

Businesses can now be started remotely

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a major boost to the economy and to attract foreign investments, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has announced that foreign investors can now set up companies in Oman remotely via the Oman Business Platform without the requirement for a residency card.

An official at MoCIIP said, "Foreign investors can start businesses in Oman remotely. Investors are allowed 100% ownership with no minimum capital requirement. Permits will be issued within a defined time-frame." Investors are required to furnish Know Your Customer (KYC) details in order to begin investments.

The ministry official noted that the Oman Business Platform includes details of the requirements and licences for 2,500 economic activities before they start investing.

"The KYC service also features facial recognition to verify users. Foreign investors should visit the Oman Business Platform website (business.gov.om), log in and select the 'Non-Citizens/Non-Residents' option.

"Investors should fill in the required information and the ministry will verify the application and send the investor a password for authentication," the official informed.

The decision was welcomed



The decision will also encourage competition among national investors and motivate them to develop their businesses

NASSER AL HOSNI

by many experts.

Nasser al Hosni, a businessman and economy analyst, told *Muscat Daily*, "The decision is an important step because it aims to stimulate the economy and attract the largest possible number of investors from different countries of the world."

According to Hosni, the decision will also encourage competition among national investors and motivate them to develop their businesses, besides sup-

porting Omani small and medium enterprises and push them to innovate.

Khalfan al Touqi, another economy analyst, described the decision is an "excellent step" that will enhance direct investment, increase national income and stimulate economic activity.

"The decision will also create job opportunities, promote the country as a tourist destination and prompt some investors to visit Oman to learn about the country's culture and tourist attractions," Touqi said.

The ministry has taken several decisions earlier to diversify investments and increase national income, such as the Investors Residency Programme that grants foreign investors and retirees long residency in Oman.

Housearch Investment Index

Meanwhile, the inaugural

Housearch Investment Index has given top rankings to Gulf countries, notably, Oman, Qatar and the UAE, particularly Dubai, for residential property investment in 2024, signaling a shift in global real estate trends.

This trend underscores the region's appeal as a stable and reliable investment haven, especially amidst cooling property markets in Europe and North America due to expected "higher-for-longer" interest rates.

According to the Index's ranking, Oman and Qatar are gaining traction, attracting global investors seeking reliable and stable cash flows.

These markets are emerging as attractive alternatives to traditional investment destinations, offering promising opportunities for portfolio diversification.

H M the Sultan congratulates Emir of Kuwait

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a congratulatory cable to Sheikh Mishal al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, the new Emir of Kuwait, on being sworn in, taking the constitutional oath and assuming the reins of power in the State of Kuwait.



Sheikh Mishal al Sabah

In the cable, His Majesty wished Sheikh Mishal success in leading the Kuwaiti people to achieve further progress and prosperity. His Majesty also stressed on the depth of fraternal relations that bind the two countries and endeavours to consolidate these bonds.

'38% of global population in need of humanitarian aid'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

This region of over half a billion people is home to 38% of the global population in need of humanitarian aid, accounting for over 140mn people, according to Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

"This is my last media briefing before the year ends, and I am speaking to you today with the heaviest heart as I, like all of us here, witness unimaginable suffering," Dr Mandhari said.

"These numbers represent the everyday tragedies experienced by the people of Syria, Afghanistan and Morocco after earthquakes, the lived horrors of the people of Libya after catastrophic flooding, drought in the Horn of Africa, rapidly worsening conflict in Sudan and, of course, the humanitarian crises in Gaza that continues to unfold with unprecedented brutality."

He informed that last week that the WHO Executive Board held a special emergency session on the health situation in the occupied Palestinian territory at the



The region deserves the compassion of the world and the global community to see the people of our region as people, not numbers that change on television screens

DR AHMED AL MANDHARI

request of 17 member states. It was the first time since the conflict began that the international community reached consensus on the situation in Gaza, issuing a resolution that calls for immediate, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian aid.

Despite this and the continuous efforts of UN Security-General António Guterres and humanitarian actors around the world, "the brutal violence is relentless and continues un-

abated," he added. It is only possible to adequately respond to the needs of the people once this conflict comes to an immediate halt.

The WHO, Dr Mandhari informed, has consistently called for an immediate and permanent ceasefire. A recent World Food Programme assessment said over 90% of households go to bed hungry and 63% spend an entire day without food.

"I plead for humanity to prevail and reiterate WHO's call for protecting healthcare workers and humanitarian assistance in the area. No one should bleed to death, and no one should die waiting for the few doctors remaining after too many have been killed.

"Despite the helplessness of our times, I insist on hope, and conclude with hopes for our region and its people to live a life of safety, dignity and prosperity. The Eastern Mediterranean Region deserves the compassion of the world and the global community to see the people of our region as people, not numbers that change on television screens."

Mega flower show to be held in January

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Over 100 participants from more than 30 countries will take part in the World Association of Floral Artists (WAFA) flower show scheduled to take place at National Museum of Oman from January 27 to February 1, 2023. This spectacular event promises to showcase the artistry of flower arrangements through competitions that will bring together participants from all over the world, making it a celebration of creativity and flowers. This is the first time ever that such an event will be held by WAFA in the GCC region.

Madhvi Khimji, the driving force behind this extraordinary floral extravaganza, has played a pivotal role in bringing together participants and blooms from diverse corners of the globe. Her passion for floral artistry is well known in the country and the floral community.

Speaking about the event, Ramesh Khimji, Chairman of Ramesh Khimji Group, who is instrumental in organising the



The event will showcase some of the best floral artists from around the world

RAMESH KHIMJI

flower show, said, "The event will showcase some of the best floral artists from around the world. It will also be a great chance for local florists to showcase and exhibit their creations. Madhvi's commitment to fostering creativity and cultural exchange will be evident in every petal of this unprecedented floral showcase, leaving an indelible mark on Oman and the GCC."

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Initiative to boost advanced digital skills of Omani youth



Muscat gears up for Christmas 2023

Initiative to boost advanced digital skills of Omani youth

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has launched an Initiative called Digital Makeen as part of the National Programme for the Digital Economy in efforts to train Omani youth to lead the digital transformation.

An official at MTCIT said, “The initiative aims to qualify Omani youth with modern digital skills that are in high demand in the labour market. Additionally, it seeks to provide income-generating opportunities for Omani youth in the digital sector by 2025, aligning with the ministry’s objectives in the 10th Five-Year Plan.” The initiative involves a multi-pronged approach - technical camps; certification for advanced skills and professional specialised qualification; and technical camps.

Technical camps will offer intensive practical training programmes of six-month duration, focusing on developing skills and



competencies in digital Oman for the labour market. The camps will include programmes for advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, data science, software engineering, mobile app development, and integrated web development.

The ‘Najeh’ programme, a training camp in collaboration OXY Company focused on cybersecurity and database, and has 23 trainees in the first round.

The Makeen Camp pro-

gramme, in collaboration with Coding Academy, targets computer engineering and information technology, with 100 trainees in 2023. Additionally, 15 jobseekers participated in ‘Omani-Saudi Camps’ for data analysis, web development (Java) and cybersecurity.

The MTCIT official added, “The Mini Certificates for Advanced Skills offer electronic training programmes via local or international platforms, preparing

beneficiaries for specific technical skills. The goal is to equip independent workers in the Omani market, enabling them to benefit from global and local self-employment platforms. This aspect of the initiative includes the Makeen Advanced Digital Certification Programme in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour through the Udacity platform, training 4,200 jobseekers of which 600 have already undergone training.”

The specialised professional qualification programmes target prominent technology partners such as Huawei, Cisco and Microsoft. The aim is to qualify beneficiaries and supply the market with specialists holding accredited professional certificates.

A module focused on technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is in partnership with Tech Mahindra, training 23 participants in the first batch.

Other modules include earth observation and cloud computing on Amazon technologies with 27 and 116 trainees, respectively.

National Museum holds lecture on Moscow Kremlin Museums

Muscat- The National Museum of Oman, represented by the Learning Centre, organised a lecture on Moscow Kremlin Museums presented by Dr Elena Gagarina, Director General of Moscow Kremlin Museums, on Wednesday.

By organising such events, National Museum aims to enhance cultural exchange with international museums.

During the lecture, Elena gave a historical overview of Moscow Kremlin Museums and its ancient buildings which reflect Russian architecture, including historical palaces that were the headquarters of the rulers of Russia in the past.

She also spoke about the Armoury Chamber, Russia’s oldest treasury museum, established in 1806 by a decree of Emperor Alexander I. The collections of the Armoury Chamber include ancient state regalia, ceremonial royal robes and coronation dresses and vestments of the Russian Orthodox Church. The largest collection of these pieces were made by Russian and Western European goldsmiths and silversmiths. Also on display



(Supplied photo)

Moscow Kremlin Museums display the world’s largest collection of Fabergé eggs, Russian and oriental arms and armours, and a unique collection of royal carriages

is the world’s largest collection of Fabergé eggs, Russian and oriental arms and armours, and a unique collection of royal carriages.

The architectural ensemble of the Moscow Kremlin and the Red Square were included in the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO) list in 1990.

Moscow Kremlin Museums receive about 2mn visitors every year, and include more than 160,000 objects of art.

Born in 1959 in the Murmansk region of Russia, Elena earned a PhD in Art History from Lomonosov Moscow State University in 1990.

From 1981 to 2001, Elena worked at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, and became the Director General of Moscow Kremlin State Historical and Cultural Museum in 2001.

MTCIT kicks off EV awareness initiative

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In its efforts to raise awareness on sustainable transport, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) started an initiative on Wednesday.

An official at MTCIT said, “The EV Awareness Initiative will go to multiple parties, both the public and private sector, with our message to be with us and accompany us on this journey.”

He informed that earlier this year, the ministry installed 90 charging stations across the sultanate in an effort to encourage adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) and reduce carbon emis-



sions.

MTCIT has also issued a ministerial decision mandating all fuel stations to provide charging

points for EVs.

The decision stipulates that owners of fuel stations are obligated to provide an electric

charging point for vehicles in accordance with the requirements and controls issued by the Authority for Public Services Regu-

lation. The decision also stipulates penalties for those violating the provisions of these regulations, ranging from a written warning on first violation to an administrative fine of RO1,000 in the event of a repeat violation.

The ministry has stated that there are 100 EV charging stations across the sultanate and that it is working on increasing the number to 300 in the next two years.

“Our aim is to offer a range of sustainable transportation solutions and contribute to the development of EV infrastructure in Oman, aligning with the national programme to achieve zero carbon neutrality by 2050,” the MTCIT official said.

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MTCIT/ 257/2023 (RECALL-1)	Generative Artificial Intelligence Challenge	20-12-2023	3-1-2024	31-1-2024	Xperienced Companies And Registered With The Secretariat General Of Tender Board (All Class)	(25/-) Twenty Five Omani Rial For Local Companies (10/-) Ten Omani Rial (For Sme) Non-Refundabl

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MoSD campaign to combat begging



Organized begging

Begging is conducted by individuals, gangs, or organized groups that force children or people with disabilities to beg in exchange for minimal returns

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) has launched a campaign called ‘Begging stops with you’ in its efforts to combat the social evil of begging.

MoSD has warned people against engaging in any kind of begging activities – both individual and organised.

An official at MoSD said, “Beggars create fictional stories and present situations to gain sympathy. Awareness of their methods will protect you from exploitation.”

He explained that beggars make up stories that make generous people emotional and dole out money for help.

“Organised begging is conducted by individuals, gangs or organised groups that force chil-

dren or people with disabilities to beg.”

Talking about MoSD’s efforts, he said, “The ministry coordinates with government agencies, including the Ministry of Labour, Royal Oman Police and the Public Prosecution to combat begging.”

The ‘Begging stops with you’ campaign seeks to educate the public about the perils of begging, urging them to report cases immediately.

“Begging also leads to an increase in criminal activities, disruption in social norms and affects the country’s reputation in terms of tourism,” the MoSD official added.

The ministry seeks public co-operation to combat begging and urges all to report incidents via dedicated hotlines – 1555 or 9999.

‘Made in Oman’ drive launched in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) launched a ‘Made in Oman’ campaign to support Omani products at a commercial centre in Dhofar on Wednesday, in the presence of public and private sector dignitaries.

A special section created for the campaign included a wide variety of food and consumer products, luxury items, household products and Omani produce.

The ‘Made in Oman’ national campaign has contributed to creating marketing outlets for Omani products in all governorates of the sultanate. The campaign is run by MoCIIP, in partnership with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development, Consumer Protection Authority, Madayn and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, as well as representatives from the business community.

MoCIIP launched the campaign as part of its activities to encourage consumers to buy local products.

Omani-Austrian forum discusses ways to enhance cooperation in various sectors

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Omani-Austrian Business Forum on Wednesday discussed ways to enhance cooperation in various sectors, including the tourism, industry, construction, infrastructure, information technology and medical education.

The meeting was organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in Muscat. It also reviewed incentives and investment opportunities in



The forum focused on new projects that the Omani and Austrian sides could undertake jointly

FAISAL ABDULLAH AL RAWAS



the Sultanate of Oman.

Faisal Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the OCCI Board of Directors, said that the forum focused on new projects that the Omani and Austrian sides could undertake jointly to augment the volume of investment and commercial exchanges be-

tween the two friendly countries.

Rawas pointed out that Oman Vision 2040 contemplates investment opportunities in various fields like tourism, industry and food security. He encouraged Austrian companies to utilise available opportunities

and incentives that Oman extends to investors, notably at special economic zones, free zones and industrial cities.

Dr Martin Kocher, Austrian Minister of Labour and Economy, commended the depth of bilateral relations. He stressed the need to expand economic cooperation between the two countries to raise the volume of trade and investment exchange.

The Austrian Minister outlined various investment and economic opportunities that, he said, could be utilised in the fields of industry, green hydrogen and tourism.

Dr Kocher pointed out that



Available opportunities could be utilised in the fields of industry, green hydrogen and tourism

DR. MARTIN KOCHER

Oman espouses an ambitious vision in this field and at the same time there is a demand for importing hydrogen into Austria. The forum included a visual presentation on the most prominent components of the investment, tourism and economic environment in Oman, as well as incentives extended to investors in various sectors.

The forum also provided grounds for meetings between Omani business owners and their Austrian counterparts for better trade relations through an exchange of experiences and exploring cooperation opportunities.

Over 5,000 visited exhibition of artefacts in Dakhliyah since Feb



Muscat - More than 5,000 people visited the 'archaeological site' in Bahla exhibiting artefacts of different eras connecting Bisya and Salut in Dakhliyah, from February to December this year.

'Bisya and Salut Archaeological Site' is an exhibition of artefacts that establishes continuous extension of the diverse cultural heritage, showcasing architectural forms, towers, wells, ground cemeteries, marine cemeteries, and rock inscriptions.

Ahmed bin Muhammad al Tamimi, Director of the Bisya and Salut Archaeological Site Department at the Ministry of Tourism and Heritage, stated

that the exhibits have been collected and brought under one roof to attract and introduce visitors to the historical dimensions as can be seen in the Bronze Age Hall, the Iron Age Hall, and the World Heritage Sites Section. These sections house 344 different artifacts, carefully selected to complement the scientific texts in the exhibition hall lists.

These pieces represent various time periods of human settlement in the region and highlight the scale and nature of economic activities, including agriculture, trade, and mining. The exhibits include tools, stone utensils, pottery, seals, and bronze artifacts.

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JOB VACANCY



Oman Electricity Transmission Company SAOG (OETC) has a vital role in the Oman Electricity Sector, as it owns and operates the main transmission network as well as transmission network in Dhofar through which electricity is transmitted from the generating stations to the distribution load centers in all governorates of the Sultanate. The main electricity transmission network operates at high voltage of 132kV and above. Also, OETC has the responsibility of balancing generation and demand at all times of the day as part of its responsibilities for the economic dispatch of power in the Sultanate, and are currently looking for motivated Omani candidates for the following positions:

Job Title	Job Code
Senior Engineer Protection Asset Performance Management	IRC18156
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Interested candidates may apply for this post through www.omangrid.com by not later than 31 Dec 2023.

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وظائف شاغرة



إن للشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء ش.م.ع دورًا حيويًا في قطاع الكهرباء بالسلطنة، حيث أنها تمتلك وتشغل شبكة النقل الرئيسية وكذلك شبكة النقل في محافظة ظفار. حيث تقوم الشركة بنقل الأحمال الكهربائية من محطات الإنتاج إلى مراكز توزيع الأحمال في جميع محافظات السلطنة. وتعمل شبكة نقل الكهرباء الرئيسة بجهد عالي ١٣٢ كيلو فولت فما فوق. كما أن الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء مسؤولة عن تحقيق التوازن بين إنتاج الكهرباء والطلب عليها في جميع الأوقات كجزء من مسؤوليتها عن لتحقيق التوزيع الاقتصادي في السلطنة، وتبحث حاليًا عن المرشحين العمانيين المتحمسين للوظائف التالية:

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(RO1 equals)	
India	216.12
Pakistan	733.85
Bangladesh	285.10
Philippines	144.60
Sri Lanka	849.70

*Rates as on December 20

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Russia reduces holdings of US debt

Russia halved its holdings of the US sovereign debt, from \$73mn in September to \$31mn in October, according to latest documents published by the US Department of the Treasury.

Russia, once a significant holder of the US state debt, started its sell-off of US Treasury securities in spring 2018. In April 2018, Russian holdings were nearly halved - from some \$96bn to \$48.7bn. Next month, in May 2018, the figure further dropped to \$14.9bn.

The Bank of Russia does not hold US treasury bonds and does not purchase them, the regulator's press service told TASS in mid-November. These bonds, among other things, can be purchased by individuals, organizations and corporate investors via banks, brokers and dealers.

Japan remained the biggest holder of the US state debt in June 2023, with approximately \$1.09tn.

Oman's condensate production rises 8.5% as oil output declines

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As Oman continues to adhere to its OPEC+ commitments on oil production cuts, the sultanate has substantially increased its condensate output during 2023. Condensate production is exempt from the obligations of the OPEC+ agreement.

Oman's total condensate production during the January-November period of 2023 rose by 8.5% to 78.1mn barrels compared to 71.9mn barrels recorded in the same period in 2022, according to data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Condensate is a mixture of light liquid hydrocarbons typically separated from a natural gas stream at the point of production. The OPEC+ agreement allowed non-OPEC oil producers to exclude condensate output from their production quotas, enabling countries like Oman to increase their condensate production.

S&P Global Ratings recently said that OPEC+ related oil production cuts will slow Oman's economic growth to approximately 1% for 2023.

'Oman is a voluntary adherent to the OPEC+ agreement. We expect hydrocarbon sector output to remain relatively sta-



Oman's crude oil production decreased by 3.9% to 272.4mn barrels in the first 11 months of 2023 compared to 283.5mn barrels in the same period of 2022

ble, with the decline in oil production mitigated by an increase in condensate and gas production. We forecast the non-hydrocarbon economy to grow by about 2%. A likely increase in hydrocarbon production should spur growth in 2024 and 2025,' S&P said.

Oman's crude oil production decreased by 3.9% to 272.4mn barrels in the first 11 months of 2023 compared to 283.5mn barrels in the same period last year, as indicated by NCSI data.

The sultanate's daily average oil production (crude oil and condensates combined) de-

Oil price climbs to \$80 after Red Sea attacks

Muscat - Oil prices were on track for a third straight rise Wednesday, with Brent crude pushing back above \$80 a barrel, as investors monitored tensions in the Red Sea that have resulted in disruptions to global trade.

US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for February delivery rose 1.1% to \$74.78 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange. February Brent crude was up 1.1% at \$80.13 a barrel on ICE Futures Europe.

Oil prices have found support this week from attacks against commercial ships in the Red Sea, which threaten to disrupt global trade routes.

Several international companies including Italian and Swiss-owned MSC, Denmark-based shipper Maersk, German shipper Hapag-Lloyd, and France-based shipper CMA CGM suspended all sailings in the Red Sea after security was compromised.

Agencies

UAE's Mubadala Energy announces major gas discovery in Indonesia

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Mubadala Energy, the international energy company headquartered in Abu Dhabi, announced a significant gas discovery from the Layaran-1 Exploration well, drilled in South Andaman, about 100 kilometres offshore North Sumatra, Indonesia.

The discovery with potential for over 6 trillion cubic feet (TCF) of gas-in-place marks a major development for the Southeast Asia energy landscape, Mubadala Energy said in a press release.

Mubadala Energy is the operator of the South Andaman Gross Split PSC and this is the first deep water well operated by the company, drilled to a depth of 4,208 meters in 1,207 meters water depth.

The well encountered an extensive gas column with a thickness of over 230 meters in an Oligocene sandstone reservoir. A complete data acquisition including wireline, coring, sampling and production test (DST) were conducted.

With an 80% working interest in South Andaman, Mubadala Energy is the largest net acreage holder in the area. In line with



company's gas-biased strategy, the positive outcome from the Layaran-1 discovery will de-risk multi-trillion cubic feet (TCF) of prospective gas resources in the area, providing the foundation for future organic growth and additional exploration drilling activities in 2024.

In a press release, Mansoor Mohamed al Hamed, CEO of Mubadala Energy, said, "With our strategy to expand our gas portfolio to support the energy transition, this development offers material commercial opportunities and adds momentum to our strategic growth story. This is

not only a significant development for Mubadala Energy but a huge milestone for Indonesia's and Southeast Asia's energy security. We are proud to have achieved this by leveraging our world class technical and operational capabilities."

This new confirmed discovery is the second consecutive successful well for Mubadala Energy in the Andaman area, coming after the success of Timpan-1 in Andaman-II, which itself came after success at Cengkih-1 in our SK320 in Malaysia. These discoveries add material contingent volume and provide a platform for continued growth for Mubadala Energy in the region.

Mubadala Energy is an international energy company, headquartered in Abu Dhabi. With a diversified portfolio of operated and non-operated assets spanning 11 countries, its primary geographic focus is in the Middle East and North Africa, Russia and Southeast Asia. The company's portfolio is around 66 per cent gas, with a working interest production in 2022 of approximately 500,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day.

OQ launches polymer innovations

Muscat - Excelling in polypropylene (PP) and polyethylene (PE), catering to both flexible and rigid packaging solutions, OQ has announced two major product launches designed to solve industry challenges and provide key sustainability benefits.

First is the OQ Luban polypropylene impact copolymer portfolio, introducing Luban EP 2340L, EP 2340P, and EP 2348R, which underwent initial proving in 2022 and are set for a full launch in the fourth quarter 2023. These grades, along with the upcoming Luban EP 2348S and EP 2348T are scheduled for launch in the same quarter.

These products provide solutions covering a broad range of applications, including thin-walled packaging, appliances, automotive parts, and consumer goods, industrial, containers, crates, batteries, and beyond.

Moreover, OQ is also launching Luban LL8446.21 - a new LLDPE Rotomoulding solution. Designed to enable safe, clean, and reliable storage and transportation of water and other liquids, it has multiple applications, including water tanks, chemical containers, pallets, traffic barriers, air conditioning enclosures



and refuse bins.

These new solutions will help industries around the world to tackle some of the most pressing global challenges.

OQ's polymer solutions, including the polypropylene ICP series, play a crucial role in empowering food producers with the necessary tools they require to address the food security challenge, as well as making it possible for end users to participate in the solution by not only effectively preserving their food during consumption, but also whilst it is on its journey through the value chain from field to table.

Through these solutions, OQ

is contributing to the vital aspects of food safety, security, mitigation of food shortages, and the promotion of circularity within the food industry.

Sadiq al Lawati, Managing Director at OQ Marketing, said, "Our grade range is carefully crafted to provide comprehensive solutions across the thin-wall rigid packaging value chain, catering to both industrial and consumer thin-walled applications. Our focus goes beyond providing just the right grade for the application and extends to offering holistic solutions backed by services tailored to meet our customers' specific needs.

Space42 set to become space technology champion in MENA region

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Further to the announcements made by Bayanat AI and Al Yah Satellite Communications Company (Yahsat) earlier this week on the recommendation to shareholders by their respective boards for a merger of the two Abu Dhabi-headquartered and ADX-listed entities, the enlarged entity will be named Space42 post-merger.

The proposed merger will create an AI-powered space technology champion in the MENA region with additional potential for significant global growth and

synergies. With a strengthened financial position, enhanced AI-powered technological capabilities and a diversified product portfolio, the combined entity will be vertically integrated and optimally positioned to capture regional and international opportunities in geospatial and mobility solutions, satellite communications and business intelligence.

It is expected to benefit from considerable revenue synergies and economies of scale that will best position the organization for

innovation and profitable growth.

On completion of the merger, Mansoor al Mansoori will assume the role of Chairman, Dr Bakheet al Katheeri as Vice Chairman and Karim Michel Sabbagh will join as Managing Director of Space42.

Together, they will oversee the enlarged entity working closely with the existing management teams of Bayanat and Yahsat, as it seeks to capture regional and international opportunities in geospatial and mobility solutions, satellite communications and



business intelligence.

Mansoori is a member of Abu Dhabi Executive Council and the Chairman of the Department of Health in Abu Dhabi. He brings a diverse range of experience across government and the private sector including telecommunications, energy and technology.

Mansoori said, "As the proposed merger unites two leading home-grown companies to create the MENA region's first AI-powered space technology company with global reach, I am excited by the opportunity that

an enlarged group can bring to our existing and potential customers globally. Furthermore, Karim's experience and track record will be invaluable in capturing our global potential and I look forward to working with him and the rest of the team to deliver for all of our stakeholders."

Sabbagh said, "I look forward to joining the proposed merged entity and am thrilled by the opportunity to create the first AI-powered space technology champion with global potential. WAM

Russia-China trade reaches \$218bn in 2023

Beijing, China – Russia and China have fulfilled the task of increasing bilateral trade turnover to \$200bn earlier than planned, Chinese President Xi Jinping said during talks with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin in Beijing.

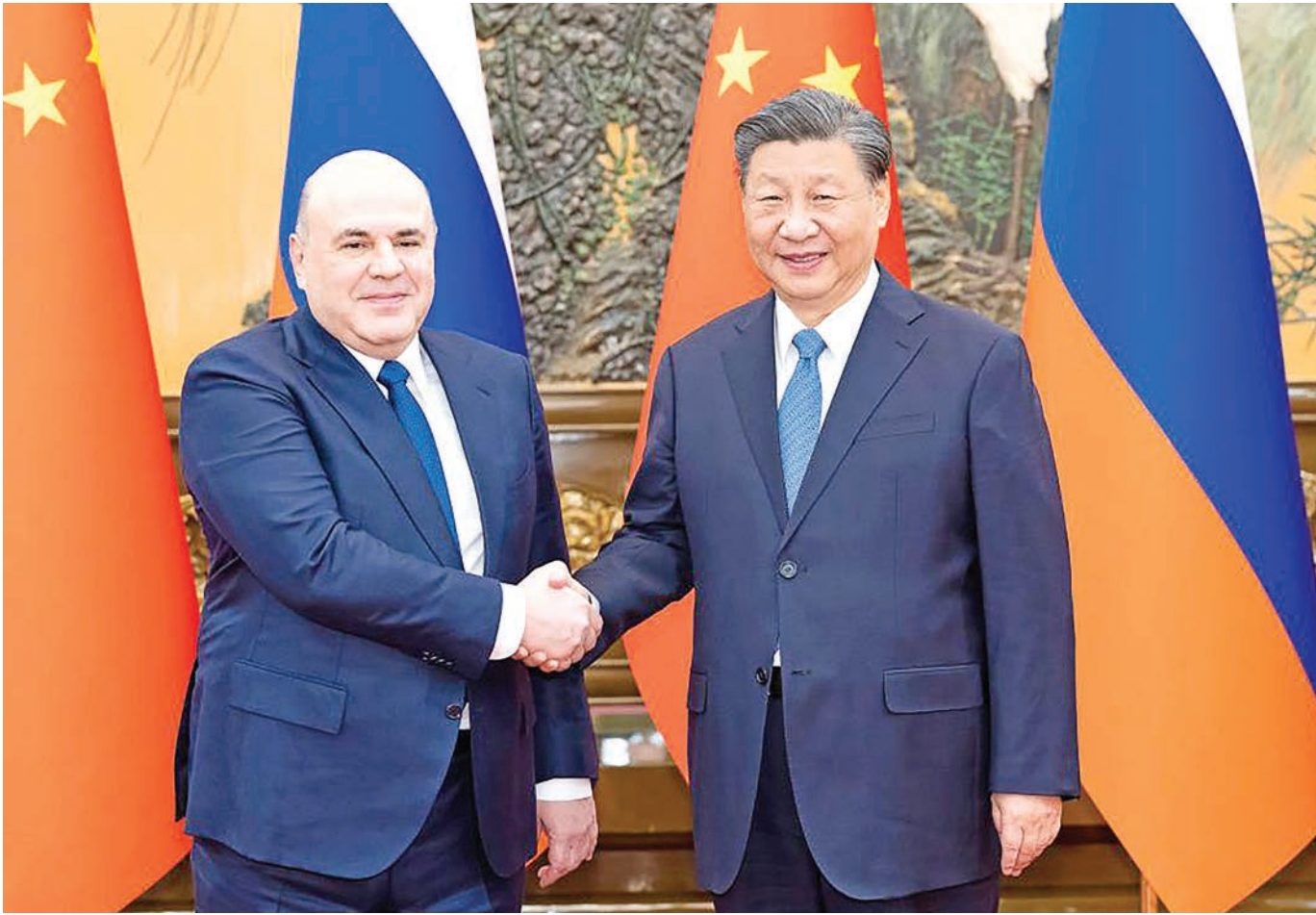
According to the Chinese leader, bilateral trade reached \$218.28bn in late 2023.

Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Mikhail Mishustin in Beijing on Wednesday.

"The task of raising bilateral trade turnover to \$200bn, which [the Russian] President and I have set five years ago, has been fulfilled earlier than planned," the Chinese leader said, adding that this reflects the positive dynamics of cooperation between the two states.

Xi noted that maintaining and developing China-Russia relations is a strategic choice made by both sides based on the fundamental interests of the two peoples.

Moscow and Beijing should deepen their trade, economic and investment ties for reaching the trade turnover target of \$300bn by 2030, Russian Economic Development Minister Maksim



Chinese President Xi Jinping meets with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin in Beijing on Wednesday (Xinhua)

Reshetnikov told reporters in Beijing.

"This year Russia's trade turnover with China will exceed \$200bn. This is a task that was

set by our countries' leaders back in 2019," he said. "A different figure has already been set by now as we are to reach \$300bn by 2030," the minister added.

"This will surely require a serious complication of our trade, economic and investment ties, this is a big challenge," Reshetnikov stressed. Moscow and Bei-

jing have almost fully abandoned the dollar in bilateral settlements, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin said at the 28th regular meeting of heads of the two

countries' governments.

"Mutual trade has increased by almost one third year-to-date. Meanwhile the majority of payments, over 90%, are made in national currencies, which demonstrates almost full de-dollarisation of economic ties," he said.

Speaking about China's economy, Xi said, "The Chinese economy has strong resilience, great

dent Putin and President Xi this year have demonstrated the firm will of Russia and China to deepen their comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination, and that Russia is willing to work with China to earnestly implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state.

Mishustin said Russia is satisfied with the steady growth of bi-

Moscow and Beijing are deepening their trade, economic and investment ties for reaching the trade turnover target of \$300bn by 2030

potential and wide room for maneuver, and its long-term sound fundamentals remain unchanged."

China firmly promotes high-quality development and high-level opening up, which will provide new opportunities for the development of various countries including Russia, he added.

Xi called on the two sides to give full play to the advantages of political mutual trust, economic complementarity, infrastructure connectivity and people-to-people exchanges.

Mishustin said the two successful meetings between Presi-

lateral practical cooperation and is willing to work with China to further tap potential, expand co-operation in fields such as economy, trade, energy and connectivity, make the Cultural Year a success, and consolidate the ever-lasting friendship between the two peoples.

Mishustin also conveyed the condolences of the Russian government and people to Xi on the earthquake that jolted northwest China's Gansu Province, saying that Russia is willing to provide rescue assistance according to China's needs.

Agencies

Eurozone annual inflation falls to 2.4% in November 2023

Frankfurt, Germany – Annual eurozone consumer inflation in November was confirmed at 2.4%, the lowest since July 2021, according to a second reading released by Eurostat.

The annual increase in consumer prices eased for the seventh straight month, following October's 2.9% year-on-year rise, Eurostat data showed.

The cost of energy dipped 11.5% last month from a year ago, a slight acceleration from October's 11.2% decline.

Food prices increased at a slower pace, 6.9%, year-on-year, down from 7.4% in the prior month.

Yearly consumer inflation in the EU eased from 3.6% in October to 3.1%, data showed.

The lowest annual rates were in Belgium (minus 0.8%), Denmark (0.3%), and Italy (0.6%), while the highest were in Czechia (8%), Hungary (7.7%), and Slovakia and Romania (both 6.9%).

On a monthly basis, the eurozone's consumer price index fell faster than the initially expected 0.6%, the second reading confirmed.



Energy prices fell 2.2% month-on-month in November, while food prices gained 0.3%.

However, European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde warned against investors rejoicing too soon, cautioning that inflation could very well spike again in December. This

could likely be due to colder weather setting in and energy demand and prices going up as a result.

This could mean that inflation falls less than expected in the next year, if energy prices keep rising once more. As a result, the interest rate cuts so eagerly

awaited by investors may have to be delayed a little more.

Several of the energy price cap measures implemented by the European Central Bank are also going to be lifted in 2024, further contributing to this upward movement of prices.

Agencies

Global hydrocarbon phase-out not expected by 2050, Russia says

Moscow, Russia – Russia does not expect hydrocarbons to be abandoned globally by 2050 and the country's energy balance will reflect this, First Deputy Energy Minister Pavel Sorokin said.

"We do not anticipate the complete phase-out of hydrocarbons by 2050 because all countries have the right to develop and it is difficult to imagine that Latin America, Africa, Asia and parts of Europe can be forced to give up cheap and affordable energy sources to further someone else's goals and ambitions. I have trouble picturing [that]," Sorokin said.

"The share of nuclear power will grow in the Russian energy balance and for renewable sources - [it] could grow to about 10%," the official said.

"Certainly, the energy balance will change but it will change within reason. We do not consider it proper to go to ex-



tremes," he added.

The situation on the global oil market is being rebalancing, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak told reporters in Beijing on Wednesday.

"The price is now growing a bit, the situation is being more or less rebalancing. One should not say that certain decisions are to be made. We always look at the situation," Novak said.

OPEC+ countries have made all the required decisions so far,

the official said. The OPEC+ can fix the date of the next meeting to assess the oil market situation in the near time, he added.

Novak said earlier that Moscow supplied more oil to China in the first 10 months of this year than during the whole last year. Shipments of Russian oil to China totalled around 100mn tonnes in 2023, while supplies to India roughly amounted to 70mn tonnes. TASS

UK to impose carbon levy on imports by 2027

London, UK – Goods imported into the UK from countries with a lower or no carbon price will have to pay a levy by 2027, ensuring products from overseas face a comparable carbon price to those produced in the UK.

The UK has a track record to be proud of on decarbonisation. The UK was the first major economy to legislate for net zero and it is reducing emissions faster than any other G7 country.

Decarbonising UK industry forms an important part of delivering the energy transformation needed to achieve net zero. But these efforts will not succeed if decarbonisation in the UK simply leads to higher emissions abroad.

"The carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) will ensure highly traded, carbon intensive products from overseas in the iron, steel, aluminium, fer-



Jeremy Hunt

tiliser, hydrogen, ceramics, glass and cement sectors face a comparable carbon price to those produced here," Treasury Department said in a statement.

The new rules will tackle 'carbon leakage', reducing the risk of production and associated emissions being displaced to other countries because they have a lower or no carbon price. Carbon leakage undermines the coun-

try's efforts to decarbonise as the world transitions to net zero.

The charge applied by the CBAM will depend on the amount of carbon emitted in the production of the imported good, and the gap between the carbon price applied in the country of origin - if any - and the carbon price faced by UK producers.

Taking this action will ensure the environmental integrity of our decarbonisation policies and will give industry in the UK the confidence to continue to invest in decarbonisation, with the knowledge that it will result in a true net reduction in global emissions.

UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt said, "This levy will make sure carbon intensive products from overseas – like steel and ceramics – face a comparable carbon price to those produced in the UK, so that

our decarbonisation efforts translate into reductions in global emissions. This should give UK industry the confidence to invest in decarbonisation as the world transitions to net zero."

The news comes as the UK government publishes its response to a consultation on a range of domestic carbon leakage mitigation measures – which found 85% of respondents said that carbon leakage is a current or future risk to their decarbonisation efforts.

The design and delivery of the CBAM will be subject to further consultation in 2024, including the precise list of products in scope. The government will also engage with trade partners, including developing countries, and affected businesses and organisations, to minimise the impact on trade and the necessary compliance steps.

TOGETHERNESS COMPANY ANNOUNCES SELLING THE FOLLOWING LANDS AND PROPERTIES:

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

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www.togethernessrealestate.com

Al Mouj holds prestigious Audi Quattro Cup Final

Al Mouj Golf was chosen as the venue for the 33rd Audi Quattro Cup Final which took place from November 10-13, joining a prestigious list of courses that have hosted the final of the world's largest amateur golf tournament. Spanning 38 countries, 470 tournaments and 50,000 participants, the tournament was down to 31 teams of two representing 29 nations, featuring both male and female golfers.

Japan led the scoreboard in Group A with a strong 76 points while Australia set the pace in Group B with 80 points. In close competition, Switzerland in Group A trailed with 59 points, while Italy in Group B had 68 points. Representing Oman were Lynn Casey and Danny Renihan.

Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, said, "The selection of Al Mouj Golf for the 33rd Audi Quattro Cup Final is a testament to our internationally recognised course, ranked #2 in the MENA region and among the world's top 100. This decision also marks a significant milestone for sports tourism in Oman, advancing the Sultanate's sporting ambitions regionally and globally. It was a great pleasure welcoming the teams from around the world to Al Mouj Golf and playing our part in showcasing Oman in all its beauty, hospitality and traditions."



Oman's world-class oceanfront golf destination cements its reputation with grand cup final; Japan and Australia lead their groups in a competition spanning 38 countries, 470 tournaments and 50,000 participants

tality and traditions."

Dominik Kaenel, International Sports Marketing Audi AG, said, "In choosing the venue for the Audi Quattro Cup final, we immediately selected Al Mouj Golf upon our first visit. The course is

well-maintained greens and fairways exceeded our expectations, offering a tranquil environment. Additionally, the remarkable hospitality and warmth of the local people was extraordinary, making our experience truly ex-

ceptional."

Open to any Audi car owner, each year, 600 national finals are held worldwide, with the winner from each qualifier tournament securing a chance to represent their country in the global final. Since 1991, the number of tournaments and golfers participating around the world has surged, demonstrating the tournament's growing popularity. Previous finals have been held at legendary locations including the Belfry in England, Fancourt in South Africa, and the Earth Course at Jumeirah Golf Estates in Dubai.

Meethaq offers exclusive rates for retail customers

Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat has announced exclusive offers for its customers on retail financing, deposits and credit cards.

Meethaq has always been at the forefront in catering to customer's financial needs through attractive rates and offers. The current offers include a 53% discount on all finance application processing fees and a 4.99% per annum profit rate on all financing products, along with a very attractive rate for takeover cases of housing and personal finance.

In addition, customers will be able to enjoy a 53% discount on issuance fee on all credit cards issued during the promotion period. For customers who spend RO100 or more in a single credit card transaction, they will get a cashback of 5.3% (max cashback RO10 per month). The offers will continue till December 31.

Customers will also enjoy special offers on deposit products, which includes cash bonuses on all standard fixed deposit bookings of 18 months and above with amounts of RO5,000 and higher, and a separate offering on fixed deposit bookings with a higher profit rate of 5.53% per annum on all bookings of 18 months and above with amounts of RO30,000 and higher. In addition to a 53% discount on Safe Deposit Lockers annual rent for the first year on all locker sizes.



On this occasion, Sami Bait Rashid, Assistant General Manager, Retail Banking - Meethaq, said, "Meethaq is keen on delivering world class innovative Islamic banking products and services in the sultanate driven by its strong customer-centric vision. We hope to provide a variety of choices to meet the different financial needs of our customers through these offers. "Meethaq is relentlessly working to simplify procedures and provide custom options to meet the individual needs of customers. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our customers for their continuous confidence and would like to invite them to benefit from these special offers."

Since its inception, Meethaq has established the largest Islamic branch network in Oman with 27 branches, a dedicated network of over 50 ATMs/CDMs, and free access to more than 750 ATMs and CDMs of Bank Muscat across the country. Every Meethaq product goes

through the process of sharia'a compliance certification by its Sharia'a Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman.

Meethaq's adoption of AAOIFI (Accounting & Auditing Organisation for Islamic Financial Institutions) standards further distinguishes Meethaq Islamic banking practices in terms of standardisation of its products and services complementing its world-class Islamic banking experience.

In recognition of its robust track record of achievements and its emphasis on its Islamic banking stance, Meethaq has been rewarded for the second year consecutively, the Market Leadership Bank Award at the 13th Award Ceremony organised by Global Islamic Finance (GIF). The Global Islamic Finance Awards grant honour to the best Banks in the Islamic financial industry worldwide and they are considered as one of the top accolades for the global Islamic banking and finance sector.



Oman Shell at Green Hydrogen Summit

Oman Shell successfully concluded its participation in the third edition of the Green Hydrogen Summit and Exhibition Oman (GHSO) on Thursday, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

Playing a significant role as the diamond partner in the MENA region's premier event for green hydrogen innovation, Oman Shell's projects are pace-setters in the development of the hydrogen economy, contributing to Oman's sustainable

energy future.

The three-day event, held from December 12 to 14, highlighted several hydrogen projects by Oman Shell, including the Green Hydrogen for Mobility project, which aims to roll out Oman's first 15 hydrogen-fueled cars and establish the country's inaugural hydrogen station.

The event also featured other hydrogen initiatives by Oman Shell like Green Energy Oman (GEO) in which Shell is a lead

developer and Blue Horizons, a landmark Blue Hydrogen & Ammonia project being firmed up by Oman Shell for planned implementation at Duqm.

The summit featured three speakers from Shell who presented their insights on the future of hydrogen in Oman: David Hone, Shell's Chief Climate Change Advisor; Guy de Kort, Director Operated Ventures at Oman Shell; and Austin Uzoka, Shell's Senior Local Content Advisor.

Driving towards sustainable future mobility with BMW iX5 Hydrogen

Delegates of the recent Green Hydrogen Summit Oman (GHSO) embarked on a journey from Dubai to Sohar, driving a fleet of the BMW iX5 Hydrogen, marking a significant milestone in the pursuit of sustainable mobility.

Led by Dr Jurgen Guldner, General Manager of Hydrogen at BMW Group, the drive also highlighted BMW's commitment to establishing a sustainable hydrogen infrastructure, working hand-in-hand with key regional stakeholders.

Over the course of the drive, the BMW iX5 Hydrogen demonstrated their viability and practicality as advanced sustainable mobility solutions. The journey culminated at Sohar Port, with an informative workshop focusing on the role of hydrogen fuel cell technology in future mobility.

The session emphasised the crucial role of hydrogen fuel tech-



nology in accelerating the transition towards sustainable mobility and its potential for large-scale reductions emissions alongside battery electric vehicles.

In addition to the drive from Dubai to Oman, BMW Group

Middle East has been actively collaborating with key stakeholders across the region, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, the UAE, and the Sultanate, to foster sustainable hydrogen infrastructure development.

These efforts focus on demonstrating first-hand experiences with the fleet and the exchange of invaluable insights with key stakeholders, as the region looks to expand the overall hydrogen economy.

VinFast joins forces with Bahwan Automobiles Trading to drive green future

In a significant move at the COP28 UAE, the UN Annual Climate Change Conference, Vietnam-based GLOBAL automotive leader VinFast entered into a partnership with Bahwan Automobiles Trading LLC (BAT).

This memorandum of understanding (MOU) designates BAT as the official distributor for VinFast vehicles in Oman, marking a transformative phase in the Sultanate's automotive landscape and advancing sustainable mobility in the country.

VinFast, part of Vietnam's largest private enterprise Vingroup JSC, has gained international recognition as a frontrunner in electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing. With a diverse product range including electric SUVs, sedans, crossovers, e-scooters, and e-buses, VinFast is steering towards becoming a key global EV manufacturer. The company is



renowned for its innovative features, formidable battery power, and performance capabilities, with models starting at 172hp, underpinned by robust intellectual property protection.

At the heart of VinFast's ethos is the commitment to a sustainable future, reflected in their state-of-the-art manufacturing complex and a mission to drive the global smart electric vehicle

revolution. Their focus on high-quality products, advanced smart services, customer experience, and inclusive pricing strategy aligns with their vision of a sustainable planet.

The partnership between VinFast and BAT is a shared commitment to sustainable mobility. As VinFast's official distributor in Oman, the company plays a pivotal role in bringing innovative EV

solutions to the sultanate. This collaboration is poised to accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles in Oman, marking a significant shift in the region's automotive market. This collaboration is a beacon of progress in the EV industry, signalling a brighter, greener future for Oman's automotive market and beyond.

A spokesperson for Bahwan Automobiles Trading LLC (BAT) said, "We are thrilled to partner with VinFast, a leader in the EV domain. This collaboration aligns perfectly with our vision to introduce cutting-edge, sustainable automotive technologies in Oman. We are committed to making a significant impact on the automotive market in Oman by facilitating the adoption of electric vehicles, thus contributing to a greener, more sustainable future for our nation."

A spokesperson for VinFast commented on the partnership:

"Our ambition to lead in the global EV market remains steadfast, and our partnership with Bahwan Automobiles and Trading LLC is a vital part of this journey.

"By collaborating with Bahwan, a respected name in Oman's automotive sector, we are integrating advanced technology and enhancing vehicle features and reinforcing our commitment to sustainability.

"This strategic alliance is a cornerstone in our global expansion, allowing us to bring our innovative and sustainable EV solutions to Oman. Together with BAT, we aim to foster a sustainable future for all."

VinFast's presence at COP28 UAE was a strategic move to establish new alliances in the Middle East. The MoU with Bahwan Automobiles and Trading LLC is a testament to VinFast's expanding international influence.

INDIA

Democracy strangled by BJP-led government, says Sonia Gandhi

New Delhi - Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday launched a blistering attack on the BJP-led Centre over the bulk suspension of Opposition members from both Houses of Parliament, saying democracy has been strangled by the government.

A total of 141 MPs - 95 from Lok Sabha and 46 from Rajya Sabha - were suspended over raising a ruckus and disrupting proceedings in both Houses over a demand for statement from Union Minister Amit Shah on the Parliament security breach incident.

Addressing the Congress's Parliamentary Party Meeting on Wednesday, Sonia said: "Democracy has been strangled by this government. Never before have so many Opposition members of Parliament been suspended from the house, and that too, simply for raising a perfectly reasonable and legitimate demand."

"All that the Opposition members of Parliament asked for was a statement to be made by the Home Minister in the Lok Sabha addressing the extraordinary events of December 13. There are no words to describe the arrogance with which this request was treated," she added.

Hitting out at the ruling BJP, she said: "What happened on December 13 is inexcusable and cannot be justified. It took four



Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi during the protest of Opposition MPs in New Delhi on Wednesday (ANI)

days for the Prime Minister to address the nation and express his views on the incident, and he did so outside of the Parliament. By so doing, he clearly indicated his disdain for the dignity of the house and his disregard for the people of our country. I leave it to you to imagine how the BJP would have responded had they been in opposition today."

On the Bills pertaining to

A total of 141 MPs - 95 from Lok Sabha and 46 from Rajya Sabha - were suspended over disrupting proceedings in both Houses

Jammu and Kashmir that were passed recently by the Parliament, Sonia said: "This session has seen the passage of some important Bills relating to Jammu and Kashmir. Those who distort history and twist historical facts just to defame great patriots like Jawaharlal Nehru have been running a relentless campaign. In these efforts, the Prime Minister and the Home Minister

have taken the lead themselves, but we will not be intimidated or cowed down. We will persist in telling the truth."

"Our position on Jammu and Kashmir has been clear and consistent: Full statehood must be restored immediately, and elections must be held at the earliest. The aspirations of the people of Ladakh are equally important, they must be addressed and

LS passes bills to replace IPC, CrPC

New Delhi - Three bills to replace the Indian Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure and Indian Evidence Act were passed by Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

Home Minister Amit Shah replied to the debate on the three bills and said the legislations are in consonance with the spirit of the Constitution.

The Bharatiya Nyaya (Second) Sanhita 2023, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita 2023, and Bharatiya Sakshya (Second) Bill 2023 seek to replace the IPC, CrPC and the Evidence Act respectively.

The debate on the key bills did not see participation from most opposition parties, as 97 of their members have been suspended from the House for 'misconduct'.

In his reply, Home Minister Amit Shah said the bills are a big step towards speedy justice. "Now the accused will get seven days to file a plea for acquittal. The judge has to hold the hearing in those seven days."

ANI

Proposed Kharge's name as PM candidate: Mamata Banerjee

New Delhi - Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge's name was proposed as the prime ministerial candidate for the INDIA bloc by Mamata Banerjee and Arvind Kejriwal in the just-held meeting in the national, where all 28 partners have converged to chalk plans for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was the first to propose the name of the Congress President as the prospective PM face of the INDIA alliance.

"Everyone was asking us who is the face of the alliance. I proposed Kharge's name and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal also backed my proposal. We have no objection to this and we are happy that Kharge will be the face of the alliance. I have no such news of anyone being un-

happy with this decision," said Mamata Banerjee while speaking to reporters.

"After dialogue and discussions, further decisions would be taken. Mallikarjun Kharge sahab is a tall leader of our country and I got the opportunity to work alongside him in Rajya Sabha," said Rajya Sabha member from AAP, Raghav Chadha.

"He has had a wonderful career over five decades-long political career. Besides being a political luminary, he is also a social reformer," the AAP parliamentarian told reporters.

CPI(M) Rajya Sabha MP, Bikash Ranjan said: "It should have happened. Congress is a pan-India party. Congress and CPI(M) has its existence in every corner of the country...There is acceptance



Mamata Banerjee shares a light moment with Samajwadi Party MP Jaya Bachchan at Parliament House, in New Delhi on Wednesday (ANI)

for Mallikarjun Kharge as well..."

Kharge has over 50 years of political experience under his

belt. Kharge rose from the ranks of a grassroot worker to become the chief of that party and the Leader of the Opposition in

the Rajya Sabha.

Anil Desai, Rajya Sabha member from Shiv Sena (Uddhav faction), also said Kharge's name was proposed in Tuesday's meeting.

"It was a cordial meeting in Delhi. All INDIA bloc partners will bring a change in the country (in 2024). West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal have proposed that Mallikarjun Kharge be made the prime ministerial face of the Opposition alliance," Desai said.

"Kharge ji, on his part, though contended that it was important to win elections collectively, and then can come the discussion about the candidate."

On seat sharing among INDIA partners, Desai said it will happen smoothly.

Meanwhile, Kharge has played down suggestions about being the prime ministerial candidate of the INDIA bloc for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and said the matter will be decided later and their priority is to try and get a majority.

"First, all of us have to win, we should think about what needs to be done for victory. Who will be PM, this will be decided later. If there are fewer MPs, what is the point of talking about the PM? First, to increase our numbers, (by) coming together, we will try to bring the majority. First, we will have to win," Kharge told reporters after the INDIA meeting on Tuesday.

The fourth meeting of the INDIA bloc took place in the national capital on Tuesday and was attended by leaders from 28 alliance partners.

Congress leader K C Venugopal told reporters after the meeting that the seat-sharing talks would start without delay and there was a proposal for 'joint rallies' also.

Earlier this week, Mamata Banerjee also said she was ready for joint campaigning and she was willing to rally for any INDIA bloc parties.

The meeting was held in the backdrop of escalating tensions between the government and the opposition over the suspension of Parliamentarians during the winter session of Parliament.

INDIA parties are seeking to put up a united challenge against the BJP-led NDA in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. The parties have come together to prevent NDA from winning a third straight term at the Centre.

ANI

Colorado SC removes Trump from 2024 ballot

Denver, US - The Colorado Supreme Court has removed former US President Donald Trump from the state's 2024 ballot, ruling that he isn't an eligible presidential candidate because of the 14th Amendment's 'insurrectionist ban', CNN reported.

As per CNN, the ruling will be placed on hold until January 4, pending Trump's appeal to the US Supreme Court, which could settle the matter for the nation. The state Supreme Court decision only applies to Colorado but the historic ruling will roil the 2024 presidential campaign. Colorado election officials have said the matter needs to be settled by January

5, which is the statutory deadline to set the list of candidates for the GOP primary scheduled for March 5.

The majority wrote in its unsigned opinion: "President Trump did not merely incite the insurrection. Even when the siege on the Capitol was fully underway, he continued to support it by repeatedly demanding that Vice President (Mike) Pence refuse to perform his constitutional duty and by calling Senators to persuade them to stop the counting of electoral votes. These actions constituted overt, voluntary, and direct participation in the insurrection."

ANI

Bangladeshi premier begins election campaign

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Wednesday began her election campaign in the eastern Sylhet district amid election boycott and non-cooperation calls from the opposition parties.

General elections in the South Asian country are slated for January 7. "Not participating in elections is their (opposition parties) democratic right. But they are creating fear with arson attacks in the name of movement and destroying government property - property that belongs to the people," she said.

She made the remarks on her first-day campaign after praying at the shrine of Hazrat Shah Jalal in Sylhet, from where political parties traditionally begin their election campaign in



Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

Bangladesh. Calling the opposition protest violent which she said will not be successful, she added: "People of the country want this election and want to exercise their voting rights."

Bangladesh has been mired in a political crisis ahead of the

election. The Election Commission set the upcoming January 7 as the election day while the opposition parties led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) announced to protest the election calling it a 'staged and dummy' election to bring back

the incumbent Awami League government for a 4th successive term since 2009.

BNP's exiled leader Tareq Zia, who went into self-imposed exile in London in 2008, Wednesday virtually announced a non-coop-

courts, and called on government officials not to work."

Since political unrest erupted in late October, at least 21 opposition supporters have been killed, along with a journalist and a policeman.

(The Opposition) is creating fear with arson attacks in the name of movement and destroying government property

SHEIKH HASINA

eration movement.

Zia, also acting chairman of BNP and son of former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, urged people 'not to pay taxes, utility bills, not to vote in the January 7 national election, stop deposit in banks, not to appear before

More than 25,100 BNP supporters have so far been arrested in the turmoil. Over 1,249 others have been handed jail terms, while cases were filed against more than 93,200, according to the party.

Anadolu Agency

90% of Gaza's population displaced by Israeli onslaughts: UN refugee agency

Ankara, Turkey - Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip have displaced more than 90 per cent of the territory's population, the UN Palestinian refugee agency said on Wednesday.

"Over 60 per cent of the infrastructure in Gaza has been destroyed or damaged," the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) said in a statement. "This is a staggering and unprecedented level of destruction and forced displacement, taking place in front of our eyes," it added.

Israel has bombarded the Gaza Strip from the air and land, imposed a siege and mounted a ground offensive in retaliation for a cross-border attack by the Palestinian resistance group, Hamas, on October 7.

At least 19,667 people have been killed and 52,586 others injured ever since, according to health authorities in the enclave.

Nearly 1,200 Israelis are believed to have been killed in the Hamas attack, while more than 130 hostages remain in captivity.



Over 60 per cent of infrastructure in Gaza has been destroyed or damaged, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) said in a statement

‘External forces’

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Wednesday that some ‘external forces’ are attempting to fan a fire of regional discord between Middle Eastern states by exploiting the situation in Gaza.

The purpose of such actions is to ‘weaken countries that pursue an independent foreign policy course’, Lavrov said at the Russian-Arab Cooperation Forum in

Morocco’s capital, Marrakesh.

“Some external forces want to use the current escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to their advantage, to ignite a fire of re-

gional discord,” the Russian Foreign Ministry said, quoting the country’s top diplomat.

Russia sees a cease-fire and increased humanitarian efforts in

Gaza as top priorities as ‘violence has taken an unprecedented and truly catastrophic scale’, he said.

“The number of dead and injured is in the tens of thousands, most of them civilians in the Gaza Strip, primarily children and women. The suffering of the enclave’s population is compounded by the consequences of the Israeli blockade,” he said.

According to the minister, Russia is continuing to make efforts to bring the Palestinian-Israeli

conflict into a diplomatic channel in coordination with its Arab counterparts.

“Russia’s principled position coincides with the line of the Arab countries, which reaffirmed their commitment to resolving the crisis based on a generally recognised international legal framework during the summit of the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Riyadh on November 11,” he said.

Lavrov believed that violence in the region would continue until the establishment of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

He asserted that creating a collective diplomatic mechanism to assist parties would help resolve key issues, including the restoration of Palestinian unity.

The Russian-Arab Cooperation Forum between Russia and the League of Arab States was

founded in 2009 to enhance economic cooperation.

Cameron to visit Jordan, Egypt

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron will visit Jordan and Egypt this week to push for a sustainable cease-fire and further humanitarian pauses in Gaza.

On his second visit to the region, Cameron will travel to the two countries alongside Minister for the Middle East Lord Ahmad, according to a Foreign Office statement on Wednesday.

The foreign secretary will discuss the urgent need for ‘a sustainable ceasefire’ involving the release of hostages and an end to rocket fire into Israel.

“No one wants to see this conflict go on for a moment longer than necessary. But for a ceasefire to work, it needs to be sustainable,” said Cameron, who was in Paris and Rome on Tuesday, ahead of his visit.

“If Israel is still facing Hamas in Gaza with rockets and terror tactics, not only will a ceasefire not be sustainable, a two-state solution in the longer term will also not be possible,” he added.

This comes after a recent policy change from the British government, which had rejected to make any call for a cease-fire, reiterating that Israel had a ‘right to defend itself’.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak had earlier said a ‘sustainable ceasefire’ is needed in Gaza as ‘too many lives have been lost’ under Israeli bombardments.

Anadolu Agency



G-7 condemns North Korea’s intercontinental missile test launch

Athens, Greece - G-7 nations condemned on Tuesday the North Korea’s test launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

“We, the G7 Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the High Representative of the European Union, condemn in the strongest terms North Korea’s December 18 launch of an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM), following four previous ICBM launches this year as well as other launches using ballistic missile technology,” according to a statement.

“We deplore North Korea’s choice to prioritise its unlawful WMD (weapon of mass destruction) and ballistic missile programmes over the welfare of the people in North Korea,” it said, drawing attention to the North’s systematic ambitions to enhance its ballistic and nuclear missile capabilities.

“North Korea’s repeated reckless actions must be met with a swift, united, and robust international response, particularly by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). We urge UNSC Members to follow through on

North Korea test-launched a Hwasong-18 intercontinental ballistic missile on Monday, fueled by solid propellants

their commitments and call on all UN Member States to fully and effectively implement relevant UNSCRs,” it said.

The statement also noted arms transfers from North Korea to Russia and urged both countries to cease those activities.

“The G7 remains committed to working with all partners toward the goal of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and to upholding the international order based on the rule of law,” it said.

North Korea test-launched a Hwasong-18 intercontinental ballistic missile on Monday, fueled by solid propellants.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol warned that North Korea’s ‘provocations’ only bring ‘greater pain’ to his country.

Anadolu Agency

Former Pakistan PM Imran Khan to contest elections from at least three constituencies

Islamabad, Pakistan - Former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, who is currently incarcerated in Adiala jail, will contest polls from at least three constituencies in the general elections, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf announced on Wednesday, Pakistan-based Geo News reported.

Speaking to reporters outside the Adiala jail in Rawalpindi, PTI Senator Ali Zafar said the Islamabad High Court (IHC) will announce its Toshakhana reserved verdict soon as the poll schedule has been announced. Notably, elections in Pakistan are due to take place on February 8 next year.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) disqualified Imran Khan for five years from



holding any public office after the Toshakhana case verdict on August 8 after he was found guilty of ‘corrupt practises under Section 167 of the Elections Act,

2017’, according to Geo News report.

He further said: “We want to inform you that Imran Khan will contest elections from at least three constituencies and we hope that the IHC will announce its judgement soon in the Toshakhana case, as the election schedule has been issued.”

Ali Zafar said the IHC will announce its verdict on PTI’s plea that requested for suspension of former Pakistan PM’s conviction in the Toshakhana case. He urged PTI workers to submit their nomination papers for the upcoming elections and added that the party will prioritise the jailed members for tickets to contest the elections.

The PTI senator said: “Those

(workers) who rendered sacrifices for the party, facing cases and braving difficulties will be allotted (party) tickets 100 per cent,” Geo News reported.

Meanwhile, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan said Imran Khan will contest elections from the Lahore, Islamabad and Mianwali constituencies. He even opposed the top lawyers’ bodies’ demand seeking the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikander Sultan Raja.

Gohar Ali Khan said PTI will not make any such demand. He further said Imran Khan will make a final decision about ticket allocation. He alleged that hurdles were being created for PTI candidates to contest the polls,

Geo News reported.

He said: “The nomination papers were snatched from Shah Mahmood Qureshi’s secretary in Adiala jail,” adding that stopping their candidates from contesting elections could disturb the law and order situation.

Khan called upon the election commission and Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa to ensure free and fair polls in Pakistan.

On Tuesday, Imran Khan challenged his indictment in the cypher case and the entire proceedings by the special court, established under the Official Secrets Act, Geo News reported. He requested the court to declare the December 12 order of the special court null and void.

ANI

Israeli Arabs hope for peace amid escalating conflicts

Arab Al-Aramsha, Israel - Israeli Arab citizens residing along the Israel-Lebanon border are hopeful for the cessation of recent clashes, which began around the Gaza Strip on October 7, and anticipate returning to their homes.

Anadolu documented the town of Arab al-Aramsha, home to Israeli Arab citizens near the Israel-Lebanon border, which was evacuated due to regional conflicts. The Arab al-Aramsha town, with around 1,400 residents, is located just a few hundred metres from the mountainous border with Lebanon.

Israeli military surveillance, including balloon-mounted cameras, monitors the border, with sounds of drones, fighter jets, and artillery fire heard in the area, accompanied by smoke billowing



from targeted areas.

Israel withdrew from the south of Lebanon unilaterally in 2000 in response to Hezbollah attacks, and a long concrete wall now

separates the border along the Blue Line, ‘a line of withdrawal’ set by the UN in 2000 for the purpose of confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the

south of Lebanon.

On the outskirts of Arab al-Aramsha, the Lebanese village of Zuheira, which is abandoned due to conflicts, is situated just across

the wall. Damage from attacks on the mosque in the Zuheira village is visible and the road near the border area is closed to civilian traffic as a precaution against possible attacks.

Sail Saad, president of the town council of Arab al-Aramsha, told Anadolu that they have close ties with the neighbouring village of Zuheira, but due to recent developments in the region, their communication has been severed for a considerable period.

Saad said that around 300-400 people, including the elderly and livestock farmers, are still in the village and exuded hope for a quick end to the war through a humanitarian pause and a political, not military, solution.

Anadolu Agency

Egypt's Sisi secures 3rd presidential term amid interwoven challenges

Cairo, Egypt - Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, Egypt's incumbent president, won the 2024 presidential election with 89.6 per cent of the vote, securing a third term in office, according to results released on Monday afternoon by Egypt's National Election Authority (NEA).

Sisi has thus become the chosen leader of the most populous Arab country, which has played a pivotal role in Middle Eastern politics. As experts have reckoned, the Egyptians recognise and value his accomplishments in his previous two terms. Addressing the nation after the announcement of the election results, Sisi said: "Choosing me for the mission of leading the country is a responsibility that I bear faithfully."

Win against headwind

According to the data released by the NEA, the turnout of the presidential election reached approximately 66.8 per cent of the total 67mn eligible voters. The incumbent president secured a substantial majority, repeating his victories in the 2014 and 2018 elections.

In a speech delivered soon after the official result came out, Sisi extended gratitude to people coming to vote at a time when 'the state is grappling with a multitude of challenges across all levels'.

His re-election came amid massive outcries at home and beyond against the conflict in the Gaza Strip.

"They (Egyptians) think Sisi, as a former defense minister, is best placed to deal with the situation," Suez Canal University professor of political economy, Gamal Zahran, was quoted by Egypt's state-run Ahram Online news website as saying.

"Sisi, aside from launching major economic projects, has freed Egypt from political upheaval and sectarian conflict, rebuilt state institutions, and restored Egypt's role in the re-



This file photo shows Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi giving a speech during a conference in Cairo on October 2, 2023 (AFP)

Choosing me for leading the country is a responsibility that I bear faithfully... the state is grappling with a multitude of challenges across all levels

ABDEL FATTAH AL-SISI

gional and international arena," Mustafa Adnan, a 42-year-old salesman in downtown Cairo, told Xinhua after voting for the incumbent.

As has been widely recognised, since taking power in 2014, Sisi has planned Egypt's development with clear ideas, including infrastructure improvement like building a new

administrative capital east of Cairo, stimulating foreign investment, and creating more job opportunities.

Redressing balance

Heading for another six-year term in office, Sisi is expected to bring about solid outcomes of national strategies especially those aimed at securing a buoy-

ant economy, while tackling various domestic challenges.

The country has been exploring ways to effectively restore growth momentum, curb the national currency's devaluation, increase Forex reserves, and rein in inflation and unemployment rates, according to Zou Zhiqiang, a researcher at the Middle East Studies Center at Fudan University.

Sisi has also struck a delicate balance between alleviating burdens on the needy who bore the brunt of a structural reform featuring privatisation efforts, cutting government subsidies on basic commodities to reduce fiscal burden, and protecting

the vulnerable from the soaring cost of living.

In the future, stronger efforts are expected to secure more financial injections, such as new aid from Gulf countries, to keep the national economy afloat in a sea of internal and external turbulence, said Zou.

Geopolitical uncertainties are another factor that has put Egypt's economic growth on a bumpy path. Egypt has revised down its growth projection for Financial Year 2023-24 to 3.5 per cent, Hala El-Said, minister of planning and economic development, said in early December, attributing the downward revision to a series

of external shocks, including the Gaza conflict.

Restoring regional security

In the lead-up to the presidential election earlier this month, Sisi briefed Putin in a phone call on Cairo's ongoing efforts to push for a ceasefire in Gaza to prevent 'further deterioration of the miserable humanitarian situation'. While urging both sides to de-escalate, Egypt has kept the Rafah crossing open for medical aid, food, and fuel delivery to the much-needed Gaza while stepping up talks with regional and international leaders to secure more aid delivery.

In November, Sisi reaffirmed Egypt's strong rejection of forcibly deporting the Palestinians from either Gaza or the West Bank to Egypt and Jordan, saying such moves risk liquidating the Palestinian cause or harming Egypt's national security. As the only Arab country with a common land border with the Gaza Strip, Egypt's presidency and diplomatic establishment have tried to damp regional spillover from the situation in Gaza.

On top of the Gaza conflict to the east, Egypt is also facing crises and conflicts in Libya to the west and Sudan to the south.

Egypt, under Sisi's rule, has acted as a major mediator for political reconciliation in these countries to foster a safe environment in its border regions.

In July, Sisi hosted a meeting in Egypt between high-ranking delegates of Palestinian factions, including Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, and Hamas politburo members, to cement the Palestinian national unity.

Rekindled ambition

Sisi has also engaged Egypt in key multilateral and Global South cooperation like BRICS and the Belt and Road Initiative.

In tandem with its ambition

to leverage regional weight, Egypt, under Sisi's leadership, restored diplomatic ties with Turkey and made solid rapprochement efforts with Syria and Iran in 2023.

Ezzat Saad, director of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, said 'the efficiency, effectiveness, and flexibility that the Egyptian diplomacy has demonstrated, especially in the past 10 years, raised optimism about its ability to achieve its goals, in a way that serves common interests and promotes security and stability in the region'.

When Sisi assumed the presidency in 2014, China and Egypt jointly upgraded China-Egypt relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership. As one of the first countries to join the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, Egypt has greatly improved its transportation and logistics and boosted its economic development, said Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly.

Besides, Egypt is the first country in the Middle East and North Africa to issue sustainable panda bonds, with Egyptian Finance Minister Mohamed Maait describing the issuance as 'a new portal for achieving sustainable development goals'.

Tarek Fahmy, professor of political science at Cairo University, said: "Egypt's accession to BRICS with the support of Beijing and Moscow will open up a large space in Egyptian international relations."

Envisioning six more years as president of Egypt, Sisi vowed in his speech to 'rekindle the covenant to dedicate every effort' to continue to build Egypt into a democratic and inclusive state, uphold the law and constitution, and advance firmly and steadfastly toward modernity and growth, while preserving its unique culture and fostering a decent life for every countryman.

Xinhua

CLASSIFIEDS

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Neymar leaves the field grimacing in pain after suffering an injury during Brazil's World Cup qualifier against Uruguay in Montevideo on October 17

Injured Neymar to miss Copa, says team doctor

Brasilia, Brazil - Brazil's star forward Neymar won't be gracing the Copa America pitch next summer. National team doctor Rodrigo Lasmar confirmed on Tuesday that his knee surgery recovery won't be complete in time for the June-July tournament in the United States.

Neymar underwent surgery last month after tearing his ACL and meniscus during international duty in October. Although the 31-year-old's return is anticipated by August, the team won't rush the process with the Copa just months away.

The news undoubtedly deals a blow to Brazil's Copa America hopes. Neymar, their all-time leading scorer, holds immense influence on the field and his absence leaves a significant void. However, the team's focus remains on prioritising his long-term health and ensuring a strong comeback upon his full recovery.

"There won't be time, it's too early, there's no point skipping steps to recover sooner and taking unnecessary risks," Lasmar

told Brazilian radio station Radio 98 FM.

"We expect that he will be ready to return at the start of the 2024 season in Europe, which is in August. We need to be patient. Talking about a return before nine months is premature.

"It is very important to have the time it takes for the body to build that ligament. The expectation is that after this time, he will have recovered at a high level."

Neymar joined Saudi Pro League side Al-Hilal in August but the former Barcelona and Paris St Germain forward played

There won't be time, it's too early, there's no point skipping steps to recover sooner and taking unnecessary risks

RODRIGO LASMAR



only five games as he struggled with muscle injuries.

Brazil have been drawn in Group D for the Copa America with Colombia, Paraguay and a CONCACAF qualifier.

Neymar has seen the last three seasons disrupted by injury. The forward was sidelined for three months during the 2021-22 campaign with an ankle injury, before another ankle injury ruled him out of two Brazil matches at the 2022 World Cup.

He returned to action for PSG before sustaining ligament damage on the same ankle in February and subsequently undergoing surgery, forcing him to miss the final four months of the season.

Neymar missed the 2019 version of the Copa America with an ankle injury sustained on the eve of the tournament, which Brazil won as hosts.

He won the Confederations Cup title with Brazil in 2013 and the Olympics three years later, but he has yet to taste success at either the World Cup or Copa America with his nation.

A CLASS APART

Manchester City dismantle Urawa Reds to reach Club World Cup final

Jeddah - Manchester City showcased their class at the King Abdullah Sports City stadium on Tuesday, brushing aside Japanese side Urawa Red Diamonds 3-0 to secure their place in the Club World Cup final. Facing a resolute Urawa defence in the opening half, the European champions found the breakthrough late with an own goal by Marius Hoibraten just before the break.

City's second half was a masterclass in dominance. Mateo Kovacic, in his first goal since joining from Chelsea, doubled the lead seven minutes after the restart, and Bernardo Silva's deflected shot shortly after put the game beyond doubt. Pep Guardiola's men, who had endured a recent slump in form, looked rejuvenated and cruised to the win.

Manchester City now stand one game away from lifting the Club World Cup trophy for the first time. Having conquered Urawa, they face a clash with Brazilian side Fluminense, who defeated Egypt's Al-Ahly 2-0 on Monday. As heavy favourites for Friday's final, City aim to etch their name alongside Manchester United, Liverpool, and Chelsea as English winners of the tournament.

The victory marks a significant turnaround for City, who had won only three of their previous eight games across all competitions. The Club World Cup semi-final win seems to have reignited their spark, leaving them primed to conquer Fluminense and claim global glory.

They will start as heavy favourites in Friday's final against Copa Libertadores champions Fluminense who on Monday beat Egypt's Al Ahly 2-0.

"The players know how important it is for the club," Guardiola,



Manchester City's Mateo Kovacic celebrates after scoring against Urawa Reds on Tuesday

ola, who won the title twice with Barcelona and once with Bayern Munich, said. "To be in this final, you have to do incredible things like win the Champions League. This may be the only time we play this in our lifetime.

City have suffered some domestic wobbles of late and have slipped off the pace in the Premier League in their quest for a fourth successive title.

But even with Erling Haaland still missing and Guardiola shuf-

fling his pack after Saturday's 2-2 draw with Crystal Palace, they had far too much for the J1 League side.

The Diamonds' gameplan was obvious as they packed their defence and midfield to create a red wall in front of their goal and it worked well as City struggled to find openings.

Despite barely getting out of their own half they almost made it to halftime on level terms but were undone as Matheus Nunes

finally found some space and his low cross was intercepted by Hoibraten who steered the ball into his own goal.

The game opened up in the second half with Diamonds showing a little more adventure but it made it easy for City.

Kovacic, twice a winner of the competition with Real Madrid and Chelsea, was sent clear and he surged away before smashing a shot high past Shusaku Nishikawa.

Newcastle pay penalty as Chelsea enter League Cup semifinals

London, United Kingdom - Chelsea and Fulham edged their way into the League Cup semi-finals on Tuesday night, both needing penalty shootouts following 1-1 draws in nail-biting clashes. Middlesbrough didn't need the drama, comfortably dispatching League One's Port Vale 3-0 to book their last-four spot.

Fulham needed luck and composure from the penalty spot to overcome Everton. Michael Keane's own goal put the Cottagers ahead, but substitute Beto's late equaliser sent the game to penalties. Fulham proved the cooler heads, converting all seven of their kicks as Everton's Idrissa Gueye missed the decisive penalty to hand the Cottagers a 7-6 win.

Middlesbrough enjoyed a straightforward path to the semi-



Chelsea players celebrate their win against Newcastle United in the League Cup on Tuesday

finals. A dominant 3-0 victory over Port Vale, with goals from Riley McGree, Marcus Browne, and Chuba Akpom, booked their place amongst the final four.

At Stamford Bridge, Chelsea looked destined for disappointment after Newcastle took the

lead. But substitute Mykhailo Mudryk saved the day with a last-gasp equaliser deep into injury time, forcing the tie into a penalty shootout. The Blues held their nerve from the spot, with Newcastle's Kieran Trippier and Matt Ritchie missing to hand

Chelsea a 4-2 victory.

Earlier, Trippier, on as a substitute, was at fault when he failed to cut out a Malo Gusto cross and allowed Mudryk, also on as a sub, to slot home.

"Trips is an incredibly strong character," Newcastle manager

Eddie Howe told reporters.

"When he's given us so much, now's our turn to support him and look after him the other way and that's what we'll do."

Chelsea had gone behind in the 16th minute when Callum Wilson, surrounded by Chelsea defenders, pounced on an error by Benoit Badiashile who got the ball caught in his feet allowing Wilson to flick his finish past Petrovic.

The hosts dominated possession throughout the game but struggled to break down a well-drilled Newcastle defence.

They brought French forward Christopher Nkunku off the bench for his first competitive appearance for the Londoners having suffered a knee injury in pre-season shortly after his transfer from RB Leipzig.

Griezmann equals record as Atletico held 3-3 by Getafe

Madrid, Spain - Atletico Madrid's perfect home run in LaLiga came crashing down on Tuesday as they surrendered a 3-1 lead to draw 3-3 with Getafe in a dramatic encounter.

Antoine Griezmann, etching his name in club history with a brace that equalled Luis Aragones' record of 173 goals, seemed to have secured the win. However, Getafe fought back valiantly, capitalising on Stefan Savic's red card just before halftime to claw their way back with two goals in the second half.

Borja Mayoral completed the comeback with a stoppage-time penalty, leaving the Wanda Metropolitano stunned and Atletico searching for answers.

The draw marks the first time Diego Simeone's side has dropped points at home this season.



Atletico Madrid's Antoine Griezmann celebrates after scoring against Getafe on Tuesday

first-ever Coppa Italia last 16, were the unlikely heroes of the night. Quickfire goals in the second half, with Enzo Barrenechea heading home a corner in the 65th minute and Giuseppe Caso adding another five minutes later, stunned the Napoli faithful and put the visitors in the driver's seat.

Dortmund held

Borussia Dortmund were held to a 1-1 draw by visitors Mainz 05 in their final Bundesliga game of the year on Tuesday to make it four league matches without a win, piling more pressure on embattled coach Edin Terzic.

Turkey club walk off pitch in protest at referee's decision

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkish football descended into chaos again on Tuesday as Istanbulspor abruptly abandoned their Super Lig match against Trabzonspor over a disputed penalty call. The incident marks a disturbing return to controversy after a one-week league suspension triggered by a club president punching a referee.

With Trabzonspor leading 2-1 thanks to Paul Onuachu's goal, Istanbulspor furiously demanded a penalty for a seem-



Trabzonspor players celebrate a goal against Istanbulspor on Tuesday

ingly harsh challenge on Florian Loshaj. Despite pleas from players and staff, the referee waved play on, prompting a dramatic escalation.

Istanbulspor chairman Ecmel Faik Sarialioğlu, incensed by the decision, stormed onto the pitch and ordered his players to walk off. Confusion reigned as some players initially hesitated, seemingly reluctant to follow their chairman's command. However, ultimately, the entire team obeyed, leaving the referee with

no choice but to abandon the match in the 74th minute.

The event leaves Turkish football grappling with further turmoil. The league was already reeling from the shocking incident just last week where Ankaragucu president Faruk Koca punched a referee after his team's defeat. Now, Istanbulspor's walkout raises fresh questions about player and official control, refereeing accountability, and the integrity of the Super Lig.



'SHOCK AND SURPRISE'

Starc reacts to becoming the costliest IPL auction buy

Mumbai, India - Mitchell Starc was "jittery" on Tuesday evening as he followed the IPL 2024 auction at his home in Sydney. It had already been a busy day for Starc: he had moved the lawn, walked the dogs, done his shopping rounds and made himself dinner.

To
Kolkata Knight Riders
For
INR 24.75 Crore
(1,145,504 OMR)

Starc waited anxiously for his name to come up for bidding in the fourth set comprising capped fast bowlers. His Australia captain and friend Pat Cummins had already gone to Sunrisers Hyderabad for INR 20.5 crore (US\$2.569 mn approx.), surpassing the record set by England all-rounder Sam Curran at the 2023 auction to become the IPL's most expensive player ever.

That distinction, several pundits and franchises heads had believed in the lead-up to the auction, would belong to Starc. Nearly two-and-a-half hours into the auction in Dubai, player Number 28's name came up for bidding: Starc.

Starc and everyone else following the auction wouldn't be-

lieve what was about to transpire. Mumbai Indians owner Akash Ambani and his counterpart at Delhi Capitals, Kiran Gandhe, started the bidding. At the INR 9.4 crore mark, Gandhe pulled out. Enter Kolkata Knight Riders at the INR 9.8 crore mark. The Knight Riders had been favourites to bid for Starc on the eve of the auction. After all, they had signed him for INR 9.4 crore at the 2018 auction, but Starc had to pull out due to injury.

After Mumbai, too, dropped out, Gujarat Titans locked into a bidding contest with Knight Riders. Several tense minutes followed as both franchises raised their bidding towards Cummins' price tag. The auction room let out a sigh of excitement when Starc surpassed Cummins. Finally, after nearly 17 minutes of bidding, Knight Riders had Starc at INR 24.75 crore. The most expensive player tag had moved from Cummins to Starc in less than two hours.

Starc was as gobsmacked as his wife Alyssa Healy, who was relaying updates from Mumbai where she is part of the Australia women's tour of India, which starts with a one-off Test this week. In a chat with Star Sports, Starc said he had been "intrigued" about how he would fare, and wasn't prepared to end up making history.

"I'm not sure any words would do it justice, really," Starc said, asked to recount his reaction to Knight Riders' winning bid. "Alyssa was over there with the Australian team at the minute, so her coverage was slightly ahead of mine here in Australia. So she sort of saw the numbers before I did, so I was getting the updates through her. But, yeah, a fair bit of shock, and certainly excitement with how it was all unfolding. But nothing that I could've ever imagined. Thoroughly thrilled to be joining KKR."

Starc has played only two seasons of the IPL - in 2014 and 2015, at Royal Challengers Bangalore, who had picked him up at INR 5 crore. He then decided to manage his workload for a few years before deciding to enter the auction ahead of the 2018 season. Even then the Knight Riders had bet big money on Starc who they believe has all the skills to be a serial match-winner. These included his ability to bowl in the 140-150 kph range while generating conventional and reverse swing, flooring batters and breaking stumps with toe-crushing yorkers, mix things up with a wicked slower ball, all this with the added threat of his left-arm angle, as well as provide depth to their batting.

Unfortunately, Starc hurt his tibia, ruling him out of the 2018

season. But six seasons later, Starc is happy to play in Knight Riders' colours. "Firstly, it's exciting to be back involved," he said. "Secondly, it's more of a bit of a shock and a surprise, I guess."

The Knight Riders had come to the auction with a remaining purse of 32.7 crore with the most slots to fill of any team - 12 including four overseas players. As soon as the auction began, they got to work by raising their paddle for West Indies allrounder Rovman Powell, who ended up going to Rajasthan Royals. The Knight Riders would eventually walk out with 10 new signings.

But how do you make sense of a team spending INR 24.75 crore, or 75.69 % of the purse they started the auction with, on a single player? "They are amazing numbers, aren't they?" He understands the pressure and expectations that will come with the price tag as soon as the season begins. But he has qualities not many possess and the experience of winning World Cups. "I'm 33 now, so I've had to deal with a few ups and downs and pressures of certain games," he said. "I would like to think that I can keep that in check, but that always comes with the territory when some of those numbers get added to the anticipation of an upcoming season as well."

ESPNcricinfo

Glam Homes-OCT Ruwi match ends in tie, Bank Muscat win

Muscat - Glam Homes and OCT Ruwi were involved in a thrilling tie in their A division League match at the Oman Cricket Academy Turf 2 on Saturday.

Batting first, OCT Ruwi made 236 with Majid Al Balushi hitting a half century and Mohammed Al Balushi scoring a quickfire 40.

Masud Parvez, Rana Zeeshan and Usman Ali picked two wickets each.

In response, Glam Homes CT's Dileepa Srilal waged a lone battle with a stunning century. Although Glam Homes lost his wicket in the last over, they still managed to tie the match. Shoaib Al Balushi and Zubair Al Balushi picked three wickets each.

In another match on Friday, Bank Muscat defeated TECS in the A Division League 2023-24 powered by Khimji Ramdas LLC



(Fom L) Usman Ali Shah, Ajay Hirlekar and Ali Hussnain of Bank Muscat

Bank Muscat's Ajay Hirlekar picked four wickets while Ali Hussnain scalped three to restrict TECS from posting a par-total.

In response, Bank Muscat's Usman Ali Shah stole the show scoring a brilliant run-a-ball century ensuring their victory in the 33rd over. Abdul Malik picked two wickets for TECS.

Brief Scores : OCT Ruwi 236/9 in 50 overs (Majid Al Balushi 64(100); Masud Parvez 2/29) tied with Glam Homes CT 236/10 in 50 overs (Dileepa Srilal 100(117); Zubair Al Balushi 3/28)

Brief Scores : TECS 158/10 in 45.1 overs (Saud Haroon Khan 49(78); Ajay Hirlekar 4/33) lost to Bank Muscat 160/3 in 32.4 overs (Usman Ali Shah 103(101); Abdul Malik 2/14) by 7 wickets.

at the Oman Cricket Academy Turf 2.

Saud Haroon Khan scored 49

for TECS but with the rest of their batsmen failing to tick, they only managed to make a mere 158.

Nandre Burger, Tony de Zorzi help South Africa draw level against India

Port Elizabeth, South Africa - South Africa levelled the ODI series by bowling India out for 211 in the surprisingly seam-friendly conditions of the usually slow and low St George's Park. It came as no surprise to South Africa, though, who added two frontline quicks to their XI and decided to bowl first on a fresh pitch with the bowling wind blowing.

Left-arm quick Nandre Burger, who seems to have it all in height, pace and movement, led the attack with three wickets either side of a nosebleed-forced absence from the field. The conditions didn't quite ease out, but South Africa had the advantage of knowing they didn't need to be urgent with their scoring and also enjoyed a significant amount of luck in the early goings, which might seem to be at odds with Tony de Zorzi and Reeza Hendricks putting on the biggest opening stand in Gqeberha to set up the comfortable win. De Zorzi went on to convert his maiden half-century into a century.

The win, though, was set up by the fast bowlers, two of whom didn't even play the last match. One of them - Beuran Hendricks - flew in from Cape Town earlier in the morning after Ottniel Baartman and Andile Phehlukwayo were ruled out with injury. Aiden Markram also left out Tabraiz Shami's left-arm spin for Lizaad Williams. The three specialist quicks bowled 28.2 overs between them for six wickets and 113 runs.

After half-centuries from Sai Sudharsan - his second in his first two ODIs - and captain KL Rahul, the lack of depth in India's batting was exposed when they



Captain KL Rahul (L) and Sai Sudharsan both hit fifties but India failed to make a challenging total

looked to score quick runs and lost wickets to leave Axar Patel with four tailenders over the last 13.2 overs. The last four wickets could add only 42.

Burger and Williams made good use of the Easterly and the pitch with seam movement and also inconsistent bounce. In comparison with Johannesburg, the ball swung much less - 0.6 degrees on an average in the first 10 to 1.3 degrees at Wanderers - but there was appreciable seam movement available, which made batting difficult. If anything, the slightly older ball seemed to be moving more off

the deck as it did in Beuran' spell as the first-change bowler.

Burger corrected his length beautifully after being driven for four first ball, trapping Ruturaj Gaikwad lbw immediately. Tilak Varma's stay at No. 3 was a troubled one, but was part of a 42-run second-wicket stand. Burger had to go off the field because of a nosebleed after three overs, but Beuran and Williams remained just as challenging.

When Burger came back, his extra pace proved to be decisive as he got Varma on the hook for 10 off 30 balls.

ESPNcricinfo

Azam topples Gill in ICC ODI rankings

Dubai, UAE - England legspinner Adil Rashid has become the No. 1 ranked bowler in T20Is, while Pakistan batter Babar Azam has displaced India opener Shubman Gill at the top of the ICC men's ODI rankings.

Rashid overtook two other legspinners - Afghanistan's Rashid Khan (No. 2) and India's Ravi Bishnoi (No. 3) - after taking seven wickets in the first four T20Is of England's ongoing series in the West Indies. He is only the second England player to become No. 1 in the ICC men's T20I rankings for



Babar Azam

bowlers, after offspinner Graeme Swann more than a decade ago. Rashid's elevation

to the top came a day after he went unsold during the IPL 2024 auction.

India's Suryakumar Yadav remains the top ranked T20I batter after scoring a fifty and a hundred in the second and third T20Is in South Africa. His lead over Pakistan's Mohammad Rizwan in second place is now a 100 ratings points.

In ODIs, Babar has gone past Gill to become the No. 1 batter after Gill was rested from India's ongoing series in South Africa, though neither batter has played an ODI since the

2023 World Cup ended.

In the Test rankings, Kane Williamson remains No.1 while Usman Khawaja moves up three places to fourth following Australia's win against Pakistan in Perth, with another opportunity to close the gap during the Boxing Day Test match.

Pat Cummins has moved up a spot to third in the Test bowling rankings, while Nathan Lyon has risen to fifth, Mitchell Starc to eighth, and Josh Hazlewood tenth. India offspinner R Ashwin remains the No. 1 ranked bowler in Tests.



14
CHRISTMAS MEAL
Make it memorable, make it spicy - the Christmas lunch



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IN TOWN
Affordable Art Show at Qurm



16
ENTERTAINMENT
A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood

FESTIVE FERVOUR



Photo: V K Shafeer

Season to be jolly

Hubert Vaz

It's time to deck the halls with boughs of holly, buntings and balls, Christmas trees and Santa images...the season to celebrate and be jolly is close at hand (beginning December 25) and people are moving around town in feverish haste to bring in the best for their celebrations at home and in the community. If hypermarkets are any indicator, no one can miss the festive fervour that marks this part of the year. And with all the restrictions (surrounding the pandemic in preceding years) now over, people are planning celebrations this year on pre-pandemic levels. A variety of merchandise, from different parts of the world, especially India and China, have flooded the market providing buyers with latest options for lighting and décor. But most of all, the essence of the festival is something that people cherish and share the most - warmth within the family and brotherhood in the community. And it has different connotations to different people in Muscat who are with their fam-

The Christmas mood is already set in town with shops and hypermarkets teeming with festive merchandise, from garments to goodies, home décor to cakes and pastries, and homes as well as commercial establishments decked up for the season of merrymaking

ilies or away from them during the festive fervour that hits town every year. Dr C Thomas, veteran reconstructive surgeon, says, "Christmas stands for the birth of Jesus Christ who offers peace and a promise for a happy life. The festival reminds us about what we can offer to others rather than what we can receive from them." Alex Joseph, an Indian educator, however, simply says, "Christmas is all about bringing a smile to someone's face". Nicole Becx, a PR consultant, when asked what Christmas means to her, said, "Time off and wishing I was in a cold country/my hometown, with

my family and friends - similar minded - and go to church to pray for a better world," While Emily Shotter, another PR professional, echoed the same sentiments, saying, "Christmas is definitely about family and friends. About sharing good times and also remembering those that are no longer with us." He Lihong (Jenny), a Chinese expatriate, said, "Christmas for me is a special time to be with loved ones, cherishing our moments together. It's also a season of gratitude, where I find joy in giving back and making those around me happy. Through small acts of kindness and thoughtful

gifts, I aim to show my appreciation and spread the warmth of the holiday spirit." Rounding up the essence of the season, others like Delicious Sahadevan, founder of Dance Academy by Delicious Sahadevan, added, "To me, Christmas is not just a season, it's a feeling of joy, love and hope. It's a festival of celebration, beauty and surprises, and it represents gratitude, happiness and celebrations." Hotel lobbies in town are already decorated with decorations, Christmas Trees, cribs, as well as other traditional winter installations to bring in the Christmas mood. An array of celebrations, especially Christmas Tree parties for children and festive dinners for December 25 and the ensuing New Year are also lined up at all starred hotels and resorts in Oman to give the faithful varied opportunity to celebrate in style.



cook-up

FIERY FARE

Christmas lunch

It's time to plan your Christmas lunch. And if you dig spice, try this fiery fare to make it memorable



Beef Roast with Potatoes

- Ingredients**
- 1kg round roast beef steak
 - 1tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
 - 3 cloves garlic – minced
 - 1tbsp chopped fresh rosemary
 - 1tbsp chopped fresh thyme leaves
 - 4tsp kosher salt
 - 1tsp freshly ground black pepper
- Method**
- Let the roast sit uncovered on a wire rack set in a

baking sheet in the refrigerator 1 hour, up to overnight. Preheat oven to 220° C. In a small bowl, combine oil, garlic, rosemary, thyme, salt, and pepper. Rub all over roast. Place roast in roasting pan fitted with a roasting rack. Roast for 15 minutes, then reduce heat to 200° C and roast for 1 hour and 45 minutes (more for medium, or 2 hours for medium well done). Peel the potatoes, sprinkle salt and place in the roasting tray during the last 30 minutes. (You may add carrots/turnips, as well, if desired, to the tray during the last 30 minutes.)

Remove the roast tray from the oven, collect all the excess juices from tray, remove the veggies, too, and let it rest 15 to 30 minutes before slicing and serving.

To prepare the jus, in a pan, add the collected juices. Add 1 cup of beef broth or a cup of water with a beef seasoning cube. To this, add, 2tsp red vinegar, 2tsp soya sauce, 1 or 2 toasted garlic cloves, ½tsp julienned ginger, ¼ tsp crushed pepper. Heat and reduce to half the quantity. Serve along with the roast beef and potatoes/veggies.



Chicken Vindaloo

- Ingredients**
- 1kg skinless bone-in chicken, cut into chunks
 - 15 whole Kashmiri chillies
 - 12 cloves
 - 10 - 12 garlic cloves
 - 5 cm piece fresh ginger - diced
 - 2.5 cm cinnamon stick
 - 1 tsp whole black peppercorns
 - ½ tsp ground cumin
 - ¾ cup apple cider vinegar
 - ½ cup water
 - 1 tsp ground turmeric
 - 3tbsp oil
 - 2 large red onions - diced
 - Sea salt, to taste
 - 1 tsp sugar
- Method**
- Pat the chicken dry and transfer to a large mixing bowl. Grind the Kashmiri chillies, cloves, garlic, ginger, cinnamon, peppercorns, cumin, vinegar, and water together in a high-speed blender to get a smooth paste. Add the spice paste to the chicken with 1 tsp of salt. Fold to

coat well and leave covered for 30 minutes at room temperature.

While the chicken marinates in the vinegar spice mixture, cook the onions. Heat the oil over medium-high heat in a non-reactive thick heavy-bottomed saucepan. Add the onions with a tiny pinch of salt and saute until they turn light brown. Add the marinated chicken with the marinade. Stir in the turmeric and sugar. Reduce the heat to a simmer, cover with a lid, and occasionally stir to prevent the chicken from sticking to the bottom of the pot and burning.

Cook until the chicken turns tender, opaque, and thoroughly cooked. If the liquid levels drop during cooking, add a few tablespoons of water. Once cooked, remove from the heat. The vindaloo can be eaten immediately but tastes better the next day.

(Note: This recipe can be used for any meat of your choice)

WINNING RECIPE

Hot and Sweet Sardine Curry

Meena S
(December 14 – Sardines)

- Ingredients**
- 250g (6-8) small sardines
 - 2tbsp tomato paste
 - 1tsp tamarind pulp
 - 1tsp red chilli powder
 - ½tsp turmeric powder
 - 1tsp coriander powder
 - 1tsp garlic paste
 - 1tsp ginger paste
 - 1tsp sugar
 - 2tbsp mustard oil
 - ½tsp salt
 - 1 sprig curry leaves
 - 2 green chillies – slit
 - 1 small onion - sliced
- Method**
- Clean the sardines (heads off) and season with a sprinkle of salt and turmeric – set aside. In a pan, heat oil and add the curry leaves followed by onion. Cook for two minutes, then add the ginger and garlic paste, and fry for a minute.



Then add all the spice powders, tomato paste, sugar, salt, green chillies and half cup water, and mix well. Reduce flame and let it cook for two minutes. Then add the tamarind pulp and one cup of water, and let it cook on medium-low flame for 5 minutes. Add the sardines, cover and cook for 5 more minutes. Serve hot with steamed rice or rotis.

My KITCHEN CREATIONS

Do you have a unique recipe? Here's your chance to share it with readers. The best recipe every week, using the given main ingredient, will be published here and receive food vouchers from:



NOTE: All recipes sent should be original and not sourced from the internet. All recipes must have a list of ingredients and method (No comments). All recipes must be accompanied by a photo taken in your own kitchen. Only recipes sent in by Monday, every week, will be considered. Unique recipes with limited ingredients stand a good chance

MAIN INGREDIENT
THIS WEEK
Coconut



Send in your recipes to:
hubert.vaz@apexmedia.co.om with the title 'My Kitchen Creations', along with your name and mobile number.

Distributed by

Please contact +968 22060236/237

take a break

IN TOWN

AFFORDABLE ART SHOW



Radhika Hamlai's Affordable Art Show, held at Al Bahja Hall, Qurm, last weekend



Photos: V K Shafeer

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Today, you will feel a strong magnetic pull toward beautiful things from other people's cultures. This increase in your aesthetic sensibilities and curiosities is probably a clear signal that it's time for you to break away from a life that is too oriented toward facts and figures. So try to step out of your daily routine.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Today, your heart is feeling generous, and it's telling you to do things because they are the right thing to do and not because they are profitable. You are coming to understand that if you only think about financial gain before getting involved with other people, you will ultimately be selling yourself short.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

One of your friends will grow into becoming an authority figure in your life, and you need to establish the ground rules before things get complicated. Make sure that the two of you have a serious and honest conversation about how this whole thing is going to work. You will be taking a big risk with your relationship if you just assume everything will be okay.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Talking is the best way to work through whatever you're confused about right now, but the big question is who to talk to. Believe it or not, one of your coworkers might be the perfect candidate. They know you from dealing with you on a nearly daily basis, and they have seen you in some of your victorious moments.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You're like a mother bear today, ready to pounce on anyone who says a bad word about one of your friends! Your boundless energy is manifesting itself in an interesting way. You aren't usually combative, but why play nice when the bullies don't get the message unless you yell it at them?



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Today, one of your negotiations might feel like it's going into a negative direction. So if you feel like one of the people involved (including you) is about to sacrifice too much, then by all means speak up! This applies to any kind of dealings at work, in a relationship, or even in terms of one of your family obligations.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

One of your current projects is having a more confusing effect on your life than you expected, and you might be feeling like you are in a fog. But you can gain clarity over whatever is bugging you if you simply ask for some help. There is sure to be someone around who understands what you are going through.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your enthusiasm for what you believe in is more powerful than ever, but today someone else will be even more enthusiastic about their own pet project or cause. They'll be so excited about someone or something that you won't be able to resist soaking up a little bit of their zeal. It's contagious! This person could be very persuasive in helping you change your way of thinking.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

A friendly competition with someone you really like is starting to become a not-so friendly power struggle! This is certainly an unexpected development given the good relationship you two have always had, but that doesn't mean you can't overcome it. Declare a truce today and send them an email or text.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Restriction never feels comfortable, but right now it's going to feel like even more of a hassle than ever before. You yearn to be free and unencumbered, and any situation that is big on discipline and structure could feel stifling for you. If you can, try to schedule formal events for another day or cancel them altogether. You'll be much happier if you can go through this day with flexibility.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You need to keep an open mind. Try to accept the changes that will be happening in your day today. Don't waste time trying to find out why they are happening. Just go with the flow and see what the next hour brings. You might not be comfortable with this idea at first, but by the early afternoon you'll begin to get into the groove and really enjoy the unexpected twists and turns that your day will be taking. It is certainly not going to be a boring time!



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

When people start throwing blame around today, you need to be the voice of authority. Step into the fray and help everyone focus on what needs to be fixed rather than who broke what. Group dynamics are going to be tricky because everyone thinks they are right, but only one person can guide the decision-making process. If you are that person, you are going to have to develop a thick skin.

BOGGLER

I	S	S	A
A	L	S	O
U	R	S	I
E	B	L	T

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

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

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS

1. What is the basic unit of life?

- A. Cell
- B. Sperm
- C. Nerve
- D. Egg

2. Which gas makes up the majority of Earth's atmosphere?

- A. Oxygen
- B. Nitrogen
- C. Carbon dioxide
- D. Helium



3. What is the national sport of Japan?

- A. Baseball
- B. Climbing
- C. Table Tennis
- D. Sumo wrestling

Answers
1. A
2. B
3. D

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

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

entertainment

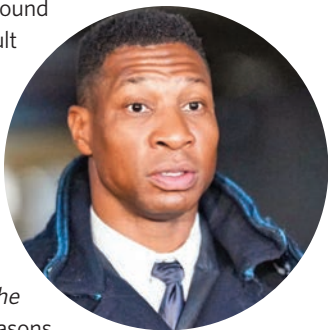


Greta Gerwig and Noah Baumbach tied the knot after 12 years of dating. The pair got married in New York City Hall, an insider disclosed. Greta and Noah met while they filmed the movie *Greenberg* in 2010. They started dating in 2011. The couple co-wrote the *Barbie* screenplay. In an interview with *Elle* UK published in July, they announced that they had welcomed a second child. "The little guy is sleeping through the night. But I'm still doing that thing where I wake up, every hour to 90 minutes, and just hover. You just keep wanting to look at that baby. So I'm slightly in a twilight state," the *Lady Bird* director said. The couple welcomed their first child, son Harold Ralph Gerwig Baumbach, in March 2019.

Greta Gerwig & Noah Baumbach TIE THE KNOT

MARVEL DROPS JONATHAN MAJORS

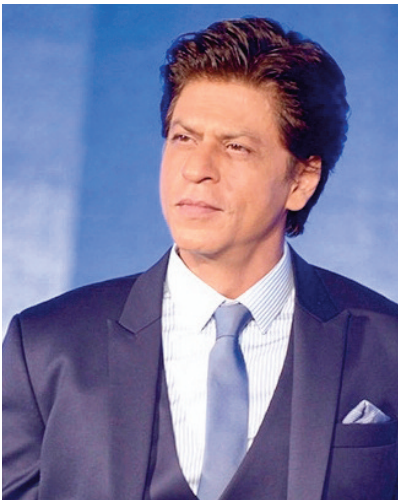
On December 18, a Manhattan jury found Jonathan Majors guilty of reckless assault in the third degree and guilty of harassment following a two-week trial that stemmed from a March incident between the actor and his ex-partner, Grace Jabbari. He was positioned as the key figure in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The time-travelling villain factored into this year's *Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania* as well as both seasons of *Loki*, and he was going to lead *Avengers: The Kang Dynasty*, slated for May 1, 2026. The feature is still in the script phase and had not begun filming.



SRK MADE 'DUNKI' FOR HIMSELF

Shah Rukh Khan recently flew to Dubai to promote his upcoming film *Dunki*. At the promotional event in Dubai, the actor explained the meaning of his film *Dunki*, the sentiment behind it, and how after making films for boys and girls - *Jawan* and *Pathaan* - the actor has now made a film for himself. He also called *Dunki* his 'best film.'

SRK said, "So when I made *Jawan*, I thought I made a film for boys and girls but I didn't make anything for myself, then I made *Dunki*. So this is my film. This film is very close to my heart. When I was doing *Pathaan*, many people who write about films, those who apparently know about films more than the filmmakers, were saying what kind of roles I was doing, so I really felt that I should do films that come from my heart and this includes all the films that I did this year. Everyone will find something in the film that will touch their heart."



ALYSSA MILANO TALKS 'RESILIENCE'

Alyssa Milano is opening up about learning to have 'resilience' while celebrating her 51st birthday.

"Today is my birthday! However, instead of just saying my age, from now on I'm going to say that I have reached 'level 51,'" the actress wrote via X on December 19, alongside a makeup-free selfie.

"I have discovered a few cheat codes that have helped me navigate the challenges and triumphs along the way. The first cheat code is RESILIENCE. I have faced my fair share of heartache, anxiety, and depression, but I have managed to overcome them with Love. Love for myself, which keeps me evolving and searching, love for others, which keeps me gentle and forgiving, and love for the world."

BROOKLYN NINE-NINE STAR DIES



Andre Braugher, the dynamic actor known for his outstanding work on such shows as *Homicide: Life on the Street* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, has died. He was 61.

Braugher died Monday after a brief illness, his longtime rep Jennifer Allen told *The Hollywood Reporter*. The cause of death turned out to be lung cancer.

Braugher starred as master interrogator Det Frank Pembleton on NBC's *Homicide: Life on the Street* for the first six seasons of the show's acclaimed 1993-99 run, then played another cop, Capt Raymond Holt — this time against type and for laughs — on the 2013-21 Fox-NBC sitcom *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*.

COMING SOON

MASHA & THE BEAR: TWICE THE FUN



You're in for a wild ride as Masha goes on a fantastic roundtrip from the forest to the city and back! On the way back from the city, brace yourself for a heartwarming winter fairytale centered around the twelve months.

Genre: Animation Starring: Madeline Marchant, West Rubin, Erynn Chapman, Gerald Owens, Caleb Ritch Language: English Release date: December 21



HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW: **WONKA** Genre: Musical fantasy Starring: Timothee Chalamet, Calah Lane, Kegan-Michael Key, Paterson Joseph, Matt Lucas, Mathew Baynton

Wonka is a 2023 musical fantasy film directed by Paul King, who co-wrote the screenplay with Simon Farnaby, based on a story by King. It tells the origin story of Willy Wonka, a character in the 1964 novel *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by Roald Dahl, featuring his early days as a chocolatier. It is the third live-action adaptation of

Dahl's book, following *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (1971) and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005).

The plot surrounds Willy Wonka, an aspiring magician, inventor, and chocolatier, who arrives in Europe to establish his chocolate shop at the Galeries Gourmet. Burning through his meager savings, he is coerced to stay at Mrs Scrubitt's boarding house by her henchman

Sweet nothings



Bleacher, and signs a contract despite orphan Noodle's warning about the fine print. To pay them off, Wonka introduces 'hoverchocs', chocolates that make people fly, at Galeries Gourmet, facing mockery from three rival chocolatiers who call the Chief of Police to confiscate his earnings for disrupting their businesses and selling without a chocolate store.

Unable to pay the exorbitant fees imposed on him by the contract, Wonka is captured and starts to work in a laundrette alongside five other captives for Mrs Scrubitt, including Noodle.

The theme of the movie is 'The greedy beat the needy

every time,' which Wonka is warned by another character. The script illustrates that idea from its opening musical sequence.

If you want to enjoy some light comedy, fantasy and fun to ring in the Christmas spirit and have a nice outing with the kids, this is your cup of tea. Audiences say, *Wonka* wonderfully pays homage to the musical, book and film, carefully incorporating elements of all while adding new unique moments.

Enjoy this bubbly movie - an intoxicating mix of magic and music, mayhem and emotion, told with heart and humour.

Rating ★★★★★