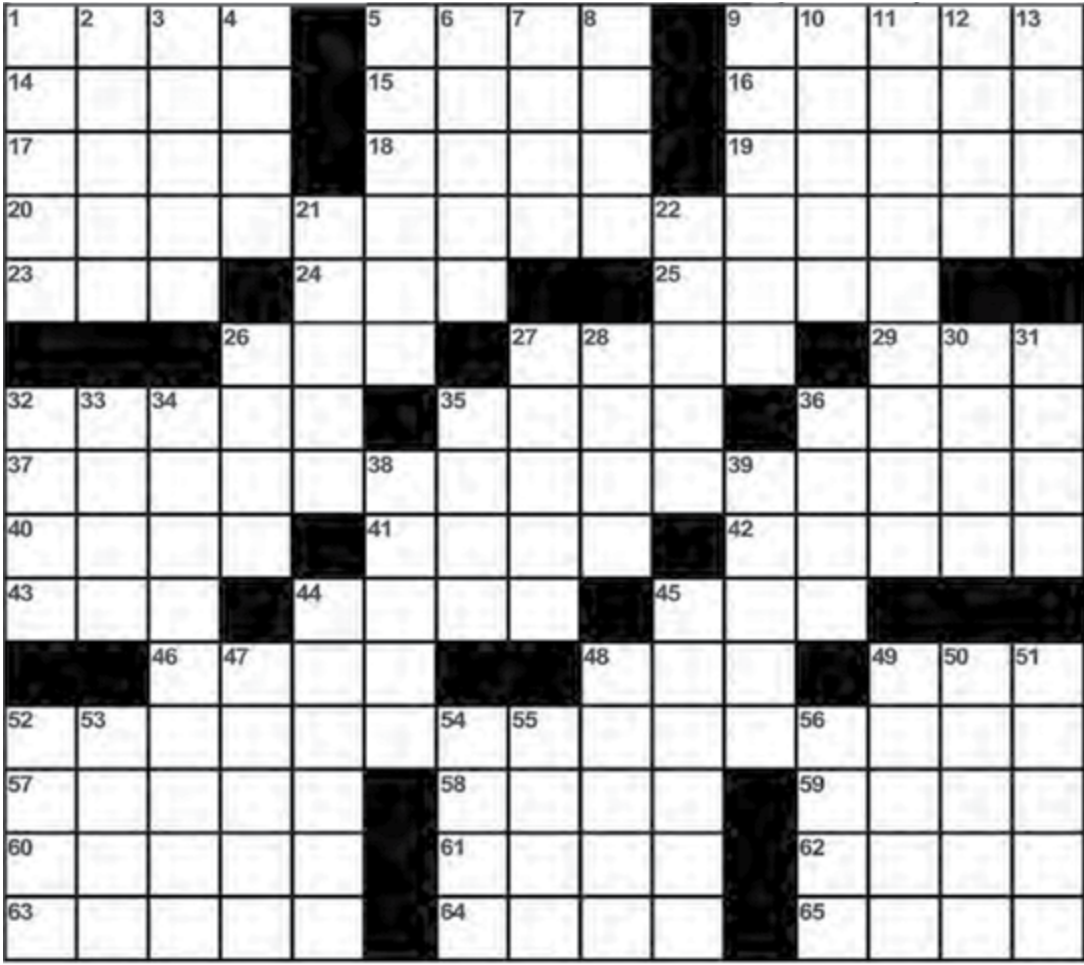
"It is my earnest request to all travellers to bear with us during this difficult period. All stakeholders are trying their best to minimise passenger inconvenience. Incidences of unruly behaviour amidst this are unacceptable, and will be dealt with strongly in line with

the existing legal provisions," Scindia said in a post on X.

"I would like to assure everyone that all stakeholders are working round the clock to minimise the fog-related impact," the minister further wrote.

ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Place known for development
 - 5) It usually has busy hands
 - 9) Raised, as a bet
 - 14) Diaper cream ingredient
 - 15) Move through a kiddie pool
 - 16) Hang in folds
 - 17) Object of devotion
 - 18) Wide-mouthed pitcher
 - 19) Day of old Hollywood
 - 20) Three things started by half
 - 23) Small prop in the grass
 - 24) "Ciao, Brutus"
 - 25) A god of war
 - 26) Before, in romantic poetry
 - 27) Bests
 - 29) Investment for the golden years
 - 32) Brown ermine
 - 35) South American country
 - 36) Straddling
 - 37) Three things started by half
 - 40) Isles, to a Brit
 - 41) Camp beds
 - 42) Tootsie Pop portions
 - 43) Republicans, briefly
 - 44) Verb for Shakespeare
 - 45) It's slung in campaigns
 - 46) Pork purchase
 - 48) Breakfast meat
 - 49) Jetted bath, e.g.
 - 52) Three things started by half
 - 57) Card-game expert Edmond
 - 58) Go on the warpath, verbally
 - 59) Morsel for Miss Muffet
 - 60) Two-tone cookies
 - 61) The munchies, for one
 - 62) "Anyone_?"
 - 63) Neglected to
 - 64) Made a right turn on horseback
 - 65) "Call of the Wild" vehicle
- DOWN**
- 1) Middle of a three-part body measurement
 - 2) Blast from the past
 - 3) The animal, not the dessert
 - 4) Word with "conveyor" or "corn"
 - 5) One way to avoid an accident
 - 6) Anchor rope's hole
 - 7) As previously mentioned, in footnotes
 - 8) Gilpin of "Frasier"
 - 9) Milk providers
 - 10) Investigate thoroughly
 - 11) Like leeches
 - 12) "Lawrence of Arabia" is one
 - 13) Cubicle feature
 - 21) You are here
 - 22) Enjoy immensely
 - 26) Puts away groceries?
 - 27) Choppers that can't fly
 - 28) Mine discoveries
 - 30) Work an ax on stage
 - 31) Dr. Zaius and kin
 - 32) Party just for guys
 - 33) Small band
 - 34) Beat on a tennis court, e.g.
 - 35) "The... thickens"
 - 36) Too dry for farming
 - 38) Bakery treat
 - 39) Perfectly vertical
 - 44) Deprive of power
 - 45) Tangled into a thick mass, as hair
 - 47) DuPont fabric
 - 48) Door attachment
 - 49) Cranium
 - 50) In and of itself
 - 51) Created a sum
 - 52) Wearing footwear
 - 53) Spelling of "Beverly Hills, 90210"
 - 54) Pharmacist's item
 - 55) Suffix with "soft" or "hard," in tech
 - 56) Bullets, in Vegas

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

If any kind of conflict erupts in your group today, you have to be frank and open about how you feel. By communicating honestly, you will show people that you aren't trying to gain anything. You are just trying to make things better for everyone. This is not the time to get suspicious or self-conscious about your feedback or criticisms. A compromise will take time to arrange, but your input will help it happen sooner, and it will be a better solution for everybody involved.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your intuitive powers are starting to tell you that you might want to follow the leader for a while. They seem to know the lay of the land a lot better than you do. Your passivity is an asset right now, so utilize it and do what you are told. Why put yourself in a risky situation when there are other people willing to do it for you? Sit back and let these folks do what they want to do. You will definitely benefit in the end. You don't always have to be in charge to gain something.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You have a healthy sense of who you are, but do you have a good sense of the person you want to be? You're still a work in progress. Everyone is. And you need to think of your future not only in terms of where you'll be living and what you'll be doing but also who you want to become. Aim high. You can take the pressure! It's critical for you to maintain an open mind and be willing to learn. Embrace controversial ideas. They will teach you valuable lessons.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Powerful people are not always powerful for the right reasons, and the chinks in someone's armor are beginning to show today. If you are good friends with this person, tell them that it's time to fess up to the fact that they don't know all of the answers. You'll be doing them a favor by being honest. But if they aren't exactly winning any popularity contests with you, then do nothing. Just sit back and watch them do themselves in by being so smug.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Try to get face-to-face with any of the people who can help you get where you want to be today. It's a great day for you to make some serious headway, but you need to do all your talking in person. Sending an email or calling someone might be more convenient, but it's also less personal and therefore less effective. Words alone cannot communicate what you want right now. Your facial expression and body language will help your cause and help you reach your goal.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Forget about the things you don't like about your life. Focus on the hopes and dreams you have for the future. The more you think about your problems or worries, the more power you are giving them over your life. Today, put a smile on your face and be confident about where you are headed. And if you can't feel confident, then just fake it until you do. If you can convince yourself of your value, then other people will be convinced of it too.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

If you want to affect someone else's life in a powerful and profound way, today brings you an opportunity to do just that. But in order to tap into this potential, you should be of service to anyone and everyone as soon as you're out and about today. Don't reserve your generous nature for just one person. Giving up good parking spots, lending small sums of money, or listening to a complaining coworker could be the opening to a bigger and more fruitful connection.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

All of those light, flirty conversations you've been enjoying with a cute someone have been fun, but today you should be brave. Push things to the next level. Instead of skimming the surface, go deep down into the real substance of who they are. Find out what makes them tick and see what you come up with. This person is not quite who you think they are, and after a probing conversation you might start to feel a lot differently about them, and they might see you differently too.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

In your career life, you should look for people to start giving you more of the kind of feedback that is difficult for you to hear. Look for feedback that is genuine and honest and therefore extremely valuable. Listen, don't get defensive, and have faith in your ability to grow from knowing how they feel. Whether you move forward in order to prove them wrong, or integrate their advice into what you are working on, their honesty will invigorate you and ultimately be very inspiring.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your compassionate nature is something others admire in you, but it could be putting you into a phase of emotional intensity and upheaval right now if you are not careful. It's simply not healthy to get too involved in other people's drama. Try to take a more impersonal point of view about things. You are not responsible for making everyone happy all the time, so do not put that level of pressure on yourself. Do something by yourself that you enjoy today. Focus on you.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your words have extra weight today, so be mindful of what you say. You can't just toss off whatever comes to your mind. Think through what you are about to say. And if you offer criticism today, give concrete examples. Help people understand what you mean or else they could just get defensive and reject what you are saying out of hand. And don't forget to make it clear to them that you know they are capable of amazing things. They need to hear it.

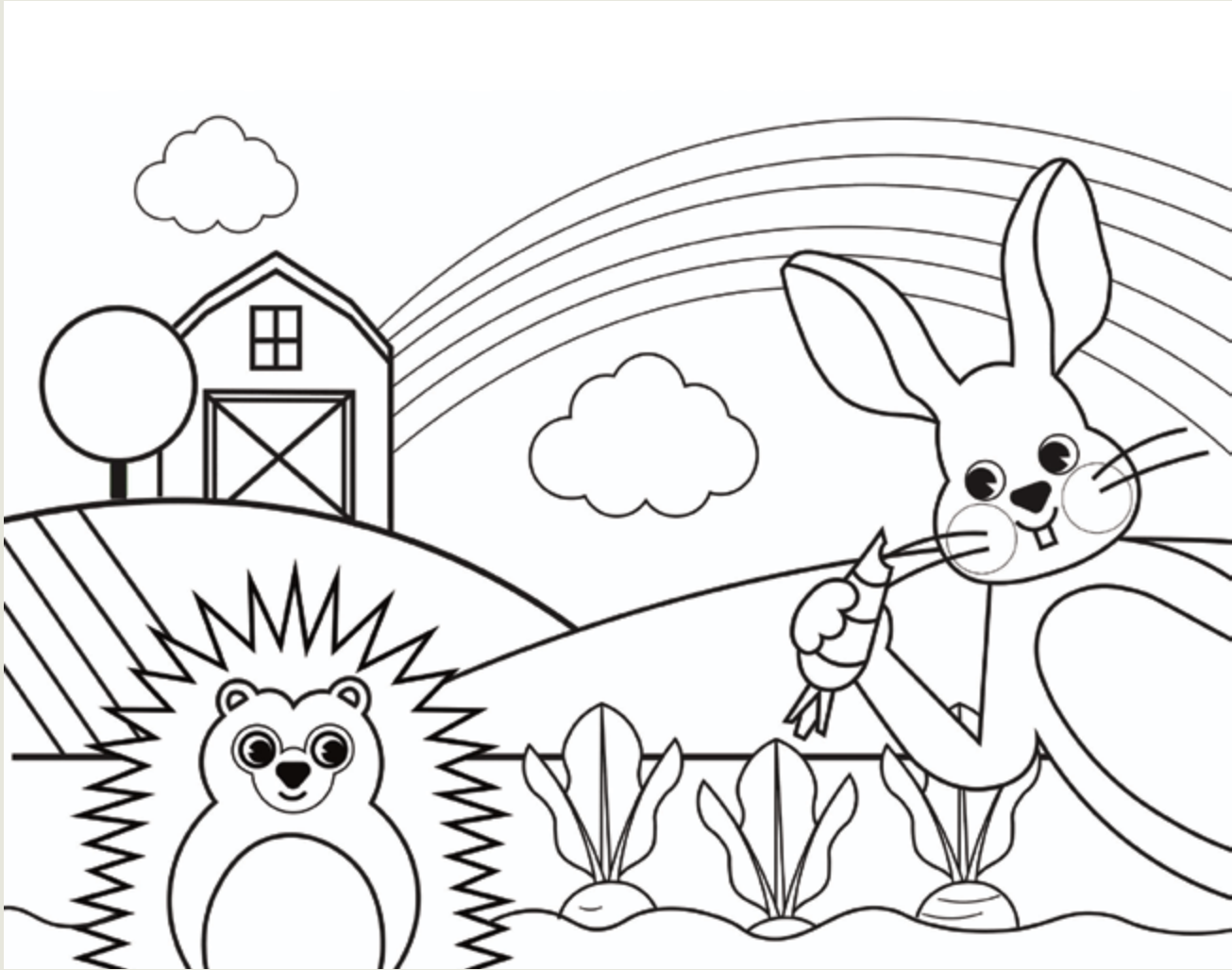
PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You might have to navigate through some unfamiliar territory today, but this should not be a very scary experience for you. You have solid footing in your life and a good sense of where you want to go, but the same might not be said of the people who are going along with you. They're in it for fun, and they could distract you from getting serious stuff done. If you are wishy-washy about their involvement, then you have to let them know your concerns.

- 01. Which brothers founded the studio which developed the dance rhythm game, Just Dance 2021?**
- A. Smith
 - B. Guillemot
 - C. Kwok
 - D. Gou
- 02. Who was Prime Minister of the UK on 28 March 1979, when the House of Commons passed a Motion of No Confidence, forcing a general election that was won by Margaret Thatcher?**
- A. Edward Heath
 - B. Harold Wilson
 - C. Alec Douglas-Home
 - D. James Callaghan
- 03. Who used to observe the Sarum Rite?**
- A. Followers of the religion now known as Wicca
 - B. Druids
 - C. Prehistoric peoples living in Salisbury
 - D. Mediaeval Christians in parts of Europe

Answers: 1.B 2.D 3.D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	Y	R	E
O	P	O	H
A	L	O	T
H	U	S	S

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

MASTERCLASS

Vinicius stars as Real Madrid thrash Barcelona 4-1 to win Spanish Super Cup

Riyadh - Vinicius Jr scored a hat-trick in the first half as Real Madrid were crowned Spanish Super Cup champions after a 4-1 demolition of bitter rivals Barcelona in Saudi Arabia on Sunday.

Real dominated every aspect of the game and toyed with last year's champions who could not handle Vinicius and ended the contest with 10 men after defender Ronald Araujo was sent off for a second booking in the 71st minute after two fouls on the Brazilian.

"I didn't expect us to score three so soon, but we took advantage of their high defensive line with an inspired Vinicius tonight," Real manager Carlo Ancelotti told Movistar Plus.

"It was a difficult match, the result seems too much for the way Barcelona played. At 3-1 it was even. At 4-1 they dropped their arms a bit. We are happy."

Ancelotti was being kind to Barca who could have suffered an even bigger defeat after a dismal second half in which they didn't record a single shot on target.

Real's masterclass, however,



Real Madrid players celebrate with the trophy

had started much earlier, with Jude Bellingham, Rodrygo and Vinicius creating all kinds of trouble for a Barcelona defence that was playing with an extremely high line.

It took Real seven minutes to open the scoring thanks to a magnificent assist by Bellingham.

The England midfielder was surrounded by three players on the halfway line but somehow managed to produce a stunning

pass to find Vinicius who took the ball in his stride and effortlessly raced past the goalkeeper to finish into an empty net.

Real wasted a great opportunity to extend their lead when Federico Valverde recovered the ball quickly and delivered a great pass through to Rodrygo, whose point-blank strike was brilliantly saved by goalkeeper Inaki Pena.

Real's second came from another long pass, this time with

Dani Carvajal finding Rodrygo in the right channel. He broke into the box before squaring the ball across the penalty area for a Vinicius tap-in in the 10th minute.

Barcelona almost hit back quickly as Ferran Torres fired a half-volley against the crossbar and goalkeeper Andriy Lunin made a reflex save to deny a bullet strike from Robert Lewandowski on the rebound.

Yet Barca were resilient and

managed to reduce the deficit with a fine Lewandowski strike from another rebound in the 33rd minute.

The momentum was seemingly in Barca's favour when Aurelien Tchouameni lifted a cross to Vinicius Jr who was held by defender Araujo as he tried to pounce on the ball. Vinicius took the penalty and netted with a tidy finish to the goalkeeper's right in the 39th minute.

The goal was a hammer blow for Barcelona and Real dominated the second half with Rodrygo hitting their fourth from a rebound in the 64th minute.

The loss will increase the pressure on Barca manager Xavi, who has faced criticism from fans and media who are unhappy with the team's form.

They sit fourth in the LaLiga standings on 41 points, eight behind leaders Girona.

Tottenham salvage 2-2 draw with Manchester United

Manchester, England - Manchester United were held to a 2-2 Premier League draw by Tottenham Hotspur at Old Trafford on Sunday in a disappointing result for Erik ten Hag's team who twice took the lead but were pegged back by an aggressive performance from the visitors.

Rasmus Hojlund's early opener was cancelled out by Richarlison and Rodrigo Bentancur levelled again for Spurs after Marcus Rashford had put United back in front.

Spurs, who were hit hard by illness this week, remained fifth in the table, level on 40 points with fourth-placed Arsenal but having played a game more.

"Delighted, mate," Spurs manager Ange Postecoglou told the BBC.

"You always want to win games but I couldn't be prouder of the players. They have had to deal with a fair bit this week and to put on a performance like that... I thought the way we handled the game was outstanding."

United climbed a spot to seventh, but are eight points adrift of the top four.

"I am quite disappointed, when you go ahead twice and then concede two soft goals it is a bit frustrating, but you have to take it as it is," Ten Hag told the BBC. "The attitude from the team was great, the spirit was great."

United got off to a lively start with a goal from Hojlund in the third minute. The 20-year-old scored for the second time in as many home games with a ferocious left-footed shot to the top corner. Richarlison capitalised on United's poor marking to head in the equaliser from a corner in the 19th. Rashford put United back on top just before the break after a quick one-two with Hojlund for his fourth goal of the season and first at home.



Tottenham's Rodrigo Bentancur celebrates after scoring against Manchester United

You always want to win games but I couldn't be prouder of the players. They have had to deal with a fair bit this week and to put on a performance like that...

ANGE POSTECGLOU

Bentancur cancelled out Rashford's goal when he scored less than a minute after the interval, taking a pass from debutant Timo Werner before firing the ball past goalkeeper Andre Onana.

"To play for a new club in this stadium against United, you're always a bit nervous. You try to enjoy it," Werner, who joined Spurs on loan from RB Leipzig earlier in the week, told Sky Sports.

Scott McTominay almost net-

ted a winner seconds before the final whistle, but his header from Alejandro Garnacho's pinpoint cross sailed just over the bar.

United were able to delay keeper Onana's travel to the Africa Cup of Nations so he could play on Sunday. The Cameroonian was scheduled to depart for the Ivory Coast on a private plane right after the match.

Some good news for injury-plagued United was the return of Lisandro Martinez.

Giroud stars as ruthless Milan ease past Roma

Milan, Italy - AC Milan striker Olivier Giroud produced a sparkling performance as they secured a commanding 3-1 Serie A victory at home to AS Roma on Sunday, thanks in large part to the Frenchman who scored one goal and created another.

The 37-year-old Giroud was in the perfect position to head in their second goal before his brilliant back-heel flick set up Theo Hernandez for the third.

Milan are third in the standings with 42 points, nine behind leaders Inter Milan, and four behind second-placed Juventus, who host Sassuolo on Tuesday. Roma are ninth with 29 points.

Milan have an eight-point lead over Fiorentina in fourth, after Vincenzo Italiano's side secured a 2-2 draw at home against Udinese earlier on Sunday thanks to a late penalty from M'Bala Nzola.

"Clearly, at 2-1 anything can happen. We had wasted chances to get the third goal and were starting to feel tired, but we got there eventually," Milan manager Stefano Pioli told DAZN.

Pioli was asked if Milan were still in the title race.



Olivier Giroud celebrates his goal

"No, take us out of that. We have to focus on ourselves and the objective is very clear, we did fairly well in the first half of the season and want to do better in

the second half," he replied.

"I don't think 39 points was too bad a tally at the midway stage, but we've got to step on the gas now."



Tunisia's Ons Jabeur defeated Ukraine's Yuliia Starodubtseva

Tunisian star Jabeur eases into second round in Melbourne

Melbourne, Australia - Ons Jabeur began her latest bid to become the first Arab and African woman to claim a Grand Slam title with a comfortable 6-3 6-1 win over Yuliia Starodubtseva on Monday.

The smiling sixth seed - who fans have dubbed Tunisia's "Minister of Happiness" - came within touching distance of Grand Slam glory previously by reaching the last two Wimbledon finals and finishing runner-up to Iga Swiatek at the 2022 U.S. Open.

"It's very special to come back here," said Jabeur, who crashed out in the second round in 2023 amid health issues. "I decided to rest a bit before the Australian Open and play here."

Last year wasn't so great for me here and I was a little stressed, but the crowd made me feel less stressed

ONS JABEUR

"Last year wasn't so great for me here and I was a little stressed, but the crowd made me feel less stressed. I saw some guys I've known from 2016 cheering for me when I was playing qualifying. They've been following me since qualifying. Thank you for coming and supporting me for so many years."

In a tricky opening set, Jabeur twice swapped breaks with her Ukrainian opponent but broke to lead 5-3 after an 11-minute game featuring six deuces before pulling away for the early lead. The 29-year-old looked far more assured in the second set as she took a 3-1 lead with an overhead smash and almost toyed with her opponent with some delightful slices to seal the victory and set up a meeting with either Mirra Andreeva or Bernarda Pera.

Osaka falls at first hurdle; Gauff progresses

Melbourne, Australia - Naomi Osaka did not enjoy the fairytale return she hoped for at the Australian Open as the twice champion lost 6-4 7-6(2) to French 16th seed Caroline Garcia in the opening round on Monday.

Osaka returned to the tour after 15 months out during which she had her first child and the four-time Grand Slam champion looked rusty at times in her first appearance at a major since 2022 as Garcia capitalised to ease through the first set.



Naomi Osaka

Coco Gauff first made a big splash at Melbourne Park in 2020 with an upset of holder Osaka and the 19-year-old American, who claimed her first major at the U.S. Open last year, romped into the second round on a sunny day two morning.

Fourth-seeded Gauff admitted to making a nervous start in the first match on Rod Laver Arena but quickly hit her stride to rattle off the last nine games for a convincing 6-3 6-0 win over Anna Karolina Schmiedlova.

'WE CAN GO TOE TO TOE WITH ANY TEAM'



Oman coach Branko Ivankovic talk to his players during a team training session

Oman are confident and excited about their opener against Saudi Arabia, says coach Ivankovic

Al Rayyan - Oman coach Branko Ivankovic has solid AFC Asian Cup experience, having led Iran to the semi-finals in the 2004 edition, and he wants his Oman side to take heart from their previous encounters against Saudi Arabia to stun them in their Group F opener at Khalifa International Stadium on Tuesday.

"We are excited for tomorrow's match and are honoured to be here at the AFC Asian Cup," said Ivankovic.

"As Omanis, we come here with great passion, our initial objective is to advance past the group stage. We start against the strongest team in the group Saudi Arabia. We have played against them and against other strong teams in recent months and played really well."

"We analysed Saudi Arabia's matches in the qualifiers against Pakistan and also used our understanding of Mancini's football philosophy, which is well known,

but we always focus on ourselves more than we focus on the opponents. It is more important to know what we are planning to do. If we are only reactive to the opponents' approach, we will never get good results in football.

"With all due respect to Saudi Arabia, we have proved many times that we can go toe-to-toe with any team we face, and the result will be decided on the pitch. What I want is to see the players being proud of themselves

and putting in a performance that makes all Omanis proud."

Meanwhile, Roberto Mancini wants his Saudi Arabia side to draw lessons from his Euro 2020 winning Italy team.

Mancini had led a then unfancied Italy side to overcome powerhouses such as Belgium, Spain and England to win the title, and he wants his Saudi players to give their all to bring home the Asian title for the fourth time in the country's history. "We are here, we know we are a big team but this is also a very important tournament. We know there are many top national teams in this

tournament, and we want to do our best job," said Mancini who was only appointed as the Green Falcons boss in August 2023.

"Saudi Arabia is a very important country, but we know if we want to win the title, we need to be very strong. Football is a strange thing; things can quickly change during the tournament. For Italy during the Euros, we were only the sixth favourites, but we won it."

An influx of foreign superstars to the Saudi Pro League last summer meant playing opportunities became limited for many members of the Saudi squad, with the likes of forward Saleh Al Shehri

As Omanis, we come here with great passion, our initial objective is to advance past the group stage. We start against the strongest team in the group Saudi Arabia.

BRANKO IVANKOVIC



making only four league appearances for the club all season, but Mancini believes the group stage matches will help him overcome the challenge.

"We have many players who often don't play in their clubs, but we had two weeks of work and we worked well. All the Oman players play regularly, but we are happy with the players that we have. We brought them because we know they are ready to fight for their country, and we will also use the first three matches to im-

prove their situation in terms of match fitness."

The former Manchester City and Italy boss has tweaked the team's formation. Deploying a three-man defence in pre-tournament friendlies. "No one knows the first XI for tomorrow, but I want only players who want to fight for their country. We could play with 3,4 or 5 defenders tomorrow, the system is not important, the important thing is the mentality with which you approach the games."



Harib al Saadi (R)

Al Saadi calls for Oman unity

Al Rayyan - Excitement is buzzing throughout the Omani camp as they take on Saudi Arabia in their Group F opener at the Asian Cup in Qatar.

Forward Harib al Saadi, eager to make his mark, thanked hosts Qatar and highlighted his team's determination to bring glory.

"I would like to thank Qatar for the hospitality," said Al Saadi.

"We are excited to play at the Asian Cup, and the players want to take the responsibility and represent the name of Oman in

the best possible way.

"Everyone knows the name of Saudi Arabia and their level in Asian football. In both games we played against them, we put in a good performance both in Oman and in Jeddah. Players change for sure, but Saudi Arabia remain one of the strongest teams in the continent. We focus on Saudi Arabia as a team, not individuals. Just like us, it is about the group together, and if we are all united, we can be superior as a team and get the result we want."



UAE's Zayed Sultan (C) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Hong Kong

UAE beat Hong Kong

Al Rayyan - United Arab Emirates began their AFC Asian Cup Group C campaign with an impressive 3-1 win over Hong Kong at the Khalifa International Stadium on Sunday.

Despite the defeat, Hong Kong scorer Philip Chan Siu Kwan etched his name in AFC Asian Cup history by scoring the 1,000th goal of the continental showpiece.

Hong Kong - the lowest-ranked team in the competition - displayed plenty of attacking intent early on with several long-range attempts but Khalid Elsa in

the UAE goalmouth was mostly untroubled.

Evertton Camargo squandered a decent opportunity just before the 10-minute mark when, despite having teammates on either side, chose to go for glory himself only to find his attempt blocked.

The tie took a significant turn in the 31st minute when Hong Kong centre-back Oliver Gerbig was adjudged to have handled Sultan Adil's shot inside the box with Adil converting from the spot to give UAE the lead.

Hong Kong hit the ground

running after the break and were rewarded with Chan drawing them level in the 50th minute, slotting home a stunning cross from Evertton.

With the equaliser, Hong Kong etched their name in the AFC Asian Cup for a second time as the occasion marked not only their first goal since Chang Chi Kong's effort in 1956 (the first-ever in the competition), but it was also the 1,000th goal of the continental showpiece.

However, the Dragons' joy was short-lived as UAE regained the lead in the very next minute.



Iran players celebrate a goal against Palestine

Impressive Iran ease past Palestine

Al Rayyan - Iran began their Asian Cup Group C campaign with an eye-catching 4-1 win over Palestine on Sunday.

The victory at the Education City Stadium means Iran top the group ahead of the United Arab Emirates - who beat Hong Kong 3-1 earlier in the day - on goal difference.

Before kick-off, the players and fans in attendance stood united for a minute of silence, in compassion with the ongoing conflict in Palestine.

When the action got underway, three-time champions IR Iran took the lead after only two minutes of play when Mehdi Ghayedi's cross from the left found Saman Ghoddos who controlled the ball with his first touch and with his second, set up Karim Ansarifard for a well-placed shot into the bottom corner.

The Iranians looked dangerous every time they ventured forward and doubled their lead in the 12th minute when Ghoddos's curling free-kick found an unmarked Shojae Khalilzadeh at the far post to sweep past a stranded Rami Hamada.

It could have been three in the 22nd minute as Alireza Jahanbakhsh stole the ball off Michael Termanini at the edge of the

Palestine box before sending his square pass towards Mehdi Taremi but an alert Hamada was quickly off his line to thwart the danger.

The third goal, however, came seven minutes before the break when a quick interchange of passes on the right flank released Jahanbakhsh who used Taremi's run as a diversion to release the ball to the onrushing Ghayedi to finish.

Palestine, however, ended the first half with a glimmer of hope, a stunning Tamer Seyam header in the sixth minute of added time giving Iran goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand no chance.

Their hopes, however, were dashed when AS Roma forward Sardar Azmoun - who came on at the start of the second half - needed only 10 minutes to make his presence felt, knocking home a loose ball from close range after good work by Sadegh Mohammadi on the right.

Palestine tried to find a way back but Iran continued to dictate the pace and it could have gotten worse for the West Asian side when centre-back Mohammed Saleh was initially shown a red card for a foul on Azmoun but upon a VAR review, the card was rescinded with a yellow card shown instead.

Cape Verde stun Ghana to continue day of shocks at Cup of Nations

Abidjan, Ivory Coast - Garry Rodrigues scored a dramatic stoppage-time winner as the Cape Verde Islands beat four-time champions Ghana 2-1 in Group B to continue Sunday's sequence of surprise results at the Africa Cup of Nations finals.

It was the third match of the day in Abidjan and followed Nigeria's draw with Equatorial Guinea in Group A while Egypt needed a last-gasp penalty to draw with Mozambique in the opening Group B match at the Felix Houphouet-Boigny Stadium.

Cape Verde went ahead in the



Jamiro Monteiro of Cape Verde Islands celebrates after scoring against Ghana

17th minute when a low shot from Dutch-born Rodrigues was parried by Ghana goalkeeper Richard Ofori, falling for Jamiro Monteiro to tuck away from close range.

Ghana thought they had equalised 10 minutes before half-time when Majeed Ashimeru struck a powerful shot into the net from outside Cape Verde's penalty area.

But after a VAR check it was disallowed because Ransford Konigsdorffer, in an offside position, was deemed to be interfering by being in the goalkeeper's line of sight.



India's Shivam Dube plays a shot during his blazing knock of 63 off 32 balls against Afghanistan on Sunday

INDIA SEAL SERIES

Jaiswal, Dube help hosts beat Afghanistan in second T20

Indore, India -Scintillating half-centuries from Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shivam Dube helped India beat Afghanistan by six wickets in the second T20I in Indore and take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. This win also extended India's unbeaten streak in the bilateral T20I series at home to 15. The last time they lost a home T20I series was in 2019, when Australia beat them 2-0.

After being sent in, Afghanistan rode on Gulbadin

Naib's 57 off 35 balls before India applied the brakes. But a late assault from Karim Janat and Mujeeb Ur Rahman, who scored a combined 41 off 19, lifted the visitors to 172.

During the chase, Fazalhaq Farooqi bowled Rohit Sharma for a first-ball duck. Rohit was out without scoring in the first T20I as well, where he was run out off his second ball. Virat Kohli, playing his first T20I since the 2022 T20 World Cup, also looked to attack right away. He was a lot

more successful than his captain, scoring 29 off 16.

The stars of the match, though, were Jaiswal and Dube. The two seemed to be competing against each other with the Afghanistan bowlers looking incidental. Jaiswal reached his fifty off 27 balls and Dube off just 22 as both tried to send every possible ball to the boundary. As a result, India chased down their target in just 15.4 overs.

Rahmanullah Gurbaz gave Afghanistan a quick start, hitting the first legal delivery of the first over for a four and the first one of the second for a six. But his stay was short-lived as he fell to Ravi Bishnoi for 14 off nine.

No. 3 Naib ensured Afghanistan did not lose their momentum. He hit back-to-back fours off Mukesh Kumar before topping it with 6, 4, 4 off Bishnoi in the next over. He ended the powerplay with yet another boundary, taking Afghanistan to 58 for 2 after six.

At the other end, Shivam Dube castled Azmatullah Omarzai with a back-of-the-hand slower ball. But Naib took a liking to him, hitting the medium-pacer for two sixes in his next over, the ninth. Between those two hits, he had a slice of luck as well, when Kohli, charging in from long-on, shelled a difficult low chance. Naib was on 41 then.

Boucher expresses concerns about South Africa's Test schedule against New Zealand

Muscat- Former South Africa Test player and coach, Mark Boucher, expressed disappointment with Cricket South Africa (CSA) for scheduling a Test Series in New Zealand during the 2024 SA20.

After a couple of false starts to set up a franchise-based T20 league in South Africa, the Cricket South Africa (CSA) launched the SA20 - a Twenty20 franchise cricket tournament in 2023.

The first edition was a huge success financially and in terms of viewership. The 2024 edition of SA20 started on January 10 and will be on for a month. At the same time, South Africa are scheduled to play two Test matches in New Zealand starting from February 4.

Due to the clash in event dates, the CSA has announced a second-string team to tour New Zealand for the Test series. The priority is to ensure player participation in SA20.

Boucher, the second most capped Test player from South Africa after Jacques Kallis, and the former head coach of the South Africa cricket team, expressed great disappointment with the scheduling decisions.

Boucher is an ambassador of



Mark Boucher

The scheduling needs to be really looked at by CSA, I don't think it's acceptable

MARK BOUCHER

needs to be really looked at by CSA, I don't think it's acceptable."

Boucher questions the CSA for what he sees as unacceptable scheduling, especially comparing it to the prioritization of Test cricket by other major cricketing nations. Boucher suggests that CSA needs to re-evaluate its scheduling practices.

"If I was New Zealand cricket, I'd be quite disappointed. I understand them not wanting to pull out as well because the World Test Championship points are at stake. But I do think that we in South Africa need to sit down, have a hard look at ourselves at the scheduling and find a way to make it right", said Boucher.

SA20 and the current head coach of the IPL team Mumbai Indians.

Speaking to SportsBoom.com, Boucher said: "I'll be honest with you. I am extremely disappointed. It's got nothing to do with the players. You can't blame the players that have been selected or the players that are not going. I think the scheduling

Al Muthla Golden, Peace Players, Fagor FCC win

Muscat - Al Muthla Golden CT defeated Aflag Group CT by 10 runs in the C Division League 2023-24 powered by Credit Oman at Municipality Grounds Amerat.

Al Muthla Golden CT posted 193 courtesy of Ali Asgar Saifee's 85. In response, Junaid Iqbal starred with a 97 but it was in vain as Aflag's chase fell short by 10 runs. Shyam Lekshman scalped four wickets.

Peace Players defeated Blue



Shyam Lekshman and Ali Asgar Saifee of Al Muthla Golden CT

Caps Cricket by 116 runs in the E Division League 2023-24 powered by

ered by Credit Oman at the Municipality Grounds Amerat.

Muhammed Rashid's brilliant century (111) and Tejesh Shetty's 59 helped Peace Players post a mammoth target of 248. In response, Blue Caps were restricted to 131 courtesy as Muhammed Abrar and Arslan Zaheer took three wickets each. Shifin Shajahan scored 46

In the G Division League, Fagor FCC beat OCT Al Amerat by 44 runs.

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eyestrain

Treatment for eyestrain generally consists of making changes in your daily habits or environment. Some people may also need treatment for an underlying eye condition.

Wearing glasses that are prescribed for specific activities, such as for computer use or for reading, are helpful to reduce eyestrain. Your eye specialist may suggest that you take regular eye breaks to help your eyes focus at different distances. Consider these tips to reduce or prevent eyestrain:

Adjust the lighting

When watching television, it may be easier on your eyes if you

keep the room softly lit. When reading printed materials or doing close work, try to position the light source behind you and direct the light onto your page or task. If you're reading at a desk, use a shaded light positioned in front of you. The shade will keep light from shining directly into your eyes.

Take breaks

When reading or doing close

work, take occasional breaks and rest your eyes by looking away from the page, digital screen or task. Limit screen time - this is especially important for children, who may not make the connection between extended viewing, eyestrain and the need to rest their eyes regularly.

Use artificial tears

Nonprescription artificial tears can help prevent and relieve dry

eyes. Use them even when your eyes feel fine to keep them well lubricated and prevent a recurrence of symptoms. Your eye specialist can suggest which eye drops might be best for you. Avoid eye drops with a redness remover, as these may worsen dry eye symptoms. Eye drops that don't contain preservatives can be used as often as you need. If you use eye drops containing preservatives, you may develop

a sensitivity to the preservative if you use the drops more than four times a day.

Improve air quality

Improve the air quality of your space. Some changes that may help prevent dry eyes include using a humidifier, adjusting the thermostat to reduce blowing air and avoiding smoke. Moving your chair to a different area may help reduce the amount of dry moving air on your eyes and face.

Choose the right eyewear for you. If you need glasses or contacts and work at a computer, consider investing in glasses or contact lenses designed specifically for computer work.



TIPS FOR COMPUTER WORK

Computer use is a common cause of eyestrain. If you work at a desk and use a computer, these self-care steps can help take some of the strain off your eyes:

Blink often

Blink often to refresh your eyes. Many people blink less than usual when working at a computer, which can contribute to dry eyes. Blinking produces tears that moisten and refresh your eyes. Try to make it a habit to blink more often when looking at a monitor.

Take eye breaks

Throughout the day, give your eyes a break by looking away from your monitor. Try the 20-20-20 rule: Every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds.

Reduce glare

Bright lighting and too much glare can strain your eyes and make it difficult to see objects on your monitor. The worst problems are generally from sources above or behind you, including fluorescent lighting and sunlight. Consider turning off some or all of the overhead lights. If you need light for writing or reading, use an adjustable desk lamp. Close blinds or shades, and avoid placing your monitor directly in front of a window or white wall. Place an anti-glare cover over the screen.

Adjust your monitor

Position your monitor directly in front of you about an arm's length away so that the top of the screen is at or just below eye level. It also helps to have a chair you can adjust.

Use a document holder

If you need to refer to print material while you work on your computer, place it on a document holder. Some holders are designed to be placed between the keyboard and the monitor; others are placed to the side. Find one that works for you.

Adjust your screen settings. Enlarge the type for easier reading. And adjust the contrast and brightness to a level that's comfortable for you.

Can fats make you fat?



VANDANA CHAWLA

NUTRITION & YOU

We have all grown up with one common contention - fats can make you fat.

For years, fat has been considered one of the biggest enemies in the dietary world. After World War II, a lot of studies were conducted on fat which brought out a general guideline that, fat is the cause of heart disease. Plus, since it gives more than double the calories per gram, when compared with carbs or proteins, it is related to weight gain. All these are still considered correct, but then, something in-between is missing in these statements.

First and foremost, the statement that 'all fats are bad' needs to be corrected to 'some

fats are bad, not all.' This indicates that all fats are not alike. Hence, we have good fats and bad fats.

Good fat vs bad fat

The good fats or the mono and unsaturated fats protect your heart, ensure proper functioning of your brain, enhance the absorption of vitamins like A, D, E, and K, and fight inflammation. These fats also keep your tummy full and control food cravings.

Foods like avocados, cashews, almonds, pecans, olives, olive oil, peanuts, peanut butter, pumpkin seeds, and sesame seeds are all good sources of monounsaturated fats.

Polyunsaturated fats, which include Omega 3's, is a big star in the world of fats. Fatty fish, walnuts, flax seeds, and chia seeds are all rich in these fats. The other type of polyunsaturated fats is found in vegetable oils, like, canola, sunflower, and soybean.

Bad fats, on the contrary, are the saturated or trans fats that clog arteries, increase the risk for stroke or heart disease, affect brain functioning and are the cause of weight gain. In this



category, trans fats are termed as ugly or worse fats. These are artificial fats which were created in the laboratories to reduce the cost and increase the shelf life of food. Processed foods usually contain trans fats, while most animal foods, like red meat, organ meat, eggs, and dairy provide saturated fats.

Now comes the question, can fats make

one fat?

The answer is not straight. The good fat although has many health benefits is not a green signal that one can eat as much as one wants. At the same time, bad fats, other than trans fats, should not be completely removed from the diet. The dietary sources of saturated fats, like eggs, and meat are also great sources of

good quality proteins, heme iron and other nutrients. So, taking these foods in balanced amounts is more important than removing them from the diet.

Hence, to make fats your friend:

- Include more good fats but in moderation
- Saturated fats found in dairy, and eggs if taken along with fruits, veggies, and whole grains make it a complete meal
- Do not replace bad fats with high-carb or high-protein foods - a balanced diet is the key
- Do not go for low-fat products as they may be loaded with sugar
- Read labels carefully and look out for words like 'trans fats' or 'partially hydrogenated fats' as they are the major culprits.

To conclude, when it comes to fat, both quality and quantity matters. Try making fats your friend by choosing the right kind, eating in the right amounts and combining it with other natural whole foods.

(Vandana Chawla is an Online Nutrition Expert and a Registered Nutritionist-UKVRN)



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ARM TONING



PUSH-UPS AND PLANKS

Looking to tone your upper arms? Whether you've got gym equipment of your own or not, there are a variety of engaging arm exercises which will tone your existing muscle and make your arms the envy of everyone



BICEP CURLS

Here's the correct way to do a dumbbell bicep curl:

- Hold a dumbbell in each hand, keeping your feet shoulder-width apart and your arms resting at your sides.
- Bend your elbows and lift your lower arms, keeping your back straight and at a 45-degree angle. It's okay to look downward during this movement in bringing the dumbbells up towards your shoulders. Be sure not to move your elbows, however; it's just your lower arms and the dumbbells which should change position during this exercise.
- Reverse the motion, lowering the weights to their original position. You've now done one dumbbell bicep curl.

DOS AND DON'TS

- Do start out with three sets of eight curls, and adjust as you become used to the weight.
- Do keep your core tight during the workout, as this will help you maintain balance and good posture.
- Don't rush through the motions. The point here isn't speed—it's to work your biceps, so taking it slowly and deliberately is key.
- Don't use weights that are too heavy for you. You should be able to lift them with some resistance. Once you've mastered your current weights, then you can scale up to something heavier.



LATERAL RAISE

Here's the correct way to do a lateral raise:

- Stand up straight with a dumbbell in each hand, your arms resting at your sides. Keep your feet shoulder width apart, and don't forget to maintain good posture.
- Keeping your arms straight, lift your arms out to the side, stopping once your arms are perpendicular to the rest of your body.
- Gently reverse the motion until you are back in

your original position. You've just done one lateral raise!

DOS AND DON'TS

- Do avoid a few easy mistakes, like clumsy/lifts or jerks
- Do maintain good posture to protect your spine
- Don't forget to breathe. This will also help you be mindful of your arm motions

PUSH UPS

Here's how to do a push up correctly:

- Get down on all fours and move into a plank position, lifting your upper body with your arms extended straight beneath your shoulders, and raising your feet to rest on your toes.
- Keep your back straight while you do this, forming a straight line down from the top of your head to your feet to maintain a neutral spine.
- Bend your elbows and slowly lower your body down until you're hovering above – and not touching – the ground.
- As you bend, your elbows should be at about a

- 45-degree angle to your body.
- Now push back through your arms to come back up into your starting position.

DOS AND DON'TS

- Do maintain control and move slow and smooth
- Do breathe naturally
- Don't hold your breath

You can make it easier for yourself by resting on your knees instead of your toes, with your feet crossed at your ankles.



PLANKS

Here's how to do the perfect plank:

- Start off by getting into a press up position, extending your arms in a straight line beneath your shoulders and raising up onto your toes.
- Slowly bend your arms to lower yourself down, resting your forearms on the floor beneath your shoulders.
- Keep your back straight, creating a straight line all the way from your head to your feet and looking at the space between your hands to create a neu

- tral spine.
- Activate your abs and keep them tight.
- Hold the position for as long as you can, before gently lowering yourself down to the floor.

DOS AND DON'TS

- Do try to look in a mirror to check your form.
- Do imagine your belly button is pushing against your spine. Squeeze your glutes.
- Don't raise your butt in the air.

Winter heart connection



Dr. Rajkumar
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In the midst of the winter chill, there's more than just frost in the air—there's a potential impact on your heart health. As temperatures drop, so does the tolerance of your cardiovascular system, raising the risk of heart attacks and strokes.

Recent studies have shed light on the intricate relationship between cold weather and cardiovascular health, revealing a 31-33% higher incidence of heart attacks during winter.

Why winter brings heart health risks

Cold weather and vasoconstriction

- Exposure to cold triggers vasoconstriction, narrowing blood vessels and increasing strain on the heart.
- For individuals with existing conditions, this can lead to heart symptoms and increased risk during exercise.

New year's resolutions and overexertion

January brings a surge in exercise resolutions, potentially leading to overexertion and heightened risk for those with heart conditions.

Stressful season

Winter stress, anxiety, and depression can contribute to heart attacks - addressing mental health is crucial.

Holiday feasting

Overindulgence during the holiday season can strain the heart - moderation in diet and alcohol consumption is key.

Less daylight impact

Reduced sunlight in winter affects



mood and heart health - vitamin D supplementation can be beneficial.

Flu season connection

The flu can increase blood pressure and inflammation, raising the risk of heart attacks - an annual flu shot is recommended.

Preventing winter heart risks

Dress appropriately - Layer up with hats, gloves, and heavy socks to stay warm.

Take breaks - If outdoors, give yourself breaks to warm up.

Moderate alcohol intake - Be cautious of excess alcohol consumption, as it can deceive your body's perception of warmth.

Hand hygiene - Frequent hand-washing helps reduce the risk of respiratory infections associated with heart attacks.

Seek prompt help - Don't hesitate to seek assistance if you experience new symptoms of a heart condition, even during holidays.

Warning signs - Acute chest pain, nausea, dizziness, shortness of breath, and cold sweats are crucial signs not to be ignored.

Ischemic stroke awareness - Recognise stroke symptoms with F.A.S.T - Face drooping, Arm weakness, Speech difficulty, Time to call for help.

Heart health tips - Maintain a heart-healthy diet, exercise regularly, monitor blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels, manage stress, and pay attention to your body's signals.

Winter heart care tips - Stay indoors on cold days, keep your home warm, remain active, wear warm clothing when venturing outdoors.

Understanding the seasonal nuances affecting heart health empowers individuals to take proactive steps. This winter, let's prioritise cardiovascular well-being for a healthier, heartier season.

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