

Oman to ban plastic shopping bags by 2027 in phases

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Environment Authority (EA) has issued a decision (No 8/2024) to ban the use of all kinds of plastic shopping bags by January 2027 in a phased manner.

The timeline drawn by EA targets specific sectors every six months, beginning with July 1, 2024 set for pharmacies, hospitals and clinics.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, Dr Mohammad Majid al Kasbi, Director of Department of Chemical Materials at EA, informed that the decision to eventually ban all kinds of plastic shopping bags in the country was in drafting since 2012 and involved the cooperation of competent authorities. "The authority has developed a plan to prevent the spread of plastic bags gradually and help people implement it easily."

The decision factors in aspects of establishing factories for environmentally friendly bags and plastic waste recycling, Kasbi added.

"We now have ten factories producing environmentally-friendly bags and 18 factories recycling plastic waste in an effort to achieve Oman Vision 2040 and a sustainable environment to promote a circular economy."

EA is coordinating efforts with



We now have ten factories producing environmentally-friendly bags and 18 factories recycling plastic waste for a sustainable environment and to promote a circular economy

DR MOHAMMAD AL KASBI

several relevant authorities, including Consumer Protection Authority, be'ah and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion to spread awareness on the significance of using environmentally friendly bags.

"We have distributed 500,000 environmentally friendly bags since 2021. EA's initiatives target school and university students and citizen's homes in all governorates. Awareness campaigns are held in cooperation with the governor's offices in



(Image for illustrative purpose)

wilayats. Many commercial centres have agreed to offer customers eco-friendly bags for free," Kasbi said.

"The new decision prohibits companies, institutions and individuals from using single-use plastic shopping bags of less than 50 micron thickness."

He informed that violators of the decision will be liable to pay a fine of no less than RO50 and no more than RO1,000. The fine will double in case of a repeat violation.

About the alternatives avail-

able, Kasbi said, "Multiple-use eco-friendly bags made of cloth, paper or other organic materials can be used. These bags can be used over hundreds of times, while plastic shopping bags are used only once and take more than a thousand years to degrade."

He added that EA will continue to launch initiatives, conduct awareness campaigns and distribute environmentally friendly bags among members of society, and that the authority hopes all citizens and residents

will cooperate and use environmentally-friendly plastic bags to achieve the plan.

"Achieving Oman Vision 2040, which focuses on long-term sustainable development, will be expedited with these efforts contributing to a cleaner and healthier environment for future generations. It's essential to continue raising awareness among the public about the environmental impact of plastic and encouraging responsible consumption."

Continued on Page 03

Airbridge established to send aid to Gaza

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has established an airbridge to deliver relief materials to the Gaza Strip. The delivery of aid, directed by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, is being undertaken by Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO).

The charity dispatched essential supplies through the Rafah crossing on Sunday.

A statement issued by OCO said, 'Continuing Omani aid, the organisation is operating an airbridge consisting of five aircraft to the Al Arish Airport in Egypt, loaded with relief and food supplies, presented to the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip through the Rafah border crossing.'

In a call to philanthropists, OCO said individuals can contribute to the Palestinian cause via ONEIC payment machines and bank transfers to two accounts - Bank Muscat 0423010869610013 and Oman Arab Bank 3101006200500.

Donations can be made through text messages. Omantel subscribers can send 'donate' to 90022, Ooredoo subscribers 'Palestine' to 90909, and Renna subscribers can use the code 181092#

OCO informed that donations are also accepted via www.jood.om or its website: www.oco.org.om

Oman warns against Rafah offensive

The sultanate categorically re-



jected the Israeli occupation forces' move to storm the Palestinian city of Rafah, which is now sheltering hundreds of thousands of unarmed civilians displaced from the northern part of the Gaza Strip.

Oman noted that the chaotic situation was a direct outcome of Israel's brutal aggression that left close to 30,000 dead and tens of thousands wounded or missing.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Sunday, Oman pointed out that Israel's action was in flagrant defiance of international law and international human charters. It also warned against serious fallout of this persistent and indiscriminate aggression in the Gaza Strip.

In the statement, Oman reiterated its plea to the international community to take concrete measures to put to practice the global political positions to address Israel's arrogance and force it to accept a ceasefire and provide humanitarian needs for the displaced population in Gaza.

Holiday declared today due to rains

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has declared an official holiday on Monday in view of the inclement weather conditions that the sultanate is experiencing.

Oman News Agency stated that the decision has been taken in the public interest.

'Monday will be an official holiday for employees in the units of the state's administrative apparatus and workers in private sector establishments in all governorates, except Dhofar and Al Wusta,' the statement said.

Workers may be employed on Monday if necessary, considering compliance with general precautions and occupational health and safety requirements, provided that they are compensated for the day.

Moderate to heavy rains lashed several governorates on Sunday. The Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation suspended classes in public and private schools and colleges in all governorates except Dhofar and Al Wusta on Monday.

Rains in the range of 40mm to 80mm are expected in some places with downdraft winds in the range of 15 and 35 knots, leading to overflowing wadis.



Finn Fisher-Black wins Stage 2 of Tour of Oman

'Together We Progress' forum spurs public-private dialogue

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The second edition of the 'Together We Progress' forum opened on Sunday under the auspices of H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Organised by the Secretariat General of Council of Ministers, the forum serves as a crucial platform for enhancing communication and trust between the government and the community, aiming to foster a better understanding of government policies, development programmes and initiatives while gathering citizen feedback.

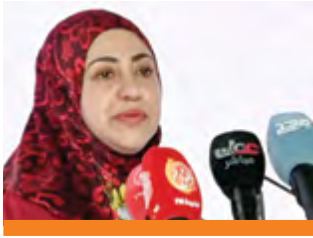
The opening day featured sessions where ministers highlighted institutional strategies aligned with the goals of Oman Vision 2040, sharing data and insights of future projects to promote transparency and inform citizens about government endeavours.

H E Dr Hilal al Sabti, Minister of Health, announced the approval of 15 investment projects in the medical and pharmaceutical sectors, highlighting the sultanate's commitment to a sustainable healthcare system. He also informed about expansion of healthcare units and hospitals across the country under the decentralisation policy, alongside an increase in operational hours to address appointment backlogs. Omanisation rate in the health sector now stands at 71%.

While addressing the need of economic diversification and entrepreneurship to create opportunities for graduates, H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Re-



(ONA)



Graduates must be proactive in creating jobs by engaging in entrepreneurship and being open to international employment opportunities

H E DR RAHMA AL MAHROUQI

search and Innovation, emphasised the fact that aligning academic programmes with the labour market needs does not ensure immediate job placement for all graduates. She urged graduates to be proactive in creating jobs by engaging in entrepreneurship and being open to international employment opportunities.

H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al

Shaibani, Minister of Education, announced plans to construct 29 school buildings within the year to reduce reliance on evening schools and highlighted the appointment of 18,679 Omani teachers from 2016 to 2023.

Citing the essential role of women in social progress and their potential for leadership positions, H E Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, spoke against the trend of early retirement by women. She urged women's continued engagement in the workforce to maximise their contribution to the country. "The earlier a woman leaves, the greater the country's loss," she said.

Nasser Khamis al Jashmi, Chairman of Tax Authority and Chairman of Board of Directors of the Social Protection Fund, detailed the social protection system's role in offering benefits, insurance, savings programmes and supplementary programmes, with over 1.39mn beneficiaries to date, highlighting the extensive reach of childhood benefits to 1,144,293.



Notice for Redemption of Unsecured Subordinated Perpetual Additional Tier I Capital Instruments (SOHAR BNK PERP BND (SIBB)) issued by Sohar International Bank SAOG (Bank) on 14 March 2019

The Bank issued OMR 100 million Unsecured Subordinated Perpetual Additional Tier 1 Capital Instruments (the Securities) on 14 March 2019 at an annual interest rate of %7.50. The Securities are listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) bond market as (SOHAR BNK PERP BND (SIBB)).

Pursuant to clause 7.1(b) of the terms and conditions of the issuance in the prospectus, and subject to obtaining the regulatory approval from the Central Bank of Oman, the Bank hereby issues an irrevocable notice to the holders of the Securities that the Bank will exercise its call option to redeem all the Securities on 14th March 2024 (the Redemption Date) at their principal amount together with the interest accrued up to but not including the redemption date.

Following the redemption, the Securities will be delisted from the MSX. Muscat Clearing and Depository (MCD) will process payments to holders of the Securities as per the records with MCD on 14 March 2024.

For further information, please contact:
Advisory@soharinternational.com

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Fun, fitness and food – Endless possibilities

In recent years, there has been a steady increase in lifestyle diseases in Oman, particularly diabetes in children, underscoring a pressing need for widespread health awareness and preventive measures. Towards this end, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued a Royal Order earlier this month for an annual budget for diabetes care in children. What else needs to be done to encourage healthy lifestyle among children? Here's what *Muscat Daily* readers said –

Khalid al Balushi
Filmmaker

This is the age of technology and we must take help from digital platforms for wellness campaigns. Engaging and informative content disbursed through social media, websites and mobile apps can reach a wide audience. Celebrities or even people of power can pass on health messages to youngsters. Embracing technology as a tool for positive change can enhance the impact of health promotion among children.

Salim al Habsi
Private sector employee

One of the easy solutions can be in encouraging healthy lifestyles that extend beyond the classroom. Voluntary services that involve parents, caregivers and local authorities play a crucial role. Organising workshops, seminars and health-focused events on lifestyle ailments and problems can also encourage sustained lifestyle changes in children.

Salman al Kindi
Salesman

Every good habit starts from home or school. Education plays a crucial role in shaping children's habits. Implementing policies that promote healthy eating options in school cafeterias by limiting the availability of sugary snacks and



(Image for illustrative purpose)

drinks must be made compulsory. Parents should encourage children to get out to playgrounds instead of sitting in front of the gaming console.

Mehdi Alam
Businessman

I feel that the best way is by investing in recreational spaces and facilities. It is important to promote physical activities among children. Public parks, sports complexes and playgrounds provide avenues for enjoyable exercise. Also, there can be sports competitions all year round. This will not only contribute to physical health but also encourage social in-

teraction and community bonding.

Khalid al Jabri
Businessman

This is alarming news and we must have more educational initiatives. Parents must be devoted to fostering a culture of healthy living among children. Spare the rod and spoil the child; parents must be strict with children about sleep time, food habits and exercising. It is important to implement educational initiatives in schools and communities. By raising awareness on the importance of balanced diets, regular exercise and the risks associated with sedentary lifestyles, we

can empower the younger generation to make informed choices for their well-being.

Chaamu
Fitness and nutrition specialist

Children are growing up without being taught the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Basic learning and better learning always begin at school. A healthy lifestyle is associated with school camps, where educators, parents and students gather to watch videos illustrating the consequences of supporting children's junk food addiction. Stands selling nutritious food should be available. The best students should be chosen to present presentations on nutrition and habits. Instead of medical camps, health camps should be introduced.

Raisa Saiki
Entrepreneur

Encourage fun physical activities at school, as well as nutrition education for students and parents/caregivers.

Sundaramany Mani
Private sector employee

Ban sugary drinks, salted chips, mayonnaise in sandwiches and unhealthy cooking oils.

Nurgul Rakhimova
Housewife

A lot depends on parents, as feeding starts with them. Physical fitness is closely connected to a healthy lifestyle. If a child is encouraged to participate in sports, both the parents and the child will understand that it requires a healthy diet, among other things. Therefore, this is a complex task where the role of parents is significant, and other factors like sports and school meals serve as support. Essentially, Oman needs to have more affordable sports clubs, and food in schools and kindergartens must be healthy. It would be beneficial if a budget was allocated for such initiatives.



Muscat Municipality installed 12 public restrooms in Seeb and Quriyat beaches last week. Which other areas need such services and what can be done immediately to reduce littering on beaches?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om You can also log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue.

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram

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Oman in talks to host annual Russian Seasons festival

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is holding discussions with Russia to host the international cultural programme 'Russian Seasons', marking a significant step in cultural diplomacy between the two nations.

On Sunday, H E Salem bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, held discussions with Olga Borisovna Lyubimova, Russian Minister of Culture.

Their meeting centred on strengthening bilateral ties in

tourism, culture and heritage, including the possibility of Oman hosting the Russian Seasons. The ministers also deliberated on organising joint programmes and enhancing cooperation with Russian museums, building on the success of existing partnerships, notably with Russia's esteemed State Hermitage Museum.

The discussions come in the wake of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit to Muscat in July 2023, when he expressed interest in showcasing Russian artistic talent in



(Supplied photo)

Oman through tours and exhibitions drawn from Russia's premier museums. "There is interest in organising tours for Russian performers and, probably, the ambitious Russian Seasons tours in Oman," he said.

Russian Seasons is an expansive initiative designed to showcase the richness of Russian culture globally. It encompasses a wide array of cultural presentations, including performances by theatre groups and orchestras, museum exhibitions, circus shows and educational activities, reaching an international audi-

ence with the essence of Russian traditions.

Since its inception, Russian Seasons has successfully toured Japan, Italy, Germany, and more recently, South Korea and Belgium. The programme's journey continued through Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in 2023, with Brazil slated as the upcoming host this year. Looking ahead, Bahrain is set to welcome Russian Seasons in 2025, commemorating 35 years of diplomatic relations between Russia and Bahrain.

Additionally, the ministers dis-

cussed strategies to enhance Oman's tourism visibility in Russia, including establishing a tourism representative office and fostering investment and capacity-building cooperation.

A joint executive programme is envisaged to further these goals, facilitating broader collaboration through events and meetings in partnership with the private sector. This initiative promises to open new avenues for cooperation and cultural exchange between Oman and Russia, enriching the cultural landscape of both nations.

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Sohar Aluminium inks MoU to fund construction of building for charity team

Suhar - Sohar Aluminium Company signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Takaful Sohar Social Charity Team on Sunday to finance the construction of a building for the latter in the wilayat of Sohar, North Batinah.

The agreement stipulates financing the construction of a four-floor residential and commercial building based on an approved design, provided that it is constructed within a year of the agreement signing, a press release stated.

The project will play a significant role in boosting and ensuring sustainability of the activities conducted by Takaful Sohar Social Charity Team to serve the community in Sohar. Revenue generated from the building will support the team, funding its social and charitable activities.

The signing ceremony was attended by Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Busaidi, Wali of Sohar, H E Abdullah bin Ali al

Balushi, Member of Majlis A'Shura from Sohar, Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Balushi, Deputy Wali of Sohar, and other dignitaries.

The agreement was signed by Ahmed bin Mohammed al Kharusi, General Manager of HR and Corporate Affairs at Sohar Aluminium, and Abdulmunim bin Mohammed al Murshidi, CEO of Takaful Sohar Social Charity Team.

According to Kharusi, funding the project for Takaful Sohar Social Charity Team reflects the company's commitment to social responsibility and its continuous efforts to give back to the communities, especially those located within its concession area.

Takaful Sohar Social Charity Team was established in 2012 and works under the umbrella of the Social Development Committee in Sohar. It undertakes various charitable and social services for communities in Sohar.

Tech trailblazers honoured at Oman innovation fest

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) marked the successful conclusion of the inaugural Oman Innovation Festival on Saturday at the Muscat Innovation Complex.

Over the six days, the festival served as a hub of creativity, culminating in the announcement of winners across multiple competitions including the Energy Hackathon, Governorates Innovation, and the Together We Innovate contest.

The festival's highlight, the Energy Hackathon, saw the Stellar Team from Oman clinching first place with their innovative self-cleaning solar panel system designed to enhance energy efficiency by combating dust accumulation using smart technology.

Following closely were the EcoSat team from the UAE with their AI and satellite imagery-based air pollution measurement solution, and the Carbo-EcoGen System team from Oman and Qatar, introducing a device to



convert air-borne carbon into methane for electricity generation.

In the field of regional innovation, South Sharqiyah governorate took the top spot in the Governorates Innovation Competition with a bio-insecticide project to fight the palm weevil using AI, showcasing Oman's commitment to integrating technology with traditional sectors like agriculture.

The festival also shone a spotlight on individual innovators, with Dr Khalsa bint Hamad al Bahariya's 'Virtual Science Laboratory' project winning the Together We Innovate competition for best overall innovation. Other notable projects included Naqla in tourism, Eternal Days in education, and several others in sectors such as cybersecurity,

food security, and energy.

Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Balushi, Director of the Oman Innovation Festival, reflected on the festival as a melting pot where innovators connected with both governmental and private sector supporters.

The event fostered discussions on innovation-enabling legislation and challenges, aiming to devise actionable solutions for the future.

The festival's comprehensive agenda featured an exhibition of innovations, the Bridge Program for startup investment opportunities, and the Innovation and Knowledge-Based Economy Forum in partnership with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

Notably, the festival facilitated dialogue on innovation,

signed several research and co-operation agreements, and offered extensive training and workshops to over 1,500 participants, underscoring Oman's proactive stance in nurturing a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

As the festival closed, H E Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Undersecretary for Scientific Research and Innovation in the MoHERI, honoured the winners, celebrating the festival's role in propelling Oman towards a future of innovation and knowledge-based economy.

With over 50 activities, the Oman Innovation Festival not only highlighted the nation's creative potential but also strengthened its position as a hub for scientific and technological advancement in the region.

MIFF to launch 'Arabwood' to usher new era for Arab cinema

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move to position Oman on the global stage, the Muscat International Film Festival (MIFF) is set to introduce a groundbreaking initiative 'Arabwood' - a portmanteau reference to Hollywood, which largely influenced world cinema in the recent era.

The venture, developed in collaboration with the French Embassy in Oman and Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, outlines a five-year strategy to establish Oman as a hub for film production and creativity.

The official unveiling of Arabwood will take place during the 11th edition of MIFF to be held from March 3-7, heralding a transformative phase for the Arab film industry.

Sudha Sha, international coordinator and marketing head of MIFF 2024, detailed the ambitions behind Arabwood, highlighting MIFF's role as a catalyst in the initiative.

"Arabwood envisions co-productions and partnerships within the Arab film industry, aiming to spotlight Oman's cinematic potential on an international scale. The initiative will kickstart a comprehensive exploration of



the Arab film market's possibilities, addressing technical challenges, funding opportunities, and co-production prospects."

Designed to replicate the success of well-established industries like Hollywood and Bollywood, Arabwood is to establish global partnerships, notably with French representatives discussing funding and co-production pathways. A significant step includes the promotion and pitching of selected projects at the Cannes 2024 festival, where French experts will assist Omani teams in reaching international audiences.

Sudha added that Arabwood aims to empower Omani filmmakers by providing a platform for showcasing their work, participating in global collaborations, and advancing Oman's film

industry. "The initiative welcomes Omani nationals and residents, encompassing writers, directors and producers. The selection process will focus on identifying promising projects across feature films, short films and documentaries."

For filmmakers aspiring to join Arabwood, submissions must be detailed in English, including a synopsis, crew suggestions, budget and marketing plans.

With March approaching, MIFF is gearing up for its commencement, promising an array of special screenings. Highlights include the best film from the 2023 Cannes Film Festival, *The Anatomy of a Fall*, the Green Oscar-winning documentary *The 18th Elephant* and *Raastha* - the first foreign film shot entirely in Oman.

Continued from Page 01

PLASTIC BAGS PHASE OUT TIMELINE

July 1, 2024

Pharmacies, hospitals and clinics

January 1, 2025

Shops selling fabrics, textiles, clothing, furniture, household supplies and eyewear; tailoring shops; mobile phone sales and maintenance stores, and watch sales and repair shops

July 1, 2025

Shops selling food, vegetables, fruits and gifts; candy stores and factories; and bakeries selling bread and pastries

January 1, 2026

Stores selling building and construction material, utensils, fodder, grain, agricultural materials and pesticides, ice cream, corn, sweets, nuts, juice, mashakek, honey, dates, irrigation systems, birds, fish, pets and pet foods; nurseries selling plants and agricultural supplies; stores selling and repairing water filters; stores selling and repairing water pumps; and stores selling and repairing car pumps

July 1, 2026

Shops selling blankets, khanjar, gold and silverware; car care centres; and automobile agencies

January 1, 2027

Shops selling electronics, sanitary and electrical materials, fish supplies, television broadcasting equipment, stationery and office supplies, vehicle repair workshops, fishing boat repair workshops, vehicle spare parts, spare parts for fishing equipment, vehicle electricians, vehicle oil changing workshops, vehicle brake repair workshops, tyre selling and repair shops, electrical appliances selling and repair shops, computer selling and repair stores, printing presses and all other activities that use plastic bags

MAFWR goes all out to curb palm weevil in Dhahirah villages

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) launched on Sunday its fourth campaign to combat the alarming spread of the red palm weevil across Dhahirah.

Ahmed bin al Abri, Director of Agriculture Development Department in Dhahirah, said that 67 teams comprising 314 individuals are actively participating in the campaign in 101 villages, covering a total area of over 3,200 hectares.

The two-week campaign involves various activities, including visits to educate farmers and expatriate workers in the palm sector on effective methods to deal with the palm tree and protect it from pests. Additionally, the initiative includes agricultural exhibitions, training workshops, and educational lectures.

Highlighting the severity of the problem, Abri underscored the classification of the wilayats of Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank in Dhahirah as agricultural quarantine areas due to widespread infestation. This status enforces strict prohibition on transferring date palm seedlings from these wilayats to other regions without per-



mission. This measure remains in place for three years post the last recorded case of infection.

Offering further insight, Abri informed that the third campaign recorded 2,052 infestations, with 1,539 palm trees treated and 513 infected trees removed in 100 villages, compared to the second campaign in March 2023, which recorded 4,372 infestations, 3,661 palm trees treated and 761 trees removed in 66 villages.

According to Abri, the ministry is committed to reduce the threat posed by the palm weevil, which has a detrimental impact on date production and jeopardises the sustainability of this crucial sector. He highlighted the ministry's collaboration with the community to confront this agricultural pest through various means. The cooperation aims to combat the red palm weevil effectively and safeguard the date palm industry.

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Omani innovator wins gold at International Invention Fair

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani innovator Hajar bint Khamis al Azriya has been awarded with a gold medal at the 14th International Invention Fair in the Middle East (IIFME), for her innovation in generating green energy from pathological animal waste.

The fair - hosted in Kuwait from February 4 to 7 - stands as the Middle East's premier event for inventions and innovations and is ranked as the world's second most significant exhibition in this domain.

In an interview with *Muscat*



Hajar bint Khamis al Azriya

Daily, Hajar revealed that she was nominated by the GCC Secretariat General to represent Oman at the annual expo, which draws top-tier inventors and innovators from the Middle East.

Her award-winning project, titled 'Sustainable biofuel produc-

tion from contaminated and pathological animal healthcare waste,' offers a green alternative to fossil fuels by processing pathological animal waste into sustainable biofuel, minimising environmental harm. Hajar underlined the project's dual focus on environmental sustainability and economic development.

"By transforming hazardous waste, typically destined for landfills, into valuable biofuel, the initiative seeks to mitigate environmental damage associated with waste disposal and capitalise on resources otherwise considered detrimental due to pathogens," she informed.

Talking about the IIFME, she said that the fair provides a vital platform for showcasing inventions, fostering a culture of innovation in Arab countries, and facilitating networking among inventors and investors.

"The fair's environment encourages inventors to present their ideas and products, bolstering cooperation and promoting the commercialisation of inventions."

Hajar, who has also ventured into producing sustainable biofuel from algae, highlighted the need for financial backing to transform her project into a commercial success.



Ministry of Health
SULTANATE OF OMAN

(Auction No. 1/2024)

Notes:-

The Ministry of Health would like to invite sealed bids for Lease of Cafeteria in Directorate General of Projects & Engineering Affairs and Head Quaters and Offers should be submitted in sealed envelopes.

Specialized Companies and establishments may collect auction documents and specifications from the Directorate of Purchase & Tender at General Directorate of Financial Affairs at Ministry's Headquarter in AL Khuwair between 8.30am and 12.00pm during official working hours on or before 22/2/ 2024.

A Bank Guarantee or a Certified Cheque valid for 90 days issued by a local bank for (1%) of the Auction Value addressed to Ministry of Health shall be enclosed with the bid as an auction bond that may be reimbursed to unsuccessful bidder. A bid unaccompanied by the auction bond will be rejected.

Offers enclosed in the sealed envelope duly signed and stamped in the original form shall be addressed to H.E. the Chairman of the Tender Committee providing the title of the auction viz:

" Auction No. 01/2024 – for the is clearly mentioned on it. Envelopes shall not bear any sign that refers to bidder's name or identity.

Offers shall be deposited in the tenders box kept at the Office of Purchase and Tender in Directorate of Financial Affairs by 10.00 noon on Wednesday the 13/3/ 2024. Offers submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

The Ministry is not bound to assign any reason for rejected bids.

Oryx Fund delivers over 29% return in 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Muscat Oryx Fund achieved industry-leading gains of 29.2% during 2023, outperforming its benchmark, the S&P GCC Composite Index, which posted a return of 6.2%.

Accordingly, the Oryx Fund maintained its track record of delivering attractive returns in 2023 with an outperformance of 23% over the index.

"The fund achieved this stellar performance despite challenging market conditions prevailing throughout 2023 due to various factors, including a sharp increase in interest rates and geopolitical issues," Bank Muscat said in a press statement.

The strong performance of the Oryx Fund positioned it as the top-performing GCC equity fund among its counterparts in Oman for the year 2023.

In addition to delivering robust returns, the fund also rewarded investors with consistent cash dividends. During 2023, the fund paid a dividend of 68bz per unit, higher than the 66bz per unit dividend paid in 2022.

Bank Muscat Oryx Fund primarily invests in stock markets in the GCC region and has a consistent and proven track record of generating attractive returns for



Bank Muscat Oryx Fund achieved a stellar performance despite challenging market conditions prevailing throughout 2023 due to various factors, including sharp increase in interest rates and geopolitical issues

29 years.

The fund is one of the largest funds in the GCC region within its category and is regulated by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) in accordance with applicable laws and regulations in Oman. The fund stands out as an

attractive investment choice for prospective investors with a medium to long-term view.

Oryx Fund offers daily liquidity with no minimum holding period. Investors may choose to sell their investment anytime and receive cash funds in their bank ac-

counts within three days. Investors can invest in and redeem their investments in Bank Muscat Oryx Fund through Bank Muscat's mobile banking and internet banking platforms. The minimum subscription amount for the fund is RO50.



The OCCI delegation invited the private sector in Sharjah to participate in Suhar Investment Forum 2024 (WAM)

OCCI, Sharjah Chamber seek to boost investment

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry's (OCCI) branch in North Al Batinah Governorate discussed ways to enhance cooperation in the investment field and develop mechanisms for promoting joint efforts aimed at supporting the business community in Sharjah and Oman.

The two sides explored promising opportunities in all sectors, with a focus on supporting the growth of startups and benefiting from the tourism and commercial potential enjoyed by SCCI and OCCI, according to a report published by

the Emirates News Agency (WAM).

This occurred during a meeting held at the chamber between Waleed Abdul Rahman Bukhatir, Second Vice Chairman of the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Saeed bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of OCCI's branch in North Batinah Governorate.

The meeting was attended by Maryam Saif al Shamsi, Assistant Director-General for the Support Services Sector at SCCI, Rashid bin Salem al Ghafri, Director of OCCI's branch in North Batinah Governorate, Jamal Saeed Buzangal, Director of the Media Department at SCCI, and Ali Abdullah Al Jari, Director of the Sharjah Export Development Centre.

During the meeting, the Omani delegation invited the private sector in Sharjah to participate in the Suhar Investment Forum 2024, scheduled to be held in North Batinah Governorate during February 26-27, 2024.

They also discussed means of strengthening joint cooperation on exchanging trade delegations and organising commercial events between Sharjah and the Omani governorate.

SCCI and OCCI discussed cooperation in training and qualification programmes, where the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Industry expressed its willingness to offer courses for Omani university students in economic and administrative specialisations.



Qatar predicts gas market shortage during 2025-2030

Goa, India - Gas will be the most in-demand resource in the world, but from 2025 to 2030 there may be a shortage on the world market, according to Qatar's Minister of State for Energy Affairs Saad bin Sherida al Kaabi.

He noted that gas will be the most in-demand resource and that from 2025 to 2030 there will be a gas shortage around the world.

The minister also stated that Europe refusing gas from Russia had a detrimental influence on the market and resulted in changes in supply chains in the

gas industry.

In addition, according to Kaabi, sudden changes in gas prices, both upward and downward, against the backdrop of changes in supply directions, are also harmful for the market.

Kaabi also highlighted Europe's decision to halt gas imports from Russia due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. This significant shift in policy has not only affected Europe and Russia but has also caused ripple effects in the global gas industry, altering supply chains and influencing market dynamics.

TASS

UAE, Saudi rank among top emerging markets

Dubai, UAE - The UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar continue to rank among the world's top 10 emerging markets, improving or holding steady in key areas while neighboring Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain lose ground in the 15th annual Agility Emerging Markets Logistics Index.

The UAE, No 3 in the 50-country Index after China and India, held its rank from 2023, as did No 6 Saudi Arabia and No 7 Qatar. Oman (15), Bahrain (16) and Kuwait (21) all fell in the rankings, according to a press release from Agility.

In Agility's survey of 830 logistics industry executives, respondents say Saudi Arabia and UAE are doing the most among GCC countries to accelerate economic diversification and lessen reliance on income from oil and gas.

UAE ranks No 1 for best business fundamentals; Saudi Arabia is No 3 in that category. Even so, logistics professionals in the survey identified further improvements for small businesses and multi-nationals as the most powerful drivers of continued diversification for all GCC countries.

The survey and Index are Agility's 15th annual snapshot of industry sentiment and ranking of



the world's 50 leading emerging markets. The Index ranks countries for overall competitiveness based on their logistics strengths, business climates and digital readiness - factors that make them attractive to logistics providers, freight forwarders, air and ocean carriers, distributors and investors.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia rank in the top 10 in every category. Qatar ranked among the top 10 in all categories except international logistics opportunities, where it was 20th. The only

In Agility's survey, respondents say Saudi Arabia and UAE are doing the most among GCC countries to accelerate economic diversification and lessen reliance on income from oil and gas

top 10 ranking for Oman, Bahrain or Kuwait was Bahrain at No 8 for business fundamentals.

Half of the logistics professionals surveyed a global recession in the coming year - down from nearly 70% a year ago. Executives surveyed say they are battling higher costs, reducing dependence on sourcing from China, and planning to boost investment in Africa despite seeing emerging markets investment overall as somewhat riskier.

More than 63% of respondents say their companies con-

tinue overhauling supply chains by spreading production to multiple locations or relocating it to home markets and nearby countries. China, the world's leading producer, stands to be most affected: 37.4% of industry professionals say they plan move production/sourcing out of China or reduce investment there.

India, Europe and North America ranked ahead of China as destinations executives expect to move production to in 2024 and onwards.

Transport Intelligence (Ti), a leading analysis and research firm for the logistics industry, compiled the Agility Emerging Markets Logistics Index since it was launched in 2009.

John Manners-Bell, Chief Executive of Ti, said, "Supply chain managers are still coming to terms with the political and economic instability characterising the post-COVID global economy. Geopolitical relationships are changing rapidly, and this is having a major impact on international trade and risk profiles. Businesses need to be alive to the opportunities and threats that exist in emerging markets and use data, such as that the Agility Emerging Market Logistics Index, to inform agile decision-making."

ICE IV Project to connect intra-Asia region to India, Middle East

Abu Dhabi, UAE - UAE telecom giant e&, Telecom Egypt, Telin and a major Indian operator have signed a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to form a consortium with the aim to develop the ICE IV Project.

This new Data Center (DC) to DC system shall seamlessly connect the Intra-Asia region to India and the Middle East on a unique route that demonstrates the true spirit of collaboration between these regions, according to a press release.

Spanning approximately 11,000km, this new system plans to deploy the latest open cable

technologies and subsea ROADMs to interconnect Indonesia and Singapore to India, Oman, Egypt, and the UAE. The ICE IV Project will adopt an entirely new route through the Sunda Strait and become the first international cable to land in Kochi, India in decades; offering an alternate resilient route and new international gateway.

Terrestrial extensions are being considered also include links between the Middle East and Egypt and between Kochi and Chennai, together making this ICE IV Project unique. The target ready for service date is



Q4 2027.

In recent years, the surge in demand, coupled with inventory scarcity has moved the global bandwidth market to thrive and become the main driver for the

construction of new subsea cable systems. The ICE IV Project shall adopt these principles providing seamless connectivity, extraordinary bandwidth, and network security through diversity.

This very significant milestone for the project took place last week during the prestigious Capacity Middle East event where the MOU was signed by top officials from the four market leading companies. The signing event demonstrates all parties' commitment to invest and grow the global bandwidth market to better serve their customers.

Nabil Baccouche, Group Chief Carrier and Wholesale Officer at e&, said, "With ICE IV Project, we're redefining the connectivity map, bringing continents closer than ever before, and unlocking bandwidth access for billions of

people. With our commitment to making SmartHub a location of choice as one of the largest neutral carrier hub, the ICE IV Project will further accelerate connectivity. The new DC to DC system will enable us to increase capabilities and global capacity further to meet the evolving requirements of customers across Europe, Middle East, Africa, Asia and Americas."

Mohamed Nasr, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer at Telecom Egypt, commented, "Telecom Egypt is honored to collaborate with ICE partners on the construction of

this remarkable project. Being a founding member of 'ICE IV' is a testament of our profound belief of the importance of this critical infrastructure. We are providing open-access to more than 20 subsea cables landing in Egypt with unique, diverse landing and state-of-the-art transit international infrastructure that will be part of the planned design."

"Furthermore, ICE IV Project will enable us to extend our footprint and further diversify our subsea infrastructure portfolio to promptly address the ever-growing demand for global connectivity."

Russia, Iran in talks on gas hub, development of Iranian gas fields

Moscow, Russia – Russian and Iranian companies are currently negotiating the creation of a gas hub in Iran and the development of gas fields, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak told Russian news agency TASS.

"We are working in this area, our companies are interacting," he said, answering the question whether the intergovernmental commission on February 28 will discuss the creation of a gas hub, and whether it is possible to sign an agreement on joint gas projects there.

Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji said that the country has defined joint projects with Russian energy giant Gazprom for \$40bn and is finalising negotiations and expects to put these projects into practice soon.

Earlier it was reported that Iran, with the participation of Russia, Qatar and Turkmenistan, plans to create a gas hub in the industrial region of Assaluyeh, located in Bushehr province on the northern shore of the Persian Gulf.

In May last year, Novak had said that Russia and Iran are currently discussing the possibility of creating an electronic gas trading platform in southern Iran. To implement this project, it is necessary to attract partners and



Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak

We have switched almost completely to settlements in national currencies and the transmission of banking messages using our national systems

ALEXANDER NOVAK



suppliers, to find sources of supply, one of which could be Iranian

gas produced with the participation of Russian companies.

Boosting bilateral trade

Novak expects that the agreement on a free trade zone between the Eurasian Economic union (EAEU) and Iran, which was signed last December, will significantly increase the volume of trade between the countries.

"Our absolute priority is a further consistent increase in trade

volumes. This will be facilitated by the free trade agreement between the EAEU and Iran, which was concluded last December on the sidelines of the meeting of the Higher Eurasian Economic Commission in St Petersburg," he said.

Novak noted that the next 17th meeting of the permanent Russian-Iranian commission on trade and economic cooperation,

which will soon be held in Tehran, will give an additional impetus to cooperation.

"As part of the commission's work, the co-chairman of the commission from the Iranian side, the Minister of Oil of Iran, my friend, Mr Javad Owji, and I pay special attention to the implementation of large projects that allow us to build up trade and economic partnership between our countries," he added.

According to Novak, Russia and Iran have almost completely transferred payments between two countries to national currencies and to their own bank messaging systems.

"We have switched almost completely to settlements in national currencies and the transmission of banking messages using our national (systems). This allows us not to depend on those who are trying to hinder the development of our economies," he said.

"We really have a lot in common, we work in a bilateral and multilateral format. Our Iranian friends have joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS. There is also huge potential for developing cooperation with Russia and with all the countries that are members of these organizations," Novak added.



US household debt climbs to \$17.5tn

Washington, US – The US household debt climbed to \$17.5tn in the fourth quarter of 2023, according to a Federal Reserve report.

Total household debt rose \$212bn in October-December last year, compared to the previous quarter, according to the US central bank's latest quarterly report on household debt and credit.

Mortgage balances jumped \$112bn to reach \$12.25tn on a quarterly basis, while credit card balances rose \$50bn to \$1.1tn, and auto loan balances increased \$12bn to \$1.61tn.

"Delinquency transition rates increased for all debt types except for student loans," the Fed said in a statement.

There was \$394bn in newly originated mortgage debt in the fourth quarter of 2023, it added.

Agencies



India's oil & gas demand to keep rising: Fitch

New Delhi, India – India's downstream oil and gas sector is poised for continued growth in the financial year ending March 2024 (FY24), with demand for petroleum products expected to rise by a mid-single-digit percentage, according to Fitch Ratings.

According to Fitch Ratings, this follows a robust 5% year-on-year increase in the first nine months of FY24 and a noteworthy 10% post-pandemic recovery witnessed in FY23. The surge in demand for petroleum products has been fuelled by a range of factors, including heightened economic activities in the agriculture and power sectors, a surge in holiday travel, and increased auto sales.

Notably, both petrol and diesel sales recorded robust 4-6% increases in the first nine months of FY24, reflecting the country's economic resurgence.

Looking ahead, Fitch expects Indian refiners' gross refining margins (GRM) to moderate during FY25 from the strong levels anticipated in FY24, albeit remaining above mid-cycle levels.

By FY26, a gradual shift closer to mid-cycle levels is foreseen, buoyed by escalating demand for end-products.

Despite the anticipated normalisation of the crude supply mix away from Russian imports, Fitch projects GRMs to remain robust, supported by

the rising demand for end-products.

In the upstream segment, domestic oil and gas production has witnessed a modest increase, driven particularly by a 5% rise in gas production during the first nine months of FY24.

Fitch anticipates production to continue to rise moderately, with technological investments in enhanced oil recovery techniques expected to offset natural declines.

The surge in demand for petroleum products has been fuelled by heightened economic activities, a surge in holiday travel, and increased auto sales

The oil and gas sector's high capital expenditure (capex) intensity is expected to persist in the medium term, driven by rising demand and strategic investments across the value chain.

ANI

EIA revises down 2024 oil price forecast

Washington, US – The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) revised down the price of Brent crude for 2024, citing an increase in global oil inventory throughout the year.

In its Short-Term Energy Outlook (STEO) released last week, the agency said global oil inventories increased by an average of 700,000 barrels per day (bpd) in 2023, with an upsurge of 800,000 bpd on average between October, the month before the Red Sea attacks began, and January.

The agency predicts that OPEC+ production cuts will lead to global oil inventory withdrawals during February and March, resulting in an average draw of 0.8mn bpd in the first quarter of 2024, putting upward pressure on oil prices in the coming months.

After a period of relatively balanced markets for the rest of the year, the EIA forecasts that the market will gradually return to moderate inventory builds next year, as increasing oil production growth will outpace slowing oil demand growth.

However, the falling inventories in the first quarter of 2024 will increase oil prices into the



EIA predicts that OPEC+ production cuts will lead to global oil inventory withdrawals during February and March

mid-\$80 per barrel range, before slight downward price pressures emerge through the remainder of the year as forecasted.

The EIA forecasts that Brent will reach \$82.42 per barrel and the American West Texas Intermediate (WTI) will hit \$77.68 per barrel in 2024. These figures were \$82.49 and \$77.99, respectively, in the previous month's report.

EIA forecasts that Brent crude will reach \$82.42 per barrel and WTI will hit \$77.68 per barrel in 2024. These figures were \$82.49 and \$77.99, respectively, in the previous month's report

For next year, the agency expects Brent crude to average \$79.48 per barrel and WTI to average \$74.98 per barrel.

Global oil production is expected to increase by 550,000 bpd in 2024 to 102.30mn bpd and by 1.87mn bpd in 2025 to reach 107.17mn bpd.

The expiration of existing OPEC+ production targets at the end of 2024 will contribute to supply growth, as OPEC is ex-

pected to increase crude oil production by 700,000 next year.

However, the agency expects the increase will be limited because Saudi Arabia and other OPEC+ countries will maintain some level of cuts in an attempt to balance markets. Non-OPEC production growth will average 1.2mn bpd in 2025, led by the US, Canada, Brazil, and Guyana.

Having reached a record high in December 2023, US crude oil production saw a slight decline in January 2024 due to weather-related shut-ins.

The country's production is expected to reach an average of 13.10mn bpd in 2024, up from 12.93mn bpd last year. The figure is also 110,000 bpd lower than the previous month's prediction.

Next year, crude oil output in the country is expected to reach 13.49mn bpd, down by 500,000 bpd from last month's prediction.

World oil demand, meanwhile, is anticipated to increase by 2.71mn bpd in 2024 to reach 102.42mn bpd in 2024. Demand is expected to be around 103.71mn bpd in 2025.

Anadolu Agency

US investing \$5bn in R&D for semiconductors

New York, US – US President Joe Biden's administration is investing more than \$5bn into semiconductor-related development to strengthen America's chip industry as demand for artificial intelligence (AI) tech hardware booms.

The administration said Friday the money will go toward the research and development (R&D) of semiconductors as well as developing workforce in the industry.

The announcement is the latest phase of the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, which created the largest publicly funded R&D programme in American history to support chip manufacturing in the US and reduce reliance on



US President Joe Biden

other countries.

"These investments advance US leadership in semiconductor R&D, cut down on the time and cost of commercializing new technologies, bolster US national security, and connect and support workers in securing good semiconductor jobs," the White House said.

The White House announced its first grant under the CHIPS and Science Act in December. Defense contractor BAE Systems (BAESY) received \$35mn to modernise an ageing factory in Nashua, New Hampshire. The move sent shares of chipmakers like Intel and Advanced Micro Devices (AMD) higher at the time.

Last month, the US Commerce Department also said it would grant Microchip Technology (MCHP) \$162mn in federal funding from the CHIPS Act to boost chip production.

In 2024, the Biden administration appears to be attempting to finally start funding a promised \$11bn total in research and development efforts.

Last year, the Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA) released a study showing that the US was not adequately preparing a highly skilled workforce. Between "67,000, or 58%, of projected new jobs, may remain unfilled at the current trajectory," SIA estimated.

(Source: Investopedia)

National Museum organises event to mark 225th birth anniversary of Pushkin

The National Museum organised an event on Saturday, as part of the official visit of Olga Lyubimova, the Russian Minister of Culture, and her accompanying delegation to the Sultanate of Oman.

The event was attended by Ilya Morgunov, the accredited Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Sultanate of Oman, along with several officials and cultural enthusiasts from both sides.

The evening started by an introductory statement of Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, followed by a welcoming statement of Illya Morgunov, the accredited Ambassador of Russia.

The evening also featured screening of the documentary film *Oman: The Jewel of the East*, translated into the Russian language. Additionally, there was a visual presentation in Russian commemorating the 225th birth anniversary of A S Pushkin - considered to be one of the greatest Russian poets.

The programme also included a selected prose reading from the poem *Sparks from the Quran* in the Russian language, consist-



ing of nine different passages that corresponded to the Quranic verses from which Pushkin drew inspiration and on which he based his poems.

The event also included launching of the book *Proverbs and Sayings Common in Oman and Russia* by author Sergei Romanov. Attendees had the opportunity to explore the treasures of the philosophical life contained in the book, featuring popular proverbs and sayings from both friendly nations.

It is worth mentioning that the National Museum launched the book on December 7, 2023. The book, comprising approximately 77 pages in both Arabic and Russian languages, was unveiled on the side-lines of the inauguration of the 'Oman Gallery' at the State Hermitage Museum in collaboration with the Embassy of Russia in Muscat.

Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin, born in Moscow to a family interested in culture and literature on June 6, 1799, was a Russian poet, playwright, and novelist. He is considered one of the most influential literary figures of the first third of the nineteenth century and passed away on February 10, 1837.

ICAI Muscat wins Best Overseas Chapter award for 9th time

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) Muscat Chapter - under the sponsorship of the College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS) - has bagged the prestigious 'Best Chapter Overseas Award' for the year 2023, for the 9th consecutive term.

The Chapter has won second prize in Category-II among 48 overseas chapters of ICAI across the globe.

The award ceremony was conducted along with the 74th Annual event of ICAI on February 8 at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi.

Jim Joseph Itty, chairperson, ICAI Muscat Chapter and Gaurav Kapoor, vice chairperson along with Managing Committee members, received the award from Om Birla, the Speaker of India's lower house Lok Sabha, in the presence of Aniket Sunil Talati, President of ICAI and Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal, Vice President of ICAI.

"The year 2023 will be writ-



ten in golden letters in the history of ICAI Muscat chapter," said chairperson Jim Joseph Itty on winning the award.

"It is a great honour to receive this prestigious recognition on behalf of the members of Muscat Chapter and we will continue our efforts to reach newer heights in future under the sponsorship of CBFS, which is a ceaseless source of support to the Chapter".

Giving a report on the group's activities in Muscat, Itty said they were able to complete the first batch of Omani CFO Mentoring programme in Muscat and Salalah and they were proceeding with a batch in Sohar.

"This initiative increased the visibility of ICAI as a brand and we were able to join hands with the local accounting community to develop aspiring Omani CFOs," he informed.

The group also extended support to the Oman India Investment Forum conducted in association with Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Embassy of India during this year.

ICAI expressed its interest in supporting OCCI to develop a curriculum for Omani Chartered Accountancy students, which will strengthen the co-operation between two friendly nations, Itty hoped.

KR Group's Talib al Balushi bags gold at West Asian Para Games

Khimji Ramdas (KR) is celebrating the outstanding achievement of Talib al Balushi, a dedicated employee for over three decades, who secured a discus-throw gold medal at the fourth edition of the West Asian Para Games 2024 (WAPG) held in Sharjah, the UAE from January 27 to February 3.

Eleven countries participated in the 4th WAPG, represented by 513 members, including 382 players and 131 coaches and administrators, competing in seven sports: weightlifting, table tennis, badminton, goalball, wheelchair basketball, boccia and athletics.

Talib al Balushi has been a star athlete of the Oman's Para Athletic Team, winning laurels at various local and regional sporting events.

Talib's success has been a consistent one over the years. This victory underscores his exceptional talent, determination, and commitment to excellence. His gold medal contributed significantly to the stellar performance of the Oman Paralympic



Team, which clinched a total of 25 medals during the WAPG games. Talib's sporting journey started in 2002 at the age of 22. An all-round sportsman, Talib has played and represented the nation in shotput, basketball, discus throw and javelin disciplines. The achievements have been highlighted by his impressive tally of 26 medals, reflecting his passion to excel at every given endeavour.

Congratulating Talib on his victory, Anil Khimji, Director of KR, said, "Talib al Balushi exem-

plifies the values of perseverance, resilience, and dedication that define our organisational culture. His will to succeed has been an inspiring note for us to push limits and achieve more."

With the goal of positioning Oman prominently on the global sporting stage and inspiring the nation's youth and future generations of athletes, Khimji Ramdas consistently honours and backs sporting talent. KR Group is committed to supporting employees' abilities both within and beyond its workplace.

ROHM continues 'absolute music' series with Elvin Hoxha, Cem Esen

The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) has announced free admission to its upcoming concert as part of its 2023-24 Absolute Music Series with talented Russian violinist Elvin Hoxha and Turkish pianist Cem Esen, at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts on Monday 7pm.

Elvin Hoxha Ganiyev is an award-winning Russian violinist who has performed with renowned conductors and orchestras in prestigious concert halls and international festivals around the world.

In this Absolute Music recital, Ganiyev will play with acclaimed Turkish pianist Cem Esen, an experienced performer in Europe, including at the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, Sofia Music Festival, and Antalya Piano Festival.



Their partnership is well established with Ganiyev performing alongside Cem Esen on his latest album, *Voyages*, Istanbul Chapter, released in 2021. Together, Ganiyev and Esen will give a spectacular recital featuring Prokofiev's Violin Sonata No. 1, Claude Debussy's Violin

Sonata in G minor and Carmen Fantasie by Franz Waxman, the soundtrack for the 1946 movie *Humoresque*.

Absolute Music puts the spotlight on the violin, a versatile instrument which is a mainstay of classical music. To further enrich the experience for audiences, the concert will be preceded by a book presentation of *The Violin Revealed: The History, Techniques, and Secrets of Italian Violin Making* from Stradivari to Today edited by Stefano Trabucchi, luthier, and journalist Roberto Messina. The presentation will take place on 11th February at 5pm at the Music Library. Attendees can explore the history of Italian violin making and delve deeper into the intricacies and secrets around this captivating instrument.

Spirit of love: Shangri-La opens exclusive dinner

Spirit of love engulfed Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and Shangri-La Al Husn on Sunday, when they swung open their doors for two curated enchanting experiences for couples to savour until February 17.

"Whether you opt for the picturesque Dine By Design setup on the beach or amidst lush gardens, or choose to ascend to new heights with a cliffside dinner at Shangri-La Al Husn, the resorts promise an unforgettable evening filled with romance and indulgence, a release stated.

At Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah, a romantic 5-course seafood extravaganza has been arranged at RO160 per couple. 'From the tantalising flavours of salmon gravlax to the succulent wagyu short ribs, each dish is a testament to our commitment to delivering an unforgettable culinary journey. Finish on a sweet note with our delectable strawberry



mousse with pistachio biscuit,' the statement added.

'For an even more exclusive

experience, envision yourself and your loved one dining atop the cliffs of Shangri-La Al Husn, with

the majestic Muscat arch and Arabian Sea as your backdrop,' it further said, while wishing that the ambiance of candlelight sets the mood as 'your personal butler attends to your every need, ensuring a truly magical evening'.

'Indulge in a Mediterranean feast featuring delights like tiger prawn tartar and Omani lobster bouillabaisse or opt for a contemporary Indian menu curated by Michelin-star Chef Rohit Ghai. From prawns masala to chicken tikka masala, each dish is a symphony of flavours designed to captivate your senses,' it went on adding.

'This exclusive Valentine's experience is available only from February 11 to 17 during dinner time. Secure your spot by making prior reservations at 24776565 or WhatsApp us at 79269247, and let us create an evening to remember', Shangri-La management stated.



Mazda Service Drive held in two Towell Auto centres

The Towell Auto Center recently held Mazda Service Drive 2024 at its service centres in Al Hail and Ghala, in Muscat.

The Mazda Service Drive 2024 has become a landmark event in Oman's automotive service industry, showcasing not only Mazda's dedication to vehicle care and customer satisfaction but also highlighting TAC's pivotal role in bringing these world-class services to the sultanate.

'This initiative exemplifies the successful combination of Towell Auto Centre's regional proficiency with Mazda's established global quality benchmarks,' the company stated in a press release.

"We are proud to host the Mazda Service Drive 2024, an event that not only showcases our dedication to service quality but also our enduring partnership with Mazda," said Riyadh Ali Sultan, General Manager of Towell Auto Centre.

"At Towell Auto Centre, we strive to provide an unmatched experience for our customers, ensuring that every Mazda vehicle, be it new or old, receives the highest level of care and attention."

Following Sultan's insights, the event featured Osada and Sakuma, distinguished engineers from Mazda's Hiroshima, Japan headquarters. Their expertise was a major highlight, bringing an unparalleled level of proficiency to the service drive.

Osada said that the automobile company's goal is to ensure that every Mazda, from the compact Mazda 2 to the spacious Mazda CX-90, receives the utmost care. "We believe in a service that goes beyond technical excellence; it's about creating a lasting relationship with each customer."

Echoing similar views, Sakuma added, "It's not just about servicing vehicles; it's about educating owners. We aim

to empower Mazda users with knowledge about their cars, fostering a deeper understanding and connection with their vehicles."

The response from the Mazda community in Oman was overwhelmingly positive. The event also offered exclusive benefits to car owners, like complimentary engine oil coupons and free car washes, further enhancing the customer experience and demonstrating Mazda's appreciation for its customers.

A key feature of the Mazda Service Drive 2024 was its emphasis on customer education. Free tyre check-ups and personalized advice sessions conducted by Mazda's engineers provided valuable insights into maintaining vehicles, empowering owners with knowledge and enhancing their vehicle ownership experience.

"The attention to detail by the Mazda team was remarkable. The free tyre check-up and per-

sonalised advice session not only enhanced my vehicle's performance but also enriched my understanding of car maintenance. It's this level of service that strengthens my loyalty to Mazda," a customer said.

The Mazda Service Drive 2024 in Oman was more than just an automotive service event; it was a reflection of Mazda's commitment to excellence in both service quality and customer relations in partnership with Towell Auto Centre which is the official distributor of Mazda cars in the Sultanate of Oman since 1972.

The event reinforced the brand's reputation for quality and reliability and highlighted its dedication to creating an informed and engaged community. As the event concluded, it left a lasting impression on the participants, reinforcing their trust in Mazda and setting a new standard for automotive service events in the region.

Qatar's Saeed al Naimi wins Endurance Cup



Saeed al Naimi from Qatar sealed a sensational victory in the 2024 Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Endurance Cup on Saturday afternoon, overcoming a strong challenge from runner-up Fares Abu Ras of Saudi Arabia to win the flagship international endurance event in AlUla.

Naimi completed the challenging 120km route on his ride Guilen Fantasia in a classified time of 05:22:01, finishing 1:14 ahead of Abu Ras and 23:19 minutes in front of Hamad al Tamimi from the UAE who completed the top three.

Incredible individual displays of speed, stamina, and strategic pace management by the trio saw them take top honors ahead of a 200-strong field that boasted the world's greatest, most renowned riders.

The riders who featured in the CEI 2* competition represented a total of 50 counties with a total SAR15mm prize pot on offer.

A new world record for an endurance event, these factors - together with regional royalty, VIPs, and global audiences in attendance - further highlighted the ever-growing prestige of the Endurance Cup in this record-extending fifth edition.

Organised by the Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU) in partnership with the Fédération Équestre Internationale (FEI) and the Saudi Arabian Equestrian Federation (SAEF), the event was an outstanding occasion like always at AlFursan Equestrian Village - providing inspiring shows sportsmanship and equestrian excellence as promised.

"I'm really proud to have won this competition and competed against so many talented riders from different countries - it was a very difficult contest but I'm delighted to have made it back first in the end," said Saeed al Naimi in his immediate reaction. "The track was challenging

throughout, but I loved riding out there. The experience was great and I'm already looking forward to coming back in the future," he added.

Prince Abdullah bin Fahd bin Abdullah, President of SAEF, congratulated Saeed al Naimi and every rider who competed, adding that "their performances helped pave the way for an experience that audiences will remember for many years to come."

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Endurance Cup is one of the biggest endurance events on the Saudi Equestrian calendar and "this edition has shown why such events in the kingdom are held in such high regard regionally and internationally," he asserted.

Abeer al Akel, Acting CEO of RCU, is of the view that the 2024 Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Endurance Cup has been an incredible success in every way possible.

Taste of Sri Lanka takes centre stage at Rozana

Rozana Hotel has tasted big success in its recent event christened as Sri Lankan Food Night - a culinary celebration that transported guests on a gastronomic journey to the beautiful island of Sri Lanka.

The Rozana Hotel culinary team, led by executive chef Viraj, curated an authentic and immersive experience, bringing the vibrant flavours and cultural richness of Sri Lankan cuisine to Muscat.

The event commemorating the 76th Independence Day of Sri Lanka, observed on February 4, was held at the Luban Ballroom on February 8, and proved a resounding success, attracting food enthusiasts, locals, and hotel guests alike.

Guests were treated to a symphony of flavours, featuring traditional Sri Lankan spices, aromatic herbs, and expertly



crafted dishes that showcased the diversity of the island's culinary heritage. Signature dishes such as fragrant rice varieties,

spicy curries, and delectable desserts captured the essence of Sri Lankan gastronomy, delighting the palates of attendees.

"We were thrilled to host the Sri Lankan Food Night at Rozana Hotel, providing our guests with a unique opportunity to experi-

ence the rich tapestry of Sri Lankan flavours right here in Muscat," said Viraj, echoing his team's sentiments. "The event was a testament to our commitment to offering exceptional culinary experiences and cultural immersion to our patrons."

The success of the Sri Lankan Food Night underscores Rozana Hotel's dedication to providing diverse and memorable experiences for its guests. The hotel looks forward to organising more culinary events that showcase the global palette of flavours and celebrate the rich tapestry of world cuisines. Rozana Hotel, nestled in Al Khuwair 42, boasts 198 well-maintained rooms, spacious banquet halls and an all-day dining restaurant, is committed to providing unparalleled hospitality and unique culinary experiences, establishing themselves in the market.

Trend Micro leader in End Point Security, says Gartner report

Trend Micro Incorporated, a global cybersecurity leader, has been recognized in the 2023 Gartner's Magic Quadrant report for Trend Vision One in Endpoint Protection Platforms (EPP). This marks the 18th consecutive recognition for Trend Micro by Gartner, showcasing a remarkable track record since its initial acknowledgment in 2002.

The Gartner Magic Quadrant research methodology places technology providers into four categories—Leaders, Visionaries, Niche Players, and Challengers - in rapidly evolving markets.

According to Gartner's report, Trend Vision One - Endpoint Security is well-suited for a 'broad range' of global organizations, making it an ideal choice for those seeking to consolidate security vendors, integrate workspace security, and manage hybrid environments.

Trend Vision One stands out as a resilient security platform, providing centralised visibility and swift response capabilities to safeguard digital assets. Its seamless integration with third-party solutions enhances adaptability, ensuring a comprehensive set of security features.

"Our 18th accolade from Gartner is not just a recognition, it's a heartwarming affirmation of the passion and dedication we've poured into our work since 2002," said Dr Moataz bin Ali, regional vice president and managing direc-

tor, MMEA, Trend Micro. "Being acknowledged yet again in Gartner's Magic Quadrant for Trend Vision One in Endpoint Protection Platforms resonates deeply with us and fuels our commitment towards an even more innovative future. We see this as a steppingstone to propel Trend Vision One forward, envisioning a future where our solutions set new benchmarks in cybersecurity, continuously evolving to meet the dynamic challenges of the digital world."

The report underscores various notable strengths in Trend Vision One offerings, including integrated attack surface management, security configuration management, and Extended Detection and Response (XDR) capabilities, all playing a pivotal role in proactive risk reduction and streamlining security operations. Furthermore, the comprehensive nature and seamless integration of Trend Micro's workspace security suite components, which now features the recent inclusion of Identity Threat Detection and Response (ITDR) capability within the Trend Vision One platform, was also acknowledged. Trend Micro is set to take part in the Gartner Security and Risk Management Summit in Dubai on Monday and Tuesday. This move underscores their commitment, as highlighted in the Trend Micro Mid-Year Cybersecurity Report for H1 2023.

Indian School Muscat holds 48th annual day celebrations

Indian School Muscat (ISM) whooped it up with much pomp and gaiety on the occasion of its Annual Day celebration at the school's New Multi-Purpose Hall on February 1.

It was indeed a captivating evening with a rich symphony of achievements and emotions, a vibrant tapestry woven with the threads of diverse cultures and a joyous celebration of harmony.

A galaxy of dignitaries graced the solemn occasion. Chief guest Mahfoudha Mubarak al Araimi, Director General for Labour, Muscat governorate and guest of honour Dr Sivakumar Manickam, chairman Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman, Ashwini Sachin Sawrikar, finance director, Board of Directors, Indian



Schools in Oman, Nideesh Kumar, Sirajudeen Nehlat, Krishnenedu S, Directors of Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman, Vinobha M P, senior principal and education advisor, Board of Directors, grandparents,

parents and other valued guests joined the proceedings.

Principal Rakesh Joshi, senior vice principal -administration, vice principals and assistant vice principals of various sections, heads of various departments,

teachers, student council members and students were luminous with pride and enthusiasm hosting the mega event.

National anthems of India and Oman marked the commencement of the auspicious occasion. Lighting of the ceremonial lamp, followed by a melodic prayer song by the school choir facilitated a connection with the divine.

Head girl Chandrika Singh Yaduvanshi accorded a formal welcome to the august gathering.

'Excellence Redefined' - a panoramic vision of the crowning moments and the principles that drive the prodigious institution was a mesmerising view. This was followed by yet another montage unveiling the latest de-

velopments and insights that accelerated the journey in the year 2024. Principal Rakesh Joshi presented the annual report that walked the audience through the chronicles of activities, events, achievements, and accolades clinched by ISM over the past year.

The most awaited moment was the felicitation and acknowledgement of the hard work and enthusiasm of the teaching and non-teaching staff for their zestful contribution to the achievements of the school. Guest of honour Dr Sivakumar Manickam was invited to do the honours.

Teachers who completed 10, 20 and 25 years of dedicated service to the school were honoured during the event.

Significant shift in Ukraine's strategy

Kyiv, Ukraine - In a long-anticipated move, President Volodymyr Zelensky has replaced General Valerii Zaluzhnyi as the head of Ukraine's armed forces, marking a significant shift in the country's military leadership amid ongoing tensions with Russia, reported CNN.

Speculation was rife for over a week before Zelensky's announcement on February 8, reflecting the strained relationship between him and Zaluzhnyi over recent months.

The change comes at a crucial moment in the war with Russia, with Ukrainian units facing challenges along various fronts, particularly in the Donetsk and Kharkiv regions. Shortages of ammunition and experienced personnel have added to the complexities faced by Ukrainian forces, as per CNN.

President Zelensky acknowledged the need for urgent changes, stating, 'the feeling of stagnation in the southern areas and the difficulties in the fighting in the Donetsk region have affected the public mood'.

According to CNN, the appointment of General Oleksandr Syrskiy as Zaluzhnyi's successor signifies a potential shift in Ukrainian military strategy. While Syrskiy is seen as a consensus choice, concerns linger regarding his leadership style



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky replaced General Valerii Zaluzhnyi as the head of Ukraine's armed forces, marking a significant shift in the country's military leadership amid ongoing tensions with Russia

The change comes at a crucial moment in the war with Russia, with Ukrainian units facing challenges along various fronts

and effectiveness.

Syrskiy has been in command of land forces since the Russian invasion but was criticised for ex-

tending the defence of Bakhmut at great human cost. Subordinates have described him as lacking empathy and some sol-

diers took to calling him 'General 200' (200 is the military code for killed-in-action.)

Matthew Schmidt, Director of the International Affairs programme at the University of New Haven, says: "Maybe it's a phase in the war where a safe choice is the right move."

Syrskiy faces immediate challenges, including stabilising the

front lines, replenishing depleted ranks, and expediting the delivery of Western munitions to bolster Ukrainian defences.

Amid persistent Russian attacks around Avdiivka and Kupiansk, 'the first priority is to make sure you can hold the current line of contact', Schmidt says.

The head of Ukrainian Military

Intelligence, Lt Gen Kyrylo Budanov, told CNN at the end of January that ammunition is 'one of the most decisive factors' in the war.

With the Biden administration's package of US\$61bn in military aid blocked in Congress, the US has been sending smaller packages for several months, and the slowdown has already begun affecting the Ukrainian military's planning and operations, according to US officials.

Schmidt says 'the immediate priority is to get enough artillery shells to the front to keep the Russians from exploiting the pause in US aid. Each artillery shell that's available to fire equates to needing fewer infantry to hold the line'.

This week, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said: "If you ask a soldier at the front what he needs most right now, he will say shells. This answer was the same yesterday, a month ago, six months ago and a year ago."

The scarcity of artillery shells remains a pressing issue, with US military aid facing delays in Congress. Efforts to enhance European production of munitions are underway but falling short of targets.

With Russia's substantial manpower advantage, estimated to be three times greater

than Ukraine's, and ongoing military adaptations, Ukraine seeks to narrow the technological gap through investments in unmanned systems and cyber technology.

Ukraine's more professional units are exhausted by two years of non-stop combat, and their ranks are thinned by casualties. Ukraine does not publish figures, but US officials estimate that as many as 70,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed and nearly twice that number have been injured.

In a column for CNN last week, Zaluzhnyi said: "We must acknowledge the significant advantage enjoyed by the enemy in mobilising human resources and how that compares with the inability of state institutions in Ukraine to improve the manpower levels of our armed forces without the use of unpopular measures."

Zelensky emphasised the importance of domestic drone technology, which has already demonstrated effectiveness in thwarting Russian advances in key areas.

While filling Zaluzhnyi's shoes poses a challenge, the focus remains on fostering unity and purpose within Ukraine's leadership amid a precarious window of vulnerability.

ANI

King Charles thanks public for support, good wishes

London, UK - King Charles III expressed his 'heartfelt thanks' on Saturday to the public for their support and good wishes in his first message after being diagnosed with cancer.

"I would like to express my most heartfelt thanks for the many messages of support and good wishes I have received in recent days," Charles said in his message from Sandringham in Norfolk. "As all those who have been affected by cancer will know, such kind thoughts are the greatest comfort and encouragement," King Charles said in the statement.

"It is equally heartening to hear how sharing my own diagnosis has helped promote public understanding and shine a light on the work of all those organisations which support cancer patients and their families across the UK and wider world," he added.



Britain's King Charles III

Buckingham Palace said on January 17 that Charles would receive a 'corrective procedure' at a hospital for an enlarged prostate.

The palace later issued another statement, that said he had been admitted to the hospital for a scheduled prostate treatment.

Following a three-night stay at the London Clinic, Charles left the hospital. But Buckingham Palace

announced on Monday that Charles has been diagnosed with an unspecified form of cancer and has begun treatment.

Charles ascended to the throne following the death of his long-serving mother, Queen Elizabeth II on September 8, 2022.

In May 2023, in the first coronation service in nearly 70 years, he was crowned at Westminster Abbey in London.

Cambodia: Celebrating fishing festival

Siem Reap, Cambodia - Wading in thigh-deep muddy waters in a big lake here in the cultural province of Siem Reap, hundreds of villagers on Sunday used traditional fishing tools to catch fish in an annual fishing festival.

Wearing palm leaf hats and traditional scarves to protect themselves from the scorching sun, villagers netted freshwater snakehead fish, catfish and climbing perch fish in a protected lake in Bangkoang village, Prasat Bakong district, about 300km from the capital Phnom Penh.

Villager Chan Poun said this tradition has been celebrated by villagers every year in February after the rice harvest season.

"It has been celebrated since ancient times. This is the tradition of our Cambodian villagers here," he told Xinhua while taking part in the ceremony.

"I'm very happy to join this festival and would like to see our villagers continue to preserve



A villager casts his fishnet during a traditional fishing festival in Siem Reap province, Cambodia on Sunday (Xinhua)

this tradition forever," he added.

Poun, who has participated in the event for more than 10 years, noticed that this traditional ceremony has gained popularity from year to year, as more and more people have joined it.

Prasat Bakong's district gov-

ernor So Platong said the tradition has existed since ancient times to mark the end of the rice harvest season, and it has been passed down for generations.

"This is the tradition of the villagers in Siem Reap province, which is home to the Angkor Archaeological Park," he told re-

porters at the event. "It is one of our traditional festivals to help attract national and international tourists." Platong said participants are only allowed to use traditional fishing gear such as woven bamboo traps and nets to scoop up their catch.

Xinhua

1,100 killed or injured in Haiti in January, says UN

United Nations, US - UN humanitarian aid workers on Friday said they were deeply concerned about escalating unrest in Haiti's major cities, where more than 1,100 people have been killed or injured in the first month of this year.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) cited the UN Human Rights Office for the tally of casualties in the capital of Port-au-Prince and other major cities, the highest for the period in two years.

"In recent days, outbreaks of deadly violence amid demonstrations have caused major disruptions to humanitarian operations, affecting our plans to reach civilians in need, especially those at displacement sites," OCHA said. "There are more than

313,000 people displaced around the country."

The humanitarian aid workers said that road blockages and movement restrictions impact healthcare workers and compromise access to essential social services. Difficulties accessing roads and ports also affect the delivery of life-saving relief.

"One humanitarian organisation in the Department of Sud was also looted, which will have a major impact on its operations in the coming days," said the office.

Additionally, the humanitarian aid workers said more than 1,000 schools nationwide, including in Port-au-Prince and other urban areas, were temporarily closed in mid-January because of ongoing anti-gang demonstrations.

Xinhua

Astronaut Gezeravci achieves historic milestone

Ankara, Turkey - Alper Gezeravci, Turkey's first astronaut, achieved the National Space Programme's goals and contributed to scientific literature, boosting the Turkish people's interest in space.

His mission, which began January 19, will be completed on Saturday with a planned return to Earth. Gezeravci conducted 13 scientific experiments aboard the International Space Station, raising awareness of Turkey's space journey.

The Turkish flag was raised on the Martyrs' Bridge on July 15 during a nationwide live broadcast. Gezeravci's journey began with the successful launch of the SpaceX Dragon capsule from Kennedy Space Center in the US state of Florida on January 19.

The Ax-3 crew was officially welcomed onboard the International Space Station (ISS) after 36 hours of travel.

During a live broadcast, he recited Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's



famous quote: "The future is in the skies," as his first words.

"As Turkey, we are experiencing the joy of taking a step towards a first in our history. We are eager to contribute to the science and research conducted here," he added.

As soon as Gezeravci arrived on the ISS as a low Earth orbit laboratory, he transferred experiment setups from the Dragon capsule to pre-experiment storage positions.

Then he observed reactions of various microgravity experiments, ranging from cancer to immune cells and from algae to propolis.

He successfully conducted 13 experiments prepared by the Turkish Space Agency (TUA) and TUBITAK Space Commission.

Gezeravci's experiments conducted in 14 days, had definitions of terms for easier understanding shared daily on TUA's social

Gezeravci conducted 13 scientific experiments aboard the International Space Station, raising awareness of Turkey's space journey

media accounts.

Gezeravci answered public questions, especially from young people, about space and explained scientific research through live connections with Earth.

He held his first meeting in space with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Gezeravci expressed pride in representing Turkey on the ISS and expressed hope for Turkish youth.

Responding to Erdogan's statement: "You have become an inspiration to our entire nation," Gezeravci said: "As we step into Turkey's Century on the 100th anniversary of our republic, I am proud to represent my country and carry our flag on the ISS in this important and meaningful mission. For years, space has been considered a dream belonging to other nations, and by turning this dream into reality, you have given many Turkish youth, including myself, the gift of hope. You have allowed us to raise and strengthen our self-confidence."

Turkish Minister of Industry and Technology, Mehmet Fatih Kacir, requested Gezeravci strike the 'TEKNOFEST pose' in space.

Gezeravci shared the moment on social media, wishing every citizen of Turkey to draw 'inspiration' from his journey, creating 'hope for the future'.

He met with students from various cities and answered journalists' questions through a live

112 Palestinians killed in Gaza in last 24 hours, death toll climbs to 28,176

Gaza, Palestine - At least 112 more Palestinians were killed and 173 others injured in the last 24 hours as Israel continues its onslaught on the besieged Gaza Strip, the territory's Health Ministry said on Sunday.

"The Israeli occupation committed 14 massacres against families in the Gaza Strip, leaving 112 martyrs and 173 injured during the past 24 hours," the ministry said in a statement.

"Many people are still trapped under rubble and on the roads as rescuers are unable to reach them," the statement said.

Flouting the provisional ruling of the International Court of Justice, Israel continues its offensive on the Gaza Strip where at least 28,176 Palestinians have been killed, mostly women and children, and 67,784 injured since October 7, according to Palestinian health authorities.

Israel has pounded the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack by Hamas, which Tel Aviv says killed nearly 1,200 people.

The Israeli offensive has left 85 per cent of Gaza's population internally displaced amid acute shortages of food, clean water, and medicine, while 60 per cent of the enclave's infrastructure was damaged or destroyed, according to the UN.

Attack on hospital
Doctors Without Borders (MSF) on Saturday said that at least two



people were killed and five others injured in the Nasser Hospital in the Gaza Strip over the last two days. "In the past 48 hours, MSF staff report shots fired at people inside Nasser Hospital. Two people were killed, five others injured, including one nurse who was severely wounded," it said on X.

It noted that the medical staff of the hospital are afraid to move within and around the hospital due to the fear of being shot. It said that Israeli forces are continuing operations in the immediate vicinity of Nasser Hospital, adding: "We are worried for the lives of MSF colleagues, medical staff and patients at

Nasser Hospital. Medical facilities, their surroundings and staff should always be protected, and access to hospitals unhindered." The Israeli army has slapped a siege around the Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Younis city since January 22 as part of its military offensive in the area. Meanwhile, Israeli Defence

Minister Yoav Gallant said on Sunday that 'deepening' the military operation in Gaza brings Tel Aviv closer to reaching a 'realistic agreement' to return hostages. "This morning, we are hosting the IDF (Israeli army) Cabinet meeting, to show the ministers exactly how we are reaching and deepening our achievements and

what we have found in Gaza," said Gallant in a televised speech broadcast by the Public Broadcasting Corporation showing, in the background, weapons and missiles that Gallant claimed were found by the Israeli army at Hamas sites in Gaza. "You can see a small part of the things here, missiles, explo-

sive devices, mines, a very large number of maps, means of communication, documents, and computers," he added.

"We penetrated into the heart of Hamas's most sensitive places, and used its intelligence against it," Gallant said, claiming: "We blew up their weapons in the field. All of this leads to penetrating the heart of Hamas' capabilities. The deeper we delve into this process, the closer we come to reaching a realistic agreement to return the hostages."

Hamas is believed to be holding nearly 136 Israelis. There was no comment from Hamas on Gallant's statement.

However, thousands of Israelis demonstrated on Saturday in Tel Aviv and Haifa to demand the dismissal of the government led by Benjamin Netanyahu, the holding of early elections and a hostage swap deal with Hamas, according to media reports.

Private Channel 12 reported that thousands protested in Habima Square in central Tel Aviv against the government and demanded early elections.

The official Israeli broadcasting authority noted 'a massive demonstration in Tel Aviv demanding the government to reach a deal for the return of all the hostages, and other two protests in front of Netanyahu's residence in Jerusalem'.

Anadolu Agency

US carries out 'self-defence strikes' against Houthi targets in Yemen, says CENTCOM

Washington, US - The US on Saturday carried out 'self-defence strikes' against Houthi targets in Yemen, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) announced on Sunday.

"On Feb. 10, between 4 - 5 p.m., (Sanaa time) (1300-1400GMT), U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) forces successfully conducted self-defence strikes against two unmanned surface vessels (USV) and three mobile anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCM) north of Al Hudaydah, Yemen, that were prepared to launch against ships in the Red Sea," CENTCOM said on X. The CENTCOM said it determined the targets presented an 'imminent threat' to US Navy ships and merchant vessels in the region.

"These actions will protect freedom of navigation and make international waters safer and more secure for U.S. Navy and merchant vessels," it added.

Yemen's Houthi group has targeted vessels in the southern Red Sea, warning that it will attack all Israeli-bound ships. It said the attacks are meant to support Palestinians as they face Israel's 'aggression and siege' in



Yemen's Houthi group has targeted vessels in the southern Red Sea, warning that it will attack all Israeli-bound ships. It said the attacks are meant to support Palestinians as they face Israel's 'aggression and siege' in Gaza

Gaza. The Red Sea is one of the world's most frequently used sea routes for oil and fuel shipments.

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin recently announced the creation of a multinational mis-

sion - Operation Prosperity Guardian - to counter the Houthi attacks.

Houthis to expand operations
Meanwhile, the Houthi group has vowed to expand its operations against Israel if it escalates the war in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

"We say to the Israeli entity that if there is any escalation in Rafah or Gaza, you should know

that our path is escalation," Mohammed Ali Al-Houthi, a member of the Supreme Political Council of the Houthis, said in a statement late on Saturday.

He added that 'as long as the human tragedy in Gaza worsens, and the injustice and mass killing of people in Gaza continues, operations will expand according to field data'.

On Saturday, Houthi group announced that 17 of its fighters were killed in airstrikes carried out by the US and UK on Yemen.

The Saba news agency, affiliated with the Houthis, said: "Today (Saturday), in a dignified funeral procession, the bodies of several martyrs of the nation, armed forces, and security forces who were martyred in the American-British aggression airstrikes, were mourned."

This is the second time that the group has announced fatalities among its members due to US and UK airstrikes.

The first time was on the day the US and UK began airstrikes on Yemen on January 12, when Houthis announced that five of its fighters were killed and six others injured.

Anadolu Agency



Kuwait, Qatar, UAE express concerns about Israel's plans to attack city of Rafah

Istanbul, Turkey - Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) condemned on Saturday the Israeli army's plans to attack Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

The Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry 'expresses its deep concern about the Israeli occupation forces' plans to attack the city of Rafah in the Gaza Strip after forcibly deporting its civilians', said a statement.

It reiterated Kuwait's stance that rejects 'aggressive practices and displacement schemes against the Palestinian people'.

The statement also reaffirmed its position that urges 'the international community and the Security Council to fulfil their responsibilities in protecting innocent Palestinian civilians'.

The agency encouraged 'the activation of international accountability mechanisms to put an end to the ongoing Israeli violations of international law, humanitarian law, and legitimate international resolutions'.

Qatar also 'strongly condemned the Israeli threats to invade Rafah'.

Doha warned of 'a human-

itarian catastrophe in the city, which has become the last refuge for hundreds of thousands of displaced people inside the besieged enclave'.

The country asked 'the United Nations Security Council to urgently act to prevent the Israeli occupation forces from invading Rafah and committing genocide in the city'.

Doha warned of a humanitarian catastrophe in the city, which has become the last refuge for hundreds of thousands of displaced people

Qatar reiterated its 'firm rejection of attempts to forcibly displace the Palestinian people from Gaza'.

Meanwhile, the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed its 'serious concern about the Israeli army's plans to launch a military operation in Rafah, which is filled with displaced Palestinians'.

Anadolu Agency

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi calls for Israel's ouster from UN

Tehran, Iran - Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on Sunday called for the expulsion of Israel from the United Nations over its deadly war on the Gaza Strip as the country marked the 45th anniversary of its Islamic revolution with nationwide rallies.

In a public address at the iconic Azadi Square in Tehran, Raisi said Iran proposes to expel Israel from the UN as it has failed to adhere to the world body's resolutions.

He called for an immediate



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi

halt to the bombardment of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, adding that Israel is 'doomed'.

Tens of thousands of people took to the streets on Sunday in Tehran and other major Iranian cities to mark 45 years of the 1979 revolution that ended the 54-year rule of Iran's Pahlavi dynasty and led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic.

The events that led to the expulsion of the last Pahlavi ruler - Mohammad Reza Pahlavi - also caused the breakdown in diplo-

matic relations between Tehran and Washington.

Following the 1979 revolution, Iran also severed its diplomatic and trade ties with Israel and refused to accept the legitimacy of the government in Tel Aviv.

During Sunday's rally in Tehran, which passed through the busiest intersections of the city, people chanted vociferous slogans such as 'Death to America' and 'Death to Israel'.

Anadolu Agency

Pakistan: PTI-backed independent candidates lead with 95 seats in NA

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) occupies the second position with 78 seats

Islamabad, Pakistan - Independent candidates allied to Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party have secured a commanding lead with 95 seats in the National Assembly, ARY News reported, saying the information is based on unofficial and unconfirmed results from 257 out of 265 constituencies.

Details revealed that results from seven constituencies are yet to be confirmed, while the outcome of one National Assembly constituency remains withheld.

The current scenario indicates that no single party is positioned to form a government independently based on the unofficial and unconfirmed results.

Currently, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) occupies the second position in the National Assembly with 78 seats, and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) follows closely in third place with 54 seats, as reported by ARY News.

The withholding of the result for NA-64 stems from a challenge posed by Qaisara Ilahi, a candidate supported by PTI. Moving beyond the major parties, Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan has secured 17 seats, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazal 3, and both Istekham-e-



The current scenario indicates that no single party is positioned to form a government independently based on the unofficial and unconfirmed results

Pakistan Party and Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid have clinched two seats each in the lower house of Parliament. Furthermore, the Pakistan Muslim League-Zia, Majlis-e-Wahdatul Muslimeen, and Balochistan National Party have each secured one seat.

The election, which saw the participation of around 60mn voters on February 8, witnessed more than 1.1mn election officials fulfilling their duties, according to the preliminary report by the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN). Additionally, over 0.7mn police and

military personnel were deployed across the country and outside polling stations to ensure peace and order on Election Day, ARY News reported.

Results for 10 National Assembly seats and 16 provincial assembly seats in Pakistan have been withheld as losing candi-

dates, dissatisfied with the outcomes, have challenged them.

Challenges from defeated candidates in 10 National Assembly constituencies and 16 provincial assembly seats prompted the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to withhold the results. The Returning

Officers for NA-15 Manshera, NA-46 Islamabad-I, NA-47 Islamabad-II, and NA-48 Islamabad-III have been instructed not to release the results.

Moreover, challenges have been raised against the results of NA-55 Rawalpindi, NA-49, NA-50 Attock, NA-65, NA-63, and NA-28, according to ARY News.

Simultaneously, results for provincial assembly constituencies PP-11, PP-14, PP-16, PP-20, PP-31, PP-33, and PP-59 are also contested by the losing candidates. Anticipating a surge in legal activity, several election results from the 2024 general elections, indicating PML-N candidates' victories, face challenges in high courts. Allegations of 'rigging' accompany these challenges, heightening tensions.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-affiliated independent candidates have taken their concerns to the Lahore High Court (LHC), challenging the results of PP-164 and NA-118, where Shehbaz Sharif and Hamza Shehbaz secured victory. In a petition, independent candidate Yousuf Mior, who contested against PML-N president, claims denial of entry to the office by the returning officer (RO), ARY News reported.

ANI

India: Cold weather continues to grip Delhi

New Delhi, India - Cold weather conditions continued to prevail in the national capital on Sunday morning. People at different places around the city huddled around bonfires to keep themselves warm.

According to the data shared by the IMD, the minimum temperature in the city can go to seven degrees and the maximum temperature would reach 25 degrees Celsius.

Owing to visibility woes, several flights were reportedly delayed at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport on Sunday.

In view of the same, Delhi Airport has issued an advisory informing flights that are not CAT III compliant may be affected.

According to the weather agency, the maximum temperature in the city would reach around 25 degrees Celsius over the next two days.

The Met Department has also predicted light rainfall over Central India from February 10-12 and East India from February 12-14.

Last week, severe cold and dense fog persisted in North India, including Delhi.

ANI

US trying to threaten India-Russia relationship with sanctions: Envoy

New Delhi, India - The Russian envoy to India, Denis Alipov, said on Saturday while his country remains New Delhi's 'reliable and time-tested friend', the US is trying to threaten the relationship with sanctions.

"In India, Russia enjoys a solid reputation as a reliable, sincere, well-intentioned, time-tested friend. Such an image was initially shaped due to the major contribution of the USSR to Indian socio-economic development, and it largely persists to this day," he said.

In an interview with the RT news agency, the Russian envoy added: "US officials who come here do not hesitate to directly state that they are pursuing the goal of tearing New Delhi away from Moscow."

"They are even making threats with secondary sanctions. Some Indian partners are forced to exercise caution, sometimes, frankly speaking, excessively, but there are also a significant number of those for whom such an approach is unacceptable."

Highlighting the growing bilateral ties, the Russian envoy said: "Our ties continue to steadily ex-



Russian envoy to India Denis Alipov (ANI)

US officials who come here do not hesitate to directly state that they are pursuing the goal of tearing New Delhi away from Moscow

DENIS ALIPOV

pand in a wide range of areas according to our converging national interests. But unlike our Western partners, we have never conditioned cooperation on politics, have not interfered in domestic affairs, and have always maintained mutually respectful and trusted relationships. Therefore, even now we mainly see a

growing desire to keep working together and finding ways to overcome well-known impediments caused by destructive unilateral approaches."

"It should be noted that over the recent years the number of such contacts has increased manifold, and they are becoming more and more meaningful, in-

cluding distributing information detailing the economic and investment potential and promising areas for interaction. It is indicative that the current bilateral trade turnover, which at the end of 2023 may exceed US\$60bn, is several times higher than the pre-sanctions figures," he added.

Alipov also called for urgent reforms of the United Nations and agencies under it while making a strong case for the inclusion of India as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

"We are of the view that India as a permanent member of the Security Council could make a significant contribution to promoting balance as well as an agenda focused on the interests of the world majority, primarily the countries of the Global South," the Russian envoy said.

India and Russia have maintained a robust strategic partnership, rooted in historical ties, over decades. Central to this relationship is defence cooperation, with Russia serving as a major supplier of military equipment to India and both nations engaging in joint military exercises.

ANI

India: Security tightened ahead of farmers' march

New Delhi, India - Security has been increased near the Tikri border amid calls issued by farmer organisations to march to the national capital on February 13.

To prevent any untoward incident, big containers, cemented and iron barricades, and water canons were placed by police officials at the Singhu border of Delhi. In Haryana, the CRPF and other security agencies have been deployed to ensure law and order is maintained. Mobile internet services and bulk SMS have also been suspended in seven districts until February 13.

A top police official said that Section 144 has been imposed in Panchkula. Sirsa-Chandigarh Highway has been blocked by digging the road, and heavy stones have been placed near Musahib Wala village along the Haryana-Punjab border.

The Shambhu border has been sealed on the Punjab-Haryana border. BSF and RAF personnel have also been deployed.

DCP Arshdeep Singh told ANI: "Due to the farmers' movement, we have sealed the Shambhu border...When they come here, we will request that they not go



A road is barricaded as security tightened at Ambala-Kaithal bypass, ahead of the farmers' call for March to Delhi, in Ambala on Sunday (ANI)

beyond this because they do not have permission for it. We want them to end the movement peacefully..."

Deputy Superintendent of Police Subhash Chandra and Sirsa Sadar Police Station Incharge Sukhdev Singh are present at the spot to oversee security arrangements. Traffic restrictions have been imposed on vehicular movement between Haryana and Punjab. Roads leading to Punjab have been blocked near Dabwali, Rodi, and Kalanwali in Haryana.

According to Panchkula DCP Sumer Singh Pratap: "Section 144 has been imposed in Panchkula. A ban was imposed on taking out

processions, demonstrations, march passes on foot or with tractor trolleys and other vehicles, and carrying any sticks, rods or weapons."

Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar-led Haryana government on Saturday announced the suspension of mobile internet, bulk SMS, and all dongle services in several districts till February 13 in view of the farmers call.

According to a notification issued by the Haryana administration, bulk SMS and all dongle services provided on mobile networks, except voice calls, will remain suspended.

ANI

Creative museum souvenirs prove smash hit among Chinese youth

Lanzhou, China - A plush toy named 'Happy Loong' has recently captured the hearts of visitors to the Gansu Provincial Museum in northwest China.

Modelled after a Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) gold ornament in the shape of a loong, or Chinese dragon, over 1,000 of these chubby and grinning loong toys were sold in the first week after it made its debut earlier this year.

Wu Xiaoyu, a designer of the toy, said the museum's creative cultural product design team had aimed to create a more adorable and joyous version of the tradi-

tional loong to cater to the tastes of young people.

Established in 2015, the team consists of 12 young designers, with the youngest of them aged 24.

This innovative approach to museum souvenirs reflects a broader trend of making cultural products more appealing to young Chinese museum-goers, driving up revenue across various museums.

The Palace Museum's online store, for instance, offers playful and humorous souvenirs featuring emperors in Chinese history. These souvenirs range from lip-



Two creative cultural products sold at the souvenir shop of the Museum in Lanzhou (Xinhua)

sticks and fans to adhesive tape and wallets, and have received rave reviews from customers.

Similarly, the Liaoning Provincial Museum has developed nearly 300 types of cultural products, generating revenue of 14mn yuan (about US\$2mn) in 2023.

According to Cui Youxin, head of the creative cultural product centre at the Gansu Provincial Museum, the success of these innovative souvenirs lies in their ability to meet the demands of young people seeking relaxation and individuality.

However, Cui emphasised

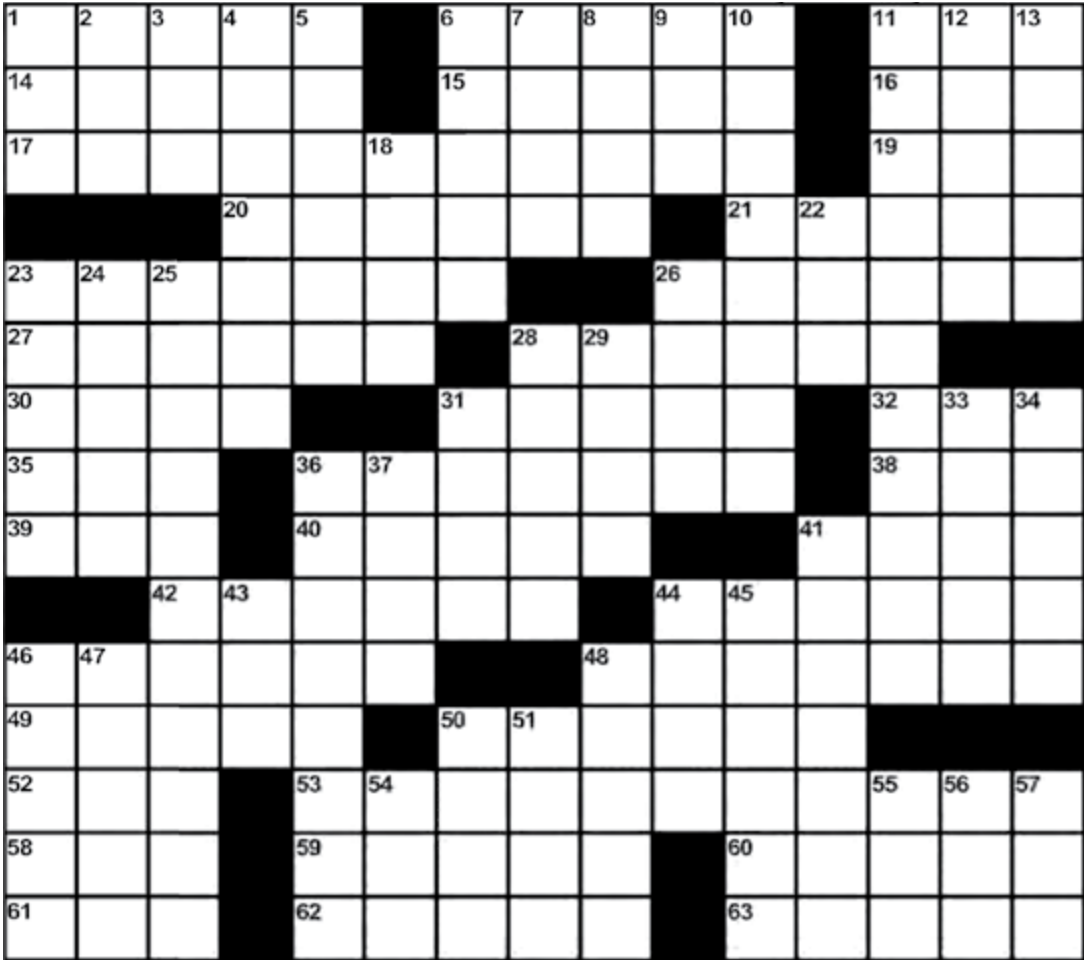
that creating truly ingenious cultural products requires an intimate knowledge of cultural relics and their historical background.

"Only those deeply rooted in the soil of Chinese history and culture can stand the test of time," she said.

In addition to 'Happy Loong', the Gansu Provincial Museum offers stuffed toys inspired by the flying apsarases of the Mogao Grottoes and the bronze galloping horse from the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), all of which combine rich history with Gen-Z appeal.

Xinhua

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Alabama city
 - 6) Lost in Paris?
 - 11) Infomercials, e.g.
 - 14) Elite military unit
 - 15) At full speed on the water
 - 16) Dandy
 - 17) Manila's country
 - 19) Transcript fig.
 - 20) Rabbitlike rodent
 - 21) Not this, that or those
 - 23) Clandestinely
 - 26) "The magic word"
 - 27) Tom of Hollywood
 - 28) Cowardly
 - 30) Yamuna River city
 - 31) Prepare for impact
 - 32) Org. in 27-Across movies
 - 35) 100 qintars
 - 36) Like zebras
 - 38) Costa del _
 - 39) Tire letters
 - 40) "Shhh!"
 - 41) Vanity case for madam
 - 42) Fix, in the animal world
 - 44) Extremely learned person
 - 46) Some tropical fruits
 - 48) Hall-of-famers and such
 - 49) Deprived of nourishment
 - 50) Mystical medicine man
 - 52) Health resort
 - 53) Gulf of Guinea country
 - 58) "... the season ..."
 - 59) Cognizant
 - 60) Continental currency
 - 61) Yoko of "Double Fantasy"
 - 62) Aired again
 - 63) Prepare, as tea
- DOWN**
- 1) It runs slowly in the forest
 - 2) Biblical verb ending
 - 3) Hawaiian freebie
 - 4) Mosquito-transmitted disease
 - 5) Compadres
 - 6) Coral Sea inlet
 - 7) Give off, as light
 - 8) Indian princess
 - 9) Conk out, as an engine
 - 10) Remaining a mystery
 - 11) Kabul's country
 - 12) Dunderheads
 - 13) Extra
 - 18) Ask, as a question
 - 22) Ball prop
 - 23) Massage target
 - 24) Impulses
 - 25) Upper Volta, once
 - 26) Walk back and forth
 - 28) Town news bearer of yore
 - 29) Deeply engrossed
 - 31) Camembert kin
 - 33) Pitcher's place
 - 34) Moves like a butterfly
 - 36) Cop's wheels
 - 37) Sounds of reproof
 - 41) Become more uniform
 - 43) Adam's beloved
 - 44) 18-wheeler
 - 45) Tequila plants
 - 46) Enthusiasm
 - 47) Detach, as a medal
 - 48) Carrying a burden
 - 50) 27-Across, for one
 - 51) Zeus' wife
 - 54) "L_ you one"
 - 55) Anger
 - 56) Fish eggs
 - 57) Psychic power

NOTE PAD

MAAM PATH ASPER
AFRO OLIO EMERY
ROOD TOTE RANGE
COMEUPFORAIR
TARPIT LETHAL
ATE POI SOLI
ERATO NIOBE NAB
GODOWNINHISTORY
RUM NONOS KARMA
ETAS OAT SINIT
TENETS TOMTIT
LIELOWFORNOW
ADDER OBIT ULNA
SINCE GENE MENS
HEATS EYER STEP

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It's a great day to get back in touch with your culinary skills. Your creativity is itching for a way to express itself, and food is a wonderful medium for expression. Being in the kitchen will give you time to relax. Let your mind wander as you concentrate on whipping up a delicious dinner for your favorite person tonight, especially if that favorite person is you! You don't always need to use creativity for the benefit of other people, you know!

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

There could be a lot of gossip and drama around you today, but you should try hard to rise above all of the pettiness -- there are people who let jealousy rule their intellect, and you need to avoid these poisonous people like the plague right now. You're in a highly susceptible time, when what other people do or say could influence you more than you would like it to. Stay objective and don't let someone's appearance influence what you think of them.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

No matter what you're feeling when you wake up, do your best to put on a happy face. Use your incredibly rich imagination to figure out a way to fake it until you feel it. There is little doubt that if you decide to show the world that you're feeling good, the world will start to give you reasons to actually feel good deep down to your toes. People like to be nice to smiling faces, so brighten up. Put your best foot forward.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

When did you get the idea that having doubt in your life was a bad thing? Sure, it might cause you to pause your progress right in the middle of a nice groove, but questioning where you are going is always a healthy thing to do. So don't hesitate to check yourself today. Even if you're happier than you have ever been, just do a bit of a review of how you're feeling about things. Take your emotional pulse and confirm that you know what you're doing and want more.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

In order to move past your mistakes, you have to keep pushing yourself forward. The only person who is still beating you up over what you did is you, and it's time to move on. You are not perfect, that's no mystery. But no one else is either. Set a goal today. Hold yourself to a high standard and force yourself to rise to your own expectations. Give yourself an emotional hug and start focusing on the future. You've learned from where you've been.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

When an authority figure tells you to do something today, do it. Now is not the time to get defensive or ask why. Now is the time to be more obedient. Trust your boss. It's important to question authority figures in order to be valuable to them, but today is not the day for major doubt. The people around you know more than you do, which is probably why they are asking you to take on more responsibilities. The only way to truly comprehend your abilities is to use them.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Today could pan out well for you, or not. The outcome depends on the way you choose to react to the day's news. The best way to make sure that things go well is to stay positive. Visualize the way you want things to go down and do whatever you can to make them manifest that way. Show the Universe how you want things to be, and it might just follow along. Avoid negative people who like to focus on doom and gloom and you're likely to stay more cheerful yourself.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

People are totally ready to get on board with your latest plan, but you need to remember to communicate clearly. What do you need them to do? Don't worry about insulting their intelligence. Draw them a picture if you have to. People need to be given expectations in order to feel a sense of accomplishment, so don't hold back when you're handing out the day's responsibilities. It's a sign of a good leader that you know how to delegate. Keep the big picture in mind.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You have some excellent social and career connections, but you cannot rely on them too much right now. It's much wiser to pursue your current goals by yourself. Not only will it help you strengthen your own skills, but it will help show these folks that you don't always need them for everything, and that will improve your stature in their eyes. It's time for you to flesh out your reputation as a mover and shaker. Looking like a follower is not going to be good for you now.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You can't have everything in your life exactly way you want it right now. Your life has to be all about give-and-take, for the time being at least. It's not that you have been acting selfishly, but you shouldn't be hesitant to give in here and there or sacrifice a few things you don't absolutely need. It will end up helping you appreciate what you have all the more. Making this sacrifice could go a long way toward impressing the people you need to impress.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You need to trust your instincts today, especially if they tell you to avoid doing something that you usually do without a second thought. Your sudden hesitation or retreat could cause some people to be confused, but they will see the wisdom of your choice soon enough. And you can't let the potential reactions of other people force you to do something that doesn't feel right, no matter how much sway they may have over your career or social life.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

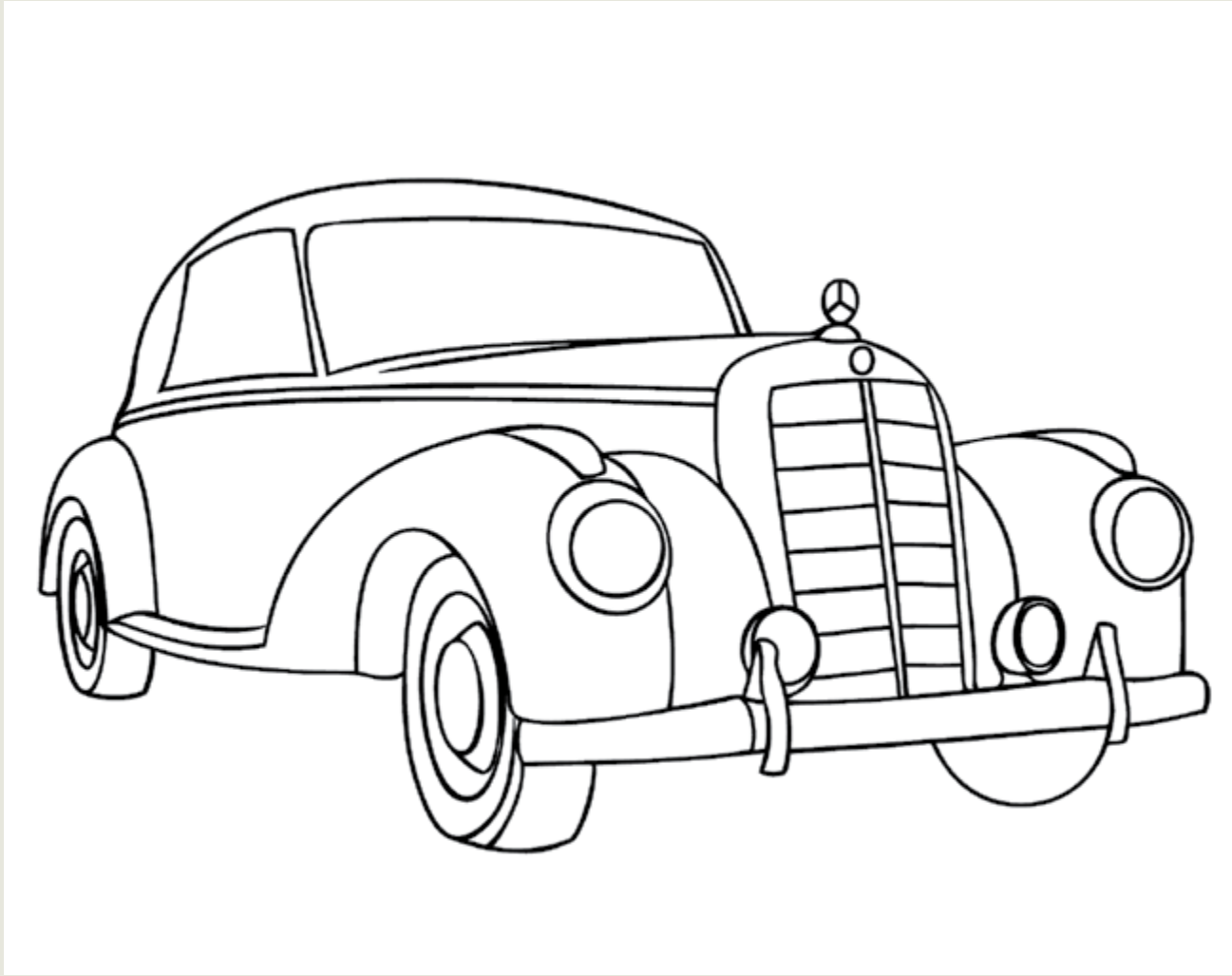
Sharing your secrets is unwise today, because someone who is known to be quite a blabbermouth will be within hearing range, and they are looking for grist for their gossip mill. Don't let it be you! So when you're in public, stick to the topics that no one cares much about, or the ones that everyone already knows everything about. Show some discretion. Even if your news is eating you up, you know you need to wait before divulging it, so be patient.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Who led the expedition that successfully made the first ascent of Mt Everest in 1953?
- A. Colonel H C J (John) Hunt
 - B. Sir Edmund Hillary
 - C. Tenzing Norgay
 - D. Eric Shipton
2. A group of what is usually called a "parliament"?
- A. Owls
 - B. Ravens
 - C. Crows
 - D. Rooks
3. What is the name of a spectacular group of six canyons in the Sierra Madre Occidental in the southwestern part of Chihuahua, northwestern Mexico, a name derived from the colour of the walls?
- A. Copper Canyon
 - B. Painted Chasm
 - C. Black Canyon
 - D. Red Gorge
- Answers: 1.A 2.A 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

S	O	T	J
A	E	I	M
O	U	L	A
D	K	A	R

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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



Finn Fisher-Black celebrates after winning the second stage of Tour of Oman on Sunday

REIGN OF FINN

It is nice to have two victories in three days after my opening triumph in Muscat classic race and then in Tour of Oman in the second stage. It was a tough race and competition

FINN FISHER-BLACK

New Zealander wins second stage in Qurayat in heavy rains

Muscat – New Zealand rider Finn Fisher-Black of UAE Team Emirates put up a dominating performance to win the dramatic 170.4 km stage two of the 13th edition of Tour of Oman in Qurayat on Sunday.

On a day of heavy rains, the Kiwi youngster picked up a spectacular victory after more than four hours of racing that began at As Sifah. This is the second successive triumph for Finn in Muscat following his earlier title of the second edition of the Muscat Classic event on Friday.

The star of UAE Team Emirates claimed the overall leader's red jersey (general individual time) after he completed the race in 4 hours, 4 minutes, and 4 seconds ahead of US rider Luke Lamperti of Soudal Quick-Step team who finished in 4h, 4mi and 6sec. Italian rider Diego Ulissi finished third also clocking 4h, 4min and 6sec. Fisher-Black bagged red (individual time classification), green (general points classification) and white (young rider) jerseys while Oscar Pelegri Ferrandis from Burgos-BH team of Spain got the golden jersey for the most aggressive rider for the second straight stage.

"It is nice to have two victories in three days after my opening triumph in Muscat classic race and then in Tour of Oman in the second stage. It was a tough race and competition in these weather conditions. I did not expect to see this weather as I was in Saudi Arabia and UAE in the last two weeks and I thought it would remain the same climate here in Muscat. The heavy rains were in the last part of the race but the weather was in good condition during the earlier part," Fisher-Black said

"We managed as a team to overcome some climbs and hills during the stage as we implemented a good tactical and strategic plan. One of our team members crashed during the race but he managed to continue the race later. We are eyeing for more victories in the coming days of the race," he said.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, the chief guest presented the awards in the presence of officials from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Oman Cycling Association.

Liverpool beat Burnley to stay top after Man City win

London, England - Manchester City claimed the Premier League summit only to be swiftly knocked off it by Liverpool on Saturday, in a sign of what is likely to be in store over the coming weeks in a nail-biting title race.

Erling Haaland's double - his first goals since returning from a foot injury - earned champions City a 2-0 victory over an obdurate Everton side at The Etihad Stadium.

That cranked up the pressure on Liverpool but Juergen Klopp's side duly responded by beating Burnley 3-1 with Diogo Jota, Luis Diaz and Darwin Nunez all on target.

It meant the day ended as it had begun with Liverpool two points clear of City, who have played one game less.

Liverpool have 54 points from 24 games with City on 52 from 23 and third-placed Arsenal, who face West Ham United on Sunday, on 49 from 23 games.

Klopp's side, beaten by Arsenal last week, were not at their best again and had to work hard to subdue Burnley who actually equalised through Dara O'Shea's header and looked capable of taking something home as they battle against relegation. Jota headed Liverpool into the lead in the 31st minute and Diaz and Nunez, also with headers, secured the victory after the break to return Liverpool above City.

"It's not only the three points. You cannot have momentum guaranteed all the time," Klopp, whose side host City on March 10, said. "It's always a different challenge. If it's not clicking straight away, fight through it. It was really tough today but the boys fought through and got three points."

One worry for Klopp, however, was Trent Alexander-Arnold's failure to emerge for the second half because of injury.

Tottenham moved back into the top four - leapfrogging Aston Villa - thanks to Brennan Johnson who struck in stoppage time to beat Brighton 2-1.



Liverpool's Darwin Nunez celebrates after scoring against Burnley

Ruthless Arsenal exact revenge on West Ham

Nottingham, England - Arsenal exacted sweet revenge on West Ham United with a 6-0 away thrashing to stay right in the thick of the Premier League title race on Sunday, obliterating their hosts before halftime.

Mikel Arteta's side had lost twice against their London rivals this season but were 4-0 ahead by halftime with goals by William Saliba, Bukayo Saka, Gabriel and Leandro Trossard.

The punishment continued in the second half with Saka making it 5-0 before former West Ham midfielder Declan Rice, who assisted two goals in the opening period, thumped his team's sixth on a day of abject humiliation for the hosts.

It was a sublime display by Arsenal who wiped off a goal difference deficit to champions Manchester City who they joined on 52 points, although they stay in third place courtesy of scoring fewer goals. Leaders Liverpool have 54 points.

Newcastle beat Forest

Brazilian Bruno Guimaraes netted twice as Newcastle United held off a spirited comeback from Nottingham Forest to win 3-2 at the City Ground in Saturday's late game.

Both Newcastle's first-half goals, scored by Guimaraes and Fabian Schar, came from set pieces, and the visitors struggled to deal with the pace of Forest's counter-attack. A corner from Miguel Almiron found Kieran Trippier, and his deep cross was brilliantly volleyed home by Guimaraes in the 10th minute.

Swedish winger Anthony Elanga netted for the hosts on the break in the 26th minute and though Newcastle's Schar scored in the 44th, Callum Hudson-Odoi made it 2-2 deep into first-half stoppage time.

Forest striker Taiwo Awoniyi had a goal ruled out for offside early in the second half and he was denied a penalty in when a long ball caught the Newcastle defence out, but his appeals were waved away.



Arsenal's William Saliba (R) celebrates after scoring against West Ham



Ahmed Hafnaoui

Hafnaoui out of 400 freestyle at worlds, Peaty eases through

Doha, Qatar - Olympic champion Ahmed Hafnaoui's World Championships got off to a poor start as the Tunisian superstar bombed out of the 400 metres freestyle on day one, but breaststroke king Adam Peaty eased through on his return to the global event.

Bidding for a 400-800-1,500 treble of world titles, Hafnaoui ranked 17th in the 400 heats with a time of three minutes 48.05 seconds - nearly eight seconds adrift of his silver medal-winning swim at last year's event in Fukuoka.

The 21-year-old appeared nonplussed as he exited the Aspire Dome pool in Doha and declined to talk to reporters.

He will bid to defend his 800 and 1,500m freestyle titles later in the meet.

Australia's former world champion Elijah Winnington topped qualifying for the 400 final later on Sunday with a time of 3:44.37, ahead of Germany's Fukuoka bronze medallist Lukas Maertens.

World record holder Peaty cruised into the 100m breaststroke semi-finals, qualifying third behind American Nic Fink (59.19 seconds) and Italy's Nicolo Martinenghi in a strong field despite the absence of Chinese world champion Qin Haiyang.



Elena Rybakina

Rybakina crushes Kasatkina in Abu Dhabi final

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Top seed Elena Rybakina powered to a 6-1, 6-4 win over Russian Daria Kasatkina in the final of the Abu Dhabi Open on Sunday to lift her second trophy of the season and seventh overall.

The 2022 Wimbledon champion began the contest on Stadium Court in typically dominant fashion to grab an early break, but seventh seed Kasatkina struck back with one of her own only to fall behind again in blustery conditions.

Rybakina regained composure to go 5-1 up on the back of big serving as Kasatkina struggled for consistency and the 24-year-old Brisbane champion wrapped up the opening set in 25 minutes when her opponent sent a forehand wide.

The pair had come into the contest having split their four meetings - all on hardcourts - and Adelaide runner-up Kasatkina showed plenty of fight to pull two breaks back in the next set with relentless baseline hitting and stunning winners.

Level at 4-4, Rybakina turned the heat up to break the 26-year-old Kasatkina with a cross-court scorcher and the Moscow-born Kazakh returned after a brief rain delay to secure the victory on serve.

The 2022 Wimbledon champion began the contest in dominant fashion to grab an early break, but seventh seed Kasatkina struck back with one of her own only to fall behind again in blustery conditions

MADRID MASTERCLASS

Vinicius and Bellingham star as Real crush Girona

Madrid, Spain - Jude Bellingham's brace and goals from Vinicius Jr and Rodrygo earned Real Madrid an emphatic 4-0 win over LaLiga title challengers Girona on Saturday, extending the home side's lead at the top of the table to five points.

Girona, unbeaten in 15 league games since losing to Real in September, would have moved top of the standings with victory but stayed second behind Carlo Ancelotti's men. "It was the best game of the season, all very good. the challenge increases the level of the team," Ancelotti told a news conference.

"Vinicius had a top game when he plays at this level and has this attitude he is the best in the world. Bellingham has a sprained ankle, he will be tested tomorrow."

The hosts opened the scoring after six minutes as Vinicius picked up Fede Valverde's pass to curl a superb long-range shot in for his seventh league goal of the season. "We did everything the coach asked us to do," Vinicius, who was named man of the match, told Real Madrid TV.

"When the team wants to, it's very difficult to beat us. I don't usually shoot from outside the box, but today I felt confident and it worked out well."



Vinicius Junior (R) celebrates with Eduardo Camavinga after scoring against Girona on Saturday

Bellingham doubled the lead after Vinicius' through ball set up an easy finish past Girona goalkeeper Paulo Gazzaniga in the 36th minute and the England midfielder struck again from close range.

"We train every day together and we are getting to know each other. He's a star, he's been scoring a lot of goals," Vinicius said of Bellingham who is LaLiga's top scorer this season with 16 goals.

Rodrygo completed the rout from fellow Brazilian Vinicius' second assist, firing a rocket into the far corner in the 61st minute before Joselu missed a late

Vinicius had a top game when he plays at this level and has this attitude he is the best in the world

CARLO ANCELOTTI

penalty.

Real visit RB Leipzig in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie on Tuesday.

"We have an advantage at this stage of the season, it's good but it's just that, a small advantage," Ancelotti added. "We have done very well, now comes the Champions League which will give us energy. We have to continue with our level and good attitude."

Leverkusen in control of title race after thrashing Bayern

Leverkusen, Germany - Bundesliga leaders Bayer Leverkusen outplayed champions Bayern Munich for a 3-0 victory on Saturday that sent them five points clear at the top of the league and put them firmly in charge of the title race.

Goals from Josip Stanisic, Alejandro Grimaldo and Jeremie Frimpong made sure of the three points as Leverkusen, who have never won a Bundesliga title, and stretched their unbeaten run to 31 matches across all competitions this season. Bayern, chasing a 12th straight league crown, were nowhere to be seen and managed only a single shot on



Bayer Leverkusen's Alejandro Grimaldo celebrates after scoring against Bayern Munich on Saturday

target over the 90 minutes.

Xabi Alonso's team, who also twice hit the woodwork, are now on 55 points, with Bayern in second place on 50.

"Today it was a very disciplined performance from my team," said Alonso. "It was not easy but we waited for our chances. Maybe we did not have the ball too much today but we wanted to be dominant even without the ball. It was a very important win but it is just three points," he said.

The game started with an eight-minute delay after fans threw candy onto the pitch before the start to protest the league's plan to let a financial investor take a stake in the Bundesliga media rights company.

Once proceedings got underway, the hosts proved more aggressive than Bayern, who initially had possession but lacked attacking ideas. The Bavarians were also shaky at the back, struggling with Leverkusen's pressure.

They were caught napping when Robert Andrich sent a cut-back through the box with Stanisic, on loan from Bayern, left completely unmarked at the far post to tap in.



Goncalo Ramos

Ligue 1 leaders PSG rally to beat Lille

PARIS, France - Luis Enrique's Paris St Germain moved 11 points clear at the top of the Ligue 1 standings with a 3-1, come-from-behind home win over Lille on Saturday.

PSG, who were without striker Kylian Mbappe before they host Real Sociedad in the Champions League last 16 on Wednesday, are on 50 points from 21 games and have ex-

tended their unbeaten run to 16 games.

It was only the third time Mbappe, who was forced off injured against Brest in the Coupe de France midweek, has stayed on the bench during an entire Ligue 1 game for PSG -- and the first since April 2018.

"Mbappe is physically very good. It is clear that we did not want to take risks, there was no

need, we are not playing in a final, it made no sense. He will be available for Wednesday match," said Luis Enrique in a news conference.

Midfielder Yusuf Yazici silenced the Parc des Princes when he gave Lille the lead after six minutes, collecting a loose ball inside the six-yard box to send it past returning PSG goalkeeper Keylor Navas.

Navas, 37, who was sent on loan to Premier League side Nottingham Forest for the second half of the 2022-23 season, missed the beginning of the current campaign with back problems. A Lille defensive error four minutes later gifted PSG an

equaliser however, with Ousmane Dembele squaring the ball to Goncalo Ramos who scored with a low shot.

The home side then went ahead when Lille defender Alessandro put the ball in his own net in the 17th minute.

Leaders Inter Milan come from behind to beat Roma

Rome, Italy - Leaders Inter Milan came from behind to win 4-2 at AS Roma in Serie A on Saturday, ending Daniele De Rossi's winning start at the capital club despite having trailed their hosts at halftime.

Inter, who have picked up 60 points from 23 games, extended their lead over second-placed Juventus to seven points before Massimiliano Allegri's side host Udinese on Monday.

They still have a game in hand

after their January trip to Saudi Arabia for the Italian Super Cup.

Fifth-placed Roma, who won each of their previous three games under De Rossi after he replaced Jose Mourinho, are on 38 points from 24 games.

Roma flew out of the traps and Stephan El Shaarawy was close to scoring inside the first minute but his close-range shot was tipped away by Inter keeper Yann Sommer.

Instead, Francesco Acerbi



Inter Milan's Alessandro Bastoni celebrates after scoring against Roma

headed home to give Inter the lead in the 17th minute from a corner kick after Roma's Romelu Lukaku flicked the ball on, a goal which stood after a lengthy VAR review for an offside check.

Roma pushed back and Gianluca Mancini nodded home a free kick before the half-hour mark before El Shaarawy put the home side in front by the interval, when his shot from a tight angle bounced in after hitting both posts.



South Africa goalkeeper Ronwen Williams saves the penalty of DR Congo's Meschak Elia

South Africa beat DR Congo to finish third at Cup of Nations

Abidjan, Ivory Coast - South Africa took third place at the Africa Cup of Nations finals in the Ivory Coast when they edged the Democratic Republic of Congo 6-5 on penalties after a goalless draw at the Felix Houphouet-Boigny Stadium on Saturday.

South Africa midfielder Teboho Mokoena hit the outside of the post with the first kick after which the next eight efforts were all successful, leaving DR Congo captain Chancel Mbemba needing to score to win the contest.

But South Africa goalkeeper Ronwen Williams saved Mbemba's effort, taking the shootout into sudden death.

Williams then saved again from Meschak Elia to win the tie.

No extra time was played in the bronze medal match, which the Congolese dominated despite proving poor in front of goal.

Silas Katompa had two glaring chances to put them ahead, first in the eighth minute when free on the left with just Williams to beat, but his hesitation allowed the keeper to grab the ball at his

feet.

When Williams dropped a high ball in his box midway through the second half, without any pressure on him, Katompa had an even easier chance but shot into the side netting.

Fifteen minutes from the end, DR Congo striker Simon Banza also had clear sight on goal but

No extra time was played in the bronze medal match, which the Congolese dominated

botched his effort from point blank range.

Substitute Fiston Mayele did well to bring a long ball down on his chest and get goalside of his marker but he, too, missed as his effort in the 89th minute went across the face of goal.

South Africa, lost on penalties after extra time in Wednesday's semi-final to Nigeria.

THE HISTORY MAKERS

Qatar coach Marquez Lopez ‘proud of my players and their achievements’

Doha, Qatar - Head coach Marquez Lopez lauded his Qatar players for their composure and focus in their 3-1 victory over Jordan in the Asian Cup final on Saturday.

The hosts produced a dominant display from start to finish with Akram Afif netting a hat-trick of penalties to seal the victory at a packed Lusail Stadium, a victory which meant back-to-back AFC Asian Cup titles for Qatar.

“I’m extremely happy and I congratulate the Qatari people



Qatar players celebrate with the Asian Cup trophy after beating Jordan in the final on Saturday

and the players. We are so happy that we won the match. The tension was high.

“Maybe it was not beautiful football but everyone remembers the winner and I’m proud of my players and their achievements,” said Lopez.

to win them.”

Qatar became only the fifth nation to win back-to-back AFC Asian Cup titles with Lopez having masterminded the triumph despite having only taken charge in December.

“I have been working in Qatar

For now, I’m going to go back to work with Al Wakrah (in the Qatar Stars League). I’m not sure what will happen but we will enjoy the moment for now

MARQUEZ LOPEZ

Afif’s hat-trick took his tally to eight, with his performances landing him the Most Valuable Player and AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Yili Top Scorer Awards, and Lopez was effusive in his praise of the striker.

“I’m happy Akram (Afif) won both the awards and he deserves

and I know the players well. It was easy to work with them and they effectively implemented our ideas on the field.

“For now, I’m going to go back to work with Al Wakrah (in the Qatar Stars League). I’m not sure what will happen but we will enjoy the moment for now.”

Afif has Europe dreams but ‘not easy to leave the club and country’

Lusail, Qatar - Qatar’s Akram Afif underlined his credentials as one of Asia’s finest forwards with a hat-trick in the Asian Cup final to guide his team to back-to-back titles, but the forward was coy on playing for another European club in future.

Afif netted three penalties in the 3-1 victory over Jordan, and he bagged a treble of individual awards: player of the match, most valuable player of the tournament, and top scorer with eight goals.

Opposition coaches who have faced him have praised his skills, with Tajikistan’s Petar Segrt saying it was only a question of time and whether the 27-year-old Al-Sadd forward wanted to return to Europe.

Since leading Qatar to the 2019 title with a tournament record 10 assists, Afif has become one of Asia’s most-feared players.

At the start of this tournament, he said he had dreams of



Akram Afif

returning to Europe having previously played for Eupen in the Belgian Pro League.

He later became the first

Qatari player to be signed by a LaLiga club when he moved to Villarreal in 2016, but he was loaned out to Sporting Gijon before

returning to Eupen and finally to Al-Sadd in 2018.

He has since developed and is arguably playing at his peak based on his Asian Cup exploits.

“I talked about becoming a professional player (in Europe). But it’s not me who decides. My wife also has to make the decision for me. It’s not easy to leave the club and country,” Afif told reporters after the final.

But he added: “I’d love to become a professional player (in Europe) ... I’d say I would love to go.”

For now, he will enjoy helping Qatar become only the fifth country to successfully defend their Asian Cup crown.

“We’re happy and we will enjoy until the next Asian Cup. Then we’ll see what happens,” he added.

Coach Marquez Lopez was appointed only in December when Portuguese coach Carlos Queiroz abruptly parted company with the national team.

Ammouta: Jordan can walk tall despite final heartbreak

Lusail, Qatar - The title eluded Jordan but Hussein Ammouta only had words of praise and encouragement for his players after their defeat to Qatar in the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023™ final on Saturday.

Having gatecrashed the final with a series of scintillating performances, Jordan could produce only some of the form that had taken them within one match of winning the title as Qatar powered to their second successive title with a 3-1 win.

“There is only great pride in my players as they had a great tournament. They played very well in getting us into the final,” said Ammouta.

“However, our performance in the first half (of the final) was a bit of a struggle as our crosses, passes were not accurate. We improved in the second half and drew level but then conceded two penalties.

“The penalties made it very difficult but the players tried their best and we have to accept that



There is only great pride in my players as they had a great tournament. They played very well in getting us into the final

HUSSEIN AMMOUTA

mistakes will happen in matches.”

After a first half of limited chances but - crucially - an Akram Afif penalty which Qatar the lead, Jordan started the second period with more drive and purpose and were rewarded with Yazan Al Naimat drawing them

level in the 67th minute.

Qatar, however, refused to panic and had Jordan on the backfoot again after that, with Afif netting another two goals from the penalty spot for the victory

“We certainly wanted much more but it wasn’t to be but there is so much that the players can take from here. They have opened new horizons and it is crucial that the players build on this.”

Jordan will now turn their focus to the Preliminary Joint Qualification - Round 2 for the FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027, with the action to resume in March.

They have some work to do, having collected just a point from their opening two matches with a double header against Pakistan coming up.

“We have created a new level and the key thing now is to continue improving the technical and physical aspects.”

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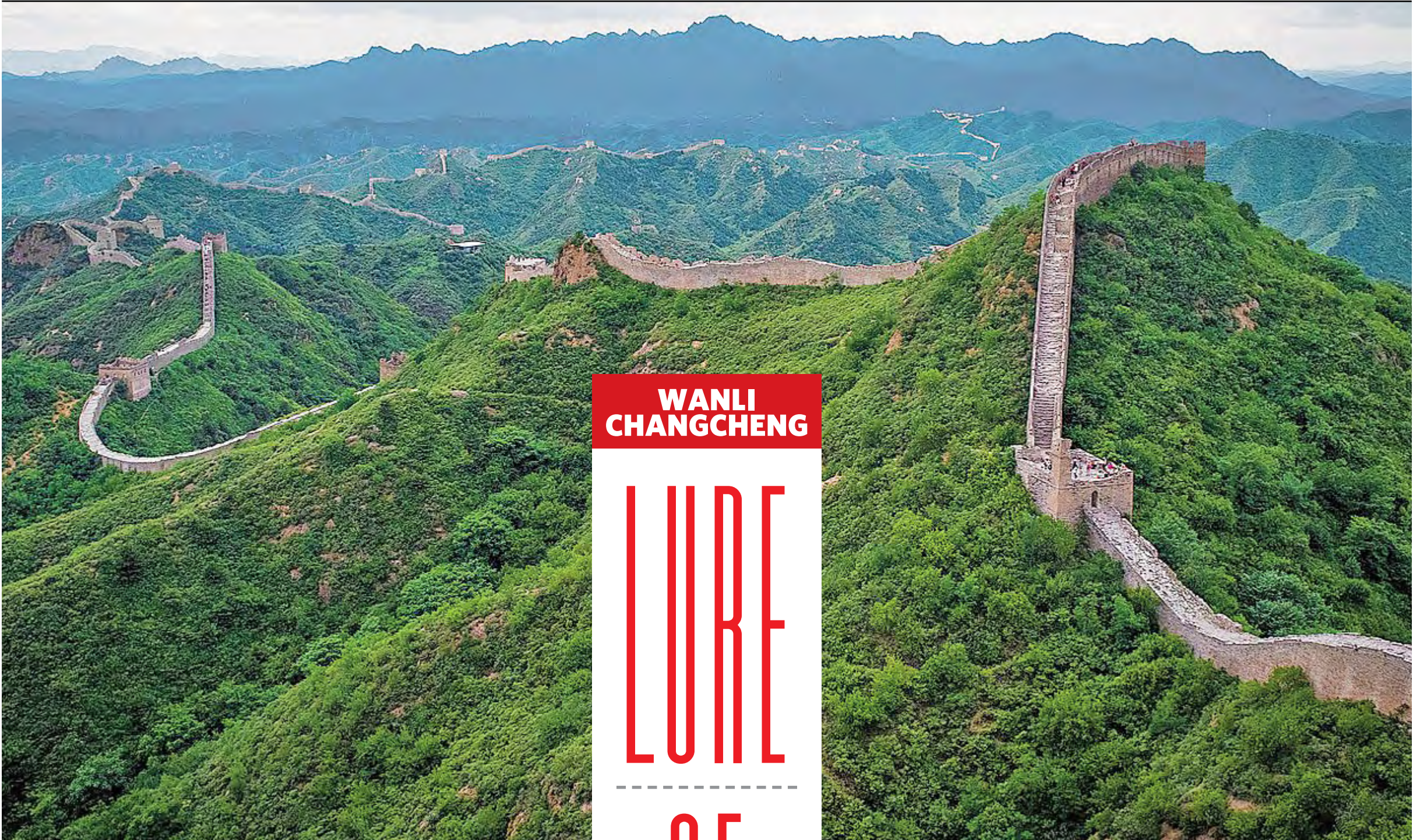
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The Great Wall of China, built over 2500 years ago, continues to be the biggest draw for tourists. A visit to China is never complete without a walk along some of the most attractive sections of the wall

Planning a visit to China? Surely your itinerary includes a trot along some section of the Great Wall which spans over 21,000km, winding through 15 provinces, 97 prefectures, and 404 counties.

While certain sections of the Great Wall - called 'Wanli Changcheng' in Mandarin - have been incredibly popular among tourists, many parts have slipped into obscurity, disrepair and sometimes oblivion. Nevertheless, if you're planning to visit the Great Wall for the first time or the 50th, the following destinations are sure to make your trip to China even more worthwhile:



YONGTAI
TURTLE CITY

The Great Wall is not simply a brick and mortar bulwark, in certain places, towers on jagged mountain peaks, fortress towns or even wide rivers count as sections of wall'.

The Turtle City, built in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) as part of the Great Wall's 'Yellow River Defense Line', was completed in 1608 and was home to around 2,000 infantrymen and 500 cavalry units during peak use.

Today, this fortress city is located in the Sitan Township of Jingtai County in north central Gansu province. While there aren't many real turtles in the Turtle City, the garrison town got its nickname due to its unique shape.

The south gate acts as the head and the west and east gates as the flippers. The town's oval wall is the body, while the north gate acts as its tail. As one of the most well-preserved and truly authentic walled cities left in China today, it's definitely worth your time.

Getting there: Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu province, has a major international airport and high-speed train connections from many cities in China. The drive to Yongtai Turtle City from downtown Lanzhou takes about 2.5 hours (195km).



MUTIANYU/
JIANKOU

The Mutianyu and Jiankou sections of wall are about 25km in length.

Mutianyu and Jiankou are two parts of the same Stone Dragon - two contiguous sections of the Great Wall that together stretch for roughly 25 kilometers along Beijing's mountaintops.

Historical records show that millions of men spent centuries constructing the Great Wall. Stand atop the wall at either Mutianyu or Jiankou, and you'll begin to comprehend the gravity of this statement.

These two sections are arguably the two most classic examples of Ming Dynasty Great Wall surviving today, and climbing either is guaranteed to be a life-changing experience.

Mutianyu is the best portion of the 'tourist wall'. Restored in the 1980s, it's very commercial but also superbly beautiful. Visitors not up for the hike can take a cable car to the top. Mutianyu and Jiankou are less than a 90-minute drive (without traffic) from downtown Beijing.

Getting there: To Mutianyu, you can also hire a car with a driver for the day or take the Mutianyu Special Tourism Bus from the Dongzhimen Wai Bus Station. To Jiankou, renting a car or booking private transport is recommended.

BATAIZI

This Gothic church was built in 1876. Bataizi village sits just inside the Motianling section of the Great Wall and is home to the ruins of a Gothic church built



WANLI
CHANGCHENG

LURE

OF

THE

LONG

WALL

in 1876 under the direction of a German missionary. It has been damaged and repaired numerous times in its nearly 150-year history; the bell tower is the only part still standing.

The juxtaposition of its ruins against the rammed-earth Great Wall makes Bataizi a unique place to spend a morning or afternoon.

Besides Bataizi, Datong should also be on your tourist map - visiting the Yungang Grottoes (a UNESCO world heritage site) and the Hengshan Hanging Temple will make your trip even more memorable.

Getting there: Bataizi village is 80km west of Datong, one of Shanxi province's largest and most famous cities. Zuoyun County is only 22km away from Bataizi - about a 35-minute drive. Datong is easily accessible by plane or high-speed train from other cities in China.



LAONIUWAN (AKA
THE OLD OX BEND
GREAT WALL)

As the locals say, Laoniawan is where the Great Wall and the mighty Yellow River shake hands. The Laoniawan Fortress was built in 1467, while the most famous tower of the Great Wall in this area, Wanghe Tower (literally meaning river-watching tower), was constructed in 1544.

Laoniuan village is located in Pianguan County, part of Xinzhou city in Shanxi province, just across the river from Inner Mongolia.

Along the Great Wall, there are only a few places where it meets bodies of water; of all those, this is the most stunning. A boat ride along the river is highly recommended.

Getting there: Laoniuan is difficult to get to by public transportation. The best option is to rent or book a car to take you from Datong to Laoniuan via Bataizi - this way, you'll be able to see two incredible locations along the Great Wall in one trip.

FAIRY TOWER

Simatai's Fairy Tower is a sight to behold. It is one of the best-known towers of the wall at Simatai but also one of the least visited due to how difficult it is to access.

Aim to take in incredible views of the Fairy Tower from Wangjing Tower (just a



few hundred metres away). It's a journey that will satiate even the most adventurous hikers, yet can be done without any ropes, ladders or other essential safety gear.

The hike to the Fairy Tower will leave you in awe of the Northern Barbarians' supposed determination to reach the capital; the mountains are nearly impassable on foot, let alone by horse, with sheer cliff faces on either side.

Getting there: Both the Fairy Tower and Wangjing Tower should be accessed via Tangjiazhai village, located in Beijing's Miyun district, 140km from downtown Beijing

DUSHIKOU

Dushikou stands seven meters tall in some spots. Constructed during the reign of Emperor Jiajing (1507-1567), this single-wall section stands seven meters tall in some spots - no small feat considering it was made by piling stones. It's located just across the road from the town of Dushikou, in Chicheng in Hebei province.

The piled-stone wall at Dushikou is unique, as many other sections of the Great Wall close to Beijing were constructed using kiln-fired bricks.

Dushikou is best visited in the summer, specifically July and August, when the rolling hills of the surrounding grasslands are peak green. Cool evenings make for perfect outdoor barbecue/bonfire weather.

Getting there: Thanks to all the infrastructure built for the 2022 Winter Olympics, the drive to Dushikou has been shortened by almost two hours. If you prefer not to drive, hop on a bus to Chicheng from the Liuliqiao Transport Hub in Beijing and take a 45-minute taxi ride to Dushikou. (Courtesy: cnn.com)

