

74 initiatives to boost financial sector

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The National Programme for Fiscal Sustainability and Financial Sector Development 'Estidamah', supervised by the Ministry of Finance (MoF), announced a detailed plan on Monday to empower the financial sector.

The initiative aims to bolster the financial sector, including banking, capital markets and insurance, thereby contributing to the economic and investment objectives outlined in Oman Vision 2040. It seeks to harmonise fiscal, monetary and economic policies effectively.

The comprehensive plan comprises 74 initiatives across six strategic pillars, supported by four enablers, with performance measured by ten strategic indicators until the end of 2025.

Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary General of MoF and Supervisor of Estidamah, emphasised that the plan is a continuation of the government's concerted efforts to improve the economy. These efforts have yielded positive results,



Estidamah aims to augment the private financial sector's role in offering financing options for diverse groups

MAHMOOD AL AWEINI

evident in the decline of the average oil break-even price in the state's general budget and a reduction in public debt, alongside an improved credit rating.

Jashmi noted that Estidamah is a national programme, launched via a Royal Directive for the transition from fiscal balance to fiscal sustainability. "The programme focuses on directing financial resources to-



(Supplied photos)

wards developmental projects with returns on investments, aiming to enhance economic development. Estidamah will collaborate with public and private sector entities to foster a developed and dynamic financial sector, contributing significantly to the gross domestic product."

The programme's goals include improving the state's fi-

nanacial indicators, enhancing readiness of the financial sector to accommodate changes in the economic and investment climate, and increasing private participation in financing options.

The plan involves two tracks - the first addressing Fiscal Sustainability Pillars, such as improving public spending efficiency, enhancing public fi-

nanacial management and strengthening non-hydrocarbon revenue, and the second focusing on developing the banking sector, capital market and the insurance sector.

The six strategic pillars include establishing a system for SME financing, directing financing towards sectors targeted in Oman Vision 2040, developing policies for investment and



Estidamah will collaborate with public and private sector entities to foster a developed and dynamic financial sector

NASSER AL JASHMI

green project finance, strengthening liquidity and local investor contribution in stock and debt markets, developing the insurance sector to support economic activities, and attracting foreign investments to reclassify Muscat Stock Exchange from a frontier to an emerging market.

The four enablers comprise developing fintech infrastruc-

ture and promoting financial innovation and entrepreneurship, promoting financial literacy and investment culture, updating laws and legislation to meet future requirements, and enhancing skills to ensure quality financial services.

Mahmood bin Abdullah al Aweini, Director of Estidamah, outlined several programme objectives, including completion of initiatives to improve the state's financial indicators and developing the financial sector to facilitate various development paths.

Aweini highlighted the programme's aim to augment the private financial sector's role in offering financing options for diverse groups, including SMEs, entrepreneurs, investors and emerging companies. He acknowledged the challenges identified in the study phase, such as limited financial services, low liquidity in the capital market, absence of investment opportunities in financial technologies and sustainable green financing, and shortage of specialised national human resources in the financial sector at leadership levels.

Comprehensive EA measures save the environment, wildlife

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) announced on Monday a series of ambitious projects aimed at protecting and sustaining natural resources and wildlife, as part of the 'Environmental Harvest for the Year 2023' press conference.

Under the patronage of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, the conference reviewed key initiatives and achievements in environmental work.

Amri highlighted the diverse achievements in environmental work at national and community levels. These achievements spanned policies, legislation, and various environmental sectors, including terrestrial, marine, and wetlands.

A notable initiative highlighted was the establishment of a gene bank for preserving the genetic assets of wild animals, aimed at ensuring their sustainability. In the National Biodiversity Survey Project, 714 sites covering 26,600km were surveyed, documenting 40 species, representing 75% of the targeted area.

EA reported a significant



(Image for illustrative purpose)

5.09% increase in the tree cover in Dhofar Governorate since 1994, indicating progress in combating desertification. Additionally, a campaign to combat invasive birds resulted in the elimination of 442,440 birds, including mynas and crows.

The Authority also undertook the 'Preparing a Map of Vital Land Corridors' project over two years, creating five vital corridor maps across Oman, including Musandam and Dhofar. The 'Annual National Programme for Monitoring Pollutants in the Marine Environment' project, covering 19 coastal sites, showed

slight increases in mercury levels in bottom sediments in Muscat and Al Wusta, and a small increase in chromium, aluminium, nickel, and iron concentrations in the northern sultanate, it was revealed.

The 'Marine Mammal Species Survey in Musandam Governorate' project aimed to identify species distribution, alongside awareness campaigns and workshops.

Eight projects were implemented in pollution control, including inventorying radioactive sources, national chemicals management, waste manage-

ment, and studies on mercury and hazardous waste. These projects aim to enhance environmental safety and awareness, EA stated.

The National Zero Neutrality Programme monitors key sectors like oil, gas, electricity, and transportation, stated EA, seeking a balance between environmental sustainability and socio-economic impact.

To enhance environmental monitoring, the Authority is introducing modern technologies and vehicle tracking devices to monitor fuel consumption and environmental efficiency of cars.

Finally, as part of the ambitious 10 million tree planting project, more than 132,980 trees have been planted, with over 11 million seeds sown. The EA also reported a total of 603 environmental violations and 518 complaints, indicating active enforcement of environmental regulations.

These initiatives underscore the Environment Authority's commitment to fostering biodiversity, promoting sustainable practices, and enhancing environmental health and monitoring across Oman.

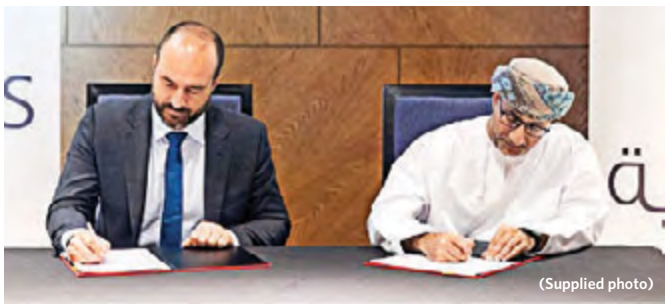
Sohar Port and Free Zone inks deal for \$210mn data centre

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move towards enhancing the digital economy and technological innovation, Sohar Port and Free Zone (SOHAR) entered into a land lease agreement with Green Data City on Monday. The collaboration involves establishing a US\$210mn high-capacity data computing centre dedicated to hosting, processing and mining data in Sohar Free Zone.

The project marks a substantial step in the field of advanced technologies within Sohar Free Zone. The facility is set to house approximately 20,000 servers from leading manufacturers, housed in specially prepared 40-foot containers. These containers will be equipped with dry cooling devices, ensuring sustainable and environmentally friendly cooling, crucial for effective data processing and other Internet computing operations, a press release stated.

Spread over 45,000sqm, the project is poised to be a vital resource for contemporary companies, offering essential infrastructure for data storage, processing and management. It represents a key step towards



(Supplied photo)

The facility is set to house approximately 20,000 servers from leading manufacturers, housed in specially prepared 40-foot containers

digital transformation, contributing to economic development and bolstering communication and information technology services in the region.

Oliver Ohnheiser, CEO of Green Data City, stressed on the significance of this collaboration, saying, "Our partnership with Sohar Free Zone is a strategic move for our company. Our infrastructure not only transforms SOHAR into a global hub for in-

novation but strategically reinforces our geographical diversification, adding significant value to our business footprint. This agreement reflects our commitment to pioneering solutions and ensures mutual success in the dynamic digital landscape."

On the occasion, Omar bin Mahmoud al Mahrezi, CEO of Sohar Free Zone and Deputy CEO of Sohar Port, said, "This strategic alliance with Green Data City aligns with our goals to attract leading companies in data hosting, processing and mining. It underscores our continuous commitment to technological innovation leadership and significantly contributes to achieving economic diversification and sustainable development. This agreement is a testament to the free zone's vital role in supporting Oman's digital future."



RO36mn Bandar al Khairan Resort construction begins



Oman in FIH Hockey5s World Cup quarter-final

GCC Secretary-General urges continued support for UNRWA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Jasem Mohamed al Budaiwi, Secretary-General of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), has emphasised the critical need of continuing financial assistance to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Amidst challenging times, he called on countries that have suspended aid to the agency to reconsider and resume their support promptly.

The call for renewed assistance comes as Estonia and Japan join other nations, includ-

ing Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, Finland, Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Iceland, in suspending funds to UNRWA. This decision follows allegations of 12 of its staff members participating in the Hamas-led October 7 massacre.

Simultaneously, the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Palestine, Francesca Albanese, made a statement on Sunday expressing concern that the suspension of funding by these countries is adding to the challenges faced by the Gaza Strip.

Francesca highlighted the impact of the funding suspen-



People seen queuing for food in the rain and cold at UNRWA shelter in Deir al Balah in Gaza (Supplied photo)

sion on millions of Palestinians. She accused the countries of contravening obligations related to the Genocide Convention, stating that this action punishes a vast population in need.

Budaiwi, in his statement, outlined the grave implications of withdrawing support for UNRWA. He pointed out that such a move would exacerbate the suffering of the Palestinian people and impede the agency's capacity to fulfill its responsibilities.

He specifically mentioned the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, underscoring the urgent need to support

children, women, hospitals and those injured in the conflict.

He commended the humanitarian and relief work carried out by UNRWA in the Gaza Strip, occupied Palestinian territories and refugee camps, and reaffirmed the GCC countries' unwavering support for the agency's noble goals.

Concluding his statement, he called on the international community and its institutions to intensify their efforts in providing comprehensive support to UNRWA, enabling it to continue its vital humanitarian work and alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Ayn film fest showcases Omani cinematic talent, concludes

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ayn Short Film Festival, organised by the Ministry of Information, concluded on Sunday with a ceremony held under the patronage of H E Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, where winners in three categories - short feature, documentary and children's films - were announced celebrating talent in Omani cinema.

Directed by Musa al Kindi, *Al Banjari* won the short feature film category. Ayman al Numani's *The Omani River* was lauded as the best documentary film, while the children's category was won by Yaqoub al Khanjari's *Burning Souls*.

In the children's film category, *In Her Place* by Wafa al Rashidiya won for best screenplay, while the award for best cinematography went to *Burning Souls*. Wafa also won the award for best actress, while Hood al Hinai was feted as best actor. Muhannad Mardi's skillful editing in *In Her Place* earned him the award for best editing, while Faisal al Shibli won best soundtrack for the film. Shahad al Balushi and Layan al



(Supplied photo)

Khatiria were winners in the best make-up artist category for *Burning Souls*.

In the short feature films category, Ismail bin Hilal won for best screenplay in *Uncertainty*, and Amjad al Nabhani won for best cinematography in *The Green Box*. Wafa was named best actress also for *Al Banjari*, with Raed al Ameri winning best actor for *Uncertainty*. The award for make-up went to Ibrahim al Jassasi and Rehab Adel for *Al Banjari*, and best editing went to Saeed al Wahaibi for *Rob*. Shibli claimed the best soundtrack also for *Al Banjari*.

In documentaries category, *The Irrigated Land* by Abdullah al Raisi won the best concept, Fahd al Maimani won best cinematography for *You Will Not Dive Alone*,

and Walid al Kharousi best soundtrack for *Magic of the Sands*. The Jury Award was presented to Maryam al Rasbiyeh for *Hajjin*.

Addressing the concluding ceremony, H E Harrasi emphasised the festival's role in the ministry's commitment to developing the film sector. He informed that the Ayn platform is a testament to this commitment, being the largest audio-visual library in Oman, attracting millions of viewers and listeners worldwide.

He also highlighted the concepts and vision of the young participating filmmakers, which reflect the social nuances and national ethos through their work.

H E Harrasi acknowledged the festival's role in enhancing the Ayn platform's presence locally, regionally and internationally.

Muscat revels in weekend action packed with sports

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Captivating sports enthusiasts of all stripes, Muscat witnessed an exciting January 26-27 weekend of major sports events. The city, now experiencing a pleasant winter, hosted several big-ticket sports events, including Muscat Marathon, FIH Hockey5s World Cup Oman 2024 and Oman Cricket league matches, offering a thrilling spectacle for sports enthusiasts.

Al Mouj Muscat Marathon 2024 concluded on Saturday, seeing a significant turnout of both domestic and international athletes. The marathon's different categories, including children's age group, witnessed enthusiastic participation, showcasing the city's vibrant athletic spirit.

Asif Shah, a seasoned marathon runner, shared his experience in the 10km race. "Participating in Muscat Marathon was a test of physical endurance, while celebrating diversity with participants of all ages and backgrounds coming together. The marathon, for me, was not just about the run but also about mental and emotional fulfillment. Crossing the finish line was not only a physical achievement but a mental victory," he said.



(Supplied photo)

The Hockey5s World Cup has raised the profile of the sport in Oman and the region. Oman is proving its ability to host major sporting events

MOHAMMAD SHAMI

Meanwhile, Oman Cricket hosted league matches in Amerat over the weekend, featuring eight teams.

Describing Oman's growing cricket scene, Peace Players bowler Monty Sunil Navani, said, "The cricket leagues here are a melting pot of talent, attracting both Omanis and expatriates. It's

a great platform for players to showcase their skills and passion. In my division, the enthusiasm and skill levels of the players are inspiring. Such leagues are pivotal in nurturing local talent and propelling growth of the sport of cricket in Oman."

Navani highlighted the significant role these leagues play in fostering talent, especially among expatriates from cricket-loving nations, while contributing to the development of cricket at the grassroots level in Oman.

The weekend also featured the FIH Hockey5s World Cup women's final in Amerat, where hockey enthusiasts witnessed an epic showdown between India and the Netherlands. The Dutch clinched the title with a 7-2 victory in an exciting final, scoring six goals in the first half itself.

Reflecting on the significance of Oman hosting the inaugural five-a-side global event, Mohammad Shami, a passionate hockey fan, said, "This hockey tournament has raised the profile of the sport in Oman and the region. Following Qatar's successful hosting of the football World Cup, Oman too is proving its ability to host major sporting events. Such tournaments significantly boost the popularity of sports in the GCC region."

The weekend's events not only provided thrilling entertainment but also highlighted the potential of Oman as emerging destination for international sports events. These events underscore the sultanate's commitment to nurturing local talent and its aspiration to become a notable sporting hub in the region.

Bahla Fort festival attracts 20,000 visitors

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Bahla Fort Winter Festival in the wilayat of Bahla, Dakhliyah governorate, concluded on Sunday evening after a six-day cultural extravaganza drawing over 20,000 visitors.

Ali bin Ahmed al Shaqsi, General Manager of the Bahla Fort Management and Operation Project, informed that the inaugural festival at the historic fort aligned with the objectives of Marasim Tourism Company, which manages the fort.

One of the goals of Oman Vision 2040 is encouraging private sector involvement in the management of archaeological and tourist sites.

Highlighting the festival's dual benefits, Shaqsi said it contributed to society by engaging local artisans and productive



(Supplied photo)

families in commercial activities, while stimulating domestic tourism. The festival attracted over 20,000 visitors, both domestic and international, underscoring its success as a significant tourist attraction.

The festival's vibrant atmosphere was enriched by the participation of over 25 families engaged in cottage industries.

They showcased their products in a dedicated area, highlighting the rich traditional crafts of the region. Government institutions, Omani Women's Association and specialised corners like Beit Harfati - focusing on pottery making - and Talid - dedicated to the ceramics industry - were among the participants. Active participation of these sectors re-

flected the unique cultural heritage for which the wilayat of Bahla is famed.

The festival concluded with a ceremony presided over by Sheikh Saeed bin Ali al Nuaimi, Wali of Bahla. In a gesture of appreciation, he honoured the participants, celebrating their contribution to the festival's success.

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MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby
give notice of tenders for the following projects

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Grade In Tender Board Registration	Last day to purchase tender documents	Last date of tender submission
1/2024	Supply	Modification Works For Replacement Of Chillers & Ahu At Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex At Bausher	Excellent	10/02/2024	11/03/2024
2/2024	Services	Renovation Of Grassed Football Pitch With Automatic Irrigation To Muscat Sports Club	First, Second	10/02/2024	11/03/2024
3/2024	Services	Construction Of Synthetic Turf Football Pitch At Muscat Sports Club, Muscat Governorate	First, Second	10/02/2024	11/03/2024
4/2024	Construction and Maintenance	Rehabilitation Work For Alslam Club - Shinas	Second	10/02/2024	11/03/2024

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site

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Muscat	29	18
Abu Dhabi	27	18
Doha	26	19
Kuwait City	19	12
Manama	23	17
Riyadh	27	13

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.31am
Sunrise	6.48am
Duhr	12.25pm
Asr	3.34pm
Maghrib	5.57pm
Isha	7.09pm

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AI summit focuses on innovation, investment

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The highly anticipated 'Oman AI Summit,' organised by Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology in collaboration with Tazeezai and Future Event, opened on Monday under the auspices of H H Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd al Said, Secretary-General of Council of Ministers.

The two-day event has drawn participation of over 200 artificial intelligence specialists and advanced technology experts from across the globe, alongside more than 40 eminent speakers. The summit's primary goal is to streamline investment and business establishment processes for foreign entities, thereby boosting investments in the AI sector and spotlighting Oman's competitive investment opportunities.

A key focus of the summit is on facilitating development and innovation in AI, encouraging new solutions and showcasing the latest technological advance-



The two-day 'Oman AI Summit' will consolidate Oman's global standing in the field of AI

FAISAL AL RAWAS

ments and strategies for AI investment.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of Board of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), emphasised the summit's role in shaping a future-oriented, smart digital environment and sustainable technical wealth in Oman. It aims to bolster the innovation, nurture skilled professionals and enhance national products in AI and future technologies, further consolidating Oman's global standing in the field of AI, he said.

In his address, Rawas highlighted the summit as a platform for AI professionals, executives and enthusiasts to exchange

ideas and insights on AI applications in everyday life. Strategic partnerships, underlining the concerted efforts of both public and private sectors, will enhance the knowledge economy. He added that the private sector's role in fostering technological industries will create new industrial sectors reliant on AI.

The summit also underscores the role of AI in solving complex problems, enhancing productivity and aiding in decision-making processes that promote business sustainability. These align with OCCI's strategic vision to support economic diversification, attract investments and expand business opportunities in line

with Oman Vision 2040, added Rawas.

Participants include experts from Oman's public and private sectors, and international AI and technology specialists. The summit will delve into three main areas: 'Artificial Intelligence and Governments', focusing on AI's role in national security, cybersecurity and government support for AI startups; 'Artificial Intelligence and the Business Environment', discussing AI in legal legislation, its impact on the digital economy and business innovation; and 'Artificial Intelligence and the Economy', addressing AI's implications in green hydrogen, a sustainable environment and logistics transformation.

Notable presentations will cover AI in healthcare, data analysis for improved decision-making and the global future of higher education in the technology era. An exhibition featuring a plethora of AI technologies and solutions, presented by a diverse group of AI experts and engineers, will be held alongside the summit.

Construction begins on RO36mn Bandar al Khairan Resort project

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The groundbreaking ceremony of the RO36mn Bandar al Khairan Resort was held under the patronage of H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, on Monday.

Spread over 189,000sqm, the resort is billed to be a major qualitative enhancement of Oman's tourism industry. It will feature 121 hotel rooms and an array of amenities, including various dining options, health and sports clubs, and an assortment of water activities.

H E Mahrouqi stated that the project is aligned with the ministry's vision to develop the unique natural features of Al Khairan. "This resort is integral to our efforts in developing tourism in Muscat governorate. It represents our commitment to enhancing our partnership with the private sector, providing tourist lands in sync with comprehensive tourism development plans."

The minister emphasised the resort's aim to cater to the expectations of both visitors and residents.

The ministry will ensure adherence to technical and engineering standards set for such resorts and will monitor the project's progress, he added. "This project is expected to foster community partnership and local value addition, opening up employment opportunities for Omani youth."

Mohammed bin Ali al Bar-



wani, Founder and Chairman of MB Holding Group, described the resort as one of the most promising projects in the tourism sector. "Designed to international standards while embracing Oman's natural beauty and heritage, this resort aims to set a benchmark in hospitality in Oman," he noted.

Musstir, the real estate and hospitality development company of MB Group, is committed to making this project a paradigm of excellence, incorporating a comprehensive vision of

social responsibility and creating 200 job opportunities with a 30% Omanisation rate in its initial phase, a press release stated.

The project also promises to benefit the local community, particularly small and medium enterprises in the Al Khairan and neighbouring areas. It is expected to provide opportunities for local craft businesses, agricultural and fishing product processing, and small tourism business owners, fostering sustainable partnership opportunities in the area.

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International Companies specialized in the field and registered with Tender Board, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date
PRE/23/064 Re-Call	Supply & Installation of Playground Equipment, outdoor Fitness Equipment at Golden Jubilee Walkway at Al-Mawaleh	05/02/2024	13/02/2024
PRE/23/231	Consultancy Services for Design of Multi-Storey Parking	17/02/2024	10/03/2024
PRE/23/281	Construction of Qantab Walkway	17/02/2024	10/03/2024
PRE/23/288	Supply of Road Marking Machine	17/02/2024	10/03/2024
PRE/23/292	Consultancy Services for Design of Ghala Village	17/02/2024	10/03/2024
PRE/24/010	Supply of Computers	17/02/2024	10/03/2024
PRE/24/019	Supply of Electrical Materials	17/02/2024	10/03/2024
PRE/24/026	Supply of Solutions Materials for MM Lab	17/02/2024	10/03/2024
PRE/24/027	Construction of Public Parks at Muscat Governorate	17/02/2024	10/03/2024

1- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2- Clarification and Support:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).

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Tender Announcement

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Tender No.	Description	Tender Fee (Nonrefundable) OMR	Tender Purchase deadline	Clarification deadline	Tender Submission Date			
TENDER/ 2024/01/ FIN/002	Life Insurance (Refer to Condition #1)	OMR 200	05/02/2024	11/02/2024	18/02/2024			
	Medical Insurance (Refer to Condition #1)							
	Workmen Compensation Money	OMR 30						
	Fidelity							
	Motor Comprehensive Insurance	OMR 50						
	Motor Third party Insurance							
	Contractors plans and Machinery	OMR100						
	Public Liability Insurance							
	Directors and Officers Liability							
	Property All Risks	OMR 60						
	Aviation Liability Insurance							
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The Conditions:

1- Insurance brokers are not allowed to participate in Medical and life insurance policies.

2- Collection of Tenders: Interested, specialized companies and establishments with CMA and a minimum of 7 years' experience in the same field.Bidders can collect the tender documents from the procurement department by sending a copy of the payment slip to procurement@almaha.com.om The tender documents will then be sent by email.Working hours 08:00 AM – 03:00 PM.

3- Bank Guarantee:The bidder should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value, with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG.

4- Offer Submission: Tender bid should be submitted a sealed envelope and addressed to the Chairman of Tender Committee, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG marked with tender number and subject. Other marks or any reference must not be printed outside the envelope. The exterior of the envelope containing the tender document must not reveal the identity of the bidder.

5- Submission Location: The bid should be deposited in the tender box at Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG head office located in Ghala before 01:00 PM on the submission date.

6- Any bid received after the specified date or if it does not meet the conditions will not be considered.

7- Each bid shall be signed and stamped with the signature of the authorized person.

8- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to accept, reject or cancel the tender without giving any reasons.

9- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to add or cancel some of the works mentioned in the tender if necessary.

10- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG is not bound to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without giving any reasons.

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BRIEFS

MSX Index marginally drops 0.1%

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Monday marginally decreased by 4.03 points or 0.1% to close at 4,591.89 points compared to the previous session.

The trading value on Monday stood at RO2.82mn, comprising a rise by 15.9%, compared to the last session which stood at RO2.43mn.

The report released by the MSX pointed out that the total market capitalisation inched up 0.02% to reach about RO23.84bn.

The report added that the value of shares bought by non-Omani investors reached RO109,000, comprising 3.88%. The value of shares sold by non-Omani investors reached RO1,050,000, comprising 37.17%.

The net non-Omani investment fell by 33.29% to RO940,000 on Monday.

Total investments in Khazaen Economic City reach \$1bn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Khazaen Economic City has witnessed a remarkable milestone as total investments in the city have exceeded \$1bn by the end of 2023, with the majority of investments originating from foreign investors.

Located in South Batinah Governorate, Khazaen Economic City stands as the first integrated economic city and free zone in the sultanate, developed through a collaboration between the public and private sectors.

In an interview last week featured in the latest issue of Duqm Economist, a quarterly magazine issued by Oman's Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), Eng Salim bin Sulaiman al Thuhli, CEO of Khazaen Economic City, disclosed that the total investments in Khazaen are expected to have reached approximately \$1bn by the end of 2023.

He emphasised the substantial interest shown by foreign investors in contributing to the city's growth, with foreign investments totaling around \$583mn, constituting 57.7% of the overall investment, while local investments stood at \$483mn.

"These investments are spread across four main sectors, with the industrial sector receiving \$345mn, the food sector \$273mn, the pharmaceutical



Investments in Khazaen Economic City are spread across four main sectors, with industrial sector receiving \$345mn, food sector \$273mn, pharmaceutical sector \$301mn, and logistics sector \$122mn

sector \$301mn, and the logistics sector \$122mn," Thuhli added.

Thuhli underscored that the considerable investments in Khazaen reflect the favorable investment atmosphere in Oman and the strong interest shown by both local and international companies. He praised the relentless efforts of companies operating within the city and the dedication of partners working diligently to achieve the city's objectives.

Strategic location
Describing Khazaen's location as strategically significant, Thuhli

highlighted its prime position along the Al Batinah Expressway. Situated just half an hour from both Muscat International Airport and Suwaiq Port, and approximately two hours from Sohar Port, the city plays a pivotal role in bolstering the movement of goods among Omani airports and ports, utilising the available storage facilities within Khazaen Economic City.

"This geographical positioning enables approximately 80% of Oman's population to access the city within a mere two-hour time-frame through an extensive

with both land and sea ports.

According to Thuhli, the city offers a comprehensive investment atmosphere and an appealing business environment for investors. He highlighted the city's diverse array of integrated investment sectors encompassing logistics, food, pharmaceuticals, industrial ventures, technology, business sectors, and clean energy, as well as supportive sectors within commercial and residential domains.

Thuhli emphasised that the high-quality projects within Khazaen Economic City serve as significant attractions for investors, including the Food City, the Khazaen Land Port, staff housing, the International Logistics Center, and the one-stop shop for licensing.

"The Food City encompasses a Central Market for Vegetables and Fruits within Khazaen. Meanwhile, Khazaen Land Port - the first international land port in Oman - offers comprehensive logistical solutions tailored for investors within the city. Also, the first comprehensive staff housing is currently under development within Khazaen."

"The future plan for Khazaen City incorporates the establishment of integrated housing units aimed at fostering a seamless blend of living, working, and entertainment aspects within the city, catering to all investors," Thuhli added.

Oman's refinery output rises 1.2% in 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Total production of refineries and petrochemical plants in Oman increased by 1.2% in 2023 compared to 2022, according to preliminary statistics released by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The production of M91 grade petrol witnessed a 13.7% increase to reach 15.7mn barrels by the end of December 2023, resulting in a 11.2% rise in domestic sales. However, the production of M95 grade petrol dropped by 25.6% to reach 11.04mn barrels as its sales also dropped by 3.9% to reach 12.09mn barrels.

Further, the production of diesel slightly decreased by 0.4%, reaching 32.4mn barrels, with domestic sales amounting to 14.35mn barrels. The production of jet fuel increased by 25.3% to 9.86mn barrels in 2023, while the production of liquefied petroleum gas went up by 13.9%, reaching 7.86mn barrels.

Oman's exports of M91 grade petrol reached 1.22mn barrels in 2023, while the exports of M95 grade petrol amounted to 580,400 barrels.



6 Omani startups selected for Cohort 3 of Omantel Accelerator Program

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omantel Innovation Labs on Monday announced the six startups selected for Cohort 3 of the Omantel Accelerator Program, following a rigorous selection process, which included bootcamps and interviews with experts.

Under the prestigious Omantel Accelerator Program, the startups will undergo an intensive six-month acceleration program, during which they will receive mentorship from both local and international mentors, as well as Omantel experts.

The Cohort 3 will consist of the following startups: Adeeb, a platform that supports teachers in creating interactive lessons for students using a library of ready-made graphical assets; Bidbid, a B2B Fintech and e-procurement platform that features live bidding and data analytics; Bon Plus, a SaaS-enabled B2B Marketplace for the hotel, restaurant, and catering Market; DarkSniper, an AI-driven cybersecurity platform that provides visibility into potential threats, predicts attacker behaviors, and halts network attacks in real-time; Decoil which

provides a suite of AI agents for task automation; and Decree, a digital platform to access Arabic and English language regional legislation.

In a press statement, Talal al Mamari, CEO of Omantel, said, "The Omantel Accelerator is an exciting and ambitious programme aimed at propelling the startup ecosystem in Oman to boundless horizons. We take pride in carefully selecting and supporting the most promising startups that have the potential to create innovative solutions for a better world. The startups from the first two cohorts have already made remarkable progress and we have full confidence that the new cohort will continue to make significant strides, walking

along the same path of success.

H H Sayyida Ghada al Said, Senior Manager of Omantel Innovation Labs said, "We are pleased to welcome the new cohort of innovative startups to the Omantel Accelerator. Our extensive selection process ensures that only the most promising startups are selected for our programme and they have all demonstrated exceptional skills and qualities that align with our ambition. We look forward to working with them to help them reach their potential."

The accelerator programme, which will take place within the Omantel Innovation Labs located in Omantel HQ in Madinat Al Irfan, will offer the selected startups a free coworking space within Omantel, access to international perks that includes a global network of over 100,000 mentors, corporates, and investors. Startups will also be assessed for potential investment by the Omantel Innovation Labs.

The Omantel Accelerator Program is one of the many initiatives offered by Omantel, through the Omantel Innovation Labs, to promote innovation and entrepreneurship in new and emerging technologies.

ahli Islamic launches Al Majd segment

Our Correspondent
Muscat

ahli Islamic, the Islamic banking window of ahlibank, on Monday launched its new Al Majd segment for upper mass customers. The launch event was held at ahlibank headquarters.

Al Majd, a service segment tailor-made for ahli Islamic's discerning upper mass customers, comes with a host of greatly rewarding benefits, fully aligned with the principles of Sharia. As an exclusive launch offer, customers will get 10% cashback on salaries as a onetime Hibba.

Customers who have a salary between RO1,000 - RO3,499 or who make a deposit of RO10,000 - RO34,999 can join the Al Majd segment and enjoy the host of offers and benefits, such as, access to 25 airport lounges across the globe up to six times a year, and a bonus of 2,000 pearl points as a joining bonus. Moreover, Al Majd also provides a special service desk



Noora Sultan speaks at the launch of Al Majd segment on Monday

made available for customers in selected branches for further assistance.

Speaking on the launch of Al Majd, Noora Sultan, AGM - Head of Retail Banking at ahli Islamic, said, "This new venture of bringing an exceptional banking experience that goes beyond the norm is a delight to us here at ahli Islamic. We strive to set benchmarks in what can be pro-

vided to our customers whilst catering to their specific needs. Al Majd further underscores our dedication to instill world-class services and products to our substantial portfolio, in conjunction with our commitment of serving our customers with grace and efficiency."

Al Majd provides customers with a uniquely designed platinum credit card and debit card,

fully secured with chip and PIN feature, in addition to the contactless tap and go technology. The card has worldwide acceptance at more than 30mn locations.

Notably, the bank also provides customers with a cheque book, as per their request. Internet and mobile banking services are at the disposal of Al Majd customers, alongside 3D-security verified by Visa for safe online transactions. The card has 24/7 direct access for withdrawals or purchases through POS terminals. Special finance rates and dedicated offers, among a host of products and services, are provided to Al Majd customers.

Noora further stated, "At ahli Islamic, we are confident that Al Majd will set a new standard in the Islamic banking scene. Serving our customers as the new harbingers of excellence is part of our objectives as we navigate the highly competitive Omani market."

Egypt exploring possibility of issuing bonds in UAE, Indian currencies: Finance Minister

Hong Kong - The Egyptian government is mulling over the possibility of issuing bonds for the first time denominated in Emirati dirhams, Indian rupees, and Hong Kong dollars.

The move is part of the ministry's pursuit of a diversified financing strategy, encompassing multiple markets, investors and financing tools.

In a statement to the Emirates News Agency (WAM) on the sidelines of the Asian Financial Forum in Hong Kong, the Egyptian Minister of Finance Dr Mohamed Maait highlighted ongoing talks with Christopher Hui, Hong Kong's Secretary for



Egyptian Minister of Finance Dr Mohamed Maait

Financial Services and the Treasury, with regard to prospects for issuing bonds in Hong Kong dollars.

The minister stated that these issuances contribute to diversifying the debt portfolio to include

different markets and currencies and attracting worldwide investors at low financing costs. He underscored the recent issuance of green bonds worth \$750mn and sovereign sukuk worth \$1.5bn.

Maait emphasised the Egyptian government's keenness to boost cooperation with the UAE, especially in taxation, economic, financial, and investment fields, across all sectors.

He added that the Egyptian Ministry of Finance is also committed to smoothing any tax or customs hurdles Emirati businesses might face in Egypt. This effort is designed to encourage

Emirati entrepreneurs to expand their businesses, invest more, increase productivity, and make the most of the competitive advantages offered by available opportunities.

Regarding the size of Emirati investments in Egypt, Maait stated that more than 1,700 UAE companies are investing around \$29bn in projects covering various sectors, including wholesale and retail, transport, storage, logistics services, financial sector, insurance, information and communication technology, real estate, construction, tourism, agriculture, and food security.

WAM

US Fed likely to hold rates steady this week

Jennifer Schonberger

The US Federal Reserve is widely expected to hold interest rates steady this Wednesday at its first policy meeting of 2024. But investors will be looking for any clues about when cuts could begin.

Will it be March, May or later? Markets may not get a clear answer. But Fed followers do expect central bank chair Jay Powell to begin preparing investors for an eventual loosening, even if he doesn't specify timing.

"This is the slow turning of the battleship of guidance where they slowly start to talk about rate cuts," said Luke Tilley, chief economist for Wilmington Trust.

The question of whether cuts will happen in March or May is currently the subject of intense debate on Wall Street as markets hang near record heights.

Investors began 2024 with a high degree of conviction that March was the time when the central bank would begin loosening monetary policy after the most aggressive campaign to cool inflation since the 1980s. Rates are currently at a 22-year high.

But traders began recalibrating that prediction following pushback from several central bank officials who pumped the brakes on market expectations for cuts in the first quarter of 2024.

The market probabilities of a rate cut in March have dropped to roughly 46%, per the CME



US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell

FedWatch Tool. That's down from as much of a 71% chance seen more than a month ago. The odds of a cut in May are roughly 51%.

Traders are also starting to re-

view downward their prediction of six rate cuts in 2024, which is twice as many as the median projection provided by all Fed officials in December. The bet now is that five cuts will happen in-

stead.

A 'topic of discussion'

These aggressive market predictions first ramped up in December when Powell used a press

conference following the Fed's last policy meeting to note that central bank officials had started the conversation of when to dial back policy restraints, calling it a "topic of discussion" and "a topic

for us looking ahead."

Falling inflation also encouraged these bets as key measures moved closer to the Fed's target of 2%.

Goldman Sachs chief economist Jan Hatzius forecasts that the Fed will most likely start cutting rates in March, citing Powell's statement from his December 13 press conference that the committee would want to cut "well before" inflation fell to 2%.

Hatzius also expects five cuts this year, in line with current market predictions.

predicts a total of five cuts this year.

Tilley bases his June prediction partly on a similar lag between when the Fed last started talking about hiking rates and then actually doing so in March 2022.

"We have to see how the data comes in and we'll just continue to see that slow turning of the battleship with communication and every little bit of data that comes in that supports the story and makes them more comfortable with inflation."

Traders are starting to revise downward their prediction of six rate cuts in 2024, which is twice as many as the median projection provided by all Fed officials in December

But Wilmer Stith, bond fund manager for Wilmington Trust, said he thinks Powell will try to walk back the number of rate cuts priced in by the market.

"He doesn't have to walk it back that much, but he wants [expectations] to be in the center so he can have room to move in either direction without causing as much of a disruption as if he was on one side or the other," said Stith. "That way if something happens he's neither that dovish nor that hawkish, he can pivot and address that."

Tilley of Wilmington Trust said he thinks the Fed will start prepping the markets for rate cuts in March and will begin actually cutting rates in June. He

Brett Ryan, senior US economist for Deutsche Bank Securities, predicts Fed officials will use this week's meeting to signal their coming pivot by tweaking language in the official statement from the central bank's Federal Open Market Committee.

What he expects is that Fed officials will change "in determining the extent of any additional policy firming that may be appropriate" to "in determining future policy adjustments" - essentially removing the word "any."

That tweak, he added, will remove the central bank's "strong tightening bias" and leave it with "a sort of neutral bias" - thus setting the table for future cuts.

(Source: Yahoo Finance)



China's international trade in goods and services rose to \$610bn in December 2023

China pledges to expand imports

Beijing, China - China plans to increase imports this year to share the business opportunities arising from its ultra-large market with the world, Commerce Minister Wang Wentao said.

"We will expand the imports of high-quality consumer goods, advanced technologies, important equipment, key components, energy and other resources, and agricultural products in short supply in China," Wang told a press conference in Beijing.

China will move to diversify import channels and streamline the process of importing, he added.

The country will continue to host the China Import and Export Fair, the China International Fair for Trade in Services and the China International Import Expo, support Chinese enterprises in attending exhibitions abroad, and further facilitate cross-border trips for businesspeople to create opportunities for face-to-face communication, Wang said.

In April 2023, the State Council issued a guideline on stabilising the scale of foreign trade and

optimising its structure, which has produced positive results, according to the official.

While continuing to ensure the implementation of the guideline, the Ministry of Commerce is now considering additional measures in this regard and trying to roll them out as soon as possible to complement the existing policies, Wang said.

Meanwhile, China's international trade in goods and services totalled 4.34tn yuan (\$610.6bn) in December 2023, up 2% year on year, official data showed Friday.

Exports of goods came in at 2.06tn yuan and imports hit 1.65tn yuan, resulting in a surplus of 409.9bn yuan, the State Administration of Foreign Exchange said.

Services exports totalled 228bn yuan last month, while services imports hit 407.6bn yuan, resulting in a trade deficit of 179.6bn yuan, according to the administration.

Tourism was the biggest services trade contributor, with a 171.1bn-yuan trade volume, the data showed.

xinhua

Indian economy likely to grow 7% next financial year: Ministry of Finance

New Delhi, India - The Indian economy is projected to grow close to 7% in the financial year 2024-25 that starts this April, said the Ministry of Finance in its monthly review report.

The strength of domestic demand has driven the economy to a 7% plus growth rate in the last three years.

India's economy grew 7.2% in 2022-23 and 8.7% in 2021-22. The Indian economy is expected to grow 7.3% in the current financial year 2023-24, remaining the fastest-growing major economy.

The robustness seen in domestic demand - private consumption and investment - traces its origin to the reforms and measures implemented by the government over the last 10 years, said the report issued by Department of Economic Affairs.

"The supply side has also been strengthened with investment in infrastructure - physical and digital - and measures that aim to boost manufacturing. These have combined to provide an impetus to economic activity



in the country," the review report noted.

"Accordingly, in financial year 2024-25, real GDP growth will likely be closer to 7%."

There is, however, considerable scope for the growth rate to rise well above 7% by 2030, the report added.

"The rapidly expanding digital infrastructure is continuously improving institutional efficiency. Technological progress is picking up pace with rising collaboration with foreign partners in the pro-

duction of goods and services. Decisive steps have been taken to speed up human capital formation. Finally, the overall investment climate is increasingly becoming more favourable with sustained enhancement in the ease of doing business," the ministry said.

In the next three years, India is expected to become the third-largest economy in the world, with a GDP of \$5tn, it asserted. India can aspire to become a \$7tn economy in the next six to

seven years (by 2030), it added.

"This will be a significant milestone in the journey to delivering a quality of life and standard of living that match and exceed the aspirations of the Indian people."

Firm GDP growth forecasts, inflation at manageable levels, political stability at the central government level and signs that the central bank is done tightening its monetary policy have all contributed to painting a bright picture for the Indian economy.

ANI



Biden pauses pending approvals of LNG exports

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden announced that he decided to temporarily pause all pending approvals of liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports amid climate change concerns.

"In every corner of the country and the world, people are suffering the devastating toll of climate change," he said in a statement released by the White House.

Biden said his administration will study the impacts of LNG exports on energy costs, the US' energy security, and the environment during this pause.

The president said the pause excludes "unanticipated and immediate" national security emergencies.

The White House said in a separate statement that the current economic and environmental analysis the department of Energy uses are roughly five years old and no longer adequately account for considerations like potential energy cost increases for American consumers, or the latest assessment of the impact of greenhouse gas emissions.

"Today, we have an evolving understanding of the market need for LNG, the long-term supply of LNG, and the perilous impacts of methane on our planet," it said.

Aanadolu Agency

Oil prices rise on increased Red Sea tension

Muscat - Oil prices started the week on a rise after air strikes between US forces and the Yemeni Houthi group continued over the weekend, fuelling concerns of a wider conflict in the region that could put oil supplies at risk.

The international benchmark crude Brent traded at \$83.30 per barrel in London, a 0.42% increase from the closing price of \$82.95 a barrel in the previous trading session on Friday.

The American benchmark, West Texas Intermediate (WTI), traded at the same time at \$78.38 per barrel, up 0.47%



from Friday's close of \$78.01 per barrel.

Tensions have escalated in the Red Sea amid Houthi attacks on commercial ships allegedly linked with Israel. The conflict in the region increased concerns about a wider conflict and supply

disruptions in the Middle East.

The US military said on Friday it shot down a Houthi anti-ship ballistic missile in the Gulf of Aden.

Meanwhile, data indicating strong economic activity in the US last week, the world's largest

oil-consuming country, supported upward oil price movements.

Analysts predict that the US Federal Reserve will keep the policy rate constant on Wednesday.

Market players will closely follow remarks from Fed Chairman Jerome Powell, which are expected to have an impact on asset prices.

Experts strongly believe that the Fed will start reducing interest rates at the May meeting, though uncertainties remain for March pricing.

Agencies

Oman Oasis celebrates winning ‘Oman’s Most Trusted Brand’ Award for 7th consecutive year

Oman Oasis, the leading drinking water brand in Oman, has been recognized as ‘Oman’s Most Trusted Brand’ for the 7th consecutive year since 2016.

The award was proudly received by Niels Bormans, Group CEO, The Zubair Corporation. This award reflects Oman Oasis’ commitment to providing high-quality products and services to its customers.

The company has consistently set a benchmark for excellence in the industry and has maintained its leadership position in the Sultanate of Oman.

Commenting on the achievement, N S S Subramanian, COO Bottled Water and FMCG, stated, “Receiving the ‘Oman’s Most Trusted Brand’ Award for the 7th consecutive year is a testament to our unwavering dedication to excellence and our leadership position in the Oman market. Oman Oasis has always been dedicated to providing the highest quality drinking water to our customers, and we take great pride in being recognized as the most trusted brand in the country.

“The results indicate a marked preference for the high standards we set and the hard work and



dedication of our entire team, who have consistently exceeded our customers’ expectations. We are grateful to the people of Oman for placing their trust in us, and we will continue to work hard to maintain this trust and deliver the best possible products and services to our customers on time, every time.”

The ‘Oman’s Most Trusted Brand’ Award is a highly coveted recognition in the Omani market, and Oman Oasis has emerged as the winner in the drinking water category. The award is the result of a rigorous evaluation process that involved over 900,000 online public votes to rate the brand’s reputation in the market.

Oman Oasis has been serving the Oman market for many years, and the brand has gained a reputation for providing pure, high-quality drinking water that is essential for a healthy lifestyle. The company continues to invest in technology and innovation to improve its products and services. It offers a portfolio of three premium drinking water products, including Oman Oasis - Balanced Drinking Water, Mai Alkaline - Alkaline Ionised Drinking Water, and Sifr - Sodium Free Drinking Water.



ESG Football Academy jubilant after Bahrain victory

ESG Football Academy U13 Boys were crowned Champions in Bahrain this weekend, registering yet another success for the academy.

The Boys flew the flag of Oman high winning the 5th round of the JPL GCC Cup series making it back-to-back wins for ESG having already won round 4 which was held in Muscat last December.

Eleven teams from across the GCC competed in Bahrain with ESG eventually lifting the Trophy beating Tekkers Academy of Bahrain 2-0 in the Final.

ESG Coach Haitham said, “It’s amazing what these Boys have achieved, and I’m absolutely delighted for them. They

deserve all the praise for they will get. It was a tough weekend in Bahrain playing 17 matches in 2 days and especially as we didn’t start to well.

“Credit to the boys they responded very well and raised their game on day 2 which enabled them to lift the trophy.

“We’ll continue working hard on the training field as there is always room to develop and improve.

“I’d like to thank Gulf Divers Oman for their belief in what we are doing in giving the kids these fantastic opportunities and life experiences and also our amazing loyal ESG parents who gave the team an awesome welcome home at Muscat Airport.”



National Museum signs National Records and Archives Authority for ‘Wosool’ management

The National Museum and the National Records and Archives Authority on Sunday signed an operating memorandum to implement the ‘Wosool’ system for managing electronic documents and records at the museum’s headquarters.

This is part of the first phase of activities for 2024 of the ‘Wosool’ project led by the National Records and Archives Authority in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology as a strategic partner in the project.

H E Dr Hamad bin Mohammed al Dhawyani signed an operating memorandum, the Chairman of the National Records and Archives Authority, and H E Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, the Secretary-General of the National Museum. This project is a central initiative in the digital transformation plan for the government sector, as the ‘Wosool’ system will serve as the central system for managing



The ‘Wosool’ will serve as the central system for managing electronic documents and records for government entities

electronic documents and records for government entities. The system aims to enable government entities to manage their documents and information efficiently, aligning with the relevant systems, standards, and best

practices in this field.

The system will enhance digital transformation in government entities by creating a secure environment for preserving and managing electronic documents and information specific to each

entity. Through this project, the National Records and Archives Authority aims to provide the technical tools to help entities manage their documents and information in a secure environment compliant with regulations and standards.

One of the notable challenges addressed by the ‘Wosool’ system is the organised handling of interconnected topics since their inception and their systematic categorisation based on the clas-

sification system and retention periods adopted by the entity.

The system will also contribute to improving government communication by facilitating the exchange of internal memoranda electronically and external correspondence with other entities, thereby reducing the time and effort wasted in government communication processes. A significant aspect highlighting this is the fully electronic signing of the memorandum, eliminating the need for printing and manual signatures.

‘Modern technologies are the cornerstone of our contemporary world, where technology has become the foundation for many transformative initiatives that have changed institutions’ shape, features, and priorities. The government sector in Oman is not immune to these changes, as evidenced by the launch of the digital transformation plan, which aims to empower government entities to leverage modern technologies in achieving their goals.’

Indian Embassy commemorates 75th Republic Day

To mark the 75th Republic Day of India, H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman hosted a National Day Reception on the evening of Sunday, at the Embassy of India in Muscat.

H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest.

H E Khalid Hashel al Muselhi, Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs in the Foreign Ministry; Pankaj Khimji, Advisor for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion; Faisal bin Abdullah bin Saeed al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI); Members of Majlis Dawla and Majlis Shura; senior government officials; Ambassadors resident in Muscat, as well as prominent members of



the Omani and Indian community attended the reception.

Chief Guest of the day along with Sayyid Nasr bin Badr al Buisaidi, Chief Postmaster General of Oman, and H E Narang unveiled a replica of the joint commemorative postage stamp released during the State Visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin

Tarik to India in December 2023.

Addressing the gathering, H E Narang spoke of India as ‘VISHWA MITRA’. He expounded upon India’s pivotal role on the global stage, embodying qualities of youthful energy, innovation, inclusivity, and rapid growth making India into an indispensable force for global good.



The evening also featured an elegantly curated Jugalbandi between Indian and Omani artists. Aishwarya Hegde and team performed Indian classical dance Odissi set to the tunes of Vande Mataram played by the Omani musical group ‘Scales Ensemble’, led by Yousef al Foori. ‘Scales Ensemble’ also enthralled the audi-

ence with harmonious tunes of various Indian melodies.

The festive atmosphere was elevated by a diverse array of Indian delicacies, offering guests a gastronomic journey through the rich culinary heritage of India. Life-size exhibits provided attendees with the opportunity to capture memorable moments.

Chery's hard-core technology facilitates building luxurious, intelligent cabins

Chery's flagship SUV, TIGGO 8 PRO MAX is a masterpiece of its core technology. Whether in terms of intelligent cabin within reach, highly efficient power or leading safety configuration, TIGGO 8 PRO presents the brand connotation of 'Technology Chery' to users with the most cutting-edge technology and the most comprehensive configuration.

When entering the interior of TIGGO 8 PRO MAX, the design of the duplex screen is particularly impressive with a size of 24.6 inches, integrated seamless design, curved structure, multi-touch, and smooth operation; it also features the W-HUD head-up display function, which can display various forms including speed, dynamic ADAS, navigation, phone, etc., and also allows users to be more focused, thus facilitating safe driving.

In addition, based on the large high-definition screen, TIGGO 8 PRO MAX also integrates 540° image function to achieve a dead-angle view of the outside environment, and achieves better vehicle machine interconnection by meeting the cell phone mapping of both Car play and Android Auto.

Besides, it possesses 50W high-power wireless charging function, which is the most applicable model in the same class, and the charging status can be



displayed on the centre control screen.

Moreover, it adds the considerate cell phone forgetting reminding function; additionally, the intelligent voice control function is also extremely practical, you can make phone calls, start music and wake up navigation by just speaking, so that the driver will no longer be bothered by the button operation and will not be distracted by the operation of the

organised an R&D team of more than 10000 talents worldwide, with its core R&D personnel coming from more than 10 countries, many of whom are top technical talents from well-known auto enterprises such as Jaguar Land Rover, GM and Ford. Up to now, Chery has obtained 17,000+ authorised patents, achieving the overtaking of European and American century-old brands.

TIGGO 8 PRO MAX has interpreted the connotation of 'technological luxury' as a flagship SUV and won high recognition from global users. With the accelerating internationalisation strategy of Chery, TIGGO 8 PRO MAX will be sold to more markets around the world as a flagship model, so that more users can experience the charm of intelligent technology.

Recently, Kantar and Google jointly released the 2023 Chinese Global Brand Builders Top 50. Chery is ranked as the best Chinese global brand builder in cars and 14th in the overall list and its brand power has achieved strong growth.

Chery Automobile took the first spot among all Chinese automotive brands in J D Power 2023 China Initial Quality StudySM(IQS).

In Oman, Chery vehicles are distributed by Saud Bahwan Group.

After more than 20 years of technology development, Chery has set up five R&D centres worldwide

Bank Muscat wins JP Morgan Chase awards for best straight-through processing rates

Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, was awarded by the global banking giant JP Morgan Chase; one of the top institutions that provide financial solutions to important corporates around the world, for its best-in-class straight-through processing (STP) rates for US dollar clearing operations.

"The bank is proud to be recognised for its best-in-class STP rate of 99.46% per cent on MT103 category and of 99.92% per cent on MT202 category for its excellent STP technique in 2023," Bank Muscat stated in a release.

Speaking about this outstanding achievement, Talal Abdul Hameed al Zadjali, Deputy General Manager - Operations, Bank Muscat, said: "The Bank prioritizes excellence in managing its operations and services, evident through consistent recognition from financial institutions and international banks. The awards received highlight the Bank's operational efficiency, particularly in electronic payment services, showcasing its commitment to technological advancements and delivering exceptional services to both individual and institutional customers.

"The bank is keen to adopt high efficiency standards in fund



transfers and transactions that minimise manual intervention, ensuring quality and preventing payment delays. We will continue to apply the latest practices that save time and effort of our valued customers."

The STP Award is a global testimony of Bank Muscat's

commitment to the highest levels of quality by meeting strict standards in the field of money transfer. It recognises the Bank's advanced internal system for sending commercial payments and money transfers, while maintaining the highest standards of the 'SWIFT' system and

achieving high rates of direct transfers.

The exceptional quality of the bank in providing payments and trade transfers has led to a high percentage of direct processing.

Bank Muscat has established more than 500 correspondent banking relationships across the world, most prominent of which is JP Morgan, Wells Fargo, Standard Chartered, BNY Mellon and Citibank.

The bank's performance has also been lauded by the international financial and banking community for decades, with prestigious awards from international publications like Global Finance, Euromoney, The Banker and EMEA Finance, amounting to 35 awards in 2023.

Vodafone Oman carrier billing from phone account

Offering yet another new digital experience with the start of the New Year, Vodafone Oman announced that customers are now able to pay for their favourite content and services from Apple via carrier billing directly from their mobile phone account.

This latest feature is available across all Apple products including App Store, Apple Music, Apple TV+, shows and movies on the Apple TV app, Apple Books and iCloud+.

The launch of the service will see Vodafone Oman take a dynamic new step in meeting its customers where they are, while developing its financial services offerings. Vodafone Oman BLACK postpaid and RED prepaid customers will have easier access to Apple content and services, further enabled by great value data from their packages.

New customers looking to join Vodafone Oman's digital-first experiences, can easily take advantage of a simple sign up to Vodafone BLACK Postpaid or RED prepaid packages through the My Vodafone App, which is available on all global app stores. For more details customers are invited to visit any of the 75 Stores and eStores or any of +3,700 distributors across Oman.



SPAR Oman expands footprint with 28th outlet

SPAR, a leading supermarket chain in Oman, proudly announces the inauguration of its 28th outlet located at Al Muna Gardens, Bousher.

The opening ceremony, officiated by Kanan Khimji, Director of Khimji Ramdas, witnessed the presence of SPAR Oman's management and distinguished guests.

With a steadfast commitment to excellence, SPAR Oman aims to serve the day to day needs of the catchment by offering diverse range of products. This includes fresh fruits, vegetables, and a comprehensive selection of food and non-food items to serve the day to day needs of the catchment. The expansive 540 square meters outlet is poised to redefine the shopping experience for the residents of Bousher.

Conveniently situated just behind Dolphin Village, the Al

Muna gardens outlet offers shoppers a hassle-free experience with ample parking space. Its strategic location ensures accessibility, making it a preferred destination for the discerning customers in Bousher.

Adding a delightful dimension to the shopping experience, the outlet features a dedicated area for Censa Coffee with indoor and outdoor seating arrangements. Here, patrons can indulge in an array of appetizers and savour freshly brewed Arabica coffee in a cozy setting.

"We are excited to bring SPAR's unparalleled shopping experience to the vibrant community of Bousher. This new outlet reflects our commitment to providing quality products and outstanding service to meet the evolving needs of communities residing in and around Boushar," said Kanan Khimji.

RAM's Investment Planning Programme ends

The Investment Planning Programme, organised by the Royal Academy of Management (RAM), in collaboration with the National Programme for Investment and Export Development (Nazdaher), came to an end after three days of intensive knowledge transfer.

Attended by 35 participants from various governor offices, free zones, Ministries and investment departments from multiple governing authorities,

the programme proved to be a pivotal platform for exploring and understanding potential investment opportunities across diverse sectors.

Commenting on the programme, Dr Fathia al Rashdi, Assistant Manager for Programme Affairs at the Royal Academy of Management, said, "It was an honour to collaborate with Nazdaher on this programme, and we commend their efforts and continued support.

"Through this programme, we aim to enrich participants' knowledge and skills with investments as well as showcase potential development opportunities in their respective sectors. The implementation of the programme reflects the Academy's and Nazdaher's joined commitment to foster collaboration, create innovative solutions, share expertise, contribute to the growth and development of the nation and attract investments in line with

Oman Vision 2040."

The programme was aimed at making a comprehensive examination of prospective investment avenues and development possibilities across sectors and governorates. It provided the participants with valuable insights into Nazdaher's way of developing, evaluating and analysing opportunities, as well as an in-depth overview of the National Investment Matrix.

In addition, participants en-

gaged in hands-on sessions, group discussions, and real-time case studies that provided practical insights into the complexities of investment analysis.

Khalid al Shuaibi, President of Nazdaher, said, "The depth of engagement and the exchange of valuable insights over these past three days have truly reflected Nazdaher's commitment to stimulate growth, enhance knowledge and harness expertise."



'We shall respond', says Biden after 3 US troops killed in northeast Jordan

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden vowed on Sunday to respond after a drone attack blamed on Iranian proxy groups killed three American service members and injured dozens more in northeastern Jordan near the Syrian border.

"We had a tough day last night in the Middle East. We lost three brave souls," Biden said during a Sunday lunch event at the Brookland Baptist Banquet Center.

"We shall respond," the president added after holding a moment of silence for the soldiers killed.

US Central Command confirmed that three service members were killed and at least 34 others were injured in the suicide drone attack but said the military expects the total number of injured 'to fluctuate as service members continue to seek follow-on care'.

Eight of those who were injured needed to be evacuated out of Jordan to receive additional medical care but 'are in stable condition'.

The command identified the location of the attack as a facility in northeastern Jordan known as Tower 22 of the Jordanian Defence Network. Roughly 350 troops are stationed there. Jordanian officials previously said the attack was not on their soil but in a border area in Syria outside of the control of the Assad regime.

Multiple reports said Tower 22 serves as a logistic hub for Al



US President Joe Biden

US Central Command confirmed that three service members were killed and at least 34 others were injured in the suicide drone attack

Tanf Garrison, which is located across the border in Syria.

The fatalities are the first amid months of attacks by Iranian-backed groups in Iraq and

Syria that began following Israel's war on the besieged Gaza Strip in October.

The Pentagon declined to provide an exact location for the

attack but said that 'additional information will be provided as it becomes available'.

Multiple reports citing anonymous sources said the attack hit a military installation called Tower 22 inside Jordan across the border from the Al Tanf Garrison in Syria.

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said neither he nor Biden will 'tolerate attacks on Ameri-

can forces, and we will take all necessary actions to defend the United States, our troops, and our interests'.

Biden has vowed to 'hold all those responsible to account at a time and in a manner of our choosing'.

Iraqi group claims responsibility

Meanwhile, an Iraqi resistance group has claimed responsibility for the attack. The group, called Islamic Resistance, stated that it launched an attack on the 'Ash Shaddadi and Rukban bases in Syria, as well as the Zvulon naval facility in occupied Palestine, in response to the massacres committed by the Zionist entity (Israel) against our people in Gaza'.

The group added that it will continue its attacks on the 'strongholds of the enemies'.

Iran refutes involvements

Iran's Foreign Ministry, meanwhile, refuted the claims of Tehran's involvement in the attack, and said resistance groups decide and work on their own principles and priorities as well as the interests of their country and people, Iran's state news agency, IRNA reported.

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Nasser Kanaani, warned that the statements and non-constructive actions of some Western officials are threatening regional and international peace and stability

"As we have clearly stated before, the resistance groups in the region are responding the war crimes and genocide of the child-killing Zionist regime and that they do not take orders from the Islamic Republic of Iran. These groups decide and act based on their own principles and priorities as well as the interests of their country and people," he underlined.

Additionally, Iranian Minister Kanaani advised the West to condemn the crimes of the occupying Israeli regime and work to facilitate humanitarian aid to Gaza rather than making baseless accusations against Iran, IRNA reported.

This comes as Kanaani lashed out at British Foreign Secretary David Cameron for his anti-Tehran rhetoric and unfounded claims.

Kanaani has called baseless the UK accusation that Iran has been involved in operations by resistance groups in the region.

"These claims are made with specific political goals to reverse the realities of the region and also indicate that they are influenced by third parties, including the child-killing Zionist regime," Kanaani noted.

Cameron has posted on X, in which, he condemned the drone attack but reiterated that Iran is involved in operations of resistance forces.

"We still urge Iran to reduce tensions in the region", Cameron added in his post.

Agencies

2 killed, 2 cops injured in Florida shootout

Florida, US - Two people including the suspect have been killed while two police officers have been injured in a Sunday shootout in Palm Bay, Florida, CNN reported.

The shooting took place after officers responded to a domestic disturbance call, according to local authorities.

Upon arrival, the two officers encountered an armed 24-year-old man, Palm Bay Police Chief Mariano Augello said during a Sunday news conference.

An exchange of gunfire occurred between the officers and the man, the police said. According to Augello, the suspect fled the scene after shooting at the officers.

"Our officers did what they were trained to do. And that's to neutralise and stop a threat to our community," the chief said. The suspect was killed after engaging the officers 'with lethal force', Augello said, as per CNN.

"As a result of the (suspect's) direct actions, another victim that I will not name at the moment is also deceased," he said.

The two officers who were shot are being treated 'at a local hospital; they are going to survive', Augello said.

ANI



A Chinese diplomatic team holds a Chinese national flag-raising ceremony in the Republic of Nauru on Monday (Xinhua)

Chinese flag raised in Nauru after 19 years

Yaren, Nauru - A Chinese national flag-raising ceremony was held on Monday in Nauru by a Chinese diplomatic team, marking the first time in nearly 19 years that the five-star red flag has been raised in the Pacific island country.

The ceremony was held by the team responsible for reestablishing the Chinese embassy in Nauru in a compound that also houses their temporary offices.

China and Nauru are naturally complementary and have great

potential in bilateral cooperation, Wang Xuguang, the diplomatic team head, told reporters. "Going forward, two sides should strengthen alignment of their development strategies, strive to find common ground for cooperation, and carry out projects."

The Nauruan government issued a statement on January 15, announcing that it recognises the one-China principle and is willing to resume diplomatic relations with China.

Xinhua

Alexander Stubb, Pekka Haavisto enter Finland's presidential election finals

Helsinki, Finland - The presidential candidate for the National Coalition and former Prime Minister Alexander Stubb will face the independent Green candidate, former Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto, in the second round of Finland's presidential election on February 11.

According to the preliminary calculation of all the votes published by the Ministry of Justice on Sunday night, Stubb received 27.2 per cent support, followed by Haavisto with 25.8 per cent. Jussi Halla-aho, candidate of the Finns Party and speaker of the Parliament of Finland, garnered 19 per cent support.

Since no candidate received more than half of the votes on Sunday, a second round of voting will be between the two candidates who received the most votes in the first round, namely Stubb and Haavisto.

The voter turnout for the first round on Sunday reached 74.9 per cent, compared to 69.9 per



Pekka Haavisto (left) and Alexander Stubb attending a media interview in Helsinki, Finland, on Sunday (Xinhua)

cent in the 2018 presidential election. A presidential election is held in Finland every six years.

Both Stubb and Haavisto refrained from giving policy statements on Sunday night regarding

the final campaigns.

Speaking about campaigning with Haavisto in the second round, Stubb said there will be a civilised discussion about challenging foreign and secu-

rity policy issues regardless of the opponent.

Describing the first-round voting as a very good result, Haavisto acknowledged some disagreements with Stubb but

According to the preliminary calculation of votes published by the Ministry of Justice on Sunday night, Stubb received 27.2% support, followed by Haavisto (25.8%)

declined to specify.

He stressed that they share similar views on major security policy issues.

As supporters of seven other presidential candidates must now choose between Stubb and Haavisto, pre-first-round polls indicated that Stubb would likely win with 59 per cent against Haavisto's 41 per cent in the second round.

Xinhua

Car belonging to Kosovo's Serb-born mayor Gorski Guric set ablaze

Belgrade, Serbia - Kosovo's Serb-born Mayor Gorski Guric's car was set on fire early on Sunday by unidentified individuals, police said.

Kosovo police said a plastic bottle and a piece of cloth smelling of gasoline were found next to the vehicle's engine.

Police launched an investigation and the relevant prosecutor was informed.

In 2023, more than 10 vehicles belonging to Kosovo Serb employees of Kosovo institutions that had Republic of Kosovo (RKS) license plates were set ablaze by an unidentified person or persons while parked.

Kosovo Serbs launched a petition on Wednesday to dismiss four Albanian mayors in northern municipalities of Kosovo.

Thousands of local Serbs gathered at the sports hall in North Mitrovica to sign a petition to dismiss Mayor Erden Atiq.

Sanja Krtinic, one of the initiators of the petition, told reporters that Atiq was illegally elected and did not represent the majority.

Atiq was elected along with three other mayors in four Serb municipalities after Serbs boycotted elections in 2023.

A total of 3,640 signatures are required to initiate her dismissal.

The signing of a petition also



Kosovo police said a plastic bottle and a piece of cloth smelling of gasoline were found next to the vehicle's engine

started on Wednesday for the Leposavic municipality. No information was given about Zvecan and Zubin Potok municipalities.

Northern Kosovo's Serb-majority area has been the scene of unrest since last April, when ethnic Serbs boycotted elections followed by protests against the election of ethnic Albanian mayors. The Kosovo government issued an administrative order to allow the removal of municipal mayors from office through a petition process.

The Serb List, a minority political party, is leading the petition process. The general rule is that 20 per cent of voters in the mu-

nicipalities in question must sign the petition for the removal of the mayor.

The petition will then be sent to the Central Election Commission, and after it is verified, the referendum process on the removal of the mayor, which will require a vote of 50 per cent plus one, can begin.

The candidates for minority Albanian political parties won extraordinary local elections on April 23 last year in four municipalities of northern Kosovo - Zvecan, Zubin Potok, Leposavic and Northern Mitrovica - after Serbs boycotted the elections.

Anadolu Agency

UN agency school in Gaza shelled; 10 dead

UNRWA school was sheltering hundreds of displaced in Al-Rimal neighbourhood west of Gaza City

Gaza City, Palestine - At least 10 Palestinians were killed and 15 others injured on Monday as Israeli forces shelled a UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) school sheltering hundreds of displaced people in the Al-Rimal neighbourhood west of Gaza City.

Palestinian medical sources at Al-Shifa Medical Complex reported that the Israeli army last night targeted the Al-Rimal neighbourhood with airstrikes and artillery in the most intense attacks in over a month following the withdrawal of military vehicles from the neighbourhood in mid-December.

Israel has launched relentless air and ground attacks on the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack by Hamas last October.

The onslaught has killed more than 26,000 people, mostly women and children, displaced 85 per cent of the blockaded enclave's population, and created conditions for famine. Israel says 1,200 people were killed in the initial Hamas attack. The International Court of Justice, in its interim ruling in the genocide case filed by South Africa, ordered Israel to prevent acts of genocide in Gaza and enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians.

Tel Aviv also has to submit a report to the ICJ on all measures taken to give effect to this order within one month.

Paramedic assaulted, detained in Jenin
The Israeli army on Monday as-



Israeli army targeted the Al-Rimal neighbourhood with airstrikes and artillery in the most intense attacks in over a month (Anadolu Agency)

The Israeli army on Monday assaulted and detained a Palestinian paramedic in the city of Jenin in the northern occupied West Bank

saulted and detained a Palestinian paramedic in the city of Jenin in the northern occupied West Bank, witnesses told Anadolu.

According to witness accounts, the action against Jamal Qandeel, who works for the Palestinian Medical Relief Society, a medical charity, was taken during a military raid. Activists also shared a video of the as-

sault on social media. During the raid, the Israeli army stormed several homes, and detained a number of civilians. Tensions have been running high across the West Bank since Israel launched a deadly military offensive against the Gaza Strip.

Japan to halt funding
Meanwhile, Japan has joined

the US, UK and other Western nations to halt funding to the UNRWA over Israeli allegations that some staffers of the humanitarian organisation were involved in the October 7 offensive by Hamas.

The Foreign Ministry in a statement late on Sunday said it decided to halt 'additional aid for the time being while UNRWA conducts an investiga-

tion into the matter and considers measures to address the allegations'.

Tokyo, however, acknowledged that the agency 'plays a crucial role' in providing essential services such as health and medical care, education, welfare, and food assistance to millions of Palestinian refugees in cooperation with the international community.

"Especially in the Gaza Strip, where the humanitarian situation is deteriorating further, UNRWA plays a vital role in delivering essential humanitarian assistance to each and every resident," it said.

So far, the US, Italy, Australia, Canada, the UK, France, and Finland have all decided to suspend funding to the UN agency. Anadolu Agency

Cease-fire negotiations between Israel, Hamas advance, says IBA

Jerusalem - Progress has been made between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas in negotiations on an exchange of hostages, the Israeli Broadcasting Authority reported on Sunday.

This follows the conclusion of a summit on Sunday in the French capital Paris with the participation of Israel, the US, Egypt and Qatar.

"The Paris summit between Israel, the United States, Egypt and Qatar on the negotiations for the exchange of hostages with Hamas has ended, and there is progress in the talks," the broadcasting authority quoted an unnamed Israeli political source as saying.

"The summit discussed a plan to release Israeli hostages in stages, while there are still gaps in demands between the conflicting parties (Israel and Hamas)," the source noted.

"The parties in the talks discussed a cease-fire (that would last) for approximately two



months in exchange for the release of about 100 Israeli hostages. Priority would be given to children, women and the sick while Israel releases a large number of Palestinian prisoners," the source added

Israel was represented at the summit by the head of the Israeli spy agency Mossad, David

Barnea, and that of Israel's domestic security agency Shin Bet, Ronen Bar, according to the broadcasting authority.

Later, the office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a brief statement that 'the intelligence summit in Europe - with the participation of Mossad Director David Barnea, ISA Director

Ronen Bar, Maj.-Gen. (Res.) Nitzan Alon, the Director of the CIA (William Burns), the Prime Minister of Qatar (Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani) and the head of the Egyptian Intelligence Services (Abbas Kamel) - concluded a short while ago'.

Anadolu Agency

Ethiopia's PM Abiy Ahmed gets UN food and agriculture medal

Mogadishu, Somalia - Ethiopia's prime minister on Sunday was awarded the prestigious UN Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Agricola Medal in Rome.

Abiy Ahmed was awarded for his government's vision, leadership, and commitment to food security and nutrition as well as the pursuit of innovative solutions in wheat self-sufficiency, according to a statement issued by his office on Sunday.

The Agricola Medal honours 'distinguished' personalities for their commitment and support to the promotion of sustainable food production, world food security, and international cooperation. In a brief statement after the ceremony in Rome, Ahmed expressed his gratitude to the organisation for 'bestowing the prestigious Agricola Medal for our efforts towards the attainment of food security'.

He said his government's focus on high-value and indus-



Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed

trial crops is 'yielding promising results and we are committed to our food sovereignty path'.

The award comes as the Horn of Africa nation is witnessing one of the worst droughts in decades, as close to four million Ethiopians need urgent food assistance.

Ethiopia's Disaster Risk Management Commission said earlier this month that the situation had deteriorated significantly due to malnutrition rates and severe water scarcity coupled

with a surge in disease outbreaks. More than 860 people have died in the country's northernmost Tigray region since September 2023 due to hunger, according to the Tigray communication bureau.

Getachew Reda, the Tigray regional administration interim head, said in December that the situation is a 'catastrophe' comparable to the deadly 1984 famine in Ethiopia that left millions dead.

Anadolu Agency

Pope Francis says his greatest fear is military escalation in Gaza

Rome, Italy - Pope Francis said his greatest fear is military escalation in Gaza, saying the conflict that began last October 'is dramatically broadening'.

"There were the Oslo accords, so clear, with the two-state solution. Until that agreement isn't applied, real peace remains distant," he told Italian daily la Stampa in an interview published on Monday. "The conflict can further worsen the tensions and violence which afflict the planet."

The pontiff, however, said he is moderately hopeful on the meetings happening behind the scenes to reach an agreement between the two factions at war. "A truce would already be a good result," he said.

Asked about what the Holy See is doing in this phase of the war between Israel and Hamas, he said Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, is a key figure in the Vatican's efforts in the area.

"He is great. He is making



Pope Francis, however, said he is hopeful on meetings behind the scenes

good moves. He is trying to mediate with determination," he said.

The Pope added that Christians and the people of Gaza - not Hamas - have the right to live in peace and that his other priority is the return of the Israeli hostages held in the enclave.

He said he holds daily video calls with the Christian parish in Gaza, which hosts around 600 people.

"We see each other on Zoom, I speak to the people. They are

going on with their lives every day while facing death."

Tensions in the Middle East are high with several overlapping crises. Besides Israel's war on Gaza and its exchange of fire with Hezbollah in Lebanon, Houthis are targeting Israel-linked commercial ships in the Red Sea in support of the Palestinians, and the US and allies are conducting retaliatory strikes.

Attacks on US forces in Iraq and Syria have also increased.

Scholz, Sisi discuss humanitarian efforts

Meanwhile, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has discussed the humanitarian efforts for Gaza in a phone call today with Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, a government spokesman said on Monday. Scholz reiterated that the German government believes that a two-state solution is the right prospect for Palestinians and Israelis to live in peace and security.

Anadolu Agency



Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu

Maldives: Motion to be submitted to impeach President Muizzu

Male, Maldives - The main opposition party of the Maldives, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), which holds a majority in Parliament, has gathered enough signatures to submit a motion to impeach Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu, Maldivian local media, The Sun reported on Monday.

It reported quoting a lawmaker from the MDP, that the MDP in partnership with the Democrats have gathered signatures for an impeachment motion.

A total of 34 members, including representatives from both the MDP and Democrats, have given their support to the motion for the impeachment of the president that was disrupted yesterday over chaos in the Maldivian parliament, according to Adhathu, an online news portal in the Maldives.

The Sun further reported that the MDP had decided it will deny approval to Ali Ihusan, the home minister, and Mohamed Ghassan Maumoon, the defence minister, if government lawmakers continue to disrupt the Parliament.

Meanwhile, after a skirmish between political leaders inside the Maldivian Parliament, heavy police arrangements have been made to tighten the security in the parliament ahead of Monday's session, according to Adhathu.

In a video shared by the media outlet, police personnel were seen assembling outside the Parliament complex carrying protective shields.

Earlier on Sunday, the Maldives Parliament witnessed violence when government MPs (PPM/PNC party) disturbed the proceedings of Parliament and the Speakers.

A key vote on parliamentary approval for the Muizzu govern-

ment was scheduled on Sunday.

As dramatic visuals surfaced on social media from Male, a fight between MDP MP Isa and PNC MP Abdullah Shaheem Abdul Hakeem was seen.

According to Adhathu, one video showcased Shaheem gripping Isa's leg and the two falling together, whereas another visual that went viral on social media showed Isa kicking Shaheem's neck and pulling his hair.

The footage also shows other members pushing Shaheem out of the area. A member of parliament was brought to an ambulance after suffering injuries, the local media reported.

After a skirmish between political leaders inside the Parliament, heavy arrangements have been made to tighten the security

Notably, the ministers' approval was slated for 1:30pm. However, several PNC members barricaded the House and disrupted the session.

The demonstrators said that accepting the ministers would stymie progress, as they demanded the Speaker of Parliament to quit.

The ruling coalition parties, the PNC and the PPP, released a statement portraying the ministers' refusal as an impediment to the delivery of public services, according to Adhathu.

However, Chief Advisor to Muizzu and PNC Chairman Abdul Raheem Abdullah stated that the ministers have the right to be reappointed even if they are not authorised.

ANI

End of tensions: Pakistan, Iran to turn borders into trade hubs

Islamabad, Pakistan - Pakistan and Iran on Monday agreed to turn their border areas into 'trade hubs', marking an end to tensions over airstrikes in each other's territories earlier this month.

The agreement was reached during a meeting between Pakistan's Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who arrived in the capital Islamabad on Sunday night on a day-long visit.

This was the first meeting between the top diplomats of Pakistan and Iran to discuss the situation after cross-border airstrikes, earlier this month.

The visit comes after the two countries recalled their ambassadors and downgraded diplomatic ties.

The airstrikes that killed 11 people from both sides, were initiated by Tehran, drawing a similar response from Islamabad.

Addressing a joint news conference, Jilani said the meetings of the 'high-level' mechanism will be held regularly and alternatively in both countries to oversee the progress on the matters the two sides have agreed. He added that liaison officers from both sides will be deployed in Pakistan's bordering district of Turbat and Iranian city Zahidan to implement the existing security agreements.

Apart from security and terrorism related issues, he said the two countries have also agreed to expand bilateral trade,



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especially expediting the establishment of five border markets.

The two countries inaugurated the first border market in May last year. The Mand-Pishin Border Sustenance Marketplace is one of the six border markets planned.

Terrorists backed by '3rd countries'

Amir-Abdollahian, for his part, said there was 'no doubt' that militants located in the border areas of Pakistan and Iran were 'led and supported by third countries'. He said the two sides have

agreed to take action against the terrorists in their respective territories, and turn the border areas into trade hubs.

Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity are as important for Iran as its own, he said.

Eulogising Islamabad for its 'strong and steadfast' support to the people of Gaza, he said the two countries will continue to support the Palestinians' resistance. Earlier, the two countries held a delegation-level meeting at the Foreign Ministry.

The two countries agreed to work toward promoting the 'mutually desired' goals of peace and

prosperity, based on mutual respect and a collective approach to address common challenges.

During the meeting, according to a statement from Pakistan's Foreign Ministry, the two top diplomats discussed bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and Iran.

They underscored the importance of 'robust dialogue and cooperation as the pathway for a positive, forward-oriented and upward trajectory in bilateral relations'. The visiting foreign minister will also meet with Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar.

Anadolu Agency

India: Polls for 56 Rajya Sabha seats on Feb 27

New Delhi, India - The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Monday announced elections for 56 Rajya Sabha seats in 15 States, the polls for which will be held on February 27.

The ECI conveyed the information in a Press Note with the subject 'Biennial Elections to the Council of States to fill the seats of members retiring in April 2024'. As per the official note, the term of office of 56 members of the Council of States elected from 15 states is due to expire on their retirement in April 2024.

The highest number of members, ie 10, will be retiring from the state of Uttar Pradesh on



A file photo of Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar with the election commissioners (ANI)

April 2, said the press note.

Both Maharashtra and Bihar have six members retiring on April 2. Meanwhile, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh will each have 5 members retiring on the same date. Both Karnataka and Gujarat will witness the retirement of four members.

According to the press note, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, and Rajasthan, each have three members retiring. While members from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are retiring on April 2, the members from Odisha and Rajasthan are retiring on April 3.

ANI

LOVE YOU SNOW MUCH



Tourists enjoy as the fresh snowfall breaks the two-month-long dry spell in Kashmir Valley in Gulmarg, India on Monday (ANI)

Ukrainian President Zelensky warns of World War III risk

Berlin, Germany - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has called for stronger military support from Western countries, warning that if Ukraine cannot defeat Russia, the conflict would escalate into a third world war.

Speaking to German media, Zelensky said Chancellor Olaf Scholz has better understood the real nature of the threat following their meeting in Berlin last year, and the Berlin has started to increase its military support.

"My impression is that Chancellor Scholz has understood that Putin is not just a name, but a threat, and not just a threat to Ukraine," Zelensky said about the Russian president, during his interview with the public broadcaster ARD.

"I think Chancellor Scholz senses that if we don't hold out, Russia will move closer to Germany," he said, adding that European countries and Baltic nations could be Russia's next target



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky

after Ukraine.

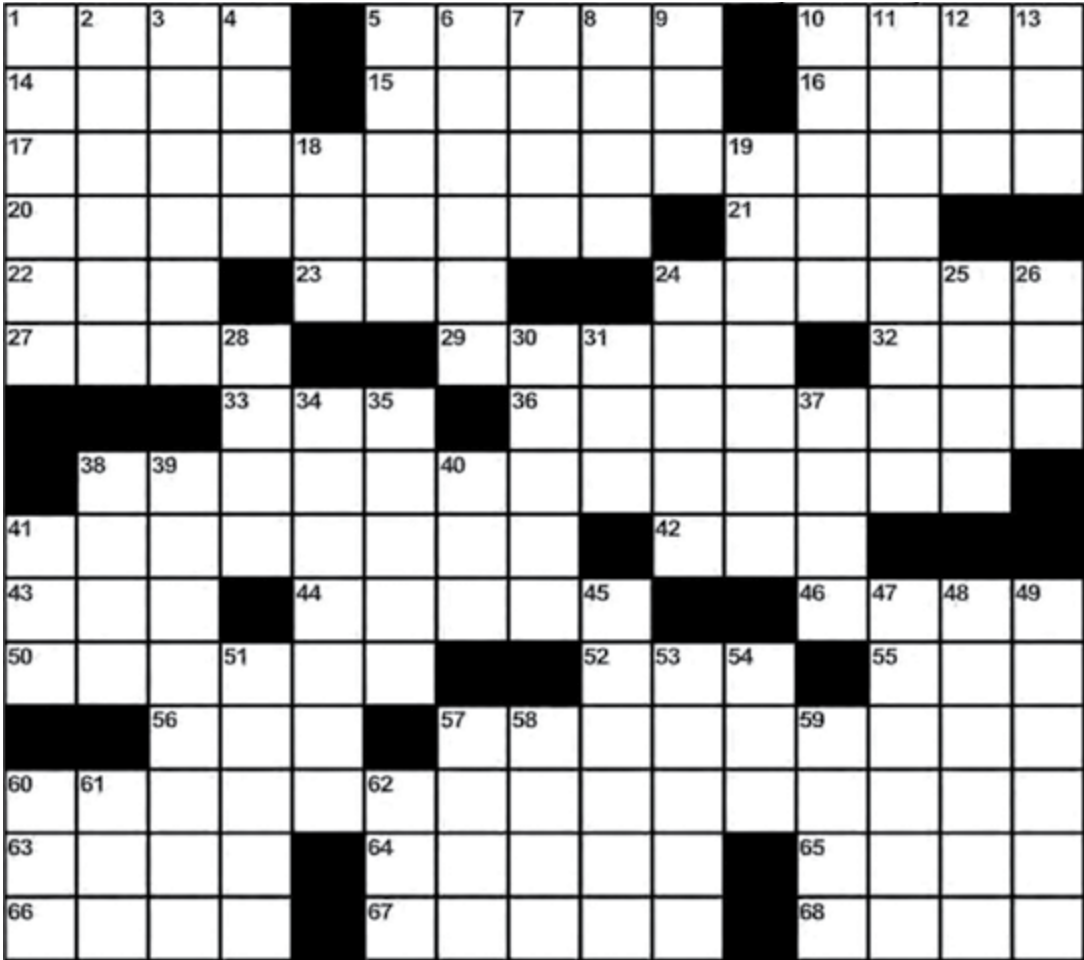
"... Chancellor Scholz understands that there is such a risk, and that is definitely the third world war. If Russia hits this or that NATO country, it would in any case mean the beginning of the third world war," he said.

Zelensky renewed his call on

Western countries to increase their support for Ukraine, and said he expects Germany to play a leadership role in Europe with regards to military support for his country. Russia started its 'special military operation' in Ukraine in February 2022.

Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Advertising award
5) States frankly
10) Cookbook command
14) Rear end
15) Plains dwelling of old
16) Prefix with "postale"
17) Become a broke bloke
20) Kind of park
21) It buzzes around flow-
ers
22) Heavy drinker
23) Chicago-to-Orlando
dir.
24) Small restaurant
27) Couple no more
29) "Bolero" composer
32) Used to own
33) Chip you can't eat
36) Eastern or Mountain
38) One job for a plumber
41) How to get news
42) Capitol Hill pol
43) Food scrap
44) Beauty's unlikely love
46) Course taken after
trig, often
50) It features a conve-
nient sink
52) Call, as a game, briefly
55) Comic strip cry
56) First word of a threat
57) Weed out

- 60) Perform a certain DIY
auto chore
63) Glasgow miss
64) Egg-shaped
65) Dispatched
66) Little ones
67) Ballyhooed
68) Industrious insects
DOWN
1) Pants fold
2) Awkward goof
3) Attribute to a cause
4) Makes a choice
5) Molecule components
6) Surface layer
7) Instruction from a den-
tist
8) Toward the setting sun
9) Emulate a seamstress
10) Corporate department
11) Event seeking dona-
tions
12) Anger
13) What untreated wood
will do, over time
18) "Aye, aye!"
19) Central Texas city
24) Church altar plat-
forms
25) "You _?" (butler's
question)
26) Keats offering
28) Fraudulent operation

- 30) It's page after page of
places
31) Compete
34) Spotted, as a horse
35) Beneath
37) It's often a coating for
steel
38) Desperate or calami-
tous
39) In most need of clean-
ing and repair
40) Org. of many spies
41) Make a promise
45) Sad in France?
47) Come to
48) Hidden, as finger-
prints
49) Upon which medals
are pinned
51) God-America link
53) Firmly fix, as in ce-
ment
54) Douglas _ tree
57) "Green" emotion
58) "... one giant_ for
mankind"
59) Org. with high-flying
missions
60) Common deli order
61) Asian language
62) "Aah!" accompani-
ment

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Even if you're in a sharing mood, you should try to keep all of your private things private today. So when you feel a secret start to bubble up, clam up and put a lid on it! Even if you merely drop a few hints to your closest friends, you might accidentally give a huge secret away that needs to be kept quiet. You can't afford to take any chances, so you might want to spend the day by yourself as much as you can. It's not a great day for heart-to-heart talks!



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You share common goals with a very important person, and you should let them know that they can count on you today. Let them know that you are on their team, ready to jump in and get to work whenever they need you to, and make sure you mean it. Follow-through is essential when you're dealing with influential folks. Teamwork is not only a great morale booster, but it's a also great way to build better relationships with people who can help you get further in your career.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Today, if you can be more flexible, you can be more powerful. Refusing to budge in your position or move your schedule around closes you from to too many things and can give you a bad reputation with people. Push things away that confuse or frustrate you, and you could be depriving yourself of an amazing growth opportunity. So leave your comfort zone and open up your mind to the idea that nothing is for sure. Roll with the punches and know that no matter what happens, you can handle it.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Being the good friend you are, you usually give a friend the benefit of the doubt if they say something that sounds rude or weird. You let it go and assume you heard them wrong or they meant something else. But today, you need to follow up on any odd behavior. It could be a symptom of a bigger issue. If a friend is acting out of character, don't just assume they woke up on the wrong side of the bed. Ask them what's going on with them. Chances are they have been waiting to tell you.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

One of your friends is behaving badly, and they aren't going to listen to your commonsense advice today. They are in no mood for cold logic. They just want good times and zero responsibilities. And it might be time to just let them get their way and see for themselves where their attitude will lead them. You can't be in charge of someone else's life. It puts you in a position you don't deserve to be in. It also gives the other person a reason to not take you seriously.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

All you have to do when faced with a challenge today is concentrate. Keep your eye on the ball and you will be sure to win. The goal you have in your sights right now is yours to lose, so do not worry about anyone taking the power out of your hands or ruining things for you. Just to make yourself feel better, try to avoid flighty people who say one thing and do another. You don't need them adding to your frustration level even if they are harmless.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It is time to get totally flirtatious today. You've been making eye contact and smiling at that cutie for a while now, and where has it gotten you? Maybe a jolt of excitement here and there, but no real progress has been made. Luckily, there is no better time than today to kick it up a notch. Linger a little bit longer with that eye contact. Say hello instead of just smiling. Ask about their weekend. Start some harmless small talk and just see where it goes.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

To get some insight on your latest problem, share your confusion with another person. A coworker could be the best choice, because they can be more objective than a loved one or close friend. They can give you a different perspective you might not have considered, and while they might not say everything you want to hear, their words will help you make the best decision. Know who to go to in certain situations. Friends are not always the answer.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

It's not a good day for moving around. Wherever you try to go, you can expect long lines, bad traffic, and unpleasant conditions. If you can stay close to home today, do it. There's a lot there to keep you entertained and perhaps even one or two little chores that you need to take care of. Going out into the world can be an adventure, but right now it will feel a lot more like a hassle. If you can get a friend to hang out with you, all the better.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Today's a great day to shake up your world and step out of your comfort zone. There is little risk involved in moving outside your normal circle of friends and a lot of potential rewards. Focus on the friendships you haven't quite solidified yet, and see if one of these people has some time to give you. Your sense of humor matches theirs, and the two of you have a lot of shared experiences. It's time to explore them together. Expose yourself to a new way of thinking.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Before you get involved in anything new today, take some time to make sure you know what you're doing. Read the instructions (and don't forget the fine print). Ask any questions that are lingering in your mind. You simply can't take things at face value right now. There is just too much uncertainty around you, and you need to stay one step ahead. There is always more to the story, and it's definitely in your best interests to find out what that is.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

An issue might pop up around the house today, and if it does you need to make it your first priority. This problem represents a real change that you need to make in yourself. For example, if there is conflict with roommates over cleanliness, you need to get rid of the clutter in your life. Throwing out garbage doesn't just refer to empty pizza boxes. Your negative feelings and self-doubt need to get tossed to the curb too, and now is a great time to do it.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The Dutch-based Stellantis N.V., formed in 2021, is a 50:50 merger between two internationally recognised manufacturing conglomerates from which countries and in what field?
A. Italy and France, automobiles
B. UK and Germany, medicine
C. Hungary and Nigeria, fashion
D. USA and Russia, energy

2. What is a medical term referring to the presence of pathogenic organisms in the bloodstream, leading to blood poisoning?
A. Tetanus
B. Septicemia
C. Hypertension
D. Bursitis

What is Hilary Clinton's maiden name?

- A. Rodham
B. Bouvier
C. Roosevelt
D. Kennedy

Answers: 1.A,2.B,3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

Y	U	L	S
S	S	T	O
S	W	H	A
U	B	P	N

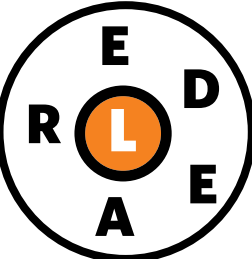
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

New kid on the block

Tennis needs the next generation, says Australian Open champion Sinner

Melbourne, Australia - Jannik Sinner was not about to announce the end of the "Big Three" after his breakthrough Grand Slam triumph at the Australian Open but the 22-year-old Italian does believe tennis needs a fresh generation of champions.

His five-set victory over Daniil Medvedev on Sunday made him the first Melbourne Park winner in 10 years not named Novak Djokovic, Rafa Nadal or Roger Federer - the trio of multiple champions who have dominated tennis for two decades.

Djokovic's incredible success into his mid-thirties has delayed the decline of the "Big Three" but with Federer now retired and



Jannik Sinner

There were so many emotions in my head and the hard work and the sacrifices I've done throughout my career. Sharing this moment with my team was maybe the best feeling.

JANNIK SINNER

Nadal looking set to join him this year, a huge gap is opening up at the top of the game.

With his Melbourne triumph, Sinner has joined 20-year-old Carlos Alcaraz in the Grand Slam winners' club, spearheading a clutch of players of a similar age coming through.

"It's quite unpredictable what's coming in the future but still it's nice to be part of this generation," Sinner said as he was photographed with his trophy in Melbourne's Botanical Gardens

on Monday.

"I think the next generation is something that this sport needs and it's also a little bit of a game-changer."

Sinner was the youngest Australian Open men's champion since Djokovic won the first of his 10 Melbourne Park titles in 2008 and even though he beat the 24-times Grand Slam champion in the semi-finals, the Italian was not inviting comparisons.

"He is a different league," he said. "I'm just happy I have this trophy for this year and then we see what's coming. There is still a lot of work to do but I will enjoy my process and then we see what I can achieve in the future."

As impressive as the clean hitting that has taken Sinner into the elite of men's tennis was his cool demeanour on court on Sunday as he withstood an early barrage from Medvedev before rallying from two sets down to clinch the title.

Although he fell to the Rod Laver Arena court after converting championship point, there was no huge outpouring of emotions as Sinner celebrated the biggest victory of his career.

"There were so many emotions in my head and the hard work and the sacrifices I've done throughout my career," he explained. "Sharing this moment with my team was maybe the best feeling I've had until now."

"It's great emotions, I was just happy, yesterday I still maybe couldn't believe and now I'm starting to realise it, so it's a great feeling."



Rahul Dravid

'We did not capitalise the conditions in first innings'

Hyderabad, India - India's failure to make the most of perfect batting conditions in their first innings cost them the opening Test against England, head coach Rahul Dravid said on Sunday.

India posted 436 replying to England's first-innings total of 246 for a sizeable first-innings lead of 190 at Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium.

England rode player-of-the-match Ollie Pope's epic 196 to post 420, setting India a tricky target of 231 on a turning track.

Debutant spinner Tom Hartley claimed 7-62 to bowl out India for 202 and help England to go 1-0 up in the five-match series.

"It was always going to be challenging to chase 230 on a fourth-day wicket which was turning," Dravid said after India's loss in an extended final session on the penultimate day.

"I thought we probably had 70 runs less on the board in the first

It was always going to be challenging to chase 230 on a fourth-day wicket which was turning

RAHUL DRAVID

FIH President Ikram all praise for Oman Hockey Association

Muscat - With the inaugural FIH Hockey5s World Cup underway in Muscat, Oman, FIH President Tayyab Ikram addressed the media in a press conference along with Oman Hockey Association chairman, Dr Marwan Juma al Juma, answering queries on the various aspects of the World Cup, as well as the future of international hockey across its various formats.

Ikram, on behalf of the global hockey family, thanked Oman and Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for their support in making the tournament the success it has already proved to be in its very first edition.

He also thanked the Oman Hockey Association and its chairman Dr Marwan Juma al Juma, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MCSY) and His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said for making the dream of an FIH Hockey5s World Cup a reality.

"The feedback from all the athletes that have participated in the Hockey5s World Cup as well as the FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifiers, which was also hosted in Muscat earlier this month, has been overwhelmingly positive. I congratulate the Oman Hockey Association on the smart creation of the stadium and adjacent infrastructure which has been built in a record time, while maintaining the highest international standards."

"I am thrilled to see the level of competition at this World Cup, with teams from all around the world writing exciting new stories in hockey. I am also thankful to all our athletes, who are the absolute best our sport has to offer and who have come from all parts of the world to make this event such a success."

Oman Hockey Association chairman, Dr Marwan also ad-

ressed the media and made note of the work that had gone on behind the scenes to make the World Cup a possibility, "Ever since we won the right to host the inaugural edition of the FIH Hockey5s World Cup, we have been working really hard to make this the best event we could. A special thanks to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MCSY) and His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, for all the assistance from the very beginning. It



Oman players celebrate a goal against the US

has been great to see the level of competition at this World Cup with new nations competing at a high level against traditionally strong hockey teams."

Legacy of new stadium in Muscat

"Legacy of any infrastructure developed for international hockey competitions is always a core subject at FIH," said Ikram. The new stadium built in Oman similarly has a lot of legacy planning that has been done for it. We plan on the stadium becoming a training hub for international teams. For teams flying from Europe to South Asia or Oceania and vice versa for hockey events, Oman and its new stadium will be an ideal spot to train in the build up to the event, making use

of these international facilities of the highest standard. The FIH Academy will also work closely with Oman Hockey Association and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth in Oman to develop a hockey program that will make use of the facilities to promote a hockey program for the youth of Oman."

"We are also planning to make these facilities in Oman as the hub for the development of hockey in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) region, which

will be very important, given the Asian Games in 2030 will be played in Doha and the 2034 games will be hosted in Saudi Arabia."

Oman enter last eight

Oman national hockey team scripted a new chapter in the country's sporting history by securing a 6-4 victory over the United States on Monday and qualifying for the quarter-finals of the men's FIH Hockey5S World Cup 2024.

The win propelled them to the top of Group 4 with seven points, following a draw in their opening match against Malaysia with a score of 3-3, a decisive 8-3 win against the Fiji, and culminating in their victory against the US.



Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair in action at the 19th Hankook 24H Dubai

Technical issues force Al Zubair and team to retire from Hankook 24H Dubai

Muscat - Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and his Getspeed Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo teammates had to retire while going strong in second place after 15 hours of the 19th Hankook 24H Dubai because of fuel pump and transmission issues.

"Leading into the race, we had a great strategy and the car felt quite good. The Audis were fast but, I think with our strategy of having the pros drive the last six hours, we had an advantage in the pocket. But, unfortunately, with nine hours to go, we got a fuel pump issue and a gearbox

failure as well.

"We weren't able to continue the race while running in P2. Honestly, we had a good chance for the win this year. That's racing. This will make victory at a future Dubai 24 feel even better," said al Zubair, who had Germany's Fabian Schiller, American racer Anthony Bartone and Austria's Dominik Baumann and Martin Konrad as teammates.

Victory, after 603 laps, fell to the Eastalent Racing Team Audi R8 LMS GT3 EVO II, crewed by Christopher Haase, Simon Reicher, Markus Winkelhock, Mike

Zhou and Gilles Magnus. Sven Müller brought the Proton Huber Competition Porsche 911 home in second place and Jack Barlow pushed the Century Motorsport BMW M4 GT3 onto the bottom step of the podium.

The Getspeed crew started the race strongly and led through the first hour mark after 29 laps. Al Zubair was in the hot seat in third behind the Proton Huber Competition and MRS GT-Racing Porsche 911s with the race approaching the two-hour mark. The Omani then pitted for fuel and slipped to fourth.

Are these muscles big enough for him? Brathwaite hits back

Sydney, Australia - Skipper Kraigg Brathwaite credited injured pride for West Indies' extraordinary upset of Australia in Brisbane on Sunday and said the Caribbean islanders needed more Test cricket if they were to continue their revival.

West Indies were once the most feared team in the Test game but expectations have lowered over years of decline, and Brathwaite's touring squad were given little chance of success when they arrived in Australia to play the World Test Champi-



Kraigg Brathwaite at the post-match ceremony

onship winners.

Those expectations were lowered still after a 10-wicket maul-

ing in the first Test in Adelaide but, spearheaded by young quick Shamar Joseph, they staged a re-

markable turnaround to beat their hosts by eight runs in a Gabba thriller on Sunday.

Brathwaite said comments by former Australian pace bowler Rodney Hogg had cut particularly deep.

"Rodney Hogg said we were pathetic and hopeless, so that was our motivation. I want to ask him: 'Are these muscles big enough for you?'" he retorted in the post-match ceremony on Sunday. "We wanted to let him know that we heard him," Brathwaite added.



Inter Milan's Lautaro Martinez celebrates after scoring against Fiorentina

Inter reclaim top spot with win at Fiorentina

Florence, Italy - Inter Milan reclaimed top spot in Serie A as they beat fifth-placed Fiorentina 1-0 on Sunday courtesy of an early header from Lautaro Martinez.

Inter, who were crowned Italian Super Cup champions for third consecutive year on Monday, moved back top in the standings on 54 points, one ahead of Juventus who have played one game more.

Juve squandered the chance to increase their lead over Inter when they were held to a 1-1 home draw by lowly Empoli on Saturday after playing most of the game with 10 men.

"The team had an excellent first half and that's where we had to end it, perhaps scoring another goal," coach Simone Inzaghi told reporters.

"In fact in the first half I wasn't satisfied with the 1-0. Fiorentina... always make you suffer, it's an important but not decisive victory."

Fiorentina have not won any of their three Serie A games in 2024.

DR Congo beat Egypt on penalties in Cup of Nations round of 16

San Pedro, Ivory Coast - Egypt goalkeeper Mohamed Abou Gabal missed his penalty in the shootout as the Democratic Republic of Congo claimed an epic 8-7 victory following a tense 1-1 draw in their Africa Cup of Nations last-16 clash in San Pedro on Sunday.

Abou Gabal clipped the crossbar with his effort and then opposite number Lionel Mpasi scored against him as record seven-times winners Egypt bowed out at the Laurent Pokou Stadium, sparking jubilant scenes for the Congolese, who now play Guinea in the quarter-finals in Abidjan on Friday.

Meschack Elia gave DR Congo the lead in the game when he headed in virtually on the goal-line, but the advantage lasted nine minutes before Mostafa Mohamed scored his fourth goal of the tournament from the penalty spot on the stroke of halftime.

Egypt midfielder Mohamed Hamdy received a red card in extra time, after which The Pharaohs, without injured talisman Mohamed Salah, stopped attacking and held on as the game went to a shootout.

The last time DR Congo beat Egypt in a Cup of Nations clash



Democratic Republic of Congo players celebrate their victory against Egypt

Meschack Elia gave DR Congo the lead, but the advantage lasted nine minutes before Mostafa Mohamed scored his fourth goal of the tournament from the penalty spot on the stroke of halftime

was in the semi-finals 50 years ago when they went on to lift the trophy. It was a fourth draw in a row for both sides in the Ivory Coast this year, while for Egypt it was a sixth in a row dating back

to the last tournament in Cameroon and a fifth extra-time in succession in knockout games.

That lack of a killer touch came back to haunt them as they could not finish the game in the 90 minutes, and once Hamdy received his marching orders it was always going to be a battle in the sweltering heat of San Pedro.

DR Congo took the lead on 37 minutes when Yoann Wissa's

deflected cross from the left was headed over the line by Elia. The goal emanated from a quick throw-in that Egypt felt should have been theirs, and as such were slow to react when the Congolese re-started play.

But Egypt levelled in first-half injury-time when Congolese defender Dylan Batubinsika struck the face of Ahmed Hegazi with an extended arm during an aerial

dual in the penalty-box, and a spot-kick was awarded after a VAR review.

In the absence of Salah, Mohamed stepped up to confidently convert and net his fourth goal of the tournament, though he would later miss in the shootout.

Mohamed became the first Egyptian player to score in their first four matches at a Cup of Nations finals.

Last-gasp win takes Guinea into Cup of Nations quarterfinals

Abidjan, Ivory Coast - Guinea scored with the last kick of the game to end the giant-killing run of Equatorial Guinea at the Africa Cup of Nations and book themselves a slot in the quarter-finals with a 1-0 victory at Alassane Ouattara Olympic Stadium on Sunday.

Mohamed Bayo's superb glancing header in the eighth minute of stoppage time in the last-16 clash proved the difference after Equatorial Guinea, who were down to 10 men in the second half, missed a penalty.

Guinea ended a long sequence of losing in the knockout stage of the Cup of Nations but took their time, and rode their luck, to claim victory.

It came after a spell of probing football at the end of the game and from an accurate cross on the right from full back Ibrahim Diakite that Bayo expertly flicked into the net, in a small gap between the near post and the goalkeeper.

"It was a very satisfying victory. We had a lot of criticism after our group games but my



Goal-scorer Mohamed Bayo celebrates Guinea's victory against Equatorial Guinea

players got due reward for all of their work," said Guinea coach Kaba Diawara.

Guinea had brought on the Bundesliga-based pair of Naby Keita and Serhou Guirassy to inject urgency into their attack and they slowly took command in the closing stages, setting up several chances.

Guinea had a man advantage from the 55th minute when Equatorial Guinea's influential

holding midfielder Federico Bikoro was sent off for a high-foot tackle on Bayo. But despite the disadvantage, Equatorial Guinea should have gone ahead just minutes later when Iban Salvador was clipped from behind in the penalty area by wing back Sekou Sylla.

It took a lengthy VAR review before the referee awarded the kick but Emilio Nsue, the tournament's leading scorer with five

goals, hit his effort against the upright with the goalkeeper going the other way.

Equatorial Guinea then looked to play for time and try and force the game to an extra 30 minutes and post-match penalties.

However, Guinea snatched victory to end the fairytale run of the small central African nation, who had finished ahead of hosts Ivory Coast and Nigeria in Group A.

PSG give up two-goal lead to draw with Brest

Paris, France - Paris St Germain gave up a two-goal advantage to draw 2-2 at home to Brest on Sunday as the hosts missed the chance to extend their Ligue 1 lead.

Luis Enrique's side, who finished with 10 men after Bradley Barcola was sent off in stoppage time, remained top with 44 points, six clear of second-placed Nice. Brest are third with 35 points, one ahead of AS Monaco.

"It is easy to explain, we lost control of the game. It's football not basketball, it can happen," Luis Enrique told Prime Video.

"There are two very different halves of the game, a great first half, one of the best of the season," the Spaniard later told a news conference.

"Then a second half that was one of the worst of the season. Today we could have lost. We thought the game was done and it turned out not to be."

Marco Asensio opened the scoring in the 38th minute with a close-range volley from a brilliant chipped pass from Barcola to score his first league goal since



Brest players celebrate a goal against Paris St Germain on Sunday

September. Randal Kolo Muani doubled the lead by tapping in a loose ball from close range after Brest goalkeeper Marco Bizot blocked Asensio's effort just before halftime.

Atletico beat Valencia

Samuel Lino and Memphis Depay scored a goal in each half to give Atletico Madrid a comfortable 2-0 home win over Valencia on Sunday which moved Diego Simeone's side to third in the LaLiga standings.

Atletico could have won by a larger margin if it wasn't for Valencia goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili who excelled for the visitors

Fuellkrug hat-trick fires Dortmund

Forward Niclas Fuellkrug scored a hat-trick to earn hosts Borussia Dortmund a 3-1 victory over VfL Bochum in their Ruhr valley derby on Sunday and lift them into the top four with their third straight league win this year.



Liverpool's Diogo Jota scores against Norwich City in their FA Cup fourth-round match on Sunday

Liverpool enter FA Cup fifth round, Man United win

Liverpool, England - Liverpool cruised into the fifth round of the FA Cup with a 5-2 rout of Championship Norwich City on Sunday, to kick off Jurgen Klopp's long goodbye at Anfield, while crowd trouble marred Wolverhampton Wanderers' 2-0 victory over West Bromwich Albion.

Twelve-time winners Manchester United gave up a two-goal lead before escaping Rodney Parade with a 4-2 victory over fourth-tier Welsh side Newport County.

Liverpool's beloved manager

announced on Friday that he would leave the Merseyside team at the end of this season, his ninth at the helm.

"I get it, it's very emotional," Klopp told the BBC. "I just have to make sure that I don't get on that side of it. (And) in the games, we need to be warriors and not celebrate the old man on the side lines."

"First match after the news and we can get used to it," he added.

The eight-time FA Cup winners had goals from Curtis Jones,

Darwin Nunez, Diogo Jota, Virgil van Dijk and Ryan Gravenberch.

Liverpool will next play either Watford or Southampton after that fourth-round game earlier on Sunday ended in a 1-1 draw thanks to a last-gasp goal by Southampton's Stuart Armstrong to force a replay.

Ben Gibson and Borja Sainz scored for Norwich City, who are ninth in the Championship, 28 spots below Premier League leaders Liverpool in England's football pyramid.

Antony scored in the 68th-

minute for last year's FA Cup runners-up Manchester United after Newport - ranked 76 places below United in England's football pyramid - had clawed their way back from two goals down.

Wolves' victory in their fourth-round match at West Brom was interrupted for nearly 40 minutes due to clashes involving the two sides' supporters.

Wolves were leading 2-0 when projectiles were hurled on to one end of the pitch in the 82nd minute, sparking a brawl in a corner at The Hawthorns.

JOY FOR JORDAN

Stoppage time goals from Yazan al Arab and Nizar al Rashdan help Jordan beat 10-man Iraq in round of 16

Doha, Qatar - Jordan showed amazing resilience to come from behind and defeat Iraq 3-2 in their Asian Cup round of 16 tie at the Khalifa International Stadium on Monday.

Down 2-1 after having taken the lead, stoppage time goals from Yazan al Arab and Nizar al Rashdan pushed Jordan over the finishing line in a hugely exciting tie that had seen Iraq reduced to 10 players after having taken the lead, with Aymen Hussein sent off after netting their second goal.

Jordan will play Tajikistan in the quarter-finals on Friday.

Head coach Jesus Casas made nine changes to the Iraqi starting 11 that defeated Vietnam 3-2 on Matchday Three of the group stage, with 10 of the players who were in the team that featured in the 2-1 win over Japan, returning to the fold.

The 2007 AFC Asian Cup winners wasted little time in asserting their authority with Ahmed al Hajjaj just failing to reach Ali Jasim's corner in the



Jordan's Nizar al Rashdan celebrates with teammates after scoring against Iraq on Monday

second minute.

Jordan, however, began to find their footing and threatened in the 11th minute with Yazan al Naimat's ambitious long range effort sailing over the bar, while Iraq's Youssef Aymen wasted another chance off a set-piece situation four minutes later.

The action was thick and fast with Iraq keeper Jalal Hassan forced to come outside his area in the 18th minute to foil Yazan al

Naimat's attempt with Ali Olwan hitting wide on the follow up. The duo threatened again a minute later, forcing Hassan into a diving save.

Jordan looked dangerous when counter attacking and came close again just before the half-hour mark with Olwan cutting through the defence courtesy of an Ehsan Haddad through ball, only to be foiled by the agile Hassan.

Jordan put Iraq under pressure again in the 38th minute when Mousa Tamari weaved his way into the box past three defenders before being foiled by Hassan but their persistence finally paid off in the closing stages of the half.

Al Naimat pounced on a poor back pass by Ahmed al Hajjaj before waltzing through the Jordan defence to finish with a sublime effort past a helpless Hassan.

A lapse in concentration then gave Iraq the opportunity to draw level in the 68th minute when Suad Natiq rose highest to nod home Jassim's corner. A stunned Jordan then fell behind in the 76th minute when Hussein pounced on a poor clearance from inside the six-yard-box before drilling his effort into the bottom left corner of the net.

But the drama had only begun.



Tajikistan players celebrate their win against United Arab Emirates

Tajikistan edge UAE to enter quarters

Al Rayyan, Qatar - Tajikistan advanced to the Asian Cup quarter-finals after a hard-fought 5-3 penalty shootout win over United Arab Emirates on Sunday.

The match was forced into an additional 30 minutes after UAE's Khalifa Al Hammadi scored in the fifth minute of second half added time to cancel out Vahdat Hanonov's opener at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium.

Goalkeeper Rustam Yatimov was Tajikistan's hero, judging correctly to deny Caio Canedo's penalty when the shootout was tied 1-1 as the Central Asian side extended their debut campaign to the quarter-finals, with either Iraq or Jordan their next opponents.

Both teams showed plenty of attacking intent right from the onset with UAE having the first sights at goal. The chance came within the opening minute as Fabio Lima's free-kick was

palmed away by Tajik goalkeeper Yatimov, followed by striker Canedo's attempt from outside the box that sailed too high five minutes later.

However, it was Tajikistan who opened the scoring after defender Zoir Dzhuraboev's inch perfect cross was headed into the bottom left corner of the UAE goal by Hanonov just as the match hit the half-hour mark.

The second half began in similar fashion with both teams maintaining their offensive mindset but it was once again the tournament debutants who came close to doubling their lead with Ehsan Panjshabe and Alisher Dzhallilov forcing saves out of UAE captain Khalid Eisa.

Tajikistan should have gone further ahead in the 60th minute when Parvizzdzhon Umarbayev's through ball found Dzhallilov just outside the box, but the Istiklol midfielder shot straight at Eisa.

Big guns Saudi Arabia and South Korea battle for last-eight berth

Doha, Qatar - Jurgen Klinsmann has told his South Korea players to be prepared to go all the way to a penalty shoot-out in their efforts to defeat Saudi Arabia ahead of their Asian Cup clash on Tuesday as both nations look to set-up a quarter-final meeting with Australia.

Klinsmann will be going head-to-head with Saudi Arabia head coach Roberto Mancini for the second time since September, when the nations met in a friendly match in England that the Koreans won 1-0 to give the

German his first victory in charge of the Taeguk Warriors.

But Klinsmann admits the challenge facing his side at Education City Stadium will be very different compared to the narrow success achieved at Newcastle's St James's Park in only Mancini's second game in charge of the three-time AFC Asian Cup winners. "You can see now his handwriting on the team after 10 games and they're a very good team, but we're prepared," Klinsmann said of Mancini, who was appointed in August. "We have

our strengths, we have our spirit that we need to believe we can move on.

"We have to believe that we can beat Saudi Arabia, but it will be a lot of hard work, it will be nail biter and it might go to a penalty shootout. Anything can happen in football, you cannot predict what will be next."

Klinsmann's team stuttered through the group phase, eventually finishing second in Group E after following up an opening win over Bahrain with draws against Jordan and Malaysia but,



Saudi Arabia needed a last-gasp goal to overcome a resolute Oman in their opening match

despite those struggles, he remains confident in his team's ability.

Both teams go into the meeting with concerns over their form, with Saudi Arabia struggling to overcome Oman in their tournament opener and drawing 0-0 with Thailand, while the Koreans have shown defensive frailties in their three games so far.

"South Korea are very good, even if they conceded six goals in the group stage it doesn't change their strength because they have very good players," Mancini said.

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MUSIC



Playing a musical instrument is linked to better brain health in older adults, including better memory and problem-solving capability, according to new British research published Sunday.

Analysis of the data of 1,000 people over age 40 enrolled in the 10-year PROTECT dementia study of 25,000 older adults found playing an instrument was associated with improved memory and superior executive function - the ability to solve complex tasks.

The PROTECT study is being run by Exeter University and Kings College London in partnership with the National Health Service.

The peer-reviewed study, results of which are published in the International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry show that continuing to play an instrument or sing in a choir as people move into the later stages of their life confers even greater benefits, the researchers said in a news release.

The team compared study participants' engagement level with music throughout their lives to cognitive test results to figure out whether being hands-on with music helps slow cognitive decline that commonly affects older people.

Singing with other people was also

BRAINS

British study finds playing a musical instrument protects older people's brains



Overall, we think that being musical could be a way of harnessing the brain's agility and resilience, known as cognitive reserve

ANNE CORBETT

linked to better brain health, but the scientists were unable to separate out the effect from the overall benefit conferred by being socially active.

Anne Corbett, an Exeter University professor of dementia research said that while the study was not the first to explore the impact of music on brain health, the PROTECT data had provided an unprecedented opportunity to research the link between cognitive performance and music in a large sample of older people.

"Overall, we think that being musical

the-brain' type activities for dementia sufferers, Corbett said music training could incorporated as part of a healthy ageing package for older adults, enabling them to "proactively reduce their risk and to promote brain health".

The paper cites the case study of Stuart Douglas, a 78-year-old lifelong accordion player who performs with the Cober Valley Accordion Band and the Cornish Division of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society.

The Scot says that after learning the instrument as a child growing up in a mining village in his native Fife he kept up with playing throughout his career as a police officer and into retirement.

"These days I still play regularly, and playing in the band also keeps my calendar full, as we often perform in public," Douglas said.

"We regularly play at memory cafes so have seen the effect that our music has on people with memory loss and, as older musicians ourselves, we have no doubt that continuing with music into older age has played an important role in keeping our brains healthy."

This study was funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research, Applied Research Collaboration South West Peninsula and NIHR Exeter Biomedical Research Centre.

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Panic attack or a heart attack?

FOR WOMEN ESPECIALLY, THE PANIC ATTACK VS HEART ATTACK DIFFERENCE COULD BE SUBTLE

Women are twice as likely as men to have a panic attack. Women also are more prone to migraine than men. One study found most women who have panic attacks suffer from migraine as well. Women who experience both had more frequent and longer-lasting panic attacks. Women over age 50 who have heart disease are more likely to have panic attacks as well.

As with panic attacks, women experience different heart attack symptoms than men. Because of this, women may not even know that anything is wrong. Women often explain away heart attack symptoms as acid reflux, the flu or aging, even though heart disease is the No 1 killer of women in the US. Panic attacks can be another reason a woman may delay getting care.

Panic attack vs heart attack: Know the signs

Panic attack symptoms include:

- Sense of dread or danger
- Feeling like you're losing control or might die
- Rapid heart rate
- Sharp or stabbing chest pain that lasts only 5 to 10 seconds
- Shortness of breath
- Pain that is localised to one small area
- Pain after a significant stressor, anxiety or while you are resting
- Pain that can be produced or worsened by pressing over the area of pain
- Hot flashes
- Chills
- Trembling or shaking

Precautionary measures

If you experience panic attacks and have a risk for heart disease, talk to your doctor about what symptoms should immediately trigger a trip to the emergency department.

If you've never had a panic attack and you're not sure? It's better to be evaluated immediately - don't explain away symptoms. Call an emergency number and be transported to the hospital via ambulance. That way, emergency medical responders can monitor you and provide important information to your emergency doctors. Every minute matters with a heart attack - time saved is heart muscle saved.



Dr. Kamal Pasha
Consultant,
Interventional
Cardiology
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Hospital, Sohar

Care for your heart in winter

Heart attacks and heart disease-related problems are more common in the morning hours during the winter. According to some studies (conducted in the real world), there may be a 31-33% higher incidence of heart attacks in winter and every 1-degree Celsius drop in temperature came with a 0.49% increase in deaths from all causes.

Some may wonder that how winter or cold may affect our heart and cardiovascular system so adversely.

Cold temperatures can lead to blood vessel constriction, raising blood pressure levels. There is an imbalance in sympathetic hormones in the morning, which may increase both heart rate and blood pressure. Same influences can cause the platelets to become stickier, thereby increasing the tendency to form clots inside the arteries.

This places additional stress on the heart, increasing the risk of heart attacks and strokes.

Winter often keeps people indoors, leading to a decrease in physical activity. There is a tendency for overindulgence in rich, high-calorie foods that can lead to obesity, high cholesterol, and other cardiac risk factors. Another factor that affects the heart is low exposure to vitamin D. Several studies have shown the connection between low vitamin D levels and cardiovascular health. Low intake of vitamin D has been linked to heart problems.



Respiratory infections, like the flu and common cold, are more prevalent during winter and this inflammation sometimes affects the heart muscle, its covering and exacerbate pre-existing heart conditions.

With winter already around us, I want to stress that there is no need to be feared and alarmed. There are plenty of things you can do to stay fit during this winter, such as -

- Stay warm to protect yourself from cold weather
- Get plenty of physical activity (as per your doctor's recommendations). Evening walk would be preferred to morning walk.
- Follow up with your doctor for a routine health checkup and review of ongoing medications.
- Healthy eating habits - like plenty of fruits and vegetables, reduced salt and salty food consumption, avoid deep fried foods (bad fats), increase sea-fish intake (rich in omega 3 fatty acids), vitamin D supplements.
- Stay away from smoke and alcohol as much as possible
- Pneumonia and influenza vaccination for those with compromised cardiovascular condition.

Although winter season is summed up within two to three months in a year, it is the most awaiting season for most of us and we eagerly wait to embrace it. But, unfortunately the same is not true for those with heart disease and at risk of heart diseases.

Only if such persons follow the above measures, they also can enjoy the winter season no less than their surrounding people.



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